



## **TANGLED: WHERE ADAPTATION EXCEEDS EXPECTATION**

Dr Sunita Prasanna Kulkarni,  
Associate Professor, Dept of English,  
L.J.N.J. Mahila Mahavidyalaya,  
Vile Parle, Mumbai.

### **Abstract**

Literary adaptation involves adapting a literary work to another medium like a film, play, television series, ballet or video game. There are examples galore of literary classics such as Shakespeare's plays, the novels of Charles Dickens, Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, J.R.R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling and countless others made into films and television serials. The present paper attempts to explore the adaptation of *Rapunzel* by the brothers Grimm to *Tangled*, an animated film by Disney. The paper will explore the Rapunzel story, the story of *Tangled*, the similarities and differences between the story and the film, and touch upon adaptation theory before presenting the conclusion.

### **Key Words: Fairytale, Adaptation, Fidelity, Agency, Feminist**

The first reference to the *Rapunzel* story is found in the Italian fairytale *Petrosinella* by Giambattista Basil in *Lo Cunto de Li Cunto* (*The Tale of Tales* 1634). A French version of it called *Persinette* by Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (1693), was developed and published by the Brothers Grimm in *Children's and Household Tales* (1812) by the name *Rapunzel*. All versions of the story involve a girl with long hair, imprisoned in a tower by a witch and her subsequent adventures.

### **The Rapunzel Story**

A pregnant woman, yearning to eat the Rapunzel/ rampion has her husband steal it from a sorceress's garden, which catches him stealing and bargains for the baby when it is born in return. The baby, Rapunzel, is raised by the sorceress, but imprisoned in a tower in the middle of a forest, her only visitor being her adoptive mother, Dame Gothel. Whenever Gothel visits

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Rapunzel, she tells Rapunzel to let down her long hair and climbs up the tower using it. A prince riding through the forest, climbs up the tower and meets Rapunzel. They marry in secret and plan to escape, but the plan is discovered by Gothel and Rapunzel's hair cut off, she is banished. The prince jumps down the tower and is blinded on thorns. Rapunzel is eventually reunited with her prince and her tears of joy cure the prince's blindness and they live happily ever after.

### ***Tangled***

Disney's animated *Tangled* (2010), directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, loosely based on *Rapunzel*, tells the story of a kidnapped princess, imprisoned in a tower, who yearns to see the outside world and embarks on an adventurous journey of self-discovery. The film features the voices of Mandy Moore as Rapunzel, Zachary Levi as Flynn Rider and Donna Murphy as Dame Gothel. The film uses a combination of the features of traditional animation and computer generated imagery, attaining the quality of a painting come alive. The film was appreciated for its technical brilliance, music, songs and characters, receiving several nominations. A video game, a short film and a musical based on *Tangled* were released and gained popularity.

### ***Tangled story***

A drop of sunshine falling down, creates a golden flower with magical healing qualities, and is used by old Gothel to prolong her youth and life. Soldiers from the Kingdom of Corona procure the flower to save their dying queen's life, which later gives birth to Rapunzel, whose hair has the healing qualities of the magical flower. Gothel tries to cut the baby's hair off, in order to obtain its magic, but when cut, the hair loses its magic. Gothel then kidnaps Rapunzel, keeps her in a tower in the forest, and uses her long, golden, magical hair to climb up and be rejuvenated. Rapunzel yearns to visit the outside world, but Gothel refuses to allow this, blaming the cruel, selfish people outside, who would take advantage of her naiveté. Rapunzel is particularly enraptured by the lit golden lanterns released by the king and queen in memory of the lost princess on her birthday.



Flynn Rider, a thief, steals the bejewelled crown of the lost princess, ditches his partners, and pursued by the royalsoldiers, enters the dense forest and finding Rapunzel's tower, takes refuge in it. Initially cautious, eventually Rapunzel strike a bargain with him, and promises to return the crown to him if he takes her outside to see the show of lanterns.

They face many adventures on their mission, such as the gang of thugs in the pub, the guards pursuing Flynn and their near-drowning in the secret passageway. Rapunzel befriends the thugs and they manage to escape using her magical hair. Gothel plants seeds of doubt in Rapunzel's mind about Flynn's motives in befriending her being only the acquisition of the crown. Rapunzel and Flynn, whose real name is Eugene Fitzpatrick, see the golden lanterns being released, but are separated by Gothel's conniving as she convinces Rapunzel to return to the tower.

Eugene, imprisoned and led to the gallows is saved and goes to Rapunzel's tower. Rapunzel, remembering the golden lanterns released on her birthday, and Corona's royal standard, a golden sun, suddenly realizes that she is the lost, kidnapped princess. Confronting Gothel, she refuses to allow Gothel to use her hair's magic again. Eugene, reaching the tower, stabbed by Gothel and close to death, cuts Rapunzel's hair off, making it lose its magic forever. For, as long as the hair has magic, unscrupulous people will continue to acquire and misuse it. Though the hair is cut off, Rapunzel's tears, retaining the magic save Eugene's life. Rapunzel is reunited with her parents and marries Eugene.

### **Similarities and Differences**

There are some similarities between the original story and its film adaptation in terms of bare basics, though the differences are more numerous.

