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For Whom the Shoe Fits: Cinderella in the Hands of Victorian Illustrators and Writers

Bonnie Cullen

“Cinderella” is a story we all know. Despite a range of oral tales from many cultures, and some distinctly different literary incarnations, one “Cinderella” eclipsed the others in English. In 1950, Disney Studios produced this version in cinematic form. In this way it is now perpetuated globally.

Fixed in print, a folktale becomes a different creation, losing the nuances of performance and gaining the literary conventions of its day. When illustration is added, another level of interpretation is formed and perpetuated.

The narrative now popularly known as “Cinderella” was published originally with only one picture—Cinderella fleeing from the ball, leaving her slipper behind. As it was propagated in English books during the nineteenth century, this tale began to acquire what we might call signature images. When illustration is added, another level of interpretation is formed and perpetuated.

By the early twentieth century, a fairly standard form of “Cinderella” had emerged in most English editions—an adaptation of the French tale written by Charles Perrault and published in 1698: “Cendrillon ou la Petite Pentoufle de Verre.” Perrault’s tale had been addressed largely to an adult and highly sophisticated audience. By the late eighteenth century, however, it had been watered down in English cheap editions, or chapbooks, read by adults and children alike. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it entered the realm of popular entertainment in pantomime theater.
Why Perrault’s story, above all others? Considering its origins, there were many contestants for the dominant tale. “Cinderella” is really a large family of tales first analyzed by folklorists in the nineteenth century. Studying more than 300 related narratives from Europe and Asia, Marian Roalfe Cox identified Cinderella stories according to the presence of certain themes: an abused child, rescue through some reincarnation of the dead mother, recognition, and marriage.

The earliest known Cinderella story is actually a literary version from ninth-century China. Already it has the familiar elements. Yeh-hsien (Cinderella) has lost both her father and mother and seeks consolation from a pet fish. Her cruel stepmother eats the fish and buries the bones. A man comes from the sky advising her to find and save the bones—she will get whatever she wishes for.

When her stepmother and stepsister leave for a festival, Yeh-hsien follows them in a cloak of kingfisher feathers and gold shoes. She loses a shoe, the shoe is found, and given to a king. A search for the foot small enough to fit the shoe ensues. Yeh-hsien is finally shown to be the rightful owner and marries the king (Ting 4–5).

In most early Cinderella tales, the dead mother hovers protectively, reincarnated as a cow, a fish, or a tree. Her relationship with the grieving daughter is as significant as the girl’s triumph. Occasionally the protagonist is male. The shoe is not always the means of identification, although it is extremely common, as is the use of some magic garment (Philip).

By the sixteenth century, Cinderella appears in print in the West. One major debut is in Basile’s seventeenth-century collection, Il Pentamerone (Lo cunto de li cunti), as the feisty “Gatta Cenerentola” or “Cat Cinderella.” Zezolla (Cinderella) kills her wicked stepmother with the help of a governess, but when the governess marries Zezolla’s father, the girl is mistreated again. A fairy in a tree supplies magic clothes and a coach for a feast where Zezolla captures a king’s heart.

In Basile’s tale, the dead mother is no longer a significant presence, although she might be vaguely identified with the fairy. While close to some oral versions, his bawdy narrative is full of intricate metaphors and clearly written for an adult audience (Canepa 14–15). The book was published in Neapolitan dialect, which probably limited its dissemination in print (Canepa 12; Opie and Opie 20–21), although Basile’s stories may have passed into the oral repertoire and traveled in other languages.

During the ancien régime of Louis the XIV, folktales were transformed into a new literary genre, the fairy tale. Narrated as a kind of conversational game in the salons of the précieuses, by the end of the century they were being written down (Zipes, Beauties 1–9; Warner 167–70). Two
distinct versions of “Cinderella” issued from the pens of Charles Perrault and the Countess d’Aulnoy.

Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baronne d’Aulnoy,⁴ was a feminist and writer, the first to publish her stories as “fairy tales,” or literary versions of popular folktales. Her Cinderella, “Finette Cendron,” is both altruistic and spirited. When their parents abandon Finette and her sisters, she engineers daring escapes for all three. They plot against her, but Finette remains loyal. With a godmother’s help she finds some magnificent clothing and triumphs at the ball. She loses a shoe and gallops back to claim it, but refuses to marry the prince until her parents’ kingdom, which they lost, is restored (d’Aulnoy, Fairy Tales 227–45).

Perrault’s “Cendrillon” is quite a different lady. He dubs her chief virtue “la bonne grace,” i.e., in the face of adversity she is generous, long-suffering, charming and good-humored; the ideal bride, from the gentleman’s perspective.

