

THE USE OF MAGIC IN CHILDREN POETRY: A THEMATIC STUDY

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Abstract

Children Poetry is very important in the sense that it can be a source of skills as well as information for the children. It helps in creating the image of people, things, society, and concepts in the mind of the children. Imagination is the essential element that children-poetry relies on in inspiring joy and happiness as well as fear and wariness in the child's mind. In this regard, it is a crucial point to tackle it as a subject for discussion and investigation in this paper. The paper hypothesizes that Children-poetry varies from one culture to another but it shares one goal that is providing children with the values and norms of their society regarding subjects, concepts, and ideas. The aim of the paper is to approve the being put hypothesis. Two different poems, by different poets from varied cultures which tackle magic as their primary subject, are handled. "Belief in Magic", a poem written by the American poet, Dean Young and 'Love and Black Magic', a poem written by the Spanish poet, Robert Graves are the scope of the discussion have been chosen to achieve the paper's aim. The paper follows the formalistic approach to analyze the form and the content of the selected poems. It contains an introduction, methodology, discussion, and finally a conclusion that sums up the results that validate the being put hypothesis.

Keywords: children poetry, Robert Graves, Dean Young, Love and Black Magic, Belief in Magic, Magic

1. INTRODUCTION

The origin of children poetry can be traced back in its oral form to the ritual of nursery rhymes and the written form to the religious verse. Nursery rhymes are regarded as conventional poems accepted by successive generations. It is only in the eighteenth century that they began to be documented, for they were merely orally said by the people. (Nursery Rhymes, Lyrics, Origins & History in <http://www.rhymes.org.uk/>)

"Mother Goose" can be considered as the most admired nursery rhymes collection. Nobody knows the origins of this name, a goose did not write the poems, but the inspiration of literature for the children is linked to the name of Goose. When Charles Perrault had published his collection of fairy tales (1697) he chose its title as "Tales of Mother Goose". (<http://www.longlongtimeago.com/once-upon-a-time/fairytales/the-fairy-tales-of-charles-perrault/>)

The rhymes, later on, have been estranged from their original authors and backgrounds or contexts. Some of those authors are known; nevertheless most of them are unknown. Believing that rhymes hide meanings of a political or sexual kind, and deal with violent themes Some critics, think that the meaning and the sources of

nursery rhymes are of less importance when compared with the truth that these poems were admired for the long time because they were easy to be memorized by the children. Accordingly, the capacity of memorizing these poems becomes more significant than meaning and authorship. Strong rhymes, repetitive structure, as well as repetitions of phrases and words and not their content are the cause behind nursery rhymes being easy to remember. There is an exaggeration in the language basic characteristics. This redundancy gives the rhymes more attraction to be heard and memorized. The rhymes' effect does not rely on the content rather than on the patterns of language used to portray those contents. Therefore, the answers to the riddles –“Little Nancy Etticoat” or “Humpty Dumpty”-, are not as unforgettable as the riddling depictions. (Ibid)

The easy memorization for these poems helps in enhancing the process of values-planting in the children who memorize them. Here, repetition is very crucial. For this reason, contents which once was not a priority, later on becomes a supreme one. This is very clear in the modern children poetry. In this sort of poetry, the poet tries to reflect an idea regarding some concepts. Throughout the use of children poetry, many values are portrayed in the children's minds. One of these concepts is magic and the portrayal of magicians in the society. Of course, different societies carry different images of magic which the society desires the children to have. In this sense, Poems told to the children have great impact in developing their character and help in molding them to become better people in the society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Magic in the Spanish culture is given a religious angle by Francis Tobienne. Tobienne compares and contrasts magic and astrology in the poem *Auto De Los Reyes Magos*. This poem which is mostly performed in Spain at some occasions and festivals talks about the birth of Jesus Christ and the journey of the three wise men that followed stars to the place where Jesus was born. According to Tobienne, the poem has a magical allusion given that the birth of a godly form of human being was directed to astrologers (wisemen) by stars. Therefore, Tobienne places special significance to the stars themselves plus the people who had the ability to read the stars (p. 80). Presence of stars in the sky (astronomy) is treated differently from the art of interpreting the meaning of the stars (astrology) by Tobienne. He notes that the two concepts were used frequently and interchangeably by Spanish poets in many works (p. 81).

