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Under the Hood

Exploring how fairy tales have evolved through time

Introduction

“It is almost as if certain fairy tales were stored in our brains and have evolved as we humans have evolved.” (Zipes, 2010) This proposal will seek to examine the history of fairy tales and the way morals of said tales have changed with time. It will do this through the study of one fairy tale, *Little Red Riding Hood*. This fairy tale will be used as an example and different tellings through history, older versions, and modern versions will be examined. This will link with illustration by studying the images that have accompanied this narrative at different points in time. How these images have impacted the narrative of each retelling will be examined, as well as how the culture and time period in which these stories have been told has impacted the tale. These three keywords will be examined: Fairy tale, narrative, and morals. Through these keywords, this proposal will dive into the history of fairy tales, what drives their narrative, how the styles they’re illustrated in have changed, and how the morals these fairy tales impart have evolved.

The illustrations examined will be from four different tellings. Two of these will be older tellings, and two will be recent. By comparing these different versions, how the tale has changed throughout the centuries will be examined. The modern takes on the story that will be studied are *Little Red Hood*, written and illustrated by Marjolaine Leray and *Revolting Rhymes*, written by Roald Dahl and illustrated by Quentin Blake. The first older version of the tale will be *Histories Or Tales of Past Times, Told by Mother Goose. With Morals*, as first collected by Charles Perrault and illustrated by D. J. Munro. One of

the images examined will be a painting by Gustave Doré as the illustrations done by D.J. Munro were based off drawings Doré had done for the fairy tales of Perrault (National Gallery of Victoria, n.d.). The second older version to be examined will be *Little Red Riding Hood*, written and illustrated by Walter Crane. These studies will be interspersed throughout the proposal as the three keywords are discussed.

Moral

Fairy tales often, if not always, have an underlying moral. “They contain enduring rules for understanding who we are and how we should behave” (Orenstein, 2003, p.10). These morals change from fairy tale to fairy tale, but some may argue have the same underlying tones. These might be impacted by whoever is in power at any such time, and whoever is in control of mass reproduced media. It can be said that those with such power often have a patriarchal standpoint. Though this is not the sole reason why fairy tales stick in our brain, it is a relevant viewpoint to inspect when investigating the moral of fairy tales.

Although I have always subscribed to the notion that the classic fairy tales tend to be overtly patriarchal and politically conservative in structure and theme and reflect the dominant interests of social groups that control cultural forces of production and reproduction, I have never been able to explain satisfactorily why the canonical tales stick with us and why they are so catchy when there are so many other fascinating and artistic tales that are just as good if not better than the canonical tales we tend to repeat and are predisposed to.

(Zipes, 2010)

The moral of little red riding hood could be seen to support this viewpoint, especially when the earlier versions are examined. In essence, at least the original tellings, seem

to be about being wary of strangers. This is specifically targeted towards young women, and you can imagine that the wolf might symbolize a predatory man.

With luring Tongues, and Language wond'rous sweet, Follow young Ladies as they walk the Street, Ev'n to their Houses, nay, beside, And artful, tho' their true Designs they hide: Yet ah! these simpering Wolves, who does not see, Most dang'rous of all Wolves in fact they be?

(Perrault, 1791, p. 23)

Morals are a key part of fairy tales. "They depict roles and behavior patterns considered socially appropriate for each gender and for each age group" (Jones, 2002, p. 20) The moral of each fairy tale may have changed over the years, impressed upon by the time and culture with which it was being told.

There is no question that each version of a fairy tale is indelibly marked by its cultural context. Storytellers are not completely autonomous and insulated individuals; they are the product of the communities and cultures in which they live.

(Jones, 2002, p. 28)

As stated above, the moral of Little Red Riding hood could be boiled down to a lesson about not trusting strangers. The older tales seem to drive home the idea that the wolf may represent a man, seeking to take advantage of a naïve girl. In figure 1, a painting done by Gustave Doré, you can see the character of little red riding hood has climbed into bed with the wolf. There is a slight blush to her cheeks as she clutches the sheets and looks worriedly towards the wolf. All these aspects of the painting drive the narrative towards this lesson.



Figure 1. *Little Red Riding Hood*, Gustave Doré, 1862

Fairy Tale

Fairy tales have long been part of our society. They can at times seem to be ingrained in ourselves from a young age. The tales themselves might be older than you'd think. The history of fairy tales is expansive and goes back far. "Analysis showed Beauty And The Beast and Rumpelstiltskin to be about 4,000 years old" (Fairy tale origins

thousands of years old, researchers say, 2016). It can be difficult to trace the exact origins of many fairy tales, as they tended to start from an oral telling, and humans have been passing down stories and tales this way for thousands of years.

