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A PEEK AT THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE FAIRY TALE ANIMATIONS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS AND RED
SHOES AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

AKANKSHA BAHUKHANDI

Student of PGDFCS at IGNOU, India

Email: akbk.sha21@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

Fairy tales are very popular amongst children. Even though children may be more enthusiastic about them, they have always held their charm for the young and the adults alike. Every culture has its own folklore and a set of fairy tales. Some fairy tales have gained worldwide popularity with their wide spread translations available in different languages all across the globe. However, the biggest credit for their wide spread popularity goes to their animated versions introduced by Walt Disney. Today, there are many other production houses that produce animated versions of popular fairy tales and super hero comics. Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is the most popular version of the story in circulation till date. A few other adaptations have gained popularity in the recent times. One such animated version is *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* that has been produced by Locus Corporation of Korea. The present paper attempts to make a comparative study of the two animated versions of the original fairy tale "Little Snow White" by the Grimm Brothers.

Keywords: Stereotypes, Archetypes, Body positivity, Body image, Hero, Damsel in distress

Folktales and fairy tales have been a great source of entertainment for the masses all over the world. They don't just entertain but they usually have a didactic purpose too. However, a lot of them may not be suitable for children due to the presence of elements of violence, gory punishments and death. Folklore have been the inspiration for many fairy tales. Walt Disney picked up a few of these tales and modified them to suit a younger audience and also introduced elements of romance in them. Snow White is one of the most famous Disney Princess out of the many other popular ones. It is based on "Little Snow White" from *Children's and the Household Tales* by Grimm brothers. Walt Disney excluded some gory details from the original tale and introduced the element of romance in it (Hamilton). Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is a movie about a beautiful princess called Snow White whose step mother was envious of her beauty and used to ill-treat her by making her do menial chores. Consumed by her jealousy and vanity she orders a huntsman to kill Snow White in the forest. But when the Queen discovers that the huntsman had spared her and Snow White is alive and lives with the seven dwarfs, she plans to kill her herself so that she could become the fairest in the kingdom. Her attempt to kill Snow White with a poisoned apple is almost a success but a handsome Prince rescues Snow White by waking her up from her magical sleep with a lovers kiss. The dwarfs chase the evil Queen up a hill from where

she falls to her death and Snow White and her Prince get to live happily ever after. Apart from Disney other studios like Pixar Animation Studios, DreamWorks Animation, and Warner Bros have also produced animations for children and young adults which are quite popular with the children. In 2019, a Korean production company made an animation *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* based on the fairy tale about Snow White. However, it's not the same old story and has a lot of twists ("Red Shoes"). The makers have tried to address some present day issues in this movie. It's a story about Princess Snow White who is on a mission to find and rescue her father from the clutches of the evil queen Regina. As advised by her father princess Snow seeks the help of the Fearless Seven and unknowingly gets the help from them. Both hide their true identity from each other. There is a romantic sub plot where Princess Snow falls in love with Merlin. Red shoes almost becomes a permanent apple tree when Regina forces her to give inn and she willingly takes a bite of the poisoned apple to save Merlin. However, she gets saved by the efforts of the Fearless Seven. Later in the movie Red Shoes manages to rescue her father and defeat the Queen with the help of the dwarfs. Merlin sacrifices himself by jumping down the broken bridge and taking Regina down with him thus ending Regina's magic. Snow's kisses Merlin who is almost dead and he comes back to life. His curse gets broken once he accepts Princess Snow just the way she is and confesses his love for her. The movie ends with a happy ending for Merlin and Princess Snow White. In the end along with the movie credits there is a depiction of how the other dwarfs also find their peculiar and unusual love.