Spanish poetry uses magic realism to some extent to bring a picture of paused events or permanency of experiences by freezing time (Debicki 221). Magic realism is the combination of real time narratives with instances of fantasy and dreamlike descriptions. Poems that employ magic realism appear as magical although they are real. Magic realism was a device used mostly in the 1920's to 1940's by artists in other artistic areas apart from poetry. Magic realism allowed poets and other artists to use abstraction to express different themes and subjects. Since abstract expressionism is not limited by strict grammatical or poetical expression, abstract poets could exploit excessive imagery in a bid to express their ideas.

Hermes of the Ways is a poem written by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. This poem is based on a mythical ancient Greek hero called Hermes who guides and directs lost souls to the land of the dead. Hermes has winged sandals and he carries a magic wand called caduceus. According to Roman et al (p. 1913), DuPleiss was inspired by other poems on Greek mythology like those of Anyte of Tegea. This poem uses natural features to illustrate the existence of a supernatural figure that waits for lost people at the seaside to guide them on their journey. Hermes is seen as a superhero that conquers gravity, oblivion and massive forces of blowing wind. This implies that American poets borrow subjects from other cultures to bring out the theme of magic in their poems. Hermes of the Ways is not the only American poem that incorporates Greek mythology and magic. Stinchcomb writes that there were more than 1692 poems that talked about Ancient Greek characters in one way or the other. 231 of these named Great Greek Gods in the text. Other poems named characters like Hermes, Hercules and Athena (81). According to Stichcomb, this extensive mention of Greek characters shows the devotion of poets to Greece and Syria (81). It can also be deduced that American poets use Greek mythology to accentuate magic and super humanity with an aim of making magic in the poems more profound. Traditionally, American culture is not marked with a lot of magic and supernatural forces. Those that exist are designed in the contemporary popular culture like in Sci-Fi games and movies. However, magic in children poetry is better portrayed when placed in a new context other than the one commonly encountered by children, and that could be the reason why American poets borrow from foreign traditions.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to examine, in detail, the magic in the children poetry, there is need to read the poem at least twice in order to get the overall meaning of the poem, this gives the opportunity to understand the work of art and get the first impression about the poems, this entails both the positive and the negative views regarding the same subject. The first idea need to be recorded to help in the later evaluation of the poem (Wolf 45).

The second step is to try to get the literal meaning and the theme of the poem and this involves understanding the individual words as used in the poem. This entails looking up and writing new words, important words and words that are barely known to the audience and the impacts that they have in the poem and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the same by observing how they influence personal interpretation. These techniques help to afford rich insight into the mind of the poet regarding magic (Angelou 120). Following these steps implies that the paper will use the formalistic approach to analyze the selected texts.

4. DISCUSSION

It is in this manner that there is need for the society to appreciate the impact of poems told to the children and the magic that helps in captivating virtues in the children. Comparison between the two poems 'Belief in Magic' by Dean Young and 'Love and Black Magic' by Robert Graves helps in showing the differences of how authors tell about magic in their poems (Koch 121). Both poets employ different skills and techniques in writing their poems and this affects the relevance of the two poems to the audience. Differences in the cultures of poets affect the way the theme of magic is brought out because authors use different poetic devices from different cultures. Due to the fact that Dean Young writes his poem basing on the American culture while Robert Graves related to the Spanish culture, there is bound to be realized differences in the skills and techniques the two employ in their poems.

Young's American culture is very diverse and this due to the fact that almost every part of the world had influenced American culture because of the high numbers of immigrants in the country. This dates back to the influence that the Europeans had in America in the early 1600s when they first colonized leading to its diversity, today, the American culture has been shaped by the Latin Americans, Native Americans, Asians and the Africans. The different flavors that immigrants from different parts of the world have induced into the American culture make America to be a 'melting pot' of cultures (Mayesky 27). Spanish culture on the other hand is contrary to the American culture as it is very conservative upholding family values and the laid down customs of the natives. Additionally, differences in languages and etiquette affect the way the two poets use language to show out magic in poems.

Although poetry is not the only way to get the children acquire the skills that they need, it is a powerful way tool through which children get acquainted to the literary world and succeed in the academic and develop their professional background. Poetry enables the children to acquire the necessary skills that prove to be crucial to their personality and suppresses their nervousness. Above all, poetry greatly helps in cultivating a reading culture among the children and expands the mental capacity by presenting opportunity for the children to brainstorm and analyze the literary world in the modern society (Fernea 32). Magic is evident in the children poetry because it compresses information hence reduces the bulk of information for the children enabling them to acquire knowledge and information through short and simple words. This enables the children to get up-to date with the trending issues in the society and help in the dissemination of information in the modern society. Magic in the children poetry is evident because it has the ability to portray different moods to the children such as funny, serious and moving either separately and at times all the three in a single poem. This makes children poetry to have the ability to relate to all children at the same time, a matter that is encouraging to the children (Anderson 312).

