

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Background

This study began with a search for two films, *Cinderella* (2015) and *Cinderella* (2021), to serve as objects of comparison. The starting observation was simple: both adapt the same fairy tale narrative, yet they construct gender in ways that seem fundamentally different from each other. With these two works identified, the study zeroes in on gender narrative construction, examining how each film produces, maintains, or reconfigures gender identity through how it organizes character behavior, relational dynamics, plot structure, and narrative resolution. To do this, the study uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as its main theoretical lens, and adopts the comparative method Susan Bassnett demonstrated in her examination of the Guinevere figure across literary texts, a method centered on tracing how ideologically named personages get reconstructed across different historical and contextual instances. Chatman's and Bal's narrative frameworks supply the operational tools for scene-level analysis.

Previous scholarship on gender representation in fairy tale adaptations, on Butler's performativity in cinematic contexts, and on these specific films has each contributed partial insight, but none has brought these elements together in a systematic comparative study of the 2015 and 2021 *Cinderella* films at the level of narrative construction. This study addresses that gap through an original analytical concept, Cinderella-ity: a normative performative script historically encoded in the Cinderella tradition, defined through five interrelated dimensions. Identity gets formed through external recognition rather than autonomous self-definition. Passivity gets naturalized as a gender virtue. Patience and kindness function as the only socially sanctioned response mechanism. Suffering gets posited as a necessary condition for a woman to become worthy of reward. And narrative resolution gets conveyed through integration into the heterosexual social order via marriage. This five-dimensional construct serves as a stable normative reference point against which both films get assessed, allowing a systematic look at what each adaptation reproduces, modifies, or fully reconfigures in how it constructs its female protagonist.

*Cinderella* is a fairy tale that has been repeatedly adapted and reinterpreted in audiovisual media across different periods and cultural contexts. The existence of various animated, live-action, television, and contemporary adaptations demonstrate that the narrative continues to be reproduced and reshaped according to changing social values. This continuing process of adaptation makes *Cinderella* a relevant cultural text for examining how gender representations are maintained,

modified, or challenged in different versions. Within this broader tradition, Branagh's *Cinderella* (2015) and Cannon's *Cinderella* (2021) provide two contemporary adaptations that reinterpret the familiar narrative in different ways, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

The path to choosing Branagh's *Cinderella* (2015) and Cannon's *Cinderella* (2021) did not start from some predetermined theoretical agenda. It started from direct, sustained engagement with the films themselves. Watching them back-to-back made their ideological differences immediately visible. In 2015, Disney released a live-action *Cinderella* built around the motto "have courage and be kind," portraying its protagonist as patient, gentle, and obedient, a figure who fulfills her dreams through marriage to a prince. Six years later, Cannon's *Cinderella* offers a contrasting picture: a protagonist with professional ambitions to become a fashion designer, a critical attitude toward marriage, and a refusal to define herself solely through romantic relationships. Both films adapt the same narrative, but they construct gender very differently, reflecting how contemporary gender discourse has shifted. What observation alone cannot answer, though, is whether this contrast marks a genuine transformation in how gender gets narratively produced, or whether it is a surface revision that leaves the deeper structural logic of the *Cinderella* tradition untouched. This gap, between what a film appears to say about gender and what its narrative structure actually does with gender, became the central problem driving both the choice of these two films and the search for a theoretical and methodological framework precise enough to address it.

*Cinderella* is widely recognized as one of the most frequently adapted fairy tales in world cinema. Since its earliest screen adaptation at the end of the nineteenth century, the story has been reimagined through numerous silent films, animated features, live-action productions, television adaptations, and contemporary reinterpretations across different countries and cultures. This enduring pattern of adaptation demonstrates that *Cinderella* functions not only as a traditional fairy tale but also as a dynamic cultural text whose meanings continue to evolve alongside changing social values. Within this broader tradition, Branagh's *Cinderella* (2015) and Cannon's *Cinderella* (2021) represent two contemporary adaptations that reinterpret the same narrative from different ideological perspectives, making them particularly suitable for comparative analysis.

