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Being a child is an interesting aspect of human development. One must learn the fundamentals of motor skills and cognitive thought, however, more complex than this is the learning of emotions and concepts a child may struggle to grasp in their youth. Despite this, alongside other forms of teaching children, books remain an accessible, Simple, and appealing way to explain to children on such parents may struggle to put into words themselves. Over the years, many attempts to convey difficult subjects to children have been made. Not all of them being the same in method and approach to children themselves. From classic fairy tales designed to scare children to modern day picture books made to empathise with them, Children's relationships with difficult subjects have always been a point of contention when it comes to conveying our messages to them. This essay aims to explore these methods of storytelling over the years, how they may affect children, how they convey their subjects and whether this is a constructive and helpful way to approach these subjects. With this medium, the question must be asked, how do children's books approach these difficult subjects?

Throughout history, storytelling has always been used to document events or to convey a message of some sort. The history of narrative is deep and complex and is riddled with Humanity's thoughts and feelings on numerous topics, subjects, and themes. Children's literature is no different. As Paul Copley (2014) describes, "Wherever there are humans there appear to be narratives". This simple quote exemplifies the idea that narrative and storytelling are tied to Humanity as a whole. For example, Children's literature has always been to tutor children as they grow up. Be it morals, different depressing and serious subjects or just teaching kids about basic human functions such as language and relationships. What is narrative, however? Rick Altman (2008) states, "Nearly every definition of narrative mentions action" and acknowledges that "recent theorists have preferred the term "event"", implying that narrative is simply a matter of performing an action. However, Altman (2008) then goes on to say, "Narratives are typically referred to as representing a rise and fall, loss and recovery, or desire and acquisition". This helps to establish a basic definition of narrative to mean some kind of development or progression. However, Altman also seems to want to contradict this definition as well, stating that summarising a narrative as only an action reduces the value of the "actors" (Altman (2008)), the characters. Altman is implying that having such a strict definition of narrative can diminish the effect of characters and What they represent. Ultimately implying that characters and narrative almost go hand in hand, that it is a symbiotic relationship. This dynamic between character narrative is further explored by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (2012) wherein they discuss the debate between whether characters or plot are more important: "Two of the persistent questions about character in fiction are how seriously we should take its mimetic potential and whether the character or plot is the more important element". Elaborating with:

If you are interested in how the shapes of actions in literary texts reflect or influence social reality (e.g., how the nineteenth-century marriage plot ties into cultural practice), then plot is clearly more important. If you are interested in literature as a window into psychology, then character is more important. (Phelan, Rabinowitz, 2012, p. 112)

This creates an interesting dynamic between character, narrative, and the reader. Implying that distinct aspects of any given novel or piece of fiction can be important at any given time, depending on what the reader is personally trying to take from the text, is an interesting perspective. However, there could be another perspective between the two. Character and plot are inextricably interwoven in a narrative, and one cannot exist without the other. Characters often have a complex purpose within a plot or story, being responsible for driving the plot forward or bringing Nuance to it. Characters can also be used to represent various people within the world. Christopher Vogler (1998) Breaks down characters and archetypes, "The concept of archetypes is an indispensable tool for understanding the purpose or function of characters in a story". Implying that archetypes allow writers to use characters in a way that can move the plot forward and can make those characters recognisable to a broader audience. Vogler also implies that archetypes can divulge aspects of the writer's personality. This separates the character from simply a plot device to more of a surrogate for the writer, allowing us to take a close look at the people creating these works and how they view their characters and people. Regarding characters being relatable to people, A revisit to the word mimetic is in order. Mimesis In its simplest form means to depict. Be it art, literature, or video media, to be mimetic is to almost mimic. Cobley (2014) describes Mimesis as, "mimesis is considered to be a reflection of an 'eternal model' in the world of language", Meaning that. Ministers, in a way, is a snapshot of their perspective of the world at that time. This also applies to depictions of characters, being able to almost exist within a bubble.

On that note, it is time to start unpacking how fairy tales deal with children. After establishing that both characters and plot are important to his story, it is important to consider how stories were traditionally told to children and how it might have affected them. A classic tale is of Hansel and Gretel. A brief summary being Hansel and Gretel are left in the woods, they stumble across a house made of sweets and are lured in by a wicked witch who bribes them with treats, sweets, and toys, only to lock them up and try to eat them. Tale as old as time.

