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İSTANBUL BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI  
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

**LOVE AND WOMAN'S CAPTIVITY ON THE SCREEN:  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHRISTOPHE  
GANS' *LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE* AND OLIVIA WILDE'S  
*DON'T WORRY DARLING***

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tezi Hazırlayan  
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## ÖZ

### BEYAZPERDEDE AŞK VE KADIN TUTSAKLIĞI: CHRISTOPHE GANS'IN GÜZEL VE ÇİRKİN FİLMİ İLE OLİVİA WİLDE'İN DERT ETME SEVGİLİM FİLMİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRILMALI ANALİZİ

Christophe Gans'ın *Güzel ve Çirkin* ve Olivia Wilde'ın *Dert Etme Sevgilim* eserleri, erkekler için ütopya niteliğinde bir dünya tasvir ederken, kadınlar için bu iki filmin tasvir ettiği bir distopyadır. Her iki eserde de kadınlar, erkeklere boyun eğdirilmekte ve sadece cinsiyetlerinden dolayı erkekler tarafından sürekli kontrol altına alınmaktadır. Bu tezde, distopik nitelik taşıyan toplumda, kadınların karşılaştığı durumları inceledim ve erkeklerin kadınlara takıntılı olmasının, kadınlara yönelik baskının kaynağı olduğunu ve bu durumun da kadınların sefaletine ve ayrıştırılmaya yol açtığını ileri sürdüm. Her iki filmde de farklı distopya yaratımları, kadınların esaretinin temel nedeni olan masallara odaklanıyor. Toplumdaki tüm anlatılar, erkek egemen toplum ve söylem tarafından şekillendirildiği için, erkekler, kadınları kontrol altına almak için, kendi hayallerinde bir aşk anlayışı yaratır. Bu yeni anlayış sistemi, kadınları bu aşka bağlamakta ve kadınların kontrolleri dışında, onları mağdur duruma indirgemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, masalların kökeninin mitlere dayandığını ve gücünü erkeklerden aldığı için diğer nesillere aktarılırken, erkekleri destekleyici, kadınları aşağılayıcı durumlar yarattığını ortaya koymaktır. Temsil yoluyla sunulan masallar, kadınların kimlik kaybına uğramasına yol açmakta ve distopik bir kurguya dönüşmektedir.

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## ABSTRACT

### LOVE AND WOMAN'S CAPTIVITY ON THE SCREEN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHRISTOPHE GANS' *LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE* AND OLIVIA WILDE'S *DON'T WORRY DARLING*

The films, *La Belle et La Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling*, depict a utopian world for men. For women, however, what these two films demonstrate is a dystopia. Women are condemned to men, and they are constantly chased by them simply because of their gender. In this thesis, I intend to examine the situations that women are forced to face in the so-called dystopian society and contend that men's fixation on women is the main source of women's oppression, which, undoubtedly, leads to women's misery and isolation. The need to create dystopias in these two films is predicated upon the hidden messages ingrained in fairy tales since they are presented as the main reason for female captivity in this thesis. As the narratives in relation to women who are traditionally supposed to exist only to be acted on by men, as literary and sexual objects, are created and authored by male dominated society, men attempt at constructing an understanding of love with the aim of enslaving and controlling women thereby reducing them to the status of victims. As such, the aim of this thesis is to unveil how the origin of fairy tales rests on myths and how fairy tales as male-authored compositions lead to problems on the part of women when they are passed on to future generations. For centuries, fairy tales that have come to represent the tools for the social and cultural constructions of female sexuality, play a pivotal role in women's loss of autonomy and end up as dystopian fiction.

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## GLOSSARY

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**Dystopia:** The meaning of the word “dystopia” is a thesis based on the idea that future societies may have a negative life under an oppressive and authoritarian system.

**Mythology:** The science that deals with myths, investigates their origin, analyzes and interprets their meaning.



## INTRODUCTION

Manifesting relationships in fairy tales from children to adults can help individuals sort out a culture of aspirational lifestyles across generations. Ever since fairy tales have gained popularity, the perspective on love has evolved in a dramatically different direction. The seemingly “innocent” narrations in fairy tales have played a substantive role in shaping societal norms and attitudes toward the construction of love. Indicating bias in their influence, they have specifically targeted a temporal context that extends far into the historical past. These narratives, which are cherished by myths and maintain their place in modern-days, represent a societal framework that society has proposed in order to control and victimize women, who have always been subjects of male authority. The representation of love in those narratives involves a perspective that is burdened by toxic masculinity to the detriment of women, who, in patriarchal societies, have been reduced to characters and images engendered by male expectations. The fairy tales offering “happily ever after” messages have arguably fostered unrealistic standards for relationships, attempting to soften the pressure on women with love. The autonomous identity of woman is undermined by her reduction to her role within the confines of the domestic sphere. The image already portrayed may frequently impose challenges on women, and it will be difficult to pursue a distinct and independent life thereafter. This situation evinces that including a dream world does not portray the role of a woman who tries to survive in the eyes of the audience. If the plot structure pushes the audience toward such interpretations, it is because the scheme is intended to elicit discerning observations. As a result, actions prompt a question about reality within a fictional storyline, and they can be asserted to involve a form of captivation targeting love when the broader spectrum of fairy tales is taken into account. The general structure of these stories is universal, and the narrative quality is maintained due to the artfully covered perception.

Fairy tales remain resistant to criticism. Making crucial comments is almost impossible for people where everything is perfect in a wonderland. In the most well-known fairy tales, a recurring issue is the lack of response on the part of the female characters to the unfolding events in the consecutive plot structure. In “Beauty and The Beast,” Belle should renounce a number of things concerning her subjectivity if she

wishes to find love in the domain of the Beast. Since the prince is her destiny, Cinderella, another fairy tale female character, has to go to the ball to be accepted by the charming prince and be his wife. These two tales present women as unopinionated and docile, which are the feminine qualities men have invented to own them thoroughly. Specifically, patriarchal culture has produced multifarious traits of femininity having her own voice and integrity which lead to control women and to rule with god-like omnipotence over their lives, challenges man's interests, because such a woman poses a threat to man. Thus, institutionalized male dominance alongside the repression, the imposing of "ideal" is evident representation of woman, who does revolt against male supremacy and authority, but she reinforces it through her enforced weaknesses. This "ideal" character has been constructed by means of impairing the independence and courage of the female, since, as Patricia J. Mills persistently argues, "a complete female with her spiritual and physical sides, with both womb and vagina, is all-powerful and uncontrollable" (Mills, 1987, p. 182). It is just at this juncture that fairy tales can be envisioned as reflections of the designs and expectations of a male-oriented society, in which the "ideal" woman is supposed to be passive, meek, and self-sacrificing. In line with this argument, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, assert that, "To be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has no story [...] is really a life of death, a death-in-life. The ideal of "contemplative purity" evokes, finally, both heaven and the grave" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, p. 25). Yet, most significantly, there is a reverse mirror reflection of an angel: the monster, the image that contradicts the idealized perception of women. That is to say, for men, women who want to have their own way outside the suffocating and boring confines of domestic life, which expect them to be good and virtuous mothers and wives, are seen as threatening and dangerous. In this sense, Medea, Hecate, and the Sirens are a few examples to name in whose literary and artistic representations, the male fear of female sexuality is well illustrated, since the monster woman drastically opposes the submissive and secondary role patriarchy has constructed for her.

The images of the "angel" and "monster" constructed by men have long pervaded fairy tales to such an extent that to deprive women of their individuality and

make them incapacitated, a tool has been brought into the fore: love, which is utilized to doom women to invisibility and silence. These idealized storybook romances have major deviations that lead to being forced to play certain roles. As long as they adhere to societal expectations, women believe that or are rather seduced into believing that men love them if they acquiesce in their passive role in society. Fairy tales do not unmask the fact that women are the victims of love. On the contrary, they try to mask the messages that are directed at the indoctrination and oppression of the female.

The shared elements work toward forging a strong connection in the context of love; *La Belle et La Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling* follow a path from the past to the future. The comparative analysis of the two distinct films, both of which seek to highlight all societal exposures upon love and how women are entrapped within traditional fairy tales, aims to demonstrate women's roles in society are not confined to fairy tales and that fairy tales are merely a few myths centered around imprisoning women. In doing so, all dismantle the feminine stereotypes prevalent in myths and fairy tales by utilizing the medium of the film. In *La Belle et La Bête*, Belle's love for the Beast is socially constructed. It is designed to praise the tradition that has persisted for centuries. Here, the said true love cannot be present. Rather, what exists is only a relationship that functions for the intended construction of female identity.

With love and the idea of being loved, society manipulates identities, allowing a system to exist that makes men have women under their control. In this way, society not only claims its power over love but also, in the big picture, completes storylines with a single mind. Based on these stereotypical meanings, people do not wonder whether fairy tales have emerged from this one-sided dimensional mindset or the societal perceptions about women have been shaped by narratives such as those depicted in the film *Don't Worry Darling*. In both films examined in this thesis, the heroine does not even know where she is, but the environment that seems perfect gradually becomes suffocating to her. The description of an idealized union belongs to man, and an illusory concept is founded upon the imposition of conformity on a predetermined norm or mold. To make matters worse, the core of previous narratives also addresses patriarchal oppression; such a situation is inevitable for women in contemporary life as well.

From ancient times to the present, narratives have been related to each other by preserving deeper information. Fairy tales reflect a singular mindset, the biased viewpoint which assumes that the influence of male dominance can actually control reality. In a similar vein, love brings forth an argument that emphasizes what role women should play in male-authored fairy tales. The symbolic concept stems from toxic masculinity, where a seemingly perfect love relationship prevails in order to prevent women from exerting their voice and ultimately to keep them under male control. To put it differently, a woman in a fairy tale, is expected to fulfill the traditional female functions in which imagination is a representation of male desire. In essence, the creation of this realm revolves around how the narrative's romantic aspects are being manipulated. Romanticism is replaced by a search for a husband; becoming a good wife and refraining from having any other aspirations should be a woman's main vocation. This undoubtedly means women are denied opportunities for an identity other than that of wife and mother. Since woman is seen as nothing on her own, her very existence is defined in relation to man. As such, her voice and visibility in a male-dominated society are effaced.

From text to screen, the construction of romantic ideals emerges as a thread of a compelling narrative by adapting the contrasting realms of fairy tales to contemporary constructs that exhibit great issues about fantasy and reality. Hence, in the archetypal fairy tale, the female character is often relegated to the role of a passive figure, her identity, if she has any, intricately woven with the said threads of societal expectations. The quest for a husband and the embodiment of the idealized wife signify the restrictive boundaries within which her character is buried alive.

Conversely, when adapting traditional structures to a contemporary setting in the film genre, a parallel character navigates the complexities of modern life, challenging the predefined roles dictated by tradition. The new heroine seeks to redefine her identity beyond conventional boundaries, questioning the societal norms that have perpetuated the passive female archetype. It is a quest for self-discovery and autonomy, breaking away from the shackles of conservative historical narratives. The juxtaposition of these two characters serves as a poignant exploration of the evolving notions of identity. While one struggles with the antiquated ideals of fairy tales, the other forges a path toward self-determination in a utopian present. The narrative is evocative of the tension between ingrained expectations and the aspiration for a more

liberated and meaningful existence. Ultimately, storytelling has a transformative and redemptive power in creating and reshaping the constructs of identity across different temporal and societal landscapes on screen.

In light of the arguments stated above, this study involves a close analysis of the two films, *La Belle et La Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling*, with the aim of indicating how, by basing themselves upon myths and fairy tales, these two films convey the hidden messages incorporated in myths and fairy tales which serve as the main reason for female captivity and secondariness. The argument is seeking to respond that women are characterized by passivity, submission, and docility in fairy tales, whose origin extends to mythology, since they are expected to never challenge the patriarchal norms, and accordingly, they do not pose a constant threat to patriarchal male order.

This thesis includes three main chapters, each containing sub-chapters. The "Introduction" presents the genesis of the thesis beginning from what a myth aims to convey to how the messages of the myth are reaffirmed in fairy tales. The examination of the two films selected, however, indicates how the hidden messages ingrained in myths and fairy tales alike are subverted in the films by the directors because they tackle the problematics in relation to female representations/misrepresentations in myths and fairy tales from the point of view of a primarily deconstructive reading. Chapter I, the theoretical framework, provides a comprehensive analysis of various themes, with particular emphasis on the construction of the female gender and her relation to love and the male. Chapter II revolves around Christophe Gans' *La Belle et La Bête*, the film version of the fairy tale, "Beauty and The Beast," which unveils the consequences of the so-called toxic masculinity as regards female captivity. The film weaves stories within stories that shed light on some considerable topics such as feminism, female suppression, women's captivity, and male supremacy. Chapter III is devoted to another film, *Don't Worry Darling*. This specific chapter intends to underscore the societal exposures upon the concept of love and how women are trapped within those male constructed expectations in terms of love, which solely incarcerates the bodies and souls of women. Lastly, the Conclusion brings together the topics discussed separately in each chapter and presents the general insights.