#### **Similarities**

- The names Rapunzel are common in both stories
- Rapunzel's isolation from society and imprisonment in the tower
- Her long hair used by Gothel to climb up and down



- Rapunzel's desire to see the outside world
- Her falling in love and subsequent punishment by Gothel
- Her tears curing her love interest
- A happy ever after

## Differences

- Rapunzel belonged to a common family in the original and married a prince in the story, while the film shows Rapunzel as a princess marrying a common man.
  - The story does not mention Rapunzel's parents after they hand her over to Gothel, while the film shows her unite with her parents.
  - In the story, Rapunzel's long hair is used to climb up the tower by Gothel, but is otherwise not special. The film shows the hair as magical, having healing and rejuvenating qualities, the reason for Gothel kidnapping her. Also, its power is used as a weapon and saves their lives several times.
  - The Gothel in the story is a witch or a sorceress who brings Rapunzel up like a daughter and though not cruel to her, is a controlling mother who punishes when defied. The Gothel in the film has a selfish reason for kidnapping Rapunzel and keeping her close and is ready to kill for retaining her youth and immortality.
  - Rapunzel in the story version comes through as a meek damsel in distress, waiting patiently and passively to be rescued by the visiting prince, while the film Rapunzel, upon realizing Gothel's refusal to allow her to visit the outside world and see the lanterns, takes initiative and gets Flynn to take her instead. Once outside, she is able to defend herself with her saucepan and her hair, is charming enough to make friends with the thugs in the pub, and finds people friendly and helpful.
  - While *Rapunzel* is a fairytale with a set format of heroes and princes rescuing beautiful captive maidens, *Tangled* may be called a 'Bildungsroman', a coming of age story, a story of self-discovery and self-awareness, with a feminist awareness.
  - The character of Flynn/Eugene, added in the film version, is vastly different from the prince in the story. The story features a generic prince falling in love with Rapunzel,
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taking initiative in finding access to her tower, and planning their escape. Flynn is not a prince, and though not ashamed to follow Rapunzel's lead at times, is a brave, handsome adventurer, as well as a dreamer. He becomes her first human friend and when she feels guilty about defying her mother and leaving the tower, he advises her that her confusion, guilt and rebellion are all a part of growing up. Just like the film Rapunzel, her partner comes through as a more rounded character than the prince in the story.

- The story has limited characters, mostly flat stereotypical characters, but the film introduces more supporting characters such as Pascal the chameleon, Maximus the guard horse, the thugs and the king and queen of Corona.
- The film version is more child-friendly than the story as it contains less cruelty and violence. The story depicts Rapunzel as pregnant, wandering in the wilderness and the prince blinded. The film shows Rapunzel and Flynn having fun, getting married in the end with Rapunzel united with her parents.

### **Adaptation theory**

Films and literary works have always been intrinsically linked as most films are adapted from some literary source. Both tell stories, though the mediums are different. Films draw their subjects from written texts, and embellishing them with music, dance, background score, technical effects and other theatrical elements and narrative techniques, present cohesive, audio-visually pleasing stories. Though literature and films are different, have their respective merits and limitations, they have a symbiotic relationship with each other and enrich one another.

Adaptation theory often discusses 'fidelity' to the source as a criterion for well-made adaptations and while some critics adhere to it, others oppose it. Fidelity discusses the degree to which important aspects of the original literary source are successfully incorporated in the film version. The assumption by some critics, of literature having more merit than visual media has sparked some dissent and given rise to issues regarding fidelity.



Linda Hutcheon is a leading critic who in *A Theory of Adaptation*, goes beyond the fidelity discourse as it implies the written work as primary and superior to the visual adaptation, and discusses adaptation as a cultural artefact. She further speaks of adaptation as both product and as process and elaborates that as a product, it cannot be completely faithful to the source and will necessarily differ from it, though retaining its important ideas. As a process, she claims that adaptation appropriates the original and gives it more meaning and more layered and enhanced interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

Disney films based on fairytales usually portray binary gender stereotypes, with a delicate, beautiful female protagonist, generally in need of rescuing by the strong, charming prince, which translates into power being gendered and patriarchal. Women with power are generally portrayed as witches, sorceresses or evil stepmothers. This representation of women as either evil despots or as helpless and ineffectual nincompoops, in need of male assistance is not realistic in the present era of gender equality. *Tangled*, though based loosely on *Rapunzel*, is different from the story as well as other Disney films, as it is a feminist rendition of the story and subverts the concept of male supremacy, strength and leadership, presenting a female protagonist who is not only beautiful, but empowered, self-aware and self-sufficient too. By giving Rapunzel agency and initiative, who thinks and acts independently and chooses the course of her life as well as her life partner, Disney's Rapunzel comes across as a well-rounded, multi-dimensional, empowered female protagonist who knows what she wants and gets it.

To conclude, the film adaptation of the story is enriching as it adds substantially to elements of plot, theme and characterization, and enhances the overall viewing experience in terms of successful transformation from the written to audio-visual medium with the addition of music, song, imagery and characterization. By making the female protagonist proactive, it breaks the traditional bastions of male supremacy, and by making Flynn's character equally interesting, contemporary and multifaceted, makes them perfect partners in adventure and in life.

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