A bland protagonist perhaps, but Perrault exhibits his wit. Cendrillon plays her own tricks on the sisters, asking one if she can borrow a dress to see the mysterious princess at the next ball. He also writes tongue-in-cheek. The slipper, evoking female virginity, is made of glass in his tale. Not only is it fragile and extremely pure, but Perrault hints that visual proof will be necessary.

Perrault’s position as a member of the French Academy may have led him to adopt this tone for tales of the peasant class (Warner 168–70). He also shifts the spotlight to the fairy godmother, giving her a dominant role. In the ancien régime, fairies were equated with powerful women at court (232–34). D’Aulnoy’s fairy is sympathetic and dignified, asking Finette to be her lady’s maid and comb her hair. Her magic is in providing the necessary items, whether or not she is present. Perrault’s elaborate description of rat-and-pumpkin tricks is a spoof: his fairy godmother is a witch.

D’Aulnoy called her stories “Les Contes des Fées” or “tales about the fairies,” evoking those powerful women with whom they were so popular. Perrault published his as “Contes de Ma Mère l’Oye,” or “Mother Goose Tales.” Warner, who argues that fairy tales were originally a women’s genre, says in doing so he distanced himself from the tales, and related the salonières to the “old wives” who originally told them (18, 234).

Was this more than an amusing literary duel? Both Zipes and Warner describe these devotees of the fairy tale as disaffected aristocrats and haute bourgeoisie couching their malaise in children’s stories as Louis XIV grew oppressive and distant. Tales of the folk, their misfortunes
reversed by magical transformation, were inherently subversive and utopian. Retold by the literati, they also served to undermine the bias toward classical literature maintained by the French Academy (Zipes, *Beauties* 1–8; Warner 168–69).

As a cover, both writers appended concluding morals in verse form. On the surface, this invoked tradition: folktales for children also served a didactic function. D’Aulnoy exhorts her readers to “overpower” the selfish with kindness (Fairy Tales, 245). Perrault’s verses, by contrast, are the final coup in his ironic development. First he advises: much better than beauty (of which, nonetheless, “we can never tire”), is “la bonne grace” in order to “win a heart, and conquer a Ball,” concluding that “Without it you’ve nothing; with it, all.” Then he parries with: it’s all very well to have shrewdness, wit, good breeding, talents, and so forth, but unless you have a “willing godmother, or godfather” who can “spread your talents further,” you’ll never get ahead (Philip 15–16). Or in other words, it’s not what you know, it’s who you know. Hiding as “Mother Goose,” then, Perrault effects a subtle male coup within the circle of fairy tale devotees, most of whom were women.

When literary Cinderellas began to appear in English in the eighteenth century, it was Madame d’Aulnoy’s story that took the lead. Several translations of her works preceded the first appearance of “Finette Cendron” in *A Collection of Novels and Tales, Written by that Celebrated Wit of France, the Countess d’Ainois* (1721–22). Perrault’s *Contes* did not appear in English until 1729.

By the nineteenth century, the tables had turned, apparently. Only seven English editions of d’Aulnoy’s tales survive in the British Library; not all contain “Finette.” There are over thirty editions of Perrault’s “Cinderella” as a separate volume, besides its inclusion with the tales. Perrault’s story was also adapted for pantomime and plays.

Perrault’s version faced new competition, however. Searching for an antidote to bourgeois life—the stale “getting and spending,” as Wordsworth put it—Romantics turned to nature. Might not the oral tales of country folk contain some primal wisdom? How closely they transcribed their originals is debated, but the Grimm brothers believed they were collecting rather than writing stories as they prepared their editions of *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812 (Warner 188–93). Their “Cinderella,” “Aschenputtel,” is indeed close to folk versions such as the Scottish tale, “Rashin Coatie” (Opie and Opie 117–18).

Mourning and revenge underlie “Aschenputtel”: the heroine plants a tree on her mother’s grave and tends it lovingly. A bird in the tree answers her calls for help. She begs for a dress, attends the feast and
attracts the prince. The sisters cheat at the slipper test, cutting off parts of
their feet, but birds reveal their deceit and at the wedding, peck out the
sisters’ eyes.

