

Ever After, A Cinderella Story Through The Feminist's Lens And Pen

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ABSTRACT:

The study analyzes the feminist portrayal of the female protagonist in the movie Ever after: A Cinderella Story using the Liberal Feminist theory and Reader-Response theory. It specifically focuses on the events and characterization that portray feminism. . The study reveals that the plot structure of Ever After has events in which the female protagonist is faced with challenges and she addresses them with confidence and wit, making her a woman of her own mind despite how the world sees her as a weak character. Moreover, the portrayal of the female protagonist reflects a brave, strong-willed, intelligent, God-fearing, resourceful, and courageous woman. These feminist portrayals in the film show woman empowerment, which encourages the audience to become like the character and inspired the researcher to create a writeback

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist portrayal, and Reader response

INTRODUCTION

The children's world of imagination and fantasy is created in their warm beds at home as their parents tell them stories about princesses and dwarfs and witches and flying horses and dragons. This may be a compelling reason why fairytales are believed to be exclusively for children. Little children may be awed by these make-believe narratives of magic and they dream about them in their sleep. However in reality, these characters who are mostly women are representatives of a societal culture that little children cannot comprehend at their young, tender age.

One domain of societal culture that children are unable to grasp is the how and why a woman character is portrayed in the tales. This is evident in the role of women in the stories. In most fairy tales women are portrayed as oppressed, subjugated, submissive and powerless. In many instances they have to be saved by dominant male characters and have to submit to their will. According to Leiberman, early feminists argues that fairytales degrade women and discourage them from achieving their full potential by reducing them to the state of helplessness and submissiveness. Similarly, Erum (3) said that fairytales provide reference to the past's belief system especially when women were perceived only as wives, mothers, and household keepers. Furthermore, according to Baker Sperry and L. Grauerholz, patriarchal control provides women who comply safe passage into society and punishment to those who disobey.

With the use of deconstruction in the adaptation of fairy tales into films, there is a break in this representation and showcases how far women have come. This is evident in movies like Maleficent, where the evil witch is portrayed as a mother figure. This is also true how Mulan is depicted as a brave and strong-willed daughter to the family and his tribe.

The Grimm Brothers collected fairy tales as part of an academic bank of oral literature that is one of the most printed books of all time. The brothers wrote the fairy tales at a time when women needed men (qtd. in Hammel 3) and when the Napoleonic wars destroyed Germany's peace and tranquility; and the need for unification became apparent. What makes the stories popular are not the artistry of how they were written nor the lurid subjects, but the context of society the stories portray (qtd. in Holder 11). German upperclassmen think the fairy tales fitted German nationalism and romanticism.

Cinderella, the Brother Grimms' tale of domestic cruelty, ranks as the most popular fairy tale, has been remade into film forty-four times. Of all the remakes, Ever After directed by Andy Tennant starring Drew Barrymore as Danielle and Dougray Scott as Prince Henry, is the most iconic feminist retelling of Cinderella. It is bound to be reinvented from a helpless, wimpy girl's need of a glass slipper to a girl's rags to riches story by her own strengths and wits, says Stephen Holden, a film critic. That's why according to Jeff Vice, Ever After is cut above other adaptations of classic literature.

This study traces the episodes of feminist portrayals in the film *Ever After* to show how the ideology of a woman has changed over time and also to encourage women to stand up against oppression. Today women empowerment is a byword, however it did not happen soon enough for male dominance to not be apparent in history. Today, women experience equal rights as men in suffrage, education, employment and many others. Women actively participate in fields used to be reserved for the men such as in medicine, law, military, and religious leadership, even (qtd. in Zaldivar 1). How women were penned before is not anymore the present scenario and filmmakers adapting classic literature into a movement and a consciousness is an example.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study assumes that the film *Ever after: Cinderella Story* has episodic events that portray feminism; hence two theories namely Liberal Feminism and Affective theories are the theoretical anchors of the study.

Liberal Feminism claims that men and women are no different and should not be treated differently (qtd. in Lorber 9). This supports women's individual liberty which would encourage women to rise up from the existing platform of male masculinity and into the fields previously regarded as men's such as in academics and science. Liberal feminism believes that gender roles are shaped by patriarchy and its elimination would open many possibilities for women (qtd. in Popa 3). This theory emphasizes the similarities of men and women rather than classifying the sexes of their differences (qtd. in Paalanen 333). This hopes to prove that there is no biological-based limit to classify men and women.

Prior to feminist movements, many writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau argue that because men and women differ in "natural rank," with women being weaker emotionally and physically - men being rational and women being emotional - their education should reflect their differences (335). In *Vindication of the Rights as Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft writes that the conceived differences of men and women are fabricated and exaggerated. Both sexes have the ability to reason thus both sexes should receive equal education to enhance rational thinking. In this light, women need to be more rational and men need to learn to develop their emotions (334).

