EA300A: Cinderella

A Reflection of Female Roles in Fairy Tales

Main characteristics of the female character Cinderella:

Obedient: This is clear that Cinderella obeys her stepmother although she treats her badly.

Helpless: This characteristic is evident at the moment when her stepmother closed the attic room on her in order to make sure that she would not come to the ball / party, Cinderella could not do anything but cry.

Dependent: Cinderella is dependent on this story on which she depends on the prince to save her from her stepmother.

Features in Cinderella as a Fairy Tale:

- It starts with the phrase 'Once upon a time'.
- It has a happy ending.
- There is a stock character who is the wicked stepmother.
- The protagonist is an orphan girl.
- There is a sense of magic on which there is a fairy who helps Cinderella to go to the party.

Q: Cinderella: Main Characteristics and Fairy Tale Features

In the story of *Cinderella*, the female protagonist is portrayed as a symbol of goodness and virtue, yet her personality also reflects the limitations placed on women in traditional fairy tales.

Cinderella is **obedient**, as she follows her stepmother's orders even though she is treated cruelly. She is also **helpless**, especially when her stepmother locks her in the attic to prevent her from going to the royal ball — all she can do is cry and hope for help. Furthermore, Cinderella is **dependent**, relying on external forces such as the fairy godmother and, ultimately, the prince to rescue her from her miserable life.

As a **fairy tale**, *Cinderella* includes many typical features of the genre. It begins with the phrase *"Once upon a time,"* signaling a magical world beyond reality. The story ends happily, with Cinderella's transformation and marriage to the prince. It also includes a **stock character**, the wicked stepmother, who embodies jealousy and cruelty. The protagonist herself is an **orphan girl**, which evokes sympathy and moral support from readers. Finally, **magic** plays a key role in resolving the conflict, as the fairy godmother uses supernatural powers to help Cinderella attend the royal ball and change her fate.

FEMALE CHARACTERS

Fairy tales are defined as amorphous and ambiguous genres which boundaries are very difficult to set. There must be a fairy story that contains fairies, talking animals, and in general the story takes place in a made-up land. The world in which the fairy tale takes place must be full of wonders which are impossible in our world. Fairy tales are stories that often rely on elements such as magic, superpowers, and fairies. Many of them have become timeless classics; however, traditional tales were revolutionary in the way they presented different images of women. The female character in the fairy tales is involved into two circles, either good or evil. The female characters in stories are either mother, sister, wife, or lover and so on. Females always represent love, respect, mercy, weakness, kindness and other good things

Female characters often took leading roles, shaping the moral and social ideals of their times. One of the most famous examples of such tales is Cinderella. Cinderella represents the ideal woman of her era — moral, virtuous, obedient, and kind. She symbolizes the traditional female role: to serve, to love a man, and to follow his lead. As a heroine, she demonstrates compassion and humility, even forming friendships with animals who assist her in times of need. However, her character can be interpreted in two ways, both positive and negative. On one hand, Cinderella's patience and kindness ultimately lead her to success and happiness. Her passivity and lack of courage reveal her as a character limited by her social expectations. She never resists her cruel stepfamily, nor does she reveal the truth to her father or the prince. Thus, while she is rewarded for her goodness, she also embodies the submissive role society expected women to play. In contrast, the stepsisters represent the opposite traits: they are portrayed as ugly, selfish, and cruel. Their laziness and arrogance make their failure inevitable. The stepmother, the main antagonist, is depicted as a heartless woman driven by jealousy and hatred. She deprives Cinderella of her rights, locks her away, and tries to force her own daughters into the prince's favor. Through her, the tale reinforces the negative stereotype of the wicked stepmother — a woman devoid of compassion and maternal love. Thus, the other female characters do nothing except ordering Cinderella: "Take the ironing", "Don't forget the mending", "Pick up the laundry and get on with your duties".

However, Cinderella offers a complex portrayal of women within the framework of a fairy tale. While the story promotes virtues such as patience and kindness, it also reflects the limited agency women had in traditional societies. The tale's ultimate message remains simple and moralistic: goodness will be rewarded, and evil will be punished. Yet, beneath the magic and fantasy lies a deeper reflection on how society once defined and confined — the roles of women.

In the traditional Cinderella, the heroine is portrayed as a passive, obedient, and gentle young woman whose main virtues are patience, kindness, and submission. Her success depends largely on external forces such as magic, luck, and divine justice. **In Modern version,** Cinderella has redefined her character to reflect contemporary values of independence, courage, and self-empowerment. Cinderella is no longer a silent victim waiting for rescue. Instead, she is intelligent, confident, and capable of making her own choices. She challenges unfair treatment, speaks her mind, and earns her happy ending through inner strength rather than dependence on magic alone. These changes reflect modern society's shift toward valuing women's autonomy and equality. Thus, while the classic Cinderella represented the ideal woman of her time—humble, patient, and obedient—the modern Cinderella embodies a new ideal: a woman who is kind yet assertive, gentle yet strong, and capable of shaping her own destiny.

HAPPY ENDING:

Q1: Is happily ever after harmful to children, provide an example from a tale you read.

In the classic version of Cinderella, the happy ending is achieved through her marriage to the prince. Her happiness and success are entirely dependent on being chosen by a man of higher status. This ending reflects the traditional belief that a woman's ultimate fulfillment lies in love, marriage, and social elevation through a male savior. The magic and the prince function as external forces that rescue Cinderella from her suffering, emphasizing her dependence and passivity. In contrast, modern adaptations present a reimagined happy ending that celebrates personal growth, independence, and self-worth. Cinderella (Modern Versions) the heroine's happiness is not defined solely by marriage, but by her courage to follow her dreams and her ability to make her own decisions. The prince is no longer her savior but rather a partner who respects her strength and individuality. This evolution marks a shift from dependence on male rescue to empowerment and equality, reflecting the modern view that true happiness comes from self-confidence and freedom rather than external approval.

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