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Class Differentiation in Cinderella

Fairy tales influence most people’s childhood during last several centuries. Cinderella, as one of the most popular fairy tales, read by millions of persons around the world. One phenomenon I found in Cinderella was that there was a huge class differentiation, not only between the upper class and the lower class, but also between who had power and who did not from the same class. I would argue about the class differentiation which happened in Cinderella in this essay.

A lot of people heard or watched Cinderella in Disney’s version. In Disney’s version, Cinderella’s father died when Cinderella was a child. Cinderella’s step-mother and two step sisters treated her very badly and attempted to prevent her married with the prince; luckily, Cinderella married with the prince with her animal friends and a kind godmother at last. Although Zipes thought that Disney made some spells with fairy tales; in my opinion, Disney did not change the main idea and the social background in Cinderella. There is another version of Cinderella which is from Brothers Grimm. In Brother Grimm’s version, Cinderella’s father was alive, and her step-mother and step-sisters treated her badly, either. A bird helped her go into the ball. She married with the prince at last as well. Therefore, I think Disney just adjusted the story into a version which was suitable for children to accept, but not changed the main meaning. For instance, Cinderella’s two step-sisters were ugly in the Disney’s film, but they look pretty in Brothers Grimm’s version. The reason why is that people who have ugly appearances have foul and black hearts is easy for children to understand. Otherwise, children may confuse that why two beautiful girls who give them a good first-sight impression can do such bad things to Cinderella. This is just a tiny change to the whole story, it does not influence the main idea which the fairy tale wants to express. Same type of tiny changes happened many times, in Grimm’s version, the step-mother asked her two daughters to cut their toes or heels in order to fit the shoes so that they could marry the prince; in the film, there is not such scene, for it would be too bloody to present cutting someone’s toes in front of so many children.

One thing should be mentioned is that class differentiation appears in both version of Cinderella. In the Brother Grimm’s version, at the beginning of the fairy tale, it says, “The wife of a rich man fell ill. (Grimm, 117)” It means Cinderella was born in a rich family. From Cinderella’s two step- sister ask their father to buy some beautiful clothes, pearls and jewels can infer that Cinderella’s family is really rich. “But her stepmother said: ‘It's no use. You can't come along since you have nothing to wear and don't know how to dance. We would be so embarrassed.’ (118)" It shows that only people who are well dressed can take part in the party in the ball. Poor families do not have enough money to buy such expensive clothes, that means only rich people can join the party, and can be chosen by the prince. Another point shows the class differentiation when Cinderella’s step-mother and step-sisters find her is in the ball but do not recognize she is Cinderella, they thought that “She looked so beautiful in the dress of gold that they thought she must be the daughter of a foreign king. (118)” In their impression, girls in the dress of gold must be a king’s daughter. It means that beautiful equals high status. In other words, a poor person cannot be beautiful, or poor person do not have the right to be beautiful. It divides the person into different classes potentially. The story represents what the writer thought and conveys this kind of concept to readers. We can find the same phenomenon in Disney’s version as well. In the film, Cinderella’s step-mother and step-sisters are definitely advantaged group in the home. Thus, they command Cinderella to do almost all housework for them. Cinderella, as the vulnerable member, she only can obey and tolerate. Exactly, Cinderella and her step-mother, step-sisters are in the same class, for they are from the same family; however, in this family, the differentiation exists, her mother and sisters are much upper than her. They can tear Cinderella’s ceremonial robe, and Cinderella cannot resist them. Honestly, if someone bullies me, I would resist, at least, I would protest. But Cinderella does not, her action depends on a kind of abnormal respect. This kind of abnormal respect is from a lower-class people to someone is in upper class; in other words, it is caused by class differentiation which is in their concept. Cinderella’s step-mother has a cat, the cat represents the advantaged group as well; it bullies the mice (cat should catch mice), even does something bad to Cinderella. It means the upper class’s pet has a higher position than the lower class. Another scene shows the class differentiation is that all girls who take part in the party in ball are from upper class, all of them are well-dressed. Cinderella should dress up like a nobility so that can go to the ball. A proper ceremonial robe divides who can go to the ball, it shows a deep class differentiation. It gives us an impression that the girl who marries with the prince should be beautiful, should be well-dressed, should be in the same class with the prince.

