

CINDERELLA, OR THE LITTLE GLASS SLIPPER¹

Charles Perrault

1. *the little glass slipper*. For many years scholars debated the issue of whether the slipper was made of *vair* (an obsolete word for “fur”) or *verre* (“glass”). Folklorists have now discredited the view that the slipper was made of fur and endorse the notion that the slipper has a magical quality to it and is made of glass.

Yeh-hsien, Cendrillon, Aschenputtel, Rashin Coatie, Mossy Coat, Katie Woodencloak, Cenerentola: these are just a few of Cinderella's folkloric cousins. If Cinderella has been reinvented by nearly every known culture, her story is also perpetually rewritten within any given culture. Working Girl with Melanie Griffith, Pretty Woman with Julia Roberts, and Ever After with Drew Barrymore: these films offer striking evidence that we continue to recycle the story to manage our cultural anxieties and conflicts about courtship and marriage. Few fairy tales have enjoyed the rich literary, cinematic, and musical afterlife of “Cinderella.”

The first Cinderella we know was named Yeh-hsien, and her story was recorded around A.D. 850 by Tuan Ch'eng-shih. Yeh-hsien wears a dress made of kingfisher feathers and tiny shoes made of gold. She triumphs over her stepmother and stepsister, who are killed by flying stones. Like Western Cinderellas, Yeh-hsien is a humble creature, who discharges the

From Charles Perrault, “Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre,” in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* (Paris: Barbin, 1697).

household chores and is subjected to humiliating treatment at the hands of her stepmother and stepsister. Her salvation appears in the form of a ten-foot-long fish who provides her with gold, pearls, dresses, and food. The Cinderellas who follow in Yeh-hsien's footsteps all find their salvation in the form of magical donors. In the Grimms' "Aschenputtel," a tree showers Cinderella with gifts; in Perrault's "Cendrillon," a fairy godmother provides a coach, footmen, and beautiful garments; in the Scottish *Rashin Coatie*, a little red calf produces a dress.

The enduring appeal of "Cinderella" derives not only from the rags-to-riches trajectory of the tale's heroine but also from the way in which the story engages with classic family conflicts ranging from sibling rivalry to sexual jealousies. Cinderella's father may not have much of a part in this story, but the role of the (step)mother and (step)sisters is writ large. If Cinderella's biological mother is dead, her spirit reappears as the magic donor who provides the heroine with the gifts she needs to make a splendid appearance at the ball. With the good mother dead, the evil mother takes over—alive and active—undermining Cinderella in every possible fashion, yet unable to hinder her ultimate triumph. In this splitting of the mother into two polar opposites, psychologists have seen a mechanism for helping children work through the conflicts created as they begin to mature and separate from their primary caretakers. The image of the good mother is preserved in all her nurturing glory, even as feelings of helplessness and resentment are given expression through the figure of the predatory wicked stepmother.

Fairy tales place a premium on surfaces, and Cinderella's beauty, along with her magnificent attire, singles her out as the fairest in the land. Through labor and good looks, Cinderella works her way up the social ladder of success. If the story in its older versions does not capture the dynamics of courtship and romance in today's world, it remains a source of fascination in its documentation of fantasies about love and marriage in an earlier time. Perrault's version of 1697 from *Tales of Mother Goose* is among the first full literary elaborations of the story. It was followed by the more violent version recorded in 1812

by the Brothers Grimm. The Grimms delight in describing the blood in the shoes of the stepsisters, who try to slice off their heels and toes in order to get a perfect fit. The German version also gives us a far less compassionate Cinderella, one who does not forgive her stepsisters but invites them to her wedding, where doves peck out their eyes.

2. *the menial household chores.* Cinderella is always the household drudge, a creature who not only has to discharge domestic chores but whose true beauty is concealed by soot, dust, and cinders. That she is always hardworking and kind points to the way in which character can create powerfully attractive figures. Rodgers and Hammerstein asked a central question in their musical *Cinderella* (1957): "Do I love you because you're beautiful, or are you beautiful because I love you?"