“Primal” tales had their opponents. With the first English translation,
in volume two of German Popular Stories (1826), the brutal eye-
pecking disappeared. During the previous century, the market for printed
tales had expanded through chapbooks, devoured by a new audience of
young readers as well as adults. By the end of the eighteenth century
there was a movement in England to sanitize children’s literature. Mrs.
Trimmer, reviewing children’s books for middle-class families, argued
that the often brutal tales “excite . . . groundless fears” and “serve no
moral purpose” (2: 185–86). This explains the intrusion of religious
motifs, such as praying and church architecture, in chapbook illustration
from the early nineteenth century, and the relative scarcity of expensive
ditions at the time.6

Fairy tales would not go away, however. Those who wanted to imbue
them with bourgeois morality faced equally vociferous champions of
“pure” tales. “A child,” Ruskin wrote, “should not need to chose between
right and wrong. It should not be capable of wrong . . . ” Innocent,
children could be “fortif[ied] . . . against the glacial cold of selfish
science” with the “inextinguishable life” of the folk tradition (83). As
Zipes points out, arguments about fairy tales became part of the greater
“Condition of England” debate on the effects of the Industrial Revolution
(Victorian Fairy Tales xvi–xxix).

In the case of “Cinderella,” it was a somewhat revised Perrault that
prevailed in Victorian England. Illustrated editions abound, and while
improvising textually and creating a cycle of pictures, they retain his
major motifs. Nor did two new editions of Basile, by Taylor in 1847, and
Sir Richard Burton, in 1893, affect the dominance of Perrault’s story.

By studying how English writers and illustrators contributed to the
discourse that produced this “Victorian Cinderella,” I hoped to discover
why Perrault’s tale is the one that has prevailed, and what lay behind the
“messages” woven into it during the nineteenth century.7

When Perrault’s “Cendrillon” first appears in English in 1729, it is in
a complete volume of his stories giving both French text and the
translation. The engravings—one per tale—are copied from the original
Contes, and repeated for the English text. They stage the ball scene, with
Cinderella running away, looking over her shoulder at the prince, who
kneels to pick up the slipper.

This edition is reissued with slight changes, but Perrault’s tale is not
particularly prominent during the eighteenth century. Enterprising chap-
book publishers see a market for more extensive illustration, however. *The Choice Gift: Containing the Story of Princess Fair-Start, and Prince Cherry and Cinderella* (c. 1775–99) from Dublin has several pictures for Cinderella, although they are generic woodblocks not designed specifically for the story.

By the early nineteenth century Perrault’s “Cinderella” appears to be a big hit. Publishers invest in lavish illustration. The earliest example, an engraved booklet with captions and foldout flaps, is curious. Dated February 24, 1804, *Cinderilla: or, the Little Glass Slipper* adds a dose of classical mythology. It opens at the court of Venus where the Prince, struck by Cupid’s arrow, sees “chaste Diana.” The familiar Cinderella tale follows, enhanced with more classical motifs, including a Roman matron (the fairy godmother) in a Pompeian landscape (fig. 1).

The book’s specific date is as unusual as its classical elements—many nineteenth-century books have no date at all. The explanation must be Cinderella’s new popularity in pantomime theater. “Cinderella” was first performed at Drury Lane, 10 January, 1804. A *Program of the Overture & Songs to the Allegorical Pantomimic SPECTACLE* from Drury Lane (1804) combines the same elements: Venus, Diana, the Prince, and the Cinderella story.

This is not so odd a melange as it first appears. Early pantomime was a hodgepodge of mythology, harlequinade and chapbook tales (Hartnoll, *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* 625). Occasionally, “panto” scenes drift into other editions of Perrault’s text, as in an 1816 Cinderella from the New Juvenile Library with engravings showing a Roman-looking fairy godmother and theatrical settings.

Chapbooks convey quite a different tone, introducing religious elements. One from Banbury, *The Interesting Story of Cinderella and her Glass Slipper* (c. 1814), follows Perrault’s text fairly closely but opens with a woodcut of Cinderella praying. Another from York, *Adventures of the Beautiful Little Maid Cinderilla; or, The History of a Glass Slipper* . . (c. 1820), adds a frontispiece depicting feminine primping and a verse about sin, pride and dress.

Despite this new emphasis on moralizing, Perrault’s concluding verses disappear from English versions at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although they persist in some French and Spanish editions. Clearly, his tongue-in-cheek remarks to the French court did not suit the wider audience of English readers.

One very significant change to Perrault’s original is the treatment of the stepsisters. Perrault never describes them as ugly (Whalley 54). Although he confides Cinderella is “a hundred times” prettier than her sisters, he focuses on nobility of being as her superior quality.
It was the English, apparently, who first portrayed the sisters as old hags. An Evans chapbook (c. 1810) calls them "deform’d and ordinary," adding that they can scarcely read or pray. The crude woodcuts drive the point home. Some expensive editions also try this formula. One from John Harris (c. 1828) with hand-colored prints and a verse text opens, "What females are these . . . ?" beneath a cut of ugly stepsisters gesturing to Cinderella (fig. 2). The fairy godmother appears as a tiny witch floating on a cloud.

