

Rewriting the *Damsel's Fate*: A Deconstructive Feminist Analysis of *Damsel* (2024) Movie and the Subversion of Fairy Tale Narratives

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*“She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come”*

— Proverbs 31:25

ABSTRACT

This research examines the movie *Damsel* (2024) through the lens of Jacques Derrida's narrative deconstruction (2016). The issue shown in the movie is patriarchal expectations that portray women as a passive figure and as a sacrificial. The purpose of this study is to examine how *Damsel* challenges the traditional fairy tale trope by showing a female protagonist who reclaims her agency through survival and resistance. This study used a qualitative method while examining scenes and narratives. The result shows that: **1)** *Damsel* deconstructs traditional fairy tale narratives by positioning the princess as her own savior; **2)** The movie subverts patriarchal expectations by resisting the rigid tradition of female sacrifice; and **3)** Elodie's survival is portrayed as an act of resistance against societal control. The conclusion of the study highlights that *Damsel* offers a feminist reinterpretation of the traditional fairy tale trope. The significance of this research is the contribution to feminist movies, demonstrating how modern literature or movies can redefine women's role in narratives. It is hoped that future researchers will further explore other fairy tales that challenge traditional gender roles similar to *Damsel* (2024).

Keyword : Fairytale, deconstruction, subverting, resistance

INTRODUCTION

Books and movies show what a society values and its structures and they often examine and test the norms that are accepted by that society. Movies use both sights and stories to improve the experience for the audience and encourage them to think. When you watch an animated movie, the pictures move. Besides, fairy tales can also act as examples. For a long time, fairy tales have helped to confirm social norms. Most fairy tales picture women as meek and weak, who need support from a man to rescue them. The movie *Damsel* which comes out in 2024, recasts the traditional fairy tale to demonstrate how stories can oppose traditional gender roles. Essentially, the movie is making an effort to help people grasp how it analyses the effects of oppression. Unlike in some fairy tales, *Damsel* does not have the princess depending on a hero, but she becomes the primary character to

save herself. This shift is important and crucial in deconstructing the long-standing patriarchal narratives and reshapes the audience's perceptions of female agency and power. The analysis explores how the movie uses its storyline and images to evaluate society and join the debates about gender, power and resistance.

What the movie explores teaches us about the impact of gender inequality at the present time. Through this movie, the moviemaker highlights common problems and forms of discrimination in many cultures. A recent UN Women report from 2023 found that 45% of women globally experience some sort of gender discrimination. For the most part, this occurred because of the beliefs and stories that treat women as less important than men. Another real life issue based on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, gender parity remains a distant goal, with only 68.1% of the gap closed globally. From the data, we can conclude that women are treated unequally in economic, educational and health fields. The movie shows that society treats this form of sacrifice as expected, just like history showed that women had to serve men because it is considered a tradition. Gender issues are worldwide and touch the lives of millions of women globally. *Damsel* fits with current feminist ideas and aims to reject systems that try to govern people.

Damsel is a fantasy-adventure movie, adapted from classic fairy tale ideas. The movie shows that Elodie only agreed to marry a prince to safeguard the success of her people. Madame Ersheim hardly realized she had married a dragon, as her husband does not love her but acts as a ritual sacrifice. *Damsel*, unlike most stories, focuses on a female hero getting herself out of peril. Audiences 13 and older are able to watch the movie which is recommended for all viewers. Produced by Netflix, the movie was released on March 8, 2024, coinciding with International Women's Day. The movie did not win big awards, yet it has been praised by critics for its novel approach and main character. This paper explores what its cultural and social relevance is. *Damsel* also invites audiences to question the cultural narratives that have long shaped people's understanding of gender roles and power dynamics. This movie also gives a new voice to female viewers through a stronger female character.

The princess Elodie agrees to marry the prince in this movie. After getting married, she discovered that the kingdom had other intentions, which is to sacrifice her to a dragon as a kingdom's tradition. Her destiny exists outside what she chooses to believe. Rather than sitting and waiting for help, she goes after what she wants. The narrative critically examines the trope of "damsel in distress", by making Elodie as her own savior. Viewing this content reveals to the audience how women are oppressed in the institution. The movie's narrative is not just a story of survival, but also a powerful commentary on the importance of individual agency. The movie's exploration of these

makes a significant contribution to contemporary feminist media and a valuable subject for academic analysis.