According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, the definition of a human being is man but the woman- a female (82). The struggle for primacy between men and women has been constant and persistent. Because of this struggle, de Beauvoir believes that woman's inferiority in society is a result not of natural differences but of differences in the upbringing of man and woman. (167)

Oprah Winfrey described liberal feminism as a woman's right to educate and empower herself. Winfrey believes that empowered women fueled by education is an example of the stereotype society is biased only on patriarchalism. Winfrey argued that society's view on women progresses because of the invalid norm circulating women's inability to participate in high-end jobs and competition against men thus concluding that women may not be equal to men but they blossom in another way both sexes can share. (qtd in Sandberg 56)

John Stuart Mill describes sex roles as a caste system in which women were assigned lower status unjustly that denies them self-fulfillment that can only be achieved with the freedom to pursue one's good. He stresses out that the exclusion of women from the public, politics, and decision-making is a barrier to moral improvement. Mill declares that the subordination of women is a relic from the past that opposes the future and must disappear (qtd. in Szapuová 182). He asserts that the origin of women's oppression is the men's physical strength which he believes would not be a disadvantage to women anymore as reasonable thinking which is the same in both sex - exists. Hence, the characterization of women has no other basis other than habit and custom. Also, the ordination of a woman's lifelong status in the society should not be based on the fact that she was born as female (184). On Mill's opinion of both sexes being equal, he states that the mental difference that exists in men and women is the differences of their circumstances that holds no bearing for them to be considered any different (186). To Mill, men are ignorant on the influences that form a human character. When removed of the need to marry and given the proper education, women can perform equal as men (qtd. in Lazenby 162) and men - as reasonable thinkers - must help the women to improve and society will benefit (164) as inequality is harmful not just for men and women but also for the society (qtd. in Szapuová 185).

Affective Literary Theory or the Reader- Response Theory focuses on the reader and their relationship with the text to their response on towards the text

without giving importance to the simplicity of the explanation (qtd. in Giangiulio 14)

Lois Tyson argues that reader-response serves two beliefs: that the role of the reader cannot be omitted in understanding literature; and readers actively make the meanings of the literature instead of passively agreeing to the meaning presented by an objective literary text. Charles E. Bressler provided factors to understand the theory which include the following: that the world knowledge. Background, viewpoint, reason for reading, and knowledge of words of the reader has to be put into consideration; and that the meaning of the text has to come from the interaction between the reader and the text (15). For David Bleich, there is no literary masterpiece outside of the readers' interpretation and the text itself is not the literary masterpiece but the responses of the readers (19). According to him, there are three responses: the reader-oriented, the reality-oriented, and the experience-oriented. A reader-oriented response would be about the experience such as the reader's memories, personal experiences, interests, and the like. The reality-oriented response, however, deals with expressing personal opinions on the moral and social issues presented on the text. Bleich favors the experience-oriented response as it combines the two mentioned responses: the readers' reaction to the text and the readers' opinion of the characters, events, or even words on the text (20). Here, the reader's characterization of the text is described and analyzes what various responses occurred and why these responses occurred.

Stanley Fish argues that there is no individual interpretation of a text but rather of an interpretative community (21). An interpretative community would be a social group that dictates strategies and ideas which the reader brings in interpreting a text. Examples of an interpretative community are schools, churches, religions, and the government. Fisher believes that a reader already has predisposed ideas about a text before reading it, that is why interpretations can change throughout history as social, political, and religious forces change as well.

In the case of Wolfgang Iser, he believes that the text and the reader become one in the reading process, when the reader takes in the text and emits a response. He then suggested that critics should not try to explain a text but rather study its effects on the readers. He also proposed two types of literary works: artistic and aesthetic. Artistic would be the original creation of the author while the

other would be the realization process of the reader.

What Iser believes is the literary work is the point where the text and the realization of the reader meet (24). Memories also hold a great impact to the reader as certain events in the text can recall certain memories, this is another proof of how the text and the reader interacts to bring meaning (25). Iser believes that while it is impossible for the reader to have the same knowledge as the author, being an ideal reader means having considering all possible meanings a text can have (29).

The Grimm Brothers' Cinderella turned into film *Ever After* offers unmistakable feminist thinking that this study hopes to delve into with the use of the aforementioned theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

French author and prominent feminist Simone de Beauvoir who wrote *The Second Sex* believe that throughout the history, women have been treated differently from men. According to her, "Man is defined as a human being. And woman is defined as a female. Whenever she tries to behave as a human being she is accused of trying to emulate the male". (237) this is also affirmed by (Carvales 20) who purported that women oppression is a result of society's mediocrity and is socially constructed to create a state of war. Beauvoir in her book wrote:

"All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception." (182)

Moreover, De Beauvoir portrays the enslavement of a lady, characterizes a technique for her freedom, and prescribes systems for this freedom that still have not been actualized today. She contends that ladies are enslaved, persecuted, and made to be sub-par compared to guys - essentially by righteousness of the way that they are ladies. According to de Beauvoir, men define their own world, and women are merely meant to live in it. She sees women as unable to change the world like men can, unable to live their lives freely as men can, and, tragically, mostly unaware of their own oppression. De Beauvoir, in attempting to define the subjugation experienced by woman, notes that women lag behind other oppressed groups of her epoch, like Jews and blacks.

