

NEWFOUND FREEDOM: A RESILIENT JOURNEY TO BREAKING THE SPELL

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Abstract

Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine narrates the tale of a young girl named Ella, who fell under a curse bestowed upon her by a fairy at her birth and her tenacious battle to break the spell. Obedience enchantment compels Ella to blindly comply with the dictates of those around her, thereby depriving her of the ability to exercise her own will and make decisions independently. During the story, Ella goes through a number of tests that force her to decide for herself and shape her own future. However, instead of casting her hope in a prince or depending on magical remedies, she liberates herself from the curse by employing her own resolve and fortitude. In this narrative, the construction of gender roles are reproduced. By digging into Ella's journey to liberate herself from the restrictions of the curse, the writer skillfully explores the themes of resilience, freedom of choice, and self-discovery. The author challenges some deeply rooted beliefs found in classic fairy tales. She condemns a society that limits women's independence and promotes the idea that marriage is the only way for them to achieve fulfillment. The character's unwavering confidence in her own capabilities and her fierce warrior spirit are the fundamental elements that distinguish this tale from the other fairy tales. Her unwavering will to free herself from the enchantment, without the help of a prince, exemplifies her rejection of societal notions of gender and traditional gender roles for women. Just as Medusa's laugh serving as a metaphor for the ability to challenge the norms assigned to women, Ella's act of breaking the curse symbolizes her reclaiming control over her destiny. Through her awakening, the protagonist stepped into a newfound sense of empowerment and redefines her identity on her own terms. Her newfound independence enables her to discover inner power, leading her to become the heroine of her own story. By examining the protagonist's journey into a powerful individual, this research aims to explore how her breaking the curse disrupts the conventional gender roles within the context of fairy tales. This paper also makes a significant contribution to redefine traditional gender roles in literature society by juxtaposing the experiences of the main character with those of the traditional Cinderella figure. By interweaving elements from classic fairy tales into Ella's narrative, this search paper highlights the development of new storytelling methods and long lasting role of fairy tales on the formation of cultural consciousness.

Keywords: Resilience, Curse, Awakening, Conventional, Gender.

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YENİ KAZANILAN ÖZGÜRLÜK: BÜYÜYÜ BOZMAYA GİDEN DİRAYETLİ BİR YOLCULUK

Öz

Gail Carson Levine tarafından yazılan *Ella Enchanted* adlı roman, doğduğunda bir perinin lanetine maruz kalan Ella adlı genç bir kızın, büyüü bozmak için verdiği amansız mücadeleyi anlatıyor. İtaat büyüü, Ella'yı etrafındakilerin emirlerine körü körüne uymaya zorlar, böylece onu kendi iradesini kullanma ve bağımsız karar verme yeteneğinden mahrum bırakır. Hikâye boyunca Ella, kendi kararlarını verme ve kendi geleceğini şekillendirme konusunda zorlayıcı bir dizi testten geçer. Prens veya sihirli çözümlere bel bağlamak yerine kendi azmi ve gücüyle bu beladan kurtulur. Bu anlatıda toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin inşası yeniden üretilmektedir. Yazar, Ella'nın kendisini lanetin kısıtlamalarından kurtarma yolculuğunu derinlemesine inceleyerek dayanıklılık, seçim özgürlüğü ve kendini keşfetme temalarını ustaca ele alır. Yazar klasik peri masallarında bulunan derin köklü inançlara meydan okur. Kadınların bağımsızlığını sınırlayan ve onların sadece evlilik yoluyla mutluluğa ulaşabileceği fikrini teşvik eden bir toplumu kınar. Karakterin kendi yeteneklerine olan sarsılmaz güveni ve keskin savaşçı ruhu, bu hikâyeyi diğer peri masallarından ayıran temel unsurlardır. Ella'nın, kendi kendini büyüden kurtarmak için prensin yardımına ihtiyaç duymadan sergilediği kararlılık, cinsiyet ve geleneksel kadın rolleri hakkındaki toplumsal kavramları reddettiğini gösterir. Tıpkı Medusa'nın gülüşünün kadınlara yüklenen normlara meydan okumasının bir metaforu olduğu gibi, Ella'nın laneti bozma eylemi de onun kaderi üzerindeki kontrolü geri almasını simgeler. Kahraman, uyanışıyla yeni keşfettiği bir güçlenme duygusuna adım atar ve kimliğini kendine göre yeniden tanımlar. Yeni kazandığı bağımsızlık, içindeki gücü keşfetmesine olanak tanıyarak kendi hikayesinin kahramanı olmasını sağlar. Bu araştırma, baş karakterin güçlü bir bireye dönüşme sürecini inceleyerek, onun laneti kırmasıyla peri masalları bağlamında geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini nasıl altüst ettiğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlar. Bu makale aynı zamanda ana karakterin deneyimlerini geleneksel Kùlkedisi figürüyle karşılaştırarak, edebiyat ve toplumda geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini yeniden tanımlama konusunda katkı sağlamayı hedefler. Bu araştırma makalesi, klasik peri masallarından öğeleri Ella'nın anlatısına işleyerek, yeni hikâye anlatım yöntemlerinin gelişimini ve peri masallarının kültürel bilinç oluşturmadaki uzun süreli rolünü vurgular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azim, Lanet, Uyanış, Geleneksel, Cinsiyet.

