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really nice title

Shifting Sands: the Aging Narrative of Moses

Impactful stories have a way of repeating themselves throughout history. They move

from one generation to the next both orally and through written words, but in the modern day,   *nice*

they are just as often passed down visually through film. And in this way, the evolution of genres

I'd pick a different word

as they follow a single story can be clearly traced. A single impactful story, if trailed through

various incarnations, can not only illuminate different facets of the narrative, but also paint a

powerful picture of the rhetorical context surrounding each genre. If these genres are to be

defined by the form and style they share with other stories, regardless of shared subject matter, it

must therefore be assumed that the contextual audience of each work plays the most important

role in the determination of how and why a story is told.

An example of this phenomenon is found in the story of Moses. The Bible's Book of

Exodus chronicles the life of Moses, specifically how he led the Hebrew people out of slavery in

Egypt. Since its original recounting, the story has been retold countless times – perhaps most

strikingly in the 1998 animated feature *The Prince of Egypt*. Changes in tone, pacing, and

characterization effectively adapt the storyline of Exodus to a screenplay, while added elements

of story-telling present exclusively in film try to add dimension and dramatic tension to the plot.

It is important to note, however, that these genre-specific alterations merely reflect the broader   *good*

rhetorical situation of each manifestation of the story; while the book of Exodus was written by

Moses himself around 1400 BC (*New International Version,* Exodus) as a way to preserve the

history of the Hebrew people, The *Prince of Egypt* is a children's musical ultimately created in order to entertain the public and generate profit.) *focused*

The Biblical account of Moses has a particularly general audience as it is part of a much larger conglomeration of religious texts, namely, the Old Testament – a collection of thirty-nine books chronicling God's works before the birth of Christ. The book of Exodus, being among the first five books in the Old Testament, is also a part of the Torah, or the book of Jewish religion and law. Today, the early chapters of Exodus remain a foundational piece of faith as well as an inspirational story of hope and deliverance. ← *this is worded really nicely Jessica!*

The Prince of Egypt was the first 2-D animated film to be produced by DreamWorks Animation Studios, and only the second feature-length product released by the infant company. (History) In order to ensure the success of the movie, DreamWorks catered to an audience known for positive reception of animation: children and their families. Beyond this simple demographic, however, the studio had the challenge of telling the story of Moses as accurately as possible to avoid alienating its potential Christian audience. So while common features of animated children's movies – musical numbers, bright colors, and comic relief– are all on display, they are bookended by direct quotations from the Bible. In part because of this, the immature elements present are handled in a more sophisticated manner than in other Children's movies. It is also important to note that the movie was very successful when premiered: the soundtrack was nominated for an Academy Award and the visual style of the animation is breathtakingly beautiful. The audience for the movie was, in turn, expanded by these victories to not only include children, but a general film audience who wanted to see the masterful work put into the production. *+ when there's kids – there's automatically parents!*

Capitalize Bible

The comic moments in *The Prince of Egypt* are some of the largest moments of tonal difference as compared to the source material. There is little enough to laugh at in the bible, as there is no real purpose for it and it would be inappropriate considering the serious nature of the information it is trying to record and relay. In fact, the repetitive nature of the biblical account is fairly boring and linguistically repetitive if read straight through. In order to keep the attention of its younger audience members, the movie throws in ample moments of laughter and comic relief, even at the expense of the original plotline. A great example of this is found in one of the opening scenes of the movie – where Moses is first introduced as an impulsive young man. He and his brother Rameses spend at least four minutes racing their chariots through the streets of Egypt and knocking the noses of statues for the sake of entertaining the audience with their tomfoolery. (*Prince*) There was obviously no such occurrence in reality, but the humor here is far from pointless. It not only sets up the beginning of Moses' character arc, but works to distract the younger audience demographic from the violent scenes of infanticide that occurred only moments earlier. In many ways, the comedy here is essential to the creation of a kid-friendly movie and the hopeful tone it tries to convey. Even some of the comedy which seems useless is actually conductive the story; it reinforces the fact that there is only one true God. The two *good* Egyptian priests Hotep and Huy are clearly charlatans and occupy a position of comic relief throughout the movie. (*Prince*) This is a subtle way of reinforcing that the polygamist Egyptian religion seen in the movie is a comical charade.