"Good food was set before them, milk and pancakes, with sugar, apples, and nuts. Afterwards, two pretty little beds were covered with clean white linen and Hansel and Grethel lay down in them, and thought they were in heaven." (Brothers Grimm, 2020, p. 96)

The story of Hansel and Gretel can easily Be interpreted as a story of greed or a story warning children about the dangers of strangers. However, is it really that adept at telling the message it is trying to convey? Hansel and Gretel are portrayed as normal children, who want things that any child would want. They like sweets, they enjoy living comfortably, they like having pets. And yet the narrative punishes them for engaging with things that an average child would like to engage with. The story also weaves distrust between the relationship of a child and their parent. The father and mother leave Hansel and Gretel to die alone in the forest, which would not spark a lot of confidence in children if they were reading this fairy tale. They would likely cast suspicion on their parental figures due to how the story handles the relationship between children and their parents. Animal story also could imply that children should not rely solely on the appearance of things in order to understand them, or that appearances can deceive. However, is this really a realistic goal expecting children to fully perceive and understand this? Heather M. Hill and Stan A. Kuczaj II (2011), on the topic of nature vs nurture, states "cultural values can impact upon one's level of trust in others" This implies that children, though cognizant of Their ability to trust and missed trust others., can be easily influenced by. Other sources as well as their parents such as books, cartoons, movies, games, etc. Subsequently also implying that portraying one's parents as evil and wanting them to die alone in the forest could be a harmful notion to give to a child, especially at a very influential age. Furthermore, children are influenced by how they are treated in response to their actions. Lionel

Ward (1969) puts it candidly, "An honest child is praised, and because he likes praise he considers it wise to be honest". Children respond better to praise rather than scolding, and using fear to teach a child moral values can be harmful in the long run, and perhaps even prevent a child from reaching a full understanding of a subject due to the fear that was instilled in them regarding that subject.

Another example of this approach of storytelling and education is the classic tale of Pinocchio. It can fly. Summary of the story is. Geppetto is a puppet maker and makes Pinocchio, who is given life. Geppetto continuously tries to encourage Pinocchio to behave and do all that which a normal child would, however, He continuously makes bad decisions, ones that one would say are immoral. And the results in him getting into trouble multiple times. The most noteworthy are that when his feet got burned off and when he almost got turned into a donkey. The tale is supposed to warn children about the dangers of messing with adult vices and misbehaving. The narrative persistently punishes Pinocchio for his actions, and almost loses his sentience due to him misbehaving. The approach to the Story can be. Interpreted as remarkably cruel and unforgiving towards Pinocchio, who is portrayed to be a small child. The narrative is very candid with profoundly serious subjects and speaks plainly when it comes to the portrayal of more adult content.

"The Talking Cricket was right! If I had not run away from home and if Father were here now, I should not be dying of hunger. Oh, how horrible it is to be hungry!" (Collodi, 2016, pg. 13)

Collodi was extremely harsh towards Pinocchio and the narrative educates Pinocchio quite a lot on the moral standings of the time. The narrative also puts a lot of responsibility on Pinocchio, at times being responsible for his father's well-being, among other things. Going back to the idea of mimesis, Pinocchio can be seen as a surrogate for the audience, the children reading the book. As he learns about these issues, so does the audience. This makes it doubly disturbing that the young boy is treated so badly and is constantly put into complex and morally grey situations that may be hard for a child to distinguish between right and wrong in. The novel asks for an emotional maturity in children that they simply might not possess and subsequently punishes that child for not having the ability to comprehend what Pinocchio is and is not supposed to do. Oftentimes Pinocchio is also portrayed wanting normal things that an average child might want, such as sweets and toys, and to go to the theatre. Contrasted with far more serious subjects such as Pinocchio being hung from a tree. The narrative does not deal with its heavy subjects well and is constantly making Pinocchio the victim and the culprit of any given circumstance. Going back to the relationship between character and narrative, you can see the dynamic between the story and Pinocchio where Pinocchio is constantly devalued by the narrative. The story does not sympathise or empathise with Pinocchio and is portrayed to be a bad role model. Not only is Pinocchio the victim of the narrative, but Pinocchio is also a bad surrogate for the audience, being difficult for the audience to identify with. Furthermore, some of the Lessons within the narrative can be contested by today's standards. Robert Straughan (1988) explains emotivism as:

