

# MARXIST CRITICISM ON DISNEY'S MOVIE *CINDERELLA*

Muhammad Faizal Hira

Project Advisor: Nurdien H.K.

English Department, Faculty of Humanities

Diponegoro University, Semarang 50275

*Cinderella* is a film made by Walt Disney based on European folk tale written by Charles Perrault in 1697. The film depicts the story of a girl who is bound by the oppressive behavior of the stepmother and step-sisters, who in continuation she wanted to change her fate in a single night. This book analyzes the film with marxist point of view. This book discussed about the class struggle, class and status, and false consciousness within the movie. The author uses theories of Karl Marx to analyze the elements that contained in this film. In this analysis we can conclude that *Cinderella* is not just a regular animated movie but a movie full of Marxist elements.

**Keywords:** *marx, class, status, false consciousness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Cinderella*, a movie released in 1950 and produced by Walt Disney was based on European folk tale about a young woman who suffered from cruelty of her stepmother and stepsisters, later on she tried to change her fate in one night.

*Cinderella* had many versions when it comes to folk tale, the most popular version was written in French by in 1697, under the name Cendrillon. The popularity of his tale was due to his additions to the story, including the, the fairy-godmother and the introduction of glass slippers which was adapted by Walt Disney in animation film.

The story revolved around a girl named Cinderella who lived with her father, stepmother and stepsisters. At first everything was alright until her father passed away, since then her stepmother made Cinderella do all the housekeeping jobs. Meanwhile in the castle, the King wanted his son to immediately get married to a woman, so he held a ball and invited all of the young women across the kingdom to find a suitable bride for the Prince. Cinderella had no suitable party dress for a ball, but her friends the mice and the birds helped her. The evil stepsisters immediately tear apart the dress on the evening night right before the ball, then come the Fairy Godmother to help her out of misery. Finally Cinderella was able to make it to the ball, the Prince noticed her and immediately fell in love, but Cinderella had to go back before midnight, because the magic would be gone. The Prince tried to look for Cinderella after that ball, only by the glass slipper that Cinderella dropped before she left him at the ball. The Prince then searched the entire kingdom for Cinderella by fitting the slipper to every maiden in the kingdom. If it fits, then she would be Cinderella. Cinderella's foot was able to fit on that slipper, and Prince married her after knowing that she was the Cinderella and they lived happily ever after.

Marx ideologies can help us to analyse this movie, the story behind this film was a portrait of socio-cultural reference at that time, the aristocrat system that led the country or kingdom, and how the society see what is the meaning of life. These points were interesting to analyse, because this film depicted the social ideology and views at that time. It is most likely that this film had a strong implication of Marx

ideology towards the society, how the class struggle between people to change their current state, how people are being classed, and how the false consciousness works.

In this essay the writer would analyse those aspects and how the movie depicted Marx ideologies. It was a Disney animated film and one of the most recognizable film of all time. Many generations have seen this film and with Marxist criticism towards the movie we can understand more about the movie, it made *Cinderella* more than just a fairy tale. I hope that we could appreciate and see what lies beneath the story of this phenomenal fairy tale.

## **2. LITERARY REVIEW**

### **2.1 Marxism**

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Germany, on May 5, 1818. Marxism is an ideology based on the concepts of Karl Marx. Marx composed major theories related to the economic system, social system, and the political system. His ideology was spread throughout the world. People who follow this ideology called themselves Marxist, here are some of his theory.

#### **2.1.1 Class struggle**

The most common issue in Marxism is the class struggle. In the eyes of Marx, class struggle will never end, as Karl Marx said: The history of man is actually a history of class struggle.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (Marx & Engels, 1969:98).

Proletarian-bourgeoisie relationship is a relationship of conflict, the dominant-subordinate. Karl Marx said that one day the proletariat will realize their common interests so that they unite and revolt.

### **2.1.2 Class and Status**

The development of capitalism divides people into two classes, one who controls and owns the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and the other one who does not have the means of production (proletariat).

