

Comparitive analysis of the movie "ever after" and "cinderella" essay sample

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Clothing plays a role in every person's life; often people are judged and defined by the types of things they wear. In “ Cinderella: Not So Morally Superior,” Elisabeth Panttaja claims that Cinderella succeeded in marrying the prince not because she was more patient than her stepsisters and stepmother, but because she was wittier and utilized the magical powers offered to her, namely an enchanted dress. In “ A Feminist's View of ‘ Cinderella’,” Madonna Kolbenschlag says that Cinderella tolerates condescension from the people around her in hope that she will one day be rewarded. She does menial labor and dresses in rags all while being told she is worthless by her stepmother. Ever After is a movie based on the same premise as many versions of the “ Cinderella” tale. In the film, a girl named Danielle lives a similar life to Cinderella. Although Danielle and Cinderella both use fashion as a means to obtain something they want, Cinderella's fate is decided solely by her fashion whereas Danielle's use of fashion is not what ultimately draws the prince to her. Still, Danielle seems to use clothing at first to slip into a role and define who she is; this is specifically evident in the scene where Danielle poses as a courtier.

In the movie “ Ever After”, Danielle is swept into a life of servitude by the hand of her stepmother after the sudden death of her father. One day, Danielle dons a fancy dress and poses as a courtier with the purpose of buying back a servant named Maurice that her stepmother, the Baroness, sold. While freeing Maurice, Prince Henry arrives and becomes intrigued by

Danielle's wittiness and the mystery that shrouds her. Danielle quotes one of her favorite books, Utopia, and the prince insists on knowing her name. She becomes evasive because she does not want him to discover her guise and slips away while he is distracted by his mother. Throughout the film, Danielle undergoes several transformations and in many instances, the clothing that she wears either strengthens or weakens her to deal with the situation at hand. Instances of this are not only visible in the courtier scene, but in the ball scene and ending scene as well.

According to Panttaja, " The battle for the prince's attention is not waged at the level of character at all, but at the level of clothes" (Panttaja 616). In other words, despite what many people believe, Cinderella did not win the prince because she was deserving of him, but because of the things she wore. The magical dress and the glass slipper were crucial elements in her success with the prince. However, before the days of magical clothing, Cinderella belittled herself by wearing rags and being covered in grime. While on the surface it appears that Cinderella and Danielle both endure abasement, Danielle uses her clothing to slide into a role and eventually rise above her debasement. Cinderella, on the other hand, has a night of fun in her dress and then returns home to docilely accept the mistreatment and servitude that she has lived with all of her life. Cinderella does not rise above her degradation until the King's attendant comes and slips a perfectly fitting shoe on her foot.

It is indisputable that in Ever After Danielle endures abasement.

Kolbenschlag claims, " The personality of the heroine is one that above all,

accepts abasement as a prelude to and precondition of affiliation” (Kolbensschlag 535). What Kolbensschlag is saying is that Cinderella puts up with the constant toil and wears shabby clothing because she is hoping that one day someone or something will take her out of this environment. In *Ever After*, there is a scene where the prince steals a horse and Danielle tries to stop him by hurling apples at him. Once she realizes it is the prince, she falls on her knees and says, “Forgive me your highness I did not see you. And for that I know I must die” (*Ever After*). Her demeanor went from enraged to submissive. While behaving in this manner she is wearing her typical servant’s garb and she behaves as a servant would. When her stepmother finds out about the confrontation between Danielle and Prince Henry, she physically pushes Danielle and demeans her until she feels worthless; convincing her that she has committed some unforgivable wrong. It is true that Danielle is dingily dressed and is forced to work like a servant; however, that all changes when she decides to pose as a courtier.

There is an immense transformation that occurs in the courtier scene. At first it would seem as if the change of clothing did nothing to alter Danielle’s state of mind. She says, “I am just a servant in a nice dress” (*Ever After*). As she walks into the King’s court it appears that she is uneasy in her role as a courtier and she asks God to help her through it. But as she approaches the man transporting Maurice away, she is empowered and says, “I demand you release him at once” (*Ever After*). From that moment on, her mentality was altered, whether she realized it or not. Immediately after her outburst directed at the slave driver, Prince Henry becomes involved. It was only days

before when Danielle abashedly threw herself on the ground and begged the Prince for mercy. However, in the King's court that day, when the prince addressed her, she stood up to him and did not behave like the meek servant she was considered to be. She was witty and quoted Utopia in order to eloquently and successfully get her point across. Danielle went to the court that day to buy back Maurice's freedom, but she also got something she did not bargain for. The prince was enchanted with a woman who did not really exist.