The "ugly stepsisters" theme does not take hold until about 1870, however. Most illustrators show three ladies (also the norm in French and Spanish editions); Cinderella is often distinguished by gesture and dress (fig. 3).

During the ’30s and ’40s, chapbooks continue to follow Perrault’s story fairly closely, but sometimes a preachy conclusion is appended. The
CINDERELLA.

WHAT females are these, introduced to our view? 
Three sisters:—most proud and unfeeling are two, 
I mean pompous Martha and Bella; 
The other, ill-treated by night and by day, 
Their drudg'ry must do,—their commands must obey, 
And is called, in contempt, Cinderella.
wording in this edition “Corrected, and Adapted for Juvenile readers By A Lady” and published by Dean and Munday is typical:

The amiable qualities of Cinderella were as conspicuous after as they had been before marriage, by means of which she retained the love of her husband, and gained the esteem of the court, and the good-will of all who knew her.12

Woodcuts now show the godmother as a witch, but the stepsisters are not usually distinguished as ugly. A fairly standard cycle of scenes is established by this time: Cinderella by the hearth; Cinderella doing the
sisters’ hair; the godmother’s appearance; the ball and/or Cinderella running from the prince; the slipper trial, and marriage.

At mid-century, writers and illustrators take fresh approaches in expensive editions. Cruikshank revamps the entire story for his 1854 Fairy Library edition, adding temperance sermons and describing the wedding in detail, as if for a society newspaper. He opens with the family suffering hard times. The stepmother is a gambler and Cinderella’s father is in debtor’s prison.

An adaptation for young thespians by Julia Corner with engravings by E. H. Forrester entitled Cinderella and the Glass Slipper, or, Pride Punished . . . (1854) shows the heroine as a Victorian lady seated before a rather grand fireplace with caryatids. Fairies become a preoccupation of the Victorian age around this time, and one might expect a reinterpretation of the godmother. With a few exceptions, her portrayal as a witch persists.

The most significant changes around mid-century involve Cinderella herself. Perrault’s is the least active of the early Cinderellas—Finette is a virago, feisty Zezolla kills her stepmother, and Aschenputtel tends her mother’s grave and asks for help. Yet Cendrillon has a sense of fun, as well as some ideas—she suggests using a rat when the fairy godmother cannot think how to produce a coachman.

Whatever vivacity she may have had, at mid-century it has been purged by most English illustrators and writers. Early nineteenth-century pictures show her and the prince gaily dancing; she now averts her eyes as she takes his hand and physical contrasts between them are accentuated, as in the 1852 edition illustrated by “M.J.R.” (fig. 4). Cruikshank’s lively lass is one exception—but such a consummate caricaturist could hardly produce a bland protagonist.

Writers leave out both her joke and her suggestions to the godmother. Chapbooks insert new phrases emphasizing her marital state. Wording in The History of Cinderella and the Little Glass Slipper (c. 1850) is typical: “Cinderella made a most excellent wife, . . . universally loved and respected for her sweet temper and charming disposition.”

Most extreme is the Cinderella in the 1854 Home Treasury series, a veritable Madonna praying by the fire (fig. 5). Sir Henry Cole, who wrote the text and commissioned the illustrators, was the first Director of the Victoria & Albert Museum, an institution dedicated to improving public taste. His text includes an injunction from the dying mother: bear everything, and you will be happy. His fairy godmother is an old beggar woman whom Cinderella feeds—noblesse oblige. Discreetly, Cole used a pseudonym.
That Cole got into the act with his own editions suggests the popularity of the fairy tale genre as a means of instilling middle-class values, including aesthetic ones. In a handwritten notice inserted into one of the Home Treasury volumes, Cole states that “one object” of the series “was to place good pictures before my own and other children,” explaining that he got Royal Academicians to produce lithographs for the first editions.15

In the 1840s, pictorial reportage took off with the debut of Punch and the Illustrated London News. Caricature and social satire were enormously popular, and illustrators forged considerable reputations. Painters
like the Pre-Raphaelites also worked on books, and as the century progressed, some improvised so much that their imagery seems to be either independent of, or leading the text (Vaughan).

Banking on the popularity of illustrators, publishers began producing “toybooks” for children. These were paperbacks with elaborate imagery
accompanied by narrative captions. Developments in woodblock printing made colored illustration on a large scale feasible and relatively cheap. Toybooks were marketed in collectible series often featuring the artist.

