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### “Cinderella”: A Coin with Two Sides

“Cinderella”, one of the most famous fairy tales in the world, has already been told to us by our parents since we were very young. Though with a common pattern that a poor, generous and pretty girl in rags fights against the evil power with the help of a fairy godmother and makes herself a princess, climbing from the bottom to the top, different versions of “Cinderella” are different from each other in concrete plot and characters. Walt Disney’s film, *Cinderella* (1950), tells a story that a pretty, kind but ill-treated girl called Cinderella struggled against her stepmother, managed to go to a royal ball with the help of her fairy godmother, and finally made herself a princess owe to the glass slippers she left in the palace. By contrast, a French fairy tale, “Donkeyskin” written by Charles Perrault, tells a story that a daughter of a powerful king was forced to marry her father after her mother’s death, but she fled from the palace under donkey’s skin disguise, following her godmother’s advice, won a prince’s heart thanks to her beauty and great culinary art, and finally became a princess again because of the ring she dropped casually in the cake for the prince.

Talking about Disney’s appropriation on European fairy tales, Jack Zipes argues in his article entitled “Breaking the Disney Spell” that Disney “used his own ‘American’ grit and ingenuity to appropriate European fairy tales” (332) and that he “capitalized on American innocence and utopianism to reinforce the social and political status quo” (333), which

indicates that applying American elements, Disney appropriated European fairy tales not only to encourage American to realize their dreams but to strengthen the notions of separated social classes. While Zipes uses *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) as his textual evidence in his article, I will compare and contrast language, visual rhetoric, dialogue, plot and characters in two versions of “Cinderella”, *Cinderella* and “Donkeyskin”, in my essay. Besides, I will also interact with Zipes’ arguments, revealing two ideologies presented in “Cinderella” respectively about dreams realization and separation of social classes.

Consistent to Zipes, I would argue that Disney made “Cinderella” more American by utilizing the duality of “Cinderella”. On the one hand, Disney strengthened an explicit and ideal ideology of “Cinderella” that one may realize his/her dreams, climbing to a higher social class, if he/she keeps on believing and working hard actively; on the other hand, Disney weakened an implicit and realistic ideology of “Cinderella” that the relatively fixed separation of social classes may limit one’s potential class-climbing success.

When Zipes talks about the crucial functions the literary fairy tale had as institution in middle-class society by the end of the nineteenth century in his article, he indicates that the fairy tales served to encourage notions of dreaming and miracles (338), which means that the fairy tales trigger people’s belief in wishes. However, faith in dreams may not be explicitly stressed in “Donkeyskin”. Instead, Perrault used a vital character to be the representation of belief, the fairy godmother. In “Donkeyskin”, when the princess encountered her father’s mad demand, the fairy godmother told her that “I understand the deep sadness in your heart. But with me by your side, there is no need to worry. Nothing can harm you so long as you follow my advice” (110), which convinced the princess that if you believed in your fairy godmother,

the representation of faith, no one could hurt you. As a result, the princess trusted her fairy godmother, did what she was told to do and successfully got rid of her evil father (110-112). Based on the help offered by the fairy godmother to the princess, it is logical to assert that the character of fairy godmother in “Donkeyskin” unfolds an ideal ideology that if you keep on believing your wishes, you may reach your goals. By contrast, Disney strengthened this ideal ideology in *Cinderella* by using a vivid song to directly reveal this ideology. In *Cinderella*, when the dawn arrived, Cinderella got up and sang a song that “if you keep on believing, the dreams that you wish will come true” (*Cinderella*), which along with the peaceful music accompany immediately gives audience a utopian sense that realizing dreams may be as simple as what the lyric of this song indicates. When Zipes talks about how Disney “transfixed” (333) his American audience, he argues that “It is the repetition of Disney’s infantile quest—the core of American mythology—that enabled him to strike a chord in American viewers from the 1920s to the present” (345), which means that Disney repetitively stressed his innocent quest to make the fairy tale more American, satisfying American audience’s taste. Consequently, apart from the song, Disney also used a plot to re-strengthen the notion of this utopian ideology. After being refused to go to the royal ball by her stepmother, Cinderella wept in the garden, whispering, “there’s nothing left to believe in”. It was at the very moment when Cinderella lost faith in her wishes that her fairy godmother appeared and helped her realize her dreams of attending a royal ball (*Cinderella*). The proper appearance of her fairy godmother not only convinces Cinderella of the power of her faith in dreams but also triggers audience’s utopianism again. Talking of the “Disney spell”, Zipes argues that “The great ‘magic’ of the Disney spell is that he animated the fairy tale only to

transfix audiences and divert their potential utopian dreams and hopes” (333), which is in conformity with my argument that Disney Americanized the European fairy tale by exaggerating the utopian elements in “Cinderella”.

