

Keywords: Representation, Anthropomorphism, Storytelling

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Proposed question for Independent Enquiry: How have animals been used to tell stories throughout history?

I have chosen base my Independent Enquiry around animals and the way in which they are described, and used in stories throughout history. I have always been fond of animals since a young age; my childhood dream being a veterinarian. I also enjoy using animals in my illustration work and would love to gain more knowledge on how animals have been used in storytelling and art throughout periods of history, to inform and inspire my work. I am very interested in the connotations behind different animals and the psychology behind these, not only in children but in adults as well.

Representation

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word representation, as a noun, has multiple meanings. The first is 'the way that someone or something is shown or described.' The word can also be defined as 'a sign, picture, model, etc. of something' and 'the fact of including different types of people, for example in films, politics, or sport, so that all different groups are represented.' (2020).



(Rollins, 1989-92)

All of these are relevant to the depiction of animals throughout storytelling and history. It will be beneficial to explore how certain animals are represented in different time periods, cultures and genres, to see if perhaps particular stereotypes prove popular. It will also be interesting to see if how these animals have been represented affect our perception of the creatures; whether that be positive or negative. An article written by

Widewalls (2016) states that 'perception affects the meaning we attribute to art, and often such understandings change over the course of time.'

(Anapur, www.widewalls.ch. 2016). This will be useful to refer to and expand upon in my independent enquiry, especially to discuss how or if views on animals have changed over time; from childhood to adulthood. It is also entirely possible that our dreams or nightmares as children have impacted our views on these animals; being read a bedtime story about an angry wolf, only to have a bad dream, and associate this animal with negative connotations. In an article by C Askew and A. P. Field (2007) an experiment was conducted on a group of children aged seven to nine years old, in which they 'were exposed to pictures of novel animals paired with pictures of either scared, happy or no facial expressions to see the impact on their fear cognitions and avoidance behavior about the animals.' The study reports that 'fear attitudes towards the animals changed congruent with the facial expressions with which these were paired' and 'children took significantly longer to approach a box they believed to contain an animal they had previously seen paired with scared faces.' (Andrew, Field, www.sciencedirect.com. 2007). This information will be useful to refer to and can also be used to link my key words together. Another idea I would like to explore in my Independent Enquiry is that of social media and news outlets, more specifically, how what we are told on social media can affect our opinions on something. It is undeniable that many of us use social media. A paper by M. A. Schwarz (2017) states that:

'The number of Facebook's active users worldwide rose from 431 million at the beginning of 2010 to 1.71 billion in the second quarter of 2016. On average, users spend more than 50 minutes per day on Facebook, Instagram, and Facebook.' (Schwarz, www.rationality-and-competition.de. 2017)

The same paper also states:

‘Moreover, the algorithms of some social media platforms make it easier to see what some individuals post and filter out other content. Social media and the Internet in general allow people to mostly communicate with similar individuals, which would expose these people to only certain kinds of information and may lead to increased segregation and polarization.’ (Schwarz, www.rationality-andcompetition.de. 2017)

This information supports the idea of someone only knowing certain ideas about a subject, leading to them having one particular connotation and reputation in their lives. If a large group of people all have a perceived connotation of something, this may prevent them from learning from others and expanding their knowledge. The same discussion paper supports this by saying that ‘The growing influence of social media and progress in information and communication technology in general decreases disagreement in a society first.’ Schwarz also argues ‘At the same time, social media make people more likely to connect with similar people and let them disagree with different people for longer (or possibly forever). This may increase tensions between different parts of a society and prevent people from learning from each other.’ (Schwarz, www.rationality-andcompetition.de. 2017) This can be related to how different animals represent certain characteristics, such as a lion being courageous, these archetypes forcing us to view these animals in one specific way, rather than taking in different viewpoints.

