Retaining the Charm of the Prince Charming: A Critical Analysis of Disney's Movie Adaptations of the Classical Fairy Tales

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Abstract

Indubitably, the classical fairy tales of Brothers Grimm, Madame Beaumont, Perrault and Anderson reflect an intense competition among girls in which there can be only one winner because there is only one prize. And that prize is the prince charming who is the most affluent and handsome man in their eyes. The winner is always the most beautiful girl who is definitely the heroine. The present paper endeavours to analyse the narratives of Disney's movie adaptations of the classical tales vis-à-vis the question whether they have succeeded in curbing the craze for the Prince Charming or not.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Prince Charming, Marriage, Individuality

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"When fairy tales show courtship as exciting, and conclude with marriage, and the vague statement that 'they lived happily ever after', children specifically the girls may develop a deep seated desire always to be courted and loved, since marriage is literally seen to be the end of the story (Lieberman 394)." In many tales, the heroine's consent for courtship and marriage is no longer sought. Her identity is from the status of her husband, and her individual identity holds no value. Disney has always been targeted by the feminist audience for propagating this regressive mentality in its cinematic adaptations of these classical fairy tales.

In Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in her very first song dedicated to the wishing well, Snow White simply wishes to meet her Prince Charming today. She could have also asked to empower herself so that she could rebel against the injustice done to her by her stepmother. However, in reality, Snow White has no plans as well no will power to change her situation. She has no faith in her capabilities. She simply waits for her prince to save her from the atrocities of the Evil Queen by marring her. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

"I'm wishing for the one I love to find me today

I'm hoping and I'm dreaming of

The nice things he'll say" (*Snow* 4:49-5:13)

Snow White falls in love with the prince at first sight without knowing anything about his nature. He seduces her with his singing. Snow White does only two things in the movie: household chores and waiting for her prince charming. Thus, Disney's movie reiterates the sexist ideology that a woman has no survival without a man in her life. Even the theme song of Snow White is named "Some Day My Prince Will Come". The lyrics go like this:

Someday my prince will come

Someday we'll meet again

And away to his castle we'll go

To be happy forever I know (*Snow* 1:09:14-1:80:00)

Leaving no loopholes in her nefarious plans to kill Snow White, the Evil Queen checks the antidote to the poisoned apple. To an utter shock, it is "Love's First Kiss". When the Evil Queen tempts Snow White to eat the poisoned apple, she tricks her completely by asking her to wish for her prince charming and take a bite of the magic apple. Snow White yields to this temptation. Here is the entire scene:

Snow White: I wish… I wish…

Evil Queen: Go on. Go on.

Snow White: And that he will carry me away to his castle where we will live happily ever after.

Evil Queen: Fine! Fine! Now take a bite. Don't let the wish grow cold! (*Snow* 1:14:36-1:15:26)

The moment Snow White takes a bite, she dies. Her prince charming comes out of nowhere again to kiss her dead body lying in the glass coffin as a showpiece. She rises from "Sleeping Death" and the chorus instantly sings their wedding song whose lyrics are perfectly in sync with the purpose of Snow White's life, that is, to get married to her Prince Charming and live happily ever after:

"And away to his castle you'll go / To be happy forever we know.

...

And the birds will sing. / And wedding bells will ring." (*Snow* 1:21:10-1:22:90)

This stereotypical notion of femininity is apparently clear in Disney's *Cinderella* (1950). The entire scene of a grand ball allowing every eligible bachelorette to mingle with the Prince with the ultimate desire to impress him with her beauty reiterates the idea that marriage is supremely important. For the first time Lady Tremaine, her two daughters and Cinderella behave in the similar manner- all dying to go the ball:

Stepmother: And by royal command, every eligible maiden is to attend.

Drizella: Why that's us!

Anastasia: And I'm so eligible!

