**Cinderella**

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Cinderella trough history

*Yeh-hsien, Cendrillon, Aschenputtel, Rashitz Coatie, Mossy***,** *Coat, Katie Woodencloak, or Cenerentola:* these are just a few of Cinderella's folkloric versions*. Cinderella* is one of the tales that has been reinvented basically by every known culture and few fairy tales have enjoyed the rich literary and cinematic afterlife of *Cinderella.* We could also mention *Pretty Woman* (Marshall) in 1990 with Julia Roberts and *Ever After*: *a Cinderella story* (Tenant) in 1998 with Drew Barrymore. In 2015 Disney has produced a new live-action version: *Cinderella* (Branagh) and in 2014 a film called *Into the Woods* (Marshall) which include *Cinderella* story as part of the plot. All contemporary films that offer remarkable evidence that even nowadays we are still recycling the story to manage our cultural anxieties and conflicts about marriage and courtship.

As pointed out by Jack Zipes in his book *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979) August Nitschke proved that *Cinderella* has its origins in the Glacial Era. He explained that the society that produced tales similar to *Cinderella* was a hunting and shepherding society in which women had a position of honor. Women were sacrificed so they could come back to life as plants or animals and collaborate in their children’s development.

Throughout history different versions of *Cinderella* have been created*.* Normally, all of them feature an innocent child, a malevolent stepmother and her ill- tempered two daughters. There is a festive ball and a lost slipper as well. But these are all the similarities that we can find. Among the many *Cinderella* stories that exist let us consider Perrault’s , the Grimm Brother’s and Giambattista Basile’s version. In the first one, a fairy godmother changes a pumpkin into a coach; in the second one, the stepmother orders her daughters to mutilate themselves in order to fit the slipper; and in the third one the heroine and her nanny have a plot to murder her stepmother.

There have been documented over seven hundred versions of *Cinderella.* The earliest version is an Italian fairy tale published in 1634 and titled *Cat Cinderella* which made its debut in Giambattista Basile’s *La Pentamerone* (The tale of Tales). Nonetheless, after this one there have been created many other versions that we could mention.

Basile’s *Cat Cinderella* forms the basis for many of subsequent Cinderella tales, being the most notable those of the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault.

Maybe not that famous but there exists a Scottish variant of *Cinderella* whose author seems to be unknown*: Rashin Coatie* in which after the heroine’s mother’s death a little red calf come to her and materializes to provide for the needs of the heroine.

There is also a Chinese version: *Yeh-hsien* by Tuun Ch'eng-shih. It is a Chinese representation of the tale in the ninth century A.D. In this tale the heroine is befriended by a golden fish that will be destroyed by the stepmother. The bones of the golden fish will supply Yeh-hsien with proper clothing to meet the warlord who will take her as a bride. She triumphs over her stepmother and stepsister, who are killed by flying stones.

Nevertheless, all these three versions of *Cinderella* as well as the rest that exist have become superseded by the Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault’s versions.

Thanks to Walt Disney, most people today are more familiar with Perrault's version. In this version Cinderella rides to the ball in a pumpkin pulled by white mice that a fairy godmother has transformed into a coach and horses. However, Cinderella must leave the ball by midnight because at that time, the spell will vanish.

As for the Grimm’s version it could be pointed out that it is rougher and includes important religious and mythic elements that are lacking in the French- the mother in heaven, her suffering daughter on earth, and the bird that mediates between them. There is also a tree growing out of the mother’s grave, which is a common ingredient in *Cinderella* stories, symbolizing, as it were, the spirit of the mother. In Grimm’s *Cinderella* the tree signals to the heroine that someone cares for her. In contrast with Perrault’s version there is somehow a maternal presence.

With no doubt, *Cinderella* has an enduring appeal which derives not only from the trajectory of the heroine through the story but also from the way in which this story depicts and reflects classic family conflicts- from sibling rivalry to sexual jealousies which with most people could feel identified with.

*Cinderella*: Leave the Sewing to the Women!

