Pinar Ece Gurgen

21018368

Rees 120

26 March 2023

Then vs. Now; Rapunzel

The one thing I loved while taking this course was learning about the origins of the fairytales I grew up with. I would have never guessed that Disney was not the original writer of their popular movies and that they were adaptations from the 19th century. The modern versions of the fairy tales written by the Grimm Brothers mean a lot to me and my childhood, I grew up wanting to be one of the princesses like Rapunzel or Snow White. Even though I have never heard of the Grimm Brothers' versions prior to taking this course, learning about them taught me a lot of things. Storytelling is one of the most popular ways to learn and relieve a culture and when I read the Grimm Brothers' version of the fairytales, I was able to travel back in time and learn about their culture and upbringing. I was first introduced to Rapunzel with Tangled and I had the biggest AHA moment when I learned about the origins of the Rapunzel that I loved and adored. There are a lot of differences between the older and the newer version of Rapunzel but I also think that there are a lot of similarities between the two as well. The similarities and differences between the two tales showcase a beautiful interpretation of the different eras they were popular in. In this essay, I will be structurally comparing the two versions of Rapunzel with the use of Olrik’s Laws to highlight how much storytelling has changed over the years.

Even though the older version of Rapunzel falls under a lot of Olrik’s Laws; like the law of opening and closing or the law of contrast, the two that I will mostly be focusing on discussing are the law of the use of tableau scenes and the law of repetition. Before I get started on the main two, I think the others also deserve a mention. First of all, the law of opening and closing. Just like any fairy tale we covered in this course, the law of opening and closing was used in the old version of Rapunzel as well as the Disney version. Both of the stories have a traditional “once upon a time…” and “there was once a man and a woman…” opening and a traditional “they all lived happily ever after” ending. In Tangled the whole movie plot starts as if a character was telling a bedtime story that happened once upon a time to its viewers and ends with everybody in that tale living happily ever after. I think that this is one of the most popular ways Disney pays credit to the original writers and the history of the fairy tale. These structures of the opening and closing staying the same highlights the importance of the fairy tale origins and I loved how Disney kept the original opening and closing law in their version. The law of contrast is used very similarly in both versions as well. Rapunzel is naive, pretty, and pure whereas the witch (or the Gospel) is cruel, selfish, and manipulative. These contrasting characteristics are kept in both versions of the fairy tale and Disney keeping the contrast between the characters also highlights how they followed the origin of the story’s plot by keeping the characteristics of good and evil. These two laws were worth mentioning in my own opinion since they showed how Disney paid attention to details by following the original story but now let’s talk about the main two laws of Olrik that showcase the culture and time difference between the two versions. The law of the tableaux scenes is used in a lot of the aspects of the Grimm Brothers version of the fairytale. The character Rapunzel is known for her beautiful, fine, long hair, and in the original version of the story the use of tableaux scenes was so efficient that the modern adaptations used it everywhere. When I search for Rapunzel online, all the versions of Rapunzel always make sure to include at least her long hair animated or drawn. In storybooks, games, theaters… Rapunzel is always associated with her hair. Every modern adaptation of Rapunzel took the written tableaux scene and brought it to life with various different perspectives. Disney took Rapunzel’s hair’s tableau scene and made their whole storyline revolve around it. In Tangled, Rapunzel’s hair had a magic potion that cured the witch and the male lead. It was the reason for Rapunzel’s kidnapping and imprisonment. The original tableaux scene turned into a new different story with Disney’s adaptation. I think it’s mainly because in this era without the magical hair, Rapunzel would not be that interesting or appreciated by the audience. Rapunzel’s hair was not the only tableaux scene that was carried on to the modern adaptations. The tableaux scene of the tower was carried on to Disney’s version as well as all the other modern adaptations. In both versions, the towers are tall and thin with one window. However, in Disney’s version, there was a hidden door added to the tower that only the witch knew about. I think this was added to help with the story’s flow between the scenes. I also think that Disney changing and adding a few new details to the tableaux scenes is simply because Disney’s version of the story is so much longer than the Grimm Brothers'. One tableaux scene that was not added to Disney’s version that kind of surprised me was the ending where Rapunzel had twins. I think this scene could have been added as a side scene, like the two main characters living happily ever after with the twins. The last law that I want to mention is the law of repetition. In the Grimm Brothers’ version the line “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair to me” is repeated throughout the plotline. This simple repetition that kept on repeating helped build the tension and the narrative in the original story. In Disney’s adaptation, this repetition was used the same way. It was used when Rapunzel was introduced to the viewers, when the witch realized Rapunzel escaped from the tower, and when Flynn came to rescue her. The repetition was used to build the narrative between the scenes. This repetition also became one of the most remembered parts of both versions.

I have mentioned a lot of the similarities between the two versions now the differences. The original story of Rapunzel was more tragic and had a darker storyline because the Grimm Brothers never really intended it to be for children. I cannot really imagine how terrifying it would be to watch a Disney movie where the male lead gets blinded by thorns while falling down from the tower. Disney changed some of the dark aspects of the storyline because of the intended audience change and viewers' discretion. In the original tale, Rapunzel’s parents were commoners and they lived in a house next to a garden owned by Gothel. I think that the character of Rapunzel being a commoner and not a princess in the original tale kind of highlights who the Grimm Brothers wanted the audience for the book to be. Not everybody that reads the tale can be a princess but they can love and find their one and only prince in life. Thus, the story revolves around a commoner. The book was for the public and the people of that era. However, I have not really seen a Disney movie where the main character stays as a commoner. Even if the main lead is born as a commoner they never stay as one. I think this structural aspect of the story was lost because Disney has a princess theme and to go along with it they turned Rapunzel’s story into a long-lost princess story.

Overall, fairy tales reflect the era that they were written in because they are written for the public that will read them. The similarities and the differences of both versions of Rapunzel highlight the different public eye the writers were aiming for. Finding these aspects helped me realize how much cultural change happened over the years.

Works Cited

Greno, N., & Howard, B. (2010). Tangled. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

*Rapunzel*. Grimm's Fairy tales - rapunzel. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2023, from https://www.mordent.com/folktales/grimms/rapunzel/