

## The Grimm Face of Disney: From Sordid to Sales

For many, the simple phrase “Once Upon a Time” calls to mind the fondest of memories: custom-fit glass slippers, marvelous enchantments, swoon-worthy heroes, and happy endings set to the merry chime of wedding bells. This is, in essence, the modern fairytale: a unique invention wonderfully illustrated by the beloved Walt Disney Studios. Disney, one of the largest organizations in the modern industrial world, built an empire upon the retelling of cherished children’s stories from the early nineteenth century, tales such as *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel*, and *The Frog Prince*. But for the first leading ladies, Grimm’s original heroines, life was not all rose petals and pixie dust.

Mutilated limbs, malicious captors, gouged eyeballs, and children out of wedlock: the hardships of life were not uncommon to a Grimm princess. The graphic nature of the tales hinges upon grotesque plot twists, even bordering on obscene. For those living in the twenty-first century, the thought of Lady Tremaine chopping off Anastasia’s toes with a blunt kitchen knife may be tough to swallow. Why? It’s not the romance-driven, good-spirited ending to Disney’s *Cinderella*. Though the names of the heroines may remain the same, the major elements of these world-renowned fairytales have transformed drastically since the Grimm brothers first wrote them nearly two hundred years ago. Not all princesses are fair of heart, and not all magic is for the better.

What accounts for such radical differences? Is it simply that modern audiences cannot stomach Grimm, or is it something much deeper than that? Through the close analysis of five heroine-centered Grimm tales and their Disney adaptations, it appears that both the type and variation of differences depend entirely upon the theme or motif being altered. Whether as subtle as a missing fairy godmother or as blatant as a newly-scripted ending, these variations speak

greatly about the expectations of the audience and how these demands dictate creative production. They also reflect a time-sensitive image of society that can offer insight into the evolution of entertainment and the function of storytelling. Take, for example, that famous Disney magic.

### *Magic*

Though the term “magician” in the modern era refers to a person who practices the illusion of magic, Disney throws the term over a host of sorcerers, witches, and fairies as a sort of blanket for controversy. Considering the uproar surrounding the release of the first *Harry Potter* book just a decade ago, modern audiences appear to be finicky regarding witchcraft and wizardry, particularly when it involves children. Perhaps for this reason, Disney masks over controversy using a generic term such as “magic” that the company itself has helped to connote over time. Magic, in Disney-terms, is not a wicked force of Hell to be used as a weapon or the supernatural manipulation of the world through questionable means. Magic is a much softer thing. It is pixie dust, magical glowing hair, floral arrows, true love’s kiss, and bibbidie-bobbodie-boo. And perhaps, above all things, magic is a *deus ex machina*.

Consider Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*. Although magic may have fallen into the grayish-green hands of the wicked Maleficent, it still prevails as good (Geronimi). The very same magic that cursed the young Princess Aurora can be used to counter evil, as illustrated when Meriwether altered the curse to sleep and not death. Before Maleficent’s entrance in the film, two other fairies exemplified the benevolent nature of magic through their generous offering of magical gifts to the princess, superficial as they may be. Fairytales often play upon the motif of trios, because the repetition is more likely to resonate with the short attention spans of young audiences. By establishing three “good” fairies and just one “bad” witch, though the term is

never explicitly used, Disney wastes no time in constructing a positive-centered paradigm of magic that will be pivotal to the story's resolution.

This same pro-magic message appears again five decades later in 2010 with Disney's release of a Rapunzel-adaptation titled *Tangled* (Greno and Byron). In the film, only one string of magic exists, and as one might suspect, this force works for the betterment of kingdom citizens. The story states that during a complicated pregnancy, the queen drinks a soup containing a magical flower with the ability to heal and provide youth to those who consume or call upon its power. In turn, the queen's infant daughter possesses the magical abilities of the flower in her unbelievably long locks, which light up with power when the healing incantation is sung. The princess is then kidnapped and raised by the evil Mother Gothel, who relies on this magic to remain eternally youthful. To prevent Rapunzel's escape, Gothel locks her high away in the tallest peak of a hidden tower, where she remains until her eighteenth birthday.