In addition, she argues that women are behind in terms of civil rights mainly because they have not identified that they are indeed being oppressed,

despite their lack of social and professional status. De Beauvoir writes that "the epithet of female has the sound of an insult." (134) meaning that women experience discrimination and social inequity. Furthermore, she asserts that man is responsible for the construction of a world based upon his values, his norms, and capabilities
(<http://www.123helpme.co>)

Moreover, Taylor's article entitled *Why Men Oppress Women* argues that even if they belong to higher social classes, most women throughout history are enslaved by men. The oppression of women stems largely from men's desire for power and control. The same need which, throughout history, has driven men to try to conquer and subjugate other groups or nations, and to oppress other classes or groups in their own society, drives them to dominate and oppress women. Since men feel the need to gain as much power and control as they can, they steal away power and control from women. According to him, men deny women the right to make decisions so that they can make them for them, leave women unable to direct their own lives so that they can direct their lives for them. There are attempts to explain the oppression of women in biological terms. For example, the sociologist Stephen Goldberg suggests that men are naturally more competitive than women because of their high level of testosterone. This makes them aggressive and power-hungry, so that they inevitably take over the high status positions in a society, leaving women to the more subordinate roles (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/out-the-darkness/201208/why-men-oppress-women>).

The book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was published in 1793 by Mary Wollstonecraft who believed that since men and women are born with the same ability to reason, women should enjoy just as much education, power, and influence in society as men do. In her book she wrote:

"Men and women should be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in." (84)

She argues that the only reason women don't seem as smart as men, she says, is because they aren't given the same education. The one thing she's willing to admit is that men might have an advantage in physical strength. But in a modern civilization, this advantage shouldn't really mean anything. For a gentleman living in Wollstonecraft's time, there are very few (if any) occasions in life where he would be called upon to use all of his strength..

An article which supports this claim is entitled *Equal Rights for Right of Women* written by Powell. He agrees that during the late eighteenth century, single women had little protection under the law, and married women lost their legal identity. Women cannot retain a lawyer, sign a contract, inherit property, vote, or have rights over their children (3). This is because of the norm-which implies men's dominance in the society. He argues that women should also be educated like men do.

In the Philippines, women's oppression is mirrored through the past. According to Verzo in his article *The Continued Oppression of Filipino Women in the Philippines* has taken substantial strides within enhancing the lives concerning women. Yet, fact shows those remain prone yet oppressed. He cites examples like Mary Jane Veloso and Jakatia Pawa who both are once victims of oppression in another country. Although, most of the women are given the rights as it states in the Philippine Constitution, Philippine women are still naive and vulnerable of these rights.

(<https://www.aseantoday.com/2017/02/the-continued-oppression-of-filipino-women/>)

Supporting Verzo's claim is an article written by the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines in 2014, women are essential in the Philippines's struggle and fight against foreign oppression such as Gabriela Silang and Melchora Aquino. But in our generation today, there are numerous reports about women being raped in the aftermath of the Typhoon Yolanda. And because of the slow response of the government, women are forced to sell or traffic themselves to foreign countries for sex work in exchange for money and food. According to him, the past administration is incompetent in protecting the well-being of Philippine Women.

(<http://www.humanrightphilippines.net/2014/03/the-filipina-and-the-continuing-struggle-for-human-rights-in-the-philippines/>).

Nanda in her journal *The Portrayal of Women in the Fairytales* explores fairytale women which originates from a variety of tiny tales having undergone numerous of transfigurations by political and social aspects. She uses fairytale stories as evidences that female characters are not silent and passive, and that they strive to find their own voice through their ambitions as shown in *Rapunzel*, *The Robber Bridegroom* and *Scheherazade*. She concluded that fairytale women are portrayed in a more encouraging viewpoint. They control more independence to make preferences

and more changes in their lives as they chase their highly eloquent dreams (5).

As stated in Green's blog entitled *Fairy Tales and Gender Stereotypes*, children are taught that women in bedtime stories like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are weak and vulnerable. They can only manifest strength when the prince comes along to save the day. She claims that this should not be instilled in the minds of little girls because clearly this is gender inequality. She adds that men and women assume that there are specific jobs for each other when in fact, they are all equal and should be given the chance to choose whatever job they desire. She argues that castles, towers and princess may need a little tweaking to change the ideology of the people about fairytale women being delicate and final (7).