Though it is impossible to trace the historical origins and evolution of fairy tales to a particular time and place, we do know that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech.

(Zipes, 2012)

This is often how fairy tales started, as tales passed around from one person to another. This can make the study of the origin of fairy tales quite complex and quite difficult to quantify (Jones, 2002). If fairy tales indeed did start from oral telling, they must all have a long and complex history.

When it comes to defining what a fairy tale is, one can start by examining how most people would use the term today. When someone today is referring to a fairy tale, they are often referring to the version brought to us by the Grimm brothers. (Orenstein, 2003, p. 9). But as stated above, the origins of fairy tales goes back much farther than this. We can also look at the fairy tale genre as it was when the first published version of *Little Red Riding Hood* was produced. This version of the fairy tale was published in 1697 in France during the rule of Louis XIV, and as a genre, the French fairy tale was mostly told among adults. (Orenstein, 2003, p. 28) In fact, most fairy tales did not start as tales for a younger reader and most tales being told prior to the nineteenth century would have been considered unsuitable for children (Koehler and Schwabe, 2018). This particular tale was a cautionary one, mostly aimed at women. It was told in an attempt to prevent sexually promiscuous activity and to dissuade young, naïve, women from involving themselves with predatory (wolf-like) men (Orenstein, 2003, p. 28). The fairy

tale genre at the time, therefore, must have been influenced by this moral dilemma which shaped the tale.



Figure 2. *Revolting Rhymes*, Quentin Blake, 2016

Today's versions, though beloved by adults, are often aimed at a younger audience. Figure below shows an illustration from the book *Revolting Rhymes*. This is aimed at children between the reading ages of five to eight. This is clearly reflected in the illustration style. The looseness and personality of Quentin Blake's illustrations give the tale a lighter tone. It does not appear as serious and seems to be quite obviously targeted at a young audience. The ending is also changed in this version. Little Red

Riding Hood shoots the wolf and makes a coat from his fur. It would seem that today's versions aim to empower or entertain the children rather than scaring them into learning a lesson.

Fairy tales are inevitably influenced by the culture in which they are being told, and each retelling is continually shaped by it. "They adapt to the weather, to local fashions, and to the mindset of each new teller and audience" (Orenstein, 2003, p.12) No tale exists within a vacuum with which the teller can remove themselves from the cultural beliefs they have been raised with.

Narrative

"Visual narratives are sequences of images created with meaningful intent, typically illustrating a continuous event sequence, particularly to tell a story" (Cohn and Magliano, 2019) Narrative is an important term to examine for this essay. It is a powerful tool in the hands of an illustrator. "The narrative becomes a shiny surface that shows us a familiar image we already know. When we project ourselves onto a character, we are delighted by the approving smile we reflect back to ourselves." (Sproles, 2019) Narrative is both visual and written, with one often supporting the other. This is especially true when referring to children's picture books. Visuals can be a powerful tool to drive the narrative in different directions. "Because the words and pictures in picture books both define and amplify each other, neither is as open-ended as either would be on its own" (Nodelman, 1990). While the written word can be powerful, the image or illustration used to support a text can give it an entirely new life and meaning. It can change depending

on the style the illustrator has chosen and can help impart more complex meanings. For this essay, the focus will be on visual narrative.

The illustrations used for a picture book can take on an entirely new type of meaning to the paintings we see hung in galleries. “Drawn visual narratives have often been associated with younger readers” (Cohn and Magliano, 2019). They have a different type of function; they drive a narrative. This sets them apart from other types of art. “As a result of these unusual features, picture books have unique rhythms, unique conventions of shape and structure, a unique body of narrative techniques” (Nodelman, 1990) Below, in figure 3, is an example from a picture book version of *Little Red Riding Hood* by Marjolaine Leray. This can stand as an example of how the style of illustration has changed as the narrative of little red riding hood has changed with time. It is more comedic and lighter in tone, and both the illustration style and written words drive this version of the narrative. The loose and scribbly way the characters are depicted is much different from the painting we examined above in figure 1 when the narrative of the story was intended to be more intense. If you compare it to figure 4, a version illustrated by Walter Crane in the 1890’s, it is also less serious in tone to that version, which is depicted in a far more realistic manner. The wolf in figure 4 looks more formidable and serious than the one depicted in figure 3, and Little Red Riding Hood herself looks far more apprehensive. These serve as examples of how illustration style can drive the change in narrative over the centuries.