Interestingly enough, unlike the magic used in *Sleeping Beauty*, there is no supernatural force of evil to counter the mysterious, and never thoroughly explained, enchanted flower. Though the antagonist manipulates this power for selfish gain, her demise does not depend upon a counterattack; rather, her death (or disintegration) stems solely from losing the magic that has sustained her for hundreds of years. If anything, this builds an even stronger correlation between magic and benevolence for young audiences, as a one-sided portrait of the supernatural is displayed. It appears that supernatural relationships between good and evil occur either at a one-for-one ratio, like in *The Princess and the Frog* and *The Sword and the Stone*, or in a strictly pro-magic context, such as with *Pocahontas* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

In original Grimm tales, however, magic wasn't always portrayed in such a tolerant way, nor were the lines between good and evil sorcery as distinctly illustrated as they are today. In the

first *Cinderella*, a pair of enchanted pigeons plays both sides of the spectrum; though the duo provides Cinderella with the gown and slippers required to attend the ball, they also are responsible for gouging out the stepsisters' eyes at the end of the tale, after Cinderella has snagged the prince and headed west for the sunset (Grimm 75-83). Even in Grimm's *Rapunzel*, the supernatural playing field is evened; Mother Gothel is not the vain yet powerless deviant portrayed in *Tangled* but a full-blown, haggardly witch (Grimm, 1993, 90-94). Although it is clear that both good and bad magic exist in Grimm and Disney film adaptations, perhaps the most startling observation is simply that Grimm's depiction of evil magic paints a far more grotesque and radical picture than does the softened, neutralized black magic of the Disney world.

Why has Disney melted down the stone-cold image of sorcery and gore Grimm so loved to use? Why the transition towards an equal, if not purely benign, depiction of magic? To expand upon an illustration mentioned above, the entertainment industry witnessed extreme backlash after the wildly popular first Harry Potter novel hit shelves in 1997, when many public schools wanted to expose children to the book. Religious parents put up great resistance, fearful the book's frequent mention of "witchcraft" would confuse impressionable children. "Conservative Christians, who charge that the series is a satanic tract designed to lure young readers to the occult by glorifying witchcraft, have campaigned to pull the books from schools in several states," wrote Julia Sheeres of the popular lifestyle website, *Wired* (Sheeres). Sheeres go on to say that much of the controversy surrounding the series hinges on the plot's good-versus-evil theme, which may suggest that dark witchcraft has virtuous qualities.

One influential "mommy blogger," however, argues that exposure to magic at a young age may open children's imaginations, enabling them to expand problem-solving skills (Dewar).

Dewar discusses an experiment in which children were exposed to either a naturalistic or magical clip from film, and then asked to brainstorm solutions to a given problem. The children who watched the magical clip created more potential solutions than those who viewed the naturalistic clip, wrote Dewar. Although more tolerant parents like Dewar certainly exist, conservative parents like those mentioned by Sheeres make up an equally significant portion of the market. In this way, perhaps Disney's decision to utilize a softer styled magic, while drawing bolder lines between good and evil sorcery, is simply a wise and cautionary marketing move. When it comes to potentially offending a finicky audience, is it not better to be safe than sorry for the sake of reputation and overall sales? Disney, through their euphemized retelling of subdued Grimm fables, certainly seems to suggest so.

### ***Elaboration***

Although several variations of Grimm fairytales are circulating today, Disney-lovers may be shocked to discover that the stories, in their most basic form, are little more than a dry skeleton of invention. Unlike the deliciously fatty, hour-long productions Disney so proudly produces on a yearly basis, Grimm leaves his fable so bare that modern audiences would surely starve from boredom, deprived from the rich and seasoned flavors of entertainment they've grown to hold so dear. For example, Grimm's *Rapunzel* spans just four measly pages while covering roughly a twenty-year period (Grimm, 1993, 90-94). Disney's *Tangled*, however, consumes a whopping one hundred minutes while addressing just a three to four day window (Greno and Byron). Likewise, Grimm's *Cinderella* spans just eight written pages (Grimm 75-83), while the Disney adaptation runs seventy-four minutes, which by today's standards could even be considered brief (Geromini, Jackson and Luske). Although both texts cover the same basic time frame, the Disney adaptation utilizes a far deeper elaboration than the original. Why the fabrication?

