



LIMINALITY IN CHILDREN LITERATURE: A STUDY ON ENID BLYTON'S THE ENCHANTED WOOD

Author 1

Dr.D.Jones Sudha

Assistant Professor

Annai Hajira Women's College

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundranar University- Tirunelveli)

Author 2

Ms.S.Kani

M.Phil Scholar

Sri Ram Nallamani Yadava College of Arts And Science

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundranar University- Tirunelveli)

Author 3

Ms.A.Selva Gnana Mathi

M.Phil Scholar

St. John's College

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundranar University- Tirunelveli)

Abstract : This research paper deals with the concept of imitation. According to Aristotle, all works of art must be the experience of the author and there is nothing new in it. Likewise, Blyton has consciously or unconsciously mentioned some of her life experiences in her books. She had fulfilled all her wishes and desires through her writings. In addition to that, though she projected herself as a strong and prominent writer in the field of children's literature, she failed to find success in all the struggles in her personal life. Applying this concept to the works of Enid Blyton reveals that she is a victim of familial restrictions and a self-made person. Thus, this paper deals with two major ideas: imitation and liminality. Blyton's book *The Enchanted Wood* is an imitation of her own life experience and she is a liminal survivor of her life

KEY WORDS: imitation, survival, mimises, utopia.

Plato coined the term 'mimesis' between CA. 427 – 347 BC. It is taken from the Greek verb 'mimeisthai', which means "to imitate". This term is commonly used in literary criticism and philosophy. It has a deep meaning in it, like imitation, similarity, receptivity, the act of resembling and many. Plato was a great literary stylist and philosopher and his philosophy led him to some doubts about the nature of poetry (literature). Plato defines poetry (literature) as the nature of representation and, in his words; he called it 'Mimesis', representation or imitation of the world through artistic means. He says every work of art is a copy of a copy and leads humans away from the truth.

Aristotle (384-322), the great disciple of Plato, and the first person who delivered his first influential response to his argument on mimesis, he argues that literature is not a copy of a copy but that it reflects and represents reality. The view and meaning of mimesis change according to the critic. Its meaning has changed and been reinterpreted many times. Mimesis has been theorised by many thinkers, like Aristotle, Philip Sidney, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sigmund Freud, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida, Homi. K. Bhabha and many. Every critic places this theory in their concept and provides different meanings for the same term.

Plato and Aristotle depict mimesis as the representation of nature, including human nature (psyche). Plato wrote about mimesis in both *Ion* and *The Republic* (Books II, III, and X). To him, a work of art is twice removed from the truth or reality. Aristotle's *Poetics* (a response to Plato's philosophy, it is his treaties on the subject of mimesis). In this book, he states that human

beings are mimetic beings, feeling a wish to create a work of art that reflects and represents reality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge claims in his theory of imagination that:

The composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and that imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or the different throughout a base radically the same. (Biographia Literaria. 72)

Coleridge has opposed imitation to copying. Next to him, Lucy Irigaray, fixes this theory in feminist studies. She used this term to describe the form of resistance where women imperfectly imitate stereotypes about themselves and to undermine them. And in the hands of Jacques Derrida, this term entered into a deconstructive mode. Later, through Homi. K. Bhabha, this mimesis study is done from a cultural perspective, so in the hands of every writer, through author and critic, this term gets a multi-dimensional perspective.

The concept of mimesis by Aristotle suits Blyton perfectly. The incidents that Blyton narrates in this book are all her own experiences in her life. According to Aristotle, the representation of reality or, in other words, the replica of real life incidents and its impact on the writer's work of art is called mimesis.

Blyton, in her book *The Enchanted Wood*, describes her love for nature and passion for new life. In every work of art there will be an impact on the author's life or the impact of contemporary life on it. According to Aristotle, in literary circles, this theory is known as the theory of imitation. Most of the old theorists deal with the role of the psyche in the field of literature. Many theories try to define the author and reader's mind, and mimesis is also one among them. It tries to bring out the inner meanings of the work of art by understanding the author's psyche.

In literary circles, Blyton was the most successful commercial writer. She went on to build a great literary empire by producing many books in a year. And in her entire career she has produced more than six hundred books. In addition, to that, she contributes to magazines and newspapers also. Today the literary world is celebrating her writings, and irrespective of age, all sorts of people are reading her books. But behind this successful journey, Blyton's life has come across many unhappy and sorrowful paths too. She faced many struggles to overcome many obstacles to become a successful writer.