3. *with mirrors so tall that you could see yourself reflected in them from head to toe.* Vanity ranks high among the cardinal sins of fairy-tale figures. Snow White's stepmother is always consulting the mirror, and Cinderella's stepsisters repeatedly look in the mirror to admire themselves. Floor-length mirrors were a real extravagance in Perrault's day, and there is something almost magical associated with being able to see your image from head to toe.

HERE ONCE LIVED a gentleman who, when he married for the second time, took for his wife the most vain and haughty woman imaginable. She had two daughters who shared her bad temperament and were just like her. The husband, however, had a young daughter whose kindness and sweet temper were unrivaled. The girl took after her mother, who had been the finest person you can imagine.

As soon as the wedding was over, the stepmother began to display her true colors. She could not tolerate the young child, whose many good qualities made her own daughters appear all the more hateful. She ordered the girl to carry out all the menial household chores.² It was she who had to wash the dishes and scrub the stairs, who cleaned the rooms of the mistress and her daughters. She herself slept on a wretched bed of straw in a garret, while her sisters occupied rooms with inlaid floors, with beds done up in the latest style, and with mirrors so tall that you could see yourself reflected in them from head to toe.³

The poor child endured everything with patience. She didn't dare complain to her father, who would have scolded her, for he was completely under the thumb of his wife. Whenever she finished her chores, she would go over to a corner by the chimney and sit down among the cinders and ashes. And so everyone started calling her Cindertail. But the younger of the two sisters, who was not quite as vicious as the older girl, began calling her

Cinderella. The stepsisters dressed in magnificent clothes, yet Cinderella looked a thousand times prettier, even in her shabby apparel.

One day the son of the king was hosting a ball to which he had invited all the notables in the land. The two young ladies were included in the invitation, for they had attained a certain social prominence. They were thrilled to be going and were busy choosing the most flattering clothes and headdresses. This meant more work for Cinderella, for she was the one who had to iron her sisters' linen and who set their ruffles. All day long the two talked of nothing but clothes.

"I think I'll wear that red velvet dress with the English trimming," said the older sister.



ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Cinderella," 1919

Cinderella gazes with longing out the window from her garret in the attic. A barefoot princess, she has a girlish charm that bodes well for her move from rags to riches. The frame that turns her image into a work of art contains playful allusions to the animals that are to serve as her servants. Beneath her, the two outlandishly dressed stepsisters dance a jig with their ludicrous suitors, while her footmen await their magical transformation.



ALBERT HENSCHEL,
"Cinderella," 1863

This German Cinderella serenely watches as birds sort the grains for her. The heroine may be poor, but she clearly keeps a tidy household and manages to dress herself in more than rags.



HARRY CLARKE,
"Cinderella," 1922

"Anyone else but Cinderella would have given them unflattering hairdos." The stepsisters, with their hideous hairdos and dresses, admire themselves in mirrors and allow themselves to be attended by a Cinderella wearing a patched, but elegant, skirt. Creatures of excess, they are surrounded by too much of almost everything.



RIE CRAMER,
"Cinderella," early 20th century

This Dutch Cinderella is physically overwhelmed by her stepsisters, almost doubles of each other, who primp and fuss while the heroine attends to their needs. Note that vanity is associated with aristocratic bearing, while Cinderella is presented as a modest young woman, willing to humble herself before her domineering stepsisters.

"I only have my usual petticoat to wear, but I'll make up for that with a gold-flowered shawl and my diamond necklace, which is far from ordinary."

The sisters sent for the best hairdresser around to put up their hair in two rows of curls, and they bought beauty marks from the finest makeup artist. They summoned Cinderella to ask her opinion, for they knew she had excellent taste. She gave them the best possible advice and even volunteered to do their hair, an offer that was gladly accepted. While Cinderella was working on them, the sisters asked: "Cinderella, wouldn't you like to go to the ball?"

"Alas, dear ladies! You're just making fun of me. That's not a place where I could be seen."