In addition to this, an article written by Al-Barazengi entitled *Women's Voice and Images in Folk Tales and Fairy*, asserts that the part of ladies in folktale and fable has a developed thought. It presents their successful voices and neamess through being ruler, princess, servant, stepmother, and witches (2). It's like fiendish and great is discussed productively through distinctive female pictures to legitimize the representation and esteem of ladies in many cultures. He concludes that in most of feminists' perspective, fairy tales are another chance to build a woman's voice and develop her passion and expression (7)

Furthermore, in ShaniM's blog entitled *How Women Are Portrayed in Fairy tales*, she describes female heroine characters are divided into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs- the perfect heroine- which is beautiful and naïve and the heroine that is evil but is intelligent. She cited. She cites Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty as the perfect heroine and Maleficent as the evil heroine (4). And that these divisions are the product of a socially patriarchal community. She argues that gender inequality is still present into this day but slowly, 21st century fairytale stories are changing them. She deduced that fairy tales are beginning to acknowledge the transformation in societal values, being developed and broaden to reflect the current society and their present day values. The capacity of women are already transfigured in today's lifestyle (7).

Women rights are a constant struggle and fight for everybody. The need to take down inequalities and discrimination is timely and relevant, up until today. The articles presented above are proofs that women oppression in work and social status are

still present. This also includes their civil rights which were also violated. These articles are of great help in the study. Although it tackles female oppression, it strengthens the claim of the study about self-worth, dignity, honor and female strength. The need to show female oppression is also the need to fight the shame of it and empower 21st century women in believing themselves and discovering their full potential.

The following studies are relevant to the present work. Dy's study entitled *P. Gregory's The Other Boleyn Girl: Manifestations and Insights on Women Empowerment* is useful and related to the present study because her research is interested in finding manifestations and insights on women empowerment. (17). She asserts that women are able to find means and strategies to empower themselves under and oppressive system. In her study. She also cites Simone de Beauvoir's view on feminism. Her data reveals that women empowerment is present through women identities- like being a queen, a mother-to as on and as a wife (54). She writes that women empowerment is also present by being manipulative, seductive and beautiful Dy also states that empowerment does not only limit on equality but taking a stand on what is right and achieving power by not being dependent on anyone.

Another study which supports the research is Cavales' study entitled *Feminism in F. Sionil Jose's Two Filipino Women*. She found out that F. Sionil Jose's *Two Filipino Women*, *Obsession* and *Cadena de Amor* reveal the Filipina as the epitome of feminism promoting equality to men (13) Her findings include feminist characterization (87), which reveals that the women characters in *Obsession* and *Cadena de Amor* represent a woman's ability to set aside her emotion for ambition and proud that in a world of politics, a woman is strong and courageous enough to equal men (88).

In the study, *Symbolic Transaction of Feminist Ambiguous Dualities* in S. Meyer's *Breaking Dawn* written by Dacanay, her second sup-problem rules the feminist ambiguous dualities and third sub-problem which is a feminist talk-back (21). Her study relates to the present research because they both dealt with feminist characterization and a write-back from the researchers which focuses concepts of feminism and equality. Based on her findings, she finds that there are feminist ambiguous dualities in the novel's characters. She also created a feminist-talk-back as a response which reveals concepts of equality (67)

The Gilead Woman Oppression in M. Atwood's, *The Handmaid's Tale* Vis-à-vis Philippine Social Conventions written by Cotejo (164) reveals that there is women's oppression in feminine-role characterization in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Women are being oppressed through their roles and functions in the society and even oppressors themselves. She also adds that the image of a woman is dictated by their social expectations including being property of men, sexuality deprived and suppression.

Furthermore, Ting in her study entitled *Gender Roles in German Fairytales*, claims that in every fairytale, there are specific molds for fairytale women dividing them to the men. She argues that most fairy tales have a female protagonist and a female antagonist (25). This clearly created a barrier between women supporting women and is dominated by men oppressing women. She deduced that because of the obedience and naivety of fairytale women before, this becomes a struggle for them to liberate themselves and that their innocence might taint other fairytale women in becoming and realizing their full potential (49). She cites fairytale examples like *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* which shows women vs women roles.

Alcantara's *Feminist Reading of Estrella Alfon's Selected Short Stories* analyzes *Magnificence*, *Mill of the Gods*, and *Espeleta* in their plot that presents feminism; the emphasis on women's decision making and actions; and how they affect the story. In her research she states how the different female characters prove their strength and self-reliance in the male-dominated world. Alfon's female characters go beyond female stereotypes as weak and helpless by confronting situations courageously and firm (45). Alcantara also notes that it is Alfon's focus to show women's responsibility to assert dignity and protect themselves from discriminations, humiliations, exploitations, oppressions and violence. This kind of woman-writing-about-women can influence the direction of change, Alcantara noticed. Alcantara's research inspired the curiosity to delve into the feminism of fairy tale retellings and is also the basis of where this study's direction heads.

