

ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN MORAL EDUCATION: CHILDREN'S LESSONS, ADULT APATHY

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ABSTRACT

The society has been moulded over many morals and values. Literature has always been a mirror to this society, to reflect upon the same. Aesop's Fables, the timeless tales of children's literature, using animals and nature as characters to impart moral lessons, have long been revered for their efficacy in educating the young. The dichotomy in the reception of moral teachings is conveyed through anthropomorphism in Aesop's Fables, specifically focusing on the contrasting impact on children and adults. However, a critical observation emerges: while these fables significantly influence children, the same cannot be said for adults. This paper intends to dissect the nature of anthropomorphism in these tales, elucidating its profound role in facilitating moral education for children, as well as to confront a pivotal paradox: the efficacy of anthropomorphism in shaping youthful moral compasses juxtaposed with its apparent inability to incite change or reflection in adults resulting in a moral dilemma. Analysing the potential flaws in the application of anthropomorphism, this paper also intends to bridge the gap of dichotomic reception.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Aesop's Fables, Children's Literature, Moral Dilemma, Dichotomic Reception

INTRODUCTION

Anthropomorphic animals, when taken out of narrative into actual visibility, always turn into buffoonery or nightmare.

- C. S. Lewis

Animals that talk can let us in on another world which we may not be able to see without their help... We find measure of escapism in the non-controversial constancy of animal behaviour.

- Sheila Burnford. The fundamental ideals that underpin an entire community or the cultural conduct, relationships, and sense of shared conscience are its societal morals and values. These shared beliefs shape the norms and expectations within a society, influencing an individual's choice, ethical judgements and social interactions. Literature, whether in the form of novels, poems, or plays, encapsulates the collective consciousness of a society, offering insights into the human condition and the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Literature stands as an invaluable repository of societal reflections, capturing the essence of different epochs and preserving the evolving narratives of humanity. Animals have always had a place in literature. Primitive story-tellers used animals as antagonists to dramatize man's ceaseless struggle against the forces of nature. Animals were also used in didactic stories such as the fables of Aesop, and had roles in medieval literature as "questing beasts and dreamland dragons" (Magee, 221). Society's moral concepts are woven in with the values and principles that guide human behaviour and interactions. These morals and values are often instilled in individuals from a young age and continue to shape their perspectives and actions throughout their lives. Literature has long been

recognized as a mirror that reflects the beliefs, norms, and moral codes of a society. Through storytelling, societies have passed down their moral teachings from one generation to the next, using narratives to convey important lessons and insights. This paper aims to delve deeper into the use of anthropomorphism in Aesop's Fables, exploring how the attribution of human characteristics to animals serves as a vehicle for conveying moral messages. By contrasting the impact of *Aesop's Fables* on children and adults, this study seeks to understand why these timeless tales tend to resonate more profoundly with young audiences, while often failing to elicit a comparable impact on adult readers. The paper will also identify and analyse the moral dilemma inherent in the reception of *Aesop's Fables* by adults, seeking to uncover the factors that contribute to a potential sense of apathy or disconnection from the moral teachings embedded in these classic stories. Understanding why Aesop's Fables tend to resonate more with children than adults can inform educators and parents about the most effective ways to impart moral education. It can help in the development of age-appropriate teaching methods and materials that are better tailored to the psychological and cognitive differences between children and adults. By examining the psychological and developmental factors that shape the reception of anthropomorphic stories, the study can provide valuable insights into cognitive processes, moral reasoning, and emotional engagement across different stages of human development. The findings of the study may have practical applications in fields such as children's literature, media, and entertainment, where the effective communication of moral messages to diverse age groups is a key consideration.

3 ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN AESOP'S FABLES

The Greek animal fables, traditionally attributed to a former slave, Aesop, who lived during the sixth century BCE had been a part of childhood and still continues to be a part of children's literature. As a genre, the *Aesopic fables*, or the Aesopica, has had a significant impact on the Western fable tradition and modern Western children's literature. The Aesopica owes much to the Mesopotamian fables and has parallels in other Near Eastern cultures. The fables typically portray animals with human virtues, the most known literary technique of anthropomorphism. For instance, the story of The Tortoise and the Hare, are embedded in our minds since childhood. The story ends with a moral that 'Slow and steady wins the race', this moral helps young minds to be confident with their own pace of learning or developing. Without even knowing the literary complexities, the young minds take these stories as something they can look up to. This method of boosting morale continued to be in literature either in visible or invisible forms. This aided in creating a psychological impact on the readers, also provided them with a chance to look back to the stories they grew up listening to.

Children identify with these personified animals' experiences, which often mirror their own social interactions and challenges. The simplicity and clarity of these tales, dressed in everyday situations, enable children to discern the fundamentals of right and wrong. The young ones perceive these fables as something they can relate to, but the problem arises when adults on the other hand see them as mere stories, which revoke their childhood memory. Consider the fable *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, whereby the

young shepherd's lies are represented through the complex consequence of his relationship with the village locals. When the boy raises false alarms, leading the villagers to believe a wolf is attacking his flock, he is teaching the lesson of credibility and the value of honesty. Another fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, the tortoise embodies perseverance while the hare symbolizes arrogance and complacency. The final outcome illustrates that slow and steady efforts triumph over hasty and self-assured neglect. The hare's defeat and the tortoise's victory communicate the moral lesson that overconfidence can be one's downfall, and determination leads to success.