Class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production - the means by which they gain a livelihood. Before the modern industry, the means of production consisted primarily of land and instruments used to tend crops or pastoral animals. In pre-industrial societies, therefore, the two main classes were those who owned the land (aristocrats, gentry or slave-holders) and those actively engaged in producing from it (serfs, slaves and free peasantry) (Giddens, 1991:210).

Status refers to differences between social groups in the social honour or prestige they are accorded by others. Status distinction often vary independently of class divisions, and social honour maybe either positive or negative. Positively privileged status groups include any groupings of people who have high prestige in a given social order (Giddens, 1991:212).

People were divided by class and this made huge differentiation towards social behaviour of people and how people see themselves at the society. Power distribution and wealth was the major role of this classification.

### **2.1.3 False Consciousness**

False consiousness refers to a certain state of thinking that prevents a person from percieving the true nature of their socila situation.

There are, however, criteria such as a person's occupation or the amount of money he earns , which all can agree about, irrespective of their ideas about class in general or this or that person's position in particular. It might seem possible, then, to find a way of class quite objectively. But we all know that it is very often the case that whilst X's neighbours insist that X is working class, X obstinately considers himself to be middle-class. X's ideas (and his neighbours) cannot be ignored, because they affect their behaviour. He is more likely, for instance, to associate with people he regards as middle-class, follow middle-class patterns of recreation, try to use middle-class accent, have middle-class ambitions for his children , etc. His subjective perception

of his class position cannot, therefore, be simply written as 'wrong' or - more sophisticatedly - as 'false consciousness' (Worsley, 1970:421).

Proletariat have false consciousness due to their condition of being oppressed and ruled by bourgeoisie. They often do not know that they have been oppressed all along by the ruler. False consciousness blinded their mental state to freedom themselves from oppression of the ruler class.

## **2.2 Cinematic Theory**

Film must be analysed not only by the values and ideologies, but also the cinematic aspects that made the film. The Director must have a vision, a way to convey the story to the viewer. Therefore director's choice of shots and angle are important, in order to deliver such a story to the viewer.

Analysis of the form of the cinematic text concentrates on the two basic building-blocks of film, the shot and the cut, and on the structure that comes into being when the film is assembled, the combination of the shot and cut that is the finished film (Hill and Gibson, 2000:13).

Each frame size of the pictures also has different meanings and impression that the director wants to convey. Close up, Medium shot, Long shot or Point of view shot depend on the director. Camera angle also will help the director in convey the story of the film.

“The Close-up is traditionally the shot showing just the head, hands, feet, or a small object. It emphasizes facial expression, the details of a gesture, or a significant object” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008:191). This shot is usually used to give identification, intensity and intimacy of the scene. The Medium Close-up is a technique that position in the middle of the Close-up and Medium Shot. “The Medium Close-up frames the body from the chest up” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008:191). It reveals only a little of the surroundings. The medium shot is the most frequently technique used in the movies. “The medium shot frames the human body from the waist up. Gesture and expression now become more visible” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008:191). It shows the subject more detail and it permits some of the background to be seen. The medium long shot is shot scale that frames from about the knees up of the character. “These are common, since they permit a nice balance of figure and surroundings” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008:191). The last is Long shot, it frames the whole of the character’s body that gives a wide view of the background. “In the long shot figure are more prominent, but the background still dominates” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008:191).

Every angle has its own purpose on this movie. Whether it is to show us the expression of the character or it adds meanings within the scene. In this movie we analyse what angle or shot that is used to make this movie and what are the purpose of using it.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

The writer uses library research in order to analyse the *Cinderella* movie. Library research is a research method that involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question, necessary component of every other research method at some point. The writer uses some books and internet sources as references that related to this essay, which include literary criticism and film studies. The writer also uses objective approach in this essay. This approach will help the writer to analyse the movie. It will help analyse the character in the film and the type of the shot that used by the director. The most important thing in this approach is the analysis must be complete in an objective way.