4. Her godmother, who saw that she was in tears, asked what was wrong. Cinderella usually finds in nature the help she needs. A fish, a calf, or a tree comes to her rescue. Perrault, by contrast, created a fairy godmother, whose importance is underscored, tongue in cheek, through the second moral to the tale. Disney's *Cinderella*, based on Perrault's version, enlarges the role of the fairy godmother and uses her to create comic relief.

In a wonderful dig at the pompous stepsisters, Gag presents two women who, with flowers and arrows in their headdresses, appear singularly unattractive. Whatever efforts these two matronly women channel into finery, they only intensify their unstylishness, which becomes evident not merely in their facial expressions but in the pudgy hands of the one and the gnarled fingers of the other.

WANDA GAG,
"Cinderella," 1936



In a composition that has a wonderful unity of design, the American Gag presents a youthful Cinderella who delights in the gift of a cloak from the tree planted at her mother's grave. This Cinderella seems carefree and relaxed in comparison with her counterparts drawn by European artists.

WANDA GAG,
"Cinderella," 1936



"You're right, everyone would have a good laugh if they saw Cinderella going to the ball." Anyone else but Cinderella would have given them unflattering hairdos, but Cinderella was good-natured, and she put their hair up perfectly. The two sisters were so excited that they were unable to eat a thing for two days. They tore nearly a dozen laces while trying to make their waists as small as possible, and they spent nearly all their time in front of the mirror. At last the happy day arrived. They set off for the ball, and Cinderella followed them with her eyes as long as possible. When they were out of sight, she began to cry. Her godmother, who saw that she was in tears, asked what was wrong.⁴ "I should so like to

5. *if you're good.* Perrault, who was heavily invested in the idea that fairy tales reward virtue, made a point of underscoring the heroine's kindness and sweet disposition. His tale is encoded with numerous behavioral imperatives, revealing the degree to which children are the implied audience for his story.

6. *"I'll go and see if there's a rat in the rattrap."* The Disney version of "Cinderella" substitutes a horse and a dog for the rat and the lizards of Perrault's story.

... I should so like to" Cinderella was sobbing so hard that she could not finish the sentence.

The godmother, who was a fairy, said to her: "You really want to go to the ball, don't you?"

"With all my heart," Cinderella said, sighing deeply.

"Well, if you're good,⁵ I'll make sure you get there."

The fairy godmother went up to her room and said: "Go down into the garden and bring me a pumpkin."

Cinderella picked out the most splendid pumpkin in the garden and brought it back to her godmother. She had no idea how it was going to get her to the ball. Her godmother scooped out the pumpkin, leaving nothing but the rind. When she tapped it with her wand, it was instantly transformed into a beautiful coach, covered with fine gold. Next she went over to look into her mousetrap, where she found six mice who were still alive. She told Cinderella to lift the door of the trap just a bit. As each mouse ran out, she tapped it with her wand, and it was instantly transformed into a fine horse. That made a magnificent team of six handsome, mouse-gray, dappled horses. The godmother was at a loss for a coachman, but Cinderella said: "I'll go and see if there's a rat in the rat-trap."⁶ We may be able to turn him into a coachman."

"You're right," said the godmother. "Go take a look."

Cinderella brought the trap over to her, and there were three huge rats in it. The fairy picked out the one with the fullest beard. When she tapped it with her wand, it turned into a portly coachman with the most handsome mustache imaginable. Then the godmother said to Cinderella: "Go down to the garden, and you'll find some lizards behind the watering pot. Bring them up to me."

As soon as she brought them up the stairs, the godmother turned them into six footmen, who stationed themselves at once on the back of the coach in their braided liveries and perched there as if they had been doing nothing but that all their lives.

The fairy godmother then said to Cinderella: "Well, you finally have something that will take you to the ball. Aren't you happy?"

"Yes, but do I have to go as I am, in these shabby clothes?" The fairy godmother waved her magic wand, and Cinderella's clothes were instantly transformed into garments of gold and silver, encrusted with jewels.⁷ Then she gave her a pair of glass slippers, the most beautiful ever seen.

