

Morals Imparted for Children in three Select Poems Featured in “Poetry for Children: Consisting of Short Pieces to be Committed to Memory” by Lucy Aikin

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Abstract: This study reviews the moral teachings taught to children in “Poetry for Children: Consisting of Short Pieces to be Committed to Memory”, a famous work of literature known for its values for children and poems that spark imagination in their minds. This study analyses the essential moral precepts provided throughout three select poems by providing a comparison between the original and modernised spellings of the poems, as well as a description of the moral lessons that they provide upon reading. It also explores the pedagogical tactics used for effectively communicating these lessons to young readers, making the book not just a captivating compilation of poems but also a useful instructional tool.

Keywords: Children's literature, moral lessons, modernized spelling

1. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has been utilised as an effective tool for instilling moral values and influencing young brains. Different studies refer to the fact that children's books enable the young generations to develop emotional intelligence and think deeper about their true feelings and emotions towards some topics in real life, by having the required elements to strengthen their moral development and value system. (Ismail) Among the many stories that have caught children's imaginations, “Poetry for Children: Consisting of Short Pieces to be Committed to Memory” stands out for its simple ideas that are made to be easily understood by young minds. Stoke Newington writes thusly in the introduction leading into the book:

It was thought that all the pieces ought to be short enough to be learned at one or two lessons, and good enough to be worth remembering; that their style should have nothing in it that a well-educated child might not, their matter nothing that he should not, understand, as soon as he should be at all able to feel the beauties of *real poetry*. (Aikin)

In order to develop one's character, moral education plays a very important part (Montessori). They act as guidelines that one must follow in order to tread on the right path in life. On this tangent, this classic work, which has been treasured by generations, provides more than just amusement; it also acts as a guide to comprehend basic values and concepts necessary to understand the charm of poetry as a whole.

2. METHOD

The analysis takes a descriptive approach, evaluating each of the three poems through careful reading and thematic analysis. Key aspects such as the moral lessons and narrative strategies are examined to reveal the underlying messages and values. Upon first observation, it is apparent that throughout the poems that have been featured in the mentioned collection, a large majority of the spellings of the words appear to be changed. Now, one of the reasons that can be speculated is that this was carried out in order to simplify these pronunciations to be more palatable for children to speak and engage with. Thus, in this study, the researcher makes a humble attempt to modernize some of these spellings for contemporary readers, and provides a comparison between the original poems and the ones in which the spellings have been updated for easier comprehension and readability.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table1. *The Beggar Man*

| Original text | Modernized text |
|---|---|
| 1. Around the fire one wintry night | 1. Around the fire one wintry night |
| 2. The farmer’s rofy children fat; | 2. The farmer’s rosy children sat; |
| 3. The faggot lent its blazing light, | 3. The faggot lent its blazing light, |
| 4. And jokes went round and carelefs chat. | 4. And jokes went round and careless chat. |
| 5. When, hark! a gentle hand they hear | 5. When, hark! a gentle hand they hear |
| 6. Low tapping at the bolted door, | 6. Low tapping at the bolted door, |
| 7. And thus, to gain their willing ear, | 7. And thus, to gain their willing ear, |
| 8. A feeble voice was heard t’ implore. | 8. A feeble voice was heard t’implore: |
| 9. “Cold blows the blaft acrofs the moor, | 9. " Cold blows the blast across the moor, |
| 10. The fleet drives hiffing in the wind; | 10. The sleet drives hissing in the wind; |
| 11. Yon toilfome mountain lies before, | 11. Yon toilsome mountain lies before, |
| 12. A dreary treelefs wafte behind. | 12. A dreary treeless waste behind. |
| 13. “My eyes are weak and dim with age, | 13. "My eyes are weak and dim with age, |
| 14. No road, no path, can I defcry, | 14. No road, no path, can I descry, |
| 15. And thefe poor rags ill ftand the rage | 15. And these poor rags ill stand the rage |
| 16. Of fuch a keen inclement fky. | 16. Of such a keen inclement sky. |
| 17. “So faint I am – thefe tottering feet | 17. " So faint I am — these tottering feet |
| 18. No more my palfied frame can bear; | 18. No more my palsied frame can bear; |
| 19. My freezing heart forgets to beat, | 19. My freezing heart forgets to beat, |
| 20. And drifting fnows my tomb prepare. | 20. And drifting snows my tomb prepare. |
| 21. “Open your hofpitable door, | 21. "Open your hospitable door, |
| 22. And fhield me from the biting blaft: | 22. And shield me from the biting blast: |
| 23. Cold, cold it blows acrofs the moor, | 23. Cold, cold it blows across the moor, |
| 24. The weary moor that I have pafs’d!” | 24. The weary moor that I have passed." |
| 25. With hafty ftep the farmer ran, | 25. With hasty step the farmer ran, |
| 26. And clofe befide the fire they place | 26. And close beside the fire they place |
| 27. The poor half-frozen beggar man | 27. The poor half-frozen beggar man |
| 28. With fhaking limbs and blue-pale face. | 28. With shaking limbs and blue-pale face. |
| 29. The little children flocking came | 29. The little children flocking came |
| 30. And chafed his frozen hands in theirs, | 30. And chafed his frozen hands in theirs, |
| 31. And bufily the good old dame | 31. And busily the good old dame |
| 32. A comfortable mefs prepares. | 32. A comfortable mess prepares. |
| 33. Their kindnefs cheered his drooping foul, | 33. Their kindness cheered his drooping soul, |
| 34. And flowly down his wrinkled cheek | 34. And slowly down his wrinkled cheek |
| 35. The big round tears were feen to roll, | 35. The big round tears were seen to roll, |
| 36. And told the thanks he could not fpeak. | 36. And told the thanks he could not speak. |
| 37. The children too began to figh, | 37. The children too began to sigh, |
| 38. And all their merry chat was o’er; | 38. And all their merry chat was o’er; |
| 39. And yet they felt, they knew not why, | 39. And yet they felt, they knew not why, |
| 40. More glad than they had done before. | 40. More glad than they had done before. |