### **4. MARXISM ON DISNEY'S MOVIE *CINDERELLA* (1950)**

Marxism plays a major role on this movie, setting up character's consciousness toward his/her class, class differentiation and social struggle. Many aspects could be found in scenes of this movie. Cinderella maybe lead character on this movie but the essence of Marxism can be found in a lot of scenes.

We can see a scene when Cinderella had a conversation with Bruno the dog. Bruno was dreaming chasing Lucifer the cat and then he woke up from his sleep (see **Picture A, Appendix**). Cinderella told him that if he insist to chase Lucifer he will lose his place to sleep inside the house and forced to sleep outside, so he must get rid



of that dream. If he does not want to lose his place to sleep, he must learn to like the cat. From this scene we know that cat has higher class than the dog, Lucifer was Cinderella's stepmother favorite pet and on the other side Bruno the dog was just a working dog. From that scene alone we can clearly state that Cat and Dog was a reference to social class that established in the Cinderella's house. Cat is a reference to bourgeoisie and dog is a reference for proletariat. The reason why cat and dog were bourgeoisie and proletariat was because the cat, as stated in the theory that bourgeoisie was the one who has power, even though the one who made decision whether Bruno sleep on the outside or inside the house was Cinderella's stepmother not Lucifer, but Lucifer was the one that play the key role here. It was Lucifer's who really decide how Bruno was treated by his attitude toward him.

In advance privileges that offered from the owner (Cinderella's Stepmother) to Lucifer and Bruno are different. Lucifer get to sleep in a very luxurious bed, but on the other side Bruno get to sleep in the kitchen on a rug, even though Bruno the dog is a working dog and Lucifer the cat is a pet cat. It means that Bruno has to work everyday to guard the hen and other kind of duties, but Lucifer does nothing at all, he just play with mouse, eat, and sleep everyday. This scene on **Picture A** also Marxism oriented, because Bruno the dog is a proletariat who must work hard and never get a chance to play or do something for his own entertainment. On the other side Lucifer the cat is a bourgeoisie that has all kinds of privileges offered by the owner, sleep in luxurious bed, delicious food, and treated differently from other animals. Cats and

Dogs are archenemies, in many cultures around the world those two were opposing sides and they will fight each other if they met and this was a perfect imagery for proletariat and bourgeoisie. Karl Marx (1969) said that the history of mankind is story of never ending struggle. The proletariat will always oppose the bourgeoisie in many kinds of aspects. In that scene stated that Bruno the dog was dreaming chasing Lucifer the cat. It was an imagery of that struggle, how the proletariat tried to chase the bourgeoisie and it was somehow planted in Bruno's sub-conscious that he must catch the cat. The director use the medium shot to depict the interaction between Bruno the dog and Lucifer the cat, so the viewer could see how this to will react to each other. As we can see that Bruno the dog is not fond of Lucifer the cat and all of his privileges. On the other side Lucifer the cat was very arrogant knowing that he had higher place than Bruno the dog. Later after that scene he was teasing Bruno's patience by wiping his tail all over him, Bruno was angry and want to bite Lucifer. Knowing Bruno would bite him, Lucifer moans to let Cinderella know that he was in a danger. Immediately Cinderella stops Bruno. Lucifer was showing his higher status and Bruno was the one who has lower status. The bourgeoisie can do whatever they like to proletariat, but when proletariat wanted to harm bourgeoisie they can not do it. This scene of interaction between Bruno the dog and Lucifer the cat was a perfect depiction of social class and struggle between these two opposing sides.

Now we analyse what Cinderella said to Bruno. Proletariat will always look up to the bourgeoisie, this was due to false conscience planted on their head.

