Steve Wang

Professor Holguin

RHET 102 (ZJU-UIUC)

April 9, 2017

Disney and the Literal Fairy Tales: Collaboration Instead of Exploitation

Nowadays, Disney is famous all over the world for its animated films which are based on the classic fairy tales. And the company Disney which was created by Walt Disney has made a great deal of profit by making animated movies adapted from literal fairy tales. However, there is a crucial point that the animated films show many differences including the plots and the key characters from the classic fairy tales. And Jack Zipes argues that the company Disney is capitalizing the literal fairy tales in its own way which is different from the original literal version, and Disney forces the audience to view the fairy tales through the animators’ eyes instead of giving the viewers a fair concept of the fairy tales. Jack Zipes wants to break the Disney spell, but I think the relationship between Disney’s animations and the literal fairy tales is positive collaboration instead of negative exploitation.

Many people know that the original fairy tales were oral, from the story tellers to the listeners. Then, with the widely use of paper and books, the literal fairy tales appeared as a set of collections of the oral fairy tales. In the twentieth century, Walt Disney, who was an American animation film producer, formed a company named Disney to create animated movies. During that time, there were few charming subjects for animated films. So Walt Disney managed his way to create movies based on the literal fairy tales as a good theme for animated movies. One of the most successful animations created by Disney is the movie *Cinderella* in 1950, which is an adaption of the literal fairy tale *Cinderella* written by Brothers Grimm. In my opinion, the relationship between the movie *Cinderella* and the literal fairy tale *Cinderella* is a good example of collaboration between visual art and literal art. As we all know, the story of Cinderella can be classified into three different versions: oral version, literal version, and the movie version. Fewer people keep the oral version, and we do not take too much care about them; a small group of people keep the literal version; but the popular animation *Cinderella* brings a lot more movie viewers who are interested in the story of Cinderella. These movie viewers could be classified into two groups: the surface viewers who only want happiness of watching a good animation but are not interested in reading the literal version, and the deep viewers who are interested in reading the literal fairy tale *Cinderella*. With some delicate differences including characters, the ending, and some key turns of plots between the movie and the literal fairy tale made by Disney, the film *Cinderella* brings the surface viewer happiness, and brings the deep viewers with a chance of comparing the literal version and the movie version to get more understanding of the story of Cinderella as well as our modern world.

There are some delicate differences between the main plots of the movie *Cinderella* and the literal fairy tale *Cinderella.* In the Grimm’s version, Cinderella lives with her father, stepmother and two beautiful stepsisters. Cinderella tries her best to finish her work to get the chance to go to the first ball, but the stepmother gives her too much housework to be finished before the ball starts. So, Cinderella goes to her mother’s grave and gets beautiful clothes from the birds and then has a dance with the prince in the first dancing party without being discovered by other people. She does almost the same thing in the second day, also without being noticed by others. But in the third day, the prince plays a trick after the third dancing party and manages to get one of her slippers. Finally, after picking her two stepsisters by mistake, the prince uses the slipper to recognize Cinderella and makes Cinderella his bride. But in the Disney’s movie version, Cinderella lives with her stepmother, two stepsisters, and a group of animals including hard-working mice, a friendly dog, and an evil cat. The evil stepmother and ugly stepsisters tries every way to prevent Cinderella from going to the dancing party. But Cinderella gets beautiful clothes from the ghost of her mother and goes to the ball to have a dance with the prince. After midnight, Cinderella escapes but leaves one slipper. In the next day, when the duke tries to find a fit for the slipper in the house of Lady Tremaine, the birds, mice and the dog saves Cinderella from being locked by Lady Tremaine. The Although Lady Tremaine manages to break the glass slipper, Cinderella shows another slipper and proves her fit to the slipper. Finally, Cinderella becomes the bride of the prince.

The first difference between the movie version and the literal version is the figure of characters: in the Grimm’s version, the heart of the two stepsisters are foul and black, but Cinderella and both of her stepsisters are beautiful; however, only Cinderella appears beautiful in the movie version. Grimm’s version of *Cinderella* focuses on the soul of the characters which the readers care more naturally though the reading process; but the movie pays more attention to the appearance and build a close relationship between appearance and inner properties of the characters which the film audience care more though the movie watching process. Jack Zipes argues in his article *Breaking the Disney Spell* that:‘The pictures conceal the controls and machinery. They deprive the audience of viewing the productionand manipulation, and in the end, audiences can no longer envision a fairy tale for themselves as they can when they read it.’ (*The Classic Fairy Tales*, First Edition, page 345) But I want to say that the change of character figures work better for the film because the judge of characters from kind to evil could be easier for the audience when watching the movie, which pleases most of the surface viewers. And the significant difference of character figures between the movie version and the literal version provides the deep viewers a chance to compare and think about the appearance versus soul. Surface viewers care nothing about the literal version, but they are happy to watch the film and get an idea of the story of Cinderella. Deep viewers also read the literal version, and they are also willing to get a deeper thought about appearance and soul of characters. In my opinion, both of two editions have done the correct thing, the difference occurs because of the difference of the media: for the literal fairy tale, we read and judge, so the behaviors of characters which are driven by their inner properties make more sense; but for the movie, we watch and judge, so the appearances of the characters which are present directly on the screen make more sense.

