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19 October 2016

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English 29

Money, Money, Money

From the first sentence, wealth is a component in the Brothers Grimm version of “Cinderella.” It becomes the item from which the society revolves around and balances upon. With wealth comes societal structure, and this fairy tale is no exception. Cinderella and her family are categorized along with every other citizen in the society created in “Cinderella,” supporting the existing socio-economic structure. In analyzing the characters and their relationship with the socio-economic structure, a focus on women and their motivations became evident through the text. The women in the fairy tale indubitably support the structure presented within “Cinderella,” by exhibiting that they become completely motivated by materialism and desire for ascension in class.

Indicating that Cinderella’s father is a “rich man” in the first sentence is only the first of many implications that the society in which they live is very concerned with wealth and class (Grimm 117). The dynamic between the base of the society and the superstructure of the society is evident through the reading of the tale, and even presents a similar dynamic within Cinderella’s family. The base and the superstructure are separated through cultural differences, yet one cannot completely function without the other. Those in the base include the workers in

the society, and involve everything that goes into creating the economic division that is seen, whereas the superstructure is an embodiment of the culture and everything that emerges from the economic base.

In “Cinderella,” the upper classes, especially the royal family, are the main component of the superstructure, which is supported by the middle and the lower classes, which could include Cinderella’s family, or at least her stepmother and stepsisters. In addition to the overall dynamic of the society, it is also replicated within Cinderella’s family. Cinderella becomes the sole occupant of the base in her family, whereas her father and stepfamily obtain positions within the superstructure in regards to their family dynamic. The dynamic within her family revolves around having Cinderella as the base, and without her, it would collapse, having nobody to take her place as the platform for their family structure. They rely on her to do all of their chores and put her to work while they relax and place their concerns on more materialistic needs like clothing and appearance, a key aspect of the fairy tale.

Clothing is an important component of wealth and standings in society, where it functions as a sign of worth and status. The elegance of someone’s clothing is indicative of how wealthy they are, and when that person’s clothing is taken away, their value seems to decrease in the eyes of the society. For those within a more privileged class, clothing is a tool to reveal the truth of their status, whereas for the aspiring class, clothes provide the opportunity to hide and disrupt their social identity, which is exactly what Cinderella does. Clothing gives women the opportunity to re-establish themselves within their society, and with Cinderella’s case, within her family.

Cinderella's status within her family was stripped away from the second her stepsisters "took away her beautiful clothes, dressed her in an old grey smock, and gave her some wooden shoes," going from beautiful to the family "silly goose" (Grimm 117). As soon as the physical change was forced upon her, she also encountered a change in her lifestyle; she was forced to complete undesirable chores and was "ridiculed" by her sisters in an attempt "to make her miserable" (Grimm 117). Cinderella didn't act in any way to cause this change, there was no change in her character, it was simply the change of clothes, which is just one example of how the fairy tale supports the societal structure which is presented, as well as the notion that the women are motivated by materialism and wealth to attain the best-case standing for themselves.

The events throughout the royal festival solidify the argument of clothing corresponding with status and worth. Cinderella is denied the opportunity to attend the festival by her stepmother, her reason being that she is "covered with dust and dirt," and that she doesn't "have neither a dress nor shoes," and she is therefore not worthy enough to be in the presence of other people, let alone the prince (Grimm 118). It is only once the doves provide her an escape from the restrictions and give her "a dress of gold and silver, with slippers embroidered with silk and silver," that she is finally suitable to attend such an event and earn some acceptance from society (Grimm 120). Each time that Cinderella asks for a dress, the doves give her one more beautiful than the last, and, consequently, the prince falls for her more and more each time. Thus, the more beautiful her appearance becomes, the more appealing she becomes to the prince, and he even makes the assumption that she must come from a family of wealth just based off of her clothing (Grimm 119). Cinderella remains the same person and maintains her character and personality throughout the entire fairy tale, only changing what she wears, and through this it becomes

evident that such a small change does a lot in creating presumptions about a person in the society in “Cinderella.” Upon close analysis, however, a situation emerges which appears to be contradictory to the argument that women desire materialistic objects; a situation where Cinderella herself subverts this notion.

When Cinderella’s father goes into town, the stepsisters ask him to bring them back “beautiful dresses, pearls, and jewels,” whereas Cinderella simply asks for a tree branch (Grimm 117). Although this request does seem to be in opposition of the argument that the women in the money-focused society are materialistic, in the end, the branch eventually grows into the tree and becomes an accessory to attaining the prince’s hand in marriage. Her clothes are the ultimate tool Cinderella uses to enter into a marriage with the prince which she might not have otherwise been able to enter. The tree branch is the vehicle for which she attains the beautiful silk dresses and slippers, which eventually leads to Cinderella’s happy ending.

While outer appearance is a crucial part in identification within society, looking at the importance of class in relation to the social dynamic also suggests the overpowering desire of women to rise in class. This desire to ascend the social ladder reaffirms the argument that they are motivated by materialism and wealth, as reflected by the society. The ultimate goal for any of the women in society is to secure a future for themselves that contains both power and prestige, resorting to extreme measures to do so, as the stepsisters exemplify. Although it is Cinderella who ultimately increases her place in society, displaying the class mobility, her stepmother and stepsisters demonstrate the desperation and how far they will go to try and increase their social standing. For example, when the prince comes to the house with the shoe, the stepmother tells one of her daughters to “cut the toe off,” and the other daughter to “cut off part of [her] heel”

(Grimm 121). This is their extremely desperate last attempt at having a chance to improve their social standing, confirming the social structure of the society that revolves around wealth and class as indicated through appearance.

Wealth and class become the clues dependent on determining how the society works in “Cinderella,” especially when analyzing the fairy tale by focusing on the socio-economic components. The women in “Cinderella” strive to improve themselves through fixing their appearance, as well as through marriage. Their wealth-driven society that circulates around social standing pushes towards the notion that the women are driven by materialism to achieve an ascension of class. They are motivated by materialism and go to extreme measures, even when the result is not guaranteed. The way in which “Cinderella” is written supports the society presented within in, promoting the aristocratic order within society rather than subverting it, as well as exemplifies how materialism is a large component within it.

Works Cited

Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. "Cinderella" Trans. Maria Tatar. The Classic Fairy Tales. Ed. Maria Tatar. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. 117-122. Print.