

the transmission of fairy tales. The external stimuli of fairy tales are immense; fairy tales act on us in infancy and continue to play a role in our lives through old age. Fairy tales are not just contagious, when considered from an epidemiological perspective, they are injected into our systems almost as a cure for dreaded social diseases.

The appeal of fairy tales still has a great deal to do with utopian transformation and the desire for a better life, and the manner in which we make it relevant in our mental representations will be in reaction to the outside stimuli and to moral codes instituted by hegemonic groups within a respective society. The more social relations make us

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*The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, a particular fairy tale comes to embody a discourse that becomes culturally relevant, and it is over the body of a particular constellation or figure such as Little Red Riding Hood that writers articulate positions regarding aspects of that tale. In the case of "Little Red Riding Hood," I argued—and still argue—that ostensive communication concerns relevant information about rape or violation of the body. The tale has become culturally relevant through the narrative means and strategies that we have metaphorically and socially construed to constitute its relevant quality. As I discussed in the previous chapter, we use the tale pertinently to comment in one way or another on sex and violence as can be seen in such

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recent and different cultural representations as Matthew Bright's cult film *Freeway* (1996), Todd Edwards's animated film for children, *Hoodwinked* (2006), Francesca Lia Block's short story "Wolf" (2000), Patricia Santos Marcantonio's *Red Ridin' in the Hood and Other Cuentos* (2005), and the picture books *Ruby* (1990) by Michael Emberley and *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* (2000) by Lauren Child. Other tales in the classical fairy-tale canon have come to embody and represent other discourses equally important, and they appear to assume a prominent role in the general cultural discourse at critical periods and reflect cultural predicaments and tendencies. "Cinderella" appears to be a good case in point.

## "CINDERELLA"

During the last decade of the twentieth century there have been an astonishing number of picture books, novellas, novels, poems, hyper-texts, plays, toys, and films that have transformed the representation of that dirty humiliated good girl who proves herself to be beautiful and a winner/survivor despite all the ashes and cinders that are heaped upon her. We recognize her for what she is—a true princess. At the same time, it is very difficult to establish her true identity in the twenty-first century, for she has become totally multicultural in the United States, primarily French or European in the United Kingdom, and in some cases transformed into a dog, penguin, dinosaur, or hog. For example, these are some of the picture books recently published in the United States and United Kingdom: Shirley Climo, *The Egyptian Cinderella* (1989), *The Irish Cinderella* (1996), *The Persian Cinderella* (1999); Jewell Reinhart Coburn, *A Hmong Cinderella* (1996), *Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella* (1998), *Dormitila: A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition* (2000); Sheila Hébert Collins, *Cendrillon: A Cajun Cinderella* (2000); Joanne Compton, *Ashpet: An Appalachian Girl* (1994); Jude Daly, *Fair, Brown & Trembling: An Irish Cinderella Story* (2000); Pamela Duncan Edwards and Henry Cole, *Dinorella: A Prehistoric Fairy Tale* (1997); Adèle Geras, *Cinderella* (1996); Vanessa Gill-Brown, *Rufferella* (2000); Diane Goode, *Cinderella: The Dog and Her Little Glass Slipper* (2000); Alvin Granowsky, *That Awful Cinderella* (1993); Rebecca Hickox, *The*

*Golden Sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story* (1998); Ellen Jackson, *Cinder Edna* (1994); Nina Jaffe, *The Way Meat Loves Salt: A Cinderella Tale from the Jewish Tradition* (1998); Ann Jungman, *Cinderella and the Hot Air Balloon* (1992); Deborah Lattimore, *Cinderhazel: The Cinderella of Halloween* (1997); Adeline Yen Mah, *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* (2005); Rafe Martin, *The Rough-Face Girl* (1992); Marianna Mayer, *Baba Yaga and Vasalissa the Brave* (1994); Barbara McClintock, *Cinderella* (2005); Frances Minters, *Cinder-Elly* (1994); Bernice Myers, *Sidney Rella and the Glass Sneaker* (1996); Janet Perlman, *Cinderella Penguin or, the Little Glass Flipper* (1992); Penny Pollock, *The Turkey Girl: A Zuni Cinderella Story* (1996); Robert San Souci, *Sootface: An Objibwa Cinderella Story* (1994), *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* (1998), *Cinderella Skeleton* (2000), and *Little Gold Star: A Spanish American Cinderella Tale* (2000); Vivian Sathre, *Slender Ella and Her Fairy Hogfather* (1999); Alan Schroeder, *Smoky Mountain Rose: An Appalachian Cinderella* (1997); Judy Sierra, *The Gift of the Crocodile: A Cinderella Story* (2000); Francesca Simon, *Don't Cook Cinderella* (1996); Mike Thaler, *Cinderella Bigfoot* (1997); William Wegman, *Cinderella* (1993); and Arthur Yorinks, *Ugh* (1990). In addition Judy Sierra has published an Oryx multicultural anthology of different versions of "Cinderella" from various countries, and Neil Philip has produced a collection of "Cinderella" versions in *The Cinderella Story* (1989) that date back to the eighteenth century. There are also feminist versions in the works of Donoghue, Block, and Yolen, and there are interesting book-length versions for young and adult readers. For instance, as part of her princess tales series, Gail Carson Levine has published *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* (2000) for ages seven to twelve and Gregory Maguire has produced *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (2000) for young adults. One of the most important fairy-tale films of the 1990s was *Ever After*, which was also transformed into a book, and of course, Tom Davenport's important work, *Ashpet: An Appalachian Folktale* (1989), produced as a video for public television and classroom use, is one of the more insightful interpretations of the "Cinderella" tradition. Three textbooks—Theda Detlor's *A Fresh Look at Fairy Tales: A Thematic Unit Exploring Gender Bias in Classic Stories* (1995), Monica Edinger's *Fantasy Literature in the Elementary Classroom: Strategies for Reading, Writing, and Responding*

