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English
The Effects of Popular Culture by Tactics Between the Lines
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For my project, I aimed to study stories in popular culture under the lenses of philosophy and story structure, to find whatever commonalities I could which might lend insight into what made some stories more popular than others. As such, my primary research question was “Are there any commonalities between popular stories at all?” This question set up what would become the most surprising aspect of my research, which is that I did find one aspect of structure which I attribute to the popularity of any given story. However, in the process I decided to drop the philosophical aspects of my search, as my scope became too broad in practice. In my second week – analyzing Classic Film – I watched a favorite movie of mine over again, Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg’s masterfully-crafted *Hot Fuzz* (2007). With the film’s intricate repetition of jokes and references, I recognized something very attractive to me in the ways it used references. From that week on, I explicitly looked for The Reference in stories, and for literature regarding similar literary techniques.

Throughout the project, after not finding any information on a branch of literary technique like what I aimed to define, I created a comprehensive set of definitions for how The Reference functions as a phenomenon. The basis of referentiality in story is based in Christopher Vogler’s analysis of Carl Jung. In his famous memo to Disney “A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*” Vogler runs with Jung by suggesting “that [story] archetypes are reflection of aspects of the human mind” (Vogler). According to the writer, “such stories are true models of the workings of the human mind, true maps of the psyche. They are psychologically valid and realistic” when we register them, given a certain amount of familiarity. As beings who enjoy sleuthing out truths, and making connections as a result of said truths, we seem to innately enjoy stories which make more connections. The Reference also relies on Frank D’Angelo and his notes on Pastiche in his article “The Rhetoric of Intertextuality”. While all intertextuality is related to The Reference, the concept of Pastiche is key, as it describes a “style produced by borrowing fragments, ingredients, or motifs from various sources” (D’Angelo 39). Where Campbell’s focus regards primarily on repetition of structure which makes frequent reference to itself or other stories, D’Angelo notes that stories may be made up of stylistic elements – related to story or not – which define it as unique but connected within our minds.

The final result of this project is The Reference – a comprehensive umbrella of literary techniques, connected by the common thread of making connections in our minds. Through these connections, The Reference ensures how much we enjoy a piece based on its referentiality – the degree to which something may be connected to other things. In my framework, each point or aspect of a story which may be connected becomes an Anchor. Additionally, The Reference is divided into two primary categories, Internal and External Reference. Where Internal Reference focuses on the degree to which a work references itself, External Reference works in how a story relates itself to other stories and notions – Objective External Reference – and how a story relates itself to its consumers – Personal External Reference. I intend to publish my findings somewhere within the next year, as well as continue to advocate for review of popular story in academia.

Citations

- D'Angelo, Frank J. "The Rhetoric of Intertextuality." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2010, pp. 31–47. JSTOR.
- Vogler, Christopher. *A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's "The Hero with a Thousand Faces."*