Rejection of Stereotypical Submissiveness: A Comparative Analysis of Disney's *Cinderella* (1950) and Disney's *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* (2002)

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Abstract

One of the major stumbling blocks in women' advancement since ages has been the patriarchy which exaggerates biological differences between men and women and uses it as an evidence that men are born to dominate and suppress women. However, feminists believe that patriarchy is not natural. It is the product of male hegemony to oppress and exploit women. Men take the help of religion, social constructs and literature to propagate the institutionalised system of male dominance and societal acceptance of submissive and docile girls as epitomes of femininity. The present paper is an attempt to find out whether Disney's movie adaptations of the classical fairy tale namely, Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella" have posed a challenge to this power game of patriarchy and given to the little minds strong princesses.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Submissiveness, Strong-Minded, Empowerment, Liberation

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All genres of literature have been manipulated by the patriarchy to establish its supremacy. Even the history of the fairy tales which are meant exclusively for the innocent minds substantiates that the genre has been one of the key tools in the hands of the patriarchy to establish the superiority of men in the society and to subjugate women. In the research article entitled "The Negative Image of Women in Children's Literature", Dan Donlan aptly puts, "Classic children's heroines are either dull-witted, spiritless, passive, naïve, or amoral (606)."

However, the Disney movies based on Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella" are advancements over the Grimms' version in one particular facet, i.e. in challenging the stereotypical demand of submissiveness in girls.

In Disney's *Cinderella* (1950), Cinderella is forced into basic slavery by her abusive stepmother and two stepsisters after her father's untimely demise. When she is sharing her dream with the birds, the clock strikes and points out that her time to start menial chores of the house has begun. In her dream, she sees her future happiness. She feels irritated with the clock. But the first streak of her assertiveness gleams when she confidently says that her boring and taxing routine will be unable to kill her desire to dream. This is what she says:

Cinderella: Oh, that clock! Old kill joy! I hear you. "Come on, get up!" you say. "Time to start another day." Even he orders me around. Well, there's one thing. They can't order me to stop dreaming. (*Cinderella* 5:31-5:51)

Lady Tremaine and her two daughters start yelling at Cinderella the moment they wake up and start piling her on with all their petty chores. When she asks about their well- being, they answer rudely. This substantiates that even women are not considerate of the feelings of their own sex. When Anastasia blames Cinderella for deliberately hiding mouse under her teacup, Lady Tremaine beckons her inside and without listening her part jumps to the decision that she is the culprit and punishes her:

Cinderella: Oh, please, you don't think--

Stepmother: Hold your tongue! Now... It seems we have time on our hands.

Cinderella: But I was only trying to--

Stepmother: Silence! Time for vicious practical jokes. Perhaps we can put it to better use. (*Cinderella* 22:30-22:48)

Cinderella surprisingly comes out as a feminist when the invitation to the ball comes from the Imperial Majesty who has invited every eligible maiden to the ball. She expresses her desire to attend it of which the two stepsisters make a lot of fun. She doesn't cave in and strongly puts forth her case:

Cinderella: Why that means I can go too!

Drizella: Ha! Her, dancing with the Prince!

Anastasia (Mocking Cinderella): I'd be honored, Your Highness. Would you mind holding my broom?

Cinderella: Well, why not? After all, I'm still a member of the family. And it says, "By royal command... every eligible maiden is to attend." (*Cinderella* 29:10-29:36)

The stepmother agrees to allow her to attend the ball on two conditions, i.e., Cinderella needs to complete all her work and must have something suitable to wear. To this decision of hers, her daughters react aggressively. But her mean and vicious nature pierces through audience's heart when with a cruel smile she tells her wicked daughters the conditions she put forth have to be made unachievable by them. They again pile up Cinderella with household chores. She is unable to fix her dress and therefore unable to attend the ball. The stepmother pokes her at her bad luck to which she gives a soft reply, however, her manner of speaking conveys her anger. She doesn't look towards her and strains her neck in defiance. Cinderella actively defies her stepmother's abuse by ultimately taking stand for her rights. Disobeying her stepmother's order of not attending the ball, she goes anyway. And when she sees her chance of ultimate happiness of marrying the Prince, brought on by the Duke trying the glass slipper on all the women of the land, she comes out of the locked room with the help of her mice friends and runs without a second thought. She offers to try the glass slipper despite her stepmother's threats through her gestures:

Grand Duke: You are the only ladies of the household, I hope-- I presume.

Stepmother: There's no one else, Your Grace.

Grand Duke: Quite so. Good day. Good day!

Cinderella: Your Grace! Your Grace! Please! Wait! May I try it on? (*Cinderella* 1:11:55-1:12:08)

The stepmother uses her cane and trips him, causing the slipper to fall from his hands and break in between Cinderella and the Grand Duke. Cinderella appears to be super wise as she has kept the other pair of slipper even after losing the one. She asks the Grand Duke to use it and to everyone's shock, she is the bride:

Cinderella: But, you see, I have the other slipper.

(Cinderella pulls the other slipper out from her apron, horrifying her stepmother and stepsisters, but filling the Duke once again with joy and hope. He slides the slipper onto Cinderella's foot, and it fits perfectly.) (*Cinderella* 1:13:00-1:13:10)

In Disney's movie adaptation entitled *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* (2002), one may criticise the King for overburdening Cinderella with the preparations of the royal banquet on her own and that also for the first time in her life. She has no experience as a princess. But if seen from a positive perspective, he has faith in Cinderella's capabilities. He wants to make her empowered by giving her responsibilities. He might make her the showpiece of his castle. But he departs from the patriarchal stance and shows faith in managerial capacities of a girl despite Grand Duke and Prudence's consistent efforts to convince him that Cinderella won't be able to manage the royal banquet:

Prudence: Your Majesty, I can take care of the preparations as I always do.