Similarly, in order to maintain the lighter, albeit dramatic, tone of the movie, darker elements of the Biblical story are omitted. When Moses kills the Egyptian Slave driver, for instance, it is portrayed as an accident brought on by righteous passion, rather than the vengeful event described in the Bible. There, Moses makes sure that no one is around before killing the

Egyptian and then hides his body in the sand. Further, Moses flees to Midian because Pharaoh

tries to kill him for this crime. (Exodus 2.12, 15) The fact that the movie includes Moses' crime

at all is impressive, since murder is not something usually found in a PG movie. In all

probability, the only reason it was kept in at all is because it is an irreplaceable catalyst for

Moses leaving Egypt. Once again, in order to avoid offending audience members who knew the

story, the plot needed to remain relatively unchanged.

Added to the genre characteristics present in Children's animation are attributes of

cinema in general, notably the beautification of the cast and extension of dramatic moments.

According to the Bible, "Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to

Pharaoh," (Exodus 7.7) but the movie makes it look as through Moses is in his early middle age

when he finally returns to Egypt – his hair is not even graying. This is unsurprising seeing as

how Hollywood has repeatedly placed stock in the idea that no one wants to look at an ugly

protagonist. Also idealized is Moses' character. The movie needed an active and dynamic lead,

and so they made Moses an inspiring speaker and leader. According to the Bible however, Moses

had a stutter and actually argued with God that he would not be able to convince Pharaoh of

anything because of this. (Exodus 6.28-29, 7.1) In fact, Aaron was the one who spoke to Pharaoh

– relating what God told to Moses.

This leads to one of the largest plot changes that The *Prince of Egypt* affected: the tension

between Moses and his brother Aaron. In the movie, Aaron is bitter at Moses' abandonment of

the Hebrews and speaks against him when he returns to confront Pharaoh. (*Prince*) This is totally

opposite of Aaron's Character in the Bible, in which he is Moses' right hand man, helps him

convince the Elders of Israel of Moses' identity and mission, and even speaks to Pharaoh for

Moses. In fact, God tells Moses that "He [Aaron] is already on his way to meet you, and his heart

[handwritten margin note: uh oh— if grey / or aging one / hair is / ugly / I'm / in trouble]

[handwritten note at bottom: Aaron gets the short end of / the deal in every / stroke of / this story!]

will be glad when he sees you." (Exodus 4.14) It is clear that the movie uses Aaron to heighten dramatic tension between members of the small cast, as well as to diversify their relationships. However, while this is not true to the source material, it does serve a purpose in the narrative arc of the movie: Aaron's Relationship with Moses is an interesting contrast between that of Rameses and Moses. Aaron represents Moses' heritage and is his brother by blood. Conversely, Rameses represents Moses' personal past and Childhood. As one relationship crumbles, the other grows stronger, creating complex drama that is definitely entertaining to witness. Comparing this to the Bible, there is not mention of any sort of relationship between Moses and Rameses, which lends itself to flat characters whose relationships do not seem to change much. Fortunately, the Biblical account does not need to be entertaining, but simply states the facts. The movie fills in the dry spots of the account with human emotions and relationships in order to tell an engaging story.

Finally, the movie slips as many dramatic, human emotions into the plotline as possible in order to engage and relate the audience. This is easily observed in the romance between Moses and his wife Zipporah. In the context of the Biblical time period, Exodus' explanation for their marriage – that she was given to Moses by her father Jethro (Exodus 2.21) – is much more likely than the love story created during The *Prince of Egypt*. But again, in order to appeal to a modern audience, the film devotes lots of screen time to their courtship, even adding several scenes where they meet prior to Moses' flight from Egypt. This, again, makes Moses more human and relatable, as he is experiencing something the audience can experience and observe in their own lives. The extended romance also serves to meet audience expectations and incline them favorably toward DreamWorks as a company. After all, since it was still just starting out, it could

not afford to lose any viewers because of showing a scenario where a woman is basically treated as property.

Despite differences in the details of the movie, clear parallels to the original story of Moses can be drawn. For even though "artistic and historical license" is taken, *The Prince of Egypt* opens with a statement that "this film is true to the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide." (*Prince*) Even though the presentation of the story changes form, the basic messages it communicates remain the same. In both cases, themes of freedom and faith are conveyed. While it can be said that the movie focuses much more heavily on freedom as a main theme, it does not do so at the exclusion of other lessons apparent in the Bible such as obedience. Overall, *The Prince of Egypt* does as it promises and effectively tells an ancient story with both accuracy and a genre suited for a modern audience.

thoughtful- thorough- and especially good at analysis with some really strong critical insights that all worded so well! I think you did a great job with this - it really demonstrates the importance & impact of genre. I watched a few youtube videos but plan on seeing the whole movie! Great job.

(97)

(Works Cited) *center*

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