Danielle was being deceptive. After all, she was a servant dressing up in lavish clothing and posing as a courtier. But was she being deceptive for the wrong reasons? Danielle is a very altruistic individual. In the scene where the prince gave her twenty gold francs for the use of the horse, she did not stop and think about buying something for herself, as her stepsister Marguerite or stepmother would have done. Instead, Danielle ran into the kitchen where the servants were congregated and told them that she wanted to buy Maurice back with the money. She also told the other servants, " This is our home and I will not see it fall apart" (Ever After). By her referring to it as " our" home it shows that she does not look down upon the servants, even though she should not really be one herself.

When Danielle was pretending to be a courtier, it turned into a bigger sham than it was meant to be. Danielle had no way of knowing that the Prince Henry would show up while she was rescuing Maurice; she did not get dressed up with the purpose of catching the prince's attention. She had to lie about who she was out of necessity since the punishment for a servant

dressing above her position was five days in the stocks. Cinderella, on the other hand, did not have a good reason for dressing up in a magical dress and deceiving the prince along with her stepfamily besides the fact that she wanted to escape the drudgery of servitude. Because of this, one could argue that Cinderella was selfish and only thought of herself.

Panttaja contends that Cinderella was deceptive, conniving even, for the wrong reasons. She compares her to the stepmother and stepsisters and claims that they are not as different they may seem. Panttaja says, "Considering the similarities in their goals and strategies, the idea that Cinderella is morally superior to the stepsisters and their mother is shot through with contradictions" (Panttaja 616). Most people look at Cinderella as the poor victim who deserves the prince because of all she has been through, but according to Panttaja she was just as guilty as her stepfamily. It goes back to the claim of "abasement and affiliation" that Kolbenschlag mentions. The stepmother wants affiliation with the prince through her daughters, the stepsisters want it for themselves, and Cinderella wants it for herself, but for a different reason than the sisters; she wants to be rescued from the monotony of tedious labor and abuse. This in itself is an example of "abasement and affiliation" because they are doing whatever it takes to gain the prince's approval. Cinderella was deceitful and dressed up in a magical dress, but her motives were different from Danielle. Cinderella went to the ball in her magical attire, knowing the Prince was looking for a bride, whereas Danielle did not get dressed up to go to the King's court and capture the prince's heart.

When Danielle masquerades as a courtier, she opens the door to new avenues of life. In her essay titled " I Am Cinderella's Stepmother and I Know My Rights" Judith Rossner claims, " I've always found it peculiar that people failed to wonder why the Prince should have wanted this one pretty young girl of all the pretty young girls, including my two daughters, who lived in the kingdom. To make a long story short, they were two of a kind" (Rossner 598). It is impossible to tell whether or not Cinderella and her Prince were two of a kind since the two never actually had a deep conversation. The only thing that is visible to the viewer is the fact that they are both immaculately dressed and that they are too busy staring into each other's eyes to do much conversing. It is apparent that the prince was attracted to Cinderella for her beauty, perhaps even her dress, by the fact that as soon as Cinderella walked into the ballroom, the Prince's eyes were feasting upon her and he abandoned what he was doing to get closer to her. In the courtier scene Danielle did not expect to see the prince again, especially in her phony guise. Unlike Cinderella's dress, Danielle's garb is not actually magic; however, her dress might as well be magic for all that it accomplishes.

Her dress gives her the strength to free Maurice, but it also gives her the confidence to speak to the Prince and even call him arrogant. Danielle would have never behaved in such a way if she were still wearing her servant's apparel. In a way, her dress is like armor and when Danielle wears it, she feels invincible. Perhaps it is her armor to " spar" with the Prince Henry and shape his ideals to be more morally correct. Danielle gives him a new perspective on life, which is probably why he is so entranced by her. In one

instance Danielle tells him, “ You have everything and still the world holds no joy. And yet you insist on making fun of those who would see it for its possibilities” (Ever After). After spending more time with Danielle, there is a visible change in the prince’s way of thinking and in the way he feels about life. In one scene at the monastery he becomes emotional and says, “ In all my years of study, not one tutor ever demonstrated the passion you have shown me in the past two days” (Ever After).

Regardless of the dress’s purpose, it is obvious that Danielle feels she now needs it when she is with Prince Henry. She uses clothing to become someone she is not, similar to Cinderella. In the beginning of her charade, Danielle’s reluctance to reveal her true identity can be easily overlooked as an effort to protect herself from being punished by both her stepmother and the royal government. It is likely that Danielle did not imagine ever being romantically involved with the prince early on; so telling him her identity in the beginning would be asinine. However, there came a time when she should have been honest with the prince. While frolicking in the field one-day, Danielle’s friend Gustav says, “ You like him [the prince], admit it” (Ever After). Danielle denies her feelings for Prince Henry, but when the prince rides by she finally admits to herself that her feelings for him go deeper than she ever imagined. Still, she withholds her identity from him and continues to dress as a comtess.