The movie's narrative structure aligns with Jacques Derrida's (1967) theory of deconstruction, that aims to eliminate the concept that have long dominated storytelling. In most traditional fairy tales, the main difference is between a powerless princess and a heroic prince. In the movie, Elodie is both hurt and wounded. *Damsel* allows viewers to look at cultural stories about gender and power in a different way. In the feminist camp, bell hooks (2000) holds that patriarchy is demonstrated by literature that leads women to rely on men. The movie critiques the societal norms that demand women's sacrifice. Additionally, Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony is used in analyzing how the scarification system in the movie symbolizes systemic oppression. The dominance of the kingdom which is established by cultural norms, is what we call hegemony. Furthermore, Michel Foucault's (1975) ideas on power and resistance provide a lens. The interpretation in the movie is Elodie's survival as an act of defiance against systemic control. Foucault believes that not all uses of power are negative; sometimes it stimulates change. The work examines how systemic oppression like that in expanded capitalism seeks to take away the freedom of individuals.

A recent study; scholarship by Lee and Smith (2023) titled "Subverting the Damsel: Postfeminist Narratives in Contemporary Dark Fairy Tale movies" inspects postfeminist narratives that focus on dark fairy tale movies. Both *The Princess* (2022) and *Gretel and Hansel* (2020) clearly exhibit how these types of movies question the usual roles of women, using distressing fights while leaving individual heroes tied to the belief that problems should be solved alone. Their study uses postfeminist media theory and Butlerian performativity to challenge the way female protagonist violence is depicted as masculine, but stops there. The movie shows women being able to save themselves from a corrupt government. Nevertheless, Lee and Smith's approach struggles to account for deeper textual instabilities in these narratives' subversive claims. As a result of these uncertainties, researchers are lacking important information about how such movies use different forms to influence female gestures.

It is here that a Derridean approach to *Damsel* reveals important new information. Lee and Smith's work (2023) highlight only the conflicts found in postfeminist fairy tales. Nevertheless, the way the narrative is put together actively challenges the oppositions between victim, hero, sacrifice and revolt through dead ends. The movie broke the regular fairy tale rule by letting the princess act as rescuer and inspire others. Showing how surface-level changes may actually just reproduce dominant structures. Derridean narrative deconstruction with Gramscian and Foucauldian theories would uniquely expose how *Damsel*'s "empowerment" narrative both challenges and reinstates the systems

it seeks to overcome, advancing beyond existing postfeminist critiques to reveal the philosophical tensions in contemporary fairy tale revisions.

Narrative deconstruction, feminist theory and analysis of power are used in the analysis of *Damsel* (2024) to examine how the movie rejects or criticizes common fairy tale scenes and oppression. Derrida's (1967) deconstruction theory reveals how *Damsel* breaks down the traditional fairy tale structure by making princess Elodie her savior. Bell Hooks (2000) feminist theory shows the movie's rejection of passive female roles, through the act of Elodie resisting patriarchal expectations. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony explains how the sacrifice tradition practice is done by the royal family which uses cultural practices to maintain power. Michel Foucault's (1975) ideas on power and resistance frames the protagonist's survival as an act of defiance against systemic control. Because she brings together these perspectives, *Damsel* stands as a vigorous attack on classic gender norms and broad social inequality. *Damsel* (2024) reverses the typical fairy tale tropes by letting the princess stand up for herself, erases the need for a princess to sacrifice and portrays succeeding in impossible circumstances as a fight against unfairness.