Introduction

Fairy tales have a profound influence on the values and norms of society, engendering both cultural and social implications. Fairy tales have the power to influence people's worldviews and behavior because of the messages they transmit through their stories. These tales frequently centered around archetypal characters and recognizable themes reinforced certain ideologies and established social norms. Especially, as the patriarchal system became more embedded in society, this also extended to fairy tales. Consequently, this reinforced the gender bias and gave men a sense of entitlement and control over women's lives. Women's voices were often silenced and excluded from the role of scribes because of the social restriction. Consequently, their narratives were filtered through male perspective even if originally narrated by women (Zipes, 1999: 7).

The portrayal of male and female characters in fairy tales serves as a medium through which gender roles and the dominant ideology of a particular culture can be communicated. These narratives frequently show male protagonists as robust, authoritative, and heroic figures, while simultaneously presenting female characters as helpless victims, subservient, second-placed. By presenting such gender stereotypes, fairy tales influence individuals' perceptions of what is considered appropriate behavior for males and females. The portrayal of characters in binary terms such as good-bad, beautiful-ugly, and weak-strong serves to reinforce the existing gender roles. Within these stories, female character who embodies feminine attributes are rewarded as Wolf states: "Cults reward submissiveness with love" (Wolf, 2002: 127). As he states, women are conditioned to believe that acceptance is dependent on the level of submissiveness. This idea is strengthened even further by the fact that: "In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves" (Wolf, 2002: 12). This furthers the gender power gap by placing women in a hierarchical system based on their outward appearance.

Women are socially conditioned to be meek and obedient as their energy and behaviors are continually governed and controlled by external factors. Diet, cosmetics, and fashion are portrayed as driving forces that shape women's appearance and behavior according to stringent standards of beauty (Bordo, 2003: 166). This perpetuates the idea that women's existence is centered around seeking external validation and pursuing a happy life, which can only be accomplished by conforming to these standards. By internalizing this message, young girls are conditioned to believe that feminine beauty and submissive behavior will inevitably attract the attention of ideal princes, thereby guaranteeing the attainment of everlasting bliss.

There is also a recurring theme in traditional stories that stresses the significance of being brave, kind, and hardworking. There is always a predictable nature of these tales where the protagonist frequently is a virtuous individual who encounters evil forces. The plot develops in a way that highlights the hero and heroine's goodness, finally leading to a happy ending which is typically marked by marriage. (Zipes, 2015: 48)

Character's physical and mental traits are shown to have a cause-and-effect relationship in the story, typically leading to an expected outcome. In other words, the character's traits tend to steer the action of the story in a specific direction, rather than leaving room for a variety of outcomes for the story's development (Tatar, 1987: 79). The 19th century saw a substantial rewriting of fairy tales. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable shift in the perception of fairy tale characters, which led to the rewriting of them in a more balanced manner. During a period spanning from the 19th century to the 1960s, contemporary artists conveyed an enchanting dream world of fairy tales. Instead of presenting fairy tales as a means of escape, they aim to awaken the people to the harsh realities of the world. By adopting a critical and skeptical perspective, they emphasize that these tales do not provide an alternative to the mundane aspects of everyday life (Zipes, 2012: 136). Fairy tales are not just limited to showing a rosy view of life anymore. The modern retellings of fairy tales now look deeper into human nature, while illuminating imperfections, challenges, and victories that make each person truly unique and different. This shift signifies a departure from the mirror-like reflection of bourgeois values, which favor appearance above substance (Zipes, 2006a: 107). Especially, the urge to question and break free from traditional gender norms is often the driving force to present