Walter Crane’s 1873 toybook Cinderella is a Pre-Raphaelite beauty. The sisters have graying hair and irregular features, although they are not called ugly in the captions. The text concludes with the sisters vowing to work harder:

We’ll work ourselves, and never have another kitchen maid.  
We have been idle all our lives,—we’ll try another way,  
And be industrious instead—it really seems to pay.

This is also a line from a Victorian pantomime, suggesting again a crossfertilization between panto and books.

In later nineteenth-century versions, some illustrators exploit the “ugly stepsister” theme (fig. 6). An elaborate 1892 satire by Lieutenant-Colonel Seccombe (who also worked for Punch) caricatures the sisters as bald hags who draw and sing horribly. Cinderella, by contrast, is demure and pretty, blushing when she enters the ball where “she hoped to have joined the gay party unseen.” Their milieu looks distinctly middle-class, and the sisters, returning from the ball, dispute the cab fare.¹⁶

Two notable exceptions to this trend involved women in production: an expensive Warne picture book from 1878, written by Laura Valentine and illustrated by Weir and Gunston; and an Arts & Crafts–style book from 1894 edited by Grace Rhys.

By the early twentieth century, Cinderella’s youthful beauty, rather than her behavior, is her chief asset in most editions. Books open with such phrases as “Cinderella was a pretty girl . . . and she had a slim figure and very, very nice feet and ankles . . . .” Millicent Sowerby, who wrote this lavishly illustrated edition around 1910–15, adds that the sad heroine dries her eyes because sobbing spoils her looks.¹⁷ Rackham presents an energetic young girl ironing vigorously, her short hair tied up in a scarf; the stepmother is an overbearing matron with lorgnette. The sisters adopt ungainly postures, their noses, hands and feet exaggerated through his use of silhouette technique.¹⁸

For this deluxe 1919 edition (aimed at both the English and American markets), the publisher, C. S. Evans, rewrites the story. He follows the basic plot, fleshing out details and developing its emotional possibilities. Cinderella remembers her mother, for example, and there is a scene in which she and the prince spy each other years before the ball. Rackham’s frontispiece (in rags, she gazes wistfully through a window) recalls the melodramatic style of contemporary silent films.
A far cry from Perrault’s witticisms! Why the shift from “la bonne grace” and moral rectitude to beauty, and what was so compelling about the ugly stepsisters?

During the nineteenth century, two theories about human appearance were circulating. Physiognomy, developed by Johann Lavater (1741–1801), held that character is revealed in facial features. Similarly, phrenology argued that “faculties” such as benevolence reside in recognizable portions of the skull. Developed by Frans Joseph Gall (1758–1828), this pseudoscientific system was popularized in art circles by George Combe’s *Phrenology applied to Painting and Sculpture* (1855) (Cowling 44–45).
Although somewhat discredited among educated thinkers later in the nineteenth century, phrenology and physiognomy were common beliefs in Victorian society, underlying the popularity of caricature in illustrated magazines like *Punch* (Cowling 25–39, chapter 4). Even Dickens fell prey to these theories for a time, according to Michael Hollington.

The Evans chapbook published around 1810–20 was apparently taking this line, linking the sister’s deformity (in both text and pictures) with their inability to read or pray. Lectures on phrenology were popular early in the century among the self-educated working classes in such venues as the Mechanics’ Institutes (McLaren 86–97). The same audience would have formed a significant part of the chapbook market. The similar treatment in the more expensive Harris edition suggests the concept was circulating among the middle classes at an early date as well.

By the 1850s, art critics were reading “beauty of face and form . . . as a badge of respectability,” according to Cowling (350), who examines the application of these theories in Victorian painting. Considering such ideas prevailed in “high art” during the 1850s, as Cowling demonstrates (232–44) with Frith’s *Derby Day* (1858) (London, Tate Gallery), it is hardly surprising that illustrators followed suit, particularly those aiming to corner the “polite” market.

Cole’s 1859 “Cinderella” spelled it out for the middle classes: Cinderella grew more beautiful, while the sisters’ “temper and cruelty . . . marked their features with ugliness” (102); his illustrator used the more subtle approach of academy-style drawing rather than the caricature favored in the popular press.

With color printing and the expansion of the market through toybook editions in following decades, imagery had an even greater impact. What had been subtle at mid-century was often exaggerated. Pantomime fed the appetite for comic spinsters. The ugly stepsisters made their theatrical debut in the 1860s. They became as popular as “Cinders” in the show, now called “Cinderella; or, the Lover, the Lackey, and the Little Glass Slipper.”

That Perrault’s tale entered pantomime at the beginning of the century indicates its appeal to English nineteenth-century audiences. Its popularity as public entertainment helps explain its continued prominence in books. In fact, the genres were feeding each other: in this case the ugly stepsisters, debuting in print and illustrations in the first half of the century, were put on stage in the second half.

