

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326560725>

Who Moved My Cheese? – A Modern-day Parable | Book Review

Research · November 2015

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.23359.41126

CITATIONS

0

READS

85,933

1 author:



Manu Mangattu

Harvard University

94 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Seminars, Conferences and Workshops in English Language and Literature [View project](#)



Poetry Translation Malayalam-English-Chinese-Sanskrit [View project](#)

Who Moved My Cheese? – A Modern-day Parable

Who Moved My Cheese? Dr Spencer Johnson. London: Vermilion Books, 1998. 96 pp.

Change is inevitable. Everything in the world, and even beyond, is perennially and eternally in a state of flux. It is something over which man can exercise no control. The only thing that he can control is his response to change. *Who Moved My Cheese?* explains how we need to do that. In short, the book offers insights into the ways of tackling life's vicissitudes.

Who Moved My Cheese? tells an apparently simple tale. However, it resounds with implications that can have far-reaching effects on our lives. The core story consists of four characters—two mice and two Littlepeople—who live in a “maze”. The maze is a metaphor for the world itself, whether it be the world at large, or one's own personal world consisting of one's family and community. The four characters seem eternally engaged in a quest to find their own “cheese”. The names given to the characters clearly show that the author wants them to remain types and not individuals. The two mice are Sniff and Scurry and the Littlepeople, Hem and Haw.

Cheese represents all that they live for and long to have in life so that they can be happy and contented. Metaphorically, cheese stands for the ends of human life — it could be a job, it could be a partner in life, it could be money, health or spiritual well-being. The story shows the two mice adapting better and faster to change, whereas the two Littlepeople, microscopic prototypes of the human race, with their complex brains and thought processes, end up complicating things. The implication is obvious. The faster we learn to adapt to change and utilize it to our advantage, the better served we will be.

This little parable is situated in a context, using the frame-tale technique, evoking fond memories of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The story is sandwiched between “A Gathering”, that depicts a reunion where former classmates try to put the changes that have happened in their lives in perspective, and “A Discussion”, which basically throws light on the

practical applications of the lessons learned. A connoisseur of art might believe that the story could have gained in aesthetic appeal had it dispensed with the context, but it is understandable, considering the aim of the book, which is primarily to instruct and teach people a valuable lesson, rather than appeal to their senses. The references to dark alleys and corridors of uncertainty certainly reminds one of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Latin American novelists who exhibited unparalleled interest in mazes and labyrinths.

Naturally, the book tries to pass on a few useful lessons. Change is inevitable, and hence, we need to anticipate and adapt as quickly as possible. It drives home the point that we ought to take change as a challenge or an adventure and try to enjoy it. As the author says, “they keep moving the cheese” (74), so we need to be ready to change quickly and savour the experience so that we can do it time and again. The story helps us laugh at ourselves and keep things simple and easy.

The story can also be viewed as an allegory of human evolution. The characters in the story make it a point to write down the lessons they have learned, so that the others following them can use these as pointers showing them the way. Human history traces a parallel course. All the knowledge and wisdom that we have garnered over thousands and thousands of years have been preserved for the sake of posterity.

On the flipside, some of the arguments and metaphors used in the story appear too far-fetched and contrived, and, in his quest to drive home his points, the author veers off, at certain places, into instruction and moralising. At times, the story suffers from prolixity and over-explanation. And the effect this book envisages to have on people should vary widely, since the human multitude cannot be subsumed into four mere categories. Moreover, experience teaches us that change need not always produce positive effects. That is why the human race is endowed with propensities like homeostasis (resistance to change). Not all change may be beneficial for the survival of the species at large, and hence, a part of the human race needs to be circumspect

and apprehensive about change. Change, merely for the sake of it, may prove counter-productive and it is sometimes better to wait and see how a new development works before adapting to it. By courting change, we should not end up courting disaster.

All said, the book is a one-time read for everyone who wants to succeed in this fast-changing world. For some, it could work like a guide, for some it could offer some fresh insights. And, for a few, it could even be a new beginning.

Manu Mangattu