76
INTERPRETATION OF GENDER IN DISNEY'S *CINDERELLA*

Cibina Chandran, Research Scholar, Research and Development Centre Bharathiar University, Coimbatore
Dr. Cheryl-Ann Gerardine Shivan, Principal, Kasthurba College for Women, Villianur

Abstract:
Children's movies that started being produced from the mid twentieth century, initially as silent movies and later swinging to full length energized films, came into being with the ultimate intention of entertaining the children community and the family and such movies have been widespread from their very inception. Through the years children's movies have turned out to be all the more outwardly engaging and later took on a practical aspect. Since, with the passage of time, children's movies have moved from being purely of entertainment value to being instructive, perceptive and instructional, it is essential to perceive the role these movies play in the present society. Movies for children are made for a viewing audience of three years and above. Given the impressionable age from which a child becomes a viewer and the fact that they are moldable and draw impressions from different operators of socialization as to how to think, feel, and act about gender and socially endorsed gender roles, a investigation into how children's movies will also create lasting impressions, becomes essential. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to explore how gender roles are delineated and the possible messages they convey. To this end, Walt Disney's screen interpretation of the very popular fairy tale, Cinderella, has been taken up for analysis.

Keywords: Children movies, cinderella, gender, society, interpretation.

Cinderella, one of the best known of the classic fairy tales has been reworked many times in different versions to suit the audiences of different generations. This shows that history is fond of retelling great stories although with modifications to the original tale. The story of *Rhodopis* (The Egyptian Cinderella) was first recorded by Strabo, the Greek historian in the first century B.C. and is considered the oldest version of the story. Charles Perrault wrote his account of the tale in 1697 and titled it *Cendrillon*. Grimms' version *Aschenputtel* came out in 1812. Similarly, certain directors have made attempts to tell the story in slightly different way and all versions have met with warm reception by the audiences the world over. Walt Disney's portrayal, considered a Disney classic, has the honour of being adjudged the most well known film adaptation.

The most popular rendition of Cinderella is the story of a modest and kind girl who loses her mother at an early age and is ill treated by her stepmother and stepsisters. She is denied the privileges that the other girls enjoy as when she is not permitted to attend a ball that the Prince is hosting at which he would select a bride for himself. A fairy god-mother assists Cinderella in attending the dance on the condition she returns at midnight. Cinderella enjoys herself dancing with the Prince who becomes quite smitten with her but in her haste to return on time, she loses one of her glass slippers. The story ends with the Prince looking for the girl with the glass slipper, and when he ultimately finds her after a long search, he marries her and they live happily ever after.

Films are social activators. A motion picture is an art form which brings together all genres. The weirdest, the most extreme, the most poignant socio-cultural issues are shown on the screen and the audience is sensitised. Films record innumerable concerns and elucidate on history, social, culture issues and a lot more. They are eye-openers about human activities and produce an enhanced empathetic view of

people around the world.

Children, all over the world, due to language differences find it difficult to understand fairy tales written in English; hence, Disney movies available in English with subtitles in different languages are preferred. In addition, the audio-visual effect that a movie produces has greater appeal when compared to the reading of the same story. In fact, the visual medium is a means of superior education as we keep in mind information for a longer time when we visually grasp it. The illiterate also benefits from the content of the movies as he needs only eyes and ears and not the skill to read or write to apprehend a literary classic. Thus the famous saying 'a picture speaks a thousand words' fits the context. In spite of the fact that books project the identical leitmotifs and themes, the volume of effect produced on the spectators through movies, is incomparable.

The ways things are depicted in the media greatly influence a child's perception of gender roles. On the off chance that a child is habitually looked at with gender prejudice and is gender typecast, this knowledge becomes incorporated and influences his / her perceptions regarding the roles men and women ought to play in life. Numerous young children are presented to different Disney characters through movies that may control their production of future mental self-views. In a significant number of the movies, impossible portrayals of the perfect male and female figure are depicted and young children regularly relate to these favorite characters, there by influencing the way they conceive their future roles in society.

Male and female characters are depicted diversely in Disney films, which additionally strengthen one-sided thoughts regarding gender roles, social conduct and societal standards. The gendered pictures displayed in Disney princess movies may eventually influence a young child's way to self-acknowledgment. For instance, Cinderella portrays the perfect princess who has an immensely thin waist and a lovely face. She has long curling eyelashes and a rosy face: physical attributes that are depicted as alluring. Young naïve women, who regularly try to define their personality by watching the media that encompasses them in their regular daily lives, could be led into believing that perfect physical features are a society's prescription for a complete woman.

Cinderella is yet another Disney archetypal figure that enforces gender roles by portraying women in a role subservient to that of their male counterparts.. It runs as one with West and Zimmerman's hypothesis of "doing sex" and "adds to, reaffirms, and imitates manly predominance and female accommodation" (Conley 282). The story of Cinderella conveys to young women that well-off men arouse passionate feelings in women and that marrying a rich man would bring about genuine joy. In the film, Cinderella makes a metamorphosis from being a poor, ignored servant to an astonishingly beautiful lady. She attracts the Prince's attention with the assistance of some magic which makes her look extremely attractive and the Prince experiences similar passionate feelings stimulated by Cinderella's beauty and not basically by the person, per se. Both the Prince and Cinderella had never known each other previously, and hence, were unaware of each other's inherent personalities. Their mutual attraction is, therefore, purely physical and could be misinterpreted as the norm for falling in love or the basic requisite for finding a partner. This film also depicts that women should be "safeguarded" by men and that women have necessarily to rely upon other individuals to look after them, particularly men. It communicates that without a male companion, women are powerless. Additionally, the verse of the song "A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes" clarifies that by dreaming sufficiently hard and through good fortune, wishes will work out as expected. Cinderella, herself, does nothing to escape the circumstances she is in. She does not have the will to stand up for herself. Rather, she lets life continue with all its accompanying miseries and waits patiently for her Prince Charming to come and rescue her. In short, she is depicted as frail, dutiful, and aloof. The story also seems to convey the sentiment that riches and high status are desirable needs and that they open a door to bliss.