According to a scholarly journal published for *Pediatrics*, cross-research suggests that children exposed to television at an early age will develop shorter attention spans and more attention difficulties later in life (Christakis, Zimmerman and DiGuiseppe). When Grimm's stories were first being published and circulated, nearly two centuries ago, nothing even remotely resembling a television existed. Since then, high exposure to technological devices and electronic inputs have impacted the way children, and subsequently adults, process information and media. If young children grow accustomed to the specific formatting of the television, including the excessive elaboration that characterizes the medium, entertainment producers have no choice but to meet the audience's expectations by producing subsequently more elaborate, lengthier films that will retain the viewer's dwindling attention span.

However, there may be additional factors driving Disney to draw out Grimm's minimalistic story outlines. According to Family Education, a website owned by Pearson Education, Inc., only twenty to thirty percent of school-aged children learn best through auditory or written means, while forty percent retain information best through visual inputs (Farwell). Unfortunately, no statistics on this distribution exist from Grimm's era for comparison, but critical conclusions can still be drawn about the need for engaging visual stimuli. The statistics above suggest that Disney's key demographic, children, best receive information visually. Not only must Disney generate enough elaboration to fill the gaps in attention span lengths between the 1800's and today, but now illustrators and producers must design content to be captivating in a way that will appeal to the highest percentage of children. At the end of it all, Disney is a business like any other, with sales quotas and profit expectations to meet. Much like magic, decisions regarding film length and the extent of plot detail included are driven by marketing.

### ***Virtue***

What do a tender heart, a good spirit, and a gentle tongue have in common? They all comprise the virtue of a Disney princess. According to films like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Tangled*, a heroine should be noble in spirit, with an honest heart, and plugged into an endless supply of grace and poise at all times. The virtue required for a Disney princess is certainly one tall order, but the world's eleven beloved royal misses have proven themselves time and time again. To the dismay of strong-willed, clumsy, realistic women everywhere, these characteristics may at times border on naivety. However, these heroines weren't always the loving and graceful swans they are today.

Despite her witty tongue, no-fuss attitude, and unbeatable work ethic, Tiana from Disney's *Princess and the Frog* has all the right ingredients for the making of royalty (Clements and Musker). She's the perfect daughter, loyal best friend, star employee, and strong-willed entrepreneur. Sure, she didn't take an instant liking to Prince Naveen at the film's start, but like any princess, her mild temper and good spirit stifled the toxic drippings of disdain. However, that's not quite the way Grimm's Tiana handled her dislike of a particularly pesky frog. No, this nameless princess was known to lie and cheat her way through any situation, with the help of a royal tantrum or two.

According to Grimm, the king's daughter stumbles upon the frog prince when her prized marble fell into a nearby well (Grimm 1-5). The frog promises to retrieve her lost good if the young princess agrees to let him dine at her table, eat from her plate, and sleep in her bed. In the heat of the moment, the princess hastily agrees and quickly flees, leaving the frog and her promise behind. The frog then appears at the king's door, demanding the princess honor her word. The heroine proceeds to seat the frog beside her and feed him off of her plate, growing more enraged and upset every step of the way. By the time the young girl brings the frog to her

bedroom to sleep, she has reached her end. “Then she felt beside herself with rage, and picking him up, she threw him with all her strength against the wall, crying, ‘Now will you be quiet, you horrid frog!’” (Grimm 3).