Fairy tales have been very popular with children and they still hold their charm for their young readers and audience. Parents like to read them to their children and the children enjoy listening to them and watching their reel adaptation. While reading good books is desirable and encouraged in children to help them learn in a fun way, cartoons and animated movies hold their charm and excite and entice the children at a different level as they engage and excite more senses. Books tend to tickle the imagination of a reader by giving it a direction but they don't give them a concrete image in their minds. However, this isn't the case with picture books and Disney animations of fairy tales as they don't leave much to their audience's imagination by giving them very concrete imagery. Even if an animation or a movie is a true adaptation of a book, it may take a few liberties with the pictorial representation which may lend a different shade or give a different dimension to a concept otherwise loosely stated in the book. Sometimes, the imagery presented in the picture books and the animations is a much narrowed down version of a particular concept. Like the concept of beauty is often a stereotypical representation of a female as a very good looking, slim, and fair damsel and the handsome is almost always tall. A lot of fairy tales use stereotypical characters which are a particular narrowed down version of some archetype. While some stereotypes can be identified with the help of their personality and actions, other character archetypes maybe given certain physical attributes and represented in a particular way graphically to represent a certain concept or attribute. Initially, *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* received a lot of criticism for its flawed and misleading marketing campaign which was deemed unfit for children as it seemed to promote body shaming. Also, in one of the trailers two dwarfs were shown peeping at Red Shoes while she was changing. This was again problematic as it seemed to be giving out a wrong message and seemed too lewd for children (Vardanis). The movie suffered the consequences of a negative publicity but after reviewing their marketing strategy and making a few changes it was released all across the globe and was well enjoyed by the audience for its refreshing take on the Disney adaptation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (McNary).

In Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* what we see is the stereotypical representation of beauty as a Slim and well groomed girl with delicate manners. Snow White is supposedly very beautiful and her animation is also made quite pretty. She is depicted as a pure and innocent girl who is beautiful inside out. She is polite, soft spoken, caring, and more than anything else she is simply beautiful. She is also very tolerant of impolite behaviour by Dopey who tries his level best to get a kiss from her. She laughs it off and handles him delicately. Her physical beauty and behaviour is a perfect combination seldom found in the real world and thus, more of a fantasy and less relatable to the audience. Also, the prince is depicted as a tall and good looking man. So, there is no trouble of body image struggle to the characters of Snow White and her Prince. However, the evil Queen is obsessed with her looks and wishes to be the fairest one in the kingdom. Even though she is evil, she has not been given repulsive looks to project her evilness. Her vain vanity over her looks is instigator of the evil

in her and leads her to her death. In Grimm's 1857 version of the story, Snow White was named so because when she was born she was as white as snow like her mother had wished while she sat sewing by her window. She had thought to herself "If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood in this frame" (Grimm). In the Disney movie there is no explanation for the choice of her name but it just mentions that the little princess was very beautiful. The rest of the depiction of Snow White has been Walt Disney's understanding of what beautiful must look like and behave like. Whereas, in *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* the princess is named Snow and her father is King White. The princess is called Snow White because her name is Snow and she is the daughter of King White. So, the makers of the movie have tried to take away the association of the colour of the skin with the beauty of the princess. Which in a way tries to move away from the unhealthy yet common notion that fair is equivalent to beautiful. They have also tried to emphasise some other virtues in her which make her a better person with the help of King Arthur's legend (Arthurian). She is able to pull out Excalibur from the stone without much effort when even Arthur can't. In the movie, only an unselfish, truthful and gracious person could set the sword free and Red Shoes does it. Also, unlike the Disney Princess Snow White, she is not very tolerant of rude and inappropriate behaviour. She doesn't shy away from giving a befitting reply to such a display of impoliteness. She punches Prince Average for his rudeness and slaps Arthur when he tries to be impolite to her by suggesting a kiss as a reward for his favour of saving her from the giant bunny.