(1995), and Gail de Vos and Anna Altmann's *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults* (1999)—offer effective ways to analyze and use "Cinderella" with young readers. The renaissance of storytelling in the United States and United Kingdom has brought about a renewed interest in retelling the classical fairy tales, and in one issue of *Storytelling World*, several well-known storytellers presented the introduction to their different versions with titles such as "Cinder Ellie," "Benizara and Kakezara," "Shmutzie," "Liberating Cinderella," "Words Into Flowers: Les paroles de fleurs," Cinder Girl," "The Feisty Little Flea," "Pick a Pumpkin," "The Untold Story of a Cinderella," "Walking in Cinderella's Shoes," "Chipper," and "Cinder Elephant."<sup>4</sup> For background reference, there are two informative websites, David K. Brown's "Cinderella Stories" (<http://ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/cinderella.html>) and "The Cinderella Project" (<http://www-dept.usm.edu/~engdept/cinderella/cinderella.html>); both provide links to other sites. Other innovative and fascinating interactive sites such as Joline Blais, Keith Frank, and Jon Ippolito's "Fair e-Tales" (<http://www.three.org/fairetales/>) provide multiple ways to reread and reinvent "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," and "Rapunzel."

During the past six years I have assisted filmmaker Joanna Kiernan and artist Joellyn Rock, who developed extraordinary projects related to "Cinderella." In the proposal that she sent to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Kiernan outlined her television program with accompanying digital video disc and website as follows:

*Cabinet of Spells: Cinderella* will dramatize and comment on versions of *Cinderella* from the 9th century to the present from Germany, Italy, France, Scotland; the Middle East; China; and Nigeria in Western Africa. Fairy Stories are now considered children's Literature, but this is a very recent development, and the program intends to speak to adult and young adult audiences. As well as *Cinderella*, the program will look at two versions of the related story of *Donkey Skin*, a variant of *Cinderella* where the father is the abusive parent, forcing his daughter to flee from his incestuous demands. With over 1000 known variants and many contemporary re-tellings, *Cinderella* is probably the most popular fairy tale in the world, while conversely, the *Donkey Skin* story has been largely suppressed during the last two centuries, its telling once again timely. The program allows the ancient art of storytelling to lead the

viewer into its rich historical material. While the *Cinderella* with the glass slipper and pumpkin coach is known by nearly everyone in the Americas and Western Europe, other variants of the tale are surprisingly unknown. The program will show how the shifting social contexts, performance environments, and multiple re-tellings of the tale have produced a contemporary *Cinderella* that synthesizes conflicting voices and messages. The result is often a reduction of meaning, and the loss of the vivid testimonial the story offers of women's experience. *Cabinet of Spells* will address that problem by untangling the different voices that lie embedded in the tale, and uncovering startling historical information about the real conditions of women's lives in the past. Through the viewing experience this ubiquitous and still beloved fairy tale will be de-familiarized and deeply enriched.<sup>15</sup>

I shall return later to Kiernan's significant remarks about the relationship between "Cinderella" and "Donkey Skin," and why there is a spreading of one tale and an obfuscation of another, both intimately related to each other, just as the Russian *Vasalisa* tale is. In her MA thesis proposal at the University of Minnesota–Duluth, Rock wrote:

Storytellers and Graphic Designers occupy a similar role as communicators of cultural iconography and canon. *The Vasalisa Project* will explore the subversive potential of the storyteller/designer by mixing and remixing messages both visually and textually. In its eclectic aesthetic, the project will mine the resources of an artistic network, soliciting writing and imagery via the internet. Through this collaborative process, it will attempt to build a sense of community. In its interactive form, the project will offer its audience a sense of agency. The resulting product will provide an alternative to the tidy packaging of fairy tales by media corporations.<sup>16</sup>

The narrative that she created along with the images was published in *Marvels & Tales* as "Barebones," and it has a distinctly feminist perspective intended to animate a response from viewers. The first part reads:

once there was  
and once there was not  
a little girl named  
vasalisa  
vasalisa  
vassalissa

wassilisa  
she was the sweetest thing,  
a really  
REALLY  
good girl.  
Her mother dressed her in the perfect  
good-little-girl-little-outfit  
with a black skirt and a white apron,  
a white blouse and a red vest  
all embroidered  
and painstakingly  
designed.