As for Cinderella, her idealized features and passive poses of the 1850s were the visual equivalent of a contemporary poem about the perfect fiancée:
She came, and seem’d a morning rose . . .
And, with a faint, indignant flush,
And fainter smile, she gave her hand,
But not her eyes, then sate apart,
As if to make me understand
The honour of her vanquish’d heart . . . (Patmore 145)

In a study of Victorian imagery, Lynda Nead argues that definitions of domesticity and gender, propagated in art, fueled the middleclass drive for hegemony in Britain during the 1850s. Establishing class identity through a code of respectability was part of the process.

According to this code, men act; women respond, or as Ruskin put it, order and praise. Further, a man’s realm is the public sphere, whereas women are naturally suited to the home. Laws regulating marriage, the national census, imagery and literature all served to define a woman’s ultimate role as wife and mother, her pleasure, self-sacrifice and devotion (Nead 12–47).

Whether or not Henry Cole imagined he was reviving traditional lore in designing the Home Treasury series,20 his conception was purely Victorian: “[Cinderella] was most happy in the love of her husband, the esteem of the court, and the good will of all who knew her.” His illustrators expunged all active portrayals, excepting the moment when she hears the clock. The image is strikingly reminiscent of Holman Hunt’s Awakening Conscience (1853) (London, Tate Gallery), an exposition of temptation and denial.21

Another change during the century, interesting in this context, is that the slipper test is offered not just to the gentry, as in Perrault’s text, but to all ladies of the realm. This implied that all marriageable women were potential Cinderellas.

That Cinderella came to signify a Victorian ideal of “femininity” is revealed in an argument Dickens had with Cruikshank in 1853. Cruikshank, ever the teetotaler, decided to plead the cause by writing and etching his own editions of fairy tales, beginning with “Hop ’o my Thumb.” Dickens, a “purist,” was livid.22 Dickens retorted with a parody of “Cinderella” in his magazine, Household Words. Lampooning both teetotalers and feminists in the story, he concluded with a morose vision:

She [Cinderella] also threw open the right of voting, and of being elected to public offices, and of making the laws, to the whole of her sex; who thus came to be always gloriously occupied with public life and whom nobody dared to love . . .

adding a Wordsworthian plea for the “pure” fairy tale:
The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it alone. (97-100)\textsuperscript{23}

Dickens’s parody of Cinderella as a suffragist is revealing, particularly when he becomes sarcastic and emotional: women active in public life are unlovable. At that moment, their ranks were growing and a feminist movement was underway (Thompson). In 1865, women were granted the legal right to own property, and by the 1870s, some were getting involved in local politics (Levine 19, 57).

The suffragist wave was also cresting. By 1919 (the date of Rackham’s edition), women in England got the vote. It is possible that the popularity of Cinderella’s ugly stepsisters in both books and pantomime during the second half of the nineteenth century related to a growing displeasure with women not disposed (or able) to emulate the ideal associated with Cinderella. That displeasure might also turn to threat. Increasingly, the sisters age. Perrault’s conclusion, in which the sisters are married off, disappears from several editions of the story.\textsuperscript{24} Whether the ugly stepsisters invoked feminists, suffragists or merely “old maids” would have depended on individual readers. The equation of female beauty with success, and ugliness with defeat, was a subliminal message difficult to avoid.

As for the fairy godmother, Perrault gives no physical description, although he associates her with witchcraft through her magic spells. A great majority of English illustrators pick up on Perrault’s implications, portraying her as a witch, or at least an old woman with a stick. Her appearance is never threatening. Some artists use her for a dash of comedy—Cruikshank’s tiny witch, orchestrating a parade of mice and lizards, is a brilliant example.\textsuperscript{25}

For readers at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, Perrault’s step-by-step delineation of fairy technology must have been compelling. With a stroke, he demystifies magical powers for the modern world, and gets a good laugh, too. In fact, one reason Perrault’s tale prevailed was its suitability for a modern audience. During the nineteenth century, the market for literary fairy tales in England was increasingly urban and middleclass. Perrault focuses on the social sphere, rather than the forest.\textsuperscript{26} He delineates hairdos, costume, behavior at the ball and reactions to Cendrillon’s appearance with the ironic tone of a society reporter.