Cinderella was finally ready for the ball, and she climbed into the coach. Her godmother told her how important it was that she return by midnight, warning her that if she stayed just one moment longer, her carriage

7. *garments of gold and silver, encrusted with jewels.* If Cinderella finds help by turning to nature, she wears a dress that is associated with the realm of artifice. Gold and silver are spun into fine threads, and jewels often cover her garment. The dress contributes powerfully to the radiant appearance she makes at the ball.



ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Cinderella," 1933

Rackham's original caption to this image for Perrault's version of "Cinderella" reads: "Now, Cinderella, you may go; but remember . . ." The contrast in the physical appearance of fairy-tale heroine and fairy godmother could hardly be more striking and is further intensified by the fact that both faces appear in profile. Rackham's fairy godmother may have a smile on her face, but her witch's hat, along with the reminder that there will be real consequences to a late return, suggests that she is not purely benevolent. With diaphanous evening wear that blends with the ivory and rose hues of her skin, and with one hand coyly lifting her skirts to reveal a slipper peaking out from under them, Cinderella seems a model of playful feminine beauty. The awkward positioning of her arms suggests that the effect achieved is not without effort.



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"They sent for the best hairdresser to arrange their hair." The vanity of the stepsisters is emphasized through the art of the hairdresser, who prepares elaborate coiffures for the young women. The omnipresence of mirrors, with one positioned before the stepsister with her hairdresser, the other reflecting the robes of the second young woman, further underscores the importance of surface appearances for Cinderella's rivals. Excess in hairstyle, dress, and perfume is the signature of their style.



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"And her godmother pointed to the finest of all with her wand." With a wave of her magic wand, Cinderella's godmother chooses the pumpkin destined to become a coach. A luminous figure whose dress lights up the scene more powerfully than the stars in the skies, this godmother promises salvation for the lowly heroine dressed in carefully patched skirts. The light in the cottage window adds a touch of warmth, even if the space within is the site for Cinderella's oppression.



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"She was driven away, beside herself with joy." Cinderella seems to float rather than ride on the trail of fog leading to the castle. Lit up by a full moon, the carriage, horse, coachman, and footmen glow in the dark. Contained within the miniature space of the carriage, Cinderella's beauty remains secret until she emerges from her hiding place to attend the ball in her regal splendor.

would turn back into a pumpkin, the horses would become mice, and the footmen lizards, and her clothes would return to their former state. Cinderella promised her godmother that she would leave by midnight. She set out for the ball, overwhelmed with joy.

As soon as the prince learned that a grand princess had just arrived and that no one knew her, he went out to welcome her. He offered his arm to help her out of the coach and escorted her to the hall where the company had



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"The King's son led her through the gardens, where the guests drew apart and gazed in wonder at her loveliness." The palace in the background forms a strong contrast to the humble cottage where Cinderella lives. The assembled company is struck by the stunning beauty of the mysterious young woman who has appeared at the ball in a radiant costume. The servant boy continues to show up in the pictures to add a touch of the exotic and distinctly dark that stands in opposition to the luminous whiteness of the guests.



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"Whereupon she instantly desired her partner to lead her to the KING and QUEEN." It is a quarter to twelve, and Cinderella does not have much time to make her getaway before the transformation takes place. The prince kisses the hand of the woman with whom he has fallen in love, little realizing that her request to meet the king and queen are nothing but a pretext for getting away.



