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English 102

The great Archetypes of stories are universal throughout the world. Stories that are passed down generation from generation are bestowed upon us from the moment we can talk. When you examine each story closely, common themes appear. Some scholars and experts argue that all the great stories have been written rather, all new stories are just offshoots of about 30 basic elements. I will examine two seemingly different poems: “The Arrival of the Bee Box” and Ode On a Grecian Urn” to point out how both authors who never interacted, raises this point.

“The Arrival of the Bee Box” is clearly a parallel to the story of “Pandora’s Box“. A box is presented to the antagonist of the story, which inside lays chaos and disorder. The antagonist is then presented with the option to open the box and release its contents into the world. After this point the stories diverge, Pandora opens the box and closes it before the finial item can be released: Hope. In Sylvia Plath, the antagonist decides to leave the box closed. In contrast they stories see different, upon closer inspection, we see in both cases, the main character controls the final outcome of the chaos in the box.

“Ode on a Grecian Urn”, the Poet spends the whole poem dreaming about the story depicted on the urn. The narrator has no idea the details of the story which implies that this can be any of the great classics. Gods and Mortals, Priests and Maidens, all imply the standard plot points of these archetypes. The narrator identifies with the story depicted on the Urn without knowing any details of the author. The urn is equated to that of divine beauty and truth that has stood the test of time. “Bold lover never, never, canst thou kiss”, we get this from a simple picture that the author can deduce, yet we do not question his result.

We know of only a limited number of stories exist in the world and given the similarities with Native American tales we have to ask: “How did these stories spread throughout the world before the discovery of America? “. Perhaps all these stories were shared with a common ancestor thousands of years ago, passed down from generation to the next by word of mouth. The stories then diverged slightly as culture was developed and man stopped wondering the world. Finally we were able to write down versions of these tales to preserve them for all future generations.

Karl Jung became one of the first to examine these Archetypes in a scientific and systemic way. This lead to his theory of the collective “unconscious” that all humans seem to share. We find these basic elements all around us today in Hollywood and Video Games. Though the media has changed, the stories have not: Damsel in Distress, Wise man and the Fool, Truth and Justice; we see these pop up all over, yet we are still entertained. What is it about them that pleases our souls so much? We may never know.