D’Aulnoy’s Finette is busy slaying ogres and galloping through the mud, while in “Aschenputtel” there is blood from the sisters’ mutilated feet. Romantics like Ruskin favored the rugged terrain of folktales, but as Mrs.Trimmer’s remarks indicate, “polite” readers were concerned about “improving” young minds to function effectively in society.
More important, perhaps, Perrault’s tale prevailed in English because it was the best vehicle for Victorian notions of femininity. D’Aulnoy’s heroine liberates herself through female power, both magical and human. Folk Cinderellas like Aschenputtel also take action, advised by incarnations of their lost mothers. Perrault’s Cendrillon is the least active, and he shifts the spotlight to her fairy godmother, whose magic is as amusing as it is powerful.

Whether or not the oral fairy tale had been a female genre, as Warner argues, by the nineteenth century the fairy tale in print was increasingly dominated by male writers and illustrators in an industry controlled by male publishers. That even some women writers followed the “party line” with canonical Cinderellas shows how powerful a formula it was for the middleclass market of nineteenth-century England.

It is interesting to note that Disney’s revival of “Cinderella,” which repeats the Victorian interpretation of Perrault’s story, came out in 1950: a time when women, indispensable in the workforce during the war years, were being urged back home with imagery of ideal wives and mothers. There have been attempts to reclaim the tale in recent years in both print and film. Yet the canonical tale, with its Victorian ideology, persists.

Whether Perrault would have liked the self-abnegating heroine in the Disney film, he might have enjoyed this update of his vision: Cendrillon triumphs through a rather complicated process of fairy technology. Pumpkin, lizard and mice are transformed, while her identity is enhanced, like a digital capture adjusted with imaging software. Only her body and the glass slippers are material.

At the stroke of midnight, her virtual reality dress, coach, and attendants all vanish, while the slippers remain. The question arises: who is the real Cinderella—the domestic drudge, or the simulated princess? Is the servant, an identity forced upon her, more real than the woman so perfect her foot fits the slipper?

In the end, it is the simulated princess, not the drudge, who captures the prince’s heart. Of the author, Angela Carter, Marina Warner writes, “Her crucial insight is that women . . . produce themselves as ‘women,’ and that this is often the result of force majeure, of using what you have to get by. The fairytale transformations of Cinders into princess represent what a girl has to do to stay alive” (195).

In the twenty-first century, producing and projecting oneself with technology is becoming the modus operandi for both genders. Simulation through computer technology is the latest form: the coach and finery that can mutate or dissolve instantaneously on the screen.
With no material substance behind an image or configuration, simulation produces a new “crisis of substance,” or lack of faith in any identity beyond appearances. Or as Baudrillard put it, we are living an “‘aesthetic’ hallucination of reality” (Woolley 209). Perrault’s little joke—“Prospects grim? Get a fairy!”—is even funnier today.

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Notes

1 Illustrators may invent tabulae rasae, of course; they may also, as some cheap editions with woodblocks indicate, recycle generic pictures. But popular narratives that are frequently illustrated tend to generate a cycle of pictorial motifs. Kurt Weitzmann examined this phenomenon in Illustrations in Roll and Codex. He was concerned with classical and early Christian illustration, but the process can be observed into the twentieth century for certain well-known narratives. Modern editions of “Cinderella” often depict the same scenes—Cinderella losing her slipper, the fairy godmother transforming the pumpkin, and so forth.

2 I am taking the position that art and literature actively construct rather than merely reflect meaning in cultures. See Nead’s discussion regarding the visual arts (4–5) and Zipes’s analysis of current literary theory and the fairy tale genre (Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion ch.1).

3 Zipes (Oxford Companion 95) names Bonaventure des Périer’s Les Nouvelles Recréations et joyeux devis (1558) as the first. Warner shows a German illustration from the early sixteenth century but doesn’t discuss it (204).

4 Also known as La Mothe in some English editions. See the discussion of her work and life in Warner (284–86), Zipes, Beauties (introduction), and Opie and Opie (14–15).

5 Perrault employs an ironic tone when depicting older women in some of his other contes as well. Knoepflmacher analyzes his barbs at female sexuality and matriarchal figures (14–19).

6 Whalley and Chester suggest chapbooks were instrumental in preserving fairy tales during this period of middleclass disapproval (94). Andrew O’Malley analyzes this trend toward “sanitization” in depth, identifying “hybrid” works that contain elements of “plebeian culture” alongside middle-class pedagogy.
Meaning in folk and fairy tales is problematic, however. Similar stories appear in many different cultures, and folktales also appear to have common structures, as Propp pointed out. There may well be universal messages encoded in them. Bruno Bettelheim argued that fairy tales guide children through difficult stages in personality development, for instance. In his view, “Cinderella” is about losing one’s nurturing mother and Oedipal issues.