## **1. WOMEN'S VISION OF EMBEDDED LOVE REFLECTED THROUGH THE MIRROR OF MYTH**

The history of the victimization of women should be traced back to pagan and Christian mythology in which patriarchal society has rendered women as mere objects of male desire by hurling them into silence and almost invisibility in order to diminish their identities to a living dead. Woman is generally expected to acquiesce in her invisible and passive role in society since her mere reason d'être is defined in relation to a man, be that man her father, brother, or husband. In this sense, it is possible to assume that a love relationship plays a significant role in perceiving how the female turns into a victim at the hands of the male. In this kind of relationship, man replaces woman with an imaginative state within himself, adapts her identity to a structure, a beautiful abstraction, related to what he seeks to perceive in her.

### **1.1. The Construction Of Female Gender Through The Concept Of Love In Myths And Fairy Tales**

Patriarchal norms dictate a behavioural standard that reinforces an idealized image of womanhood. Women are compelled to conform to this constructed ideal to be deemed desirable for men. This enduring concept of perfection was brought forth by the creation of patriarchy to ensure the assimilation of women. This is why myths exist and have been told for generations. What is called divine love in old myths proves to be catastrophic and horrifying as far as women are concerned.

Christian mythology reinforces the notion that to create pertains to men. The myth of man as the creator and possessor of woman functions to reaffirm male primacy and ascendancy. Moreover, the expectations of male-dominated culture should work in such a way that women should not incarnate male dread of female sexuality but should be thrown into a state of muteness and oppressive silence. Accordingly, a system of morality based on what is right and wrong infiltrates the cultural contexts of the place and time and supports the dominant discourses of an entire culture.

One of the main tenets of feminist criticism has always been to identify and deconstruct the ways in which women have been subjugated. Feminists identify these repressed forces as unifying under the umbrella of "patriarchy," a concentration of

societal forces that reduce women to objects that are meant to be exploited. These forces of oppression manifest not only as physical violence or judicial restrictions, but also as emotional exploitation. The most telling microcosm in which these forces of exploitation can be observed in their most explicit form is the home that is also emblematic of the entire culture. Likewise, in most feminist fiction, the house, which is a man-made institution, stands for a kind of prison for women.

The family unit, which is considered to be the nucleus of society from a more traditional point of view, is also the most common unit of manipulation. The intellectual and emotional burden of women within the household requires an “ideology,” if it can be called, to have the exploited “consent” to her exploitation, as the enduring forces of patriarchy can continue to exist only through making invisible the conception of an alternative to patriarchy. Thus, an autopsy of this “ideology,” the primary instrument of patriarchy in its captivity of women, would prove to be composed of two elements: one being “love” and the other being “domesticity.” A combination of these two forces, when applied to curtail female emancipation, serves to entrap women in the family unit, separating her from the idea of female solidarity, further entrenching her imprisonment behind the confines of patriarchy.

The historicity of patriarchy has always been an important issue that has drawn the attention of feminists, as formulating a hypothesis of what might have led to the creation of patriarchy is a fundamental question. Similarly, its enduring presence for thousands of years in human society also poses a similar question. Gerda Lerner, in reference to the feminist awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wonders what might have led to women's long delay in realizing their subordinate position, which can be attributed to their unwitting deception and collusion with patriarchy. Upon entertaining what sort of manipulation patriarchy would use to make women a part of the system, one is confronted by the fact that this question is also asked by feminist critics themselves. Lerner asks how women are responsible for traditional complicity by defining themselves and transmitting this across generations. Confronting this idea of “complicity,” however, invokes more questions. Discovering the methods and techniques through which patriarchy acquires “complicity” requires a more thorough analysis.

Lerner proposes that the first forms of human political organization already had an interest in curtailing female freedom, arguing that “the archaic states were organized in the form of patriarchy; thus from its inception the state had an essential interest in the maintenance of the patriarchal family” (Lerner, 1987, p. 9). Patriarchal norms dictate a behavioral standard that moulds an idealized image of womanhood. Women are compelled to conform to this constructed ideal image to be desirable for men, a situation that culminates in the objectification of women and shapes women’s thinking to become objects whose only purpose should be to please and attract men.

On the subject of what patriarchy might have used to secure “[w]omen's cooperation in the system,” it is important to emphasize Lerner’s last article which is about the categorisation of women in regards to their respectability. This is precisely where women’s emotional exploitation happens; it is something that deeply concerns romantic affairs and directly regulates intergender relations on a personal basis. Closely connected with this argument is the habitual state of reality that creates confusion in the perception of love and allows it to be reduced to the object of desire and a few elements that belong only to it. These desires form a concrete transformation in what people feel, and significantly enough, the power of society cannot be ignored in their formation.

In the context of the present feminist interpretation of women’s captive position, Lerner asserts that unlike men, women are categorised only in relation to their standing with the opposite gender, stating that “for women, class is mediated through their sexual ties to a man, who then gives them access to material resources. The division of women into ‘respectable’ (that is, attached to one man) and ‘not-respectable’ (that is, not attached to one man or free of all men) is institutionalized in laws pertaining to the veiling of women” (Lerner, 1987, p. 9). This representation clearly demonstrates how society upholds its expectations while skillfully concealing any truths that may contradict those expectations at first glance. Additionally, putting women into categories along with their social standing based on their relations with men has unfortunately hindered the emergence of female solidarity. Thus, women who are deprived of a form of sisterhood or solidarity find themselves further submerged in patriarchal oppression. The definition of female identity in relation to “respectability” and to the opposite “powerful” sex is what has caused “love” to

become a tool for subjugation. This is also where domesticity also becomes a means of entrapment, as the woman who does not live a life that is sanctioned by patriarchy, which is essentially a servitude to men, is ostracized from society.

Since patriarchy needs to entrap women in the domestic realm to prevent them from having a feminist awakening or any sort of realization of solidarity, a tool is required to convince women that they indeed need men to control their lives. It is at this juncture that “love” is abused as a vehicle for manipulation. In the light of this argument, Elaine Hoffman Baruch claims that “[f]or women, much more than for men, love has provided reparations for social injustice or has served as a giant pacifier” (Baruch, 1991, p. 1). The idea of love functioning as a tool for social control has not escaped the notice of feminist critics, as Baruch notes feminists argue that believing in the notion of love prevents women from concentrating on their own lives. Used in this manner, a woman’s feelings of love are exploited with the aim of confining her into a life of domesticity, thus rendering her individualistic ambitions uneffected. This raises a question: how can a person’s feelings of affection be exploited in such a way? Eva Feder Kittay initially explains why she named her study on dependency “Love’s Labor” and then goes on to argue how one person’s love for another can come at a cost, which is reminiscent of how the majority of people find themselves in dependent relationships in terms of emotional and relational characteristics. These factors trigger motivation to restrain power if one pushes aside his or her own needs to be conscious of what the other is concerned about. “Such an effort transforms us into what I have called in the book a “transparent self.” As such, the term “love’s labor” is evocative of the cost to the self—a cost that love may well discount—when one turns one’s attention to another’s interests, even foregoing our own interest” (Kittay, 1999, p. 2). Feelings for people cannot be a controllable phenomenon; every individual has their own unique love forms, and this is sacred to these individuals. Among societal values and cultural influences, however, love has the propensity to transform one into a captive physically or mentally.

Henceforth, a woman’s love for a man can come at an enormous toll. If a person’s feelings of affection for another human being could cost the person something, then it is inevitable that this could easily result in exploitation since this process of affection is transactional. A study of the average family arrangement

provides a perfect example of this phenomenon. To consider, Kittay's description of the average household as a template, in which Kittay sketches the household as comprising "[o]ne adult, call that individual the provider, participates in a public economy and is designated head of household [...] A second adult, usually the mother, is occupied primarily (though rarely exclusively) with the dependency needs of the children, as well as with the dependency needs of disabled and elderly kin" (Kittay, 1999, p. 46). In such an arrangement, when described in purely materialistic terms, the parties could argue to live in a sort of symbiotic relationship, in which the sacrifice of one party, whether it is emotional or material, is reciprocated by the other. However, real life family arrangements are not so simple, as Kittay posits. In the first place, society interferes with relationships by using qualified norms, and this interference concerns only its ability to make emotional and social connections. There seems to be a mutual relationship; when one is perceived as unequal to their partner, the partner deemed less competent will be deprived of the positive outcome. As Kittay persuasively states, "For the relationship to continue, the less favoured participant must be willing to tolerate a more conflictual situation—and one that is unfair by objective standards—than the more favoured participant" (Kittay, 1999, p. 46). While man intends to find the perfect woman, woman, on the other hand, has to fit the ideal manifestation of love as an ideal state to be achieved. Hence, love puts one in a situation; it is no longer an emotion that should be experienced freely. The established boundaries can be the existing social context. As seen in stereotypical romance narratives, man appears as a figure that woman needs to reach. These factors unintentionally control woman's perception of what constitutes perfect love.

The current concept of love has become a symbol of power in societies. It is very easy to see how an arrangement in such perspective could very well become a domain of exploitation for women, who are still designated as "other" characters, even regarding emotions. Even if an explicit formal arrangement is made between a couple, the outcome is ultimately influenced by subjective factors like individual perspectives about which party gets a lesser deal. The party that finds themselves in the less favourable position does not always have to agree under duress. Even when faced with such circumstances, a compromise accepted in this way can make the weaker party believe that the agreement is necessary. As stated by Kittay, the emotional or moral

obligation felt by one party, which mostly happens to be woman in a patriarchal society, inescapably leads to the said party's subjugation. Women are almost always depicted as striving to conform to stereotypes, attempting to live up to the expectations of idealized narratives, particularly in the realm of emotions. In instances of capability, a prevailing power is observed wherein men assert dominance. If one perceives emotions as the expression of a great power, the only one who has a say in this power is man.

In the light of the above-discussed argument, Elaine Hoffman Baruch, analyses the romantic and intellectual relationship between Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and explains their formulation of intergender relations as follows: "In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir spoke at length of women as economic parasites, forced to live vicariously. What Sartre revealed in *Adieux* was men's emotional parasitism. Because of their overvaluation of intellect, he says that men constantly look to different women to replenish their emotional resources. This is not, he implies, a good division" (Baruch, 1991, p. 239). Interestingly, both parties' definitions of intergender relations are based on parasitism, in which, according to de Beauvoir, women leech off materials that men provide, and Sartre argues that men sap women emotionally. Even in an intellectual theorising of intergender relations, it is inevitable to come to the conclusion of the existence of transactionality behind romantic entanglements. When applied to the domestic sphere, this comes as no surprise that exploitation goes hand in hand with emotional manipulation. Thus, in a patriarchal arrangement, as exemplified by Kittay, exploitation is unavoidable.

## **1.2. How Love Becomes A Vehicle For Manipulation And Self-Effacement For Woman In A Patriarchal Society**

Having established how domesticity proves a fertile ground for exploitation, it is also equally important to sketch exactly how women are roped into such arrangements. Although the arguments stated on previous pages have shown that "love" serves as a vehicle for luring women into such affairs, it is important to define precisely what this "love" is and how it functions. Although the word might have, at least in popular imagination, positive connotations, it is essential to examine why society has constructed a positive perception of this phenomenon. Since words and the

value they hold within the culture are ultimately social constructs, it is a meaningful endeavor to dissect the genesis of these values in order to attain a clearer understanding of women's subjugation.

Love has been the subject of infinite amounts of artworks in all fields that are countless such as poems, songs, plays, fairy tales, novels, and so on. It also continues to occupy popular imagination as the most important thing in life to exist. Since "love" has such a stranglehold on culture, its portrayals in literature provide important clues on how this phenomenon is exploited by patriarchy as a tool of entrapment to the disadvantage of women. The construction of masculine and feminine archetypes within stories is not solely the depiction of character traits; furthermore, they operate as a subtle reinforcement or challenge to existing power dynamics. The effort to make women fit the proper image has significantly influenced their role in various aspects of life. So much so that not only society decides this, but women also tend to define themselves through this fantasy. It is possible to see that these existing imprints on myths have been told for generations.

Similarly, Annis Pratt traces the phenomenon that exists in classical mythology. Analysing classical mythological tales, she contends that "when women heroes do seek erotic freedom, which we define simply as the right to make love when and with whom they wish, they meet all the opposition of the patriarchy" (Pratt, 1981, p. 24). Surprisingly enough, they are also designated as demonic under the concept of divine love in old myths. Zeus, for instance, does not avoid chasing any female he is attracted to, copulating with them, and most of the time abandoning them to their fate despite the fact that Hera, among other things, happens to be his wife. Traditional gender roles have big privileges between individuals. In her analysis of mythology, Pratt points to the fact that men's love can indeed be dangerous, not only because it can be manipulative but also because it can manifest itself as a direct source of harm. She also makes a clear note on how a woman's search for love on her own is usually met with overt violence, asserting that in classical mythology "not only is the feminine Eros discouraged, but its opposite, rape, is proffered as a substitute" (Pratt, 1981, p. 24). It is quite obvious that since they challenge male control of female sexuality, women come to pose a threat to male domination.

