

Symptoms Speak

Ruqayya Abdul Qadir

Elsa, the protagonist in the film “Frozen”¹, is born with once harmless ice powers. At the beginning she hurts her sister with these powers, an action that is instantly followed by her father's words, “What have you done?” This is the first symbolization of an event that leaves a lasting mark and becomes inscribed in a chain of events that leads to a process of meaning-making. After which, her powers are uncontrollable and cause pain to herself and others and eventually takes the form of a symptom.

From there, Elsa goes on a journey towards the truth of her symptom. This is a journey toward truth that proceeds through the Lacanian registers: Real, Symbolic, Imaginary.

Throughout the film, the signifier does its thing, it speaks too much, and all the while – it lies. Multiple fictions are composed from the Other’s discourse “that darts from mouth to mouth, conferring on the act of the subject who receives its message the meaning that makes this act, an act of his history and gives it, its truth.”² This leads Elsa to her truth, but also her solution, namely, by isolating herself she cannot hurt anyone and no longer has to live in fear of hurting anyone and she can finally be herself.

Elsa’s fiction, the truth of her symptom, is made from the words of her father and others. Attaching meaning to it, in an effort to explain and reduce their words through suggestions-- “Fear will make it worse”; “Conceal, don’t feel, don’t let them know” never fully succeeds but “stumble[s] upon a residue of jouissance that could not be dealt with by truth”.³ Even after disappearing in hopes of finally containing her symptom, she fails at containment and freezes the whole kingdom of Arendelle.

What remains is the real, a problem of impossibility, of saying it all. Symptoms - belonging to the real and speaking through the body - tell the truth but cannot be completely articulated or interpreted. The audience can see that language fails because Elsa’s symptom, at its core, includes a jouissance that makes it return again and again. Thus, she experiences a painful satisfaction through the repetition of hurting others with her uncontrollable symptom.

At the end of the film, and in its sequel, Arendelle returns to normal only when attempts to explain and remove the symptom are abandoned. A move is made from the imaginary to the real of the structure, from prohibition to the impossible, as Elsa accepts and identifies with,

¹ Buck, C., & Lee, J. (Directors). (2013). *Frozen*. [Film} Walt Disney Animation Studios; Walt Disney Pictures.

² Lacan, J., “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits*, trans.B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, p. 215.

³ Miller, J. -A., “Truth is Coupled with Meaning” *The Lacanian Review*, 2, 2016, pp.9-20.

“You’re the one you’ve been waiting for”. There is a knotting of imaginary, symbolic, and the real through another use of her symptom, one which allows her to create and protect.