

“Be the One that Rescues You”: Contexts for the Construction of Agency in Kenneth Branagh’s “Cinderella”

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Abstract: Disney’s 1950 animated feature ‘Cinderella’ remains one of the studio’s most successful properties. So widespread is its popularity that students are often surprised to learn that the narrative is not original, but an adaptation of Basile’s ‘La Gatta Cenerentola’ (1634), Perrault’s ‘Cendrillon’ (1697), ‘Aschenputtel’ by the Brothers Grimm (1812) and other source texts, although as Ohmer (1993) points out, only Perrault is credited. Alarm at the significance of this cultural amnesia is a major factor in Zipes’s frequent railing against Disney’s appropriation of traditional fairy tales (1979-2016). Bacchilega (2013), however, argues that rather than focus on what is absent from Disney’s texts, it would be more constructive to unpack the cultural values embedded in contemporary adaptations. This article therefore explores some of the contexts for understanding the most recent of Disney’s adaptations of the Cinderella story in Kenneth Branagh’s 2015 live-action film by comparing its construction of agency with that of the 1950 text.

Keywords: Cinderella, Disney, adaptation, Branagh, Perrault, Zipes, Bacchilega

While scholars agree that ‘Cinderella’ is the most widely known and best loved of all fairy tales, the difference between the number of variant written texts they estimate is astonishing. Saxby (1979) mentions the figure 600, De Vos and Altmann (1999) ‘more than 700’, and Heiner (2012) says there are ‘well over 1000 with a conservative estimate of over twice that...recorded.’ The range itself – particularly that cited by Heiner – is instructive. How few of the tropes can be present for a narrative to be recognised as a variant of ‘Cinderella’? Limiting his estimate to the medium of film, Zipes (2016, 361) agrees that ‘Cinderella’ is the most popular of fairy tales and refers to ‘over 130’ film adaptations. How broadly he interprets ‘film’ is not clear, but the ‘over’ presumably suggests that the number would increase significantly if it included short television and internet parodies and narratives where Cinderella tropes were present but not explicit, for example in ‘reality’ television shows such as ‘The Bachelor’ and ‘Married at First Sight’. Why, then, would Walt Disney

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Studios add to this extensive field yet another major adaptation in the live-action ‘Cinderella’ (2015) directed by Kenneth Branagh?

Disney’s first Cinderella adaptation was released in 1922 (Zipes 2016, 367), its 1950 ‘Cinderella’ endures as one of the studio’s most successful animation properties ever – second only to the recent exhaustively merchandised ‘Frozen’ – and the direct-to-DVD sequels ‘Cinderella II: Dreams Come True’ (2002) and ‘Cinderella III: A Twist in Time’ (2007) attempted to repeat the iconic status of the 1950 film. In the context, furthermore, of ‘Ever After: A Cinderella Story’, a successful 1998 adaptation produced by Flower Films/ 20th Century Fox, and Disney’s ‘Enchanted’ (2007) and ‘Into the Woods’ (2014), the extensive marketing of Branagh’s ‘Cinderella’ seems surprising. Hutcheon’s argument (2006) that an adaptation confirms rather than deletes a source text is one response. Although both ‘Enchanted’ and ‘Into the Woods’ are parodies, they celebrate and confirm Disney’s apparent ‘ownership’ of the Cinderella story, but the main reason is frankly commercial. As *New York Times* reviewer Manohla Dargis puts it, ‘there’s gold in those glass slippers no matter how many miles they have on them’ (*NYT* 12/3/15). Worldwide earnings of over \$543 million by Branagh’s adaptation on a budget of \$95 million (boxofficemojo.com 19/9/16) support her assertion.

Zipes’s brief and perhaps ill-judged attempt to include Branagh’s ‘Cinderella’ in his most recent publication as a ‘pathetic unoriginal adaptation of a film that was already a trivial somewhat sexist interpretation of Perrault’s fairy tale’ (2016, 388) restates his argument in a series of articles on Disney’s misappropriation of classic fairy tale source texts. And he is not alone in his alarm at one generation, maybe two generations, of students who are shocked to discover that ‘Snow White’, ‘Sleeping Beauty’ and ‘Cinderella’ existed long before Disney got hold of them. While acknowledging the valuable contribution Zipes has made to fairy tale scholarship, Bacchilega explains the limitation in the binary assumptions of his argument, which ‘arise at least in part from his strong sympathy for the needs of the socially oppressed’ (1997, Kindle loc. 163). Stam (2000) argues that an evaluation of fidelity in films that are based on long form fiction is often moralistic in the terminology used and inevitably leads to a deficit position in adaptation scholarship. From such a position, the adaptation will never be as acceptable as its source text. Applying this argument to Disney specifically, Bacchilega (2013) says that rather than rail against Disney’s lack of fidelity to the European source tales, it would be more illuminating to focus on the studio’s role in the production and consumption

of cultural mythology. Considered from that perspective, the construction of agency makes Branagh's 'Cinderella' a far more complex and interesting text.