characters in non-traditional roles. These modern tales highlight the fusion of gender qualities and the importance of equality between men and women. Gender does not limit the development of qualities such as courage, honesty, and intelligence (Zipes, 1999: 160). In her book *Fairest of Them All*, Tatar emphasizes the transformation of female characters. The contemporary depiction of female characters has evolved toward the more powerful and resourceful warrior princess. However, she also emphasizes the importance of showing vulnerability and fear in the moment of helplessness. Despite experiencing such emotions, one can have the ability to overcome challenges and find safety (Tatar, 2020: 55).

Many fairy tales often incorporate fantastical elements, enchanted objects, magical creatures, dwarfs, and dragons. In classical tales, through these magical elements, the change and resolution of the conflict in the story are achieved. In other words, individuals either undergo significant transformations or are rescued from perilous circumstances thanks to magical objects, and spells by the story's conclusion. According to Zipes, the protagonist encounters a difficult endeavor, frequently personified as an itchy, monster, or ogre. To surmount this challenge, the hero must prove himself and gain supernatural gifts to make a remarkable change. For him, miracle intervention is crucial overturning his adverse circumstances and achieving a desired goal such as marriage, prosperity, and survival (Zipes, 2006b: 50). To illustrate, in classical tales, Cinderella's life takes an unexpected turn thanks to the help of a fairy godmother. In a similar vein, Beauty's tears of compassion for the Beast magically turn him into a handsome prince. Lastly, Snow White's bite from the poisoned apple brings her to the verge of death but she is brought back to life by the kiss of true love (Tatar, 2020: 45).

While traditional fairy tales portrays unquestioned version of reality, postmodern fairy tales reveals this portrayal as a constructed illusion shaped by gender norms. These postmodern adaptations challenge the authenticity of "mimetic fictions" (Bacchilega, 1997: pp.35-36). Angela Carter retells the Cinderella story in *Ashputtle or The Mother's Ghost* by presenting three distinct versions. In each, the protagonist, Ashputtle is portrayed in a different light: a reflection of her mother's will, a survivor shaped by mourning, a figure embracing death but follows her own path. These retellings question maternal influence, marriage and social expectations of traditional fairy tales. (1997: p.142)

In contemporary retellings of fairy tales, authors deliberately subverted characters and adapted stories to align with a modern context. Modern fairy tales tend to focus more on realistic scenarios and the development of the characters. Happiness and success are attained through self-discovery rather than exclusively depending on miraculous events. In contrast to traditional fairy tales, contemporary adaptations of these narratives deviate from the representation of the characters possessing supernatural abilities and those who depend on magic to resolve the challenges. Instead, these narratives highlight the significance of wisdom, problem-solving skills and critical thinking as essential factors in navigating challenges. Trites suggests that the female character may have been oblivious to her agency and the ability she possessed to shape her destiny. This awareness of her agency and voice ultimately empowers her to transcend the repressive system, letting her achieve personal victory. A female character triumphs over evil or succeeds in tasks traditionally dominated by men or develops self-confidence in the face of skepticism from others (Trites, 1997: 21-22). By presenting counterworlds, fairy tales serve as a social and artistic function beyond compensation and amusement. They have the power to reveal new possibilities, thereby freeing our thoughts from mental stagnation. The enchanting world portrayed in fairy tales has the ability to spark our imagination, which in turn enables us to face and conquer fears in real life. Through interacting with these stories, we are motivated to take action and change the world for the better (Zipes, 1999: 31).

Disrupting Traditional Narratives in *Ella Enchanted*

Stereotypes for men and women are based on the notion of gender inequity, which portrays women as weak, helpless, and in need of care. In this *Ella Enchanted*, the author portrays Ella as a woman who is burdened by an obedience spell since childhood, mirroring the limitations imposed on women by stereotypes. Thus, she was doomed to follow any commands due to the curse she is under. By integrating comedic and adventurous elements, the author portrays Ella's battle with the limitations imposed by the curse and her pursuit of autonomy. At this point in the story, her resilience

offers readers a compelling depiction of women who assert control over their destinies. In this regard, the work revitalizes traditional fairy tale narratives. Although Levine preserves the conventional motifs of traditional fairy tales such as the wicked stepmother, the prince, the ball, and magical elements, Levine reimagines these elements with a fresh lens. In doing so, the author successfully balances fidelity to the fairy tale tradition while simultaneously criticizes the conventional roles attributed to women.