Lerner has earlier specified how society and civilisation, since their earliest incarnations, have always sought to curtail female freedoms. Similarly, Pratt discovers a similar inclination in mythological narratives as well. She argues that “social expectations for a young woman’s destiny surface in women’s fiction as a division of loyalties between the hero’s green-world authenticity and the social world of enclosure” (Pratt, 1981, p. 25). This argument proposes the existence of an innate connection between women and nature, as opposed to the connection between men and civilisation, a conclusion that is hard to avoid due to the close-knit nature of patriarchy and society. If men are to embody the laws, institutions, and societal taboos that seek to restrict women’s freedom, women, in turn, would identify with their opposites. It is in this context of paramount importance that women are associated with nature, which is usually portrayed as an idyllic world, but also as unknown and destructive and therefore doomed to human attempts at domesticating it. Delving into primitive mythology, Joseph Campbell states that in order to emphasize the interaction between woman and man nature, “the fear of woman and the mystery of her motherhood have been for the male no less impressive imprinting forces than the fears and mysteries of the world of nature itself” (Campbell, 1972, pp. 59-60). After women leave a fearful impression on men, their ability to give birth and use their sexuality render them guilty in terms of patriarchy. Pratt provides examples for this argument from classical Greek mythology, counting numerous instances of women metamorphosing into plants and objects of mother nature to escape the exploitation of men, exemplifying how Daphne rescues herself by turning into a laurel tree instead of accepting Apollo’s love. Pan is responsible for the Syrinx’ reed form, and Arethusa finds a solution in becoming a spring in order escape from Alpheus. The important portrayal of nature archetypes has a protective and hopeful consolation for the damage brought about by men. It is possible to argue that violence, in the form of love, manifests itself in these examples explicitly. Women must metamorphose to avoid being the recipients of “affection” that these furious men offer. It truly has become a battle between the sexes, a power relation rather than the union of two individuals.

Moving her attention to our current era, Pratt claims that the dilemma between love and marriage has attracted the attention of the twentieth-century writers. This approach hints at the existence of a false façade of domestic bliss offered through the

popular notion of love. Since women are manipulated through their affections into relationships in which they possess very little control, she makes the argument that inevitably the desire for equity has come to account that most feminist fiction has a rebellion deep inside. The absence of affection in marriages is so obvious that many works are concerned with inventing an idealized narrative that has inevitably led to the prioritizing of certain themes by authors themselves: “The nineteenth-century author’s desire for affectional marriages and the twentieth-century author’s desire for romantic and erotic ones inevitably lead them to create textual constructions and narrative strategies that emphasize these themes” (Pratt, 1981, p. 44). This need to weave such narratives highlights the emotional vulnerability experienced by women in matrimony.

Inevitably, this sense of exclusion and restriction results in women’s loss of “self” and an erosion of identity. Since the woman, who is subject to such oppression, is unable to experience “Eros” and love on her own terms, suffering a loss of identity becomes inevitable. It is known that the existence is specified as a controversial subject when it comes to women. Such an understanding of love drives people to discern misconceptions about how an affectionate bond should be when it is self-imposed. Women experience individual suffering by misidentification. Pratt's analysis of literary narratives highlights how patriarchal norms constrain women, not only limiting their individual agency but also dictating their roles within society and marriage. Additionally, these norms often lead women to disconnect from their own bodies and minds. In the remaining small parts of selfhood, women find ways to exist in more antisocial or diminished roles. These literary descriptions, undoubtedly, mirror real life occurrences. They are exemplified by Lerner’s arguments above on the categorisation of women. Since the categorisation of women according to their respectability has been the object of such an intense focus of law and society, it is no surprise to find that literary narratives in these cases mirror and reinforce real life restrictions that women go through in their romantic and erotic experiences. Women who exert their voice by refusing to be a contingent and secondary being in marital arrangements automatically find themselves to be classified as non-respectable and hence the target of social ostracization.

Pratt, in her discussions on the discoveries made by Lerner, maintains that these “extreme prohibitions spring from a fear of feminine sexuality,” and they are

also historical phenomenons since they are “rooted in the early history of the human race” (Pratt, 1981, p. 73). Pratt, basing her understanding of “Eros” on Rollo May’s definition of the term, “The drive toward union with significant other persons in our world in relation to whom we discover our own self-fulfilment,” posits that since women’s feelings of sexuality and romance are severely curtailed, women suffer from having their intellectual and emotional growth hampered” (Pratt, 1981, p. 74). Every individual's affinity for meaning suggests that love could be perceived as a pursuit to manifest the imaginative realm. Love, portrayed in personal narratives and fiction, becomes a vessel through which individuals embark on a journey to transcend the boundaries of reality and delve into the realms of fantasy and creativity. Pratt argues:

[...] Eros is one of the primal forces leading the personality through growth towards maturity, as necessary to human development as intellectual growth and the opportunity for significant work. Whereas the intellect and the capacity for work find their outlets in the world of social activity, however, Eros springs from the inner realm of unconscious experience. Indeed, fully experienced Eros demands the capacity for moving down into and returning from the deepest realms of the libido. (Pratt, 1981, p. 74)

Men shape this process so that it is in accordance with their own understanding. Eros, metaphorically, can be considered as a represented figure of man who has a potential to control imagination. The manipulation of women’s limited imagination with one-sided reality has never offered a choice for women except being a captive in men’s world.

The entanglement of woman in a marital affair, which assigns her the traditional role of a dutiful wife and a selfless mother, condemns her to an existence that deals with domination and authority. By being subjected to enforced weaknesses, woman reinforces and justifies it. The fate of being led into what is essentially an incarceration is what makes love such a threatening tool of manipulation and the ultimate self-effacement of woman. Since experiencing it out of wedlock is already a taboo in classical narratives, experiencing it in a marital domain is likewise confining.

The punishment of woman who disobeys the patriarchal conventions of romance and matrimony is also an established trope in literature. Male-dominated

culture needs to construct a narrative that women who attempt to transcend the male made restrictions will be annihilated. Pratt identifies such a figure in literature as “the young ingénue” who is “misled by boredom with socially acceptable suitors and with ordinary feminine life, runs away with an exciting and apparently gallant lover, only to find herself ‘ruined,’ consequently perishing in childbed or through suicide” (Pratt, 1981, pp. 75-76). She then moves on to allude to the hypocrisy of patriarchy in the sense that these adventures present men gracious while making female characters guilty and thereby punishing them. When women try to overcome this erosion of the self, they find themselves falling into the same trap of debasement. Man has to reaffirm his own status and privilege by violating woman. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that “a life of feminine submission, of “contemplative purity,” is a life of silence, a life that has no pen and no story, while a life of female rebellion, of “significant action,” is a life that must be silenced, a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, p. 36). In her own way, Simone de Beauvoir puts it how woman is specified “the sex” by man is that femininity actually comes from a signification from the male who is accepted as a sexual being. This suggests that all she is supposed to be is nothing more than a sexual object. Woman is regarded as the "other," while man is positioned as the subject (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 83). De Beauvoir’s interpreted lines indicate how the female is expected to identify herself with the male since she is nothing on her own and her identity is defined only in relation to the male who is regarded to be the “absolute.”

Pratt proposes that a similar evolution is observed in the works of female authors as they mature artistically. These writers seek a more existential meaning beyond the popular understanding of “love.” For her, in accordance with the need to establish an alternate space to patriarchy, female authors must inevitably create their own spaces given the recurrent theme of women's pursuit of love and fulfillment. This established urge to create an alternative space further hints at the strangling nature of matrimony and the traditionally established notions of romance.

To conclude, having demonstrated the evolution of patriarchy in history, it is inevitable to reach the resolution that matrimony and romantic relationships can ultimately serve to entrap and inhibit the development of women as individuals made of flesh and blood. Patriarchy, which augments its techniques of oppression through

cultural and judiciary constructions, seeks to foster complicity with women by using both force and manipulation, and the female who is subjected to such repression inevitably has her judgement clouded. This situation, surely, prevents her from recognizing female solidarity or seeking to establish an alternative life.



## **2. FILMS SPEAK LOUDER IN WOMEN'S CAPTIVITY: CHRISTOPHE GANS' *LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE***

Men have had a prominent influence on the alienation of women by submerging them in various norms. Fairy tales emerge from men's use of societal norms as a means of a very powerful manipulation method serving male desires. Bruno Bettelheim says that fairy tales "convey overt and covert meanings [...] speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult" (Bettelheim, 1989, pp. 5-6). From Bettelheim's idea, it is possible to assume that fairy tales transmit significant messages to the conscious and the unconscious mind beneath which the underlying values of dominant hegemonic discourse lie. Thus, the cinematic structure of narratives and the interpreted love myth reveal fairy tale-like relationships and make people think about how women are identified with the characters in these tales.

### **2.1. Changing Old Narrative Structure: Beauty and The Beast in Film**

The main concern of the films is to create another perspective, mostly a feminist perspective, and deconstruct the societal values which are actually the unseen aspects of the world lying beneath the obvious. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov asserts that "Myth then, as a form of speech or discourse, represents the major means in which women have been used in the cinema: myth transmits and transforms the ideology of sexism and renders it invisible – when it is made visible it evaporates – and therefore natural. This process puts the question of the stereotyping of women in a somewhat different light" (Todorov, 1975, p. 25). As Todorov points out, male desires, incorporated in social myths in the forms of fairy tales, push women to a state of captivity. The fairy tale, "The Beauty and The Beast," can be considered to offer the most explanatory structure in terms of a sexist bias. Many versions of the tale are taken as a specific motif that is the conventional role of women in film industry. The screen adaptation of the tale, which revolves around how the struggle of women continues in real life conditions

under a specific image and roles through its weaving of scenes, is vocalized in a single narrative based on a convenient environment.

Christophe Gans dictates the outcomes of the notion of toxic masculinity in “Beauty and The Beast” version of *La Belle et la Bête* about woman’s captivity. The entire structure weaves stories within stories that bring to light some focal points such as feminism, repressed emotions, gender aggression, women’s captivity, and male supremacy. At its core, the narrative is centred around the unlikely romance between Belle, a young woman of humble origins, and the Beast, a cursed prince trapped in a monstrous form. He will live the rest of his life as a monster if he does not find a young woman to love him. While the film seems to be depicting a love story on the surface, deep inside it is easy to see that this so-called romanticized relationship between the two turns woman into a victim. Belle's position reflects the struggles of women within patriarchal structures, as she navigates themes of repressed emotions and gender aggression while facing her own captivity. Her desire to read and know constitutes a threat to men’s control of female sexuality, and thereby, they use love as a distraction. If Belle wants to be with the beast, she has to sacrifice her identity and choose to marry him.

In traditional fairy tales, the portrayal of marriage is often presented as a life of eternal happiness: the hero and heroine end up marrying and then live happily ever after. For the female character, most fairy tales end with a marriage. The princesses always get married to the handsome prince or king. “Sleeping Beauty,” “Cinderella,” “Rapunzel,” and “The Frog Prince” are a few examples to support the very end of the traditional fairy tales. In this way, attempts are made to push the notions of marriage, wedding, children, and family into the unconscious, especially into the unconscious of young girls. What the reader actually sees between the lines is that marriage is a form of self-denial for the female character formed by male-dominated culture, a kind of enclosure out of which there is no escape.

When overlooked, the texts (the film adaptations) depict the stereotypical everlasting love despite the fact that the lover is a monstrous creature and the protagonist is a profound character that sees what lies behind physical attributes. In “Beauty and the Beast,” patriarchal demands which address to the interests of a man-made system

that appropriates the body and mind of women and thus expect them to conform to prevalent ideology offer a captive position in a traditional romance as far as women are concerned since men want to possess women in every sense of the word. Man tries to mould woman into a shape that will satisfy his personal needs, but that ignores, and, in fact, rejects, her integrity and personality. That being so, the beast's capturing Belle for the deal he made with her father explicitly demonstrates women's captivity both figuratively and literally. Captivity for women means social constraints, physical confinement, and emotional oppression. The female of the species has to be kept as passive as possible. In this sense, it is possible to assume that this passivity and life-in-death position for woman can be accomplished through the notion of love. Haunani-Kay Trask implies a pattern that "within a patriarchal world, women's deep capacity for love is likely to mean a life of emotional pain, a yearning after idealized love, and frustration and bitterness in later life" (Trask, 1986, p. 81). Woman, as such, cannot assert her autonomy in a hierarchical world where she is made to be invisible and passive by the oppressive patriarch, who can cherish neither her body nor her spirit. To illustrate, the "Innocent Persecuted Heroine" fairy tale, reveals not only varying social norms but paradoxical ones; gender is shaped within the structures of class and social order, and "the heroine's innocence and persecution are ideologically constructed" says Bacchilega (Bacchilega, 1993, p. 2). With ongoing representations, woman is tested with imitations concerning the text, and these representations leave their mark on individuals and serve as vivid expressions of their current experiences. This narrative manipulation restricts the reader's capacity to envision a life outside the predefined norms, shaping perceptions in a manner that works in tandem with specific societal expectations. The entire process emerges in one of the popular narratives, fairy tales, which tie in to a set of historically fixed rules long ago to maintain male authority. These are the narratives that promote patriarchal values, while debasing the status and power of women.

