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THE BRUSH STROKES OF ARCHETYPES ON THE MIND: NURSERY RHYMES AS CARRIERS OF INNATE IDEAS

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ABSTRACT

The division of the human mind into three parts by Freud has shown that at the time of birth itself, man is a being not with a mind which is like a blank sheet as suggested by Locke. The various images and objects present in the *id* get to the conscious mind through the teachings by the society. The first element that establishes this teaching includes the rhymes and riddles meant for children. These contain various archetypal images, which are the remains of the common ancestral memory of man, seen in the lowest part of the mind. The rhymes are only needed to understand the whole history and life of man in the universe. The analysis of the rhymes results in the finding that, as opposed to what the modernists say, man in a social as well as a historical being, rather than an asocial and ahistorical being. The archetypal images in the rhymes show the different phases of man's life as well as his character and personality, the latter being created with the help of the surrounding environment and fellow beings. The creation of the personality compels man to go in search for the truth, which will result in the discovery of his own self. That is the quest-myth results in man finding who he himself really is.

Keywords: *Carpe diem*, Innate ideas, Mother archetype, Quest-myth, Rebel archetype, Shadow, *Tabula rasa*

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Saussure's explanation of language as a system of signs, comprising of the signifier and the signified, gives clear evidence that, each and every element of language is concretely established in a person's mind by the society from the earliest period of her/his life. But it can be said from the psychological point of view that these elements are present in the mind of that person from the time of birth itself. Freud, the father of Psychology, suggested three divisions to the mind as the *id*, the

super ego, and the *ego*, the *id* being the lowest portion of the mind. It is in this part that there is the presence of hidden wishes which are prohibited to be fulfilled by the society, along with certain other images. What the society does is, bringing these images from the unconscious *id* to the conscious *ego*, by giving them different names. Thus, the images get established in the mind, and they turn out to be the signifier and the signified. The various riddles for children, sometimes in the form of

rhymes help in this process. To bring the image of a walnut to the conscious mind of a child, the riddle

“As soft as silk, as white as milk,
As bitter as gall, a thick wall’
And a green coat covers me all” (*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

was formed. The qualities given in the riddle get to the conscious realm of the child, and when s/he sees something with all these qualities together the image of the walnut comes to her/his mind, and thus it can be said that the walnut becomes a sign to the child. In a similar fashion each and every object of the universe becomes a sign. It is earlier said that these are already seen in the id. For this, Carl G. Jung gives the explanation that it is because of the ‘collective unconscious’- that part of the mind where every memory and image is common to all human beings, due to their common ancestry.

As far as an artist is concerned his works are the indirect fulfillment of the hidden wishes, and sometimes in the works of art the hidden images and myths make their appearance repeatedly. These recurring images and myths are known as archetypes. Sometimes these images appear in the works of the same author as well as in the different works of different authors. The nursery rhymes, or rather the children’s rhymes which are the creations of different people comprise of these archetypal images, which sometimes will be commonly seen in more than one rhyme. Through these rhymes a general awareness of the whole universe is conveyed. The presence of the archetypal images is proof enough that, these songs for kids have in them hidden meanings, which come out from the writers’ minds accidentally or deliberately.

An analysis makes it evident that the different categories of archetypes- soul, ego, and the self type- make their appearance in the nursery rhymes. Apart from these the archetypal characters and features like the hero, the mother figure, the innocent youth, the mentor, the doppelganger, the scapegoat, the villain, the journey, the initiation etc. too are present in them, though scattered. Along with these the rhymes can be divided on the basis of what Northrop Frye said, the spring phase, the summer phase, the autumn phase and the winter phase. Similar to such rhymes are the riddles. In a

sense, the theme of the rhyme, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star...”, and that of the riddle,

“Little Nancy Etticoat,
In a white petticoat,
And a red nose;
The longer she stands’
The shorter she grows” [Candle]
(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

are similar in nature. The star in the sky and the candle are the representatives of the hero archetype. Just as a hero, both these work for the common happiness, and to restore harmony and justice to society. It is through self-sacrifice that they do it. The self-sacrifice of the hero and his hard work even in limited ability is seen in the riddle about a star as,

“I have a little sister, they call her peep,
peep;
She wades the waters deep, deep, deep;
She climbs the mountains high, high, high;
Poor little creature she has but one eye”
(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

In the case of all the three verses it can be seen that there is an attempt to equalize the natural and the human worlds in that, there is the reference to the star, which is a natural gift, and the candle, which is man-made.