In the three brief paragraphs following this outburst, the horrid frog transforms into a handsome prince, the two are wed, and the kingdom rejoices. In contrast with the faithful and kind-hearted Tiana, the star of Grimm’s tale exhibits little virtue; she uses idle promises to get her way and loses her temper when the frog dirties her “pretty clean bed” (Grimm 3). Unlike the heroines of modern fairytales, the young princess does not assume the “innocent bystander” role, but rather plays an active part in bringing about the tale’s main conflict. By removing this element in the Disney film adaptation, a sense of realism is lost that diminishes the prominence and believability of the story’s moral: good things happen to those who stand by their word. So, why take away such a crucial element?

Disney’s first princess arrived on the scene in 1937. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* was Disney’s first full-length production and also a Grimm original (Cottrell and Hand). Even in the Grimm telling, Snow White’s virtue is crucial to her role as protagonist; she plays upon ethos to gain support from the audience using her admirable response to adversity. This played nicely into the 1930s expectations of women, which promoted morality and good temperament. The next Disney princess, Cinderella, would not come until 1950 (Geromini, Jackson and Luske). Again, the helpless and abused Cinderella gains sympathy and support from the audience with her sweet-tempered reply to her domestic Hell, both in the Disney and Grimm renditions. Both Snow White and Cinderella were popularly received at their initial release, indicating a widespread support and love for a heroine “worth” fighting for.

By the time Disney decided to tackle the least pious of Grimm's cast, such as the heroine of *The Frog Prince*, a precedent of virtue had already been long established. Like an accessory, grace, poise, and kindness became a Disney princess signature. It was not until the 1990s, when women began entering the work force in mass numbers and encouraging social gender equality, that the Walt Disney Studios implemented modern ideologies into the princess franchise. This began with *Beauty and the Beast*, which is often casually referred to as the "Disney feminist movie" (Trousdale and Wise).

In a theological analysis of *Beauty and the Beast*, written by Seok-Cheol Shin, the feminist elements of this film, particularly as they pertain to virtue, are discussed in a way that juxtaposes traditional films honoring beauty and virtue over ability, such as *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* (Shin). Shin writes that "Beauty's inner virtues in this story do not reflect conventional satisfaction for men. Rather, they play dynamic roles to unfold the matters of the story and solve the tensions in the story" (Shin 2). Shin goes on to argue that through her unconventional demonstration of virtue, through which she captures the beast's heart, Belle demonstrates the ability of women to "overcome biased conventionality" and to "fulfill the requisites of modern feminism that encourage the spirit of autonomy and freedom of women" (Shin 3).

Disney has demonstrated a willingness to adapt the portrayal of virtue as societal values shift, as demonstrated with *Beauty and the Beast*. Then why doesn't Tiana throw Naveen violently against the wall as the nameless heroine in Grimm's *The Frog Prince* does? After all, *The Princess and the Frog* was released 18 years after *Beauty and the Beast*. The answer is, quite simply, because it would not be the "princess" thing to do. A newly emerging societal construct of the word "princess," partly developed by the history of Disney royalty mentioned above,

hinges upon morality. Recent films like *The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled* suggest that characteristics such as kind-heartedness and grace still play an integral role of the company's royalty franchise. Despite a more modernized appearance, virtue still seals the heroine's soul. As long as sales continue to support the correlation between princesses and piety, fans will be hard-pressed to find splattered frog guts coating the castle walls.

### ***Beauty***

What do obesity, irregularly-shaped noses, brightly colored make-up, and oversized feet have in common? They're the physical characteristics of a classic Disney villain. All eleven ladies who have been officially inducted into the Disney princess franchise are prized, to some extent, for their physical beauty: slim figures, flowing glossy locks, rose-red lips, and flawless complexions. *Brave* is the only Disney princess film without a human antagonist, and of the ten remaining movies, only three boast a beautiful villain: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* is the only antagonist of the three whose attractive appearance does not contribute to the tragic flaw of vanity, which essentially leads to the untimely but celebrated demise of Gaston (*Beauty and the Beast*) and the evil queen (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*). For Disney, ugly equals evil.

