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Dilshad M. Quraishi

Research Scholar , English Literature

GLS University

Ahmedabad, Gujarat,India.

qureshidilshad@gmail.com

Debunking the Myth of Prince in *Ella Enchanted*

Abstract:

This paper will highlight the character of Prince Charmont from the novel *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine in the light of Anti Cinderella features of the Prince. The novel *Ella Enchanted* is a re-writing of Cinderella story with some realistic aspects of a fairy tale. Yes. This is strange to seek realistic aspects in fairy tale. No surprise that this novel has strengthened the female characters by removing them from the trope of “Damsel in Distress”. While strengthening the female figures, Gail Carson Levine has not demeaned the male protagonist- Prince Charmont which is represented in this paper.

Introduction:

Ella Enchanted is a novel written by Gail Carson Levine, published in the year 1997 which has been regarded as a “1998 Best Books for Young Adults, Notable Children’s Book of 1998 and 1998 Quick Picks for Young Adult” by ALA on publication details page of the novel. (Levine) The background of the novel is a Cinderella story which has created a dispute among the critics about the total number of Cinderella versions throughout the world. But Gail Carson Levine has drawn her novel on Charles Perrault’s *The Little Glass Slipper* with embellishment of pumpkin, rats and lizards turning into coach, coachman, horses and footmen subsequently.

The Role of Prince in Perrault's Cinderella- *The Little Glass Slipper* :

Cinderella is a story of the girl's oppression by her step mother and step sisters after the death of her mother. Cinderella in various versions does have the support of fairy Godmother or some other supernatural power. In all of these versions, Cinderella does not seek her fairy Godmother or other super natural power to eliminate her servitude. Instead she requests her step-mother and step-sisters to take her along with them to a stupid party which is to attend by her step family. In Perrault's version, Cinderella's fairy godmother provides her dresses and jewels for the party and transforms mice, lizards and rats into a nice golden coach with a coachman and footmen. At the party, she meets her Prince who chooses her to dance with him. The Prince has done nothing but looks at her all the time at the ball because he falls in love with the beautiful person who has owned the glass slipper. Then Cinderella loses her one glass slipper while hurrying to leave from the party as she has been warned to come before midnight or the things provided by a fairy will come back to its original form. The Prince announces to marry a girl to whom this glass slipper fits in. Later on the Prince arranges a test to check to whom the slipper fits in order to find the girl whom he has met at the ball. When comes Cinderella's turn, the glass slipper perfectly fits in her foot. Finally, prince has found his princess and thus Cinderella frees herself with marrying of a prince or male counterpart.

Neither Cinderella nor Prince puts any effort to free Cinderella from her misery. Cinderella is objectified because the prince gives due importance to the slipper than the person whom it belongs, "the king's son had it proclaimed, by sound of trumpet, that he would marry her whose foot this slipper would just fit" (Perrault). It would be rather fair to say that a magical glass slipper might have performed its magic or have done something

which human and non-human beings in the tale can't i.e. a slipper has made Cinderella free. Prince has done nothing yet he has been awarded with Cinderella as his bride because he just uses his authority to pick the best bride for him. And for Cinderella also that is the only key to open the lock of slavery from her step family i.e. to marry a prince. That is the role of a prince performed by him to rescue his princess in Perrault's tale.

Debunking the myths of Prince by Prince Charmont in *Ella Enchanted*:

When Gail Carson Levine read Cinderella story, she did not like it at all as she was stuck in with the thought why Cinderella was too much good and did whatever was told her to do. Therefore, Levine has taken the concept of obedience from Cinderella tale to which she has converted into a curse.

Ella Enchanted is more than just a quirky homage to the many versions of the Cinderella story that has permeated popular culture for centuries. It is a complete overhaul of an antiquated tale for modern audiences, that sticks its tongue out at the outdated philosophies through its loose handling of gender roles and overturning of stereotypes (*Ella Enchanted: female independence in literature*).