King: Just show her what to do! We have a princess now. It's her duty to plan the banquet. And the king's duty to endure it. (*Cinderella II* 4:35-4:50)

As being taught since her childhood, Cinderella submissively tries to attune herself to the traditions of the castle. She feels bitterly disappointed when her friends from the commoners are not allowed to meet her. However, she passively agrees to this. She even tries to learn the King's favourite dance with four books on her head and neck straight like a crane. She is in complete agony when a flurry of questions are rolled before her. She gets panicky and gives up. She cries initially and calls herself as a complete failure in front of Jaq. However, she soon recollects herself and decides to do things and the preparations in her own way. Her self-respect and sense of individuality make her realize that in following the outmoded traditions of the castle, she is herself suppressing not only

her desires but also her identity as a person. She confidently discloses that she was initially loved by the Prince in her real self, therefore, after marrying him, she need not change herself just because others want it to be so:

Cinderella: Why, I was a dish maid when | the prince married me.

And he loves me because I'm me. (*Cinderella II* 12:24-12:28)

She decides to break the set rules of the royal banquet thus setting the much needed standards of assertiveness for a fairy tale princess. Her self-confidence is clearly reflected in the following song sung by Cinderella:

Cinderella: Whoever made them had to change the rules that came before

So make your own way | Show the beauty within

When you follow your heart | there's no heart you can't win. (*Cinderella II* 12:55-13:10)

Prudence is not ready to accept the change as she is worried of being fired by the king from her job. But Cinderella keeps on breaking the obsolete traditions. She opens the curtains. She invites the commoners to the royal banquet. She changes the sweet dish from prunes to chocolate pudding. She changes the music and dance moves and what not:

Prudence: You're supposed to be inviting dukes and counts and other aristocrat s.

Cinderella: I am inviting them, along with all my friends here in the village. Thank you… Jaq-Jaq love chocolate. Chocolate pudding! Now that sounds good. We never get to dance like this…

Prudence: What will the king say?

Cinderella: I know this is a big change. But I have to try this my way. (*Cinderella II* 13:18-15:20)

Everyone is desperate as well as horrified to see King's incomprehensible fury on seeing the radical change in his age-old traditions. But to everyone's surprise, the King whole-heartedly accepted the changes. He likes the moon view from the window as well as the chocolate pudding. He meets his own childhood friends among the commoners, and also likes the music as well as the dance. He publicly appreciates the positive and much required changes brought in by Cinderella. Even the Prince applauds her for her confidence and capabilities:

King: Mmm, chocolate. My favourite! What happened to the music? Everybody dance! I always said we needed | some new traditions around here… I told my son he had chosen well. You're a natural…

Prince: I'm glad you do things your own way.

Cinderella: Someday I'll get this princess thing right.

Prince: I think that day is today. (*Cinderella II* 18:00-18:38)

The third part of the movie deals with Anastasia, Cinderella's stepsister's love story. She appears to be quite haughty in the first Disney movie, all busy in dominating Cinderella. But in its sequel, she comes out as a victim herself being continuously restricted by her mother whenever she wants to do things her way. She wishes to purchase the garland of love. On her mother's arrival, she gets diffident. She wants to say goodbye to the Baker with whom she has somehow fallen in love at first sight, but refrains when her mother commands her not to utter a single word to him:

Lady Tremaine: Come along, Anastasia. You're not to say a word to that shopkeeper. I forbid it!

Anastasia: - Yes, Mother. (*Cinderella II* 40:18-40:28)

Cinderella encourages Anastasia to meet the Baker. But the latter is diffident as she fears if her mother comes to know about her decision, she will not spare her. Cinderella instils in her the confidence that she is an individual and has full control on her life. She must be confident of her choices and must be determined to achieve the same:

Anastasia: But what if Mother catches me? She told me never to speak to the baker again!

Cinderella: May be it's time to stop following someone else's orders and start following your heart. (*Cinderella II* 47:24-47:32)

Anastasia goes to meet the man of her dreams the next day. When her mother catches her with him, her anger knows no bounds. She tries to convince her that as a mother, she wants best for her daughter. However, this time Anastasia listens to herself and she confidently announces her love for the Baker. As she is right and confident of her decision, Lady Tremaine has to back out:

Anastasia: No, Mother! | You're wrong! He's sweet. |

Baker: - She's wonderful.

Anastasia: He's romantic. And we are going | to the ball together.

Lady Tremaine: Drizella, come along. Drizella! (*Cinderella II* 53:10-53:34)

In Brothers Grimm's tale, Cinderella silently accepts her poor fate when her stepsisters prevent her from attending the ball. But in Disney movie of 1950, Cinderella emerges as a fighter when she puts forth her case that as all young girls are invited to attend the ball, she will also go. In the end, when Duke is trying the glass slipper in her stepsisters' foot, she escapes from the locked room and offers her foot to wear the glass slipper. In its sequel of its 1950 movie, *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* (2002), Disney has given Cinderella far greater authority to bring changes in the conventional ways of thinking and doing things in her new home after marriage, i.e. the Prince's castle ruled by his father and that in her capacity as the princess of the kingdom. Thus, it would be appropriate to state that the original fairy tale has more or less projected the typical patriarchal mind-set in portraying meek, submissive and non-confident female protagonist in Cinderella who banks on others for her lives' decisions as well as her safety. However, the cinematic re-renderings of the tale have made successful efforts in nullifying these patriarchal, gendered codes embodied in the original version which propagate woman's passivity as a virtue.

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