On her feet, Vasalisa wore little red boots.  
On her head:  
a scarf  
decorated with colorful patterns  
that had been passed (with viral ferocity)  
from generation  
to generation  
was tied  
babuska-style  
beneath her chin.  
Her long braids twisted like DNA down her back.  
Her mother loved her very much,  
doted on her  
wished she might stay this  
sweet and doll-like forever.<sup>17</sup>

This passage is part of the first node of a series of nodes that constitute the text and images of Rock's version of "Vasalisa the Brave," the good Russian girl, who suffers humiliation after humiliation in her quest for self-respect and autonomy. But does she really gain self-respect and autonomy in a marriage with a prince? Will she be free of abuse in her marriage? Will she be recognized for who she is? Is there truly a happy ending to her suffering? If so, why do we keep revisiting this story? Why is it so infectious?

If we take together all the thousands if not hundreds of thousands of endeavors (many of the oral kind) that pertain to "Cinderella," can we speak of a "Cinderella epidemic" today? Or is it more appropriate to speak about a "Cinderella complex," which Colette Dowling in 1981 called "a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to 'transform their lives.'"<sup>8</sup> But is Cinderella really passive? If we recall, in two of the earliest literary versions of "Cinderella," Giambattista Basile's "Cat Cinderella" (1634) and Mme. d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron" (1698), she did not hesitate to kill to get what she wanted, and even in the Grimms' version, she takes an active role by provoking her discovery through an ostensive act as does the heroine of many of the "Donkey Skin" tales. So, I have my doubts as to whether the thousands or hundreds of thousands of "Cinderella" tales constitute a "Cinderella complex." It might be more pertinent to discuss them in relation to what some psychologists have called the "Cinderella syndrome," in discussing how foster daughters have used the tale to attract attention to their maltreatment by their foster parents.<sup>9</sup> But the question that the Cinderella discourse opens up, perhaps the underlying relevance of the tales from the very beginning, concerns child abuse or infanticide, which many of our canonical fairy tales touch upon—something that really should not come as a surprise to us.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT CINDERELLA

In a recent study, *The Truth about Cinderella: A Darwinian View of Parental Love*, Martin Daly and Margo Wilson maintain that there is nothing special about the European tradition of stories about wicked stepmothers and stepfathers who unjustly mistreat their stepchildren. "Innocent children are victimized by vicious, neglectful, exploitative stepmothers and stepfathers all over the world. Cinderella's domestic situation is iconic."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there is an iconic constellation that pertains to familial relations where there is a stepmother or stepfather. Daly and Wilson demonstrate that there is something about the human

condition, a genetic disposition, which explains why biological parents are more inclined to treat their children with more kindness and love than stepparents give their stepchildren. In fact, Daly and Wilson are not afraid to talk about stepfamily dysfunction, and they raise significant questions directly related to the spread of the "Cinderella" tale:

What are the simple epidemiological facts about problems in one family circumstance versus another? Do children really incur risks of various sorts when one parent dies or departs and the remaining parent takes a new partner? And if so, to what degree: are we talking about a slight elevation of risk, or something more dramatic? These would seem to be rather obvious questions for research, but as we shall see, they have been surprisingly neglected. And that is unfortunate, because it turns out that the risk differentials are immense.<sup>21</sup>

Daly and Wilson explore the behavioral patterns of animals and humans to show that there are certain striking similarities in situations that involve nongenetic parents. Animals, particularly the males, will not exert energy or emotions to look after offspring that are not their own and in some cases will kill the offspring. The major factor that contributes to this abusive behavior is related to the allocation of resources. In the case of humans, parents often resent obligations to children who are not their own, and they generally will not take time and spend energy in guaranteeing their survival, which may threaten their own genetic lineage. For the most part they do not provide them with the same care and love that they would provide their genetic children. Daly and Wilson reveal that the risk factor for child abuse is greater in families with stepparents than in those with two genetic parents, and this situation is widespread and has probably existed for centuries. As they explain:

Step-parents do not, on average, feel the same child-specific love and commitment as genetic parents, and therefore do not reap the same emotional rewards from unreciprocated "parental" investment. Enormous differentials in the risk of violence are just one, particularly dramatic, consequence of this predictable difference in feelings. The Darwinian process favours attributes that contribute to their own proliferation relative to alternatives. That's *all* that it favours, all it *can* favour. It follows that the motives, emotions, attentional priorities, and so forth—have

harm his daughter, he does contribute to her suffering through benign neglect and abandonment. Generally speaking, he does nothing to help her or to protect her. If anything he enables the stepmother and stepisters to exploit Cinderella and to degrade her. In other words, he contributes to the abuse by absenting himself from his daughter's side. Clearly, though one may interpret "Cinderella" in other ways, its primary theme concerns child abandonment and abuse. The tale asks from the very beginning: What will happen to a child when her mother dies and the father remarries? It is a question that is also asked by the "Donkey-Skin" tales, closely related to the Cinderella discourse, and there, of course, the issue of incest and abuse by the biological father is raised.

If "Cinderella" caught on centuries ago, that is, took root in different ways in the minds of numerous people in Europe, was remembered through word of mouth and print, and became contagious and stuck, it was, I contend, because it was addressing issues of child abandonment, family legacy, sibling rivalry, and parental love. Many of these contested areas or issues remain with us, or they have been transformed in some way. Though the more traditional versions of Perrault's and Grimms' "Cinderella" continue to be replicated, there have been highly significant transformations that signal shifts in perspective with regard to abused stepchildren. Moreover, even the "traditional" Cinderella tales still speak to a predicament in stepfamilies that has not been resolved and perhaps may never be. Consequently, this "strain" of the fairy-tale tradition will continue to spread. But what are some of the alternatives to the Perrault and Grimm versions? Are they more pertinent for the twenty-first century? Do they offer more hope?