Cinderella is a portrayal of the ideal conventional woman. Her life is limited to a residential circle,

she invests her energy doing family tasks in a joyful way and regardless of the poor treatment meted out to her by stepmother and stepsisters, and she does not offer much by way of resistance. She is portrayed as fairly detached, a quality customarily credited to 'great women'. Another trope that is considered by Benshoff and Griffin is that women are frequently connected with little creatures to highlight their charm and helplessness (218). The woman in this story fits in with the thoughts of what constitutes a decent woman. Endearing creatures like fowls and mice are her companions. In addition, the other female characters re-affirm gender roles as when the female mice send away the male mice before helping Cinderella wash, clean, and sew, demonstrating that the male mice do not partake of household activities. So, all that Cinderella truly has is her simplicity, generosity and docility which has sustained her for the better part of the story.

The possibility that women are passive and depend on their virtues and physical qualities to advance in life, as talked about by Nelmes, is additionally stressed in the film when Cinderella's beauty is all that is expected to influence the Prince to fall in love with her to rescue her from the drudgery of her present existence (242-248). The triviality on which their relationship demonstrates how women's beauty is viewed as their most significant characteristic, as the sovereign knows nothing about Cinderella separated from what she resembles. The womanliness of Cinderella is such a quality that in the long run encourages her to discover the 'satisfaction' which is so customarily as womanlike characteristics of magnificence, weakness and aloofness which are counterbalanced with marriage(Belle 112). Here, the film interfaces Cinderella's fantasies of bliss with marriage, consequently affirming the possibility that marriage brings joy and is a definite objective in women's lives. In this way, the film additionally accentuates the qualities of the prince as the rescuer and the woman as domestic and detached as is customarily done (Murphy 125).

Cinderella's stepsisters are also used to pass on gender roles. There is a conspicuous difference between Cinderella's exquisite developments and beauty and her step-sisters apparently unfeminine developments and offensiveness features and the differences are used to the set up laws of gender. They are constantly instructed and reminded by their mother on how to be 'womanlike' while they keep on displaying impolite, forceful, commonly 'masculine' comportments. One scene that stresses this thought of gender role as a progress is when the sisters have lost their desire for wedding the prince in light of the fact that he is ridiculously enamoured by an unknown young woman. The stepsisters by yawning and seat themselves with legs spread, besides their uncombed hair and natural expose of beauty express their 'unfeminine' attitude during the scene. However, they tried to bring back the 'feminine' nature by running here and there to adore themselves at the moment their mother instills in them the hope of getting them married. It is significant to note at this juncture that the concept gender is rather a style than a nature which Butler disapproves. According to Butler, films contrary to the notion of gender as oppression, represents as good and voluntary.

At one point, when Cinderella goes to the market, a woman asks her for what reason she chooses to live with her stepsisters and stepmother given the dismal circumstances they subject her to. Cinderella answers that she loved the place as they did, and that it was ultimately, her home. This shows that she could take the decision to leave yet she intentionally chooses not to. Later in the film, nonetheless, she leaves her home that she had stated to love, behind, keeping in mind the end goal which was to be with the Prince. Here, the film infers that her own flexibility and expanded bliss is not as important as marrying the prince, and she will make the forfeit for him; however, not for herself. This relates back to the possibility of marriage as a definitive objective for a woman.

Taking everything into account, it can be said that Cinderella depicts women to be loyal, yet feeble and uninvolved. It additionally makes riches and excellence an imperative need and a passage to joy. Depicting female characters along these lines subscribes to common standards and conceptualizations, including those identified with age and gender roles, regardless of whether the pursuers question or reject

those standards. This sort of depiction perpetuates gender roles and typecasts which tend to embed itself in society. The Disney version of Cinderella was chosen for review and research because of the large impact it has on the entertainment industry and its influence on millions of children around the world. In Disney films, gender roles for both male and female are exceptionally conspicuous. However, there has been a significant change all through the historical backdrop of Disney in the depiction of female characters. The portrayal of women and their gender roles has undergone no less than three different changes. One, is the first depiction of Disney princesses as clichéd and extremely subservient and domesticated. A second depiction of female characters is as defiant and goal-oriented. Finally, the female characters as autonomous, free, and energetic. These diverse sorts of depictions of women through the different movies can be seen to coincide with the changing social patterns of the times down the ages.

Works Consulted
Primary Source:
1.   *Cinderella.* Dir. Kenneth Branagh. Perf. Cate Blanchett. Disney, 2015. DVD.
Secondary Sources:
1.   Belle, Elizabeth. "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies." *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture.* Eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 107-124. Print.
2.   Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
3.   Dalton Conley and Jason Fletcher. *The Genome Factor: What the Social Genomics Revolution Reveals about Ourselves, Our History & the Future.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. Print.
4.   Jeffords, Susan. "The Curse of Masculinity:Disney's Beauty and the Beast, "From Mouse to Mermaid:The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture.Eds.Elizabeth Bell,Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington.Indiana University Press,1995.161-172.Print.
5.   Murphy, Patrick D. "The Whole Wide World Was Scrubbed Clean." *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture.* Eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 125-136. Print.
6.   Nelmes, Jill, ed. "Gender and Film." *An Introduction to Film Studies.* 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2003. 241-277. Print.