

The Contestation of Magic in the Adaptation of a Fairy Tale into a Film: ‘Snow White’ to *Snow White and the Huntsman*

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Abstract

Fairy tales are considered stories for children because of magical events in them. The consideration is based on assumptions that children's rationality is not well-developed yet. However, adaptation of fairy tales continues in the time when people do not believe in magic anymore, even they multiply the magical elements in the works of adaptation. This article analyses positions of magical and real elements in a fairy tale entitled ‘Snow White’ by Brothers Grimm and a film directed by Rupert Sanders called *Snow White and the Huntsman*. We apply theory of Adaptation by Linda Hutcheon to recognize the adaptation as a product, process, and context while to map the magical elements in the two stories we apply magical realism by Wendy B. Faris. To explore the context of adaptation of the magical elements, constructionism by Vivien Burr is also applied. The results of this paper analysis show the position of magical element in the adaptation varies. The variation become possible First, the magical element is dominant in Snow White by Grimm but logic invades the magical element. Second, the adaptation of Snow white in the form of film shows the dominance of magical element in a hyper-contestation of magic. Third, both works are not magical realism works which support the same agenda in different ways. Grimm’s version supports colonialization discourse with the logic of the post-enlightenment paradigm, and the film version supports re-colonialization discourse through the contestation of magic that is technological rather than ideological.

Keywords: adaptation, fairy tale, film, magical realism, re-colonialization

INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are identical to magical stories that are suitable for children in developing their rational thought. Meanwhile, Madame d'Aulnoy the one who coined the term fairy tale for stories with magical elements worked the fairy tales (*countes de fées*) as political strategies (Barchilon, 2009; Kaliambou, 2007; Reddan, 2016; Zipes, 1975). Since the function of a fairy tale is as media to speak up about the social environment in the hands of d'Alnoy and writers in her salon, the fairy tale is not aimed for children at the beginning. However, fairy tales travel through time and space and they adapt. The adaptation of fairy tales keeps reproducing the magical elements from time to time. In one of Jack Zipes' researches, he and the team found that until 2015 there were 919 filmographies of fairy tale that had been done by people around the globe (Zipes et al., 2015). This article analyses the adaptation of the magical elements in *Snow White and Huntsman* directed by Rupert Sanders which has two centuries-distance production.

"Snow White" by Brothers Grimm is a fairy tale published in 1812 in Germany while the film adaptation directed by Rupert Sanders is a global product released in May 2012. The distributor, screenwriter, producer, and most of the artists who support the film are American, but Sanders is British, and the film was produced under a British scholar consultant and some frames were taken in Europe. The history of the fairy tale from Grimm to film by Sanders shows that it travels from Europe to America.

Snow White and the Huntsman is not the first film adaptation of Snow White. In 1937, Disney filmed it into a cartoon film, and it became a popular version of Snow White (Mollet, 2013, p. 123). The live-action version of Snow-White film also been there in 2001 titled *Snow White the Fairest of Them All*, and *Mirror Mirror* in 2012. This article uses *Snow White and the Huntsman* as the material object of analysis since it presents a bunch of magical events in the scenes. The contestation of magic in the adaptation of the fairy tale drives us to questions; how is the position of the magical element in its adaptation? What are the changes in the magical element adaptation? Why do they change?

Adaptation of fairy tales into films has been discussed by scholars and film makers with diverse perspectives. There are previous studies examining the magic and fantasy in the adaptation of fairy tales (Barnim, 2020; Kaliambou, 2007; Klapcsik, 2018; Lassner & Cohen, 2014; Lukasiewicz, 2010; Moen, 2013; Reddan, 2016; Talairach-vielmas, 2010; Zipes, 1975, 2011), fairy tale and society (Gregory et al., 2007; Hosking, 2011; Joosen, 2010) Snow White in the perspective of psychology (Opperman & Roets, 2012) Snow White and the local culture adaptation (Deveny, 2016; Mollet, 2013). However, the previous studies do not discuss what the magical element adaptation promotes in each of their presentations related to their changes. To complete the gap between the previous research, this article focuses on position, form, and function of the magical element changes in its adaptation using a theory of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon, magical realism by Wendy B. Faris, and constructionism by Vivien Burr.