Patriarchal oppression that exists in day to day life is not separated from the ideal romanticism or a typical love story presented in fairy tales. They are free to be interpreted in multifarious ways within the same dimensions. Adapting a story for the screen, for instance, adds new qualities to the narrative, such as a visual element, which, subsequently, generates new layers of meaning over time. The film format, as

mentioned by Sergei Eisenstein, highlights the impotency of the reader, as the use of cinematography enables the materialization of the narrative which transcends any other art form. As he claims, "For literature – cinema is an expansion of the strict diction achieved by poetry and prose into a new realm where the desired image is directly materialized in audio-visual perceptions" (Eisenstein, 1949, p. 182). In these narratives, the transformation of characters and the vivid portrayal of their inner worlds align with Eisenstein's notion of audio-visual perceptions materializing desired images. Likewise, it can be argued that the representation of a tale on the screen comes to epitomize one of the "invisible" constituents of a system, preparing the audience, in particular, children and women, for a man-made system of stereotyped people. Moreover, the exploration of women's position through the lens of toxic masculinity unveils a parallel narrative.

The complex narrative framework mirrors the old stories with origins almost the same with Cupid and Psyche (Hamilton, 2011), which are extended to the original fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast." The representation based on the desired standards of masculinity is explained in the most common fairy tale, "Beauty and The Beast." Bottigheimer combines myth and fairytale in his Cupid and Psyche vs. Beauty and The Beast: The Milesian And The Modern and comes to the point that:

In both cases, the heroine of these tales can be regarded as victimized by her circumstances, but Psyche is an active heroine, while Beauty appears curiously inert in terms of her world and of the people who inhabit it. Even the two names suggest very different degrees of real existence. In the Roman, as in the contemporary world, "Psyche" connotes the soul, the essential personality; "Beauty" (La Belle), on the other hand, represents a corporeal attribute defined and conferred by others. (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 9)

In depth, in "Beauty and The Beast," Belle appears to embody a more passive role; her agency is often overshadowed by her physical appearance and the perceptions of others. The fairy tale genre reflects a broader narrative pattern where male characters dominate the storyline, constructing a fantasy world in which women are often depicted in idealized and objectified forms. Woman is stuck; she is there for a reason but at some point, she is manipulated to believe that she is in a moderately fine situation. The visible self is the idealization of women as either embodiments of inner

virtue or as objects of external beauty, reflecting historical and contemporary societal norms in respect to women's roles and identities.

Each scene in the film adaptation of “Beauty and The Beast” offers layers of meaning, inviting viewers to engage critically with themes of feminism and power dynamics within the context of timeless fairytale narrative. As Susan Sellers notes, the stories have been continually reformed and transformed to touch upon changing values and tastes, and she further goes on to suggest that “they assume mythic status only when they resonate with the dominant ideology: a constellation that has been predominantly male for thousands of years” (Sellers, 2001, p. 13). Dominant ideologies, historically male-centred, have perpetuated narratives that prioritize male perspectives and values. Belle's agency and autonomy are continually challenged within the narrative, reflecting the struggles of women in order to assert their identities and desires within patriarchal structures. This is how past burdens change the idea of possible happiness when love is at the center. By juxtaposing Belle's relationships with the Beast and her father, the film critiques patriarchal love that restricts women's lives. As previously stated in this thesis, the representations of Belle, the Beast, and the side characters all demonstrate issues also mentioned in the film both explicitly and implicitly.

Unlike traditional portrayals, where Belle's captivity is often romanticized, Gans' adaptation highlights the oppressive nature of her confinement, symbolizing the broader constraints imposed on women by patriarchal structures. Gans' objective is to revisit an old myth/fairy tale in order to imaginatively give voice to the unheard and unspoken. In this sense, the marginalized woman, rather than being presented individually in the older texts, is depicted in a different atmosphere in the film that reinserts what has been omitted in the original story: the subjectivity of the female character who is dehumanized and silenced in the hegemonic world of the myth and the fairy tale. Furthermore, Gans' revision of the myth also enables him to reclaim the myth/fairy tale for an examination of contemporary cultural matters over sexual relations. The possible reason why Gans deals with a myth is to refer to the continuity and universality of oppression committed by men and the subsequent devastating results of it for women who are mentally and emotionally exploited. The revision of the original story and its transformation into a film help the spectators to watch and

listen to woman's side of the story. Thus, the film by Gans is not simply the presentation of one woman's agony and frustration but of many women in different centuries and in different patriarchal cultures.

## **2.2. Cultural Criticism**

The idea of men's love portrayed as a tool to capture or control women rather than as an expression of genuine emotion is a recurring theme in literature and film. Jeremy Chow, in his article "Beauty-ful Inferiority: Female Subservience in Disney's Beauty and the Beast," draws attention to the fact that "Beast, as Belle's destined true love, is largely considered a good character, but Beast's actions throughout the film are problematic, and at times, less than good" (Chow, 2013, p. 4). Hence, 'A life for a rose', the beast's anger towards anyone touching the rose, is reflective of the intensity of his emotions, symbolizing the kind of life obsessively attached to a rose, and that magical element added to the narrative stands for love. The symbol of the rose reminds him of true love, and it is attached to the idea that women, like Belle, could end up being with him forever. If someone were to steal or damage the rose, this love would damage the life of the Beast, in that, consciousness focalizes deviation. As such, this love should consist of two elements: being possessed by love and victimized by it as society demands it to be so through the acts of the Beast. Despite the fact that the descriptions sound romantic, beyond the precise image that warns the viewer, this love actually becomes a state of domination for woman. Henry Jenkins notes that there are expected roles, but there is also the female strength that can overcome every obstacle (Jenkins, 1991, p. 12). According to his conception, the film pictures the possibility of a kind of relationship that does not refute "the power, strength, and autonomy of women" (p. 12). Likewise, in the old Disney narrative, a single rose locked in a jar appears to be a symbol of captivity. The act of plucking the rose is a metaphor for human inclination to possess and control love. It also highlights the tendency to confine and shape love according to one's desires. The idea of possession, well-intentioned though it is, can inadvertently lead to the distortion of love's true essence. If the Beast had not learned to genuinely fall in love with a woman and earn her love in return before the last leaf fell, he would have been trapped in the curse indefinitely.

However, it is crucial to note that the emphasis here is not solely on genuine love but on reciprocity.

Belle accepts to be the victim of love by taking the place of the rose. The rose, which is supposed to be the symbol of love, hurts those who try to touch it through its thorns. Jeremy Chow underscores the societal construct that equates women's fulfillment with the attainment of romantic love when he says, "Belle cannot escape abuse or durance, and thus her psyche represents that of a battered woman, and yet she remains, attempting to persevere, and attempting to effect change in her captor. Belle becomes a sacrificial lamb wherein her self-abnegation – read. Exacerbation of her victimized role – is the conduit to freedom for the castle" (Chow, 2013, p. 5). That is, Belle's embrace of her captivity, epitomized by her substitution for the rose, reflects an inherent conviction intertwined with the societal pressures and expectations placed upon her as a woman. Love, like the rose, is meant to be appreciated in its natural state, with all its complexities and imperfections. Anna Carson comments that Eros is questioned as a phenomenon men create, thus making women confused about love and expectations: "His ideal impassivity constitutes for her a glimpse of a new possible self. Could she realize that self, she too would be "equal to gods" amidst desire; to the degree that she fails to realize it, she may be destroyed by desire" (Carson, 1986, p. 69). As a matter of fact, the rose serves as a poignant reflection of the dual nature of love—its capacity both for beauty and challenges. In tales like "Beauty and the Beast," the Beast's initial capture of Belle can be interpreted as emblematic of this dynamic, where women are seen as prizes to be won or possessions to be controlled rather than as autonomous individuals deserving respect and agency. By portraying women as inherently unprotective without the validation of male love or approval, these stories reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and undermine the agency and autonomy of female characters.

Delving into opposing perspectives opens up a broad spectrum of meanings, preventing one from adhering to a limited endorsement of moral factors. A narrative leads to reflection and conflict, and a multi-layered story adds depth to the context. Imagination provides an avenue for transcending stereotypes and prejudices and challenges the established notions of truth. A notable observation the scene brings is the contrast between the son's concern for his possessions, specifically his treasure

chest, and the daughters' distress over their dresses, jewels, and other belongings. What is inside the treasure chest is revealed by the son: "all my books, my notebooks, my sketches. I was going to leave them here" (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 04:47-04:54 ). This incident reveals that male chauvinistic powers use art to shape reality in order to alter the self-narration women have in regards to their own life. Women are not allowed to actualize themselves outside the domestic sphere. The road in front of them has already been settled down, and if they attempt at violating the lines of demarcation between the male and the female spheres, they are punished. Activity and self-assertion are commonly considered to be male privileges, and these attributes are deemed "unfeminine" and hence irreconcilable with the patterns of domesticity and servitude in which women have been placed. What lies behind this argument is that women's possible ability to revolt against male domination and thereby breaking their enforced inactivity is assumed to be a threat to men. Unlike Immanuel Kant's opinions in terms of freedom in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, where he says, "we have finally reduced the definite conception of morality to the idea of freedom" (Kant, 1949, p. 76), freedom is just a limited morality on behalf of patriarchal society, and women are forced to accept it. Women's supposed freedom is fixed in the concept of love and in certain roles in fairy tales.

It could be said that the characters that are stereotypical in fairy tales are the products of imagination. Women's criteria of value are different from those of the opposite sex. To pursue values such as credibility and truth, it is important that women be silent and obedient followers of the existing social order. According to Jacques Lacan, "identity is built up as a composite of images and effects – i.e., mental representations – taken in from the outside World from the start of life, which are developed in relation to the Desire for recognition and the later social requirements for submission to an arbitrary Law" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1982, p. 7). In accordance with the film, *La Belle et La Bête*, Belle's situation exemplifies the challenge of stereotypical character portrayals in fairy tales, revealing how imagination shapes these constructs. As Jacques Lacan suggests, Belle's identity is formed through a complex interplay of external images and internal desires, driven by the desire for recognition and later social expectations to adhere to arbitrary norms and laws.

Belle's appearance in the garden while looking at her mother's memorial statue and talking to her mother causes the audience to realize that this is actually an initiation into a new reality. In his article entitled "How to Read a Film," James Monaco comments that "film can give us such a close approximating of reality, it can communicate a precise knowledge that written or spoken language seldom can.... But they are not nearly so capable of conveying precise information about physical realities" (Monaco, 1977, p. 130). The future is a part or a copy of the past; hence, Belle finds herself talking to her mother's statue, expressing her love by leaving flowers to her memory. Reasonably, it is also symbolic of the fact that she will continue her footsteps. All of these personal realities are passed down through generations. That the mother is dead is evocative of the fact that she could not survive in that patriarchal culture in which women have to be subdued and silenced. Woman must acquiesce in patriarchal ideology and therefore be put in her proper place. Belle does not have an accepted role model held up to her. The dialogue between the father and Belle points to the fact that the old still holds its sway. "There, mother. We are starting a new life. And I am ready now.'... Would she have liked a life in the country? 'She'd have loved it.' 'Me, too. I will love it. I am sure.' 'Of course. We still have pride and courage in this family'" (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 05:54-06:22). The bond between the two women's identities goes back to the past, combining the present and the future. Belle can no longer speak with her mother, but it is the reaffirmation of the situation that she will replace her mother, which also alludes to the sufferings she will be exposed to in her life.

Surprisingly, the cold sculpture of Belle's mother, which appears in a garden in a scene and is protected by nature, bears a striking resemblance to Shakespeare's Ophelia from *Hamlet* who is painted by John Everett Millais. The irremediable love results in Ophelia's tragic end, leaves a stain on her heart, and damages her mental health almost driving her to the edge of insanity. Ophelia, whose body lies peacefully on the surface of the water in the picture, is victimized by her desperate love for Hamlet as well as by the draconian laws of her father, disregarding the choices of his daughter.



**Figure 1. John Everett Millais Ophelia, 1851-1852 Movement: Pre- Raphaelism  
Location: Tate-Britain Museum**

**Source:** Millais, J. E. (Artist, 1851–1852). *Ophelia* (painting). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia\\_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia_(painting)). A.D: 20 August 2023.

As the tragic story of Ophelia indicates, generations of commanding fathers, brothers, husbands, dutiful daughters, and obedient mothers will always be there. This culminates in the promotion of patriarchal values and the debasement of female power and status. Even the rules of love in a relationship are determined by an oppressive patriarchal system that also holds its tyrannical sway over the traditional gender roles. Ophelia longs for love and affection, longs for the freedom of being loved. Yet, she is not allowed to display her emotions since woman should be confined in a life of submission, what Gilbert and Gubar calls “contemplative purity” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984, p. 36). As stated before, it seems that feelings have a power to change the present by playing with the past. Ophelia's body would be a figure presented to women to intimidate them if they tried to deviate from male prescribed norms. It is in this sense that some forms of art, instead of enabling the marginalized characters, the “others,” to vocalize and present their stories of oppression, contribute to their marginalization.

Such examples symbolize that love specified by man is the reason women give up their identity and sacrifice their own life.