"In making a moral judgement one is first expressing one's feelings in the form of approval or disapproval, and secondly trying to persuade others to share those feelings." (Straughan, 1988, pg. 53)

This means that emotivism can be used to contest previous notions of morality. A famous example would be the public's outlook on homosexuality and race. As humanity grows, so do their moral outlooks, and nowadays, such strict moral values are significantly less common in younger audiences, ultimately resulting in an audience not identifying as much with Pinocchio or the lessons he was taught. However, children may still be able to perceive Pinocchio as alive in some way. As

Piaget (1975) describes on the subject of objects having feelings, "it becomes fairly easy to detect those children who answer at random and to recognise those who have genuinely some latent scheme of systematization", exploring the possibility of children legitimately perceiving Pinocchio as a real boy. These factors culminate in the Stories of Pinocchio, Hansel and Gretel, and Fairy tales as a whole losing a lot of their potency when it comes to dealing with children and the issues that they face. Either they are irresponsible with how they approach children or fail to engage with them overall. Doubly so when it comes to more serious subjects, being that older fairy tales and novels were not sympathetic or empathetic to the younger audience and were not capable of explaining and breaking down these concepts in a way that children may understand.

So how do modern narratives handle these difficult subjects? Modern day picture books and children stories tend to approach children from a far more empathetic and sympathetic angle, taking the children's emotions and feelings into account. On top of this. Children's own psychology is considered as well, how they process information and how they relate it to other pieces of information. Essentially, modern day stories consider a child's psychology. The example that will be analysed for this purpose is a children's picture book by the name "Something Else" by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell (1995). The story follows Something Else as he tries and fails to fit in with his peers before ultimately encountering a strange creature, unlike himself. They become friends and accept their differences. At the end of the story, they learn to accept that people should be accepted no matter their appearance when a human knocks on Something else's door. The story paints Something else as a sympathetic figure, being described as having no friends and failing to mimic what the others do:

"If he tried to sit with them

or walk with them

or join in their games,

"They always said:

Sorry. You're not like us.

You're something else.

You don't belong.'" (Cave, Riddell, 1995, pg. 3)

The narrative makes a clear statement in separating Something else from the rest of his peers, being able to relate to a child in a school setting. The narrative also sets up a clear parallel and symbiotic relationship between something else and the plot. Being simultaneously driven by the character, but also revolving around the character. This helps quell the issue of discussing whether narrative or character is more important. By making the character the centre of both. This also plays into children's psychology as well as children. More likely to view the world as thinking the same way as them. Margaret Anne Defeyter (2011) defines egocentrism as "the tendency to perceive the world solely from one's own point of view", further stating "children often assume that other will perceive and think about the world in the same way they do". This establishes the idea that anecdotes from stories can help form their own worldview. In the narrative, something else is constantly looked down upon by. His peers, and a child may identify with that if they are in something else's position. However, a child who isn't necessarily looking at the story from that perspective may help open their eyes to the complex problem of social anxiety and the fear of not fitting in. The narrative is crafted around the idea that a child may perceive it in diverse ways depending on how they engage with the story. It also conveys these concepts in simplistic ways that children can identify and understand

with ease. This contrasts the past attitudes of children's storytelling wherein the plots would either be insultingly simple or attempt to scare the children instead of intellectually engaging with them on an emotional level and help them understand nuances of growing up and learning right from wrong.

In conclusion over human history. Narratives relating to and aimed at children have been hit and miss. Classic fairy tales refused to empathise and engage with children and resort to scare tactics in order to force the children to learn right from wrong, good and bad. However, modern stories tend to have a far more empathetic approach to children, meeting them where they are at. Modern stories also identify that children have their own psychology, thought processes and ways of viewing the world. These modern stories identify that children have their incredibly unique psychology that need to be acknowledged when crafting narratives and stories to help teach them or make them aware of complex issues such as social anxiety, loneliness, etc. This is further emphasised by Prajna Das Gupta and Ken Richardson (2001), "they may be able to exhibit 'logical' thought and understanding well before the ages which Piaget had suggested as a lower limit, Ruth L. Ault (1983) having suggested Piaget's idea of the lower limit being "seven or eight years". This can be used as a baseline to help understand what tools we can use to explore these more difficult themes and help children come to terms with them in a way that doesn't scare them or alienate them. Regardless, Children's narratives should continue to empathise with the children they seek to help and teach, and further develop as we gain a greater understanding of children and their curious ways of thinking.

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