Indifference in adults is caused due to the impracticality and simplicity of the fables. When in a dilemma, they do not find solace with the morals at the end of each fable, be it 'slow and steady wins the race', no one believes a liar even when he tells the truth 'And so on. They need something concrete and rigid to believe which also aligns with the parallel corporate enterprise. The roots of this issue can be traced back when initially the *Panchatantra Stories* were made for adults and how this ended up in the genre of children's literature. To prove this argument further, The book is intended for the adult mind, though children will love it if helped; it contains a fountain of India's philosophical wisdom - a fountain of nectar. (Chandiramani,5)

FLAWS IN AESOP S FABLES

The dichotomy in reception of *Aesop Fables*-moral tales in children and adults varies mainly on two major grounds, namely psychological and cultural. The former one deals with the development of brain structure and associated cognitive abilities. Children's open mindedness and formative cognitive stages render them particularly receptive to the teachings conveyed

through anthropomorphic storytelling. With fewer established preconceptions than adults, children are more likely to embrace and emulate the virtues portrayed by the characters they come to admire. On the other hand, the same anthropomorphic stories tend to invoke a different reaction in adults, whose moral and ethical frameworks are generally more solidified. The receptivity to the lessons in these tales often leaves little imprint on adults, whose life experiences have already shaped their moral compasses. Adults may appreciate the wit and wisdom of the narratives, but these tales seldom incite fundamental changes in their principles or behaviour.

This difference in reception between children and adults underscores a paradox within moral education through literature: the same narrative that forms the basis of character in the young becomes a mere echo of already established beliefs in the grown up. For adults, the fables act more as reminders of the moral codes they have already chosen to accept or ignore. Anthropomorphism in *Aesop s fables* presents a unique and powerful avenue for developing the moral values in children while often merely reaffirming the established values in adults. The acceptance of these stories by children showcases their role as educators in virtues and consequences, sculpting the ethical frameworks that will carry them into adulthood. The divergence in impact between the two age groups elicits profound contemplation on the capacity for change at different stages of life and the effectiveness of storytelling in moral education. The *Aesop s Fables*, therefore, claim a dual function: laying the moral groundwork for the young while serving as a touchstone for self- examination in the older, their wisdom resonating through the ages with both simple truths and complex human insights.

BRIDGING THE GAP IN DICHOTOMIC RECEPTION

In order to bridge this gap, there should be value added education or a holistic approach to education, for young adults and more literature of the same context for adults. This can boost confidence and morale in human minds. Often people end up in situations where they are forced to exhibit a particular type of response to a recurring problem. This may be due to their cultural, political and philosophical backgrounds they grew up from. Also, another reason may be the psychological impact they have to respond in this particular manner. Even after becoming an adult, one can always learn, relearn and unlearn certain things in their lives. The moral values once we upheld to ourselves, are being compromised either forcefully or wilfully to meet the ends of everyday life, this can be rectified with proper guidance, like the self-help genre in literature. In the contemporary context, the integration of anthropomorphism in literature continues to inspire fresh avenues for moral education, ensuring that the universal themes of virtue, wisdom, and compassion are conveyed in a manner that resonates with both the innocence of childhood and the contemplative spirit of adulthood. Through the prism of anthropomorphism, literature becomes an ever-potent vessel for instilling timeless moral principles, fostering empathy, and nurturing ethical consciousness. Other ways to provide a continuum to this moral education can happen, by adding technological advancements to the equation. Simple exercises for example, interactive workshops, intergenerational storytelling, collaborative learning platforms, all these can help an adult to relearn certain moral values and resolve their ethical dilemma.

CONCLUSION

The *Aesop's Fables* and *Panchathantra Stories*, comes under the umbrella of literature which imparts values and morals to children through fables. The former pays tribute to the West and the latter to the East, both serving the same purpose. This genre is now popular among children's literature, which was initially meant for adults to improve their social

skills. Anthropomorphism is common in these fables, where the moral education is imparted in a simpler method to the children, where eventually this simplification becomes the problem in adult apathy towards the fables.

To address this issue in perception, the limitations in moral education must be recognised and should be supplemented with other empathy building exercises and real-world applications of ethical and moral principles. As long as human beings rule the planet, there is always scope for humanity backed by moral and ethical values. Individualistic differences in our reception may be caused due to the different social and political backgrounds we belong to, nevertheless, the core values we are imbibed to remain as our solid base, where our psyche acts upon. To conclude, the moral dilemma which we face in our day-to-day life can be resolved if we create a continuum of moral education from childhood to adulthood. By fostering a holistic approach to moral education, we can change adult apathy. If we incorporate technology into this equation, the outcome will be more positive.

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