When it comes to the film, *La Belle et La Bête*, the scene, slowly moving to a rural setting, brings Belle in front of the audience while she is hanging out the laundry in the garden. On the other side, the son of the family is in a corner working on a book. Holding a book alludes to knowledge and hence power. Some argue that the narrative presented through the pages of the books, from which the audience absorbs the story, is authored by a male character in the movies. Thus, it is a metaphorical reference to Belle and to the women like her that share a doomed destiny. Gans develops a feminist background which is not quite satisfactory for women after all. This might be observed in the housewife figure whose only interests are to do the laundry, find a prince, and live in his castle. According to the argument presented by Mayne in *Feminist Film Theory and Women at the Movies*, since cinema is a form of direct narrative and display, feminist work plays a decisive role in presenting pressure on women (Mayne, 1987, p. 18). She further suggests that cinema is an important area of ambivalent positions of desire: "... of the acting out of patriarchy's most pervasive notions of the woman as other, whether as the object of the look or as proof of narrative resolution" (Mayne, 1987, p. 18). Again, the power on the part of women would be to the detriment of the subjective reality of masculinity, forcing masculine authority to prevent women from obtaining the so-called power.

Similarly, the representation of woman expresses the psyche, and what she was going through during her journey, the woman is a reflection of the relationship with the universe itself. Because of his power, the male represents the body figure and preserves the existence of the female in himself. The imprisonment of women is precisely an attempt to use the power of the soul by men. Metaphorically, when the symbolic union takes place between Eros and Psyche, it defines the captivity of woman in man's body so that women in men's bodies continue an uncertain life. The body keeps the soul and controls its power according to its own limits. As such, woman becomes the property of man and cannot be a separate identity.

The audience jumps into the world of the Beast where the setting is dull and gloomy. As a female protagonist navigating a world constrained by societal

expectations, Belle grapples with the dichotomy between conformity and self-expression, symbolized by the juxtaposition of the gloomy mansion and her yearning for something more. Through her journey, the audience not only gains insight into the multifaceted nature of femininity but also confronts the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures that seek to confine and diminish individual autonomy. Customs are repeated in reproducing narration forms, and these repetitive phenomena do not help reader to gain a clear knowledge about the roles and presence of women. Conversely, they condemn women to even more misunderstandings and threaten them with severe punishments if they show signs of disobedience and rebellion. It encourages people to embrace love in its entirety and to resist the temptation to manipulate or confine it. To be represented is to allude to the aesthetic way of reality or settled order while rejecting the judgements. The Beast, ensnared in the chain of his own curse, has found a perverse solace in manipulating the very essence of love. With each beat of his monstrous heart, he ignites a dystopian setting, weaving an illusion of affection that masks the insisted subordination.

### **2.3. Identity Loss and Dystopic Structure of Fairy Tales**

The film consistently matches romance and dystopia in a mutual relationship in a higher level of meaning. As Angela Carter argues in *Heroes and Villains as a Dystopian Romance*, “replacing the romantic convention of a happy ending with a dystopian moment of loss and separation, [the female] further reinforces the critique of patriarchy implicitly present in the generic framework of romance” (Karpinski, 2000, p. 10). In a very simplistic approach, a romance is almost about any sort of adventure, be it of love or of chivalry. For the most part, a romance refers to a narrative of heroic achievements, of chivalry, of love, of deeds. As the definition of romance clearly states, the female figure is nothing but an object used for the maturity of the male character. She is denied subjectivity and is merely a passive object of male desire. This dehumanizing situation is further suggested by the position of women in the film where, bewitched by the allure of a romanticized dream, they unwittingly become the subjects of the Beast's calculated affection, unknowingly ensnared in a toxic dance of control. Love, once a force that could break the curse, now serves as a mechanism for the Beast to prepare his own dominance and ability to communicate his cursed

existence. In this darkened sanctuary, love's transformative power has been perverted, giving rise to a nightmarish dystopia where the pursuit of salvation is entwined with the eroding genuine connection and the self.

In the case of Belle, her role as a captive to the Beast echoes the narrative structure that is much shaped by patriarchal influences. The conversation between the father and the Beast highlights this statement: “-For whom is this rose? +For the youngest of my daughters. I love her more than life itself” (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 26:56-27:13). This typically conveys a profound and intense emotional connection. To wield influence over and shape one's existence, control is exerted within one's surroundings. This dynamic is particularly salient when considering the societal context surrounding women. Thus, in the context of the present feminist interpretation of the relationship between “Beauty and the Beast”, it might imply a love that goes beyond superficial aspects and that values the essence of the female, her strength, and individuality. One could perceive this as a declaration of love that concerns some sort of abuse committed against women, reducing them to a mere accessory in a man's narrative. The captivity of the female identity undergoes a critical analysis in the film, not only through love but also through an examination of her entire existence.

Belle's “selling” herself, albeit for her father's sake, aligns with traditional gender expectations that expect women to sacrifice their freedom and autonomy for the sake of men. However, one cannot ignore the recurrent theme of women undertaking challenges to prove their devotion to male figures. In the context of Belle's sacrifice, this can be seen through the traditional gender roles and cultural expectations. Butler believes that “films seem to represent the wider notion of culture that women only really have an existence in relation to men – at worst they are the property of their fathers until they marry, when they become property of their husbands” (Butler, 2005, p. 86). As the audience embarks on a journey to solve these cinematic narratives, the aim is to dissect the layers of representation and shed light on the transformative potential of women's cinema as a compelling counterforce to such deep-rooted societal norms. Ultimately, her sacrifice becomes a pivotal moment in the story, setting the stage for the development of the relationship between Belle and the Beast and contributing to the overall theme of love and transformation

in the narrative. Carol Gillian, in her *Theory of Moral Development*, argues that this feature is only specific to female sex. Men have played a fundamental role in morally conditioning women and have successfully convinced women that they must adhere to certain expectations within a predetermined societal order. "The traditional conception of morality as a matter of making definite choices based on facts available to any moral agent does not seem plausible. Especially, being part of "complex attitudes to life which are continuously displayed and elaborated in overt and inward speech but are not separable temporally into situations" (Kyte, 1996, p. 3). Carol Gillian's firm refusal may stand out amidst themes of love and sacrifice, underlying the demand for justice, equality, and empowerment that women are advocating for against the pressures imposed upon them by men. It is possible to say that women are still made to believe that the idea of love between a man and a woman presented in fairy tales is an honest depiction of morality. In this way, they are incapacitated and blinded to male dominance, and it is a strong sign of toxic masculinity displayed towards women.

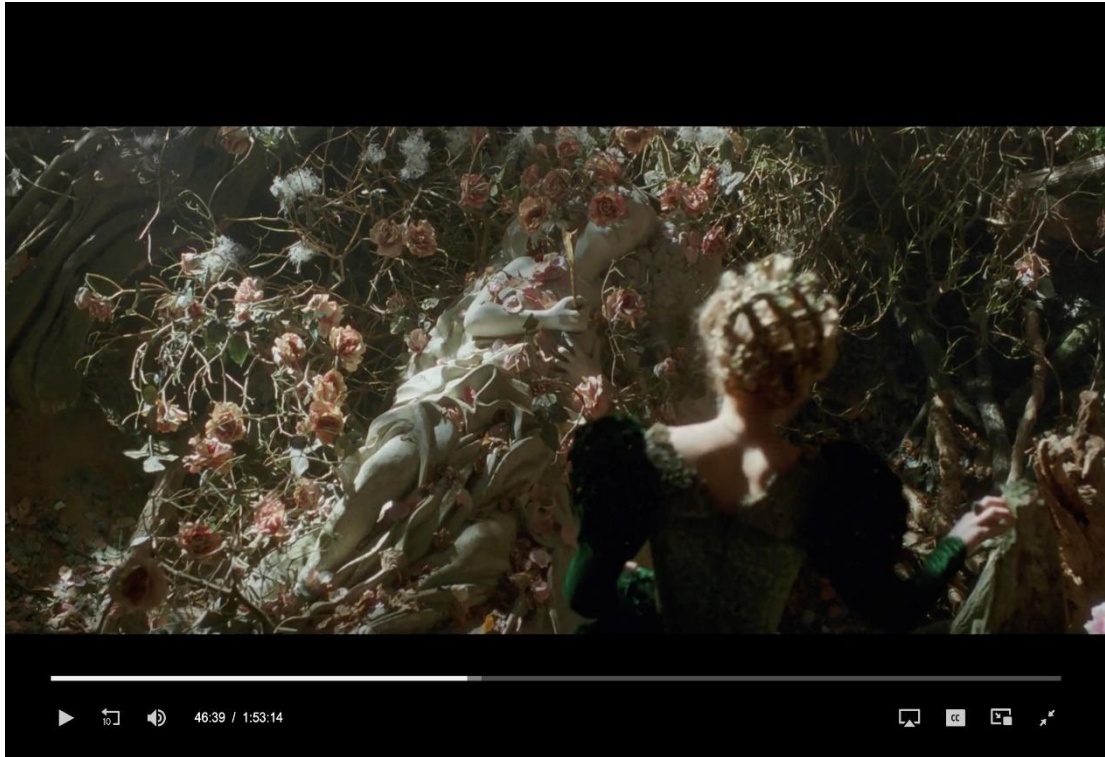
As stated, the sacrifice made for a man in terms of love is not only related to the Beast's strong emotions, but it is also tied to how ancient narratives framed love. In the past, the prince was cursed because he was incapable of loving. He, in turn, becomes fixated on the idea that he can possess love by imprisoning it. The Beast's abusive behaviour is a way of manipulating or of imposing a patriarchal understanding of love on Belle's consciousness mind. That is, in effect, what fairy tales contain as hidden messages which are invisible components of a system controlled by a set of rules that work in favour of patriarchal authority. And love itself becomes one of the means of control to shape women into a predetermined form. Chodorow believes that women perceive a supposed emotion as if there is such a relationship type. Women think they love "men," but it is just the platonic idea of love that they ask for. "Beauty and The Beast, by contrast, presents the possibility of an emotional union with a man who is, in fact, uniquely capable of the sort of symbiotic relationship which, Chodorow maintains, women wish to recapture" (Williams, 1992, p. 6). The message given to the audience is Belle's acceptance of going to the Beast on her own, implicitly allowing the definition of love to be seen as obedience to man. In such a condition, the self-effacement in the service to man is interpreted as the highest virtue for woman. To

have a “happily ever after” end, Belle should never step aside from the Beast. For the female character, the end of most of the fairy tales coincides with marriage, a seemingly happy existence and an eternal happiness for woman offered by man.

The fact that Belle secretly likes the ball dress when she sees it in the scene indicates that her closeness to such a love is actually an acceptable situation. After all, putting it on, going down to dinner, and presenting herself to the monster is a sign of obedience to this love relationship, in other words, a submission to toxic masculinity. The first encounter with the Beast and their conversation contains Belle’s trade for her life and demands of the Beast as follows: “-Seat yourself. Eat. When you have regained your strength, you will be able to walk wherever you want on my domain. But when night has fallen, I forbid you to leave the castle. Each evening at 7 o’clock precisely, you must be here. Do not think of escaping” (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 36:13-37:20). Belle is portrayed as a captive in the patriarch’s marginalizing gaze. She has to suffer the paternal-like attitude of the Beast who rules with god-like omnipotence over her life by talking to her in a very patronizing manner. The cool palette used in Belle’s sleeping may imply that the castle she is forced to live in is just one observable truth that can give rise to various other potential realities. Significantly, the low key lighting is preferred to create a gloomy and mysterious tension that enables the audience to question the validity of what they see, reminding that there may be something amiss that warrants further scrutiny. In this way, the audience finds themselves passing from the dream world to another reality. The illusions and hallucinations function as a proof of the fact that changing realities are symbolic, yet they bring about someone’s reality. In Belle's situation, love does not appear genuine to the viewer; rather, it seems to reflect societal expectations. Similarly, the Beast's approach to love seems uncertain to the viewer, as it is unclear whether the narrators can be fully trusted.

One reality persists until another emerges, causing the initial one to lose its significance and relevance. Freud’s *Delusion and Dreams* underlines this fact that the individual should go through this process indirectly by evaluating comparisons. In other words, the story does not directly tell us that reality is wrong, but it suggests that it can be reproduced. Freud claims that “Dream-interpretation itself does not show that these are fancies and not memories of actual happenings; it only furnishes us with a

set of thoughts and leaves it to us to determine their actual value” (Freud, 1917, p. 185). Like a transition, acts of sleeping and awakening herald the fact that time is changing. In that sense, the audience find themselves in a different rapture point which focuses on the change of time in certain images. The point of view beyond time is in-between the supposed reality and fantasy. The medium shot angle enters the scene as two female figures watch each other through the mirror. When they are in front of the mirror, the camera suddenly changes one to the other female’s dimension, which is reflective of a change of narration. Meanwhile, the woman, who has been presented as being stuck in a mirror, becomes part of the stream, and this reality is shaped according to her. In the old state of the kingdom, the woman that resembles Belle captivates the attention of the viewers. She welcomes her husband who has just returned from hunting. The detail of the man's approach to the woman, in which he describes her as an object rather than as love, dominates the ambience. “-What better trophy ? After you” (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 41 :57-42 :01). The woman is introduced as a reward for the man, whereas the kissing of the man is meant to suggest love and caring. Man’s world constructed on desires damages the true essence of love and it, accordingly, leads woman to be drawn to the wishes of a fixtated obsession. Belle finds herself confined within the conventional narrative constraints of a fairy tale, and that is evident from the moment she awakens. She insists on living the life of the imprisoned woman who came before her, as indicated by the altered ball gown, which is the first thing she observes. As per Freud’s theories, the unconscious mind conceals an individual's latent personality traits; this part is forgotten because it deals with what is on the surface called consciousness. After repressed emotions are released, the unconscious becomes conscious. This dynamic unfolds due to the intricate interplay of reality and fantasy, where hidden aspects are unmasked once limitations are removed.



