

Subverting The Centenarian Archetype: In The Work The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out Of The Window And Disappeared By Jonas Jonasson

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Abstract-

Archetypal Criticism gets its impetus from psychologist Carl Jung who postulated that humankind shares a kind of universal psyche "Collective unconscious", which usually gets embedded in dreams and myths and harbours themes and images that we all collectively inherit. Literature, therefore, imitates not the world as it is but rather the "total dreams of humankind". These archetypes not only impacts the intelligibility of the text but also tap into a level of desires and anxieties of humankind. In the novel The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared, Jonas Jonasson tries to deconstruct the age-old archetypal figure of a centenarian.

Keywords-*archetype, centenarian, myth and legends, collective unconscious, patterns and themes, elderly.*

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Archetypal criticism is a theory that analyses and evaluates a text by focusing on recurring archetypes and myths. It picks out certain characters, symbols, or patterns of circumstances that recur throughout literature and thought, generally called archetypes. It evaluates the significance it holds in a collective psyche and thereby the formation of the meaning in various contexts. Some experiences and symbols seem to be universal, belonging to a shared human experience. As a writer, archetypes are some of the best tools for crafting stories that resonate with masses and help readers empathise with characters whose lives look nothing like their own.

The word archetype comes from the Greek word *arche*, which is formed from the verb *arches* meaning, beginning or origin and the noun types like model and form. In ordinary language, the term means "the original form" (Braga). The term archetype was adopted and popularised by literary critics from the writings of Carl Jung, who formulated the theory of a "collective unconscious". For Jung, the varieties of human experience have somehow been genetically coded and transferred to successive generations. These primordial image patterns and situations evoke startlingly similar feelings in both the reader and the author. Archetypal images and story patterns encourage readers and viewers of films and advertisements to participate ritualistically in basic beliefs, fears, and anxieties of their age.

The Canadian literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye was influential in extending the use of the term archetype to specifically literary contexts. Archetypal criticism has been connected with another group of thinkers more closely allied to its Jungian roots, including Maud Bodkin and James Hillman.

I. Subverting The Old Man Archetype

The work *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* is taken up and analysed to evaluate how Jonas Jonasson has subverted the pre-existing notion regarding a centenarian. *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared*, is a 2009 comic novel by the Swedish author Jonas Jonasson. The Swedish version was the first to be published on 9 September 2009, and later the English version on 12 July 2012.

The novel opens with Alan Karlsson living in a nursing home in Sweden, awaiting his 100th birthday celebration. Despite the festivities planned for him, Allan decides that he does not want to participate and climb out of his window, escaping the facility. As he makes his way to the nearby bus station, he is approached by a young man carrying a suitcase, wearing a denim jacket with the words "Never again" (11).

Allan ends up stealing a suitcase from the bus station, unaware that it contains millions of kronor and is connected to a criminal gang's transaction. An unlikely friendship forms between Julius, an ex-conman, during his brief stay at Byringe Station, while being constantly pursued by both the gang and police.

As they travel across Sweden, Allan's backstory is revealed through flashbacks. Throughout his long life, Allan, with an unusual obsession towards explosives, has had numerous extraordinary adventures and encounters with historical figures. He helped develop the atomic bomb, became friends with US President Harry S. Truman, and even had a hand in various significant historical events.

Back in the present, Allan and Julius are joined by new acquaintances, a hot dog owner Benny who later takes up the role of personal chauffeur for them, and Gunilla, a farm owner. The story takes an even more bizarre turn when they end up on a bus filled with passengers, including an elephant, a gang leader who strangely is their pursuer.

The book concludes with the 100-year-old Allan and his comrades flying to Indonesia, where they spend time at a luxury hotel, managed by a friend of his. When he is approached by a representative of the Indonesian government, who is interested in Allan's atomic bomb expertise, he agrees to help, telling himself that at least the Indonesian president, is sane – unlike the other leaders whom he has met in his lifetime.