Throughout the novel Ella faces the uphill battle of complying with whatever she is told. She cannot resist any direct command given to her no matter how absurd or challenging it may be. The immense power the curse holds over her is reflected in the following quotation. "If someone told me to hop on one foot for a day and a half, I'd have to do it And hopping on one foot wasn't the worst order I could be given. If you commanded me to cut off my own head, I'd have to do it" (Levine, 1998: 3). Even a few minutes of resisting the commands cause physical discomfort and distress. As much as she fights against it, the curse always finds a way to remind her of limitations. Despite the curse placed upon her, Ella constantly finds loopholes in their request to avoid directly obeying them. By refusing to succumb to blindly follow orders, she seeks way to assert her own will and make choices that align with her values. One notable act of defiance occurs when Ella refused to wear traditional mourning attire upon her mother's death.

It was a terrible game I played, trying to break my curse, seeing how long I could last against the need to do what I had been told. There was a buzzing in my ears, and the floor seemed to tilt.. I stood and walked to my wardrobe. Immediately I felt perfectly fine (Levine, 1998: 12) .

As the quotation highlights, there is a constant battle for Ella to resist the orders. Despite ultimately succumbing to the adverse consequences of the curse, she exhibits steadfast resolve in pursuing her desires. She chooses to wear her late mother's vibrant green dress, which emphasizes her independent spirit and refusal to conform to social norms. Upon seeing her attire in green amidst a somber atmosphere where all the people garbed in black, her father reprimands her for not showing proper respect for her family and deceased mother. Thus, her small act of disobedience highlights her courageous attempt to break free from patriarchal control.

Ella's resistance to conform to social expectations is further highlighted by her reluctance to attend finishing school, an institution that traditionally prepares young girls for their gender roles as wives and mothers by instilling values such as obedience, kindness, and virtue. Through her journey to Ladies Academy Levine allows the reader to explore the limitations of traditional gender roles. Writer wants to highlight the pressure placed on women to adopt behaviors associated with being female.

However, Ella chooses to exist on the fringe of the traditional ideal of the female. She is put to the test as she attempts to navigate the hurdles of fitting social expectations. Upon her entrance at Ladies Academy, the stark contrast between her appearance and that of her peers is immediately apparent. It is clearly reflected from the mouth of Ella. "Each one wore a pink gown with a yellow hair ribbon. My gown was stained and wrinkled from the journey, and my hair was probably limp and unkempt" (Levine, 1998: 48). She could not help but feel out of place because she stands apart from her peers who are all dressed in cleaning aprons and meticulously groomed hair. One could probably remark that she did not fit the stereotypical image of a female based on the fact that her appearance lack polished and elegance. Ella's distinction from the other girls extends beyond her appearance, including her proficiency in sewing, dance and music.

Furthermore, the curse becomes an increasingly burdensome for her to bear as she grapples with the arduous task of social norms. Despite her persistent efforts, the spell hinders Ella to perform mundane tasks such as sewing and makes her life more challenging overall. It is evident during her lessons with the Mistress tasked with instructing the students proper ladylike behaviour. On one occasion, she accidentally pierced her hand with a needle as a result of her lack of attention. She is struggling to grasp technique of the intricate art of sewing. The Mistress demeans Ella's efforts comparing her stitches to "three teeth in a toothless gum" (Levine, 1998: 49). Mistress further demonstrates the extent of her frustration by relegating Ella to her room without supper. Ella also experienced persistent mockery from her classmates who effortlessly stitched gorgeous and intricate

designs. One of her friends cautions her about the traditional perception of roses: "Roses have to be red or pink, or yellow if you're daring" (Levine, 1998: 48). It seems that the author stresses what Ella's friend interprets as criticism is, in fact, her ability to surpass conventional artistic expectations. Levine highlights Ella's distinctiveness and exceptional qualities, contrasting her with the heroines of traditional fairy tales. In addition to her lack of inability in sewing, Ella also struggles with performing delicate and fluid movements required for feminine roles. During the dance rehearsals, Ella exerts a considerable effort to perform graceful movements. Her clumsiness and awkwardness and her lack of precision in dancing hinder her from matching the elegant demeanor of her peers. (p.54)