Binary Opposition

Princess as Victim	Princess as Hero
<p>In traditional fairy tales, the princess is often portrayed as a passive victim who needs to be rescued by a male hero. This reinforces patriarchal norms and limits women's agency. <i>"Woman, if she is any-thing, is not-any-thing. [...] She is not a person, but a power, an action, a process."</i> (Derrida, 1978/1979, p. 103)</p>	<p>In <i>Damsel</i>, Princess Elodie defies this trope by becoming her own rescuer. She takes control of her destiny, challenging the notion that women need to be saved. <i>if woman is truth, she at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here and that no one has a property in it.</i>" (Derrida, 1978/1979, p. 51)</p>

METHOD

Through qualitative research methods the investigators analyzed *Damsel* (2024) by applying the framework of Jacques Derrida's narrative deconstruction (2016). The paper examined the representations of women among the patriarchal society in the film. A thorough analysis was conducted based on the binary opposition to be deconstructed. The research used thematic analysis to examine the movie *Damsel* (2024) incorporated with modern feminist perspectives. Thematic analysis helped researchers discover recurring feminist themes including resistance and autonomy and solidarity from evaluating principal scenes along with dialogue exchanges. Alongside Derrida's theory of Deconstruction, the researchers examined how linguistic components as well as narrative

structure and visual elements built new gender role frameworks in the movie. The study examined how the main character used specific movie segments to break social norms while establishing self-sovereignty by thorough movie analysis. The analysis then divided extracted data into thematic segments about female empowerment and gender role inversion and autonomy before comparing these features to standard fairy tales.

DISCUSSION

1. Deconstructing the Fairy Tale Narrative

The *Damsel* (2024) movie deconstructs the traditional fairy tale narrative by presenting a princess who becomes her own rescuer. This movie fights back against the classic "damsel in distress" trope. The movie stated the subversion in the early movie with narration "*There are many stories of chivalry where the heroic knight saves the damsel in distress. This is not one of them.*". Through this statement, viewers are informed that this narrative will not follow the commonly seen structure in classic fairy tales, where male heroes hold the power and women await rescue. This kind of rejection is rooted in Derrida's theory of narrative deconstruction (1967) that suggests that stories do not hold a certain meaning. When the movie states "*many stories of chivalry*" tells the viewer about the long tradition where male are portrayed as heroes and females as the passive object. This story reinforces a patriarchal narrative where men are used as active objects, meanwhile women are the passive object needing to be rescued, married, or used as symbols of the male success. The phrase "*This is not one of them*" announces that the story will reject the legacy of the traditional trope. Through Jacques Derrida's (1967) narrative deconstruction, reveals the idea of "there is no transcendental signified" which means that there's no fixed meaning, it is always constructed and reconstructed. In *Damsel*, the narrative acknowledges the knight rescues the princess and then rejects it. This created a new kind of narrative, a narrative where princesses do not depend on male heroism. Furthermore, this narrative serves as a thesis for the entire movie. Through the narrative, it reframes the viewer's expectations. As the movie continues, the audiences are able to see Elodie face physical pain, betrayal, and fear. Her journey is not focusing on romance, but reclaiming her agency in a system that tried to erase and remove her.

The movie's cinematography and camera work plays a critical role in visualizing the deconstruction. In the early shots, Princess Elodie mimics classic fairy tale compositions along with the soft lighting and elegant costumes. As the movie continues, and Elodie realizes that 'No one is coming to save her' the cinematography adopts darker and claustrophobic angles as the scene shows that she is betrayed and thrown into the dragon's lair. The realization itself acts as a turning point in

Damsel (2024). Elodie's perspective changed from the comforting delusion that someone will arrive



and rescue her to surviving on her own. This shows a rejection of the traditional fairy tale trope which used to be women waiting for salvation. The line becomes an awakening for Elodie that must recognize that her survival depends only on herself. From the perspective of feminist theory, especially Bell Hooks (2000), this

moment symbolizes what it means for women to forget the passive roles imposed by patriarchal culture. Hooks writes that "*Women must unlearn socialization that teaches them to be passive victims*" (2000, p. 5). Elodie's realization of rescuing herself reflects this, by no longer being the object of rescue but the subject of resistance. Meanwhile in terms of narrative deconstruction (Derrida, 1967), the quote tells about the dismantling of the fairy tale trope. Usually, fairy tales are built around a rigid and fixed structure: danger arises, princesses or heroines are endangered, and a hero comes in to rescue. By stating that a rescue will not come, Damsel collapses this structure. As Derrida argues that meaning is never fixed and that it is shaped by what comes before and after. Cinematically, the line is delivered in isolation, surrounded with silence. The lighting is also dim and harsh. During the time of this narrative, there is no orchestral music which underlines the absence of fantasy. Through the cinematography, it reinforces that Elodie's survival is not a scripted miracle, but a personal decision to act.