Anthropomorphism

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the word anthropomorphism as ‘the showing or treating of animals, gods, and objects as if they are human in appearance, character, or behaviour.’ (Cambridge Dictionary, www.dictionary.cambridge.org. 2020). They also give titles such as Alice in Wonderland and Winnie-the-Pooh as examples of anthropomorphism in books. Throughout media history, in particular children’s books and entertainment, anthropomorphism has been commonly used, from Beatrix Potter to Disney animated classics.

E. G. Urquiza-Haas and K. Kotrschal discuss how humans internally anthropomorphise animals, stating that ‘Babies pay more attention to animals than to any other kind of object in their environment.’ In addition to this they also state that ‘Animal names and sound effects of animals (woof, meow, quack, moo, etc.) were among the first 50 words produced by infants.’ (Urquiza-Haas, Kotrschal, www.sciencedirect.com. 2015). Another article written by R. L. Severson and S. R. Woodard (2018) proposes that ‘the imaginative process of simulating and projecting internal states is common to both role play and anthropomorphism.’ They then go on to produce the findings of an experiment, stating that ‘Ninety children (5, 7, and 9 years) were administered Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism Questionnaire – Child Form (IDAQ-CF), comprised of the technology-inanimate nature and animal subscales, and the Role Play Scale.’ ‘Results indicated that the imaginative act of impersonating an animal, person, and/or machine was positively related to anthropomorphism, and specifically anthropomorphism of inanimate nature and technology.’ (Severson, Woodard, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 2018). This link between children’s psychology and



Potter, 1902

anthropomorphism will aid my discussion in my Independent Enquiry and could also suggest more ways to link this internal anthropomorphism to the stereotypes of animals we still hold as adults. While discussing the results of their questionnaire, Severson and Woodard reveal that 'Second, anthropomorphism of animals was highest amongst children with invisible Ics (imaginary companions), followed by those with toy ICs and those who impersonated.' (Severson, Woodard, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 2018). From this we can clearly see that animals and the idea of anthropomorphism has been with children since a very young age, and thus would likely find concepts such as Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit and J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter easier to watch and possibly, more enjoying and relatable to when they roleplay.

In a journal article written by A. Dundes (1991) titled *The Journal of American Folklore*, they discuss the psychology of fairy tales and the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim. Within the text, Bettelheim gives the opinion that 'fairy tales were helpful to children "in helping them cope with the psychological problems of growing up and integrating their personalities."' (Dundes, www.jstor.org. 1991). He adds to his by also saying 'just as dream deprivation research suggests that individuals prevented from dreaming during the night become emotionally disturbed, so Bettelheim argues, perhaps by analogy fairy tale deprivation will prevent children from working through the unconscious pressures in their lives.' This will be a useful source to refer to later on, the discussion of whether fairy tales aid children's imaginations and mental health will be interesting to compare to the reputations we hold, and how these may have been affected by the fairy tales we read. Dundes also quotes that 'in Bettelheim's scheme of things, fairy tales provide a necessary forum for the playing out of interpersonal problems.' This further supports the previous statement and can help to explain how a child might internally anthropomorphise animals they encounter and inanimate objects they find. I would like to further develop the discussion of internal anthropomorphising and the psychology behind how and why this happens, as this may have a strong link to the stereotypes we have of animals and the way many fairy tales are designed.