Holder in her *Fairy Tales Revisited* argues that fairy tales should combine the world of fantasy and the world children face growing up with the careful presentation of the characters. Fairy tales (23) emphasizes on fantasy, beauty, and love but modern retellings must incorporate improvement on social and gender diversity and provide new versions of happiness beyond a marriage. Her

research includes why the brothers recorded fairy tales and how they edited these tales. She found out that the moralizing and editing of the recorded tales shows what society thought fit to ingrain to children that includes paternal authority, beauty, and obedience. The tales of the Grimms' demonizes women and furnishes women's innate evil as they are presented as wicked step mothers and witches driven by hunger of power and the need to get rid of children. According to Holder, fairy tales are a tool for fostering to children positive outlooks other than tales of empty headed princesses and useless princes (41). *Fairy Tales Revisited* is useful to this study as it offers in-depth research and analysis on selected Grimms Fairy Tales including *Cinderella* and *Little Snow-White*; both fundamental to this research.

Mill's Liberal Feminism: Its Legacy and Current Criticism by Szpuova provides John Stuart Mill's views on the problem of gender equality as he specifically stated in *The Subjection of Women*; Mill's biography as a feminist; the reception of his views in contemporary philosophy; and the critical voices his study gathered. Szpuova presents Mill's central argument of the human race depending on the progress of women; the benefits to mankind if women change their traditional tasks; his consideration of the principle of equality as imperative and many others (179). Szpuova's research has been most helpful in providing insight to John Stuart Mill's feminist views which this research is anchored on.

Giangiulio's *Reader-Response Theory: A Path Towards Wolfgang Iser* presents the different approach of many authors and many critics towards the theory and provides the history of the reader-response theory according to different perspectives (333). Although the study is centered on Iser's motion on the theory, it does not lack crucial information on many other proponents including David Bleich of whom this research favors.

If the Shoe Fits: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Adaptations of Cinderella by Doupont explores the various themes and various representations of economic class, gender, sexuality, character roles, and over all plot in each adaptation of the fairytale. Modern adaptations of the fairytale exposes Cinderella's real personality which is a mixture between the expectations of a 19th century woman and values of a modern woman (32). Her thesis supported the claims this study stands upon as it explains each change an

adaptation makes throughout the years and offers a romantic moral to each adaptations.

Tjeng's, *Masculine and Feminine Traits in Cinderella and Ever After* presents the comparison of the original Cinderella by the Grimm Brothers and Danielle as the Cinderella character in *Ever After*. Her study proved that while the original Cinderella possessed a dominantly feminine trait of gullibility, Danielle in *Ever After* is the opposite. This study has been very helpful as a part of this thesis delves into the feminist traits of Danielle in *Ever After*. She concluded that the reason for Danielle's lacking of feminine traits is because of her possession of significantly masculine traits.

Williams focuses on the troubling gender with the constructions of identity not limiting to feminist fairytale retellings in his dissertation, *Re-Conceptualizing Gender Through Narrative Play in Fairy-Tale Retellings*. Her main concern is to examine how modern fairytale adaptations conceptualizes gender. More importantly he delves into the question of how modern fairytale retellings shaped by feminism conceptualizes gender (2). This study helped shape the explanation of the fourth chapter in this thesis as it offers plausible and backed-up claims.

Hammel rewrote fairy tales for her thesis, *The Grimm Fairy Tales Rewritten with Feminist Perspectives* because while Disney's adaptations are popular, their portrayal of women is worse as aside from being weak, Disney insinuated that a woman's seek for power and ambition will result to villainy and horrendous death (4). Hammel intended to create a role model for children especially girls to show independence and self-care thus rewrote different fairy tales based on different feminist perspective, one of which is Liberal Feminism. Hammel rewrote The Little Red Riding Hood in the perspective of liberal feminism and made Little Red dependent. Instead of relying on the huntsman for freedom, Little Red cut the wolf's stomach weakening the him then piercing a knife through his heart. Another point Hammel made through the story is making Little Red feel ashamed for her mistake unlike in the Grimm's version (27). In Hammel's introduction, she gave out feminist ideas that this research benefited on. Each of these researches and studies led this thesis to the right direction and without the support of each, the problem and sub- problems this thesis begs to answer would have remained unanswered.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative which uses the critical-descriptive-imperative approach in examining woman characters in the film *Ever After*. The theories of feminism and reader-response are used to analyze feminist events in the stories, the characterization of women, and the responses of the critics. The primary sources of data is the tale of the Grimm Brothers, *Cinderella*; and the film, *Ever After*, released in 1998. The secondary sources of data are internet articles, books, and unpublished theses.

There are three phases that this study follows. Phase 1 presents the plot of events in the story where the female characters show feminist actions. The plot of the films and the fairy tales is cautiously examined to gain a better analysis of the stories. With the use of the theory of feminism, how the female characters face challenges and break the norm the Grimm Brothers set on them are analyzed. Phase 2 studies the portrayal of the female characters in the film in contrast to the fairy tales. To understand the characterization of the female characters, the women are analyzed through their actions, thoughts and what the other characters think of them. Phase 3 presents the response of the researcher-critic on the reimagining of the fairy tale woman. With the support of the reader-response theory, how the critic feels on the previous representations of women and how she sees the woman is created through poetry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feminist Events in the Plot Structure

The story, *Ever After* begins with the Grimm Brothers arriving to the palace of a Grande Dame who admires their collection of stories except for their version of *Cinderella* which she finds disturbing. Both brothers defend themselves claiming the truth will never be known as there are many claims as to what truly happened. One of the brothers notices a painting near the noblewoman and asks about it. She informs them of her name, Danielle de Barbarac and then reveals to them a glass slipper which belonged to Danielle. The noblewoman then begins telling the real details of the story.