Blyton has set this novel in an undeveloped village, where there is no transport facility, the exact location where she spent her childhood days. The family of those young children shifts their home from city to village. The three young children, Joe, Beth and Frannie, leave the city by saying a huge good bye to it. Through the conversation between those children, Blyton reflects her hatred for city life or, in other words, materialistic life in this book. When children reach the village, they have no transport facility to reach their home, so they have to go by walk. Along with their parents, those children walked for five miles to reach their home from the railway station. And she fixed the residency for the protagonist in a lovely small cottage. In the words of Blyton,

But before they reached their new home they were tired and could not bother to say a word more to each other. Their cottage was five miles from the station, and as the children's father could not afford to do anything but walk there, it seemed a very long way indeed. There was no bus to take them, so the tired children dragged their feet along, wishing for a glass of warm milk and a cosy bed.

At last they got there – and dear me, it was worth all the walk, for the cottage was sweet. Roses hung from the walls – red and white and pink – and honeysuckle was all round the front door. It was lovely! (2-3)

The above cited lines represent her childhood days. Blyton's father, Thomas Carey Blyton, was a sales agent, so he couldn't offer a luxurious life to his children, but he could afford a decent life for them. Along with Blyton, there were two children in her home. Among them, she is the eldest. Blyton's father brought her up as a lover of nature. She, along with her father, maintained the garden in their home, they spent their time in the laps of nature, and he taught her to play piano. Blyton spent her happiest time in the countryside with her father. She reflects on her love for village life in this book. But she failed to mention her father's love for it because her father left her when she was young. After the absence of her father, she was brought up by her mother. She felt no freedom in the hands of her mother, because what she received from her mother was discouragement and restricted freedom. Her mother thought her writings were a mere waste of time. So Blyton had no faith in familial life, so in all her books she deals only with children's characters or other young characters, and runs the plot around them. She places family in her stories as a mere object.

In the same, she mentions three children, the protagonist in this story, who are all siblings. Those three children have both a father and a mother but do not have any attachment to them. They decide what to do and what not to do. They seek no permission from their parents to do adventures. If they do not, they will get their permission of their own. This is the exact scenario of Blyton's life when her father leaves her and joins her with another lady. She lost her belief in people, so she grew up alone without seeking any permission from others. She decided on her own life.

Throughout her life, Blyton seeks a Utopian world, where people are real and lovable; and this is the world where money has no value. MH Abrams, in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th edition), defines Utopia as:

The term utopia designates the class of fictional writings that represents an ideal but nonexistent political and social and social way of life. It derives from Utopia (1515-16), a book written in Latin by the Renaissance humanist Sir Thomas

More which describes a perfect commonwealth; more formed his title by conflating the Greek words "eutopia" (good place) and "outopia" (no place). (328)

Abrams further adds that,

The utopia can be distinguished from literary representations of imaginary places which, either because they are inordinately superior to the present world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects, serve primarily as vehicles for satire on contemporary human life and society...(328).

In this book *The Enchanted Wood* Blyton had created many Lands but her thoughts of utopian world or the quest for utopian world is reflected through the character called Moon-Face, when he describes about the Land of Take-What-You-Want he says,

‘It’s a marvellous land,’ he said. ‘You are allowed to wander all over it and take whatever you want for yourselves without paying a penny. Everyone goes there if they can...

Is it quit, quit safe? Asked Joe...
‘Oh yes,’ said Silky...(126).

The chapter which depicts *The Land of Take-What-You-Want* expresses the sufferings of the author during her childhood. When children’s parents suffer from the poor economy, they decide to help them. They mended their clothes, helped their parents with gardening, they remained in the home as a supporter of their parents. In the woods, Moon-Face and Silky were expecting their arrival for two weeks but they would not come. Then through an Owl, Moon-Face sent a message that the Land of Take-What-You-Want is appearing above the tree, so Moon-Face and Silky wants their companionship. After receiving the letter from Moon-Face, the children decide to go to the land and wish to bring some things to their family to survive in the economic depression. The children got an opportunity to leave the home; as a gift for their two-day support to their parents in completing their domestic work, their parents allowed them to play as a credit of their goodness. Using this chance, they reached the wood, and then the special land named Land of Take-What-You-Want. Inside the land, they can take whatever they want, but the children take only hens and goats, which will help their parents to earn money. For the ordinary reader, these episodes are mere explanations of those children’s lives, but if the reader rereads the text, it will reveal that this book is a lamentation of Blyton about her struggling life. Blyton is good at narrating. She blends her personal life incidents, experience and impacts with this magical story and produces a classic piece of children’s literature. Her talent at narration is revealed through this book, *The Enchanted Wood*.