**Figure 2. La Belle et La Bête (2014) 46:39**

**Source:** Gans, C. (Director). (2014) 46:39. *Beauty and the beast*. [La belle et la bête] [Film]. Eskwad Pathé Studio Babelsberg.

The given voice in the film reflects at a comparable level of oppression to that experienced by women in their current life as such; “and this was how Belle learned that some years, or rather, centuries before, another woman had lived, loved and died in this cursed castle” (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 46:59-47:08). The metaphor helps the audience to get to know how social violence is reflected on an individual through the penetration of Eros’ arrow hitting the mark on princess’ dead body. The common pattern of women generation is that men place holder to make decisions, and for the accomplishment of this, Eros is a suitable helper to maintain control. The marble sculpture of the princess covered up with roses-the approach here is an explanation by referring to the previous scene-points to the life of Belle represented as a decent mirror for the past of the princess, and they complete one another. The woman’s deceased position is a reference to Eros’s arrow, which arranges the death of someone by using love. Death in this context is in accordance with Ophelia’s fate in *Hamlet*. Ophelia’s tragic demise, driven to madness and ultimately drowning, highlights the consequences of misunderstanding the true nature of love and goodness.

Her sacrifice, though noble in intention, ultimately leads to her demise, illustrating the dangers of misplaced love and idealization. It is contended that the attribution of this force to the male figure, namely Eros, is a societal decision. This is no longer called love, but it reflects being a prisoner in a cage.

Among the concepts of love that society insists on, Belle longs for a certain kind of love; the Beast also seeks for love, but his desires may differ from Belle's intensity. In that case, Belle's mirror scenes in *La Belle et la Bête* serves as a powerful reminder that reality is not fixed or immutable. Belle finds herself navigating through another realm while asleep, as depicted in the film, to lend trust to this notion. Curry, in *Films and Dreams*, refers to the fact that the realization of one's dreams shapes life in accordance with how one approaches and interprets life itself. He goes on to say that "dream worlds are lived worlds, and even when the dreamer is a kind of spectator to his dreams what he sees in a fundamental respect is like what he sees as a spectator of a film" (Curry, 1974, p. 3). A dream could show important evidence of living by traveling, and each reality is a window which allows the person to choose at his/her discretion what he/she wants to see.

Trying to capture love accepts communal feelings and social relations that Roland Barthes criticizes in the complexity of desire in his book titled *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*: "on the other side of the lover, the writing of the imaginary, is indeed its social story, its situation, its implications. The problem of the writing is that of the development of an affirmation without that development merely returning the stereotype, the convention, the values given" (Heath, 1982, p. 5). Belle's intention supports Barthes's claim in that male prescribed decisions about life allot women to the status of captives. To build a connection by obtaining toxic masculinity over Belle involves anger and rebellion in return.

Christophe Gans' film captures a distinctive image of a dystopian masterpiece based on the conventional gender norms and gender inequalities in fairy tales. The audience is also forced to believe in this romanticized perspective, especially through very powerful visual symbols. As the color red is, among other things, the symbol of loyalty, Belle's vibrant red dress embraces obedience to male supremacy. Taking a ride in the inner world where the reality and illusion are significantly repeated, the

audience have to be more concerned about the notion of love. This could be described by how Princess dealt with the victim of a wrong love as a result of the choice she made at the time. “He has cherished your daughter with eternal love” (*La Belle et La Bête*, Gans, 2014, 1:15:00). The scene unmask what has been embedded behind the meaning, which is toxic masculinity’s giving certain identities to women and transforming them into captives under the influence of love.

The story of the film *La Belle et La Bête* is dissected, and the underlying themes and ideas are revealed from representation of women to class difference. In conclusion, the film discusses the original story “Beauty and The Beast” as a multidimensional text with its characters, story, and the themes. However, despite these layers, problematic basis upon woman still remains unchanged in cinema after all. The narrative appears as a rich tapestry of themes and representations that resonates with even today’s issues.

When the film adaptation of the fairy tale, “The Beauty and The Beast,” is taken into account, the struggle of woman and her giving up herself for the sake of her love for the Beast is a common subject depicted in fairy tales. When assessed through the lens of auteur theory<sup>1</sup>, on the other hand, the film, *La Belle et la Bête* is actually positioned somewhere between a fairy tale and dystopia. It endeavors to debunk the unhealthy and biased narratives about male-female relationships that the statement reveals deeper meanings compared to the enchantment of fairy tales on the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> Auteur Theory: It is a theory that appeared in an article written by François Truffaut in 1954. The artist language does not exist without being affected by social, historical, political, and cultural elements. Director’s influence on the film is limited, but audience’s evaluation is based on every detail towards a new perspective.

### **3. REVERSE MEANINGS OF FAIRY TALES IN CONTEXT ADAPTATION: FEMINIST DYSTOPIA IN OLIVIA WILDE'S *DON'T WORRY DARLING***

In Olivia Wilde's film, *Don't Worry Darling*, the exploration of feminist themes within timeless narratives sheds light on the permanent impact of incomplete or partial love on women's lives, while allotting them to a subordinate position. The film strives to accentuate the female experience in cinema, offering a critical perspective that challenges the notion of fairy tales for having a responsibility for the stereotypical images of women. The concept of the ideal feminine approved by patriarchy advocates obedience, submission, and weakness for women in fairy tales which are reflective of civil and domestic life. Kate Millett argues that patriarchy subjects women to subordinate positions relative to men like lesser beings (Millett, 1999, p. 24). As such, Olivia Wilde's *Don't Worry Darling* reveals the secret of the fairy tale as a socially constructed feminist dystopia. Her adaptation, while seemingly in tune with a familiar genre, differs in confronting the alienation of resilient women burdened by emotional constraints. The film enables the questioning of the preconceptions for those who are accustomed to chasing dreams, and it also paves the way for the exposition of contemporary events trapped in a fairytale lifestyle. The film also deftly touches on the controversies surrounding beliefs and the rule-based male power prevalent in the debates.

#### **3.1. The Secret Journey of Fairy Tales into a Socially Constructed Feminist Dystopia**

“The happily ever after” concept that ends the majority of fairy tales, as shown in the discussions in the previous chapter about “Beauty and the Beast” tale, cannot easily be discerned in a love relationship, which has more real, complex, and ambivalent dimensions. In fact, such a reality tells the story of women's lives that turn into a dead-end, and it triggers the feeling of catharsis by arousing curiosity in the audience since the cult of happiness turns out to be a myth. It is a state of mind extended from a constant bond of beliefs with the reality of human actions. Olivia Wilde's interpretation, indeed, displays a completely different Belle image than what the audience used to know and what Disney puts in front of society as a protagonist. Anna Gilarek, in Marginalization of “the Other”: Gender Discrimination in Dystopian

Visions by Feminist Science Fiction Authors, notes that “the negative aspects of patriarchy, including the marginalization of women, are typically exposed by means of dystopian visions. Masculinist dystopias feature worlds of male dominance, where discrimination and sexism are carried to the extreme” (Gilarek, 2012, p. 2). The portrayal of lust covered with compassion, accepting and embracing it, is at the core of the film, which portrays how captured women cannot live in peace in a fairy tale-like structure. The female protagonist, Alice, has never considered or encountered any life beyond the one society has predicted for her as a woman. The film establishes links between a fairy tale atmosphere and that of modern day to indicate how idealized perceptions can distort reality by depicting the characters who embody the archetypal traits of fairy tale figures. The female identity is never there or slips away from the cracks of the time and place the female finds herself in. The same attitude of self-effacement, which is the greatest virtue for a woman who serves a man, continues when it comes to a love relationship. Without an understanding of natural love, the relationship evolves into a belief system that satisfies only man’s expectations. These male-based norms usually allow for a disturbance in the notion of equality and impose a restriction on the female. Wilde's attempt to commence the film with the portrayal of the male protagonist in the guise of a prince, as opposed to the traditional beastly form as depicted in *La Belle et la Bete*, aims to convey the conviction that underlying this transformation lies the persistent representation of masculinity exerting control over love through toxic tropes. This portrayal ultimately perpetuates the entrapment of women within the narrative framework of fairy tales.

Women are not traditionally permitted to define themselves, especially their feelings. In *Dystopian Literature, Emotion, and Utopian Longing*, Amanda Hemmingsen discusses how relationships depend on social views that change human feelings and turn the individual life into a dystopia. Hemmingsen further argues that “Examining the interplay of emotion in a dystopian novel can reveal how the text explores how feelings of agency are controlled, contorted, shaped by our emotionally-derived beliefs about reality and how those beliefs and emotions circulate within a society” (Hemmingsen, 2015, pp. 11-12). In the cinematic narrative, the characterization of the female protagonist is notably contingent upon her emotional responses, which are subsequently validated by the male counterpart. This dynamic

inclines the prescribed emotional path that the female character is expected to follow, as dictated by the male character's influence and interpretation of her tenderness. Romantic love conforms to the emotional influence exerted by individuals, typically men, within the relationship. Woman's role revolves around navigating and responding to the emotional cues presented by her partner. Her task is to reciprocate the emotional gestures extended by the man, and this reciprocal exchange forms the basis of the emotional bond within the relationship.

As a matter of fact, the repetitive reflections of narratives into contemporary contexts reveal the paradigmatic representation of the beastly figure in fairy tales, particularly exemplified in "Beauty and the Beast," as emblematic of entrenched patriarchal power dynamics. As observed in "Beauty and the Beast," the narrative initially explores a love constructed according to the beliefs of the male protagonist. Subsequently, in the film, *Don't Worry Darling*, the progression of this love through the institution of marriage is scrutinized, elucidating the perpetuation of woman's continued assumption of a subservient role. This observation aligns with the claim that "the princesses used domestic work variously as an expression of servitude and a way to gain love" (England etc., 2011, p.9). This romantic love should be the pinnacle of aspirations for women which is achieved by starkly contrasting idealized notion of romantic love with the harsh reality of women's oppression and manipulation within the institution of marriage.

In films, the comprehensive nature of production encapsulates various elements to create a cohesive artwork. This platform effectively evinces the substitution of emotions with instances of violence and abuse, often camouflaging male desire within the narrative framework of fairy tales. Wilde's deliberate choice to invert the traditional progression of fairy tales by commencing the male protagonist's journey in a human form in *Don't Worry Darling* serves as a metaphor for the concealed intricacies and darker facets of male identity. The film would be scrutinized in terms of how the characters, particularly women, navigate their experiences beyond the honeymoon stage, commonly referred to as "happily ever after." For her, the controversial fantasy world after marriage highlights how Alice's image as if she is a princess evolves, therefore more suits how utopian community trapped woman. She is expected to live an isolated life, being kidnapped by her husband Jack, where she is

not integrated with her real identity and imprisoned in a fantasy world. In this perpetuation of reality through the exploitation of suppressed emotions, the marital fantasy continues to exert control over women's feelings.

The audience, in the film, is immersed in the ambiance of a 1950s town bar, as depicted in the close-up shot within the frame. Women are delineated as engaging in the act of entertaining men by gracefully dancing with trays balanced on their heads, ostensibly displaying contentment with their circumstances. Such a portrayal likely constitutes a deliberate segment or sequence crafted for the film, and the scene serves as an illustrative component within the broader narrative, emphasizing the societal constructs and gender dynamics prevalent during the era, while also suggesting a commentary on the performative nature of gender roles within the entertainment contexts. The use of such visuals could be a stylistic choice or representation of a particular time period or cultural element within the film's narrative. The social expectation placed on women in the 1950s combines with a dance scene in the film, a form of entertainment in which women serve people drinks while, at the same time, serving for themselves. From a feminist perspective, they keep trays on their head in a balance, which epitomizes the challenges of life, burdens and expectations that surrounded the women in that era. Consequently, the audience can have a commentary view on gender roles and the struggles women faced in the 1950s. The article entitled "The Ideal Woman" contains claims about how a woman was made to fit into the expectations of society: "the ideological and institutional constraints of 1950s American society had a significant impact on the construction of women's identities during this time period" (Holt, 2004, p. 1). Men often engage in humor at the expense of women, exploiting their struggles and expectations in relationships. This behavior is often rooted in a biased conception of love, where the creator or originator is typically assumed to be male. "-Look at this love! +Are you going to kiss me right now?" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 2:02 – 2:04). It is possible to note that as women are hardly aware of what true love is, because they are forced to believe in an emotional relationship based upon man-made notions, their minds are easily confused when they experience any physical touch like hugging their partners. To Lacan's observation, a narrative or language is very important to engage the subconscious. Moreover, human language can therefore appear as a spiritual tension and contrast.

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, in her article “Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity,” claims that “Any implication that patriarchy inheres in the realm of consciousness and “will” dooms the sexes to a repetition of history that is the unconscious” (Ragland-Sullivan, 1982, p. 7). The imagery of love found in narratives, such as “Beauty and The Beast” and “Cupid and Psyche” slightly persists as an unconscious force, a cycle of history wherein the sexes are doomed to repeat past patterns elicited by male supremacy.