Bettelheim did note that emphasis varies with different narrators. One “Cinderella” theme he identified is “striving for higher goals.” The version that prevails in English editions ridicules this notion by showing that influence makes the difference; hence its popularity in what he called our “cynical age” (262).

Whatever archetypal messages “Cinderella” may hold, I shall be concerned with the meanings constructed by specific narrators and illustrators during a specific period in time. Warner critiques Propp’s approach with regard to “Cinderella” (238), and Zipes summarizes the issues surrounding an historical versus a “universal” approach to fairy tales, in The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales (xvii–xix).

Current theory would also argue that despite the narrative, audiences are not monolithic. One story may console an ill-treated stepdaughter while entertaining misogynists: reception generates ever more “Cinderellas of the mind.” I do not address the problem of audience reception in this paper.

Information kindly supplied by Keith Ludwick, the Theatre Museum, London.

Pearson (42) dated this chapbook 1814, attributing the design to George Cruikshank.

They survive in the 1836 edition of the Contes illustrated by N. Thomas and the 1867 edition illustrated by Gustave Doré, as well as the 1883 edition from Barcelona.


Similar wording appears in the Edinburgh Cinderella (c. 1840) and the 1889 edition illustrated by W. Gibbons.

One notable example with a fairy for the godmother is the 1852 edition illustrated by “M.J.R.” On the popularity of fairy painting, see the excellent catalogue to the 1997 Royal Academy exhibit, Victorian Fairy Painting.

The demure heroines in the 1854 edition illustrated by Forrester and the Routledge edition written by “Aunt Mavor” should be compared with the dancing cinderellas in the Banbury chapbook and the John Harris edition. Chapbooks at mid-century sometimes repeat the earlier formula, however. Later
French illustrators such as Doré (1867) and Gerbault (1898) also portray a more subdued heroine than Thomas’s pumpkin-toting girl in the 1836 Contes.  

15 The process proved expensive and in later volumes he had to resort to colored woodblocks “with inferior results,” according to a note dated 16 January, 1880, and signed “Henry Cole” in an 1846 edition of Traditional Nursery Songs of England now in the British National Art Library collection.  

16 Other depictions, varying in subtlety, appear in Cole’s edition, on the cover of the Cassell Story Book edition (c. 1869), and in The Cinderella Nursery Story Book (1878) and The Surprising Adventures of Cinderella (1889). Gerbault’s illustrations for the 1898 French edition also contrast an attractive Cinderella with disagreeable stepsisters and a domineering stepmother.  

17 Similar treatments are used for the versions published by W. Collins, 1903, Blackie & Son, c. 1904, and the French edition from Librairie Renouard, 1898.  

18 Rackham may have got the idea for the stepmother from Gerbault’s illustrations in the Librairie Renouard Contes.  

19 The ugly sisters were introduced at the Royal Strand Theater, December 26, 1860 according to Pickering’s Encyclopaedia of Pantomime.  

20 A view taken by Alison Lurie and Justin Schiller in Classics of Children’s Literature, 1621–1932.  

21 Cole’s Home Treasury series began in 1843 but the volume with “Cinderella” is dated 1859.  

22 While Dickens helped develop a new type of literary fairy tale as an indictment of industrial society, he was also a protector of traditional tales. Zipes suggests he had personal as well as political reasons—fairy tales were a consolation in his sad childhood (Victorian Fairy Tales xx–xxi). Harry Stone studies Dickens’s relationship to fairy tales in Dickens and the Invisible World.  

Dickens’s objections may have been as much artistic as anything. Cruikshank was a consummate illustrator, but his sermonizing in the text was extremely crude.  

23 Cruikshank forged ahead with Cinderella. He neither idealized the heroine nor parodied the sisters in his etchings, but continued teetotaling in the text, defending himself with “Notice to the Public” at the end of the book. Their friendship never recovered.  

24 Among them, Cole’s and Crane’s versions, and the Cassell and Ward editions. Rackham includes it, however.
The priestess-like figure from early pantomime style versions disappears quickly, and at mid-century some editions leave the godmother out of the imagery altogether, putting the focus on Cinderella and the social realm. Those illustrators who interpret her afresh show an angel, a fairy, or an ancient dame with a wimple.

Powerful women as positive agents are not common in nineteenth-century imagery, except where their power involves sacrifice—Joan of Arc, for instance. Dangerous women like Morgan le Fay, and the femme fatale type grow popular toward the end of the century, but the original model for the godmother—the précieuse—is absent from the scene.

For fairy interpretations see the edition illustrated by “M.J.R.” and published by Addey & Co. around mid-century, as well as Crane’s toybook edition; the Routledge toybook shows an ancient dame in medieval settings.

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