Blyton’s selection of land in this book reflects her psyche, and shows the journey of her struggling life. The reader can compare the list of the land to the author’s growth in her life. The first land in this novel is Roundabout Land, depicts her childhood days where she lavishly spends her time with her siblings without any fear of question of future in her mind. Then the Land of Snowman shows her absence of her father, and the wilderness in her life. The melting of Snowman in front of other people symbolically represents the gradual loss of her father’s love in her life.

The next state of her life is her career. She decided to choose her own career without the permission of any. She chose teaching and later writing as her career. This is revealed in the story while describing the actions of those children. In the land of Take-What-You-Want, the children take what they need, not all the things they want. Likewise, Blyton also prefers writing as her career is not all that she wished. Then she narrates the experience of those children at Dame Snape’s School. Similarly, after choosing her career, she went into a strict school, but from that school she began her writing career.

Then in her career she faced many struggles and controversies which made her stop writing for a long time. Her books were removed from libraries and readers and critics called her racist, chauvinist, and sexist. She could not struggle more with choosing her career, but she struggled hard to be a successful writer, but at last she kicked away all the controversies and charges which were thrown at her. The symbolic representation of this event in this book is the Red goblin’s entry in the Faraway Tree. That gobbling has no authority on the tree but they tried to own it and want to become a master of that wood. Likewise, the critics of Blyton tried to remove her from the field of literature, but Blyton’s books and popularity made her remain in this field.

Through the last land *The Land of Birthday party* Blyton has revealed that, she suffered in her life and career, and had nothing in her hand but she manages to overcome all the struggles and holds an immortal position in literary field. The entire book symbolically represents her life. Using those lands, she depicts her personal life in an entertaining way. The psychoanalysis of the author through this story reveals that this is not only a story for children but an autobiography. Blyton has narrated her life experience in this novel and, in other words, she has imitated her life experience in this book and that comes out as a better story.

Reading this novel through the author’s psyche shows the presence of her personal experience in this book, and the remaining part of this novel depicts the social scenario of nineteenth and twentieth century England. She speaks about industries and its impacts on land, the materialistic world, and deforestation through the children’s context.

Blyton illustrates how materialistic world detached the families. In this story, the children’s family has a patriarchal set up. Father is the head of the family and he is the man to take care of the economic needs of the family. When he fails to bring money the family struggles. He shows his incapability through anger, as a result the family become disturbed. When the children’s father explains his economic condition he says;

Things did not go very well the next week. Father lost some money one night, and Mother could not get very much washing to do. So money was very scarce, and the children did not have as much to eat as they would have liked.

‘If only we could have a few hens!’ sighed Mother. ‘They would at least give us eggs to eat. And a little goat gives us milk.

‘And what I want is a new garden shovel,’ said Father. ‘Mine broke yesterday and I can’t get on with the garden. It’s very important that we should grow as many vegetables as possible, for we can’t afford to buy them. (118)

The father is in an imbalanced position. He is not economically well. His feeling and incapable of bringing money threatens him and he reveals it to others as anger. Blyton has depicted the psyche of a common person in the industrial society through this character. Industries helped the nation to grow but it failed to care about the ordinary person. According to the scenario of industrial society in England, the rich always remain as rich and the poor were pulled below the poverty line. Though the industrialists ruined the lives of people, nature is there to protect them. In the situation of survival and food, they seek the help of nature as the presence of hens and goats in their home will help them to survive.

On the other hand, her portrayal of all the lands and incidents shows that Blyton herself is an ‘escapist’. Escapism is the avoidance of unpleasant, boring, arduous, scary or banal aspects of daily life. And this term can also define the actions taken to help persistent feelings of depression or general sadness. If the reader reads this book from the perspective of ecology and industrialization, the psyche of Blyton will seek the utopian world and wants to leave this materialistic world.

Blyton’s portrayal of incidents and dialogues depicts her hatred of the modern world. As she has grown with nature, the cutting of trees and deforestation made her sick in most of her novels both for children and youth she shares her view of the cruel materialistic world and the magnificence of nature. This entire Magic Faraway Series is a voice for the voiceless elements which tries to save nature from the hands of money-minded industrialists. And also depicts the life of humans in the space of liminality.

Thus the multidimensional perceptions in Blyton’s *The Enchanted Wood* proves that this book is not just a story entertaining the budding children but a remarkable work of art which deals with the author’s psyche and the social issues of England.

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