Commencing from ancient myths and extending through fairy tales, the recurrent exploration of identities mirrors the everyday repetition observed in the breakfast scene of the film. The act of preparing breakfast, typically performed by a woman on a daily basis, symbolizes the mundane yet significant roles assigned to women within societal structures. The wife's articulation of her own objectification to her husband reflects a parallel limitation evident in the narrowness of male aspirations, thereby intimating a cyclicity wherein both genders find themselves ensconced within predefined societal roles and aspirations. Alice's statement, “I forgot to tell you, but you are not feeling well. And only way to cure it is if we stay home all day, and I tend to you and kiss you and cook for” (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 04:43 – 04:49) severely illustrates her entrapment within traditional gender roles, where her worth and identity are tethered to her ability to fulfill domestic duties and cater for her husband's needs. This narrative parallels the conventional mindset in “Beauty and the Beast,” where the father assumes the role of the primary breadwinner, thereby perpetuating the notion of male financial dominance within the household. The scene aims at depicting the status of women that is situated often behind the male figure, reinforcing the idea of women's subservience and dependence on men for economic stability. Both narratives highlight the subjective past and present damage inflicted on women, leading to the unconscious acceptance of their roles as victims. Alice's situation exemplifies how societal norms dictate women's roles and limit their agency, just as Belle's story illustrates the societal pressures on women to conform to traditional gender roles. As Maria Varsam explains in her article “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others,” “relations become distorted in slave narratives as in female-authored dystopias and as a result, women are seen as inter-changeable breeders and female identity is reduced to the maternal” (Varsam, 2003, p. 133). This reductionist

attitude is evident in both Alice's and Belle's narratives, where their worth is tied to their relationships with men and their roles within the household. As such, while the female is limited to the confines of the domestic sphere, the patriarch occupies the public sphere.

To keep woman within house boundaries in the modern world, obedience to patriarchy is projected through the radio or television, which functions as an omniscient narrator. This manipulation of information and narrative bears resemblance to the concept of brainwashing depicted in George Orwell's *1984*. In *La Belle et La Bête*, the books encountered are predominantly owned by men, while in *Don't Worry Darling*, the all knowing voice, akin to a female, dictates how women will navigate within the existing system. Both films vividly depict woman's captivity through narrative: "Victory Project, Day 987. Security Level, yellow. All employees in transit to Victory Headquarters. All resident safe and accounted for. Enjoy the beautiful day, ladies, and stay tuned for Frank's Radio Hour" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 05:46 – 6:00). Alice, the heroine, listens to the voice that comes from the radio while she is doing the housework. The omnipresence of these mediums, similar to Orwell's telescreens in *1984*, exerts a subtle yet powerful influence on individuals, shaping their perceptions and behaviors to conform to established norms. Like the concept of doublethink in *1984*, where individuals simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs, the characters in *Don't Worry Darling* find themselves torn between their own desires and the expectations imposed upon them by society. All the female characters watch television under the influence of the standards of the totalitarian regime that undermine individual life. In the character of Winston, George Orwell, in his dystopian novel *1984*, illustrates how human freedom is severely restricted by a totalitarian regime which is illustrative of Alice's captive position connected to an authoritarian control over individual lives. This totalitarian system arises from a singular ideology, perpetuating a fantasy lifestyle while enslaving individuals. According to the article named, "Orwell's 1984 and the Concept of Powerlessness," Winston's lack of freedom comprises one of the totalitarian regime's characteristics. "The Big Brother follows him wherever he goes. This is seen through the many plastered posters of Big Brother everywhere where the black-moustached face gazes down on its viewers at every commanding corner with a caption that says: 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING

YOU” (Al-Subaihi, 2020, p. 293). This convergence highlights the theme of powerlessness in the face of the oppressive systems, whether in the context of a dystopian novel or a contemporary film.

### **3.2. Revisionist Mythmaking and Dystopian Literature**

Unlike the dark colours in *La Belle et la Bête*, the mise-en-scène of *Don't Worry Darling* and its soft color palette choices resemble the atmosphere of a wonderland. Furthermore, Alice's name identifies her as a reincarnation of the character Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, where the young girl unconsciously wishes that her empty and lost life, in which she feels abandoned, will be fulfilled more beautifully in a new place. Marius Conkan in *Dystopian Structures in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* draws attention to the condition of women by saying, “Alice continuously searches for Wonderland, the utopia beyond the horizon, beyond the unstable places, that do not offer a security of the self. But her journey through the fractal space actually meets and traces the dystopian limits through the exceeding of which the character will not become totalised, but will carry the whole schizophrenic content of space” (Conkan, 2013, p. 6). At first, the rabbit hole seems to offer a new beginning for Alice, but this seemingly wonderful utopian world is a terrible trap because it swallows her step by step as she struggles to get out of it. She is desperate to find a way to go back home. In discussions centered around the idealized concepts, much is often spoken of the splendid and the flawless. Yet, these notions tend to diverge from the complexities of real-life circumstances. Hence, life's intrinsic nature is chaotic, and attempting to control it can intensify matters. Ancient myths narrate the primordial state of chaos, followed by endeavours to eliminate disruptive elements and to impose order.

The organized system in *Don't Worry Darling* eradicates gender equality since it is perceived as a rivalling and competitive aspect within the societal order. The ones kept outside this circle or those who somehow do not conform to it are stigmatized as rebels, much like the four women dressed in black are juxtaposed with a new-comer ballet dancer dressed in pink, entering the scene with a medium camera shot. This stark visual contrast strikingly highlights the tension between conformity and rebellion

within the narrative. Since Alice is not like the others, the choice of the pink suit tells her condition. On the other hand, the slow motion of camera angle wandering among women shows how some may have pink elements in their black attire. This could be considered an indication of adaptation to the environment or becoming a part of that reality.

Surprisingly enough, the upcoming scene is not just a link with the preceding one; rather, it continues to unfold as a magnified reality through the emotion of the entire past: “All that matters is how you respond in those moments, I trust that you will prove to yourself, to everyone who has ever doubted you, that you are worthy of the life you desire” (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 10:30 – 10:45). Broken eggs in this reality can signify cracks, disruptions, or things not as they seem; all indicators may imply there is a tear in reality. The repetitive background song says “life could be a dream.” Additionally, Alice plays with a similar model of the world they live in. And the creator's wife, praising her husband, says: “Frank has built something truly special” (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 17:21 – 17:28). It is indicated everywhere by signs that theoretically everyone exists but lives in someone else's unconscious, as such he/she is part of everyone's dream. The scope of one's actions is limited by the reality of the other party, covering the expression of love, behaviour, and communication. That is why all realities are possible and cannot be limited; only people should be brave enough to write their own reality.

The film is narrated through the perspective of a man by the name of Frank. He is an omniscient narrator; thus, he is everywhere, even in the characters' home via his voice. He puts himself in the image of a creator; he seems to be a god-like figure and says without hesitation: -I know exactly who you are. If a person's whole life is a dream shaped by external influences and uncertain reality, he/she admittedly loses his sense of identity. Since the created identity completes someone else's reality, the sufferings experienced in the individual's own reality do not mean anything, and they become a lie. As a matter of fact, there is a prevailing misconception that women are inherently predisposed to experiencing pain. However, this assumption is unfounded and lacks empirical support. While women may encounter various challenges and discomforts, it is essential to recognize that pain is not an inherent characteristic of their gender. This is the illusion of an oppressive system. Relatively, Frank's “Changing the World”

plan under the Victory Project is just a lie. The following images that Alice has could be interpreted as the nightmare version of these realities compared to Belle's journey into the dream world. Things do not look so good for her when she stands out in front of her mirror image in a more exhausted state. The reflection standing in front of her is a mindset, the past versions of women that preserve their place in the modern world. The metaphor, which becomes more meaningful through the ghosts, points to what previous generations have required from women. It, moreover, suggests the universality and continuity of female oppression and victimization, as the monological voice of history is to build a new society upon the existing one, and it is a replica of the former. This situation is well illustrated in the extract from the film: “We can let go of what society has taught us to feel. We can let go of the chaos that reigns under the auspice of equality. We can fall deeper into what we know is true, that we crave order. Allow your consciousness to sink. Into this World, into this truth. Sink deeper into the way things are supposed to be” (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 34:01 – 34:42). In the creation version of mythology, there is an unbridled hum, devoid of structure and order, dominated by deep chaos. From this rumble emerged the divine, the deities whose purpose transcended the chaos. When life itself is considered to be chaotic, then it is impossible to imagine if men have the ability to control it. The message given to the audience with the growing eyeballs scene is a direct reference to George Orwell's dystopian system pictured in *1984*.

*La Belle et La Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling* process into two concepts: love and dreams. The relationship between them shows a mutual matter which threatens the women's subconscious. As dreams are misleading, men have essentially recreated love for their own benefit. The desire to mold love according to personal expectations is a common pursuit among men seeking romantic connections with women. In patriarchal aspects, love stems from certain dynamics of traditional gender roles and societal expectations obligatory for men and women. The observing eye in George Orwell's *1984* is cognizant of what the characters are doing. Thus, it prevents everything from disturbing the existing order. Similarly, in *Don't Worry Darling*, this situation is addressed through women; the eye emerges from a television which is responsible for managing women's mental process. Surely such a situation interferes with women's living spaces and aims to make them live only with certain ideas. In history, culture is

the significant side of all the vital and social proceedings. Although power is part of an ultimate resource to govern culture, without power there is no culture since they complete one another. Closely interwoven with this idea is the control of feelings through male supremacy. Therefore, Jack asks Alice, “you love me?”, which implies what is between them is still called love. This so-called toxic behaviour is employed by men to preserve patriarchal order so that the understanding of love comes to be associated with toxic masculinity, and women are supposed to strive to attain the male definition of love as their only vocation in life. Although Alice seems to have freedom, her freedom is restricted by the house that incarcerates and suffocates her. To make things worse, she cannot possibly clarify her feelings: are they her true feelings or just hallucinations? However, every dream has a share in reality. The mirror image that appears to be a bridge which ties women also has its place in *Don't Worry Darling*. A curse inflicted upon all women in the past is similar to what Belle has to go through when she touches the princess through the glass.

Seemingly “innocent” fairy tales can be chaotic and evolve into an element of dystopia as depicted in *La Belle et la Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling*. In both films, the captivity of woman is due to her clinging to the toxic and prejudiced image of love. This position creates misery for the heroine, and Alice’s solution is wrapping herself with stretch film just like the way food is covered tightly with stretch wrap. Despite the fact that the reason for such behaviour is not explicitly explained to the viewer, it is obvious that she feels like food that is bought and sold and thus consumed. The events that take place in each scene, with Aristotle's view of catharsis, increase curiosity, mystery, and fear, making the audience think about what may happen in the next move of the film. Admittedly, Aristotle’s handling of catharsis is a more complex term than what modern readers are used to. His approach to drama, rooted in catharsis, is not focused on providing mere pleasure and entertainment. Rather, it is an urgent call for the survival of society in a long term. Thomas Scheff notes that:

Both dramatic and psychotherapeutic approaches involve the re-experiencing of past emotional crises in a context of complete security: in the safety of the theatre or the therapist’s office. Catharsis in these contexts is analogous to Wordsworth’s definition of poetry: emotion recollected in tranquility. The

extension of catharsis to include aggressive retaliation is utterly without foundation. (Scheff, 2007, p. 101)

Other scenes that are selected during the film's overall have significant roles that gradually match with information about catharsis. Namely, this is a window scene pressing Alice while she is trying to clean it. In other scenes, the more Alice tries to prove herself, the more she is in struggle to be right in the eyes of others. This world tortures her, and this arouses curiosity and discomfort in the audience. Hence, the purpose is to shake the audience with emotions, indicating the necessity for the unconscious mind in the audience to be prepared and acknowledging the fact that something is wrong. Additionally, it encourages the audience to make their own evaluation of reality.

Alice's complaint to her friend about 'Frank's voice' reverberating in her head is a reference to the fact that this is not her mind; the things have been accomplished with his preferences and directives. As such, man emerges as a control mechanism. Women and the audience are steered towards aspirational ideals reminiscent of fairy tales, instilling a belief in their authenticity and leading to the choice of a life of enslavement for women. In this fantasy world, happiness is designed only to satisfy men. "It is more than just a celebration it is of our freedom from society's arbitrary regulations, it's a celebration of potential unleashed! It's a reminder of who we are!... Whose world is it? Ours" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:06:45 – 1:08:17).

The torments life inflicts on people have much greater impacts on the body and mind than any kind of pleasure. Men, unable to envision a scenario in which they experience defeat, often construct an alternate reality where their dominance persists rather than the possibility of failure. As such, men utilize this ability by creating a romanticized vision of toxic masculinity through love. To put it into practice, they initially disable women from discovering the negative aspects of the so-called toxic masculinity by restricting their identities and making them characters in their own utopias. To illustrate, all married couples in the film meet their partners on a train to Boston. They have the same perfect honeymoon stories. Alice observes that "we're told what we remember until we try to remember things that they want us to forget" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:15:39 – 1:15:48). This selective memory

implies that women fail to realize that they have the power to create their own reality when they suffer. Actually, how abusive narratives have distracted women is brought about by idealized and romanticized norms.

