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This essay explores the connection between folklore culture and drawing, looking particularly at the tensions between popular culture and high culture, the way different cultures have transmitted folklore and the way folklore drawing traditions have developed over time. Theorists such as Bourdieu and Roland Barthes are used to explore aspects of culture and status in society.

All societies have common stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Some are described as myths and others as folklore. In truth there is little if any distinction between the two (Kirk, 1973, p.35). Myths can be described as ancient stories depicting people and their cultural beliefs as well as natural phenomenons (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Folklore is defined as traditional stories, beliefs and customs that a group of people have (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Folklore's roots are based in oral transmission, people in different cultures around the world were telling these folk tales orally before they were transmitted to literature (Zipes, 2013, p.3). Fairytales are seen as a category of folklore where the main character faces everyday issues, as is the case in all folklore (Jones, 2002, p.9). Fairy tales are simple stories that were passed through oral culture that had magical elements related to the belief systems of ordinary people and their pagan traditions (Zipes, 2013, p.21). Ruth Benedict argues that it is almost impossible to distinguish myth from folklore. If there is a difference, myth includes more supernatural elements, whereas folklore depicts more simplistic, ordinary situations (Kirk, 1973, p.35). Roland Barthes in his book Mythologies explores the idea of myth in a very different way. He states that an object can become a myth when given significance (1957, p.109), thus updating the idea of how myths have formed. Therefore myth and folklore are almost indistinguishable. As we look at the Disneyfication of lots of tales, the distinction becomes harder and harder. Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty would be considered as coming from folktales whereas Hercules and Mulan would be closer to myth, but in truth they all have magic, they all work on the same power types and dynamics. Moreover, according to Barthes, society can mythologise many aspects of everyday society. Although definitions are blurred and always changing, folklore can be understood at its simplest, as myths that focus on ordinary life.

Campbell claims that the reason many people are drawn to and relate to myth is because they relate to human experience. People who told myths went through the same stages of

life as their audience - childhood, sexual awakening and maturity, adulthood, marriage, and bodies changing from their peak to gradually becoming weaker. He says that a person from cave times and a modern person have the same body and the same experiences within their bodies, therefore they are able to connect with the same experiences (1988, p. 44). He states that no matter what culture the myth comes from the protagonists all face the same problems, which he describes as the same plays with different costumes (Campbell, 1988, p. 45). Myths and folklore are fascinating because people of all different cultures can relate to the main themes in the stories.

The definition of culture is “a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performance, artefacts) in which that are expressed or embodied” (Burke, 1978, p.1). Culture is sometimes separated into high culture and popular culture. To understand these categories one must understand Bourdieu’s idea of ‘Cultural Capital’. Those who have economic capital (wealth) also have cultural capital (meaning that high culture has worth that comes with class) (Huang, 2019, p.45). Bourdieu is not just interested in the tastes people have but how they are used to support social status (Jenkins ,2015, p.129).

Bourdieu also talks about ‘legitimate culture’. This allows higher class people to use culture to justify their position in society. However, in recent times the lines between high culture and low culture are blurring and it is more difficult to make the distinctions than it used to be**.** However there are still common systems of classifying cultural items into high and low culture. Classical music, literature, and the opera are often considered high culture, whereas television, comic books and pop music are often categorised as popular culture (Van de Haak, 2018).

Mostly Folklore would be considered as popular culture. However, there are many examples of folklore being explored in high culture. Examples of this are ‘A Midsummer night's dream’ and ‘Macbeth’ by Shakespeare (Kateryna and Kseniia, 2020, p.62). His plays are often inspired by stories and characters from English Folklore. A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a comedy in which the author represents both the human world and the magical world of fairies drawn from British folklore. Interestingly, British folklore at the time often thought of magical creatures as human size however Shakespeare made them tiny, the size of insects (Kateryna and Kseniia, 2020, p.62). The character Oberon who is the King of the forest was originally a magic dwarf from the French story chanson de geste

‘Les prouesse et faitz du noble Huon Bordeaux’ (Kateryna and Kseniia, 2020, p.63). Another important character in the play which Shakespeare had changed and adapted for his story is Robin Puck, Oberon’s servant, this character is a comedic character who enjoys playing tricks on humans. This character was created originally from two folklore characters Puck and Robin Good fellow (Kateryna and Kseniia, 2020, p.63). These days Shakespeare is often seen as ‘high culture.’