Storytelling

This leads to the third and final keyword, 'storytelling' in which the Cambridge Dictionary defines as 'the activity of writing, telling, or reading stories.' (Cambridge Dictionary, www.dictionary.cambridge.org. 2020). It will be interesting within the Independent Enquiry to look into storytelling from the Greeks, more specifically their use of fantastical beasts, and then expand this to the storytelling of today, for example the Harry Potter book series, and its use of fantasy creatures. In an article written by E. B. Kyrkanidou (2001) he makes reference to not only the classic, well known chimera, which most describe as containing parts of a lion, goat and serpent. The article also states that human-animal chimera's have been referred to for just as long, stating that 'The Centaurs, as horse/men, first appear in Geometric and early Archaic art, but in the literature not until early in the fifth century B.C.' (Kyrkanidou, www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com. 2001). This can lead us to believe that the idea of anthropomorphism being with humans for far longer than we can imagine, surpassing the fifth century B.C. Another form of storytelling I would like to touch upon in the Independent Enquiry is that of Aesop's fables, which the Dictionary has defined as 'A group of stories thought to have been written by Aesop, a Greek storyteller. The main characters in these stories are animals, and each story demonstrates a moral lesson.' (dictionary.com. 2020). These collections of stories could very well support the idea of children anthropomorphising animals and inanimate objects from a young age. This could also be linked to the stereotypes or reputations animals have within storytelling mediums, such as foxes being cunning and sly or owls being wise and intelligent, for example. In a book by Seth Lerer (2008) he tells that literature has always been with children and shaped them as a person, stating 'Aesop's fables lived for two millennia on a classroom and family shelves.' (Lerer, www.books.google.co.uk. 2008). Later on in the book, the

author goes on to discuss the tale of 'The Jungle Book' and the connection between humans and animals, stating that 'The *Jungle Books* are, in effect, Kipling's *Descent of Man*: an exploration of the nature of the human species; a set of fables about what the human shares with other animals.' The book then continues to discuss how the human character in The Jungle Book learns from his animal companions while still retaining his human nature, 'he does not devolve into a beast. True, he may pick up patterns of behaviour from the animals. But devolution does not happen.' (Lerer, www.books.google.co.uk. 2008). This can then lead onto more modern storytelling and how animals are used in fiction today, for example in the Harry Potter series. This fantasy story features a wide variety of animal and mythical creatures, from centaurs, sea creatures and the common household cat. A journal by H. Batty discusses the varied use of animals within the well known book series and how different creatures are treated.

She states that:

'Like the world of wizards, we arbitrarily decide which creatures are worthy of our care and which are worthy of exploitation. The social injustices that these hybrid creatures endure and how this mis-treatment parallels real-world animal exploitation have been highlighted.' (Batty, www.muse.jhu.edu. 2015)

This real world link between Rowling's universe and our society will be interesting to discuss and elaborate further. The author goes on to discuss the main protagonist, Harry's relationship with animals throughout the series, specifically that with the number of snakes he encounters, arguing 'I would argue that these first-hand experiences with animal embodiment and subjectivity bring Harry, and perhaps even the reader, a post-humanist perspective.' The close relationship Harry shares with snakes and the experiences he with them, can be related back to anthropomorphism, and children's ability to internally anthropomorphise animals, and inanimate objects.



(Gill, 2017)

has

To summarise how this all led to my proposed question, I knew from an early point that I would like to theme my Independent Enquiry around animals, as I am very fond of illustrating animals as well as interacting with them. At first I was puzzled on where to begin with such a broad topic, but realised that this would not only be more interesting for me, but also relevant to my practise if I centred the question around art and my practise. I have always wanted to illustrate stories or create a picture book, so choosing 'storytelling' as one of my keywords became an obvious choice. From here, I realised I was interested in delving deeper into stories and fairy tales, asking why most of them followed a similarly constructed narrative; why certain animals would be used as antagonists or to guide the hero on their journey. I thought of words such as 'stereotype' or 'characterisation' but concluded that the way in which animals are represented in stories was a much stronger keyword

and felt more appropriate in regards to what I would like to discuss. Whilst doing research for my keywords, I had recognised that I was interested in looking into the history of fairy tales and stories, and perhaps discovering if our perception of certain animals had originated from a certain story, myth, or culture. I also sought to discover if these preconceived notions had changed throughout history or if we, as a society have always had the same ideas. These strings of ideas also led to the idea of not only looking into classical fairy tales, but also ancient Greek myth and modern stories such as Alice in Wonderland and Harry Potter; revealing if certain tales were inspired by the ones before. In addition, this then further led to the discussion of anthropomorphism, looking into how we interpret animalistic behaviour or assign certain personality traits onto animals. These ideas could further lead into humans playing or acting as animals in film, art or theatre but also children's imaginations.

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