Oddly enough, Grimm did not seem to care for this correlation the way that Disney does today. In Disney's adaptation of *Cinderella*, the evil stepsisters had faces to match their hideous personalities, which seems to contribute to the exaggerated comedy of the situation (Geromini, Jackson and Luske). In this way, the inside affects the outside. Grimm, by contrast, paints a far different portrait of the stepmother's two daughters: "The new wife brought two daughters home with her, and they were beautiful and fair in appearance, but at heart were black and ugly" (Grimm 76). For Grimm, it seems that the outside does not serve as a reflection but rather as a disguise.

The only film discussed above for which the trend reverses is *Sleeping Beauty*. Maleficent, though of a curious gray hue, is every bit as beautiful as the young, fair Aurora (Geronimi). Her slim waist, flawless complexion, and berry-stained lips somehow make her even more compelling as a villain, as though her beauty is just another deceptive layer to assist in her evil plans. Her beauty is almost trust-worthy. However, in the original Grimm tale, no mention of the thirteenth guest's appearance is made explicitly in the text. She is referred to only as the old woman, which contrasts the youth of Disney's Maleficent. In the book's illustration on page 670, however, the old woman is portrayed as hideous, hairy and ghastly (Grimm 670.). However as stated at the book's beginning, the artwork for these tales was created by Arthur Rackham in 1900 and do not necessarily represent Grimm's conception of character.

In contrast with the mixed images of the antagonist, Disney and Grimm share one similarity in their prescription of beauty: female protagonists get an extra dose. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Grimm writes that "the Queen bore a daughter so beautiful that the King could not contain himself for joy, and he ordained a great feast" (Grimm 668). Of Snow White, Grimm writes, "Now, Snow-White was growing prettier and prettier, and when she was seven years old she was as beautiful as day, far more so than the Queen herself" (Grimm 346). Of the young princess in *The Frog Prince*, Grimm says, "...but the youngest was so beautiful that the sun himself, who has seen everything, was bemused every time he shone over her because of her beauty" (Grimm 1).

It is clear that princesses have long been portrayed as radiant beacons of blinding sex appeal, but the idea of an unattractive antagonist seems to be a trend on the rise in Disney pictures. Even when Grimm fails to dictate the physical appearance of an antagonist, like with Mother Gothel in *Rapunzel* and the stepmother in *Cinderella*, Disney takes initiative in

illustrating evil with a handful of unpleasant features. So, what are fairytale fans to make of the bizarre equation between an ugly form and heart? It is possible these artistic decisions are made to help children understand the distinction of good and evil by playing into exaggerated binary oppositions, which children are likely familiar with. Of course, over time, this could simply accumulate a fear of the old, fat, and ugly. More likely, these portrayals listen to the firm hand of marketing.

One of the benefits of children's movies is providing young viewers with a role model worth emulating, meaning the protagonist must be desirable. Although the princesses are never blatantly concerned with their appearances in the films, for that would be vanity, that hasn't stopped Disney from launching a major line of princess beauty products: glittery hairbrushes, pink plastic vanities, happy-ending colored lipstick, and handfuls of plastic diamonds made in a third-world country. If children realize they can be beautiful without being a princess, like Maleficent or the Evil Queen, will they still fawn over the doll-me-up, pretty-in-pink Disney princess merchandise?

Children can learn a wealth of knowledge from the Disney princesses. They can learn to be brave like Merida, patient like Cinderella, educated like Belle, and compassionate like Snow White. However, when children begin trading bravery for hair-bows and patience for pink, the mimicry becomes a shallow sales pitch to women in the making. One mother calls this practice into question in her wildly bestselling book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, which critiques the hyper-feminism of the Disney princess franchise and the popularity of child beauty pageants. Orenstein acknowledges the limitations of consumerism: "Just because little girls wear the tulle does not mean they've drunk the Kool-Aid. Plenty of them shoot baskets in ball gowns or cast themselves as the powerful evil stepsister bossing around the sniveling Cinderella" (Paul). Still,

she asks parents to consider the implications of Disney's (and even Grimm's) portrayal of female beauty. "Yet even if girls stray from the prescribed script, doesn't it exert its influence? Don't our possessions reflect who we are; shape, even define, our experiences?" According to Anne Murphy Paul, who wrote a review of Orenstein's book, these sharp-eyed observations are what made this almost self-help guide a smashing hit with parents of young daughters.