In “Twinkle twinkle little star...” there is the archetypal comic vision of the mineral world. Frye argued that in the mineral world, if it is a comic vision, there can be seen certain images like the star-lit dome, the glittering precious stones, and many others. In the rhyme both the star-lit dome and the star which resembles a diamond is presented. Moreover, star stands for nature just like the snowflake falling from the sky in

“Snowflake, snowflake
Little snowflake
Falling... in my hand... on my head... on my nose”
(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

The words of the rhyme themselves stand for the winter season, which is an archetypal symbol for the death of the hero. During the inactive season, the only movement is the movement of the snowflakes, which can mean that, the only movement is that of death. The snowflake falling on the head and nose

of the speaker can refer to the probability of even the speaker's fall, and his final inactive state. In another sense, the rhyme gives the archetypal image of life as well. That is, even during the inactive state, there is the movement of something; there still is life. The moving element is the snowflake which is a part of nature. Thus, nature is, to a certain extent presented as the mother figure; or rather mother earth, who hides spring under the snow.

In certain rhymes the combination of the Epicurian philosophy and the concept of *carpe diem* bring out the jester archetype, and sometimes the explorer. In

"Row row row your boat
Get me down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream"
(Kidspot)

the speaker follows the concept of "seize the moment" as well as "eat, drink, and be merry...". That may be the reason why s/he says, "life is but a dream." This is the jester archetype whose motto is that, man lives only once, and the wish is to live life to its fullest, and complete the full cycle of life. The rowing of the boat is a circular movement. So by "rowing" the speaker meant completing the full cycle of life, enjoying each and every moment with full freedom, exploring new things, and even one's own self. It is the fear of being made into a nothing that motivates the speaker to go on with the journey. Thus, the rowing of the boat in this manner presents also the explorer archetype. So, there is the hint of passing through Frye's four phases of myth, just as presented in,

"If you are happy... clap your hands'
If you are angry... stamp your feet
If you are scared... say Oh! No
If you are sleepy... take a nap"
(Kidspot)

In the rhyme, happiness can stand for the hero's youth when there is the slaying of the shadow, or the villain. Here anger also plays its role. "Scared" as said in the rhyme, can stand for the autumn phase, or old age, when there is less power. Finally there is "nap" which is the inactive phase of life. It can mean that there is still life, which shows

the probability of the reappearance of the spring phase.

The nap can also mean the temporary failure of the hero at the hands of the villain. But there is the hope that s/he will soon overcome all the difficulties as the spider in

"The incy Wincy spider went up the water spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out;
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
And the Incy Wincy spider went up the spout again"
(Kidspot)

Here the various images like the sun, rain, and the spider can be seen carrying inside them different and indirect meanings. The different forms of the mother archetype are presented in the rhyme. As per the study by archetypal critics, there are the caring mother and the terrible mother. While the terrible mother causes great disturbances and disasters, the caring mother patches up all the troubles. In the rhyme the terrible mother took the form of rain, which resulted in the failure of the hard working hero, while the caring mother, in the form of sun helped him succeed in his effort by drying up the rain. It is from the sky that both rain and sunlight came, representing the caring as well as the punishing nature of the natural world, or rather Mother Nature.

Sun too is an archetypal image, standing for the most powerful element as well as fire. Fire has the capacity to destroy everything. In the various artistic works, sun represents the male sex. Thus, a close analysis of this innocent rhyme shows that though the terrible mother punishes the hero, the powerful male counterpart controls her and helps the hero, resulting in the patriarchal concept that, it is always the male, which is more powerful than, and superior to the female counterpart.