Like Snow White, Cinderella (1950) is a prisoner of her dead father’s second wife; in this plotline Cinderella’s evil stepsisters also spend their days torturing Cinderella. While Cinderella’s role is one of domestic service, the stepmother and stepsisters take on the only other acceptable role for females in the film, as luxurious mistresses whose female role is to spend Cinderella’s father’s money. Women’s subordination is a consistent theme throughout the film, as each of the “eligible maidens” in the kingdom is obligated to attend the prince’s ball, where each is put on display for the prince in hope that he will choose one of them to marry. Every girl in the kingdom appears to agree that nothing would be better than marriage to the prince who, although not unkind to Cinderella, is portrayed to have a flat personality, his only intention being to find the girl he would like to marry. In the first scene of the film, Cinderella is awoken by the chimes of the town clock, grumbling “even he orders me around!” The masculinization of the asexual clock is crucial in reinforcing gender roles: a male orders, a female obeys.

Like Snow White, Cinderella sings about her dreams to escape the tyranny of her stepmother and stepsisters; unlike Snow White, with a push from her fairy godmother Cinderella defies her stepmother and attends the prince’s ball. She does not do this with the explicit intention of seeking out the prince, but rather as a demonstration of her status

as an “eligible maiden.” Cinderella works diligently, albeit doing housework, throughout the day as a means to convince her stepmother to allow her to go to the ball, and perhaps in a sense earns access to her dream.

The ball was arranged for the prince to “show interest in one [maiden].” The importance of marriage is depicted as equal for both sexes in this film, whereas Snow White’s need for marriage was based on her own desire for love, and her prince’s ideas about marriage were neither expressed to the audience nor did they seem particularly important to Snow White. The relationship between prince and princess-to-be in *Cinderella* is slightly more dynamic than it had been in *Snow White*; however, their primary interaction takes place through the silence of dancing with one another, suggesting to young girls the prevalence in relationships of physicality over conversation or personal compatibility.

Cinderella’s rush home at midnight, when she loses her glass slipper on the castle steps, cuts their night short. Thereafter, the importance of Cinderella’s shoe is equated with her importance as object of the prince’s love; her identity is reduced to a shoe size. This process is dehumanizing and degrading, as it suggests that the prince would not be able to identify her by any indication other than whether the shoe fits. One must ask, then, how he knows that she is the girl he is meant to be with for the rest of his life, after only one dance, if he would not even be able to choose her out of a crowd. Although *Cinderella* demonstrates feminist progress in the thirteen years since the first Disney Princess movie, the romantic relationship is again reduced to physicality and dependence, and Cinderella’s only meaningful relationships, the ones through which she is able to

express herself and assert her ideas, appear to exist with her pets—mice, birds, and Bruno, her pet dog. In their quantitative analysis of Disney Princess films, Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Descartes, and Melissa A. Collier-Meek explore the feminist progression of princess’s traits. In their discussion of the first three Disney Princess films, they write, “The women were more assertive with animals and children, and far less with other people. This suggests a fairly submissive and limited way of being assertive, as if they could not assert themselves with other adults, but only when they were mothering, or with those who had less power.”19 Through their inability to assert themselves with other adults, Disney’s princesses accept their limited status in a patriarchal society that subordinates women.

Task:

a) Please, read the stories and (animated) movies listed below:

Grimm, J, and Grimm W, “Aschenputtel”, Internet izvor: www.gutenberg.org

Perrault, C, “Cinderella or the Little Glass Slipper”, Internet izvor: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

Branagh, K, (dir.) 2015, Cinderella, USA/UK, Walt Disney Pictures

Geronimi, C, Jackson, W; Luske H (dir.), 1950, Cinderella, USA: Walt Disney Studios

b) Now, when you introduced yourself to the material, try to answer the following questions:

1. What did the film makers change in the story? What remained the same?

2. How do these changes/similarities reflect ages and cultures?

c) Please fill in the COMPARING table (characters, plot, time and place, implied literary message, cultural context and ideological context) and write an essay on this topic.