The song which sang by Cinderella in the film goes, “…believe and dream will come true.” It was sung when Cinderella bullied by her step-mother and step-sisters. At last, her dream comes true, she marries with the prince and lead a better life. Songs as the background music is a kind of film’s technique of expression, and this song is the good-for-good ending’s foreshadowing. What I want to argue is what’s her dream? Be the prince’s wife? Exactly not, she does not know the prince is finding a wife at that time. I think her dream is leading a better life. In fact, the convention she achieves her dream is marrying with the prince. The essence is getting to a higher position. As she marries the prince (gets a high position), her step-mother and step-sisters cannot bully her anymore, and Cinderella can live happily, even the mice get some interests from this happy ending as well. All these things show that a high position was important. Compared with Cinderella’s life before, the class differentiation is so obvious. There are some songs in Brothers Grimm’s fairy tale as well. "Roo coo coo, roo coo coo, blood's in the shoe: the shoe's too tight, the real bride's waiting another night." Although it is not relevant to class differentiation, it has some other functions. One of the function is to remainder the prince this is not the shoes’ owner. This song does not appear in Disney’s version is to prevent the bloody scene.

In most people's memories, fairy tales are something populist, which are popular in quite a lot of children from different classes; however, it was wrong in 17th and 18th century. Zipes wrote that "In fact, the French fairy tales heightened the aspect of the chosen aristocratic elite who were always placed at the center of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century narratives. They were part and parcel of the class struggles in the discourses of that period. (Zipes 335)" That means in the beginning, fairy tales were only written for the upper class. Zipes’ words can perfectly explain why there are so many phenomena about class differentiation in the story *Cinderella*. The fairy tales were written for upper class, that means, the writers had a strong sense with class differentiation; otherwise, a writer who is only concerned about the poor people, and his works is full of sympathy to poor people, cannot be accepted by the upper class. Writers had strong senses with class differentiation, so the fairy tales is full of class differentiation. Zipes’ words prove my discovery in *Cinderella*. Fairy tales are some story written on the paper, before 17th century, there had been some stories told to children orally. Zipes says, “Unlike the oral tradition, the literary tale was written down to be read in private, although, in some cases, the fairy tales were read aloud in parlors. However, the book form enabled the reader to withdraw from his or her society and to be alone with a tale. This privatization violated the communal aspects of the folk tale, but the very printing of a fairy tale was already a violation since it was based on separation of social classes. (335)” These words show that fairy tales were not open, could not be read by everyone. It shows class differentiation from a point of view; however, I cannot agree with his opinion wholly. We can know that only seldom persons can read fairy tales from this Zipes’ sentence. What’s more, he calls Disney’s changes on fairy tales spells in the title. In my opinion, Disney’s work is adjusting the stories more acceptable for children to read. All works down by Disney are helping fairy tales spread more broadly, Disney used the form of films to spread fairy tales. Honestly speaking, I, as a Chinese person, firstly heard fairy tales is from Disney’s films. What’s more, as a fact, there must be some differences between literary tale and oral film. For instance, literary tale can hardly present characters’ tones, and there are some common ways we speak which are not formal to write in a book. Thus, I think Disney helps fairy tales spread, and these tiny revises cannot be called spell.

As conclusion, the story *Cinderella* has a lot of phenomena of class differentiation, the characters’ actions and some potential details in the fairy tale prove that. This phenomenon was partly caused by that fairy tales were written for upper class at the beginning. Disney made some tiny changes in fairy tales, but did not change the main ideas, and it remains the concept of class differentiation in Cinderella as well.

Works Cited