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ENG 476

Two Clever Girls

Although the motif of cleverness leading to success is common to both Cinderella variants, Cap O’ Rushes by Joseph Jacobs presents a girl who is intelligent from the very beginning. On the other hand, Charles Perrault’s Cinderella is a much more passive girl, whose cleverness is induced only after the intervention of a supernatural power.

To begin, Cap O’ Rushes’ intelligence is clear from the start of the story when she cleverly responds to her father’s question saying, “I love you as fresh meant loves salt”. While her father does not understand the ingenious answer, Cap O’ Rushes has demonstrated an amazing understanding and knowledge for the world around her. In essence, her answer is better than either of her sisters because she knows that without salt, fresh meat would be tasteless and detestable to eat. Additionally, Cap O’ Rushes plans from the very beginning to attend the ball, almost in another disguise, and fool the other maids by claiming that she is “too tired to go”. This reveals real brilliance because the ruse allowed Cap O’ Rushes to infiltrate the dance without being discovered as a house maid. It also indicates that perhaps Cap O’ Rushes has further plans to secure for herself a higher standard of living than just a common house maid. On the contrary, Cinderella only shows any form of personal cleverness after her Fairy Godmother has entered the story. Once Cinderella witnesses the Fairy Godmother transforming the pumpkin and mice into a coach and horses, she suggest transforming a “rat” into a “coachman”. The sudden appearance of the Fairy Godmother functions as a *deus ex machina* which quickly resolves Cinderella’s problems and does not allow the girl to show any real intelligence on her own part. Instead, it functions to disable the girl from solving many of her own problems through her own intellect. This girl is clearly different from the smart and self-sufficient character in Cap O’Rushes.

Furthermore, the differences between the girls is furthered by the ending of the story. When Cap O’ Rushes “slipped her ring” into the young master’s gruel she is showing a very thoughtful action. For the same reason why she hid her true identity as a maid and as the beautiful young woman, Cap O’ Rushes realizes that she will not able to just present herself to the master’s son. First, she would probably never be granted access as a house maid and even if she did, nobody would believe her, even with the ring as proof. By crafting a situation in which the young master sends for her himself, she has created the opportunity for him to discover who she really is on his own. By using this “sly” and cunning intelligence to improvise a situation to her advantage, Cap O’ Rushes essentially creates for herself, her own happy ending. In contrast, Cinderella’s happy ending does not allow Cinderella to portray any sort of intelligence. Rather she is granted the opportunity to try the shoe on by the equerry and it just happens to fit, “moulded to its shape like wax”. In this ending, Cinderella is granted a happily ever after through no direct action of her own. There was little to no effort on her part. This final action really detracts from the strength of her character and diminishes the power she has over her own life.

Perhaps the differences in the stories is due to the culture of the story and the intent of the storyteller. Cap O’ Rushes comes off as a very capable and intelligent young woman who can take care of herself. On the contrary, Cinderella reacts well in the given situations but only once prompted by outside, sometimes supernatural, forces.