The second difference between the movie *Cinderella* and the Grimm’s literal *Cinderella* is the ending of the stepsisters at the end of the story: in the Grimm’s version, the doves pick the eyes of the two stepsisters, which results in blindness for the rest of their lives; but in the Disney’s version, there is no mention to any injuries of the two stepsisters, only the happy marriage of Cinderella is mentioned in the end. In a word, cruelty is treated differently between the movie and the literal fairy tale. Jack Zipes says in his article *Breaking the Disney Spell* that: ‘But Disney's film is also an attack on the literary tradition of the fairy tale. He robs the literary tale of its voice and changes its form and meaning.’ (*The Classic Fairy Tales*, First Edition, page 344) But I want to reply that Disney has made a correct choice because the viewers of movie recently have a different taste compared with readers of the classic fairy tales one or two centuries before. Previously, people had wars and bloody reality, but now peace and civilization take control of our world. Just like Yuval Noah Harari has written: ‘In most areas wars became rarer than ever.’ ‘Even more importantly, a growing segment of humankind has come to see war as simply inconceivable.’ (*A Brief History of Tomorrow*, page 16 and 17) Modern people are not familiar with body cruelty any more, and they do not want to face body cruelty directly. What people need now is mental kindness instead of physical violence. The removal of physical cruelty pleases surface viewers, and it provides the deep viewers an idea to think about our civilized modern world. The reasonable change which Disney has made marks the fade of cruelty, which exactly fits into our civilized modern society.

The third difference between the movie *Cinderella* and the literal fairy tale *Cinderella* occurs at the key turn of the plots: in the Grimm’s version, Cinderella has done almost nothing except waiting for the prince to come and fit her with the slipper; however, in Disney’s movie, Cinderella calls for the duke to return and give her a chance to try the slipper. What’s more, Cinderella shows the other slipper and fit it in after the first slipper is broken. Grimm’s Cinderella just waits for her prince, but Disney’s Cinderella makes efforts to win her prince. To summarize, Grimm’s Cinderella waits for her fate, but Disney’s Cinderella fights for her fate. Jack Zipes argues in his essay *Breaking the Disney Spell* 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 through the false promises of the images he cast upon the screen.’ (*The Classic Fairy Tales*, First Edition, page 333) However, I would like to argue that what Disney displays in its animated movie is not the potential Utopian dreams and hopes, but the fact to fight for our fate in our modern lives. Of course, the plot seems to be more dramatic after Disney’s adaptation, which appeals to the surface viewers of the film; and the plot difference tells the deep viewer that maybe people could wait for fate to come one or two centuries before, but now in our modern world, we must fight for our own fate.

Generally speaking, Jack Zipes thinks that the difference Disney has made while adapting literal fairy tales into animated movies has ruined people’s view of classic fairy tales. but my point is that it is the difference between the movies and the literal fairy tales that create beauty, and make viewers happy. Surface viewers know, while deeper viewers understand. The Disney movie brings surface viewer happiness and bring deep viewers deep going thoughts. Zipes expresses his idea in his essay *Breaking the Disney Spell* that Disney uses the adaptations from literal fairy tales to the animated films to make profits, which proves the negative exploitation which Disney has done on the literal fairy tales, but I want to say that Disney does make a lot of money from people who are mostly surface viewers. But how does Disney use the money? It makes movies, creates dolls, and builds Disney parks, which can bring surface viewers more happiness. What surface viewers actually purchase from Disney are not only movie tickets, dolls, there are something more important: they take a mental trip to a different fantasy world but get the same thing, which is the feelings and memories of their innocent childhood. And for deep viewers, what they actually get from Disney’s movies are deeper thoughts when comparing the movie and the literal fairy tale. Disney does make profits, but the viewers get more benefit.

From my point of view, Disney’s movie brings surface viewer happiness, and brings deep viewers deep going thoughts based on both versions of fairy tales which can not occur only with the classic literal fairy tales. with the presence of Disney’s movies, not only can we get a better understanding for the fairy tales of literal versions, but also we can have deeper thoughts for the whole set of classic fairy tales even deeper thoughts of our society. So, in my conclusion, the relationship between Disney’s animations and the literal fairy tales is positive collaboration instead of negative exploitation.

Work cited

Tatar,Maria. *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Harvard University, 1999.

Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney Spell" *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Edited by Maria Tatar, Harvard University, 1999.

Noah Harari, Yuval. *A Brief History of Tomorrow,*  HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2017.