The application of the fidelity criterion to one of the traditional fairy tales by Perrault, the Brothers Grimm or Andersen is in any case different from its use in describing or evaluating the adaptation of a novel. Adapting a fairy tale that may be just a few pages long into two hours of film requires extensive invention and addition to the narrative, rather than the omission of existing and familiar narrative content that is necessary in adapting long form fiction, so fidelity in fairy tale adaptation is a questionable objective.

Right from the opening titles and credits, Disney's 1950 animated 'Cinderella' both gestures towards tradition and ignores it. The titles, superimposed on a background of generic European folk embroidery, attempt to establish continuity with classical source texts, and contrast sharply with the primary colours and hard edges of mid-century modernist design, while the choral soundtrack begins with lyrics that seem totally unaware of the reason the protagonist was named 'Cinderella' in the first place:

Cinderella, you're as lovely as your name.
Cinderella, you're a sunset in a frame.
Though you're dressed in rags, you wear an air of queenly grace.
Anyone can see a throne would be your proper place.

Cinderella, if you give your heart a chance
It will lead you to the kingdom of romance.
There you'll see your dreams unfold.
Cinderella, Cinderella, in the sweetest story ever told.

The name 'Cinderella' is thrown in the face of the one legitimate female resident of the family home as an insult, just as the lentils are tossed into the ashes for her to sieve through before she is permitted to go to the ball. Far more than any reference to the Grimms or even Disney's main source text, Perrault, the vision in the 1950 title song is of the transcendence of domestic drudgery by the suburban woman, aided by electrical appliances and post-war 'modern conveniences'. It is consonant with mid-century television advertising. Like Snow White, Cinderella is edged towards adulthood by Disney to make more acceptable the romance theme - which Snyder (2005) argues is always the B-plot in Hollywood movies, even when the A-plot is not ostensibly romance, as it is here. Hoerner (1996) points out that

Disney films contain more adults than children. Only 10% of the films' characters are children (newborn to age 12); 5% are adolescents (ages 13-18); 28% are adults (ages 19-50), and 7% are seniors (over 50 years of age). However, half of Disney's film characters have indeterminable ages. (HOERNER 1996, 219)

The implied inscription of the adult segment of the 1950s cinema audience helps to explain the second framing device in the 1950 ‘Cinderella’, which was to become a signature trope in Disney film adaptations, as it was in the long-running television program, ‘Disneyland’/ ‘The Wonderful World of Disney’: the once-upon-a-time opening of a book cover and the turning of its pages. Bacchilega reads this as an infantilising device (2013, Kindle loc. 1620). In the context of adult concerns over the effect that the new medium of television would have on children’s reading in the 1950s, however, the storybook image with its tooled leather cover and pages of loosely sketched watercolour illustrations, represents continuity. The subtext was that adults had no need to fear that filmed or televised adaptations of fairy tales would compromise literacy, and an added reassurance was the warmth of the storytelling voiceover by Betty Lou Gerson:

Cinderella was abused, humiliated, and finally forced to become a servant in her own home. And yet, through it all, Cinderella remained ever gentle and kind, for with each dawn she found new hope that someday her dreams of happiness would come true.

The lack of agency in the narrator’s words here reinscribes the blame implied in the lyrics of the opening theme song: Cinderella’s relief from suffering is contingent, not upon the removal of her abusers, or the restoration of justice, but on her willingness – or otherwise – to ‘give her heart a chance’. As in the second of the three signature songs from the 1950 ‘Cinderella’, ‘A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes’, hope is the only substitute for agency that the protagonist is offered.

A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you’re fast asleep.
In dreams you will lose your heartache.
Whatever you wish for you keep.