But does beauty boil down to just marketing? According to Orenstein's book and Murphy's review, which point to developmental psychology research, children rely on items like clothing and toys to dictate sex until at least age seven. If princesses are beautiful, and young girls want to become princesses, then they naturally will pine for beauty assistants like toy cosmetics and elaborate costumes. So ultimately, Disney's exaggerated juxtaposition of feminine, stately beauty and a wicked homeliness is nothing shy of a highly successful marketing stunt, and Orenstein can prove it. At a toy fair in New York, Orenstein asks one of the representatives if all of that pink was really necessary. "Only if you want to make money," he said (Paul).

### ***Violence***

Nothing says "I love you" quite like slaying a fiery, purple dragon for a beloved, or so Aurora might say. Yet the heroes and white knights of Grimm's fables would gladly endure far worse obstacles for a chance at marrying the princess, even if she previously tried to destroy him as in *The Frog Prince*. Disney has certainly toned down much of the gory violence that makes a Grimm tale grim, and perhaps this revision is for the better. Surely children would be paranoid for days at the mention of Grimm's borderline sadistic punishments and agonies that plague both protagonists and antagonists alike. No, the violent nature of a Grimm tale can at times be hard for even a seasoned, desensitized adult to stomach. Yet somehow, the missing limbs and gouged organs balance the sugary-sweet royal romance in a way that pleases the pallet.

Although Mother Gothel's attempted murder of Flynn Rider in *Tangled* is one of the most daring Disney assault scenes in ages, gore is nonexistent (Greno and Byron). There's nothing but a sliver of crimson on Flynn's shirt to tip off the audience to his nearly-fatal injury. Fortunately, thanks to Rapunzel's magic tears, Flynn only suffers for a few brief minutes before being completely healed. Grimm's handsome prince was not so lucky. When he realizes that Rapunzel has been hidden away in the desert, the prince, so stricken with grief, jumps from the tower window into a patch of thorns, on which he fell and "put out his eyes" (Grimm 94).

In Grimm's *Cinderella*, when the stepsister cannot wiggle her toes into the prince's gold slipper, she resorts to drastic measures: "So the girl cut her toe off, squeezed her foot into the shoe, concealed the pain, and went down to the prince" (Grimm 81). When the prince spies the blood gushing from below, he resumes the search with the other sister. When she cannot wedge her heel into the slipper's narrow back, she follows suit: "So the girl cut off a piece of her heel, and thrust her foot into the shoe, concealed the pain, and went down the Prince, who took his bride before him on his horse and rode off" (Grimm 81-82). As punishment for their wickedness and falsehood, the two sisters had their eyes picked out by a pair of pesky pigeons as they returned from the wedding of Cinderella and Prince Charming. Romantic, indeed.

Just before Prince Charming awakens his comatose beloved at the end of Disney's *Snow White*, the queen must face her fate. After being chased into the forest by seven enraged dwarves, the queen attempts to roll a large boulder from the top of a mountain onto the dwarves below (Cottrell and Hand). However, a bolt of lightning strikes the precipice and sends the wide-eyed queen into a dizzying spiral of distress as she meets her demise. Grimm's queen, however, had a far greater, and far more violent, price to pay. Still enraged by Snow White's fair beauty, the

queen sets out to see the bride on her wedding day. To her surprise and horror, she is met by “ready red-hot iron shoes, in which she had to dance until she fell down dead” (Grimm 354).