Levine challenges the prevailing idea that a woman's value is exclusively defined by her domestic tasks, thereby demonstrating her capacity to excel in a multitude of endeavours that transcend conventional gender roles. For example, Ella excels in other areas such as composition and ciphering. Her curiosity and passion for learning exotic language sets her from the other traditional girls who focus on traditional pursuits and interests. She takes great pleasure in mental challenge of decoding words she is not familiar with. Her dedication to practise Ogrese language despite the dreadful meaning of these words makes her stand out among the other girls. Furthermore, her bravery is exemplified through her efforts in combatting creatures during her quest to find fairy Lucinda and to reclaim her autonomy. As she makes her way to Uaaxe farm, she comes across ogres, bandits and ghouls, all of which tested her courage and resilience. She first comes across elves with their mossy hair and green skin. Ella feels grateful for their presence as they offer her food and shelter, which makes her feel safe. Compared to the tale of Hansel and Gretel who get lost in the forest and face the threat of being enslaved by a witch, Ella encounters friendly elves. Despite her small knowledge of Elfian, Ella rapidly manages to forge a common language with them through the use of gestures. Despite her limited knowledge, her resourcefulness and quick thinking help her navigate in an unfamiliar atmosphere. Thus, her ability to break barriers sets her apart from other girls who may have felt intimidated by the unfamiliar surroundings. Upon departing from the Elfs, Ella encounters ghouls in the wilderness. Just as Ella is about to make her way away, one of the ghouls recognises her unique skill and halts her with a command. In her attempt to break the spell and liberate herself from the clutches of the ghouls, Ella exerts her utmost effort as stated in the story.

Mimicking the ogres, I made my voice as persuasive as I could. "What is a spell?" I asked myself. "Only words. I can walk away from these ogres. I can do it. No magic can stop me... My voice had been persuasive; might not persuasion have other uses? Could I mimic the ogres? Could I speak with their persuasive power? (Levine, 1998: 75)

The above quotation demonstrates Ella's resourcefulness in deterring ogres. She ponders if she mimics ogres, she may be able to dissuade them. Thus, she starts to use her wit to convince the ghouls not to eat her. She cleverly points out that they have already feasted on eight fat ladies and eating her would make them even more sick (Levine, 1998: 76). She continues to persuade them, hoping to divert their attention long enough to slip away. Ella demonstrates remarkable courage and resourcefulness to outwit ghouls, thereby proving the power of intellect in combatting powerful foes. In the context of fairy tales, it is common for the main character to rely on external assistance and to employ magical artifacts to overcome challenges. Nevertheless, Ella defies this conventional narrative by defeating the ghouls solely through her unwavering faith in her own capabilities.

Despite successfully defeating ghouls, she acknowledges the transient nature of her triumph. There was the potential risk of the ghouls awakening and devouring Ella. As she ponders this, she witnesses Prince Char and his knights attempting to bind the slumbering creatures with sturdy ropes. Just then, the ghouls awaken and launch an assault on the knights. The prince demanded that Ella either tame ghouls or escape and defend herself from them (Levine, 1998: 79). In classic fairy tales, it is frequently the duty of a prince to rescue a princess from the clutches of the villain and to keep supernatural creatures under control. Here, the prince's plea to Ella shows his recognition of her unique abilities to handle the situation. This is a shift in power dynamic. Upon the request of the prince, she convinced the ogres to be tied and gagged in exchange for the feast they desire. (Levine, 1998: 79.) With her persuasive speaking, Ella gains their attention and slowly brings the ghouls back under control. At the end, one of the knights admits her ability. It is stated in the novel "With this maid's

help, we just caught eight ogres. Six knights never did that before" (Levine, 1998: 82). These sentences show the deep respect and admiration the prince has for Ella and her exceptional abilities in overcoming a challenge that even the knights could not achieve. Ella's triumph over the ghouls and her subsequent aid to Char and his knights serve as a testament to her courage and resilience.