Princess Snow is not the typical good looking Disney princess who conforms to the conventional standards of beauty with a tiny waist and soft looks and a delicate appearance. *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* promotes the idea of body positivity by making its female protagonist a plump, fat and good natured girl who is very comfortable with her body image and doesn't feel the need to conform to the conventional beauty standards of being a certain size to be deemed beautiful. When she sees herself in the mirror for the first time after her magical transformation she doesn't recognize herself at first. She doesn't give a happy or thrilled reaction over her transformation into a beautiful damsel. She just says that she looks different thereby emphasising that she is indifferent to her new found charm. Even when she wears the pair of magical red shoes which makes her very attractive to everyone, she doesn't get obsessed with them and just uses them as a means to fulfil her mission to find her father unlike Karen's obsession with her red shoes in Hans Christian Anderson's story *The Red Shoes*. In this movie the makers have used the motif of 'red shoes' as a symbol of temptation and vain vanity. While Princess Snow doesn't fall prey to the vanity these shoes bring, Regina's obsession with them leads her to her ruin just like Karen's red shoes led her to her ruin and a gory punishment. Princess Snow tries to reveal her true looks to Merlin and doesn't have any bad intention of deceiving him into liking her for her looks. When she feels the need to get back to her true self for utilizing her physical strength to rescue Merlin, she doesn't hesitate a bit to remove her shoes to jump into the deep waters to rescue him. This paints a very positive picture about Princess Snow as she seems very happy with her true self, unaffected by the vanity of her magical charming looks. She doesn't seem to derive her self-worth and self-esteem based on the opinion of others. This is a very positive message that encourages body positivity and a virtue worth cultivating for the audience and especially for the children as they have young gullible minds and tend to follow their heroes.

The makers of *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs* have tried to bring before its audience the struggle that people have with body image issues. The 'Fearless Seven' were a group of seven handsome and arrogant princes who used to fight evil and save the innocent. All of them were supposedly good looking until one day they get cursed by a fairy who they attacked and annoyed by thinking that she was a witch. The fairy was not the stereotypical good looking fairy. She had a green face and unconventional looks. They assumed that the fairy must be a witch because to them she looked ugly. Also, when they meet Red Shoes for the first time and enquire about her identity, they speculate that because she was very pretty she mustn't be a criminal but some princess. To them a princess had to be beautiful and vice-versa. Through the Fearless Seven they have also depicted how prejudiced people can be over physical appearances and how wrong that is. The makers have depicted the struggle of the 'Fearless Seven' about accepting their altered looks after getting cursed by a fairy. All of them keep trying their level best to break their curse and return to their original handsome and mightier self. They have a difficult time accepting their physical and social limitations as green coloured dwarfs. Merlin is the most

obsessed with his looks out of all the seven. Red Shoes tells him that she likes him just the way he is and she likes him for the wonderful person he seems to be. But he laughs it off, doesn't take her seriously and keeps insisting that she would really like him once he returns to his former good looking and popular old self. This is because he is not able to accept himself as an unattractive short and stubby green dwarf. While on the other hand, Princess Snow is portrayed as a very mature, kind hearted and strong willed girl who is happy in her own skin and comfortable with the way she looks. She doesn't seem to be affected by the opinion of others. When Red Shoes goes to the market place in the kingdom, people are wonderstruck by her magical beauty. However, she doesn't enjoy the vanity of being so mesmerizingly beautiful. Instead she remains focused on mission of looking for her father. The lyrics of the background song "This is me" that plays during her time spent in the market tells the audience about her state of mind. It reveals to the audience just how well attuned she is with her true self and how unaffected she is by the vanity of her false beauty. The movie brings up the up the contrast in the thinking of both the protagonists and their comfort levels with their body image and looks. This not only highlights the vain vanity and prejudices people can have over looks but it also emphasises on the idea that beauty is skin deep, highly subjective and that love makes the loved one beautiful for the lover.