Proletariat dreamed about a way of life like bourgeoisie, a life surrounded by luxury and privileges. What Cinderella said to Bruno the dog was the example. She said to Bruno if he does not want to lose his place to sleep, he should learn to like the cat. Cinderella was a depiction of proletariat in this movie, she always suffer from chores, household duties and many kinds of work assigned to her by her stepmother and stepsisters. She does not had a free time for her own and she must work from dawn until night, somehow she developed a mental state that made her look up to a condition where she does not have to work or taking orders anymore. In that sense Cinderella become a proletariat and think that living a good life means you have to be a bourgeoisie. What Cinderella implied in that word was Bruno the dog must learn to like Lucifer the cat, the proletariat must be able to like bourgeoisie in order to achieve that goal.

Furthermore as stated above that Dogs and cats are archenemies also mean Cinderella wanted Bruno to throw away his pride and gave up in order to achieve those privileges, to sleep inside the house, even though he will never catch up with same privileges that Lucifer the cat had, Cinderella was so blinded by that ideology even when Bruno got angry when she said he must learn to like the cat, she tried to explain good things about Lucifer but finally she came to nothing and with that words Cinderella was already drawn into a false ideology, a concept where she only understands that good living is a life like bourgeoisie even though she does not know the specific reason why it is good to be a bourgeoisie.

In **Picture B, Appendix**, we can see the bourgeoisie depiction. In the picture we can see the king and his advisor discuss about the prince who have not decided yet his bride and the king was mad because he is getting old and he wanted to hear children running around in the castle again. Then he had an idea to throw a ball in order to choose the perfect maiden for the prince. The King was a depiction of a bourgeoisie, because as stated in the theory before that a bourgeoisie was the one who had the means of production and was the one who controls the economic system of the kingdom. The fact that he can summon all of the maiden across the country is the proof that he has the highest power. The director uses medium long shot to describe how big was the castle and all of the luxury things that possessed by the King.

There was a scene where Cinderella's stepsisters humiliate Cinderella who want to go to the ball (see appendix **picture C**), they mocked Cinderella by mimicking her and the prince dancing. This scene implied how her stepsisters oppressed Cinderella. Cinderella can not go to the ball because she was considered as a person not worthy for such kind of privileges, to meet the prince and attend the ball. This is a way to keep the proletariat down. Cinderella insists to attend the ball because it was her right and by that royal decree she proved that she is qualified for that ball. In the other hand her sisters keep mocking her and said she can not go to the ball. This is what happens in real life also for someone who was born in poor family can not have the same privilege as someone who was born in a noble or rich families even though they are the same. The director uses medium shot in order to capture the

interaction between Cinderella's step sisters and Cinderella's expression towards the action of her stepsisters.

Cinderella tried to make her own dress in her room, but as soon as she tried to make it her stepsisters and her mother gave her chores to keep her occupied and cannot continue to make her dress. This scene on **Picture D** in the **Appendix**, was a strong proof that Cinderella was a proletariat in this movie. She always worked day and night, never got a chance to pursue what she wanted. The director uses long shot in order to capture Cinderella and her dress, her dreams and her obligation. The director uses medium long shot to capture Cinderella and her surrounding.

In **Picture E**, we can see Cinderella was sad that she cannot go to the ball and disappointed that she cannot meet with the prince, she was very sad. This was also an example how Cinderella was a depiction of a proletariat blinded by her false consciousness, she was dreaming how was it like to be on that ball and how was it like to her dream, to achieve her ambition. The director uses long shot to capture the moment when Cinderella was watching the castle, this gave a feeling that her dreams are so close yet so far.

There is a scene where Cinderella was mourning after her dress was being ripped off by her sister and she was very sad that she could not go to the ball even she was being helped by her mice and birds friends (see **Appendix, Picture F**). She was broken inside knowing that she could not go to the ball. This was an example of her

false consciousness, she thought that everything would end and her world start to fall apart, just because she could not attend the ball. The idea that she must have a good life by living like a bourgeoisie leading her to a dream that break her. Indeed we must have a dream to achieve something in life but to think that our current life is not good and setting up parameters same as bourgeoisie to live a life, it was a false consciousness. The director using long shots to capture the atmosphere and use dark backgrounds as marker that this is a very sad situation.