In classic fairy tales, the narrative revolves around depicting female protagonists who are in need of a prince to liberate them from the mundane lives. On the other hand, Ella has intelligence allowing her to be free from the chains of social expectations. This is observed in her relationship with Prince Charmont, the kingdom's heir, commonly referred to as Char. He conveys an aura of sincerity and fairness, displaying insecurity about his social position. His empathetic attitude transforms their relationship into something more than a conventional fairy tale. Thus, Ella and prince Char's relationship serves as a noteworthy illustration that surpassed traditional gender roles and expectations. Their relationship challenges the notion that women should only seek partners for material gain. Ella's love for Char goes beyond social expectations as stated in the story:

I loved him equally well, or better. I loved his laugh, his handwriting, his steady gaze, his honorableness, his freckles, his appreciation of my jokes, his hands, his determination that I should know the worst of him. And, most of all, shameful though it might be, I loved his love for me. (Levine, 1998: 139)

Ella's feelings for Char go beyond superficial qualities, recognizing his unique traits and the way he treats her with affection. On the other side, Char finds Ella's remarks funny and values her sense of wit. Char is also open-minded and is fascinated by her unique ability to speak Gnomish. His appreciation for gender equality is a refreshing perspective in this story. In contrast to conventional fairy tales, which frequently depict women as simple-minded, Prince Char supports her exceptional attributes and intelligence. Thus, he questions the value of finishing school, believing that they are wasteful to nourish a girl's mind and could potentially diminish Ella's admirable qualities and intelligence. These lines effectively express his thoughts: "she has gone to finishing school, where I fear she will be made less admirable. What do they teach in such places? Sewing and curtsying? It is a great distance to go to learn such paltry tricks" (Levine, 1998: 63). His cynicism about the teaching of such institutions is indicative of a larger attack on the expectation society put on women at that time. His remarks imply that women should be valued for more than just sewing and curtsying. Their interaction goes beyond the typical prince and princess found in traditional fairy tales.

The female protagonists in modern fairy tales appear to encounter intricate predicaments that call into question the idea of a happily ever after. Such is the case for Ella who must assess the possible consequences of her decision as well as the potential hazards they may pose. Ella carefully weighs her decision, considering not only the effect of the curse on herself but also its potential consequences on others. She realizes that marrying Char would not spare her from the curse but rather amplify it. Realizing the potential consequences of her curse, she fears that her obedience could be exploited by individuals. Moreover, she could be a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands to reveal state secrets even being forced to harm Char (Levine, 1998: 139). Ella's decision-making process emphasizes her ability to recognize the wider implications of her actions, setting her apart from fairy tale heroes. Compared to other fairy tale protagonists who often act impulsively, Ella evaluates the consequences of her choices and takes matter into her own hands.

Additionally, Ella's decision to keep her curse a secret from Char sets her apart from the heroines typically found in traditional fairy tales. She fears that if she reveals her curse to Char, he probably takes extreme measures to protect her by isolating her from the world just like Rapunzel. She senses that being confined like Rapunzel would make her feel trapped and further limit her freedom. (Levine, 1998: 140). It challenges the notion that women are passive characters waiting to be rescued and instead empowers Ella to take control of her own destiny.

By skillfully incorporating elements from traditional fairy tales such as Cinderella, Levine creates a sense of familiarity for readers who are already familiar with classic fairy tales. In contrast to Cinderella who patiently endures the torment inflicted by her stepsister, Ella is portrayed as an individual who employs strategic thinking to overcome adversities imposed by her stepmother and stepsisters. In the novel, Ella's life turns upside down when his father married to a woman called

Olga. The cruelty exhibited by her stepmother and her own daughter, Hattie add an extra degree of difficulty to an already difficult situation in Ella's life. Ella's stepmother and her stepsisters treat Ella as if she were a maid in her own house is reminiscent of Cinderella's wicked stepmother and stepsister. Ella is working as a maid, and is subject to physically demanding task, resulting in injuries to her hands, knees, and arms. Ella believes that her step-family take pleasure in seeing her degradation. Additionally, Ella's stepsister, Hattie, constantly imposes strict rules on her and exploits her obedience to the curse. Instead of sobbing quietly in a corner, and passively succumbing to her stepsister's wishes, she constantly devises clever plans to outsmart her wicked stepsister. To illustrate, Ella uses library as her hideaway because no one suspects her presence there. She enjoys a temporary reprieve from Hattie's incessant requests. Her clever way of finding solace in the library shows her resourcefulness and wit to overcome obstacles. Ella also demonstrates her quick thinking and intelligence by finding a way to communicate with Char despite the impediments posed by her sister. By instructing Char to address the letters to Mandy, a servant in the house, Ella ensures that her stepsister remains unaware of the secret correspondence. Her clever tactic to receive letters through Mandy highlights her resourcefulness in resilience in overcoming obstacles, which challenges the passive role attributed to female characters in fairy tales.

