

The significance of symbols in literary works by Jackson and Behr

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



A symbol in the story is like a souvenir from a travel destination. It holds meaning beyond what is actually being seen. Every author has their own deft way to instill thematic meaning into a seemingly inanimate object, which then grows to become a powerful symbol. In horrific stories about reality such as *The Lottery*, Jackson uses the black box as a strong representation of tradition, whereas in books inspired by sociocultural situations such as *The Smell of Apples*, Behr successfully uses apples and whales to portray child-like innocence. The more we start comparing and contrasting these works to one another, the more interesting and real the conclusions we derive become.

To begin, Jackson's *Box* symbolizes the fear of change. We read that the box is so broken and worn out that it had to be reconstructed into a newer one by its old parts. Still, the villagers have been using it since decades even though its opening rituals have been forgotten due to the increase in population with every passing generation. This fact clearly states that the most prominent elements of the past, according to the villagers, must be preserved as much as possible despite of the dark, ugly and defective aspects. Evidently, the *Box* plays quite a significant role in maintaining the traditions of the village.

Similarly, Behr uses apples as a symbolic means to remember the heroic past. The apples were brought to South Africa by the Afrikaners hundreds of years ago when they invaded the country into pieces in order to rebuild it, with their own systems and set of rules for everyone to blindly obey. Over the years, it became a typical symbol of their accomplishments and

dominance over the native land. However, the the same apples, which present-day Afrikaaners are so proud of, get a stain of Afrikaaner brutality when Johan Erasmus' semen is transferred onto their skin via Frikkie. As one of the most militarily important people in the government, Johan serves as a reflection of white supremacist thought prevailing within the Afrikaaner community as a whole. By raping an innocent child, he tarnishes that heroic historical image for the readers. Thus, apples illustrate how contaminated Afrikaaners are, and were when they set foot on South Africa to victimize the innocent citizens.

Unlike the apples, the black box is only showcased to the public for two hours every year. During these hours, all villagers try their best to keep their distance from it because they are- like normal humans- afraid of death. This clearly foreshadows the future conflict. Yet, certain aged villagers like Mr. Summers confidently take the responsibility of keeping the special box with them for the rest of the year. It is soon realized that the old men play the biggest role in controlling and implementing such a tradition. They take advantage of the fact that this tradition leaves most villagers unscathed, In order to make it last. This points to the power of tradition as it is perpetuated by those in charge.

In contrast to how the box is cherished by the powerful, the whales in the smell of apples characterizes weak victims dwelling fearfully in Cape Town's apartheid era. The whales are being caught and killed in massive numbers annually for no fair reason. This is analogous to the conflict regarding an end to social righteousness. For instance, the discrimination against the the

Coloreds by the whites. Furthermore, it emphasizes the growth of unjust power in the hands of cruel people.

Nevertheless, Behr introduces a Christian symbol of knowledge and maturity, that juxtaposes this concept of innocence, in the previously-discussed apples. Frikkie examines them and becomes curious about their smell. He unknowingly uses a euphemism for Johan's inhumanity: rotten apples. Although he never discloses the abuse to Marnus, Marnus ultimately figures out where the smell originated from; and this origin becomes painfully clear to the reader himself. Therefore, it is the apples that symbolize realization and coming-of-age of both the readers and the characters by the end of the novel.

In conclusion, Jackson cleverly chooses her box to evince the the invariable sense of power and fear throughout her short story whilst Behr develops his symbols to characterize tarnished naivety. However, both taint their symbols to criticize the influence of tradition. The indirect messages conveyed by both is unfortunately very relevant and relatable, not only to the present world but also to international relations, childhood and human nature.