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Comparative Analysis

Typically, when people think of princesses, an obedient helpless girl waiting for a man to rescue her comes to mind. Conversely, in the film *Ever After: A Cinderella Story*, Danielle, the star, shatters the stereotype of princesses. She is not the typical blonde, sweet, and quiet girl; instead, she is quite the opposite. In this Cinderella themed film, Danielle is a girl orphaned by her parents and left in the care of her stepmother who forces her to complete demeaning tasks. Despite her stepmother's attempts to thwart her pursuit of a better life, Danielle, in the end, triumphs and is at last happy and free; yet, in contrast with the commonly told Cinderella stories, Danielle is an independent and outspoken individual. More specifically, she defends her friends, openly states her opinions, confronts bullies, and even stands up to the prince. But one common theme remains: she obeys her stepmother. After seeing the distinct difference between the princess in *Ever After* and the generic version of Cinderella, one might wonder why Danielle seeks approval and love from her stepmother when she is independent in every other aspect of her life. Analyzing the significance of this topic, Freudian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim discusses the relationships in the Cinderella tale in his article "Cinderella: A Story of Sibling Rivalry and Oedipal Conflicts." Within his essay, Bettelheim reveals reasons why society is so fascinated with the Cinderella story, explaining that the core of the tale is actually sibling rivalry; moreover, Bettelheim offers reasoning as to why Cinderella behaves the way she does. Also contributing answers to this subject, notable author Madonna Kolbenschlag in her piece, "A

Feminists View of ‘Cinderella,’” points out that the fantasy of Cinderella is more than a rags to riches story. Explaining the history and the lineage of the Cinderella story, Kolbenschlag touches on the meaning behind each variation of the fairy tale. In addition, she acknowledges the various motifs such as sibling rivalry and the characteristics of a heroine shown in Cinderella’s thoughts and actions, specifically her passive behavior towards her family. After evaluating these sources, one might consider that Danielle is obedient to her stepmother because she feels inferior as a result of her sibling rivalry with her two stepsisters. Furthering this point, perhaps Danielle obeys her because she believes that she deserves to be treated poorly by her stepmother, and that if she serves her time, she will receive salvation in the end.

Although in the movie *Ever After* the majority of Danielle’s actions are depicted as extremely self-reliant, the story still includes her searching for her stepmother’s blessing. In the film, Rodmilla sells Danielle to a wealthy man and announces “You are not my problem anymore,” in response Danielle asks, “Is that what I am, your problem? I have done everything you've asked me to do and still you deny me the only thing I ever wanted!” (*Ever After*). Rodmilla then asks what is it that she has wanted, and Danielle replies “What do you think? You are the only mother I have ever known. Was there ever a time, even in its smallest measurement, that you loved me at all?” (*Ever After*). It is here when Rodmilla blatantly dismisses that she has ever cared for Danielle, proclaiming “How can anyone love a pebble in their shoe?” (*Ever After*). Danielle frankly admits how she has always strived to be loved by Rodmilla, and has to accept the fact that she has failed. Bruno Bettelheim asserts that this subservient behavior displayed by Danielle is derived from sibling rivalry. Bettelheim explains, “When a child’s older brother or sister is more competent than he, this arouses only temporary feelings of jealousy. Another child being given special attention becomes an insult only if the child fears that, in contrast, he is

thought little of by his parents, or feels rejected by them” (280). It is apparent that Danielle does not receive the same amount of attention as her stepsisters and this could be an answer to why she adamantly obeys Rodmilla; to show that she is just as capable and worthy as her stepsisters. Additionally, Bettelheim clarifies that “The only explanation for parental criticism a child can think of is that there must be a serious flaw in him which accounts for what he experiences rejection” (283). Therefore, Danielle feels as if there is something about her that is wrong or not up to Rodmilla’s standards. It is understandable why it is so difficult for Danielle to accept that the only parental figure in her life is embarrassed or ashamed of her, further justifying Danielle’s continuous strive for love from Rodmilla. Author Madonna Kolbenschlag would agree with the central idea of sibling rivalry and the desire of acceptance. She concludes, “There are moments when all of us can find ourselves in the Cinderella tale: as bitchy, envious, desperate sibling-peers; or victim-souls like Cinderella, passive, waiting patiently to be rescued; or nasty, domineering “stepmothers,” fulfilling ourselves by means of manipulative affiliations—all of them addicted to needing approval” (Kolbenschlag 322). This emphasizes how common it is for people of all sorts to seek the approval of another; doing whatever possible to try to satisfy their expectations or wants.

Another account for Danielle’s devotion to pleasing her stepmother could be that she believes, eventually, she will be rewarded for her virtue and hardships. In the film, Danielle speaks to her friend Gustave, talking about how if she waits for her sister to marry the prince, she assumes that “they would move into the palace...and I could stay with the manor and turn things around” (*Ever After*). This indirectly shows Danielle believing that if she waits patiently for change, that she will receive what matters to her most at the time; her home. Kolbenschlag acknowledges this idea, contending that “There is a subliminal value implied here, that work is

seldom to be enjoyed for its own sake, but only to be endured for some greater end” (Kolbenschlag 320). This implies that all of the meaningless and belittling work Danielle undertakes will somehow contribute to her happiness in the future. Equally important, the author submits that “This willing acceptance of a condition of worthlessness and her expectation of rescue (as a reward for her virtuous suffering) is a recognizable paradigm of traditional feminine socialization” (Kolbenschlag 319). Bettelheim would agree that this is a plausible reason for Danielle’s actions, by arguing that “as badly as one’s parents or siblings seem to treat one, and much as one thinks one suffers because of it, all this is nothing compared to Cinderella’s fate” (282). Essentially, the authors both would recognize that Danielle believes she will benefit from her efforts. If given the chance to interact with Bettelheim, Kolbenschlag would most likely add that Danielle’s behavior is that of a typical heroine; making sacrifices and skimming rock bottom before they become triumphant. Holding that “The personality of the heroine is one that, above all, accepts abasement as a prelude to and precondition of affiliation” (Kolbenschlag 319). She also adds “The paradox of this acceptance of a condition of worthlessness in the self, along with a conviction of the ultimate worthiness and heroism of one’s role, is part of the terrible appeal of the fairy tale” (Kolbenschlag 319). This theory is very conceivable; Danielle knows that she tries her best to be an honorable person; therefore, why would she not hope that it would lead to a salvation or happily ever after?

The articles “Cinderella: A Story of Sibling Rivalry and Oedipal Conflicts” and “A Feminist View of ‘Cinderella’” both attribute valid ideas to why Danielle seeks approval from her stepmother. However, these articles were not inspired by *Ever After*, but from different variations of the tale of Cinderella. This information can only be used for analysis and not for a definite answer for this question. But readers can learn from this analysis a greater understanding

of the female version of heroism. Although these articles refer directly to Cinderella, the actions of Cinderella can be applied to all women. The theory that Cinderella's obedience to her stepmother was due to her belief that she would be rewarded is similar to how many women handle other situations. For example, often women believe that with time and work they can change a "bad boy" into their dream man, or that if they focus on enhancing their beauty that they deserve special attention, or as seen in the past where some women thought that if they kept a neat household that their family relationship would be superb as well. Women are left toiling through their hardships, believing that someday they will achieve their goals, when in reality the world is not dictated by hard work or positivity.

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