It is quite clear that the idealized interpretations of truth have trapped women in a kind of veiled reality imposed upon them for ages in myriad forms of myths, fairy tales, and other works of literature. When Frank asks Violet “no one trapped us here do you feel trapped here,” he does not get a logical response. It is all about a control mechanism as suggested by Weronica Kostecka when she claims, “The fairy-tale scenario, according to which nobody has the right to change anything or to control his or her own life, seems to follow totalitarian rules” (Kostecka, 2018, p. 10). Since Alice rejects to conform to what society has prescribed for women, she has come to be labeled as “crazy” or “insane.” This is a method of vilifying women and their power. Women have been stigmatized as sinful, disobedient, and rebellious within cultural tradition by means of a gender-biased definition that is unfortunately still valid today. The powerful and self-assured woman now blends in nature and sexuality. A powerful woman is strongly contrasted what male-centric society’s expectations prepare for her, aiming to keep her in certain lines. In many respects, the representation of male-authored women accords with Laura Mulvey’s; she displays that women are reduced to be silent and frozen objects under patriarchy (Mulvey, 1998, pp. 586-587). Woman must conform to her role as a companion for man and must not aspire to that of a competitor to man. This idea has long-term roots, which are the same as Adam and Eve in Genesis. And this dehumanizing attitude does not change when it comes to the representations of woman in fairy tales.

Feminist criticism declares the revisiting and reinterperation of fairy tales from a primarily female perspective with the aim of filling in what has been omitted in the original: that is the submerged female voice and as such the retelling of the story from the female point of view. This, unquestionably, enables the reader to listen to woman’s side of the story that has been neglected or repressed somewhere for ages. Advocating multifaceted individuals, women are capable of charting their destinies free from the constraints of archaic gender expectations. Director Olivia Wilde intends to explore identity loss and the totaliterian system by resorting to some major intertextual links, such as the story of Cinderella and *1984* in her film *Don’t Worry Darling*. Farrah V.

Kurronen states in her *If The Shoe Fits: Cinderella and Women's Voice* that Wilde urges “women authors to use the Cinderella tale-type to express the idealized woman, reject literary stereotypes about women, and reveal women’s attitude toward love and marriage in their respective cultures. Women who add to the Cinderella cycle use the heroine of their story to assert that women are capable of managing their own affairs and determining their future” (Kurronen, 2019, p. 2). In the traditional tale of Cinderella, she never loses her shoes during the time she tries to leave the ball. Instead, the princess's abduction prompts the viewer to consider whether such an end could only come about if she has rejected the life offered by her lover, husband, or handsome prince.



**Figure 3. Disney’s Cinderella (1950)**

**Source:** Geronimi, C. (Director). (1950). *Cinderella*. [Cinderella] [Film]. Walt Disney Productions.



**Figure 4. Don't Worry Darling (2022) 1:26:55 "No! Jack! They're Hurting Me!"**

**Source:** Wilde, O. (Director). (2022) 1:26:55. *Don't worry darling*. [Don't worry darling] [Film]. New Line Cinema Vertigo Entertainment.

In the film, Alice, symbolically delineated as a princess, is actually a doctor before being kidnapped and before her identity is stripped away. The centuries-old speculation that a woman's existing identity is pitiable is debunked—only if she finds a prince to marry because the existence of women is associated with men. Her fate will be proven beautifully and perfectly, which is a way of controlling woman's mind and heart. This concept not only undermines the diverse aspirations, talents, and ambitions of women but also imposes a limited and unrealistic standard of success. This is indicated in the film with this statement: "There is beauty in control. There is grace in symmetry. We move as one" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:34:00 – 1:34:23). The idea that a woman's life is only validated through the lens of a fairy tale romance restricts her agency and reinforces traditional gender roles, reducing her existence to a mere quest for an external validation and societal approval.

Woman is hurled into a slave-like situation in a love relationship that devoids her of her identity, while man plays the role of the perpetrator for the prevalence of the patriarchal order. Man's portrayal of woman as docile and submissive is evident in Jack's interactions with Alice, where his only expression of affection is the simplistic

phrase "I love you." Alice's response reflects a rejection of this shallow conception of love, as she asserts that such a sentiment devoid of depth or understanding does not suggest true love. Jack has decided to take her life by making her forget that she has had a private life. Even if it was miserable to Alice, she would have a chance to live freely. In his perspective, the life that has been taken away from her is actually replaced with a new life that is granted upon woman. The male lead's insistence on happiness in the final scenes appears as a clichéd notion: "-You are happy" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:41:00 – 1:4:11). It does not matter how she feels as long as being with him, there is nothing much to worry. Hence, the short cut fairy tales are constructed on the subsequent reunion of completeness and perfection. There will not be other choices whether this union damages people individually or not: "We can fall deeper into what we know is true, we can fall deeper into what we know is true... Allow your consciousness to sink into this world. Into this truth" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:37:53 – 1:38:12). The scene gives the clue about more than one reality. After individuals attain an understanding of the prevailing realities, they can liberate themselves. Significantly, focusing on the problematic presence of history, Olivia Wilde revisions not only history about the female archetypes but also deconstructs the boundaries that have been imposed on female existence. In this respect, she uses alternative ways in order to create a sense of distortion in deep-rooted narratives in which it has been a long time since layout came in for fairy tales.

Fairy tales have robbed women of their identity and self-assertion and turned their enforced passivity, inadequacy, and self-sacrifice into a lifestyle in their real-life relationships. Despite the romantic nature of the quest for a happy ending, as if marriage is supposed to be a proper ending women should have the ability to achieve, Alice, all of a sudden, wakes up from this dream before midnight. *Don't Worry Darling* actually helps the heroine realize herself by making her drift out of romanticism to cling to her own logic. The scene in which Jack dictates the ideal circumstances for Alice supports the idea that men use their imagination to control women's roles and destinies: "so that we can live the life that we deserve! And you are happy! Don't you want to be perfect with me?" (*Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde, 2022, 1:40:38 – 1:41:17). One could get the impression that these tales are based on norms so that they are interpreted in terms of the pre-determined patterns on women's lives.

Indeed, “Cinderella” or “Beauty and The Beast” or the ancient myth “Cupid and Psyche” commonly display if love and marriage are a necessity or a criterion of society. It seems “Cinderella” should have the Prince Charming just as Belle needs the Beast when the story comes to an end. As for Alice, her rebellious identity contradicts with what is expected from her. Notwithstanding her experiences, Alice questions her identity as a woman and becomes a source of inspiration for rebellion against such an oppressive system. *Don't Worry Darling* revolves around the quest of the heroine by mixing her experiences with those of other female characters in tales like “Cinderella” and *Alice in Wonderland*. The final destination of their quest is “know thyself.”

The fact that Wilde compares Alice to Cinderella is actually to foreground the idea of self-formation that is an important tenet in feminism. In “Women’s Voice and Images in Folk Tales and Fairy Tales,” Luma Al-Barazenji claims that “Cinderella represents a female agency in transforming woman’s victimization into independence and self-expression” (Al-Barazenji, 2015, p. 4). In this sense, Cinderella is not a conventional female figure since she objects to marrying the Prince Charming. The common belief that as long as she keeps dreaming and desiring, the prince will ultimately find her is the position most women console themselves with. Yet, what is forgotten is that in doing so, they are forced to fulfill the expectations of the other. On the other hand, Olivia Wilde’s inclusion of fairy tales as well as mythological elements in her film is an attempt to eliminate the archetype from the narrative within her film.

## CONCLUSION

The object of this study is to explore the construction of female gender, starting with the female representations in myths and moving on to fairy tales. Moreover, this examination extends to the portrayal of women in two films, *La Belle et La Bête* and *Don't Worry Darling*, which aim to fill in what has been omitted in the original narrative: tradition that burdens woman. This thesis tries to demonstrate that while both films depict a utopian world for men, it is a dystopian world when it comes to women. Hence, this thesis intends to examine the situations that women are forced to face in the so-called dystopian society in which they have to experience misery and frustration. The desire to create dystopias in these two films is centred around the hidden messages embedded in myths and fairy tales since they are viewed as the main reason for female captivity in this thesis.

According to The West, mentality aligns selves with masculinity, and pushes women toward "other" because of their femininity. The main reason for labelling women is originated in masculinity, which comes from biased norms. With the norms, woman is embodiment of boundaries and extremes – radiantly beautiful yet dependent, or resilient yet naive. According to the lacks and excess present in the "other," gender alienates the self. On the top of this mindset, men protect their authority and supremacy with the worlds they create, among other things, in fairy tales, myths, and all the other forms of storytelling which originate as utopian visions. These narratives supported by patriarchal definitions of femininity portray woman as weak and passive by making her dependent on man.

In the light of the ideas stated above, the films *La Belle et La Bête* (*Beauty and The Beast*) and *Don't Worry Darling* delve into the nuanced explorations of love and come up with a societal paradigm from the past to the future. Therefore, the comparative analysis of the two films in this thesis interrogates the conventional narratives associated with toxic masculinity. It is also shown that, historically, fairy tales have perpetuated the notion that women derive their worth from being loved by men, an ingrained concept since the inception of these tales. Individuals, endowed with the capacity to experience emotions from birth, possess the inherent ability to shape and reclaim their own realities. Since its inception, mythology has often presented

women with a biased and partial representation, perpetuating narratives that reinforce societal norms. In the critical examination of “Beauty and The Beast”, this study reveals how the female protagonist undergoes profound suffering when she thinks that the Beast is on the verge of death. Nevertheless, she sets out on a journey to regain his affection like Psyche does, thereby reinforcing the conventional narrative in which a woman's pursuit culminates in the attainment of a man's love. The perception based on *La Belle et La Bête (Beauty and The Beast)* is the same as the one in the old myth of Cupid and Psyche. The notion of betrayal on the part of woman or man confronts a curse that involves lovelessness or being distinguished as a witch or a monster. Conversely, the film *Don't Worry Darling* challenges the notion that love is incomplete without the presence of a man, contending that such perspectives are solely constructs of a patriarchal framework. This narrative seeks to deconstruct the societal norms that bind love to traditional gender roles, thereby offering a more progressive perspective on the concept of love within the context of fairy tales.

While scrutinizing both films, this thesis attempts to construct a feminist framework around the restoration of a woman's character, which has been distorted in various ways over years. Upon closer examination, fairy tales are revealed to be dystopias inherent to the male system, as evidenced through the elements in the analysis of both films. Women have consistently been depicted as conforming to an idealized image in fairy tales and have been compelled to ignore their own identities to this day. This idea aligns with the previously mentioned metaphor of heroines using a mirror for journeying into the past and future. Women are captured in the dungeon of patriarchy by narratives metaphorically. This is a representation of a dystopian scenario wherein men exploit love as a means to possess this power.

Women's identity has remained unknown for decades; the mold dictating that women should conform to predefined gender roles has to undergo a necessary revision. The representations of women through films have been employed to alter the perceptions in the context of ancient narratives. For a woman to construct her own identity on this journey, it is imperative that she should become aware of the situation in which she currently finds herself.

Viewers are encouraged to engage with the diversity of meanings within the realm of art. No one can take away the ability to play out their own reality from the characters in the film. Therefore, old traditions reproduced by the artist have new impressions. With changing perspectives, it expands the perception in both ways to reach the meaning beyond the artist and the work. When art is considered as a whole, the details, act of reading, the form, the audience make up the components of this whole. Words cannot be self sufficient enough to make a precise claim about the conditions; this is why visual stories are the backbone for meanings. Otherwise, women would never come to realize that fairy tales have doomed them to surrender to patriarchy. After all, society's biased preference for fairy tales as a more submissive method defines women's role in life as captive. When women try to go against these myths, they are doomed to remain as evil characters forever.

I contend that nothing has been taken away from women; indeed, they possess a richness far surpassing their conceivable imaginations. If people entertain the notion that there is no singular reality and subscribe to the belief that they exist in this world only as individuals, the significance of any reality dissipates. In essence, the narratives of fairy tales embody an internal journey for female characters to discover themselves completely. The parallels between *La Belle et La Bête* (*Beauty and The Beast*) and *Don't Worry Darling* in terms of female characters' exploration of self-identity are abundant. While Belle accepts the identity presented to her, Alice contemplates the possibility of her own reality, ultimately discovering the connection between reaching a sense of wholeness and self-awareness. Elaborating on this concept, one can discern a thematic alignment wherein both narratives delve into the intricate process of self-discovery and its inherent link to achieving a sense of completeness. Belle believes that personal fulfillment can be achieved as long as there is a partnership with a husband or male counterpart. To that end, failing to recognize one's own identity transforms every narrative into a dystopia and each character within it into a mere actor. Women are destined to vanish in every dystopia crafted by others as long as they remain unaware of their own potential and reality. In this world, idealized versions of reality are at human disposal and adapt to their own conformations.

There is no reason to endure darkness. Women who care about the past will also care about what they should do to survive in the future. Alice, one of the heroines

who manages expectations, understands and proves that women have not been seeking a place, a stage, or love to happily move into, but it is self-discovery. In effect, the imagination is more important than love and constructs an artificial relationship in both films. Experiences learnt through the flows of dimensions on screen enable the audience to recognize that love is a socially constructed phenomenon and that it ends with loss. What remains is a societal understanding where toxic masculinity prevails.



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