## CONTEMPORARY CINDERELLAS

There appear to be two distinct tendencies in the transmission of "Cinderella" texts in the 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century that indicate how writers will continue to transform and adapt the basic plot about an abused or unwanted child as survivor: the picture books and stories included in anthologies for very young readers between five

been shaped by the process of natural selection to be effective means to the ends of personal and kin reproductive success. In this light, we may expect the psychology of parental solicitude in any species to be designed to allocate parental investment discriminatively, in ways that will promote the individual parent's genetic posterity (inclusive fitness).<sup>22</sup>

Although Daly and Wilson cannot provide absolute "truth" that stepparents and dysfunctional families are at the basis of the Cinderella tales and form a kind of Cinderella syndrome or discourse, they do enable us, I believe, to grasp how and why "Cinderella" is contagious and has spread and will continue to spread in different forms in the twenty-first century. If we accept the notion that humans are genetically disposed toward discriminating in loving and rearing their own biological children, and if we also accept that environmental stimuli such as family formation and cultural representations, in particular, tales about stepchildren and their parents, play a role in the manner in which we store, remember, and retell relevant material for cognition and adaptation, then it is not difficult to grasp why "Cinderella," as mental and cultural representation and part of a relevant oral and literary genre that has been accepted and developed "memetically" over the past five centuries, has such a profound meaning for contemporary society. We live at a time when there are numerous divorces, numerous families with stepchildren and stepparents, numerous dysfunctional families, and a high rate of child abuse. "Cinderella" as imaginative narrative does not mince words but uses words and images to tell things as they are, or as they might potentially develop for stepchildren—with hope that we can understand and overcome abuse. But does it tell the whole story?

As Daly and Wilson point out, most abuse in stepfamilies is caused by the stepfather, not the wicked stepmother. If this is the case, why is the stepmother singled out as the wicked character in the tales? Daly and Wilson suggest that more women died from childbirth before the twentieth century and that there were more families with women as stepmothers. There are also some other reasons. It is well known that the Brothers Grimm changed many biological mothers to stepmothers because they did not want to cast disrespect on their own mother or mothers in general. Moreover, one could also argue that, though the father figure in Cinderella tales up to the present does not physically

and ten do not alter the traditional narrative very much; the stories and novels for readers ten and above, especially those intended for young adult and adult readers, make dramatic changes in the plot and often focus on aspects unrelated to abuse or they minimize the issue of abuse. Of course, it is difficult to discuss all the texts and illustrations that have been produced during the past fifteen years, and consequently I will comment only on some select examples from the two groups I have mentioned. In each case I will deal with books that are, in my opinion, indicative of tendencies that will have a bearing on the development of the fairy-tale genre as a whole.

In analyzing the recent epidemic of “Cinderella” picture books, the first question that comes to mind is: Why so many when there is so much duplication? The answer here is obvious. The publishing industry is based on a competitive market, and each company, large and small, wants to capitalize on the memetic fame of Cinderella. The result is that there are numerous mass-market cheap “Cinderella” books that repeat the same message. Perhaps the most popular text or icon today is that of Disney’s *Cinderella*, which continues to float throughout the world in various viral forms. It is probably not an exaggeration to assert that millions of children will grow up exposed to some form of the traditional “Cinderella” narrative, often a mix of the Perrault, Grimm, and Disney versions, and even the revised texts and pictures that contest or question the conventional plot and forms that rely on the basic motif of the abused stepchild or orphan. Here are some examples of how different books begin more or less the same and end on a harmonious note.

Once upon a time a sweet pig named Ella lived with her father. Then Father Pig got married again. His new wife and her two daughters were very mean. Father Pig was a traveling salesman and was away from the ranch more days than he was home. So Ella got all the meanness those steppies dished out.<sup>23</sup>

Now lis’en. Smack in the heart o’ the Smoky Mountains, there was this old trapper livin’ in a log cabin with his daughter. One night, while Rose was fryin’ a mess o’ fish, the trapper, he starts lookin’ dejected-like.

“I reckon it’s hard on ye, not havin’ a ma,” he said. “Tell me, Rose would ye lak me to git hitched again? There’s a widow woman with

two daughters down the road a piece. Way I see it, we’d all fit together neater’n a jigsaw.”

“I don’t mind,” said Rose, settin’ a plate o’ corn bread on the table. “You go a-courtin’, Pa, if you think it’s best.”

So before the huckeberreries was fit for pickin’, the trapper got himself hitched for the second time. That’s when the trouble started a-brewin’.<sup>24</sup>

Long ago in a cabin deep in the shadow of Eagle’s Nest Mountain, lived a serving girl called Ashpet. She’d been hired out since she was a young girl to the Widow Hooper and her two daughters, Myrtle and Ethel. All day long the Hooper women thought of chores for Ashpet to do, “After you’re done washin’ up, there’s firewood that wants bustin’, and our supper to cook. And don’t forget to tend to the animals.”