Choosing *Cinderella* (2015) and *Cinderella* (2021) as the objects of this comparison is not coincidental. It follows from considerations rooted in the nature of the two works themselves. As a classic fairy tale that has crossed cultural and generational boundaries, *Cinderella* plays an important role in shaping the collective imagination around gender ideals. Fairy tales function as cultural instruments that propagate

social values, gender norms and expectations included, and the Cinderella narrative specifically has long been associated with a gender model emphasizing tenderness, patience, obedience, physical beauty, and a focus on external validation. Often described as a submissive gender construct, this model positions women as passive, male-dependent figures for whom marriage is the ultimate goal, and how persistently it has lasted over time points to how narrative repetition sustains a dominant gender hierarchy. Against this backdrop, these two adaptations got selected both because they share a narrative source, making them directly comparable as two discursive realizations of the same basic story, and because of the institutional and historical differences separating them. The 2015 film was produced within Disney's live-action revival strategy, committed to the emotional and moral architecture of its classic animated catalogue, while the 2021 film was distributed through Amazon Prime Video as a platform-distributed, openly revisionist retelling. These differences are not incidental. They reflect a broader ideological shift that happens whenever the same canonical narrative gets reworked for new audiences in a different cultural moment, which is exactly what makes these two films such an analytically productive pair for this study.

With both works selected, this research focuses specifically on gender narrative construction, not on how gender gets visually represented on screen, but on how gender gets produced and governed through the structural organization of the narrative itself. In cinema, gender constructions emerge through narrative mechanisms including character positioning, plot structure, relational dynamics, and how rewards and consequences get distributed within the story. Studies of Disney films show that gender ideology gets embedded not only in visual representation but also in dialogue patterns, behavior, and narrative outcome. This repetitive narrative pattern functions as an implicit script shaping audience perception, particularly among children and adolescents, of what counts as normative gender. From a comparative literary perspective, this continuity and transformation can be understood as part of a process of cultural mediation, since cinema can be treated as a cultural text operating through a narrative structure comparable to literary work.

To analyze gender construction in both films, this study draws on Butler's theory of gender performativity, which holds that gender is not a fixed identity but an effect produced through repeating socially regulated discursive actions, behaviors, and practices, meaning what looks like natural gender expression is actually the cumulative product of narrative decisions that repeatedly position certain gender performances as valued and legitimate. Through this lens, the five dimensions of Cinderella-ity become analytically readable. Ella's identity gets consistently narrated as something conferred by others rather than self-defined, reflecting the

first dimension, identity formed through external recognition. Her repeated non-resistance to mistreatment, framed as nobility rather than constraint, instantiates the second dimension, naturalized passivity as virtue. The narrative's exclusive offer of kindness and tolerance as a viable response to oppression instantiates the third dimension, these traits as the only sanctioned gender mechanism. The film's insistence that suffering must come before reward encodes the fourth dimension, suffering as a condition of worthiness. And the final resolution through marriage to a prince consolidates the fifth dimension, narrative fulfillment as integration into the heterosexual order.

The comparative methodology adopted here follows the analytical procedure Bassnett demonstrated in her examination of *Guinevere*, tracing a named cultural figure across different textual and historical instances to reveal how that figure gets ideologically reconstructed under different conditions of production. This study applies that same procedure to *Cinderella* as a named personage, tracing how her performative construction gets reproduced, modified, or reconfigured across the two adaptations, with Chatman's and Bal's narrative frameworks supplying the scene-level vocabulary needed to identify the specific narrative mechanisms enforcing that construct.

The scholarly conversation informing this study spans several overlapping bodies of research, each contributing a necessary but partial perspective on the phenomenon examined here. Mapping these conversations reveals three distinct clusters of prior work: studies examining gender representation and stereotypes in fairy tale narratives and *Cinderella* adaptations specifically; studies applying Butler's theory of gender performativity to cinematic and popular cultural texts; and studies addressing broader questions about how narrative structures function as mechanisms for constructing and transmitting gender ideology in film. Together, these bodies of work establish the intellectual context for this research and, more importantly, reveal the gaps motivating it. The review below goes through each cluster in turn, attending not just to each study's contribution but to the specific analytical limitations this study is designed to address. What becomes clear across all three clusters is that while individual studies have advanced the field in important ways, none has brought Butler's performative framework into systematic comparative contact with the 2015 and 2021 *Cinderella* films at the level of narrative construction, an absence this study fills by applying *Cinderella*-ity as a five-dimensional analytical construct capable of tracing how the *Cinderella* tradition's normative performative script gets reproduced, modified, or reconfigured across both adaptations.