The radical difference in the demise of the antagonist, and the violence that accompanies it, speaks greatly about the intended audience of both Grimm and Disney. Television did not yet exist when Grimm composed these stories, so children would either read or hear the stories. Depending on the storyteller, the stories may have produced a less dramatic effect than they do today, where everything appears on screen in a larger-than-life manner. According to Visual Teaching Alliance, an organization providing visual learning tools, sixty-five percent of the population learns best through visual stimulation (Visual Learning Alliance). Therefore, television will likely have a greater influence on the majority of viewers than other forms, like oral storytelling and reading. As a result, production companies like Disney must consider the implications of modern technology on storytelling, which could lead to necessary revisions of plot detail. More importantly, film producers must consider the concerns of parents, who grew vocal in the mid-1990s.

As audiences grew more tolerant of violence and sexuality in television and film, parents began to fear how exposure to such adult elements would impact their children. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was drafted to help parents monitor and control what their children are exposed to (Federal Communications Commission). Thanks to this act, televisions produced in 1996 or later must contain a V-chip, allowing parents to block channels they deem inappropriate. The process of generating legislation typically takes several years, so it is likely that parents were concerned about content regulation long before 1996. Disney’s sudden alteration of classic plot endings in the early 1990s supports this idea.

*The Little Mermaid*, released in 1989, was the last Disney film in which one of the protagonists intentionally causes the demise of the antagonist. For example, in the end of the film, the brave and heroic Prince Eric drives the pointed end of his ship into the enormous Ursula, who shrivels and vanishes into thin air. Yet in *Beauty and the Beast*, Gaston slips off of a steep castle turret just after stabbing the beast (Trousdale and Wise). *Beauty and the Beast* set an anti-violence precedent for the protagonist that is still in effect today. In *The Lion King*, from 1994, Scar dramatically slips from atop Pride Rock into a crowd of enraged hyenas (Allers and Minkoff). In *Tangled*, from 2011, Mother Gothel trips over her cloak and stumbles backwards out the tower window (Greno and Byron). Mother Gothel disintegrates before she ever hits the ground, however.

Although other explanations do exist for the drastic retellings and censorship of violence between Grimm and Disney, again marketing seems to blame. Whether writing a novel, comic book, or film script, knowing the audience's limits and expectations is crucial to producing a bestseller or blockbuster. Like any corporation or business, Disney's primary goal is to generate revenue. By limiting the degree of violence in films, particularly assigned to protagonists, the company can widen the potential market by including younger, more impressionable children without rubbing parents the wrong way. Although in many ways the loss of Grimm's signature morbidity comes as a disappointment to the character of the stories, perhaps these revisions are necessary in the vivid world of twenty-first century technology. Perhaps Grimm, at some point, could no longer be so grim.

### ***Happy Endings***

“Some day when spring is near, we'll find our love anew, and the birds will sing, and wedding bells will ring, one day when my dreams come true.” Such a sweet serenade could be

sung only by a Disney princess in love, Snow White to be exact. The promise of eternal love, along with a homemade white gown, sets the very foundation for the most memorable and bittersweet element of all classic princess films: happy endings. For the most part, Grimm and Disney follow a similar plot structure: princess overcomes obstacle, falls in love doing so, and weds the prince. Typically these events may occur in just the period of a few days, but that may arise from the extremely short length of Grimm's original tales. So although the flow of events may be the same between these two storytellers, the degree of difficulty in achieving that long-awaited happy ending certainly isn't.

Disney's Rapunzel had an overbearing "mother" who abused her magical hair. Is she cast into the desert where she somehow emerges with twin children from an unknown, unavailable father? No. There's no question that Grimm's Rapunzel faced a far grittier, real fate than her naïve, doe-eyed Disney counterpart. "And she [Mother Gothel] was so hard-hearted that she took Rapunzel and put her in a waste and desert place, where she lived in great woe and misery" (Grimm 94). Grimm's Rapunzel would have had a far more difficult time defying these wishes as well, because Grimm's Mother Gothel was actually a magical witch, as opposed to a controlling and vain elderly woman.