The three-night festival extends an invitation to all youthful women of the country, precisely as in classic fairy tales. The underlying concept residing in this phenomenon is that one must conform to prescribed feminine characteristic in order to gain acceptance by society. Hence, the ball necessities for each young lady to adorn herself with an elegant gowns. However, it important to note that this part diverges from the typical fairy tales as Ella's intention to attend the party is solely driven by her desire to encounter Char. Compared to heroines in traditional tales captivating the prince with their physical appearance and magically acquired attires, she arrives at the ball in a modest yet elegant gown and wearing a mask. Ella's garments do not magically transform into opulent gowns. Her servant Mandy alters Ella's late mother's gown to fit the current fashion trends (Levine, 1998: 150). Rather than conforming to a preconceived mold, and striving for a luxurious appearance, Ella desires to be true to herself. The fact that Ella does not possess ostentatious garments and even a necklace to adorn herself does not bother her. Instead, Ella's sole desire is to be able to see Char, which sets her apart from the other girls in fairy tales who rely on their flashy attire and physical beauty to capture the prince's attention. It is clearly reflected in the novel: "I had no jewels. My throat was unfashionably bare. But it would have to do. I didn't have to be the most elegant creature at the ball; I only had to see Char" (Levine, 1998: 153). Thus, Ella achieved yet another triumph over her stepsister by attending three grand parties, skillfully concealing her true identity from other attendees.

In communities characterized by patriarchy, men hold positions of authority while women assume subordinate roles. The man's unilateral decision to marriage signifies his exercise of autonomy, reinforcing gender inequality. In traditional fairy tales, the balls are typically governed by social hierarchy and gender roles where the prince has the privilege of selecting his partner while princess is positioned as the passive recipient of the prince's choice. This power dynamic perpetuates the stereotype that women are objects to be won and pursued by men rather than active subjects in their lives. However, in refreshing twist, Ella subverts the expected gender roles by gracefully curtsying to the prince Char. At the ball, she reveals her assertiveness and boldness by approaching Char without taking off her disguise and curtsying him. Ella curtsied to Char as a sign of respect and Char replied by bowing as well, indicating a mutual respect and equality between them. This small act of courtesy demonstrates a reversal of gender roles and more modern dynamic between the characters. Thus, Ella's bold and confident nature breaks away gender stereotypes which are commonly depicted in traditional fairy tales.

Ella's ability to captivate Char during their dance, despite concealing her identity behind a mask, is another significant aspect. During their dance Ella sparks Char's curiosity by speaking with a heavy Kyrian Accent and vocalizing a verse from Areida's song. Their shared love for music goes beyond superficial attraction as it is stated in the novel: "Char joined me, singing softly. Near us, heads turned. Over all the others I was his choice!" (Levine, 1998: 157-58). This pivotal moment shows Ella's ability to transcend social expectations and highlight the notion that true love sees beyond physical appearances. Instead of relying on her beauty, Ella captivated Char with her genuine

personality. Thus, Levine challenges the traditional fairy story's message that a woman's value is solely determined by her external beauty.

Towards the end of the story, Levine creates a scene that recalls the story of Cinderella once again. Just like Cinderella, Ella hastily departs from the grand ball as the clock strikes midnight, leaving behind one of her glass slippers. On the other hand, in an unexpected turn of the events, Ella's stepsister takes off Ella's mask as she is leaving the ball, thus revealing her true identity. Furthermore, the prince Char's unconventional actions of directly visiting Ella's residence with the glass shoe belonging to Ella accompanied by his knights add humor and irony to the story. In the original tale, Cinderella's triumphant moment of wearing the shoe in fact symbolizes her acknowledgment of the prince's choice of her as his partner. Here, the writer does not desire for Ella to embody the passive characteristic of Cinderella devoid of her agency in selecting her life partner, accepting the predetermined path.