Lessons on magic in the children's poems help in educating the children about the impact of magic in the society and the way they are shown in poems dictates the impacts that they have in the perceive magicians in the society. Graves and Young play a crucial role in molding the character of the children and their beliefs. The styles that the authors use in the poems dictate their poems affect their relevance on the lives of the children and the impact on the society. Magic in the children poetry is evident in that children's poems rich and suggestive full of marvelous sights, texture and sounds that cannot fit in any other literary work but only in the children's poems. This gives the children the ease of understanding the thoughts put forward by the authors and the language used in the children's poems is also full of possibilities thereby encouraging the children to believe on the possibilities in the society and work towards the betterment of their personal self (Rich 527). Additionally, children poetry contains stanzas that provoke the children to comment on the poetry in general thereby helping the children to develop their debating skills and initiate discussions that are of great benefits towards the development of thoughts. Above all, children poetry helps the children to look at the world with fresh eyes and this sensitizes the children to have positive thoughts towards the development of the society. Poets need to cultivate the virtues in the children by employing the right skills that would ensure that the children conform to the laid down societal rules. In this light, authors need to identify how to optimize the use of magic in children poetry to help in the sustaining proper growth and development of the children (Mayesky 23).

In the process of analyzing magic in the two poems, there is need to analyze various artistic skills used from the two poems to aid in the understanding of the impact of poems in explaining the idea of magic in the modern society. The evaluation of the various artistic skills such as rhyme, rhyme scheme, alliteration, repetition, assonance and personification help in explaining the use of words to make the topic of magic to become more evident in the two poems. In the poem 'Belief in Magic' by Dean Young, personification is clearly used to bring about the theme of magic and this evident when the poet writes 'Seen lipstick on a wine glass not shatter the wine.' In this manner, the poet gives the lipstick the human power to shatter the wine and this suggests that lipstick has a big influence in the natural world. Personification is also used when the poet writes that 'All rivers are full of sky' as this suggest that the rivers have the ability to consume the sky.

Young also employs the use of repetition when he uses 'been' twice and rhyme when he uses the words 'been' 'been' and 'seen' in different lines in the poem. Additionally, assonance and alliteration are greatly employed in the poem with the author using the rhetorical devices extensively in the poem to help in explaining the idea of magic in the poem. By the use of personification, Young proves that it is magical for the non-living things to acquire the human effect in the universe and this proves to the most influential rhetorical device in the poem. It is not natural for the non-living things to have a strong impact on other non-living things in the society.

The second poem of 'Love and Black Magic' by Robert Graves also employs the use of rhetorical devices to bring out the theme of magic in the society. This is through the use of rhyme through the use of words such as 'gone,' 'alone,' 'smile,' 'crocodile' among others to help in explaining the activities of the wizard to show that magic is real and this attributed to the existence of magic in the society. Other rhetorical devices such as assonance and alliteration are also employed in the poem and these are very crucial in explaining the idea of magic in the society. By ensuring that all ideas are properly employed in the literary work, there is improved quality of the poems and this improves the understanding of the audience regarding the issue of magic in the society. Due to the improved academic standards in the society and the high interest of the students in the study of literary devices and artistic skills, students are encouraged to learn about the effect of rhetorical devices in putting forward various themes and mostly the theme of magic.

An example of a poem with the theme of magic is the poem 'love and black magic' by Robert Graves. Robert Von Ranke Graves was born on 24th July 1895 in Wimbledon, England and died at the age of 90 years. He was a novelist, a poet and a soldier who participated in the First World War. He has written several historical novels and poems but was mainly popular for his poems. In this particular poem, the persona is a maiden who works for a wizard. The poet portrays the persona as a character who does not believe in magic yet her master has pledged her hand to a wizard and she has to marry him, the tone that Robert uses help in alluring the audience to understand the impact of poems. She scorns the whole setting of the wizard's grotto and terms it as 'trumpery trash'. Her hate for wizards is intensified when she wishes she had died the day she was born, given that she was born into a family of wizards "And oft I wish I had died instead- ." She believes that she does not need the assistance of a wizard to bring her baby boy into the world and says wishes are just enough. She does not wish to marry a wizard and opts for a soldier instead but sadly the decision is not for her to make. This helps in acknowledging the effect of sound and rhythm that Robert uses to bring about magic.