After the death of Danielle's father shortly after his marriage to Baroness Rodmilla de Ghent, Danielle becomes a servant in her own house. The baroness spoils her favored daughter, Marguerite- who is as cruel as her - with clothes that might catch the

prince's eyes despite their lack of income. To compensate for their spendings, the baroness sells household items from the manor, blaming the servants for the loss of things, then deducts their wages as punishment. In the beginning of the movie, the baroness sells one of her servants, Maurice who was a dear friend to Danielle.

After Danielle's brief encounter with the prince which ends with the prince having a bruise on the eye and Danielle in possession with twenty gold francs, she poses as a countess despite the consequences and the wary of her childhood friend, Gustav to bring Maurice home. This begins the curve of the story as well as the feminist events in the film. The first feminist event in the film can be seen when Danielle stops the carriage with the criminals bound for America demanding the carriage guard to free her servant as she is willing to pay the debt against him. The guard does not oblige as Maurice was already bought and is bound to America but Danielle does not stop and scolded the guard for calling Maurice the property of the buyer.

"He's not property at all you ill-mannered tab of guts."

This angers the guard who raises his voice to her. The prince heard the guard's disrespect for Danielle and chastised him.

"You dare raise your voice to a lady, sir?"

Danielle, after a slight shock from seeing the prince, defends servants after the guard called them thieves. She argues that servants who do steal cannot help themselves. The prince, is surprised with her words, and orders her to enlighten them, looking at his noble subjects. Danielle asserts that the lower class people are subjected to ill-education which corrupts their manners. By punishing servants for what their education disposes them, the kingdom is merely creating criminals and then punishing them. Her words impresses some of the noble women, Maurice and Leonardo da Vinci, and defeats the Prince who unhappily demands for the guard to release Maurice.

It is revealed that Danielle is quoting Thomas More's *Utopia* when the prince follows her and asks for her name. He gallantly confesses the book as sentimental and dull as the plot of slaves whom he refers to as the "everyday rustic" bores him and that he, of the highest rank, naturally do not converse with peasants. Danielle, slightly angry and might be forgetting she was speaking with the

prince, contradicts saying there is nothing natural about disrespecting peasants whom she refers to as the legs the country stands on. Due to Danielle's words, Maurice was freed and so were the other servants later on. This will not be the last time Danielle's opinions will affect how the Prince will rule and see the world.

Danielle as the Cinderella character in *Ever After* is a feminist in contrast to the sexism-washed character of the Grimm Brothers (Gomez 39). The film offers more than the concept of women represented as a passive object and only an object of desire. This isn't the case in the film. Although Danielle is an attractive woman, she is not portrayed as such and the prince's attraction to her isn't just because she is nice to look at. She definitely is not passive as she verbally combated with the prince and will continue to do so no matter what. This sets her apart from other women in the film who would rather be passive and the other adaptations of the character of Cinderella who, most, maintain the weak, submissive, and weepy personas.

Role-reversal is prominent in the feminist plot in the story the trend of the damsel rescuing the male is shown many times. This technique is to demonstrate how specific identities for gender is a socially constructed concept (Williams 77) This is true when characters act out of their range of specific gender behavior like Danielle demonstrating masculine abilities rather than sticking to her feminine ones. Critics suggest that the Cinderella character in *Ever After* is for women today and beyond who sees the fairy tale heroin not as a victim (qtd. in Gomez 38).

In the middle of the story, Danielle is still posing as Countess Nicole de Lancet and Prince Henry gets lost in the woods. To find their way. Danielle takes off her dress and climbs a rock instead of the prince, the male who typically does the difficult task. When terrorized by a group of gypsy men, Danielle jumps onto the gypsy leader's shoulders who has her dress despite Prince Henry telling her to stay safely on the rock. Although out-manned, she bravely demands the gypsy leader for her things and a horse.

The gypsy leader humors her by promising to give her anything she can carry, obviously thinking she will go for her dress. Instead, Danielle walks towards Prince Henry and carries him onto her shoulders earning laughs from the gypsies. Her boldness and strength does not go unrewarded as the gypsy leader promises her things, a horse, and

a night of revelry (Williams 95) where Danielle redefines Henry's point of view on the gypsies.

"A gypsy, for example, is rarely painted as anything else. They're defined by their status as your title defines you, it is not who they are."

Danielle, later, encourages the prince to be king as he could do much for his country. Inspired, Prince Henry plans to build a university for all the classes and insists the gypsies be invited to the ball.