The consolation for lack of change in your physical circumstances is minimal: you get to keep your dreams. Two bluebirds draw back the theatrical curtains on an upstairs window and reveal Cinderella in bed asleep. Although they are clearly the greeting-card ‘bluebirds of happiness’, they have a strange lineage in the Cinderella narrative. The dove that advises Zezolla in Basile’s 17th century Italian source tale and embodies the spirit of her dead mother is the precursor of the doves in the hazel tree on the grave of Ashputtel’s mother in the story by the Brothers Grimm. They act as a chorus, repeatedly exposing the stepsisters’ deceit and

finally pecking out their eyes and blinding them at Ashputtel's wedding. Here, they pester Cinderella until she wakes, and stands by her bed with the window behind her.

Although initially not identified in this scene, the castle visible through Cinderella's window is later revealed as the place where the Prince lives. So it is both an object of the narrative and a daily taunt and reminder of Cinderella's low status. Inspired by the Romantic Revival excess of King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein in Bavaria, the image has become known as 'Sleeping Beauty's Castle', the centrepiece of Disney's Magic Kingdom theme parks and the logo of Walt Disney Studios. In what becomes the familiar metalanguage of Disney fairy tale adaptations, Cinderella's dreams – which are all she is guaranteed to keep – are therefore identified with the producer of this fiction, Walt Disney Studios. Along with the mice, the two birds create Cinderella's dress and help the Fairy Godmother with her makeover. The focused activity of the birds, and the more comically chaotic though purposeful activity of the mice highlight Cinderella's limited agency. Again, the mice are part of the metalanguage of the narrative. Why mice? 'Steamboat Willie' (1928) and the 'Silly Symphony' series of short animated films from the 1920s on establish animals, music and sight gags as key ingredients of Disney's success, and Mickey Mouse becomes the studio's mascot, so the appearance of mice in the full length animated features creates content, but also brands the narrative.

The opening sequence in the 1950 adaptation takes a long time to get to any plot that readers of Perrault or Grimm would recognise, but it functions to establish Cinderella's connection with the natural environment, although most of the scenes are set indoors. As the birds and mice help Cinderella make the bed and do the housework, it reprises the emphasis on collaboration inscribed in the post-Depression feature 'Snow White' (1937), with its signature songs 'Whistle While You Work' and 'Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, It's off to work we go'. Ohmer (1993, 235) argues that the emphasis on hard work, patience and fortitude – delayed gratification – is consonant with the values in previous Disney animations. The effect of the drama and the comedy invented for the mice, however, is to make Cinderella seem sweet but dull by comparison. For Wood (1996: 40) the antics of the mice 'possess the libidinal energy that the Cinderella plot lacks'. Intriguingly, Wood's contrasting of the energy in the male-male relationships lends unintentional support to the popular post-'Frozen' contention that most of Disney's animated features have an LGBTI subtext (TheAtlantic.com 23 April, 2014) and are not really about heteronormative sexuality at all. Wood's main point, however, is that fairy tales traditionally endorse patriarchal values. In its exposition of dreams and fulfillment, the dream of the 1950 'Cinderella'

promises that those women who follow the rules by being self-contained and submissive to a patriarchal order will be rewarded. At the same time, the movie also offers in contrast more visceral, anarchic pleasures, pleasures associated with the two male couples (the mice, Jaq and Gus; and the king and grand duke): loss of self-control and the gratification of explosion and eruption. (WOOD 1996, 27)

The choice of live-action rather than animation as the medium for Branagh's 2015 adaptation determines many of the differences between it and the 1950 film, but Cinderella's agency is not one of them, although it might have been anticipated, given the capacity of animation to make the protagonist undertake physical feats that even with CGI technology can appear unconvincing in live-action. The impact of physical limitations on agency is minor, compared with the impact of psycho-social limitations. Branagh's opening titles point to both confirmation of the 1950 'Cinderella' and a departure from it. From a 21st century perspective, the very dated quality of the animated film almost confers on it the kind of textual authority that, for an older generation, pre-Disney adaptations have. The theme song 'When You Wish Upon a Star' is drawn not from 'Cinderella', but from Disney's 1940 adaptation of 'Pinocchio', where it is sung over the opening and closing credits by the character Jiminy Cricket. It became the theme song of Disney's weekly television show in the 1950s, although if the reference is picked up by anyone apart from those interested in Disney Studios history, it is only likely to be the grandparents of the young members of Branagh's audience. So its inclusion functions mainly for Disney to reprise its own fairy tale history and a tradition of serial adaptation that can be constructed as ownership.