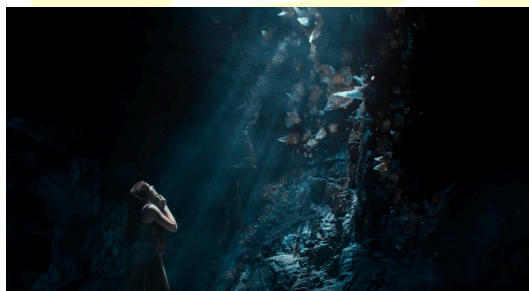
Another significant scene in the movie that marks another point of the movie is when Elodie thinks 'I have to find my own way out' and by the time she stated "*Mother wanted you to fight*". The narrative embraces Elodie's rejection of the traditional fairy tale trope and claiming her autonomy in the world that used to make her as the victim. If we analyze from Jacques Derrida's (1967) theory of narrative deconstruction, this moment illustrates how the movie breaks apart the usual



opposites we usually see in fairy tales, especially the idea of male hero and helpless damsel. Derrida argues that meaning in the text is never fixed or absolute because it's connected to other words and ideas. A concept known as *différance*. Damsel displaces the assumption of the typical fairy tale. The statement rewrites the script that there is no prince, no fate, and she herself, her will, and her struggle is portrayed in this movie. Another understanding from bell hooks' feminist theory (2000) that emphasizes that women must unlearn the socialization that teaches them to wait, depend, and get

rescued by a male hero. She writes, "*To be feminist is to want for all people liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.*" Elodie is brought up to accept her marriage, trusting royal rituals, being in the dragon's den which reflects the societal norms she is raised to follow. However, this quote signals her act of breaking the traditional fairy tale structure. Elodie acknowledges that no one is coming to save her, but instead of giving up, she uses it as a motivation to survive on her own. This aligns with Hooks' argument that resistance begins with consciousness, identifying the system that holds women back and choosing to reject them. The cinematography work during this narrative is said, reflects a shift. As the framing tightens into close-ups, isolating her from the vast, oppressive architecture such as the dragon's cave. The soundtrack here provides more tension and silence, emphasizing her loneliness. The mood is filled with more and more harshness, which mirrors the harsh truth of her survival that depends on her own action. By combining Derrida's deconstruction and Hooks' feminist theories, the realization that 'I have to find my own way out' becomes clear that it is not only a line of dialogue, but a subversive act that breaks down the perception of female passivity.

The movie challenges patriarchal traditions in classic fairy tales by presenting the idea that a princess saves herself rather than waiting to be saved. Through the representation, female characters who used to be passive characters and wait for a male hero to save them, are changed. Elodie claims the ownership of her own story by resisting against the cultural conditioning that has historically silenced women. When Elodie realizes that she needs to rescue herself, there is no heroic music, but



silence. The absence of great audio effects allows the audience to see and feel the scene to become more powerful. This decision aligns with bell hooks' feminist theory, particularly her statement of "*women must unlearn socialization that teaches them to be passive victims*" (2000, p.5). Elodie decided rather than performing heroism for the audience and to fit the

narrative mold, but she reclaims her autonomy that challenges the diegetic world of the movie and the tradition of gendered storytelling. The minimalist sound design and introspective cinematography mixed with close-up shots that capture her exhaustion helps deepen her declaration.

Although it is not stated specifically in the movie, the narrative shows that Elodie's journey is never about a prince, but about survival and reclaiming her agency. This moment occurs at the climax of the movie, when the focus shifts from reuniting with a prince to reclaiming autonomy in a context of betrayal. The movie reinforces the shift with high-contrast lighting that symbolizes Elodie's

rejection of idealized victimhood. Instead of soft, glowing light, the different and sharp visual emphasizes the rawness of her reality. With no romantic framing, longing glances, swelling music, nor returning prince repositions her as survival, agency, and resistance. Based on hooks' feminist theory, Elodie's narrative is not just a personal statement, but a rejection of