In the end of the story, Danielle is sold to Le Pieu in exchange for the household items her stepmother sold. This is permitted as she is a woman which means she can be possessed either as a servant or as a wife (Williams 96). She is bound in shackles after she tried to escape. When a threat presented itself in the form of her perverted owner trying to force close their distance, she skilfully takes his weapon.

"My father was an excellent swordsman, monsieur. He taught me well. Now hand me that key or I swear on his grave I will slit you from navel to nose."

Despite having her feet in chains, Danielle was able to aim a sword at her new master. Unafraid, Le Pieu pulls her intending to kiss her but out of reflex, Danielle slashes his face. He was taken aback and Danielle uses his momentarily shock to point two swords at him. She threatens to kill him if he will not hand him the key for her chains. Fearing for his life, Le Pieu hands her the key and eventually surrenders her freedom. All this while the prince is on horseback on his way to save her. When Danielle left the home of Le Pieu, Prince Henry arrives too late to rescue as she has already rescued herself.

As viewers attach symbolic meanings to the appearance of the characters (Williams 77), the correlation of the characters responsibility to the story and to the other characters are fixed - this is the traditional pattern in fairy tales: Examples of this are the usual helpless damsels-in-distress and the strong knight-in-shining-armour.

This is not the case of the film as it questions the ideology of the genders. Making the maiden in need capable of rescuing herself encourages the reader why she needs rescuing in the first place. This kind of femininity shows that gender is a construct and that women could do what men can. As for the romance between Danielle and Prince Henry, the change in their roles and Danielle's masculinity is vital as he finds himself attracted to

her every time Danielle is portrayed as strong, independent, witty.

The generic meaning for "cinderella" is "one suffering from neglect and lowly position then suddenly lifted from obscurity and neglect to honor and significance." It doesn't say anything about a man doing the lifting for the woman or anyone else. This feminist portrayal in the plot proves that Ever After strayed from the typical heroin-rescued-by-the-hero story and proceeded to showcase female strength and capabilities.

Feminist Characterization of Danielle

Danielle's bravery as an adult is presented the moment the story skipped to the future showing Danielle aiming an apple at the man stealing her father's horse, the prince, unbeknownst to her.

This characterizes her not only as a brave woman but also as a different one from the women her age who rather focus on lady-like things. Instead of fleeing and letting the thief get away, she faces him head-strong. Of course, her bravery can be connected to her forced slavery which forces her to be independent as well. When she and Prince Henry are lost, to find the way to the castle, she climbs a rock in her undergarments while the prince stays still below.

This action is a disregard for social convention because it is a shameless and inappropriate behavior to walk around only in undergarments (Tjeng 25). She reasons that she would rather climb the rock instead of the prince to protect his safety and the kingdom from an unwanted royal funeral. This shows her being independent and capable of taking care of herself without anyone stronger or with someone stronger, even. She is aware of her strength to survive, she does not ignore these instincts and follow them.

Being a slave in her own house from childhood to adulthood, Danielle keeps her patience but it is her defiance to the continued maltreatment that significantly moves the story. During her stepmother's interrogation while she is in bed, she answers tiredly not hiding her want for more rest, surprising her step-family. When Marguerite demands for breakfast, she nonchalantly refuses. This act of rebellion shows Danielle finally able to stand up even a little bit. Later on, when Marguerite disrespects her mother, she doesn't hesitate and punches her, threatening her also. Her defiance doesn't stop there as she declares her stepmother's wrongdoings, something that is by default not to be talked about out loud. Although

her defiance and rebellion earn her a few lashes and her imprisonment, this showcases her ability to exert power and dominance rather than remaining subjective to her harsh situation.

A woman, for Gibson, is a weak and delicate creature (qtd. in Doupont 26). Danielle, however, stripped the title away from her when she aims a sword at Le Pieu demanding her freedom. Although just briefly shown in the film, this shows her determination and her confidence to solve problems with her own effort.

Danielle as a strong-willed woman. Even as a child, Danielle does things frowned upon by others like playing with her servant friend on the mud or befriending servants, even. Her attachment to her servant-friends causes her to make cautious decisions which impacts the rest of the story. Although, she keeps the house clean following gender roles, her motivation is not to bend to social rules but because of her devotion to the servants and to her home (Doupont 31). This attribute of her took full extent when one of her servant friends, Maurice was sold by her stepmother. In possession of a few gold, she decides to buy her friend back. To do so, she must pose as a countess, which is a crime.

"They'll never buy a servant with twenty gold francs.

I am Maurice's only hope"

Even with her friends' doubts and her awareness of the consequences, Danielle goes to the castle and saves Maurice earning awe from the spectators and the prince. This begins Henry's attraction for her and continues Danielle's portrayal as a different woman. These actions prove her to be more than an orphan and a slave, that she has the potential to be a fighter.