Cinderella: Why that means I can go too! (*Cinderella* 28:51-29:12)

On seeing Cinderella in ball dress made out of their stuff, the stepsisters tear away her dress brutally. As a solution to break free from these shackles, a fairy godmother clads her in an expensive gown and glass slippers and makes arrangements so that Cinderella meets the man of her dreams. The King, a single father, is desperate to have some grandchildren and throws a ball, demanding every maiden in the kingdom to attend and compete fiercely with each other to win his son's heart. The Prince's yawning after bowing to every girl as if he is disinterested is quite disrespecting as well as rude. On seeing Cinderella, he falls for her. Cinderella is already in love with him though she has seen him for the first time at the ball. Without even a word of conversation, she sings a love track for him in which he also joins. How can this be true love where the boy falls in love with a girl only because she is the most beautiful of all? Here is the song:

Cinderella (Singing): So this is love

So this is love / So this is what makes life divine...

Prince and Cinderella: I'll touch every star in the sky

So this is the miracle that I've been dreaming of

So this is love (*Cinderella* 53:03-54:22)

When Cinderella is introduced in the movie, she sings her Dream Song. When the story closes with the wedding bells, the Chorus sings the same song and the audience feels cheated into finding that her only dream of empowerment is, in fact, her marriage to the Prince, based not on mutual understanding and respect but superficial looks and appearances:

Chorus (Singing): Have faith in dreams and someday

Your rainbow will come smiling through / No matter how your heart is grieving

If you keep on believing / The dreams that you wish will come true. (*Cinderella* 1:13:36-1:14:05)

Much to the amazement of the audience, in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast (1991)*, the craze for the prince charming still retains its impact in the movie. Belle is an avid reader. But her favourite book is one related to a prince in disguise and even in that book her favourite part is that where the princess can't recognise her prince charming:

Belle: ♪Oh! Isn't this amazing! It's my favorite part because, you'll see! Here's where she meets Prince Charming… But she won't discover that it's him 'til chapter 3!♪ (*Beauty and the Beast* 6:00-6:15)

Gaston whom everyone wants to marry, wishes to marry Belle as she is the most beautiful in the town. He feels that Belle will be lucky to marry a man like him. But to the amazement of all in the town, Belle turns down his proposal. Gaston's preference for Belle is the same as a competent man generally wishes for. He needs a beautiful

wife for his own sake as well as for having a beautiful progeny:

Gaston: She's the one! The lucky girl I'm going to marry.

Lefou: But she's—

Gaston: The most beautiful girl in town…And that makes her the best. And don't I deserve the best? (*Beauty and the Beast* 7:00-8:02)

When her father asks about her interest in Gaston, she says no to him. Cting the reason which every self- respecting girl do, she tells her father that she can't marry a man who is vain of his competency. Her father, Maurice unlike a typical father agrees with her decision rather than forcing her to marry a man just because he is affluent and opulent:

Maurice: What about that Gaston? He's a handsome fellow!

Belle: He's handsome all right, and rude and conceited and… Oh Papa, he's not for me! Maurice: Well, don't you worry, cause this invention's gonna be the start of a new life for us. (*Beauty and the Beast* 10:30-10:45)

She belies all the expectations of Gaston who comes to propose her with a false confidence and arrogant righteousness.

It looks ridiculous when the inmates of the castle dress up the Beast so as to make him attractive enough to impress Belle. They even guide him how to behave with a strong- minded girl like Belle:

Lumiere: Impress her with your rapier wit.

Mrs. Potts: But be gentle.

Lumiere: Shower her with compliments.

Mrs. Potts: But be sincere.

Lumiere: And above all…

Both: You must control your temper! (*Beauty and the Beast* 34:00-34:28)

This conversation bears witness to the introduction of many turns and twists in Disney's fairy tales as a man is conscious of his looks and behaviour and working on improving the same. However, here the Beast despite his monstrous looks wins the heart of that very girl audience who prefer an understanding partner to a handsome one. On looking in the magic mirror, when Belle finds her father as unwell, she requests the Beast to allow her to go to him for some time. Unable to bear her agony and understanding the plight of a daughter, the Beast sets her free for forever. When the inmates of the castle questions his decision, he tells them that he loves her and can do anything for her happiness:

Beast: (Very sadly) I let her go.