Fig 1. Little Red Riding Hood, Crane, 1898


Fig 2. Little Red Riding Hood, Hood, Ford, 1889

Popular culture is often seen in a negative light or as “unofficial culture” and the culture of the lower class - the “non-elite” (Burke, 1978, p.1). Fairy tales have their origins in popular culture. As an example, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, is a very well known fairy tale with a long history that has been franchised and written in lots of different versions. One of the oldest versions was a folk tale told by peasants in eighteenth century France (Darnton, 1984, p. 17). The original was much more graphic, gruesome and violent than the better known versions of Charles Perrault (Darnton, 1984, p.19). Bettelheim analysed Perrault’s version of Little Red Riding Hood, and claimed it was written in a way in which to get a message across to young girls about the dangers of trusting strangers and sexual intent, as portrayed by the wolf (2010, p. 105). Bettelheim says that many of the ideas in fairytales are full of symbols and relate to the Freudian idea of the unconscious (2010, p. 27). However Darnton argues that he was working from Perrault and never saw the earlier

versions of the story told to children by peasants which are more brutal and sexualised, and do not have symbols like red hoods (1984, p.19). It is important not only to analyse modern versions of fairytales but also to try and understand their origins and the history behind them.

In the eighteenth century peasant version of Little Red Riding Hood, the grandmother's blood is poured into a bottle and her flesh is sliced onto a plate. A cat calls Little Red Riding Hood a ‘slut’ (Darnton, 1984, p.18). In an old oral version of Sleeping Beauty, Prince Charming is a married man who has sexual intercourse with Sleeping Beauty while she is asleep and ends up having multiple children (Darnton, 1984, p.22). Robert Darnton argues that interpretations based on later versions mean that the life of the peasants who were telling these stories from generation to generation has been lost (1984, p.21)**.** Fairy tales have changed over time and allow us to understand different communities and the place of folklore within them.

The reason why violence was so prominent in older fairytales is that life for peasants at the time was extremely harsh and cruel. Families lived in very small spaces with animals, children witnessed sexual activity from an early age, death was very common, and food was scarce for poor peasants (Darnton, 1984, p.35). In not recording folktales, many were lost to accommodate the taste of higher society. Charles Perrault was one of the first writers to publish fairytales from oral traditions. “Histoires ou contes du temps passé” was published in 1697. His fairy tales became fashionable in 17th century French salons which represented the high culture hubs of the time. The stories would provide entertainment as well as morality in demonstrating correct behaviours. Perrault adapted the fairy tales to the taste of French high culture (Breed, 2015, p.58).

It is interesting how the same themes in folktales can be found in different cultures. As an example, according to Darnton, there is a Chinese version of Cinderella from the ninth century, in which Cinderella is given her slippers by a magic fish and loses one of them at a village fair instead of a ball. Although it is different in many ways the story has the same framework (1984, p.28). In Europe too, there are many versions of Cinderella, and the older ones are also more brutal. In one version, the Cinderella character is only given a crust of bread a day and is about to die of starvation when the virgin Mary appears and gives her a magic wand. Every time she touches a black sheep with the wand, it creates a big feast. The stepmother discovers the magic sheep and kills it. She gives Cinderella the

liver. Cinderella then buries it and it grows into a tree. A Prince who comes along really wants the fruit of the tree because he is greedy. One of the sisters tries to get it by climbing on a ladder but falls and breaks her neck. The prince wants the fruit and will marry the one who will get it. Cinderella is the only one tall enough to reach it so she gets it and marries the prince (Darnton, 1984, p.39). These varied versions of stories are perfect ways to explore storytelling in different cultures at different times.