Two CGI bluebirds fly out of Sleeping Beauty's 2015 castle in the Walt Disney logo and into a lush, sunny meadow, where the baby who we are told is named 'Ella' and her mother and father are lolling in the kind of tableau found in a French Impressionist painting. There is no Magic Kingdom castle in the distance of this live-action scene, and if anything the turreted gothic brick McMansion in the mid-ground looks like a pretentious suburban attempt at a castle. This is where Ella and her parents live. The distinctive voiceover of Helena Bonham-Carter as the storyteller tells us that Ella 'isn't a princess – but she is to her parents' and that 'Sorrow can come to any family – no matter how happy. And so it came to Ella's home'. Set against a house that recalls the proverbial saying 'An Englishman's home is his castle', the scene signifies the wealth that is never explicit in the 1950 animated feature, and shifts power away from monarchy to the middle class family, although the real centre of

power – Walt Disney Studios – remains subliminal. All that wealth, however, is not enough to protect the 21st century family from tragedy. Cinderella's father dies in the opening narration of the 1950 film, so there's very little of his backstory offered, whereas the choice of live-action for the 2015 film has clearly obliged both the writer and director to infill with explanation that is absent in other adaptations. Here, as well as justifying the father's constant absence on business, which Ella will complain about once we see her as a teenager, the pretentiousness of this huge family home for a man, a woman and their young daughter establishes the existence of sufficient wealth for the stepmother to squander.

In using the Fairy Godmother, played by Helena Bonham-Carter, as narrator, Branagh follows not the 1950 film but 'Cinderella II: Dreams Come True', in which the metafictional opening is almost the only interesting aspect of the text. In the opening sequence of that film, just as the Fairy Godmother comes to 'The End' of reading Cinderella's story, the mice Jac and Gus arrive too late, and ask her to read another Cinderella story. She says, 'I'm sorry, Gus, but that's the only Cinderella story there is.' Not to be deterred, the mice decide that *they* can be the ones to write a new story. The self-deprecating idea of any sequel being written by mice, rather than 'men', valorises the traditional tale, but the Fairy Godmother says that if she waves her magic wand, she's sure she can help to make a new Cinderella – not 'story', but 'book'. The mice decide that the book will be about Cinderella's first day in the castle, and the camera again self-referentially lingers on a shot of Sleeping Beauty's castle. The narrative, then, will be about Cinderella's first day as the queen of Walt Disney Studios – which, as implied earlier, she remained until her position was usurped by the snow queen Elsa and her sister Anna in 'Frozen' (2013).

Significantly, Bonham-Carter's storytelling voiceover is delivered not in character as the Fairy Godmother, but as the actor herself. Whereas the Fairy Godmother in the 1950 film is old, cuddly and a bit forgetful, in the 2015 film she is young and glamorous, but wacky and repeatedly surprised by her own power. This sense of surprise is a displacement of the live-action Cinderella's slow growth towards acknowledging her own power – which is given her as a mantra by her dying mother: 'Have courage, and be kind.' Jorgensen (2007) points out that fairy godmothers are rare in oral folktale, and that Disney's 'Cinderella' is the main reason that readers think otherwise. The 2015 Fairy Godmother's first appearance, however, is as an old woman in rags with bad teeth and in need of a bath, whom Cinderella encounters when she goes out into the garden in tears at being denied a final chance to go to the ball. No

doubt this old woman is living large. When Ella offers her a bowl of milk, her kindness echoes the Christian parable of the sheep and the goats:

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (MATTHEW 25: 34-40)

The text stays just this side of the ‘milk of human kindness’ cliché. CGI imagery enables the comic and spectacular transformation of the pumpkin, mice and lizards, but Ella’s kindness is the real magic being posited here. Her agency consists first in being kind to others, as her mother begged her to be. We see Ella ride off desperately into the forest, where she is confronted by a stag. Hearing the hunters’ horns in pursuit, she warns the stag of its impending death and saves its life. The unintended benefit to her is that she meets a handsome man called Kit, who has ridden away from the hunting party and tells her that he is an apprentice, though he doesn’t mention that he is an apprentice to his father the king. The audience recognises, though Ella doesn’t, that this is the Prince.