Now Ethel and Myrtle were as ugly as they were lazy, but Ashpet was fresh-faced and regular featured. Those two girls were so jealous that whenever anyone came to their cabin, they stuck Ashpet under a wash-tub. And they never let her go anywhere.<sup>25</sup>

Once upon a time there lived a fine gentleman who had a beautiful home on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans. He had one child, a daughter. She was *très belle*! He gave her all that he could buy and spoiled her terribly because she had no mother. The little girl did wish for a mother and her *père* knew this. So he married a woman with two daughters, hoping it would make his *petite fille* happy. The new *belle-mère* had not been married one day when she became very jealous of her husband’s child. She gave her stepdaughter all the hard and dirty work to do while her own daughters pampered themselves all day long.<sup>26</sup>

Long, long ago in the land of Cambodia, there lived a lonely fisherman and his daughter, Angkat. Their riverside home in a quiet inlet was sheltered by waving palms. Being dutiful and obedient, Angkat was the joy of her father’s life.

Beyond the fisherman’s pond there lived a widow and her daughter, Kantok. She was a girl of great beauty but had no redeeming qualities.

While cleaning his fish ponds one day the lonely fisherman and the widow met. They were soon married. The minute Angkat and Kantok became stepsisters the new wife insisted that her daughter be known as Number One daughter in the family. That was the most important of family distinctions.

Angkat protested, "But I am my father's daughter, and I am entitled to be the Number One child!" Discontentment filled the air and in no time at all, there was little peace in the new family.<sup>27</sup>

There once lived a fisherman whose wife had drowned, leaving him with a small daughter named Maha. Nearby lived a widow with her own young daughter. Every day she went to the fisherman's house to care for Maha, and every day she said, "You poor motherless child! I love you like my own."

"Father," begged the girl, "You should marry our good neighbor so you won't have to cook your own food or mend your own clothes, and then I can have a mother and a sister."

Her father stroked her hair. "Ah little one, I shall never marry, for stepmothers are often jealous of another's child."

But Maha continued to beg, and by and by the fisherman and the neighbor were married.

At first all went well, but as time passed the woman saw how much the fisherman loved his daughter. She saw how lovely and clever the girl was, and how pale and clumsy her own daughter seemed in comparison. As the months went by, Maha was forced to do more and more of the work, and during the day when the fisherman was gone, her stepmother fed her nothing but a few dried dates.<sup>28</sup>

Once there was a rancher who married for his second wife the orneriest woman west of the Mississippi. She was meaner than a rattlesnake, and she had two daughters who were the spitting image of her. The rancher also had a daughter, who was just as sweet and gentle as she could be. Her name was Cindy Ellen.

Cindy was a pretty good cowgirl, too. Riding her little gray horse, she wrangled and roped and galloped and loped with the best buckaroos on the range.

But as soon as the wedding was over, that snaky old stepmother began to pick on poor Cindy Ellen. She was so good she made her step sisters look bad. So her stepmother made her do all the dirty work around the ranch.<sup>29</sup>

At the far edge of Baba Yaga's forest there lived a mean-spirited woman with her two ill-tempered daughters and her stepdaughter, Vasilisa. Whereas the other girls were cruel and ugly, Vasilisa was kindness itself and beautiful beyond measure.

Vasilisa's mother had died when the girl was quite young. Her father had soon remarried, more for the child's sake than for his own, believing his daughter should have a mother's love as she grew up. But while his intentions were for the good, the results were sadly the opposite.<sup>30</sup>

In two Native American story books, *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story* by Robert San Souci and *The Rough-Face Girl* by Rafe Martin, the initial situation concerns a widower with three daughters, and the two eldest maltreat the youngest so that her face becomes marred. In another unusual Native American version, *The Turkey Girl: A Zuni Cinderella Story* by Penny Pollock, an orphaned girl, who does not keep her promise to magical turkeys, is left in rags at the end of the tale. But, for the most part, no matter how extraordinary or ethnic the storybook may be, the abused girl (and sometimes it is a boy) generally triumphs in the end. For instance, in Jude Daly's *Fair, Brown and Trembling*, the tale begins in a similar way to the Native American versions, but in a different setting:

Once upon a time, high among the green hills of Erin, there stood a castle. In it lived a widower and his three daughters: Fair, Brown, and Trembling. Fair and Brown always wore new dresses to church on Sundays. Trembling stayed at home. "You must do the cooking," said her sisters. But the real reason they would not let her out of the house was because Trembling was very beautiful, and they were terrified she would marry before they did. (1)

Of course, Trembling is helped by the henwife to appear in magnificent array at the church door every Sunday. The Prince of Emania pursues her and defeats some other princes to marry her. The tale ends on this "bright" note: "In time they had fourteen children, and they lived ever after in great happiness. As for Fair and Brown ... they were put out to sea in a barrel with provisions for seven years—and were never seen again!" (24–25).

Now whether having fourteen children brings happiness or causing your sisters to die is fair punishment is something for readers to decide. What is interesting is that this "Irish tale," based on Jeremiah Curtin's *Myths and Folk-lore of Ireland*, was written and illustrated by the South African artist Jude Daly. Many of the writers of the storybooks have the ostensible objective to recapture and restore some kind of ethnic

and national tradition and will endeavor to legitimate the effort by citing historical sources at the beginning of narrative or as an afterword. While the intentions may be sincere, they are misleading, for the writers cannot and do not have the foggiest notion of how and why these tales were relevant or significant in their original traditions. Nor can they contribute to an ongoing folk tradition. What the writers are cultivating, however, is a literary, oral, and iconic tradition that focuses on the treatment of stepchildren, orphans, foster children, or the youngest child in a family. And their narratives have a bearing on how we will remember and record the Cinderella-like versions in the future.