To overthrow the light on the re-writing of Cinderella tale by Gail Carson Levine, one would be enchanted to know the story of *Ella Enchanted*. The leading character Eleanor or Ella is bestowed with the gift of obedience by a fairy Lucinda on her day of birth. As a result of this gift, Ella has to obey direct order given to her by anyone without any choice. As Ella says: "If someone told me to hop on one foot for a day and a half, I'd have to do it...If you command me to cut off my own head, I'd have to do it. I was in danger at every moment" (Levine Ch.1). The whole novel revolves around Ella's quest for freedom from gift of obedience. Ella has to become victim at the hands of her step family who gives her orders and leads her into servitude after the death of Ella's mother. Ella's support is Mandy- their cook

and Prince Charmont also called Char who befriends Ella and gradually their friendship converts into love which leads to mutual respect for each other. When fairy Lucinda rejects to take back her gift of obedience from Ella; it is Ella's love for Char who makes her free from the curse at the end when she rejects Char's proposal for marriage in order to save him. It is Ella herself who saves herself as well as Char and while doing so she has rejected the stereotype of princesses to be rescued by princes. While making Ella a strong figure, Gail Carson Levine has not portrayed Char-a weak character. Levine has maintained male-female potential and equity of gender roles by treating Ella and Char equal and giving both of them their choices to do whatever they like instead of imposing on them defined gender stereotypes.

The Prince of the modern fairy tale *Ella Enchanted* is heir to the throne of Kyrria, who is two years older than Ella and has a royal bearing like his father's. Like the king, he has tawny curls and swarthy skin—with a sprinkling of freckles across his nose that Ella finds it surprising on such a dark face. Char is Ella's best friend. The very first trait of Prince Char is that he is sensitive and sympathetic which trait is usually not attributed to so-called macho hero of traditional fairy tales. The sympathy and sensitivity is not the only tag of damsel in distress rather a strong and balanced portrayal of a male character may also express it. To express sympathy by shedding tears does not make one weak but it allows one to express his/her feelings freely without being under the constraints of gender stereotypes. Thus, on the first meeting at the funeral of Ella's mother, Char follows Ella to graveyard to weep with her and consoles her.

Sympathy and sensitivity of Char does not overshadow the quality of his bravery. Char rescues Ella from the grip of beastly ogres with the help of six knights on her journey towards Uaaxee's farm to find Lucinda. Char also praises Ella's courage when she helps to catch ogres by taming them and her decision to travel alone would be criticized by one of the

knights of Char in the following words: “It’s fortunate that all the maidens in Kyrria do not decide to travel by themselves. We have work enough without having to rescue them” (Levine Ch.15). It is Char who thinks that girl may also protect themselves and Ella need not to be rescued. He appreciates Ellaby saying: “If all the maids in Kyrria could tame ogres...we would have much less to do” (Levine Ch.15).

Thus, Char is not prejudiced on gender roles. He is adventurous and he does not mind her heroine to be adventurous. Ella and Char both slide down from the banister on the occasion of Ella’s father’s marriage to Dame Olga at an old castle. As for a boy to slide down from a staircase may be regarded as adventurous but for a girl this would be seen unusual. It is with Char, Ella feels herself free even being under a horrible curse of obedience. They together fight with ogres, they together venture to find the corridors at an old castle and find glass slipper. Char does not believe that a girl should be proper and prim. Therefore, Char does not appreciate when he finds that Ella has been sent away to finishing school to learn sewing, knitting, singing, dancing and manners; instead learning these sort of things are considered as paltry tricks by Char. Thus, Char does respect the feelings and wishes of woman due to which Ella rejects the tag of Princess after marrying the prince and adopts the titles of Court Linguist and Cook’s Helper at the end of the novel.

It may be true that strong female characters would create a feminist text but while doing so these texts might represent male characters inferior to empower women over men. *Ella Enchanted* is a novel where one finds strong female character with strong, sensitive and sympathetic male character. Both male and female characters have blurred the line of gender stereotypical roles. When Ella fights with beastly ogres, flees alone from finishing school to venture her journey to find her fairy Lucinda, takes revenge from those who have exploited her by giving bizarre orders; Char also ventures in fighting with ogres, shedding tears to

express his feelings, does not appreciate her princess to be ladylike and encourages her to follow her free will and so on.

Char is a prince who has overthrown the concept of romantic love rather their love develops gradually. Char has not picked up his princess due to his power and position. Instead Char gives Ella her choice to choose her companion. It is their love which makes Ella free from the curse of obedience when Ella refuses Char for marriage in order to save him as she fears that she might be used by Char's enemy against Char because of her curse of obedience. It is Char's inner personality, true love and respect for Ella makes Ella to kneel down and ask for his hand for marriage but Char has not let Ella kneel before him. He pulls her up. Char has really proved his statement that "Love should not be dictated" (Levine ch.21). He has not imposed any sort of duty over Ella rather Char always appreciates Ella's free will.

It might be regarded that a strong female character may create a feminist text but while doing so such a text demean opposite gender by not allowing it that much potential to display in a text. *Ella Enchanted* has established the gender equilibrium on the grounds of modern fairy tales; better to say it a human tale.

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