Representation of old characters in a novel is not something new. It has come in various shapes and sizes. More usually than not, they play a side role, a persona whom the protagonist goes to, for advice and wisdom. In contrast to the representations of old characters as wise, some elderly characters are portrayed as weak or vulnerable as well. Old characters are more commonly shown as physically frail and as affected by several of the other geriatric concerns like not being able to perform tasks that they once could, such as hunting or fighting. This physical weakness is often used to contrast them with the strength and vitality of younger characters. Thus the characters are made to be dependent on others for care and assistance. They may require the help of younger characters or even become burdensome to their families or communities. Certain scenarios demand that they are isolated from society, either by choice or circumstance. They are made to live alone in remote places, cut off from the support and companionship of others. In some stories, old characters become victims of villains or antagonistic forces. They may be seen as easy targets due to their physical weakness, and this can drive forward the conflict of the narrative.

Various mythologies and folktales are in tune with this outlook of senior characters. In Greek mythology, King Priam of Troy is an example of an old character who becomes vulnerable in the face of failure of Greek army during the Trojan War. He is depicted as a father grieving for his sons and ultimately meets a tragic end. Meanwhile in Japanese folklore we are introduced to an old fisherman who, after spending what seems like a short time in the undersea kingdom, returns to find that many years have passed. He becomes an old man, isolated from the world he once knew in the story of Urashima Taro.

One of the most striking characterisations occurs in Shakespeare's *King Lear* where King Lear loses his power, both figuratively and metaphorically, and descends into madness and vulnerability. In short, senior characters are generally represented as victims of fate or circumstance, and a pathetic figure represents a loss of power.

Jonas Jonasson deviates from the usual representation of an old character, by providing a protagonist who has more than what it takes to take care of himself and also of others around him. Alan is described as a spry old man with a wiry frame, twinkling blue eyes, and a shock of white hair. He's a witty, unconventional, and adventurous character who defies the expectations of his age. Despite his certainty, he moves with surprising agility and energy. On the eve of his 100th birthday, Allan Karlson, an ex -explosive expert decides to escape 'Old People's Home', and in doing so decides to take back his life, which otherwise might have ended under the terms and conditions laid out by the Director of the home, Alice. In no sense, is he in his prime physical condition, but that doesn't stop him from jumping out of the window and making a run for it. Even the local newspaper couldn't fathom the possibility of him leaving in his accord, and thus they lean toward the eventuality of kidnapping. The young man, from whom Alan stole the suitcase, underestimates who he's dealing with, and gets outsmarted by the old men, Alan and Julius respectively.

Alan Karlson throughout his life has been traveling from one place to another, as demanded by the circumstances, and continues to do so at the age of hundred. In every encounter that he has with a fellow character in the novel, he/she is left amazed at how he manages to do things the way he does. Julius, his close companion in the story, in his awe and excitement asks the first question, "Are you one hundred years old?" (20).

Throughout his journey, Allan demonstrated quick thinking and resourcefulness, whether it was getting out of tight situations or dealing with dangerous criminals. An interesting example among many is the young man, from whom Alan stole the suitcase, underestimating who he's dealing with and eventually getting outsmarted by the old men, and ultimately leading to his untimely death.

Allan's backstory reveals that he's had a rich, complex life, involving encounters with historical figures and events. His meeting with General Franco, encounter with Harry Truman, working with Stalin, helping Mao Zedong and Chinese communists, and last but not least, his accidental involvement in the Cold War, all show the limits to which he has challenged the stereotype of older adults being defined by their age, with little relevance to the present. Jonasson uses Allan's interactions with the historical figures in a way that shows his

unintentional influence on global events. “ Allen didn’t know why the two groups were fighting each other, and he didn’t care much either. He just what he was good at blowing things up”(105).

Despite having such a vibrant and exhilarating past, Allan is not a man of the past; Instead, he moves forward without dwelling on what’s left behind. Rather than lamenting on his age or reminiscing about better days, he actively chooses freedom and embraces new adventures. This becomes quite evident when, he decides to climb out of the window of old people’s home, on the pretext of the promise that he made to himself “he could die some other time, in some other place”(8). Allen’s philosophy in a purview could be boiled down to the habit of avoiding overthinking and enjoying life as it unfolds, which is unlike any other usual elderly representations in books or elsewhere.

Jonasson with the portrayal of Allan Karlsson, subverts the old man archetype, through a character who is unburdened by the usual limitations of age and embodies a vigorous and energetic persona. His journey challenges societal expectations connected to aging, making him refreshingly unpredictable and a unique protagonist.

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