The picture books, despite apparent differences, have more or less the same outline: a widower remarries after his wife dies. He recedes into the background or vanishes after the marriage and permits his only daughter to be maltreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. The soiled girl, often given a degrading nickname, lacks love, protection, and guidance. She seeks help from another powerful female figure (perhaps her dead mother) who provides her with the resources to regain her self-respect and establish her true identity through marriage to a wealthy prince. She can find love and become a beloved object. What is striking about most of these lovely or humorous illustrated children's books is that the stepmothers and stepdaughters or sisters are depicted as wicked and terrifying. The fathers are mostly well intentioned and disappear from the story. The key agent of power lies with a magical female who intervenes to assist the downtrodden girl and make her feel loved.

This plot or constellation is altered greatly in most of the works for young adults and adults, but the writers of stories, novellas, and novels for older readers assume a deep knowledge of the traditional narrative about Cinderella. In fact, they depend upon this relevant knowledge as though it were part of the reading audience's material experiences, as though they were already disposed to the tale. Therefore, they feel free to experiment in ways that the producers of storybooks do not feel they can take poetic license. Here I should like to cite some examples by Gail Carson Levine, Philip Pullman, Priscilla Galloway, Francesca Lia Block, Emma Donoghue, Gregory Maguire, and Mavis Jukes.

Levine, Pullman, and Galloway all shift the focus from a girl to a boy in novel ways. Levine, who has written a series of princess tales for

readers between the ages of seven and twelve, introduces a young farmhand named Ellis who lives with his two brothers, Ralph and Burt, in an imaginary kingdom of Biddle. Evidently they are orphans, and Ellis is called Cinderellis because one of his inventions with flying powder backfired, and he became covered with soot and ashes from a chimney. Ellis is always trying to win the attention and respect of his two plodding brothers, but they neglect him, and he suffers from loneliness, as does Princess Marigold, who has no mother and whose father is always away on quests. Eventually, the father realizes his daughter is ready for marriage, and he prepares a contest to determine what knight might marry her. The king has a glass mountain built, and whoever can climb it on a horse can have Marigold for a bride. With the help of three magical horses and powder, Cinderellis accomplishes the task.

Levine's narrative is comical and not to be taken very seriously. The problem faced by Ellis and Marigold, two humble and innocent characters who ooze sweetness, is loneliness and neglect, and once they encounter each other, it is clear they will no longer need their brothers or father to live happily ever after. This is certainly not the case with Roger in Pullman's *I Was a Rat!*, which has more tragic-comic overtones than Levine's trivial story. In this novel, a grubby young boy dressed in a tattered page's uniform appears out of nowhere on the doorstep of a cobbler's shop at ten in the evening. An old couple named Bob and Joan provides him with shelter and care. When he tells them he does not have a name, they are puzzled and explain to him what it means to have a name. Bob and Joan do not realize that Roger, the name they bestow upon him, was once Cinderella's page and had indeed been a rat, but somehow the fairy godmother had not retransformed him into a rat. In his human condition Roger must learn what it means to be civilized, but at the same time, he is bent on proving to Bob and Joan that he truly was a rat. Indeed, he cannot prevent himself from acting like a rat in certain situations. What follows is a series of tragic-comic episodes in which Roger's rodent behavior is greeted with punishment and horror by the adult world. Newspaper reports about his "dangerous" behavior are interspersed in the novel, and they create mass hysteria as they portray Roger as a monster. But he is merely a kind-hearted innocent who has great difficulty learning proper English expressions and



manners and is completely misunderstood by the world around him. Only Princess Aurelia, who was once Cinderella, can help prove that he is not a subhuman fiend or a venom-dipping beast from the nethermost pit of hell, but just a normal little fellow. In the end, Roger gives up his quest to be a rat again because he might be exterminated by people driven to hysteria by the mass media. Though he says it's difficult being a person, he's willing to become a cobbler/craftsman like Bob. So Roger stays with Bob and Joan, and Pullman ends the novel with sweet irony: "The world outside was a difficult place, but toasted cheese and love and craftsmanship would do to keep them safe."<sup>31</sup>

Safe from whom, one must ask. Safe from society? Safe from the media? Safe from the forces of "civilization"? Roger's tale is very reminiscent of the profound true story of the nineteenth-century Casper Hauser, whose life has been the subject of plays and novels. This young man appeared one day in a German village out of the blue and could not speak or write. He had been mysteriously confined in a house in the woods until his late adolescence. When the well-intentioned people of the town discovered the young "savage," they tried to "civilize" him and eventually caused his death. In Pullman's novel, Roger is ironically a Cinderella figure, who learns that he will be victimized in society for appearing to be different and wanting to prove this difference. He does not triumph in the end. Rather he withdraws and seeks refuge from a world that misunderstands him. He merely survives.