Danielle was not the one to tell the prince that she was not Comtess Nicole de Lancre; it was her stepmother. Danielle waited too long and she missed her chance to be the one to deliver the news. Why could she not overcome

her hesitations and tell Henry who she was? Danielle enjoyed the feeling of being liberated from her role of servant and was reluctant to give up her disguise just yet. Once she realizes that she is attracted to Prince Henry, she is so overcome by this newfound passion for life, that she is afraid to do anything to jeopardize it. Her hesitation is also a result of her lack of self-confidence; the man she loves is not just any man, he is a prince. There is more at stake than in a typical relationship.

Kolbenschlag states, " Like many of the Jews who went to the gas chambers in World War II, she has internalized the consciousness of the victim" (Kolbenschlag 535). Throughout her childhood, Cinderella was constantly degraded and put down. It was instilled into her by her stepfamily that she was an insignificant facet of their household; because of this, Cinderella did not have very much self-respect. The same is true for Danielle. When a person is told that she is worthless all of her life, she begins to believe it. Danielle did not have a high level of confidence or self-worth, especially when wearing her servant's attire. Ultimately, Danielle never did overcome her self-doubt and tell the prince who she really was. In this respect she is behaving similarly to Cinderella. Cinderella did not reveal her identity to the prince after their short interlude. However, unlike Danielle, Cinderella does not appear to be overly worried about telling the prince who she really is.

Eventually, after spending more time with Prince Henry, Danielle becomes more confident in herself and her clothes seem to not define who she is. The morning after Danielle and Henry return from the monastery she is once again garbed in her servant's frock, yet she will be a servant no longer. Her

stepmother tells her to get up and fix breakfast, but instead of acquiescing to her demands as she has done in the past, she says, " You have two hands, make it yourself" (Ever After). The night of the ball arrives and Prince Henry still does not know the true Danielle.

Danielle goes to the ball dressed in resplendent attire, more beautiful than she has ever been. However, the clothing doesn't matter now; she knows that she must tell the prince who she really is if there is to be any hope for a future between them and the confidence that she usually derives from her clothing is not present on this occasion. Danielle realizes that this moment will decide her future. As Prince Henry and Danielle walk down the aisle towards the King and Queen, her stepmother rips off part of her costume, shredding any hope that Danielle had of the evening going well. Her worst nightmare is confirmed when Prince Henry rejects her. Kolbensschlag states, " She wants to be ' chosen' for herself, in her natural state, rather than because of a splendid appearance" (Kolbensschlag 537). That is how Danielle feels; she inadvertently fell in love with a prince while dressed up to be someone she is not. The ball brought forth a chance for Prince Henry to accept her for who she really is, but he denied her. In Disney's Cinderella, the prince never had a visible chance to deny Cinderella. The shoe fit so she was automatically engaged. Similar to Cinderella, Danielle flees the ball and the only thing she leaves behind is a single glass slipper.

At first, one would think that the glass slipper holds less significance in Ever After than in " Cinderella." After all, the prince already knows who Danielle is and where he can find her; there is no need to search the kingdom for the

maiden whose foot perfectly fits into the slipper. However, the slipper takes on a new role. After discovering that Danielle is the woman he his meant to be with, servant or not, he goes to rescue her from Monsieur Le Peau. As Danielle walks out of Le Peau's house in her dingy clothing, she is obviously flustered and taken aback to see the prince standing in front of her. She absently pats her hair and her dirty dress, feeling visibly inadequate in her natural state. Prince Henry approaches Danielle and says, " Perhaps you would be so kind as to help me find the owner of this rather remarkable shoe. She is my match in every way. Please tell me I haven't lost her" (Ever After). The prince then slips the shoe onto her Danielle's foot and proposes. The shoe is an " engagement shoe;" it is part of the old Danielle and by incorporating it into the proposal the prince is accepting all of her, the old and the new.

Panttaja claims, " The prince marries Cinderella because he is enchanted by the sight of her in a magical dress" (Panttaja 617). Even though clothing played a significant role for Danielle in Ever After, it does not compare to the impact that Cinderella's clothing had on her fate. Cinderella was not chosen for herself or her character, she was chosen because of a dress and a shoe. She met the prince one time and the next day they were engaged. There was not love between Cinderella and her Prince. In Ever After, Prince Henry and Danielle spent time getting to know each other and when Henry finally did choose her, Danielle knew in her heart that it was for her, and only her. Danielle transcended clothing and the holds it had on her; she no longer let her attire define who she was and what she did.

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