Ella’s second major act of kindness goes horribly wrong. When her stepmother expresses concern that the two stepsisters have to share a room and are always fighting, Ella volunteers to give up her larger room, and is about to add ‘in exchange’ when her stepmother finishes the sentence for her and says how wonderful it is that she is willing to live in the attic. The attic becomes her prison, from which she is only released by the help of the mice and finally by her own beautiful singing, which the courtiers hear floating over the suburban ‘castle’ when they think they have tried the glass slipper on the last remaining woman in the household. Whereas Cinderella’s singing in the 1950 film models a co-operative attitude to domestic work, here in 2015 Ella’s singing is a spontaneous expression of her ineffable goodness. The emphasis on self-help in Branagh’s ‘Cinderella’ derives from the social agenda set by US daytime television talk shows, principally by Oprah Winfrey, and the assumption –

as in the 1950 film – is essentialist. You will eventually express your inner goodness, even if by hard workshopping rather than physical labour, and it will be acknowledged.

To a greater extent, however, the impulse to explain, which is determined here by the live-action medium, constructs a limited dialogic exploration of goodness. Although Ella's mother is never anything but good, and although Ella's momentary irritation with her father for his constant absence has the potential to interrogate his goodness, it remains intact with his death. But the traditional evil of her stepmother Lady Tremaine is contested to some extent, as played here by Cate Blanchett. When she arrives at Ella's brick castle, we see only her elaborately tooled boots as she alights from the carriage, and then a rear shot of her enormous black hat and green brocade gown as she enters the house. Younger and more beautiful than the witchlike 1950 stepmother, she justifies in every movement the narrator's comment that 'She, too, had known grief. But she wore it - *wonderfully* well.' Dressed for most of the film in unconventional shades of green, signifying envy, this is Cate Blanchett, award-winning actor who has become a fashion icon, but to some extent a (however willing) prisoner of Hollywood's red carpet. When Ella asks her father whether he misses her mother, he tells her that he misses her every day and that her spirit still lives on in this house. Through a glass door, Lady Tremaine sees them talking and as she listens in to their conversation, we are shown a moment of fear in Blanchett's expression. This fear is expressed later in a loud cry of desperation, when it is announced that Ella's father has died. To the stepsisters this merely means they won't be getting the trivial gifts they have asked him to bring back from France, but Lady Tremaine silences them with the cry, 'Can't you see that none of that matters? We're ruined!' As a woman totally dependent on her husband's finances, the only future she can envisage is another marriage – and there has not been even a hint of pleasure in this one. Her wild partying and gambling stop, along with her sexualised laughter, and she embraces fully the epithet that is inextricably yoked to the word stepmother: 'wicked'. She fires the household staff, even those who have been with Ella all her life, and schemes to get one of her daughters married to the prince. This is self-help, but not the kind promoted to American women by the daytime talk shows.

Bacchilega (2013) demonstrates the multilayered dialogic interrogation of the individual vs capitalist society in fairy tale adaptations, and the 2015 text goes to complicated lengths to explain capital's need for alliances. Just as there is never any hint of romance between Lady Tremaine and Ella's father, if not constructed as a charitable act their marriage is the father's attempt to provide proxy parenting for Ella, given his constant absence at work.

The narrator refers to the far-flung places where he travels to do business as Ella's 'kingdom'. The implication is that it is Ella's *fault* that he is away so frequently. She controls her father's destiny. His absence is due to her very existence, and her need for financial support.

Whereas at the ball in the 1950 animated 'Cinderella' the identity of the prince's mysterious partner is kept secret because they waltz in the shadows away from the dance floor, in the 2015 film *Lady Tremaine* begins to suspect that Ella is the object of his quest. Live action interrogates the credibility of her traditional failure to recognise her stepdaughter's transformation and when Ella goes up to the attic to retrieve her one remaining glass slipper, she is alarmed to find that it is missing. Then out from the shadows steps Lady Tremaine. She wants to know the story behind the slipper and when Ella is silent, she tells her a story in the third person: a fairy tale within a tale. A beautiful young girl marries for love, but her husband dies, so she marries for the security of her children, but that husband too is 'taken from her'. She has to live with a stepdaughter who worships the woman her husband was still in love with, and so she 'lived unhappily ever after.' It is of course, Lady Tremaine's own story of being deprived of agency. She confronts Ella with her knowledge that she is the mystery partner. She shatters the shoe, an act reminiscent of a prelude to the ugly violent 20th century crime of 'glassing' – the drunken smashing of a bottle and the using of it to attack the victim's face. But instead of attacking her physically, Lady Tremaine demands power for herself in the impending royal household, and marriages for her daughters. When Ella says no, the word seems unfamiliar to her stepmother. This is the point at which Ella asserts her own power, significantly against another woman. Until now, any minor testing of her power has been tried on the males in her life, who include the hunted stag.