Another male figure in a Cinderella tale, "The Prince," by Priscilla Galloway also feels misunderstood, and he recounts his story in a first-person narrative that reveals just how obnoxious he is. From the very first paragraph it is clear that we are dealing with a highly neurotic and narcissistic character: "Guilt. Guilt. Guilt. My analyst keeps telling me I need to work out my feelings of guilt. Such nonsense. My mother died when I was born. I killed her. My father kept provoking wars so that he'd have to go away and fight them because he couldn't stand the sight of me, and no wonder, always reminding him."<sup>32</sup> In the course of his self-indulgent story we learn that he has had a homosexual affair with Stephen, his tutor, who was put to death by the prince's father because of his disapproval of the relationship. In fact, he orders a ball and commands the prince to choose a wife, or the king will choose one for him.

The prince vows he will not marry, but he dances with a princess with glass slippers, and her toes remind him of Stephen, his former lover, and the foot fetish he had. When the young lady rushes away from him, he is left with a glass slipper and is obsessed with finding her.

Galloway's provocative narrative is concerned with obsession and self-absorption. We learn nothing about Cinderella but all about a pathetic prince. The implications are clear: if this prince is what Cinderella can expect, she will have nothing but trouble for the rest of her life. Galloway's intriguing first-person narrative reveals the ambivalence of the happy ending of most Cinderella narratives. We know nothing about the prince except for his foot fetish.

In Emma Donoghue's "The Tale of the Shoe," we have another first-person narrative, but this time it is Cinderella's voice that we hear, and it is the voice of an awakening and a new beginning. In grief about her mother's death, the unnamed young woman endeavors to deal with her sorrow through work: "Nobody made me do the things I did, nobody scolded me, nobody punished me but me. The shrill voices were all inside. Do this, do that, you lazy heap of dirt. They knew every question and answer, the voices in my head. Some days they asked why I was still alive. I listened out for my mother, but I couldn't hear her among their clamor."<sup>33</sup> Fortunately, one day a stranger appears, a friend of her mother, who describes herself as from her mother's tree, and indeed, she provides the support and comfort that the young woman needs. She enables her to attend three balls until the young girl realizes she is in love with the older woman, and she throws the other shoe that she did not lose at the ball into the woods to leave for home with the strange woman. Donoghue's story is a coming of age fairy tale that celebrates the self-awareness of a young woman and love that she feels for another woman.

This story is repeated with a slightly different emphasis in Francesca Lia Block's "Glass." Told in a third-person narrative, a young woman who is somewhat inhibited and likes to stay at home, clean, and tell stories to her sister, meets a strange woman with red and white hair, young and old, who begins to speak to her in whispers. She said:

You cannot hide forever, though you may try. I've seen you in the kitchen, in the garden. I've seen the things you have sewn—curtains of dawn,

twilight blankets and dresses for the sisters like a garden of stars. I have heard the stories you tell. You are the one who transforms, who creates. You can go out into the world and show others. They will feel less alone because of you, they will feel understood, unburdened by you, awakened by you, freed of guilt and shame and sorrow. But to share with them you must wear shoes you must go out you must not hide you must dance and it will be harder you must face jealousy and sometimes rage and desire and love which can hurt most of all because of what can then be taken away. So make that astral dress to fit your own body this time. And here are glass shoes made from your words, the stories you have told like a blower with her torch forming the thinnest, most translucent sheets of light out of what was once sand.<sup>34</sup>

This passage reads like a pep talk, and it is, for Block's story is trite: it waxes sentimental about a young woman who incurs the jealousy of her sisters because she dares to come out of herself and win the attraction of a prince. When she realizes that her sisters despise her because of the attention that the prince shows her, she runs away, loses her shoe, and deprecates herself at home. However, the prince pursues because he recognizes her for what she is, and his love for her draws her out for good. So Block's coming of age tale is a more traditional heterosexual version of love than Donoghue's more unusual lesbian version. What is important in each case is that two women authors focus not so much on child abuse but on the need for love. The focus is on the self-affirmation of a young woman, who has been suffering from grief about a dead mother. The intervention of an older, powerful, wise woman in the form of a fairy godmother is the necessary impetus for self-discovery.

Such intervention does not occur in Gregory Maguire's compelling novel, *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, one of the more graphic Cinderella novels about wicked stepmothers and child abuse to have appeared in recent years. Maguire sets his story in the small city of Haarlem in seventeenth-century Holland, and he has a great eye for capturing the customs and living conditions of the time. His narrative concerns the return of the widow Margarethe Fisher from England with her two daughters, Ruth, an awkward but gentle mute, and Iris, a plain but gifted and compassionate girl. Fierce in her determination to protect her daughters and to provide a livelihood for her daughters, Margarethe finds a job as a servant for a master painter and then as head of the van