From line 25 to line 28, the moral of pity is shown through the farmer’s action of bringing the freezing old man towards the warm fireplace inside the house. From line 29 to line 32, it is seen that the children approach the old man and helped him feel more comfortable and “chafed his frozen hand in theirs”. The “good old dame” prepares a warm and hearty meal for everyone present there. This presents the moral of kindness and generosity towards the less-fortunate and the needy, as evidenced by these actions. From line 33 to line 40, the value and importance of gratitude and its satisfaction is shown through the flow of tears of the beggar man and the satisfied sighs of the children once the environment had settled and everything was over.

Table2. *Prince Leeboo*

| Original text | Modernized text |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From the mighty Pacific with foft-fwelling waves, 2. That a thoufand bright regions eternally laves, 3. ‘Mid rocks of red coral with fhell-fifh abounding, 4. The notes of the parrot and pigeon refounding, 5. Crown’d with groves of banana and taper bamboo, 6. Rife the gay funny fhores of the Ifles of Pelew. 7. From China returning with filk and with tea, 8. The tall Englifh veffel fails over the fea; 9. Ah! look how fhe heaves! on the rocks fhe is ftranded! 10. But the boats are thrown out, and the failors are landed. 11. What black men are thofe in their flender canoe, 12. Who gaze with fuch wonder? – The men of Pelew. 13. How kindly they welcome the failors on fhore! 14. And yams and fweet cocoanuts bring from their ftore; 15. But vain ev’ry effort to foften their anguifh: 16. For home, diftant home, the poor Englifhmen languifh; 17. They build a ftout fhip, they fail off from Pelew, 18. And away with the ftrangers fails young Prince Leeboo. 19. O! what is his rapture, and what his furprife, 20. When in gay bufy London he opens his eyes! 21. “Fine fhops, houfes, coaches, O! joy beyond meafure! 22. Yes, yes, my dear friends fhall partake in my pleafure: 23. Fine clothes, coaches, horfes, I’ll bear to Pelew – 24. What wonder for them, what delight for Leeboo!” 25. Fond projects! In vain fhall his father explore 26. The wide fhinlefs waves – he fhall fee him no more. 27. O! chide not the Englifh thy darling detaining, 28. And chide not thy fon ’mid the ftrangers remaining: 29. Know, death has arrefted him far from Pelew, 30. And the ftrangers have wept o’er the gentle Leeboo! | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From the mighty Pacific with soft-swelling waves, 2. That a thousand bright regions eternally laves, 3. ‘Mid rocks of red coral with shell-fish abounding, 4. The notes of the parrot and pigeon resounding, 5. Crown’d with groves of banana and taper bamboo, 6. Rise the gay funny shores of the Isles of Pelew. 7. From China returning with silk and with tea, 8. The tall English vessel sails over the sea; 9. Ah! Look how she heaves! On the rocks she is stranded! 10. But the boats are thrown out, and the sailors are landed. 11. What black men are those in their slender canoe, 12. Who gaze with such wonder? – The men of Pelew. 13. How kindly they welcome the sailors on shore! 14. And yams and sweet cocoanuts bring from their store; 15. But vain ev’ry effort to soften their anguish: 16. For home, distant home, the poor Englishmen languish; 17. They build a stout ship, they sail off from Pelew, 18. And away with the strangers sails young Prince Leeboo. 19. O! what is his rapture, and what his surprise, 20. When in gay busy London he opens his eyes! 21. “Fine shops, houses, coaches, O! joy beyond measure! 22. Yes, yes, my dear friends shall partake in my pleasure: 23. Fine clothes, coaches, horses, I’ll bear to Pelew – 24. What wonder for them, what delight for Leeboo!” 25. Fond projects! In vain shall his father explore 26. The wide shinless waves – he shall see him no more. 27. O! chide not the English thy darling detaining, 28. And chide not thy son ‘mid the strangers remaining: 29. Know, death has arrested him far from Pelew, 30. And the strangers have wept o’er the gentle Leeboo! |