patriarchal scripts that usually define female protagonists through their relationship with men. Elodie's survival is not a product result of male intervention, but the outcome of her own strength and self-determination. Hooks' theory shows how *Damsel* fractures the traditional fairy tale trope, by illustrating a heroine who is not "rescued" but rather proves her worth through resilience and resistance. Moreover, through Derrida's deconstructionist theory, and based on his "*there is no transcendental signified, only a chain of interpretations*" (1967, p. 158) emphasizes a meaning such as the idea of "happy ending" that requires a prince are not eternal truths, but opens to reinterpretation. And through Elodie's line she is telling that this movie deconstructs the long traditional myth. By stating her struggle that her story is never about love or royalty, subverts a binary opposition of fairy tales where prince as savior versus princess as victim. Then replaces it with a new paradigm where survival is declared as empowerment. The statement shifts the audience's expected fairy tale trope and supports Derrida's idea that meaning is not fixed, but rather always contingent, and always deferred. This way, *Damsel* uses Elodie's line to reject the patriarchal narrative blueprint and define a new feminist concept where a woman's story is defined by survival and not romance.

2. Subverting Patriarchal Sacrifice Traditions

The movie "*The Damsel (2024)*" has subverts traditional patriarchal fairy tale traditions by disrupting the princess-sacrifice trope. This uncovers how narrative structures and ideological conditions operate institutionalized oppression. The word *Damsel* itself explains about a young woman who is unmarried. The "*Damsel in Distress*" archetype reveals not only a young woman, but also in danger and in need of rescue by a male hero. Classic princesses' fairy tales frame females as passive, impotent, vulnerable and weak. However, focusing on Derridean' deconstruction, the movie reversed the "*Damsel*



in Distress” archetype by making Princess Elodie her own hero. This justifiably deconstructs the binary opposition of a victim and hero. Where traditional fairy tales always interpret female characters as sufferers (e.g. *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*), *Damsel* reverses this expectation – Elodie’s survival is not granted by external forces or help by a prince but seized through defiance. By deconstructing the fairy tale’s foundational logic (Derrida, 1967), the movie reveals how such narratives naturalize female disposability.

The movie starts with Elodie chopping wood with her sister, followed by her marriage proposal invitation, until the journey to “*The Kingdom of Aurea*”. While on the way, passing through a waterway where the left and right sides are filled with dragon statues. The waterway lined with dragon statues represents the danger that is approaching. This reinforces hidden oppressions, patriarchal deception, and an illusion of safety and protection by the dragon. The movie illustrated a big beautiful majestic castle, crowded with plenty of villagers. However, behind the castle shows a big mountain, its dark ambience and atmosphere lies a deep dark secret. Moreover, it mirrors how the royal family masks their brutality with tradition. The sacrifice tradition in *Damsel* demonstrates what bell hooks (2000) identifies as patriarchy’s core tenet, the systemic devaluation of women’s lives.



Traditional fairy tales highlight patriarchalism that women have to suffer to continue the male prince's legacies. Illustrated in the movie *Snow White*; *Snow White*'s poisoned slumber preserves the prince's heroic narrative, *Sleeping Beauty*'s curse exists only to be broken by his kiss. These stories



teach audiences that a woman’s pain is inevitable, even romantic, so long as it serves dynastic continuity. *Damsel* (2024) ignites this trope. Elodie’s sacrifice is not redemptive, it’s exposed as raw exploitation. When Elodie states, “*I refuse to be part of this lie,*” she rejects and defends not just a dragon’s attack, but the entire machinery of patriarchal storytelling. The

kingdom's insistence that “*The sacrifice must be completed*” demonstrates how tradition is weaponized to maintain power. The queen’s wicked way is hidden neatly by using evil and cunning