Apart from encouraging notions of dreaming and miracles, Zipes also mentions another function of the literary fairy tale in middle-class society by the end of the nineteenth century, which was to “encourage notions of rags to riches and pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” (338), indicating another ideal ideology that one may become rich and climb to a higher social class if he/she keeps on working hard. In “Donkeyskin”, Perrault tried to convince readers of this second utopian ideology by the princess’ struggle. After getting rid of her father with the assistance of donkey’s skin disguise, the princess had to “wash the dish rags and to clean the trough for the pigs” (112) to earn a living. Besides, when she had an opportunity to make a cake for the prince, her dream lover, the princess “locked herself up in her room to make the cake as carefully as she could, took some flour that she had ground to make her dough as fine as possible and mixed it with salt, butter, and fresh eggs” (114), from which it is reasonable to claim that the princess worked as hard as she could to make the cake as delicious as it could be. Finally, the princess successfully climbed back to the top social class by becoming the prince’s bride thanks to the ring she had left in the cake (115-116). The princess’ way to success is consistent to the second ideal ideology that one may become a member in higher social classes if he/she works as hard as he/she can. Similarly, Disney also applied this second utopian ideology in his American version of “Cinderella”. In *Cinderella*, after Cinderella was ordered by her two stepsisters to prepare their clothes for the ball, her “anthropomorphized” (Zipes 347) animal friends sang a song that “make the fire, fix the

breakfast, wash the dishes, do the moppin', and the sweepin' and the dustin', they always keep her hoppin', she'd go around in circles, till she's very very dizzy, still they holler, keep her busy, Cinderelly" (Cinderella), which shows the heavy load on Cinderella's shoulder and implies that Cinderella had to work really hard to fulfill her stepmother and stepsisters' requirements. More importantly, Disney explicitly stressed Cinderella's willingness to work hard to realize her dreams by a dialogue between Cinderella and her stepmother in his film. When she had her stepmother's word that "I see no reason why you can't go, if you get all your work done", Cinderella immediately replied that "Oh, I will. I promise", hurrying out to undertake her work (Cinderella). From this scene, it is rational to claim that Cinderella had a strong desire to realize her dreams by working hard, which contributes to her final class-climbing success. When Zipes talks about the reason why Disney's films are memorable, he argues that Disney celebrated an American myth about perseverance and hard work in his films (348), which means that he promoted the American notions of perseverance and diligence to make his films unforgettable. Thus, it is logical to assert that Disney also Americanized the "Cinderella" by highlighting Cinderella's passion in working hard to realize her wishes. In a word, Disney's devotion to two utopian ideologies respectively about faith in dreams and diligence leads to the first part of my thesis statement that Disney strengthened an explicit and ideal ideology of "Cinderella" that one may realize his/her dreams, climbing to a higher social class, if he/she keeps on believing and working hard actively.

Based on the ideal ideology in "Cinderella", someone may claim that climbing to a higher social class could be easy if he/she keeps on believing and working hard actively.

However, Zipes denies this claim by arguing that “the fairy tale in form and content furthered notions of elitism and separation” (335), which means that the fairy tale reinforces the concept of the separation of social classes. Particularly, when he talks about the French fairy tales, Zipes asserts that “the fairy tale had to fit into the French salons, parlors, and courts of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie if it was to establish itself as a genre” (334), which is revealed in the French version of “Cinderella”, “Donkeyskin”. In the French version, Donkeyskin herself was the daughter of “the most powerful ruler on earth” (109), which shows that Donkeyskin was virtually a member of the top social class. Besides, to stress Donkeyskin’s high social status, Perrault highlighted the Donkeyskin as a princess owning three suits of finery that were so magnificent that no one had ever seen (113), which is consistent to Zipes’ argument that “the French fairy tales heightened the aspect of the chosen aristocratic elite” (335). By contrast, though Disney weakened the aristocratic aspect of “Cinderella” to make it more American, he still preserved the notions of separated social classes. At the beginning of *Cinderella*, the voiceover introduced that Cinderella’s father “gave his beloved child every luxury” and that her stepmother was “a woman of good family” (Cinderella), which reveals that Cinderella’s family was at least rich, belonging to bourgeoisie. From my perspective, it is Cinderella’s wealthy family background that enables the young ladies in her family to have the opportunity to attend the royal ball. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that no matter how poor Cinderella or Donkeyskin is, they are set to be at least in the middle class or an even higher social class, which means that the origin where they start to climb to a higher social class is above the classes which most of the audience belong to. Furthermore, virtually imposing a hidden premise on the utopian ideology, “Cinderella” implies a realistic ideology

that one needs to be in a high enough social class to support his/her class-climbing success.

When Zipes talks about the crucial functions the literary fairy tale had in middle-class society by the end of the nineteenth century, he asserts that the fairy tale “introduced notions of elitism and separatism” (337), which means that the fairy tale strengthened the quo of separated social classes, consistent to the realistic ideology implied by “Cinderella”.

Talking about the role Disney played in appropriating European fairy tales, Zipes maintains that “it would not be an exaggeration to assert that his revolutionary technical means capitalized on American innocence and utopianism to reinforce the social and political status quo” (333), which simply indicates that Disney exaggerated American utopianism to strengthen the notion of separatism. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that Disney Americanized “Cinderella” by utilizing its duality. On the one hand, Disney highlighted ideological utopianism that one may realize his/her class-climbing dreams if he/she keeps on believing and working hard actively; on the other hand, Disney weakened ideological elitism and separatism that the separation of social classes may limit one’s potential class-climbing success. The duality of Cinderella reminds us that fairy tales may not be as simple as they seem to be and that there may be some important notions hidden in the fairy tales purposely by the authors. More importantly, the hidden concepts may be the very ideas that the writers want to reveal. Awareness of the duality enables us to intentionally consider metaphors in our reading, which eventually helps us grasp the writers’ core ideas. In other word, we cannot be captivated by one side of a coin. Instead, we should consider dialectically both sides of a coin, forming our own ideologies to analyze the issues we encounter in daily life.

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