This study does not stand apart from the scholarship reviewed above; it continues it. The studies discussed here have each examined gender construction from a different angle, whether through stereotype analysis, performativity in other media, or tracing Cinderella's evolution across texts, but none has used performativity theory to compare how gender gets built within the narrative structure of the 2015 and 2021 *Cinderella* films specifically. This study takes up that unfinished work.

El Shaban (2017) conducted research examining gender stereotypes embedded in the narrative and visual structures of classic fairy tales, with a special focus on Cinderella. The study found that across different cultural versions of Cinderella, female protagonists got consistently represented through an emphasis on physical beauty, domestic virtue, and a passive disposition. El Shaban argues that this representation works ideologically to naturalize a model of gender that equates a woman's worth with her physical appearance and her willingness to conform to socially defined gender roles. By examining how beauty and passivity get repeatedly prioritized as defining qualities of the heroine, El Shaban's work provides an important foundation for understanding how the Cinderella narrative has historically codified and transmitted limiting gender ideals. However, this study does not engage with the mechanisms of performative repetition through which such norms get produced and maintained at the narrative level, nor does it address contemporary live-action adaptations.

Budidarma et al. (2023) carried out a comparative study of gender representation in three classic Disney fairy tale films, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, analyzing how gender ideology gets constructed and reinforced through narrative convention and character depiction. The study identified consistent, repeated patterns of submissive gender across all three films, noting that female protagonists get systematically portrayed as gentle, patient, selfless, and ultimately rewarded through romantic union with a male figure. Their findings underscore how fairy tale narratives function as cultural instruments for reproducing traditional gender norms. However, this study does not analyze how these patterns operate as performative repetitions in Butler's theoretical sense, nor does it extend its comparative scope to contemporary live-action adaptations that claim to offer a more progressive gender construct.

Berlianti (2021) reaches a similar conclusion through an analysis of *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, finding that all three heroines get consistently coded through passivity, domestic virtue, and dependence on male rescue, reinforcing the same stereotypical gender pattern El Shaban (2017) and Budidarma et al. (2023) identify. Her study, however, treats the three films as a static representational pattern rather than examining how that pattern gets produced or

potentially disrupted through narrative repetition, a limitation this study's performativity-based approach is designed to move past.

Nurhaliza et al. (2024) focused specifically on the 2021 *Cinderella* released via Amazon Studios, analyzing how the film challenges and subverts traditional gender stereotypes through its portrayal of the female protagonist. Their study found that *Cinderella* (2021) presents a heroine who actively pursues professional ambition, openly questions the institution of marriage, and refuses to define her identity solely through romantic relationships. Their analysis, however, stays at the level of thematic description and does not systematically examine how these progressive narrative choices get produced and maintained through a pattern of performative repetition within the film's narrative structure.

Parsons (2021) carried out a comparative analysis of the Cinderella narrative, examining Charles Perrault's *Cinderella* alongside Betsy Cornwell's *Mechanica* and Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* to trace how the gender storyline has evolved from its patriarchal canonical roots toward contemporary YA retellings. Drawing on sociocultural and gender literary theory, she shows how these novel adaptations deconstruct binary gender roles by reframing the heroine as someone who actively frees herself from servitude, prioritizes independence and personal agency over heteronormative marriage, and forges supportive relationships with other women. Parsons further argues that these texts disrupt the traditional metaphor of the inherently evil stepmother, offering instead complex depictions that critique systemic injustice and advocate for social justice. Her work highlights how gender expression in the twenty-first century has evolved beyond passive beauty and patient suffering to encompass self-determination, technological ingenuity, and communal resistance, providing valuable context for understanding the cultural significance of shifting gender constructs across Cinderella adaptations. Despite this significant contribution, though, Parsons' study did not apply a systematic performativity framework to analyze how these gender transformations get shaped repeatedly through recurring character behavior, relational positioning, and plot structure, a theoretical gap this study directly addresses.