Now, Ella is happy to be with the prince but she also knows that the curse would never leave her. With a heavy heart, she declines the prince Char's proposal. She feels that she "had to obey wanted to marry him. I would destroy my love and my land. They were in danger... Char was too precious to hurt, too precious to lose, too precious to betray, too precious to marry, too precious to kill, too precious to obey" (Levine, 1998: p.171). This quotation perfectly captures the internal conflict she experienced between her love for Char and her sense of duty. While oscillating in her seat, Ella reiterated these words: "Marry him, I won't" (Levine, 1998: 171). The battle against the curse for Ella begins right now. By boldly proclaiming her refusal of the prince's proposal, she asserts her independence. With her refusal, the weight she felt is finally lifted.

Could my refusal mean the spell was broken? Could it? I took stock of myself. I did feel different: I had been able to break the curse myself. I'd had to have reason enough, love enough to do it, to find the will and the strength... Now it was over. Ended forever. I was made anew. Ella. Just Ella... Not Ella, Not a scullery maid. Ella (Levine, 1998: 173).

According to the quotation, one can understand that Ella feels relief and liberated from the weight that was put on her. The weight she feels potentially symbolizes the duties and expectations placed on her by society. This act of defiance is the start of her path to freedom and independence. This aligns with Cixous's laugh of Medusa who represents rebellion against social norms. Trites emphasizes it in the following quotation.

Cixous metaphor for laughing Medusa symbolizes the triumph of a woman who can laugh at and thus subvert the existing order...She does not simply grow she grows in power. No longer the passive "good girl" who grows into a prescribed and circumscribed social role...Her awakening is not bestowed on her by a male awakener; instead, she wakes herself and discovers herself to be a strong, independent and articulate person. (Trites, 1997: 7-8)

As the quotation states, by using laughter Medusa subverts the existing order and expectations placed on women. This laughter symbolizes the triumph of a woman who awakens and finds strength and agency within herself. Trites also emphasizes that Medusa's awakening is not dependent on a male but rather on her self-discovery and realization of her voice. Just like Medusa, Ella subverts the existing order by breaking the curse and taking matters into her own hands. Finally, Ella's marriage to prince Char and their happy ending are not attributed to the prince's efforts but rather stemmed from her own agency and determination.

Conclusion

In this fairy tale, Levine recounts the tale of a young girl who successfully liberates herself from the enchantment she was doomed through her own endeavours. Over the course of the story, Ella is subject to a number of trials requiring her to make her own choice and take charge of her own future. Rather than waiting for a prince to save her or relying on magical solutions, she uses her determination and resilience to free herself from the curse. She constantly seeks out ways to subtly break the rules imposed on her. As she achieves small victories throughout the narrative, Ella's confidence grows, enabling her to liberate herself from the enchantment that has been controlling her life. This newfound independence allows her to unearth strength to lay within her and as a result, she ends up being the protagonist of her own story.

In *Ella Enchanted*, the familiar elements of Cinderella's story take on a new direction under the skillful pen of Levine. This tale is reimagined in a number of ways such as the modern portrayal of the prince, the princess's challenges with her stepsisters and the prince and princess's more modern dynamic relationship while at the ball. By interweaving elements from classic fairy tales with Ella's narrative, Levine encourages readers to consider alternative perspectives. The fundamental distinction that sets apart Ella's story from the other fairy tales lies in her firm belief in her abilities and her embodiment of a resolute warrior. Her relentless determination to break the spell without any assistance or reliance on a prince illuminates her defiance against social gender and conventional expectations imposed on women by society. In other words, in the classical *Sleeping Beauty* tale, the princess is liberated from the curse by a prince's magical kiss, in contrast, Ella breaks free from the curse and awakens solely through her own persistence and resourcefulness. This awakening helps Ella discover herself and grow into a self-assured individual who is able to control her destiny.

In the final section of the story, the author subverts many deeply ingrained beliefs in traditional fairy tales. Levine criticizes a society that restricts women's autonomy and enforces the notion that marriage is the sole path for their fulfillment. This aspect highlights the importance of challenging established norms as exemplified by Ella's act of defiantly shouting "no" in the final part of the novel. Just like Medusa's fearless laugh, Ella's breaking of the curse conveys a profound message of emancipation and freedom for everyone. Ella's tale encourages individuals to shape their own fate and surmount the challenges they encounter along their life journey.

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