In line 13 and line 14, the moral value of generosity and sympathy is shown as the men of Pelew “welcome the sailors on shore”, and bring for them “yams and sweet cocoanuts” to feast upon. It is also implied that they comfort the anguished Englishmen in their time of distress, which shows their kind-heartedness and willingness to extend their help in times of need. From line 21 to line 24, the inner thoughts of Prince Leeboohave been shown here. Prince Leeboo, upon arriving in “gay busy London”, is amazed to see the luxuries and facilities that the place offers. He thinks of taking them back to his own place, where the people of Pelew could indulge in these goods as well. This displays the moral concept of altruism, or generosity for others. In line 27 to line 30, the value of forgiveness is implied through the narration in the poem, as the news of Prince Leeboo’s death reaches his father. The “strangers” mentioned here are speculated to be the Englishmen that he journeyed with, to London. Even though they were strangers to each other, the Englishmen still “wept o’er the gentle Leeboo”, which shows their compassion and empathy towards him.

Table3. *The swallow*

| Original text | Modernized text |
|--|---|
| 1. Swallow! that on rapid wing | 1. Swallow! that on rapid wing |
| 2. Sweep’ft along in fportive ring, | 2. Sweep’s along in sportive ring, |
| 3. Now here, now there, now low, now high, | 3. Now here, now there, now low, now high, |
| 4. Chafing keen the painted fly,.... . | 4. Chasing keen the painted fly,... . |
| 5. Could I fkim away with thee | 5. Could I skim away with thee |
| 6. Over land and over fea, | 6. Over land and over sea, |
| 7. What fstreams would flow, what cities rife, | 7. What streams would flow, what cities rise, |
| 8. What landfcapes dance before mine eyes! | 8. What landscapes dance before mine eyes! |
| 9. Firft from England’s fouthern fhore | 9. First from England's southern shore |
| 10. ‘Crofs the channel we would foar, | 10. 'Cross the channel we would soar, |
| 11. And our vent’rous courfe advance | 11. And our vent’rous course advance |
| 12. To the lively plains of France; | 12. To the lively plains of France; |
| 13. Sport among the feather’d choir | 13. Sport among the feather’d choir |
| 14. On the verdant banks of Loire, | 14. On the verdant banks of Loire, |
| 15. Skim Garonne’s majeftic tide, | 15. Skim Garonne's majestic tide, |
| 16. Where Bourdeaux adorns his fide; | 16. Where Bourdeaux adorns his side; |
| 17. Crofs the towering Pyrenees, | 17. Cross the towering Pyrenees, |
| 18. ‘Mid orange groves and myrtle trees; | 18. 'Mid orange groves and myrtle trees; |
| 19. Entering then the wild domain | 19. Entering then the wild domain |
| 20. Where wolves prowll round the flocks of Spain, | 20. Where wolves prowl round the flocks of Spain, |
| 21. Where filk-worms fpin, and olives grow, | 21. Where silk-worms spin, and olives grow, |
| 22. And mules plod furely on and flow. | 22. And mules plod surely on and slow. |
| 23. Steering then for many a day | 23. Steering then for many a day |
| 24. Far to fouth our courfe away, | 24. Far to south our course away, |
| 25. From Gibraltar’s rocky fteep, | 25. From Gibraltar's rocky steep, |
| 26. Dafhing o’er the foaming deep, | 26. Dashing o'er the foaming deep, |
| 27. On fultry Afric’d fruitful fhore | 27. On sultry Africa's fruitful shore |
| 28. We’d reft at length, our journey o’er, | 28. We'd rest at length, our journey o'er, |
| 29. Till vernal gales fhould gently play | 29. Till vernal gales should gently play |
| 30. To waft us on our homeward way. | 30. To waft us on our homeward way. |

From line 5 to line 8, the narrator expresses his desire to follow the swallow on its journey around the world, expressing the value of curiosity, wonder, and the desire for knowledge, companionship, and new experiences. The poem underscores the importance of curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge through the diverse sceneries observed by the swallow during its journey across the world’s beautiful landscapes. From line 28 to line 30, the pleasant spring winds are described, which carry the travelers home after a hard journey, emphasizing the feeling of relaxation and renewal that follows. It highlights the need of enduring hardship and the satisfaction that comes from taking a break after working hard. Here, moral lessons are learnt about the worth of perseverance, the possibility of rejuvenation, and the consoling notion of going home after doing one's duty.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of three original poems featured in this collection highlights the remarkable ability of the poet to convey valuable lessons through engaging and accessible poetry. This study proved how poems like kindness, compassion, generosity, and empathy may be used for both literary delight and moral education. The use of vivid imagery and sympathetic characters creates a gripping narrative, making these poems an ideal introduction to the world of poetry for children. Thus, this study reaffirms the literary and educational impact of the poetry that is featured in this collection, suggesting that further exploration of this broader body of work could yield even deeper insights into the contributions to moral and ethical education which is engaging and easily accessible for children.

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