A parallel line of inquiry into literary rather than cinematic Cinderella retellings appears in Taufik and Leiliyanti (2020), who examine how sexuality gets constructed in the Cinderella-adapted novel *Ash*. Their study shows how a queer retelling of the Cinderella narrative destabilizes the tradition's default heterosexual resolution, extending the kind of transformation Parsons (2021) traces in *Mechanica* and *Cinder* into an explicitly non-heteronormative direction. Their analysis, however, works at the level of novelistic prose rather than narrative film, and does

not address the specific 2015 and 2021 cinematic adaptations this study takes as its object.

Wang (2023) investigates the feminist transmutation of Cinderella from the Grimm Brothers' patriarchal fairy tale through contemporary live-action film adaptations, mapping the character's evolution specifically across the 2015 and 2021 cinematic versions. Her analysis shows how this modern retelling progressively dismantles stereotypical "angel" imagery by presenting a heroine who shifts from passive attachment to male authority toward actively pursuing individual ideals, professional autonomy, and equal self-awareness. Wang identifies a major narrative departure in which Cinderella's motivation shifts from seeking male validation and salvation toward affirming personal happiness and self-possession, effectively rejecting the patriarchal educational function embedded in the traditional story. By emphasizing themes of women's independence, courage, and the rejection of subordinate gender roles, she situates these films within a broader cultural discourse advocating for women's emancipation and equal rights. Together with Parsons' work, Wang's analysis contributes significantly to understanding how cultural narratives reflect and shape evolving discourse around gender equality and women's subjectivity. Even so, Wang does not use the lens of performativity to examine how these ideological transformations get materially produced and maintained through the repetitive patterns of embodied performance, interpersonal dynamics, and structural repetition in the narrative, gaps that motivated the comparative performativity analysis this study carries out.

Firdausy (2023) similarly undertakes a comparative reading of Cinderella (2015) and Cinderella (2021), framed through a comparative literary studies lens (*kajian sastra bandingan*) rather than performativity theory. Her analysis traces how each film's portrait of womanhood reflects the values of its production era, finding that the 2015 film retains a more submissive femininity while the 2021 film foregrounds independence and self-determination. While her comparative structure closely parallels the object of this study, Firdausy's (2023) analysis does not draw on Butler's performativity framework and does not trace how these differing portraits get produced through repeated narrative mechanisms at the scene level, which is the specific gap this study's application of Cinderella-ity addresses.

Lenni Herawati Sirait et al. (2025) drew on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to investigate the representation and subversion of gender norms in Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995), using a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis. Their study examines how central characters, including Cher, Tai, and Christian, construct fluid gender identities through repetitive performative action, particularly through fashion, speech, and social interaction. The authors

argue that Cher embodies hyperfemininity while simultaneously subverting traditional expectation through intellectual agency and emotional maturity, while Christian's metrosexual appearance and ambiguous sexuality challenge hegemonic masculinity. They also show that humor and satire function as important tools exposing the artificiality of gender and class construction within society, illustrating how popular media can reflect and reshape how gender gets understood as a dynamic social performance. While this study effectively sets a theoretical precedent for applying Butler's framework in cinematic analysis, it does not extend to fairy tale adaptations, nor does it examine how performativity operates specifically at the level of narrative construction and repetitive plot pattern, a gap this study addresses by applying Butler's framework to a comparative analysis of Cinderella's narrative across two film adaptations.

Gloria Lizana-Iglesias (2024) applies Butler's Gender Trouble framework to analyze gender formation in HBO's *Euphoria* (2019), adopting a constructivist perspective that treats gender as an external performative reality consolidated through social repetition rather than as interior essence. Focusing on Nate and Cal Jacobs, she illustrates how compulsive heterosexuality and the obsessive repetition of masculine patterns reflect the internalization of patriarchal law and the suppression of perverse desire, while her analysis of Jules Vaughn reveals how bodies that resist binary categorization threaten to expose the fundamental instability of Western gender binaries. While her work offers a rigorous model for reading contemporary serial media through Butlerian theory, it is not directed at a comparative analysis of Cinderella adaptations, nor does it specifically investigate how performativity gets encoded in the narrative structure and repetitive plot patterns of the Cinderella tradition, the exact dimensions this study sets out to examine.