In **Picture G**, we can see the ball that is held in the castle. Everyone in the kingdom go to the ball just to see the prince and hope the prince to like them and by that way they can step up their class in society. Everyone in the kingdom saw this as a chance to change their class and this was caused by false consciousness that has been planted on their minds. Their life as a proletariat was miserable and need to be changed. The director uses long shot in order to capture all of the maiden and guest that join the ball in the castle to indicate there was a lot of people who wanted to meet the prince and hoped to be chosen as his bride.

Cinderella was dancing with the prince in **Picture H** and she was smiling and very happy. This was a depiction of a dream of a proletariat, where you can dance with the price, someone with such a high class, under the moon, and with fine dress. It represents what Cinderella and proletariat wanted all this time, to be able at the same level as the bourgeoisie and feel the joy of privileges. The director uses

close up shot to capture Cinderella's expression while dancing with the prince, by this shot we can clearly see what Cinderella felt at that time.

We can see the step sister tried the glass slipper and faked it only by wearing the tip of her foot inside that slipper. This scene in **Picture I** indicates the amount of effort that was made by the people from lower class to achieve the higher status in society. People from the lower class will do everything in order to achieve their dream to be on the same level as the bourgeoisie. Once again they were led by their own false consciousness and think that it is okay to do everything in order to attain greater social status. The director uses medium shot to capture how the step sister faked the fitting and how the king judge was reacting to that situation.

Finally in **Picture J**, at the ending we were shown that Cinderella is finally married to the prince, her wedding party was luxurious and everyone was happy and the last scene before the credit there was a picture of Cinderella and the prince on a photobook and on that book was written "and they live happily ever after". The director uses long shot to capture Cinderella, the Prince, and all of the wedding ceremony in order to show how happy they are. We can imply from this scene, this is the main idea implemented in every people's mind, to live a good life you must be rich, set a high standard of everything and live like a bourgeoisie. The thing that must be considered is, a lot of people after setting these standards realise that their life was miserable or not worthy enough of living. They keep dreaming on how does it look like to be someone in the top of social class, they tend to forget that all people are the

same. Everyone has their own problems and we rarely notice it, the only thing we see was just the good side of it. It also happens to the *Cinderella*, notice how was Cinderella was dreaming to be another girl for a night, to be something more than she was, to be with those who joined the ball and danced with the prince and how broken she was when she could not go to the ball, it was not the end of her life, she was so sad and could not carry on anymore. So this movie led us to believe that to have a happy life you must be like Cinderella, but this is wrong. This is a false consciousness that planted in our mind, to think if your life was not run on that way, it was not worthy of living, whether you are just a peasant or some royal born, everyone has to live their own life to the fullest, because what determine our life was worthy or not is not money, status, or achievements. It is ourselves.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

*Cinderella* was a movie that has surpassed generations, all of the people in the world had already seen the movie, some of them fell in love by the drama and some of them see this movie as something more. A movie with such heavy Marx ideologies, lies beneath all these characters.

*Cinderella* told us about the social class and how they struggle in order to achieve their goal of life, how the social system was established in the movie, even by seeing the interaction between the animal we could see how the interaction and



conflict between two opposing sides, proletariat and bourgeoisie. How people and Cinderella was blinded by their own false consciousness. Most importantly after analyzing Marx ideologies within *Cinderella*, we could say this movie shows us we must free ourselves from the chains of class and live a life like we wanted.

## 6. REFERENCES

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. (2008). *Film Art: An Introduction*.  
New York: Mc. Graw-Hill Companies

Disney, Walt (Producer). &. (1950). *Cinderella*[Motion Picture]. United States: Walt  
Disney Productions

Giddens, Anthony. (1991). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Hill, John and Pamela Church Gibson. (2000). *Film Studies Critical Approaches*.  
New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Marx, Karl and F. Engels. (1969). *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*.  
Moscow: Progress Publishers

Worsley, Peter. (1970). *Introducing Sociology*. New York: Penguin Books