Danielle as a firm woman. Unlike Marguerite who thinks alike her mother, Danielle sticks to what she thinks is right and she is not intimidated to let her mind speak. In the period where *Ever After* is set, it is expected of women to submit as it is considered the most feminine virtue and that men wanted a woman who would obey and follow their thoughts (Doupont 26). Danielle, however, is far from a follower, and doesn't yield to opinions of people from higher stature such as the prince. Her reason for being so is not to impress the prince but because she is firm to what she believes is right.

When Prince Henry expressed his boredom reading about servants, Danielle quickly defended peasants, scolding the prince in the process.

"Excuse me, sire, but there is nothing natural about [snubbing peasants]. A country's character is defined by its "everyday rustics" as you call them. They are the legs you stand on, and that position demands respect"

According to Cloud in her article *Gender Roles of Women in the Renaissance*, historically, women are seen not heard. Although they can speak their minds. Their thoughts and ideas are shaped by men - mostly everything women had input were given by men, Low class women are expected to know how to take care of the house.

Danielle already knows that and her affection to her household causes her to care for the house more than her masters. Danielle may be seen as a typical female character because of this but her additional traits of speaking her mind not shaped by anyone but herself provides proof that she is more than capable being her own person.

Her fair outspoken opinions make an impact to the prince as after an intelligent encounter with her, the prince passes on laws for the common people. This shows how she can make an impact not only to the prince but to others.

"You own the land there is and you take no pride in working it! You have everything and still the world hold no joy and you would make fun of those who would see it for its possibilities."

Danielle's blatant show of opinions shows her to be aware of her sharp mind and not being wary or ashamed by it. She shows that in a place where almost everyone has similar goals, she can have her own bearings and opinions thus being her own person. Having been provided enough reading materials by her father and enjoying reading. Danielle's intelligence and smart opinions is no mystery-apart from first-hand experience.

In Heather Doupont's *if the Shoe Fits: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Adaptations of Cinderella*, it is stated that Danielle is raised to express her thoughts which she does even after her father dies which earns harsh treatments from her stepmother.

On the contrary, one of the many reasons the prince fell in love with Danielle was her clever and opinionated personality. This admiration is fascinating because men at that time were portrayed to fall for women with reserved nature (24)

When the prince challenges her to present why Maurice should be released; she quoted Thomas More whose book, *Utopia* she always reads.

"If you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners corrupted from infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded, sire, but that you first make thieves and then punish them?"

This may impress the prince but most importantly, this shows that women - like men-can learn from books as well, that women are not too dumb to be educated and understand society. Women have the ability to better themselves. Her witty and outspoken personality changes the prince's mind on many issues and made him want to be a better person. Danielle as an intelligent woman and everything else challenges the image of femininity. Not only is she an old image of a female (beautiful with knowledge of the household) but she is also an image of a new woman who represents the ideals of girl power and liberal feminism (Williams 81).

Originally, Cinderella as a female character was shown to be obedient and weak but adaptations such as *Ever After* shows what women could become over the years: strong, intelligent, expressive, persistent, firm, and brave.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the plot structure of *Ever After* has events in which the female protagonist is faced with challenges and she addresses them with confidence and wit, making her a woman of her own mind despite how the world sees her as a weak character. Moreover, the portrayal of the female protagonist reflects a brave, strong-willed, intelligent, God-fearing, resourceful, and courageous woman. This feminist portrayal in the film shows woman empowerment, which encourages the audience to become like the character in real life which inspired the researcher-critic to create a writeback.

Reader Response through Poetry

The following are three poems that are the responses of the researcher to the character portrayal of Danielle in the film *Ever after*; Cinderella Story.

Cinder-Woman Musings

By: Carmel Vip Derasin

How many men have you
Carried on your back?

Walk still, are they heavy or light?

Why didn't you leave them and ran to your

Home, to heat the porridge, brew coffee,

Stew the meat, or boil the eggs?

Why didn't you leave them and ran to your
Siberian prison, where the frosty twigs shiver
Looking for that smoke in some tropical island
Leave them. Run. Read your library of
Utopian world of kings and queens and peasants.
Oh Woman, saddled with pots and ladles
Why are you Water bearer, and Dreamweaver
But Corpse bearer?

SILENCE

By. Carmel Vip C. Derasin

Bodies clad in petticoats
Sweating profusely in
Work sheds toiling all
Day and Night sipping the
Roars of monsters of iron
Yes, Night and Day folding the
Screams of the beasts of burden
Yes, Day and Night, dreaming that
Sleeping sleeps and snoring snores.

Women, do we not commune
In dreams weaved of quiet labor?
Do men not know that silence
Complains of silence, protests?
Dare they mistake our meekness
For submission, for surrender?

Gold coins for your silence!
Do you hear that?
Here, for your silence

My Mother was an excellent swordswoman

By: Carmel Vip C. Derasin

My mother was an excellent swordswoman
She taught me well
Now hand me that key

My feet are in chain,
But I need no prince:
I can fight the gypsies
I can fly a kite
I can read my book
I can sing and dance
I can till the farm
I can do all pretty much
The same as you can

Now hand me that key,
My mother taught me well
She was an
Excellent swordswoman

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