Thus, it can be said that the fixation of the powerful too is sometimes propagated through the nursery rhymes and riddles. Certain riddles like,

"Flour of England, fruit of Spain
Met together in a shower of rain;
Put in a bag tied round with string,

If you'll tell me this riddle, I'll give you a ring"

[Plum-pudding]

(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

Propagates the idea that synergy can help in the creation of something more powerful than the existing ones. England and Spain were the earliest colonial powers and both these countries engaged in constant conflicts with each other related to the colonies as well as trade and commerce. Both were equally powerful and so, if both of them unite and make a strong move they would be capable of bringing the whole world under their control. So through the riddle, the speaker tells out the unconscious idea that, unity is strength. Also there is the presence of the rebel archetype which tries to bring together the opposing forces, thus creating a sort of revolution, at last in the mind of the reader. The speaker also plays the role of the mentor archetype, whose major duty is giving advice to the hero. Here, the speaker's call for unity is clearly visible though he finds no great success.

The major role that the mentor plays is already said. But the rebel archetype pays no heed to the advice. Such a character tries to overcome the dark powers and wishes to travel along the tragic vision of the world as in,

"Walking in the jungle

We are not afraid..."

(*Kidspot*)

In the rhyme the characters, while passing through the jungle see a frog, a monkey, and a bird. These do no harm to them but, hearing the mere grunt of a tiger, they all run afraid. The rhyme is inclusive of a myriad images, the most important being the jungle. It is an element of the tragic vision of the vegetable world. The mention of jungle itself reveals that a shadow is awaiting the hero/heroes. However the role of the shadow or the villain is played by the tiger. But the presence of the mere shadow of the shadow makes the characters run in fright. Here, the rhyme itself plays the role of the wise old man, or the mentor. It hints that, to avoid a fall, the hero should be careful even about the shadow of the villain. The child who listens to the rhyme understands, at least later, that in the whole world there are different people with different attitudes.

Those doing harm should be taken good care of, or otherwise it will result in the winter phase of life. This idea is already imbibed in the child's *id*, and it is brought to the conscious by the rhyme, with the use of various symbols and images. The rhyme actually hints that, if the autumn phase is carefully dealt with, a person can jump to the spring phase, avoiding the winter phase. For such a movement, there should be a good determination and imagination. The rhyme'

"Good night to you,

Good night to me,

Now close your eyes

And go to sleep

Good night, sleep tight

Sweet dreams tonight

Good night, I love you"

(*Kidspot*)

stands proof for this. Night refers to the darker side of life, or the approach of the shadow. The speaker tells the listener to escape the shadow and dream. The dreaming proves that after the night there will surely be the dawn of life. This makes dream a kind of wish fulfillment. Thus, with the reference to dream this particular work of art, which too is a kind of wish fulfillment, has given the hero the advice to get to the dawn of life. So the creator archetype is introduced here, whose motto is that the capacity to imagine helps one to make the same practical. A vision is about to be realized with the help of imagination, and this proves that there is a way to escape the death of the hero. The escaping hero becomes a new trend, and hence a new culture. So it can be said concluded that the rhymes and riddles are the carriers of earlier human culture and traditions.