Even Grimm's Cinderella had a harder time snagging the handsome prince than Disney would let on. Unlike the 1950 Cinderella, Grimm's leading lady had to risk her life sneaking away from the house not once, but three times (Grimm 78-80). There is no telling what horrid abuse would await the neglected child should her escape be discovered, and there's no doubt Grimm would have delighted to write such sadism. Regardless, Cinderella worked thrice as hard to solidify her future as queen. Whether it was due to a lack of time, funds, or romantic spontaneity, Grimm's "love at third sight" mentality did not make the film's final cut.

Perhaps Disney decided that children out of wedlock, overpowering witches, isolation, and multiple escape attempts were not as romantic as the swift-swooning love at first sight. However, in softening these tales and toning down the hardships, some sense of heroism is lost as persistence is decreased. Although falling in love was effortless for Grimm's cast, reaching a happy ending seldom was. For Disney, however, both appear as natural as simply breathing in and out. The oversimplification of the process can reap serious consequences for children and adults who fail to recognize the fictional ease of the situation, which has actually spurred a psychological phenomenon known as the Cinderella Syndrome.

First described by Colette Dowling in 1981, the syndrome refers to women who have developed an unconscious fear of independence, which is in some way linked to the commercialization and popularity of dependency by figures like Disney princesses (The New York Times). A reverse phenomenon for men has also emerged in recent years and is known as the White Knight Syndrome. The condition is so widespread that *Psychology Today* offers a slew of articles to help men trapped in this condition overcome their compulsive need to date women who need rescuing in some way or another (Lamia and Krieger). Typically, after rescuing the woman, a man with White Knight Syndrome will abandon the relationship in pursuit of another needy damsel. It would be a stretch to blame solely Disney for the development of these conditions, as the majority of people have at some point watched a Disney film without affliction. However, it's possible the studio may have contributed to the rise of such social issues.

Lately, however, Disney has been working to counteract the stereotypes with heroines and heroes who do not play into the typical archetype. For example, neither Flynn Rider from *Tangled* nor Prince Adam from *Beauty and the Beast* save the heroine. Rather, in both instances,

a reversal of the norm can be seen whereas the female character actually saves the dying hero with the help of magic. *Mulan* offers an even more radical depiction of trend reversal, as Mulan physically saves the life of Captain Shang in battle, without the aid of magic (Bancroft and Cook). However, perhaps the most extreme counteraction of all is Disney's recent film, *Brave*. In the film, the young Merida enters into an archery competition in hopes that she will beat her male suitors and escape an unwanted wedding, as she feels that she is too young and free-spirited to be saddled in union like her mother (Andrews, Chapman and Purcell). Since 1991, with *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney appears to be paving a new princess-cut path that veers from themes of salvation and dependency.

To the great pleasure of Disney fans everywhere, these recent advances are not at the sake of the protagonist's happy ending. Stories and films often serve as a source of hope and inspiration, which is precisely why the happy ending is absolutely fundamental to the fairytale. No matter the trials or tribulations, the villains or schemes, happiness does exist for those willing to fight adversity. Regardless of the degree of difficulty in overcoming trouble and the detailed manifestation a happy ending may take, Disney has upheld the esteem and inspiration found in the "ever after". As it turns out, happy endings are about more than marketing, wedding bells and conflict resolution; they're ultimately about hope.

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With the exception of traditional fairytale archetypes, like the happy ending, Disney has whittled the words of Grimm to fit the needs and demands of a contemporary, consumerist society. These changes, driven largely by marketing, affect the depiction of themes like magic, elaboration, virtue, beauty, and violence, both for better and worse. Although these alterations do detract from the raw but relatable essence of Grimm's invention, they promote a far less

disturbing image that may help prevent desensitization in young children. Perhaps the best way to enjoy tales like *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, and *Sleeping Beauty* is to simply enjoy both interpretations, Disney and Grimm, as complementary pieces. Perhaps it is only by appreciating the two dated halves of a timeless whole that one can truly appreciate the Grimm face of Disney.

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