Drawing can be defined in various unique ways. The Cambridge dictionary definition focuses on the process of using a tool such as a pen or pencil to make a picture (2023). However drawing is not just about the process but also about emphasising an experience that includes the relationship between the artist and the drawing. Drawing is a way to express thoughts, observations, perceptions, and feelings. It is about giving the artist the freedom to express themselves and a tool to interpret the world (Ching, 2018, p.1).

Throughout history, drawing has played a major part in telling human history and exploring human connection with the world. Drawing was used as a way to communicate before written languages. This is shown on caves and rock art representing animals and human life. These images could be representative or symbolic in prehistoric times about 30,000 years ago. In fact, the earliest human drawing, a cross-hatched pattern, is thought to be about 73,000 years old and was found in a cave in South Africa. This drawing was done using a pointed ochre crayon, with the tip length measuring about one to three millimetres. The researchers suspect that the original pattern would have extended onto more surface area and was probably more complicated (Pavid, 2018).



Fig 3. The Blombos Cave drawing, Craig Foster, c. 73,000

Drawing as an artistic expression and the importance of the relationship between the artist and the drawing seems obvious in modern times. However, this idea only developed during the Italian Renaissance of the 15th and 16th century. Drawing enabled an understanding of the artist's skills and the way an artist thinks, as stated by 16th century artist and historian Giorgio Vasari. This is particularly evident in the sketches of Leonardo da Vinci representing his varied interests in human anatomy and the world (Holcomb, 2009).



Fig 4. A Walking Bear, Da Vinci, 1482–85

Furthermore, drawing is a medium of representation and communication that can serve many functions. In Ancient Egypt, drawing was widespread in many forms such as hieroglyphs, symbols, or figurative drawing. It was a way of connecting to the Gods, seeking their protection in life and after, thus creating a different type of perspective. The aim was not to represent reality from the single perspective of the viewer. The compositions made of different elements and have been given the name "aspective" in some writings on ancient Egypt art (University College London, 2002). This is why it is useful to explore drawing with myths, because it was a way of exploring the supernatural and supernatural concerns creating an innate link to myth and folklore.



Fig 5. Le Petit Poucet, Doré, 1876



Fig 6. Cendrillon, Doré, 1876

Using drawing within Folklore is very important, as it helps make the story visible and can aid the storyteller. For example, the use of forests as a common landscape in fairy tales which evoke the themes of danger, escape and transformation. In Perrault's folklore tale and Doré's illustrations, the forest ends up signifying deeper meaning and is not just a landscape anymore (Breed, 2015, p.5). The illustrations help bring the story to life and give the characters in the story and the readers that feeling. In Disney's Cinderella, the animation of animals is key to the story. Some of them are able to speak and others are not but Cinderella speaks to all of them which makes them an important part of the story. In other versions, such as that by Perrault, animals are not given much significance in that sense but assist in the story's progression (Breed, 2015, p.45). This is an example of how artists can interact with a story and change it.

Disney is not the first to use animals to enhance a fairytale. In Doré's illustrations, animals can play important roles. One example is the way the cat draws the viewer's attention to the glass slipper. The cat and the way it is looking gets the viewer to pay attention to the important part of the scene which is when Cinderella slides her foot into the glass slipper. Furthermore, the audience identifies with the cat as it is placed further away from her and the slipper and is almost watching the scene happen as is the viewer. This encourages the viewer to interact with the images. Interestingly, Lucifer, the Cat in the Disney adaptation plays an important role (Breed, 2015, p.45). Not only do the illustrations help the story progress, but they also help the reader identify with what is happening in the story. The interaction between artists and old fairy tales allows them to change and be retold in new ways.



Fig 7. Cinderella, Walt Disney, 1950



Fig 8. Cinderella Sketches, Davis, 1948


Fig 9. Cinderella Drawing, Larson, 1950

Illustration and folklore both have long histories and a study of them can help us understand different aspects of society at different points in history. Each has influenced the other over time. Both have had a place in high and popular culture. Therefore the question to conclude is - Illustration and Folklore, how has one influenced the other over time?

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