The ancient man's life is very interesting to look into. They were at first nomads and later, started creating their personal space, each man having his own domesticated animals and enclosures. Ownership compelled them to protect their belongings, and for the purpose counting started. At first, as a means of counting they made use of stones, each stone representing the object to be counted. After that they started using the fingers on the hands and toes. Thus they got the ability to count up to twenty. Since every individual is a part

of the human community, the idea of counting is present in the unconscious mind. It is interesting to note that most of the nursery rhymes that help children learn counting, end by the number ten, and some, twenty, thus carrying the dormant numbers from the unconscious to the conscious level of the mind. An example for this is,

"There were ten in the bed,
And the little one said,
"Roll over, roll over"
And they all rolled over
And one fell out
....
There was one in the bed,
And the little one said'
"I'm lonely""
(*Kidspot*)

This rhyme even says that man can never have an isolated existence and that, he is a social animal, the fact which is true till this era. In a sense, the different rhymes composed during the different periods of history are still important in the life of an individual, some even trying to maintain the innocence of man all throughout his life like the rhyme,

"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Guard the bed that I lay on!
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head;
One to watch, one to pray,
And one to bear my soul away!"
(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

Apart from establishing the religious belief in the child's mind, the rhyme presents the innocent archetype, which is always morally pure. Listening to the rhyme, the first image coming to the mind will be of a child sitting on bed and praying with great sincerity. The innocent archetype, which, even living in the midst of darkness and evil, yet remaining pure at heart, thus comes out from the listener's *id*, in the form of a child's image. Along with such kinds of archetypal images, the speaker sometimes make use of symbols, the most common being the different colours. In the rhyme, "I see something blue..." (*Kidspot*) there is the mention of the different colours like blue, red and green. Each of these colours has got an indirect meaning, which gives a

clear idea of the natural world, with the blue sky, the green nature, and the red living space. In another perspective, blue represents highly positive attitude, arising as a result of truth and religious belief as well as optimism, red being representative of blood, which is symbolic of the lifeblood as well as violence, and green being representative of growth in the positive sense and in the negative sense, of death and decay. This single rhyme contains in it all the three divisions of the archetypes- Ego, Soul, and Self- as suggested by Carl G. Jung, the combination resulting in understanding the role of each and every archetype not only in the works of art, but in the whole life of a man who has to encounter the spring, summer, autumn, and winter phases.

Finally, but the most significant, the rhymes introducing the alphabet give the base of a language of which all the rhymes are part. The psychology is that nothing can be understood in isolation, as everything is a part of larger structure/structures. Regarding the rhymes, they cannot be understood, not even in parts, without knowing the larger structures of which they are parts. That is, without knowing the sign system that gives form to the rhymes, these end products will remain unintelligible. To give a concrete shape to these abstract ones, the basic elements should be given greater importance, and hence the alphabet rhymes.

The archetypal analysis of the children's rhymes and riddles is enough to understand that the modernist view of man as being a social and a historical is questionable. The following riddle can be of use here,

"Old mother Twitchett had but one eye,
And a long tail which she let fly;
And every time she went over a gap,
She left a bit of her tail in a trap"
[A needle and thread]
(*The Nursery Rhymes of England*)

The riddle, when read in another perspective, is trying to convey the idea that, in every work of art, a bit of the author's personality is left behind. George Luckas, in his essay, *The Ideology of Modernism*, suggested that man is a bundle of potentialities, of which only a few become realized. While the others

remain as abstract potentialities, the realized become concrete ones. It is the decision of the person that turns out the abstract potentialities to be concrete ones, thus revealing his personality. So, it can be said that personality derives from making the various decisions, which is possible only with man's interaction with the larger structures, which are the environment where he lives, and his experiences; in simple terms from his social life and the various experiences that are personal history. John Locke, in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, dealt with 'ideas' and how they are formed. In the work he put forth his ideas regarding innate ideas, where he opined that there is nothing called innate ideas. He gave many arguments supporting his statement which included the idea that, man's mind is like a blank slate at the time of birth (*tabula rasa*), and that ideas and knowledge are injected into them later. But the archetypal analyses of the various works of art, and psychoanalysis prove that it is only the conscious mind of a man which is a blank slate, at the time of birth, and that the unconscious mind is filled with images and symbols which are parts of knowledge, already imbibed in the mind, or which are inborn. A deep study of this results in the quest myth where the character goes in search of some truths which in turn results in self-realization, which leads him to the conclusion that he is not a social or a historical, but that he is a social animal who has got a history of his own.

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