Katarzyna Wilk (2024) investigates the representation of women in contemporary American cinema through a comparative analysis of the five highest-grossing live-action films of 2018 directed by men versus women, using critical mass theory and critical actors to evaluate the impact female filmmakers have on representation both on and off screen. Her study reveals persistent systemic bias in Hollywood, showing that female-directed films feature a higher percentage of women in lead production roles and more diverse female protagonists, yet receive much smaller budgets and lower box office returns. While this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the institutional gender gap in modern filmmaking, it does not specifically address fairy tale adaptations or examine how performative mechanisms operate in the narrative construction of the Cinderella story, a dimension this study prioritizes.

Similarly, Lehan Yang (2023) examines how Disney animated films affect children's perceptions of traditional gender roles and sexist stereotypes, focusing on *The Little Mermaid*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and *Cinderella*. Yang demonstrates how Disney princess narratives often portray female characters as passive, submissive, and dependent on male rescue, reinforcing patriarchal norms among young viewers. However, Yang concentrates primarily on the psychological effects of media consumption on children rather than analyzing the performative construction of gender through narrative repetition and plot structure in *Cinderella* adaptations specifically, a methodological gap this study directly addresses.

Jiang et al. (2024) extend this line of inquiry through a meta-narrative review of gender portrayal across the broader Disney film catalogue, finding a persistent pattern in which female protagonists get coded through appearance-based virtue and domestic aspiration despite the studio's increasingly public rhetoric of progressive representation. Their review-level approach identifies the pattern's prevalence across many films but does not undertake the kind of close, scene-level narrative analysis this study applies specifically to the 2015 and 2021 *Cinderella* adaptations.

With respect to narrative methodology, Chatman (1978) and Bal (1997) supply the basic tools this study uses to systematically analyze narrative structure. Chatman's distinction between story and discourse, separating what gets narrated from how it gets narrated, makes it possible to identify narrative elements like events, character traits, and relational position as distinct analytical units. Bal's narratological framework supplies complementary categories for examining focalization, character agency, and temporal organization, essential for tracing how gender gets constructed and repeated across both films. Combining these narrative tools with Butler's theory of gender performativity forms the methodological core of this study.

Even though research on gender representation in fairy tale adaptations keeps developing, significant gaps remain. Studies examining gender stereotypes in classic *Cinderella* narratives have identified consistent patterns of normative gender construction but have not engaged with the mechanisms of performative repetition through which those norms get produced and maintained at the narrative level. Studies focusing specifically on the 2021 adaptation have noted its progressive surface elements but have not systematically examined how these get constructed, or whether they represent substantive structural transformation rather than surface-level revision. Studies applying Butler's framework to cinematic texts have done so outside the fairy tale genre, without extending the analysis to the specific narrative conventions of the *Cinderella* tradition. And while several comparative studies have

traced shifts in Cinderella's characterization across adaptations, none has applied Butler's performative framework to a comparative narrative analysis of the 2015 and 2021 live-action films specifically. In particular, the concept of Cinderella-ity, with its five operational dimensions as proposed here, has not previously been used as a systematic lens for tracking how culturally rooted normative gender models get produced, maintained, or reconfigured across both adaptations at the level of narrative structure.

This gap matters because the two films present seemingly contradictory gender models, yet it remains unclear whether their differences reflect substantial transformation at the level of narrative performativity or merely superficial variation within a fixed structure. Without a systematic, performativity-based comparative analysis grounded in the kind of named-personage methodology Bassnett demonstrated through her Guinevere analysis, any claim of transformation would stay descriptive rather than analytically grounded, and it is precisely this absence that this study addresses.

Collectively, these gaps show that gender is not a fixed or universal category but one constantly negotiated within specific social and cultural contexts. Given this, the study aims to analyze and compare gender construction in both films through the lens of performativity, focusing on the narrative construction of the female protagonist while situating that performative construction within the broader relational network of characters in each film, attending in particular to character autonomy, dialogue, interpersonal relationship, conflict structure, and plot resolution. Using Cinderella-ity as a diagnostic instrument that systematically traces the tradition's five normative dimensions, the study assesses whether these contemporary adaptations represent a genuine transformation in gender construction or simply a reconfiguration of existing norms, contributing both a theoretically grounded comparative analysis and a transferable analytical concept to the growing body of feminist narrative scholarship on popular fairy tale cinema.