Cogsworth: Ha haha, yes. Splen—(Cogsworth stops in the middle of his sentence.) You what? How could you do that?

Beast: I had to.

Cogsworth: (Still amazed) Yes-yes-yes, but why?

Beast: Because, I love her. (*Beauty and the Beast* 1:07:40-1:08:03)

In Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, the prince charming Prince Eric has been portrayed as being fed up with his own charm. He wishes to live a life of a common man, with no interest in crown and his father's treasures. He wishes to be a sailor and live a life full of freedom. He appears to be subversion of conventional Prince Charming as portrayed in classic fairy tales. On the contrary his female counterpart, Ariel in this movie adaptation lacks assertion of her identity and individuality to be the part of Prince Eric's world. The following song is sung by Ariel after saving Prince Eric from drowning:

Ariel: No, look! He's breathing! Oh, Scuttle…..just look at him. He's so beautiful.

(Song begins) What would I give to live where you are?

What would I pay to stay here beside you?

What would I do to see you smiling at me?

…Just you and me, and I could be part of your world (*The Little Mermaid* 24:54-25:35)

One feels like sparing Ariel here for having fallen in love with a human. For what she deserves censure is her insanity in love, which is cashed in by Ursula who uses Ariel as a means to take her revenge upon King Triton. Ursula's slaves, Flotsam and Jetsam bewitch Ariel with false promises that she can be helped only by Ursula in order to be with the prince for the rest of her life. Ariel becomes so senseless, if not stupid, in love that she sacrifices her voice to be with the prince. When Ariel is quite diffident in signing the contract according to which she has to give her voice as the price for a human form, Ursula takes

advantage of her situation and compels her to sign it without giving a second thought:

Ariel: If I become human, I'll never be with my father or sisters again.

Ursula: That's right! But you'll have your man. [Chuckles] Life's full of tough choices, isn't it? (*The Little Mermaid* 42:02- 42:18)

As it happens in every patriarchal society, Ariel sacrifices her talent of magical voice to be with the man of her dreams which is certainly stupid on her part as love never clips anyone's wings. Prince Eric never takes undue physical advantages of the voiceless Ariel who even gives him hints to be his in every way. When Sebastian propels Prince Eric to kiss Ariel with his song, he refrains from doing it:

Sebastian: Sha lalalalalala, music play, do what the music say you gotta kiss the girl. You've gotta kiss the girl. You've gotta kiss the girl!

You've gotta kiss the girl! Oh! Go on and kiss the girl! (*The Little Mermaid* 1:01:30- 1:01:48)

He is not keeping Ariel with him in the palace as his mistress. He actually likes her a lot and wishes that it would be wonderful had she been the same girl whom he is searching for. When the Ensemble sings their wedding song, Prince Eric keeps her on equal plane in their life but Ariel only wants to be the part of his world:

Ensemble: Now we can walk, now we can run. Now we can stay all day in the sun!
Prince Eric: Just you and me

Ariel: And I will be….

All: Part of your world! Ahhhh! (*The Little Mermaid* 1:17:17- 1:17:41)

Thus, it can be concluded that the cinematic versions of the selected classical fairy tales by Walt Disney illustrate marriage as the fulcrum in the life of all fairy tale princesses. It is highly disillusioning for a feminist reader as well as a feminist audience that in these movies, courtship is magnified into the most exciting part of fairy tale princesses' lives. Henal Patel reveals the truth behind the pseudo charm of the prince charming in fairy tales when she rightly puts, "He gets his bride and a happy ending, regardless of the plot. Most of the time, he does not even cause the successful conclusion, but depends on minor characters who are on his side. Regardless, he is still the unequivocal hero (26)."

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