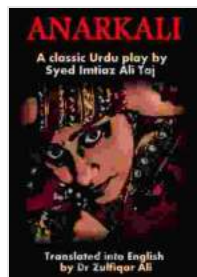


Anarkali: Unraveling Wallace Stevens' Alluring and Enigmatic Muse



ANARKALI by Wallace Stevens

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

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Wallace Stevens, one of the most celebrated American modernist poets, found profound inspiration in the enigmatic figure of Anarkali. This article delves into the multifaceted role of Anarkali in Stevens' poetic imagination, exploring her historical, cultural, and literary significance. By examining the intricate interplay between Stevens' personal life, his fascination with the Orient, and the evolving literary landscape of his time, we uncover the rich tapestry of meanings that Anarkali embodies.

Historical and Cultural Context

Anarkali was a legendary courtesan who lived in the Mughal Empire during the 16th century. Her tragic love affair with Prince Salim, later known as Emperor Jahangir, has been immortalized in numerous folktales, plays, and films. Anarkali's story resonated deeply with Stevens, who saw her as a symbol of both the allure and the danger of forbidden love.

During the early 20th century, when Stevens was writing his poetry, there was a growing fascination with the exoticism and sensuality of the Orient. This fascination was fueled by the popularity of Orientalist art and literature, which depicted the East as a realm of mystery and allure. Stevens' interest in Anarkali was part of this broader cultural trend, but he also brought a unique and deeply personal interpretation to her story.

Anarkali in Stevens' Poetry

Anarkali appears in several of Stevens' poems, often as a symbol of unattainable desire or the bittersweet nature of love. In "Sunday Morning," one of Stevens' most famous poems, Anarkali is invoked as a reminder of the ephemeral nature of beauty and the inevitability of death:



“Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, Within whose burning bosom we conceive Resemblances on summer afternoons, And death, in me the mother of what is here. Of that I speak now, being myself ephemerally, None other than the breath upon these flowers.”

In this poem, Anarkali becomes a metaphor for the fleetingness of human life and the futility of trying to hold onto the objects of our desire. She is a reminder that all beauty must eventually fade, leaving us with only the memory of what was.

In other poems, Anarkali is a more positive figure, representing the transformative power of love. In "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," Stevens writes:



“Call the roller of big cigars, The muscular one, and bid him whip In kitchen cups concoctions that bang When the ice-cream man arrives.—

We have a lot of faith In chasms, and we think the size of the moon Known by children. Yet should we have The wisdom to take our own measure.”

In this poem, Anarkali is invoked as a symbol of the pleasures of the flesh and the importance of embracing life's fleeting moments. She is a reminder that, even in the face of death, we can find solace and joy in the simple pleasures of life.

Anarkali is a complex and multifaceted figure who has haunted the imagination of poets and artists for centuries. In the hands of Wallace Stevens, she becomes a powerful symbol of both the allure and the danger of love, the ephemeral nature of beauty, and the transformative power of art.

By unraveling the enigmatic figure of Anarkali, we gain a deeper understanding of Stevens' poetic imagination and the enduring themes that he explored throughout his career.

Further Reading

- Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"
- Wallace Stevens, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream"

- Anarkali, Encyclopedia Britannica
- Anarkali: Legend and History, by Iqtidar Alam Khan



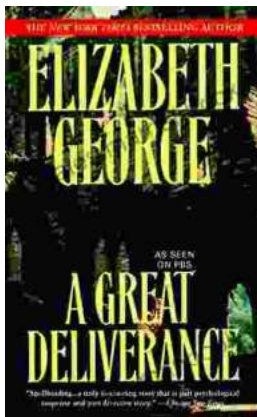
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