In Linda Hutcheon's perspective, an adaptation is a new work that is not supposed to be subverted to the adapted text. The basic concept of her theory of adaptation is 'repetition but not replication' (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 06). Discussion of adaptation always relates to repeating and changing the previous work. In other words, adaptation deals with adoption and adaptation. Hutcheon proposes three things that involve in an adaptation, they are product, process, and context. The three of them intertwined in each part of the discussion. As a product, an adaptation work can be seen as a text that shows its mode of engagement. An adaptation also deals with the ways of adaptation works where intertextuality and reception are discussed. While the adaptation context relates to the discussion of who has done the adaptation, why, where, and when the final product of an adaptation is enjoyed by the audiences or the readers as a new aesthetic construction.

Snow White and the Huntsman is film adaptation of a fairy tale entitled "Snow White" by Brothers Grimm that still reproduce magical element in its representation, this article analysis also uses the magical realism concept from Wendy B. Faris. A magical realism work has 5 basic elements, they are irreducible element, phenomenal world, unsettling doubt, merging realms, disruption of time, space, and

identity (Faris, 2004, p. 07). In defining ‘magic’ in this article, we focus on two contrast elements, they are the magical and the real elements. The magical element includes what Faris defined as Irreducible element, unsettling doubt, merging realms, disruption of time, space, and identity and the real element is what Faris called as phenomenal world. The real element is logical and can be verified empirically, the magical element is the opposite one; cannot be verified empirically and logically. While magical realism in Faris’s perspective must be in the position between the real and the magical elements. The *in-betweenness* of text position is one of the civilization revolution upgrades on the human paradigm. Magical realism tries to reposition the magical element that used to be repressed by the real element. The real element is a product of modernism and *the rule of the game* of modernism is rationality; everything must be logical, empiric, and structured. While the consequences of the subordination of such paradigm legitimate othering what the modernist cannot measure in its logic. Therefore, this article combines the use of the theory of adaptation and magical realism to find out reasons beyond the changes of the magical element in the adaptation. Furthermore, Vivien Burr’s theoretical concepts that stated reality is a construction through social, historical, and cultural processes (Burr, 1995) ties the theories that are applied in this article since this theory is rooted in language.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this analysis are taken from Snow White Fairy tale by Brothers Grimm and *Snow White and the Huntsman* film directed by Rupert Sanders. The selection of the data is done by contrasting the real with the magical elements in the two works. The data in the printed work are taken through close reading and taking notes while the data in the film are taken by watching it, detecting the screen captures for pictures, and taking notes. Data for this analysis are in the form of lingual data (written, audio, and visual) that are collected in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, discourses, pictures in shots or frames, and sounds or music that are presented in the film. Textual, semiotic, and discursive analyses are conducted to figure out the adaptation of magic from the fairy tale into the

film. The position between the magical and the real elements reveals the ideological position of the text in the discursive formation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Between Magic and Logic

Snow White and the Huntsman as an adaptation film from a fairy tale that has magical events, returns with a multiplied magical event in its new representation. In Grimm’s version, Snow White is a little girl who is sent by the new queen, her stepmother, to the jungle because of her jealousy over Snow’s beauty. The queen does some witchcraft to kill Snow, but the dwarfs save her through some verified actions empirically. The witchcraft done by the queen is an irreducible element while the dwarfs’ efforts to free Snow from the charm are verified so that the fairy tale contested magic versus logic. However, the logic of events in the fairy tale are not a realistic one. Rationality and certainty are basic characteristics of realism literary works (novel) (Watt, 1957). Snow White as a written fairy tale only shows some characteristics of realism and presents magical elements from the previous civilization in the form of myth, belief, and rituals.

Based on Faris’s concept, the irreducible element is a failure of the text to explain a phenomenon empirically while the phenomenal world is the opposite of the previous element (Faris, 2004, p. 7). Details of events that are rooted in the real world are what is called a phenomenal world. A magical realism work presents the two elements precisely or else it fails to be a magical realism work. The other elements support the in-betweenness of magic and realism. The following quotation shows an example of magical element construction in Snow White by the Brothers Grimm.

“She had a magic looking-glass, and she used to stand before it, and look in it, and say,
‘Looking-glass upon the wall
Who is fairest of us all?
And the looking-glass would answer,
‘You are fairest of them all.’
And she was contented, for she knew that the looking-glass spoke the truth.” (B. Grimm, 2001, p. 215)

The mirror can speak and a ritual is also held to invite the speaking mirror in the conversation

with the queen. Speaking mirror cannot be verified empirically and so does the ritual. Mantra to invite the mirror into the queen's world comes from the tradition of premodern life (primitivism) and emphasizes the magical element of the magical mirror. At the same moment, when the queen is having a conversation with the mirror, it creates merging realms where the queen's world merges with the mirror's world. However, the following quotations are examples of a contrast construction upon the magical events.