### **1.1.1 Justification of the Term "Cinderella-ity"**

Before turning to the statement of the problem, it is worth pausing on the term Cinderella-ity itself, since the term is doing three distinct pieces of conceptual work at once: signaling a theoretical register, closing a gap left by existing terminology, and solving a specific methodological problem in this study's comparative design.

The suffix is not decorative. Within the theoretical vocabulary this study draws on, "-ity" is the standard morphological marker Butler and her commentators use to name a regulated, systemic condition rather than a simple attribute: performativity, normativity, citationality, iterability (Kakoliris, 2025) are none of them adjectives describing a trait a subject happens to have; each names a process that produces and

sustains an effect through repetition. "Cinderella-ness" would have suggested something closer to a quality or flavor, a vague sense of "being Cinderella-like." Cinderella-ity is coined deliberately to sit inside this same technical register, signaling that what is being named is not a character trait but a regulated performative mechanism, exactly the kind of object performativity, normativity, and citationality are used to name elsewhere in Butler's framework. The suffix, in other words, makes a theoretical claim before the term is even defined: it announces that Cinderella-ity works the way performativity works.

Several existing terms already circulate around this cultural material, and the term needed to be shown as doing something none of them do. Popular labels such as "Cinderella complex," "princess culture," or "damsel-in-distress trope" function descriptively at best, cataloguing a recurring image or a general psychological tendency without specifying the narrative mechanism that produces or sustains it, and without offering criteria by which a text could be shown to reproduce, modify, or dismantle it. None of these terms is operationalized through Butler's performativity framework, and none is built, the way Cinderella-ity is, out of five discrete, independently checkable dimensions that Chatman's and Bal's tools can trace at the scene level. Cinderella-ity was coined specifically to close that gap: to give this study, and any future comparative work on the tradition, a term that names not just what the pattern looks like but how it is produced and how its production could, in principle, be disrupted.

The concept also exists to solve a specific methodological problem raised by Bassnett's (1993) named-personage method, developed further in Chapter II. Bassnett's own analysis of Guinevere works because Guinevere functions as a stable comparative reference point, something at least implicitly constant against which each new textual version can be measured. But Bassnett never names that reference point explicitly; she lets the reader infer it from the accumulated pattern across her readings. That works for a single-author comparative essay; it does not work for a study whose whole method depends on checking two films against five discrete dimensions in a structured, repeatable way. Cinderella-ity makes explicit and operational what Bassnett leaves implicit: a named, defined, falsifiable construct that plays the same structural role the Arthurian feminine ideal plays, unnamed, in Bassnett's own Guinevere analysis. Without naming it, this study could still describe differences between the two films impressionistically. With it, the study can state in advance, before any scene is analyzed, exactly what would count as reproduction, modification, or genuine structural transformation.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Taken together, this body of scholarship has not yet produced a systematic, performativity-based comparison of the 2015 and 2021 live-action Cinderella films at the level of narrative construction. What is missing is a framework that can trace how the normative gender model historically encoded in the Cinderella tradition, here termed Cinderella-ity, gets reproduced, modified, or reconfigured across both adaptations. Without that framework, claims about the 2021 film's progressiveness stay descriptive rather than analytically grounded. None of the recent studies on these adaptations has applied Butler's framework of gender performativity to a comparative narrative analysis of the 2015 and 2021 films specifically, and the concept of Cinderella-ity proposed here has not been used before as a systematic lens for tracing how this culturally rooted normative model gets produced, maintained, or reconfigured at the level of narrative structure in either film.

The central theoretical question, then, is whether the 2021 adaptation marks a genuine shift in how gender gets performatively constructed, or whether it simply rearticulates the same narrative norms in a modified form. Answering that question needs the systematic, performativity-based comparison this study undertakes. Without it, any claim about transformation stays descriptive rather than analytically grounded. Based on these problems, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is gender constructed through performative repetition in the narrative of *Cinderella* (2015) and *Cinderella* (2021)?
2. How does "Cinderella-ity" operate as a model of gender performativity within the narrative structures of both films?

## 1.3 Research Purposes

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Analyze how gender is constructed through performative repetition in the narrative of *Cinderella* (2015) and *Cinderella* (2021), using the framework of Judith Butler.
2. Examine how "Cinderella-ity" operates as a model of gender performativity within the narrative structures of both films.