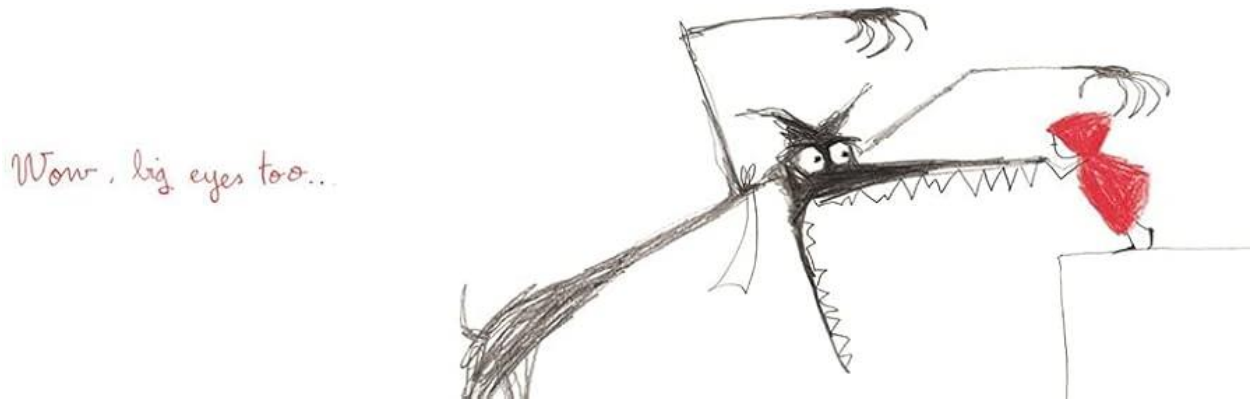


Figure 3. *Little Red Hood*, Marjolaine Leray, 2011

Narrative is an important part of our human culture and has long been a part of it. It is what drives a story and retains the readers interest. A good narrative can make or break said stories. It is an important tool in societies that enables core values and empathy to be instilled in the younger generation, as well as teaching the older generations to view the world in a new way. Narrative is important, and illustration not only supports a narrative, but can be a powerful way to change it.



Figure 4. *Little Red Riding Hood*, Walter Crane, 1898

Conclusion

Fairy tales have long been part of human history, and each one has a unique story to tell. They have been retold again and again, changing with the times and cultures that they are being told within. There is some intangible aspect of fairy tales that makes them special. They have been a cultural phenomenon that we have used as a vessel to tell many different types of stories. I hope to use *Little Red Riding Hood* as a vessel to tell my own type of story, the moral of which has yet to be decided. It is hoped that

through the study of the history and retellings of such a tale, and fairy tales as a genre, that I might find inspiration for my own retelling.



Figure 5.

The personal practice outcomes will be four finished spreads as well as a dummy book. If the narrative will be greatly changed is yet to be determined. Figure 5 shows an example of the potential style for this outcome. Figure 6 shows further exploration of what the main character might look like for this personal retelling and is an exploration of the mediums that would be used. These are both examples of my personal style as an illustrator and provide evidence of how the outcome would look. The mediums of

choice would be watercolors and ink. The work produced will hopefully have a charming and whimsical feel, and the aim would be to appeal to children around the ages of 6-9 years old.



Figure 6.

Fairy tales have been around for centuries and don't show any sign of disappearing soon. They have a unique way of capturing attention, and have a way of imparting the culture and time to us within which they were told. "Nonetheless, fairy tales provide a

unique window into our most central concerns, our sense of social and cultural identity, who we think we are (or should be) – and how we change” (Orenstein, 2003, p.8) Fairy tales will continue to be retold again and again. The culture and time in which each retelling has been produced has greatly impacted the moral and illustrative style of the story. This will inevitably be the case in the version that is produced for my practice.

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List of Figures

Figure 1, Dore, G. (1862). *Little Red Riding Hood*. [Oil on canvas] Available at: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3918/> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

Figure 2, Blake, Q. (2016). *Revolting Rhymes*. [Ink and Watercolor].

Figure 3, Leray, M. (2011). *Little Red Hood*.

Figure 4, Crane, W. (1898). *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Figure 5, Larson, Abigail (2024) [Ink and Watercolor]

Figure 6, Larson, Abigail (2024) [Ink and Watercolor]

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