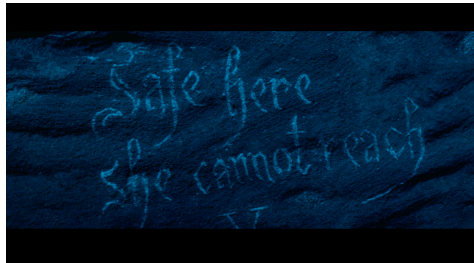
strategies to trick princesses. The marriage ceremony is the start of it all, it is to help make the tradition later labeled as something normal and good for Elodie. This portrays how leaders in this world have authority over civilians, often misusing the authority that has been given over. The queen underestimated Elodie's strength and survival, because a lot of women do not survive the dragon for long. Woman identity is molded and placed into a false point of view, where woman is always the victim, never the hero. The feminist theory by hooks (2000) states "*patriarchy is a political-social system that insists males are inherently superior to females*" (p. 23). Traditional fairy tales define women as passive objects, male legacy-supporters, moral martyrs, not to mention as emotionally governed. Women are expected to always wait for the prince to be rescued, when in reality no one is coming to save them from destruction. How it's unfair to label men as superior, and women as submissive This signifies how a woman's existence is only to birth man's heirs, nothing else. Women are not allowed to complain against man's cruelty out of fear of what man would do towards women's resistance to obey. Portraying how oppressions that women have to go through is true destiny.

From the moment Elodie steps into the gilded cage of Aurea's royal palace, the movie already exposes the rotten truth beneath tradition, although it is vague. The movie's most radical act is not just letting its heroine survive, it lets Elodie rewrite the rules, disassemble patriarchal survival mechanisms through visceral action and symbolic cinematography. In Elodie's wedding ceremony, instead of wearing a white gown Elodie is draped in a champagne gold metallic gown, while also using a red necklace. This symbolizes the foreshadow of blood sacrifice that must be done, Elodie's fierce personality, and the honor Elodie will receive, and how she subverts the kingdom's royalty traditions



as what gold represents. The queen explains to Elodie how the traditional ceremony works and states "*Your duty is to obey the law.*" Showing how Elodie has no option but to obey this command from the queen of Area Because Elodie is the princess now. Elodie successfully withstand the royalty's savagery toward women and earns respect for courage. During the traditional ceremony, the camera moves slowly to show Elodie's face illuminated by torchlight—not with terror, but confusion of what is about to happen. Therefore in the end, Elodie found out that the kingdom's wealth is built on women's corpses, however Elodie's fall is the first step toward its patriarchal collapse.

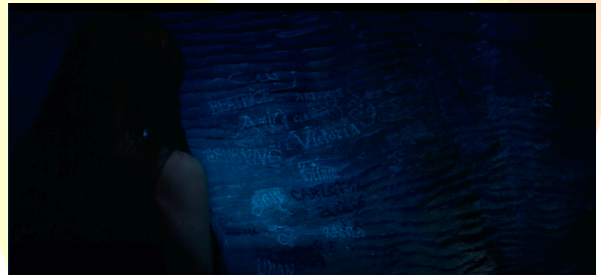
The queen covers up the truth behind tradition by stating that *"Your duty is to obey the law,"* and *"This tradition is older than any of us."* This is an evil scheme for women to obey the queen's



order, creating oppression. Queen Isabelle, exemplifies this, internalizing and enforcing the very system that victimizes her. The movie frames tradition as tyranny, highlighting the kingdom, the queen as an oppressive ruler. Elodie falls into the cave of bones of a woman that is sacrificed. The camera pans slowly across the wall inside the cave, showing writings of women as victims, and tattered wedding veils or maybe

parts of the dresses worn, the debris of women reduced to fuel for dynastic power. Here, the cinematographer uses cold blue light to contrast the golden luxury of the palace above, a visual indictment of how patriarchy glamorizes female suffering. The kingdom defines a woman as *"A woman's place is to serve the kingdom."* Elodie is not one of them.

Her rebellion is physical, not rhetorical. In the water cavern fight, Elodie not only fights using a sword like a male hero, she uses the environment, using sand and rocks for distraction, and the curved pillar to impale the dragon. This act highlights her rejection of prescribed femininity: she's not delicate or "ladylike," but feral, pragmatic. Even the clothes worn arc mirrors this, the once-ornate wedding gown is torn into a battle-worn tunic, stained with dirt and blood. Instead of being rescued by the prince during the battle, Elodie fought alone. Elodie uses smart strategies to distract the dragon. The plot is



revealed as the climax hit, Elodie told the dragon the evil tricks that the queen does to victims. Elodie states how the dragon has been killing innocent daughters just like the queen. Instead of killing the dragon, Elodie helped the dragon to destroy the kingdom. Gramsci writes that *"hegemony is exercised through consent rather than coercion"* (p. 57). Defining how Elodie has disrupted the

ideological submission by rejecting Elodie's assigned fate.