"And by witchcraft she made a poisoned comb. Then she dressed up to look like another different sort of old woman." (W. Grimm & Grimm, 1993, p. 220)

"When they saw Snow-white lying down on the ground as dead, they thought directly that it was the stepmother's doing, and look about, found the poisoned comb, and no sooner had **they drawn it out of her hair** than Snow-white came to herself, and related all that had passed." (W. Grimm & Grimm, 1993, p. 221)

The quotations above show the queen's effort in the magical way of making the comb to kill Snow White but then it was canceled as a magical thing through what the dwarfs had done. Removing the comb from her hair is banalizing the magical event that had been done by the queen.

Even in the last scene of Snow White's death, Brothers Grimm use similes in describing the death which means the death is not fully confirmed as a death. When the text mentions that Snow's cheek is still blooming in her 'dead' emphasizes that magic is still happening as seen in the following quotations.

"For the apple was so cunning made, that all poison was in the rosy half of it.... but the sooner had she had taken a morsel of it into her mouth than she fell to earth as dead." (W. Grimm & Grimm, 1993, p. 222).

"... they would have buried her, but that she looked still as if she were living, with her beautiful blooming cheeks." (W. Grimm & Grimm, 1993, p. 222).

"...and the king's son called her servants and bid them carry it away on their shoulders. Now that happened that as they were going along, they stumbled over a bush, and with the shaking the bit of poisoned apple flew out of her throat. It was not long before she opened

her eyes, threw up the cover of the coffin, and sat up, alive and well" (W. Grimm & Grimm, 1993, p. 223).

The way Brothers Grimm present the magical element and the 'real-like' one intertwine one another, even they are popping. However, the story ends with the domination of magic since the fairy tale's world is separated from the real world. The distinction of the characters in the story signifies the domination of the magical element. The characters are not ordinary people; the queen is a witch, Snow is the chosen one who was born from a magic wish, the dwarfs are not human, the huntsman is a knight who has bravery, Snow's mother has a wish come true and her father is a king with power. Besides the extraordinary characters, the magical events discussed before also strengthen our argument that Snow White by Brothers Grimm is positioning the magical element to be dominant over the real element.

In Faris's concept, a text is a magical realism when the magic and the real elements are balanced; no hierarchy position between them. Therefore Snow White by Grimm is not a magical realism. Even the logic presents in the story but it does not represent realism because of the limitation of the fairy tale world as the other world. Logic is only inscribed in the story as the voice of Grimm's class; bourgeoisie, not as a mode of writing.

Snow White was published at the beginning of the 19th century when the romantic movement in Europe developed. Romantic movement against the classic movement because of its focus on the form rather than content based on rationality as the canopy of perspective. Collecting folktales and fairy tales become one of the romantic scholars to represent the longing for the past (Kaliambou, 2007, p. 52). They negotiate with the Enlightenment and pre-enlightenment perspectives to find truth in their version (Williams, 1960, p. 48). Grimm's Snow White represents the negotiation of the perspectives since the fairy tale brought the previous civilization through the magical element but logic as the product of the enlightenment paradigm was also present as a unique form of literary work.

Magical Element Over the Real Element

Rupert Sanders as a British who lives in the United States of America directed an

adaptation film of Snow White with a European gothic setting. The screenplay of the film is written by American: Evan Daugherty, John Lee Hancock, and Hossein Amini. Overall, the film is produced by an American company (Universal Pictures) (IMDbpro team, 2022). The film was released for the global market in 2012.

Sanders repeated the magical element of the fairy tale in the film but in different ways. The repetition made but also multiplies the magical element because the media used provides the multiplication of magical element in the media of audio-visual.

The smallest unit in reading films is not words, but images that are more complex than just pictures, namely frames/images (Irawanto, 2020a, 2020b, p. 152; Metz, 1974, pp. 45–46). While pictures from the film are protected by copyright, therefore we only use frame descriptions in the analysis.

Almost every scene of the film presents magical element so that it becomes a magic contestation. The beginning of the film shows Snow White's mother whose finger is pricked by a rose thorn and three drops of her blood fall on the snow. Using slow motion and close-up shoots this frame strengthens the event as an important one (Lacey, 1998). Furthermore, the mother touches her belly and the huntsman's voice-over follows the scene to tell her wishes for her future baby. Eric is the huntsman who narrates the whole narration of the film story, the film is from the perspective of the huntsman. The voice-over and shots in the frame of the mother's wish are the fairy tale's mode. The frames and the narrator's voice-over represent each other as pictures in realistic stories. The characters in the film also have names which means the story of the film indicates certainty as realism works.