den Meer household, where Irene is giving English lessons to a beautiful and anxious girl named Clara, who had been abducted and saved from her kidnappers when she was a child. Because of this incident, she never leaves the premises, and her mother, Henrika, is overly protective. When Henrika becomes pregnant, her health declines, and she dies in childbirth as does her baby. We later learn that she was poisoned by Margarethe, and of course, it is Margarethe who takes over the household and marries Cornelius van den Meer. From this point on she rules the domestic affairs of the house with an iron fist, and though Clara and her stepsisters are close and mutually supportive, Margarethe treats her with disdain and becomes obsessed with guaranteeing the business success of her new husband and the rise of her own daughters in society. However, everything she does and touches is eventually ruined. Her new husband's business goes bankrupt; Clara rebels against her and becomes an ash girl who refuses to leave the kitchen; Ruth becomes more and more petulant; and Iris becomes torn as she tries to keep the peace in the family and pursue her own interests in painting. When the Dowager Queen of France comes and a ball is held in her honor and the honor of the Prince of Marsillac, Iris convinces the beautiful Clara to attend and help save the family. She succeeds, and while Clara and the prince have a moment of intimacy, Ruth burns a portrait of Clara in a desperate act to help her mother and starts a fire at the ball, a catastrophe that brings an end to her mother's machinations. But this is not a happy ending, for we learn in an epilogue, surprisingly told by Ruth, who was not as slow and vacant as she appeared to be, that Clara leaves Haarlem with the prince and eventually ends up in New York, where she dies. Iris marries a painter and dies at a young age. The wicked mother/stepmother Margarethe, though blind, lives on without remorse.

In fact, Maguire's novel is concerned with the immortality of this stepmother, who is the driving force behind the action of the novel. He is not dismissive of the stepmother figure, nor is he judgmental. The entire narrative, in fact, is construed to represent Ruth's viewpoint, and while her tone is terse and her perspective frank, she has empathy for her mother, as though this was the way life was back then, this was the way my mother acted to enable us to survive if not prosper. Margarethe's motives were no different from those of the others in "good" society.

So, Ruth's "confession" is a true story mainly about her mother and her ambitious striving to make sure that her own genetic daughters would have a better life. She acts out of desperation and tries to overcome poverty by any means she can just as the Dutch merchants ruthlessly deal with one another in the town of Haarlem. It is a dog-eat-dog world that Maguire depicts, and it is no surprise that the crude and domineering Margarethe is not punished in the end but lives on and will haunt future Cinderella tales.

It is clear that stepmothers like Margarethe will continue to haunt Cinderella narratives so long as there is no magical intervention and so long as there is no real intervention in dysfunctional families. In Mavis Jukes's *Cinderella 2000: Looking Back* (1999), a novel for young readers ten and up, we have an instance of intervention by a "fairy godmother" granny, but it represents more of a regressive step than a step forward into the twenty-first century. In this frivolous novel, which takes place in California, fourteen-year-old Ashley Ella Toral, who has lost both her mother and father, is being raised by her zany irresponsible stepmother Phyllis, who has mean and preposterously nasty twelve-year-old twins, Paige and Jessica. Phyllis can control neither the twins nor herself. Ashley is the only sane person in this household, and she is looking forward to ushering in the year 2000 at the Ocean Crest Country Club and beginning a relationship with the handsome Trevor Cranston. The twins, who have no redeeming qualities whatsoever, and Phyllis, who is a caricature of a flighty, well-meaning, but incompetent mother/stepmother, are threatening to ruin Ashley's dreams until Phyllis's mother arrives from Florida and takes Ashley's side. Coincidentally, she has just won the lottery, and she uses her money and wisdom to enable Ashley to drive to a ball in a limousine with Trevor. And so, it appears that life in 2000 will be happy for Ashley.

Yet, such a revision of the Cinderella story does not augur happiness for young girls (or boys) who are seeking to sort out problems with their siblings and parents or to deal with problems of identity and sexuality in the teenage years. Jukes places too much emphasis on material things and money as means that will help Ashley to become more confident and content with her disastrous situation. The arrival of a savvy grandmother who just happens to have extraordinary power and insight into

her situation is a deus ex machina that might work in fairy tales, but it is contrived and simplistic in this novel that makes a mockery out of previous endeavors by writers who have seriously explored the ravaging effects that humiliation and abuse might have for a young girl. There is, of course, always a role for parody and comedy in Cinderella revisions, but Jukes's novel is a contrived romance that relies too much on caricature and stereotypical roles so that the humor of the situation falls flat.

Jukes's *Cinderella 2000* is insignificant but not irrelevant. Its relevance is constituted by the motivation of the writer to communicate something new about a disadvantaged fourteen-year-old orphan who must submit to intolerable living conditions with her stepmother and stepsisters; by the intention of the writer to make something aesthetically and ideologically unique out of a narrative that we recognize as belonging to a particular strain of the fairy-tale genre; by the format in which the text is produced and distributed; by the reception of the text among the intended readers; and by the social, aesthetic, and ideological functions it plays within the genre along with other comparable texts.

The irrelevance of *Cinderella 2000* is also relevant. If the text does not take root, does not make a mark, does not catch on, it will indicate that the information that is being communicated and the manner in which it is being communicated do not have a meaning for a particular culture in a certain historical context. This does not necessarily mean that the work of art is lacking, for it could be revived, or perhaps the timing is wrong. The fact that a text becomes a bestseller does not mean that it is a work of great literature. Relevance may have little to do with the intrinsic value of a work of art. What relevance reveals is that at a certain point in time, relevant information necessary for cognition can be considered crucial for understanding social relations, for adaptation to changing conditions, and for changing the environment. The choices that we make when we seek to transform the world are intertwined with ethics, aesthetics, and politics. As we continue to form and re-form fairy tales in the twenty-first century, there is still a glimmer of utopian hope that a better past lies ahead, but more practically, a fairy tale like "Cinderella" replicated as meme reveals to us what we have not been able to resolve and how much more we need to know about the world and ourselves.