The movie *Damsel* illustrates the subverting of patriarchal sacrifice tradition by having Elodie burn down the kingdom to ruins, a visual for rejecting ideology that believes princesses have

to sacrifice themselves for man to reach a happy ending.

Which is shown in the final shot where Elodie is walking away from the chaos, the castle burning down, dragon soaring overhead rejects the fairy tale's typical marriage-or-death binary. The fire represents a visual metaphor of the destruction of corrupt systems. The



burning castle symbolizes the fall of patriarchal control, Elodie does not save the kingdom, she lets it burn to the ground. Elodie earns her freedom through violence, different from other princesses' fairy tales. *Damsel* disrupts this dominance from the kingdom by portraying Elodie's refusal as not just



personal defiance, but systemic collapse. *Damsel* does not just subvert the princess myth; it burns its blueprint, proving that patriarchal systems cannot survive women who refuse to be relics. The movie exposes the brutality masked by fairy tale romanticism, by the fake marriage proposal to deceive women.

Elodie's survival depends on her strategic defiance and ideological confinement, mobilizing the deceiving as a site of both terror and empowerment. *Damsel* is powerful because it does not sugarcoat rebellion. It shows the princess-sacrifice tradition for what it really is, sometimes it takes violence. The movie does not just flip the old fairy-tale script, it forces us to ask hard questions about the price of fighting back. There are no simple happy endings, only a challenge: to rethink the stories we've always been told.

3. Defying Systemic Control

In *Damsel* (2024), survival functions as an active force which fights against existing machinery of family-based control and societal rules and cultural myths. The central character rejects every unrealistic stereotype by showing her strength which goes against fairy tale stereotypes of passive heroines. The protagonist takes control of her destiny because she understands opposition leads to



survival as she asserts "*Obedience will not save you*" and "*Survival is not about following rules. It's about breaking them.*" Another key moment of resistance is when she declares, "*I'm through doing what I'm told,*" signaling her complete rejection of patriarchal authority. When asked mockingly, "Because you somehow managed to escape the dragon?" her survival becomes a defiant retort to every voice

that doubted her agency. The dragon itself, traditionally framed as a monster to be defeated by a male hero, symbolizes more than danger or evil. In a deconstructed interpretation, it represents patriarchal violence and generational trauma, used historically to justify the sacrifice of women. Through a feminist lens, the dragon reflects how systems of power employ fear and tradition to maintain dominance. Elodie's confrontation with the dragon is thus symbolic of her confrontation with internalized oppression and the larger machinery of control she is expected to obey.

Survival functions as a form of rebellion according to the core message expressed by the movie. As bell hooks (2000) argues, *"True resistance begins with people confronting pain... and turning that pain into power"* (p. 15). The protagonist's rebellion reflects a feminist resistance that rises from personal struggle and grows into collective empowerment. This aligns with how Elodie transforms her pain into active defiance. The princess fights back through self-generated rebellion because power always entails resistance according to Foucault (1975). As Foucault states, *"where there is power, there is resistance"* (1978, p. 95), showing how resistance is not external to power but formed within its networks. The resistant actions of the princess manifest directly from the power arrangement which tries to constrain her. The same way as the movie challenges royal and family institution control through Gramsci's (1971) hegemony theory. Gramsci observed that *"every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship"* (p. 350), and the movie shows how this education toward obedience is actively unlearned by the protagonist. The princess rejects the dominant story which demands her submission as obedient wife before becoming a sacrifice thus demonstrating counter-hegemonic resistance. She prioritizes her survival by creating a new identity which fights against all restrictions imposed by societal expectations.