In *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs*, Princess Snow hides her real identity and calls herself Red Shoes. She hadn't had any help with finding her father for the past one year. When she comes across the seven dwarfs, she realises that they were interested in helping her because they were smitten by her beauty. So she just plays along not wanting to lose the opportunity to help her father. Princess Snow is strong both physically and mentally and is determined to find her father King White. Unlike Disney's Snow White, she is a fighter and she does not sit back in hiding at the cottage of the seven dwarfs and sing songs about how she is in love with a handsome prince who is going to be her hero. She seeks the help of the Fearless Seven and doesn't shy away from playing her part in the action sequences of the movie. This is much more relatable and an inspiring twist to the stereotypical character of the Disney princess Snow White who is delicate and dependent on the help from others to save her life and get her happy ending. She is exceptionally beautiful, delicate, and a victim of the villainy who needs a handsome saviour. Throughout the movie she keeps getting help from someone or the other. First it was the huntsman who showed her mercy followed by the forest animals then the dwarfs and finally the Prince who wakes her up from her poison induced coma. It's not only difficult to relate to such a model of exceptional beauty and perfection which is far removed from reality of our world, but it also seems to promote the idea that exceptional beauty and delicateness make a complementary set and are enough to get a handsome saviour with next to no efforts to fight for one's self. As if a handsome fellow or a charming prince is always on a lookout for a beauty in distress and will be just around the corner to save her in the nick of time. While this may be a welcome concept for popular romance novels meant for entertainment, movies targeting children as their audience need to be careful with what message they send across to the children ("6 Animations"). Red Shoes stands in sharp contrast to the Disney princess as she is not only mentally and physically strong but also willing to fight for her life, rescue her father and save the one she loves. The story begins with Red Shoes being the victim of the evil plans of Regina but it ends with Red Shoes fighting her way out of her troubles by getting help and helping the others. Here, the audience not only gets to see a breakthrough from the stereotypical Disney princess image of being very beautiful and delicate but they also witness a character's evolution from being an archetype of 'Damsel in distress' to that of a 'Saviour or Hero'. The plot of the Disney movie is very simple and doesn't involve any character growth as all the characters remain within the bounds of their respective archetypes. The Prince is the 'hero archetype', dwarfs and forest animals are the 'helpers', Evil queen is the 'villain' and Snow White is the 'Damsel in distresses. However, one exception to this is the Huntsman who has a change of heart and spares the life of Snow White. Even though he seems reluctant at first to carry out the queen's orders, he submits to her will and makes up his mind to follow her orders. The goodness and innocence of Snow White appeals to him and he spares her life and hops from the archetype of a 'villain' or 'villain's sidekick' to that of a 'saviour'. However, all the Disney Princess are not the stereotypical Damsels in distress. Mulan in Disney's *Mulan* and Rapunzel in *Tangled* and both the sisters in *Frozen* are very strong female characters who overcome their problems and trials with their determination and courage. In *Red Shoes and The Seven Dwarfs*, Princess Snow is the 'Damsel in distress' and also a 'Hero' archetype. She needs help and seeks it proactively instead of waiting for a hero to save her. Also she saves Merlin in the end and breaks his curse with

a true loves kiss. Merlin's character starts off as a 'hero' but he was also always the 'Damsel in distress' archetype as he was longing for a kiss from the most beautiful woman to break his curse. Also, after playing his part as a hero and killing the vamp, he gets saved by his hero, Princess Snow. Thus, in the movie all characters are not one dimensional like Prince Average and Regina who remain true to their stereotypes. Some show a growth and are more relatable.

In Grimm Brothers story of 'Little Snow White' from their collection of fairy tales, the moral of the story is that excessive vanity and jealousy get punished very severely. Whereas, in Disney's adaptation of 'Little Snow White' slight changes in the plot and the overall presentation through the animation add a little more to this moral of the story. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, all good and bad that happens in Snow White's life revolves around her beauty. The evil Queen wants her dead so that she can become the fairest of all and Snow White gets all the help and gets rescued because she is beautiful and everyone loves her. It seems to give out the message that evil deeds and jealousy get punished and true beauty and a good heart always attracts help and wins in the end. In *Red Shoes and the Seven Dwarfs*, Princess Snow just uses her magical beauty to aid her in her mission to rescue her father. Regina is after her because she wants her magical pair of shoes back at any cost. She isn't jealous of Princess Snow but just obsessed with her own need to look good. Here the element of vain vanity and obsession with beauty is still the same in the Evil Queen in both the movies. However, the Korean animation gives out a much deeper message through their movie. It emphasises the idea of beauty being a subjective matter and that true love doesn't look for physical beauty but it looks beyond it. It also, reinforces the idea that beauty is skin deep and that having a likeable and beautiful personality is a much more valuable virtue than just being blessed with good looks. It helps the audience to see the downside of having baseless prejudices in life and emphasises on the idea of standing up oneself and keeping a fighting spirit instead of harbouring a victim mentality.

Thus, both the movies have a similar story line, yet they are stand apart from each other due to twists in the plots, modern day relevance, character portrayal and the message they send across making a sea of difference in their child friendly quotient.

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