An example of another poem with the theme of magic is 'Belief in Magic' by Dean Young. Dean Young is an American poet born in 1955 in Columbia, Pennsylvania. He is from a poetic lineage of John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch. He has won various awards for his poetic creations. He has been cited as a second generation New York school poet. Dean Young has also written other books and has some of his works published in magazines. In this poem, the poet is not of the thought that magic has to involve wizards and witches. He describes magic as the simple beautiful things that happen or we see daily and often forget to appreciate and this is clearly evident through the analysis of the structure he employs in the poem.

He believes reality makes up for approximately 65% and the rest explains magic. "All rivers are full of sky...I believe we are surrounded by crystals". The poet appreciates how a powerful moment such as the declaration of independence is written by an object as simple as a feather. He terms this as magical. He also regards life as magical and appreciates the second chance he was given when his heart failed 'Even though this is my second heart.'

From the two examples above, it is clear that the poets have different views on magic. In the first poem, "Love and Black Magic", the poet considers magic as an act that is performed by wizards but does not necessarily believe in it. In fact he mocks the whole idea behind wizards performing magic. He believes one does not need charm and that a wish is enough. In the second poem, "Belief in Magic" the poet simply considers magic as the simple beautiful things that happen in our daily lives.

In the early years, imagination was mainly used to help children to escape reality. It was believed that as they grew up, they would push these imaginations aside and come back to reality. Belief in magic enhances children's growth in that their intellectual growth can easily be monitored. It therefore easier to track the age in which they can be able to distinguish between imaginations and reality it was later discovered that imagination thinking and fantasies are helpful in children development. Literature has great impact in the society and this is very crucial in the learning processes of children which prove the fact that there is need for the society to appreciate the role of the same in teaching. Children come from different backgrounds and this makes them to conform to different living conditions and develop in a different manner. The learning process also differs from child to child courtesy of character of the parenting skills and efforts (Rudd 90). In order to relate to the differing interests of the children and ensure that they share the common beliefs in the society, poems need to come in to bridge the different gaps that come up as a result of the differences in the process of bringing up children differently.

5. CONCLUSION

Children poetry shows that it is of great importance in formulating the child's personality, in the sense that it helps the child specific information regarding life and people in a certain society. Hence, learning institutions and curriculums need to be formulated to conform to the changing education requirements and help the children to develop their linguistic and intellectual skills. It is evident that magic play a big role in children's development. It is however important that children know how to differentiate between reality and imaginations. Learning institutions should therefore provide exercises that enhance faster brain development in children. Poems play a great impact in the learning process of the children and this should not be lost as a result of the technological development and the use of social media. The rate at which technology develops kills creativity in children which proves the need to mentor a new generation of children that appreciate informal education and can use their natural skills to excel in education and the social world as a whole (Fernea 34). In order to guide the youth and reduce vices common in the social framework, parents need to ensure that their children acquire basic social skills and help in addressing the challenges affecting the modern world.

The paper concludes that poems play a crucial role in helping the children to build their memorization skills because they pick patterns and sequences in the poetry recitations. Poetry therefore helps in linking memory with audio and visual events and this is beneficial to the students as it gives them easy time to learn new languages, perform better in mathematics and in reading comprehensions. Self- confidence of the children also gets a boost through the reading of the poems as they get ease of expressing feelings to their audience, giving them the confidence of addressing the challenges that they face in their daily lives. Finally, poetry needs to be developed in that it helps the children to develop their physical awareness as the children become aware of their breathe coordination, movements of mouth and related physical gestures because they align with the rhythm in the poems (Ostriker 182). Children also get to learn how to connect with the emotional level of their audience through poems hence they need to get to learn about the poetic skills as such skills have various benefits to the children. Initiatives of developing poetic skills are crucial in maintaining unity and peaceful coexistence among the children.

Each culture has its own way of portraying the values and the norms which it respects. One of the ways any culture uses to create an image of anything the way it desires is poetry. In this sense, the paper conveys very clearly that American poet differs from Spanish poet in the way he uses to portray the image of the magician and to convey the value of magic as a concept in life. The difference comes from the very fact that the society to which each poet belongs looks to magic and magicians in variously. In spite of that, both poets are successful in showing the children how magic and magician are seen in their societies. Of course, this result validates the before mentioned hypothesis that children poetry is very important in implanting the social values in the mind of the children and that each culture has its own way of looking to the same concepts and this appears throughout children poetry.

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