The scene of Snow White's birth, childhood, and adulthood shows a distance from the mother's wishes to be true because the film cannot deny the logic of the film medium which is audio-visual. As white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony present in Snow's physical appearance, not right away as the written version.

The witch-nees of Ravenna, Snow's stepmother, is presented through her power to create fake soldiers made of glass to fight all

threat for her power, eternal beauty, and camouflaged ability to be someone else or crows (Sanders, 2012; 01.32.27'-01.32.35'), heal any wounds right away, and to turn living creatures into ashes. Ravenna is also portrayed as a rude queen who killed the king she married and took the kingdom as hers. She also sucked maidens' youthfulness literally to stay young as seen in frames 00.20.14'-00.20.15' (Sanders, 2012). Magic in Ravenna's hands is presented as black magic. However, Snow White is also a magical creature because she is presented as the chosen one. She was born from a magical wish of her mother, protected by angels who led her to escape from her prison and wake up from her death to lead a war against Ravenna and her soldiers. Her magic represents white magic.

Realism indicators in the film do not represent Faris's phenomenal world element but are just 'phenomenal world-like'. The irreducible element dominates the other elements in the story. The audience is only served by the simulation of pleasures of dreams without bringing them to the real world. The world of fairy tale still become a distinct world to escape from the routines and all the not-dream-like life from the world they live in. Magic in the film is not confronted with reality, magic is contested and celebrated in the world of fairy tale, but magic becomes a confrontation to magic; white magic which is represented by Snow-white versus black magic which is represented by Ravenna. The condition of magical realism as a genre is violated in the film.

The burst of magic in Snow White and the Huntsman is not rooted in the culture of the story makers, but it is collected from any cultures, presentation, or part of previous works as a pastiche. The magic construction is a postmodernist perspective that only focuses on the deconstruction of structures and loss in the games without resistance. Meanwhile, magical realism persists in its mission of decolonization. Therefore, *Snow White and the Huntsman* directed by Sanders also fails a magical realism.

Ideological or Technological of Magic in the Two Works?

The magical and the real elements in Grimm's fairy tale aim to counter classic movement. Brothers Grimm tried to be part of the

romantic era in presenting residue of the past culture in the story, but they cannot avoid the reification of post-Enlightenment so that the fairy tale is in a form of deviation from romanticist goal. Therefore, the magical element of Grimm's version is ideological, but is not in line with magical realism ideology.

The film directed by Sanders shows a variation of function of magical element to Grimm's version. The black magic and the white magic in the film are not ideological as concepts of magical realism but as tools or technology. The magic is formulated and standardized as most people desire without relating or comparing it with the real element and becomes a false pleasure as one of the characteristics of popular culture (Strinati, 1995, pp.12-13). Pleasure and entertainment which are promoted in the contestation of magic frames consumerism since the era of film production is the post-production era. Grimm's era was in the time of the Industrial Revolution when production was still the focus of the civilization. The difference the variation of the works relates to the era of their production as their social context.

Magical realism was born to a revolution over the developed paradigm that positioned the real over the magical element as a mission of decolonization. In its history, magical realism was promoted by Latin American writers and then it spread to Africa and many other countries that shared the same experience of colonization. Therefore, territory orientation became the focus of the post-colonialist writers. Meanwhile, Sanders who was born in Britain and moved to the United States to develop his career in the entertainment industry tends to support postmodernism mission as he is a part of the Western Culture. What he focuses on through the contestation of magical events in the film is not to criticize the power of coloniality but social classes. The celebration of pleasure through the magical events in the film pacifies the working class without considering territorial boundaries.

CONCLUSION

The adapter with his ideological and social context at the time of producing an adaptation work shows changes in the adaptation presentation. Adaptation of magical element in Snow White as a fairy tale by

Brothers Grimm into film entitled *Snow White and the Huntsman* directed by Rupert Sanders fail to support mission of magical realism since the adapter and his team come from western culture that do not experience colonization. However, the film is successful in adapting magical element because it reproduces the mission of modernism inscribed in the fairy tale literally; to educate people in obeying their roles based on their social classes so that the bourgeoisie class can easily control them. Snow White in Brothers Grimm version supports colonialization discourse because of their bias toward bourgeois interest. Meanwhile the failure of *Snow White and the Huntsman* to be a magical realism turns it to be in line with re-colonization discourse.

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