The movie uses its visual elements to powerfully show the transformation of the princess' journey. Early parts of the movie showcase constricting close-ups combined with tight angles inside the dragon's dwelling to show both her physical and political limitations. The patriarchal system shows an illusion of order through its symmetrical framing as well as cold, blue lighting. Movie theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) argues that visual language can often reflect patriarchal power structures through how women are positioned in the frame. This aligns with how the early shots show the princess as confined and objectified. The visual elements of the movie undergo transformation when the princess develops resistance against her situation. Her self-discovery is visually depicted through wide dynamic shots as well as natural handheld movements combined with warm fiery lighting effects which represent her increasing strength and liberation. Through changing movement patterns from fixed to uncontrolled patterns the movie shows her progress from compliant behavior to open defiance.

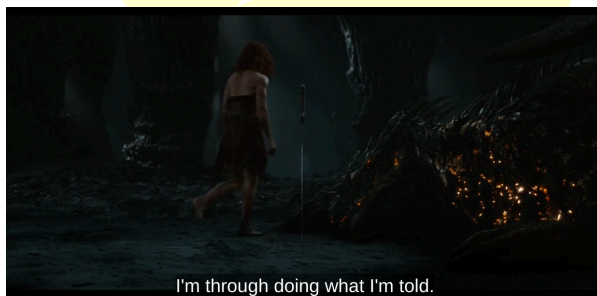
Sound design together with musical elements intensify this thematic element throughout the movie. In the oppressive moments of the movie low strings and Silence stand as dominant auditory elements which express a feeling of personal powerlessness and separation. According to Michel Chion (1994), “*sound is never innocent; it always signifies*” (p. 8), reinforcing the use of silence and low tones to signal



internalized oppression. The score reaches a high point through pounding percussion and multiple vocals when her ideological transformation takes shape. Through sound effects including the dragon roars and falling architecture the character declares “*I will not die quietly*” thus establishing audio expressions that signify defiance. Through its loud auditory elements the movie lets viewers feel the character's combat so they understand how survival requires powerful resistance rather than quiet survival.

The scene adds an additional metaphor. Through the scenes of the collapsing castle walls followed by labyrinthine hallway backgrounds the video visualizes how patriarchal structures are falling apart. The first soft-lit symmetrical shots of the arranged marriage reveal a hidden reality about its essentials which are built upon abandoning trust and sacrificing relationships. By asking “*How do I escape?*” She concurrently poses a philosophical question that shows her transition from being a character in someone else’s story into becoming her own story’s author. As bell hooks (2000) wrote, “*true resistance begins with people confronting pain...and turning that pain into power*” (p. 15), which echoes in the princess's decision to reject the story written for her and create her own.

Lauded by its visual and auditory components, Damsel presents survival as the strongest form of resistance against control mechanisms established by institutions. The movie transforms the



fantasy genre into a platform of defiance through smart cinematic choices and deep sound effects and an emotional story structure. More than enduring punishment against her will the princess actively rises against oppression. The character represents Foucault’s view that power automatically creates forces that challenge itself

when she resists her oppressors. The princess fights through defiance because her actions hold dual significance as survival and liberation.

Additional supporting expert voices further underline the importance of resistance through survival. As Sara Ahmed (2017) points out, “*Feminism is about giving up on the idea that we can be accommodated by the system*” (p. 6), which is reflected in the princess’s refusal to play the role the system has assigned to her. Similarly, Audre Lorde (1984) insists, “*The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*” (p. 112), a sentiment embodied by Elodie’s decision to not work within the oppressive structures but to destroy them entirely. Defiance because her actions hold dual significance as survival and liberation.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, this research shows how Damsel (2024) subverts the traditional fairy tale narrative by rejecting the patriarchal structure and replacing it with a narrative of survival and resistance. Unlike classic stories where a princess is saved by a prince, Elodie becomes her own rescuer. Through Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the movie breaks apart fixed roles like hero vs. victim, and shows that meanings in stories can always be changed and reinterpreted. Through the lens of Bell Hooks’ feminist theory, the story reveals how women must unlearn the passive roles society teaches them to accept and instead claim agency over their own fates. Elodie's journey is not about finding love, as traditional fairy tales used to be but about fighting back against systemic control and reclaiming her right to live. This movie is a reflection of how modern narratives can challenge oppressive traditions and offer new models of empowerment for female characters. Overall, Damsel serves as a powerful counter to traditional fairy tales by showing that true strength lies not in being rescued, but in surviving on your own terms.

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