## 1.4 Research Significance

This section covers the significance of this study across two dimensions: theoretical and practical. On the theoretical side, the study contributes to feminist cultural and literary studies by applying Butler's theory of gender performativity as a systematic

framework for analyzing how gender gets narratively constructed in Cinderella adaptations, shifting the focus away from descriptive representation toward a process-oriented look at how gender gets produced and maintained through narrative repetition. At the center of this contribution sits Cinderella-ity, an original analytical construct built from five interrelated dimensions: identity formed through external recognition rather than autonomous self-definition, passivity naturalized as virtue, patience and kindness as the only socially sanctioned mechanism for gender, suffering as the necessary condition for worthiness, and narrative resolution through integration into the heterosexual social order. Together these form a normative performative script that this study turns into a transferable analytical tool, one usable well beyond the two films examined here. Methodologically, the study draws on Bassnett's comparative literary framework to establish film as a legitimate object of narrative and literary analysis, which makes it possible to apply Butler's performativity theory to cinematic texts as meaning-producing cultural artifacts. On the practical side, the findings carry direct relevance for media literacy education, filmmaking practice, and the broader conversation around gender representation in popular narrative media, each discussed below.

This study contributes to feminist cultural and literary studies by applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as a systematic framework for analyzing how gender gets narratively constructed across Cinderella adaptations. Previous studies have mostly treated gender in these adaptations as a matter of representation, describing what kinds of female characters appear rather than examining the mechanisms through which gender gets produced and maintained as a narrative process. By shifting focus toward performative repetition within narrative structure, this study moves past description and toward a process-oriented analysis of how gender norms get actualized, reinforced, or challenged through the specific narrative choices each adaptation makes.

The study also introduces Cinderella-ity as an original analytical construct describing a culturally embedded normative model, a set of norms the narrative enforces through repetition, making certain performances of gender look natural and inevitable. Built from the five dimensions outlined above, this construct functions as a process-oriented analytical lens. Unlike existing frameworks that examine gender representation in fairy tale adaptations descriptively, cataloguing which traits show up and which do not, Cinderella-ity traces how these five dimensions get produced, maintained, or reconfigured through patterns of performative repetition at the narrative level. In doing so, it bridges Butler's theoretical framework with the specific narrative conventions of the Cinderella tradition, offering a construct grounded in established feminist theory while staying responsive to the particularities of this narrative corpus.

This concept makes a contribution on two fronts. First, by operationalizing the five dimensions of Cinderella-ity, the study offers a more precise vocabulary for identifying the specific mechanisms through which a culturally dominant gender model gets naturalized in narrative texts, moving past broad claims about "passive" or "active" heroines and toward a systematic look at how gender gets produced through the accumulation of performative choices across a narrative arc. Second, naming and operationalizing this model makes it available as a transferable analytical tool. Cinderella-ity is not meant to apply only to the two films examined here. It could potentially analyze comparable patterns of gender performativity in other fairy tale adaptations, princess narratives, and broader cultural texts where a similar constellation of normative gender construction is at work. In this way, the concept extends Butler's performativity framework into a domain, popular fairy tale cinema, where its application has stayed undertheorized, contributing a replicable analytical instrument to the growing body of feminist narrative scholarship. The study also draws on Susan Bassnett's comparative literary framework to establish cinematic texts as legitimate objects of literary and narrative analysis, which lets Butler's theory of gender performativity get applied to film not just as visual entertainment, but as narrative text that encodes and circulates cultural meaning across media forms.

This research also carries direct relevance for media literacy education and for building critical awareness of gender representation in narrative media. The findings offer concrete evidence of how narrative elements, character placement, plot structure, relational dynamics, the distribution of narrative reward, function as mechanisms that implicitly construct gender ideologies, often operating below the level of conscious awareness. That gives educators, parents, and policymakers concrete analytical tools for examining how storytelling shapes how children and adolescents perceive gender roles and expectations.

The study also offers something for filmmakers, screenwriters, media content creators, and film critics: insight into the relationship between progressive-sounding narratives and how gender actually gets constructed in storytelling. Understanding how female characters represent or challenge gender norms through narrative choice gives filmmakers and screenwriters the tools to make more conscious, deliberate decisions when building female characters, supporting representations of women in popular media that are more inclusive, complex, and equitable.