'I was not able to protect my father from you, but I will protect the prince
– and the kingdom.'

When Ella asks Lady Tremaine why she is so 'cruel', reinscribing her powerlessness with such a childlike word, her stepmother says, 'Why? Because you are young and good and innocent, and I -' There is no need for her to finish the sentence, but she compromises most of the sympathy she may have momentarily won from the audience when she then blackmails the Grand Duke – not because he is an object of sympathy, but because her actions challenge the feminine stereotype of kindness that the narrative establishes through Ella herself and her saintly mother. He has been positioning the prince, now the king, to marry the glamorous

Princess Chelina of Zaragosa for political reasons. The kingdom is small and insecure – read ‘feminine’ – and needs a strong alliance. The subsequent success of the Brexit campaign in 2016 and the buyers’ remorse that followed its success is a fascinating subtext to the kingdom’s need for political stability. When Ella and the prince decide to marry, Ella forgives her stepmother, although once the marriage takes place the Grand Duke, Lady Tremaine and her daughters are banished from the kingdom and never seen again. Ella is the one who leads her husband out onto the palace balcony to greet the crowd below. Just before they do, as they gaze at one another, he says, ‘My queen’ but she answers, ‘My Kit.’ Although it is his name and resonates with the many Elizabethan and Shakespearean associations of Branagh’s career in theatre and film, ‘kit’ is also a British colloquial term for clothing or gear, so this husband and his trappings of wealth and office are merely Ella’s external signifiers; the essential woman is underneath.

As the camera follows the couple, it is impossible to resist the connection between the image of the circular fountain, around which the crowd below is gathered, and the iconic Victoria Memorial, centrepiece of so many crowd scenes outside the gates of Buckingham Palace in London. And beyond that image, the balcony scene in particular after the royal wedding of Princess Diana and Prince Charles in 1981. For a generation of girls who are now women in their late 30s, Diana was the fairytale princess, dubbed the ‘people’s princess’ who when interviewed said that she didn’t believe she would ever be Queen of England, but wanted to be the queen of hearts.

Again, the framing of the 2015 film is an important component of the narrative. Over the closing credits, the soundtrack consists of three songs. First is ‘Strong’, with lyrics by three writers including Kenneth Branagh, which begins:

In a perfect storybook
the world is brave and good
A hero takes your hand
a sweet love will follow

But a life's a different game
the sorrow and the pain
Only you can change
your world tomorrow

Although the cloying grammar of the line ‘Be the one that rescues you’ in a subsequent verse is familiar from popular self-help texts, its currency endorses Bacchilega’s argument that rather than denounce the popularity of these fairy tale adaptations, it is more productive to

accept their existence and analyse their role in constructing social values. Branagh's narrative resists the full name 'Cinderella'; his protagonist is 'Ella', ostensibly the maker of her own destiny, despite the assistance of wacky street women who are fairy godmothers in disguise, or computer generated visual effects. The second theme song is a new rendering by the actor who plays Ella, Lily James, of 'A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes' from the 1950 film. The two songs are in conversation, as are the films they come from. And finally the third song is a rendition of the 1950 Fairy Godmother's spell, 'Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo' by Helena Bonham-Carter. Like Lily James she is not known for her singing, and is unlikely to be in the future, but the final words in the film belong to her once she finishes singing: 'Where did everyone go?' After at least five major film adaptations, this final metalinguistic shrug is delivered with the apparent carelessness of an institution confident in its power.

What is being endorsed in Branagh's 2015 adaptation is connection, family, indeed society, but based on kindness to others rather than self-seeking strategy. Certainly, this avatar of Cinderella has learnt that she can assert her own power, even if it is the power to marry and protect her man, and the grammar of the popular 'Be the One That Rescues You' indicates an odd failure to integrate her selves. And yet this is set against both the authoritarian commercial practices of Walt Disney Studios, which as Shortsleeve (2004) points out was encapsulated in the labelling of the corporation as 'mouschwitz', and against the patriarchal values embedded in the fairy tale tradition, which adaptation may contest or parody, but simultaneously confirms.

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