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"She made her escape as lightly as a deer." Starry skies, lights in the castle, the marble staircase, and Cinderella's apron illuminate a scene in which Dulac once again uses blues and whites to display a mastery of nocturnal scenes. Unstoppable, especially now that she is wearing her rags and unencumbered by the ballroom dress, Cinderella is in a kind of natural state that is the antithesis of the seemingly aristocratic young woman at the ball.

assembled. Suddenly everyone fell silent. No one was dancing, and the violins stopped playing, because everyone was so absorbed in contemplating the great beauty of the unknown lady who had just entered. There was nothing but a confusion of voices. "Oh, how beautiful she is!" The king himself, as old as he was, could not take his eyes off the princess and whispered to the queen that it had been a long time since he had seen such a beautiful and charming person. All the ladies were carefully inspecting



EDMUND DULAC,
"Cinderella," 1929

"The Prime Minister was kept very busy during the next few weeks." The courtly pomp of the prime minister and his assistant appears ludicrous in the context of the two cottages, which are in a natural state of disarray. The cock strutting before the prime minister makes a mockery of an aristocratic bearing. Still, as we know from the face in the window, the visit has evoked some curiosity.



HARRY CLARKE,
"Cinderella," 1922

"Cinderella and her Prince." As the clock strikes twelve, Cinderella has an anxious look on her face, realizing that she must release herself from the grip of the prince and get back to the coach within a matter of seconds.

Cinderella's headdress and clothing so that they could try to find the same beautiful fabrics and hire able hands to make what she was wearing.

The prince conducted Cinderella to the place of honor and asked if she would dance with him. She danced with such grace that everyone admired her even more. There was a sumptuous dinner, but the prince was not able to eat a thing, because he couldn't take his eyes off her. Cinderella went to sit with her sisters and paid them a thousand compliments. She shared with them the oranges and lemons that the prince had given her. The sisters were astonished, for they did not recognize her at all. While Cinderella was talking with them, she heard the clock sound a quarter to twelve. She bowed low to the company and departed as quickly as possible.

As soon as she came back, Cinderella went to look for

her godmother. After thanking her, she said that she was hoping to go to the ball again, for the prince had invited her to return the next day. While she was telling her godmother about everything that had happened at the ball, the two sisters started knocking at the door. Cinderella went to open it.

"You stayed out really late!" Cinderella said, yawning, rubbing her eyes, and stretching as if she had just gotten up. In reality she had not had the slightest desire to sleep since the time that the two had left. "If you had gone to the ball," one of the sisters said to her, "you would not have found it boring. A beautiful princess was there, more beautiful than you can imagine, and she paid us a thousand compliments. She even gave us some oranges and lemons."

Cinderella felt overjoyed when she heard those words. She asked the name of the princess, but her stepsisters said that no one knew who she was and that even the prince was baffled. He would give anything in the world to know her name. Cinderella smiled and said: "Was she really beautiful? Dear God, how lucky you are! Won't I ever have a chance to see her? Alas! Mademoiselle Javotte, would you lend me that yellow dress, the one that you wear every day?"

"Of course," said Mademoiselle Javotte. "That's a great idea! Lend my dress to a dirty little Cindertail like you. I would be a fool to do something like that!" Cinderella was not surprised by that answer, and in fact she was pleased, since she would have been terribly embarrassed if her sister had been willing to lend the dress.

The following day the sisters went to the ball, and so did Cinderella, but this time she was dressed even more magnificently than before. The prince never left her side and whispered sweet things in her ear all night long. The young lady was enjoying herself so much that she completely forgot her godmother's advice. She thought it was still eleven o'clock when she suddenly realized that the clock was beginning to strike twelve. She rose and fled as gracefully as a deer. The prince followed her, but he was

pick up with her. One of the glass slippers fell off her foot, and the prince picked it up very carefully. When Cinderella reached home, she was out of breath. Her horse was gone, there were no footmen, and she was wearing ragged, tattered clothes. Nothing remained of her magnificent dress except for one of the little slippers, the mate of the one she had dropped. The guards at the palace were asked if they had seen a princess leaving the palace. They said that they had not seen anyone leave who was poorly dressed and who looked more like a peasant than a lady.



WARWICK GOBLE,
"Cinderella," 1923

The original caption reads: "The only remnant of her past life being one of her little glass slippers." Goble's painting depicts Cinderella as she admires the perfect fit of the one remaining slipper. The rat, lizard, and pumpkin in the foreground are all reminders of her magnificent carriage, coachman, and footmen, and the spinning wheel are reminders of the domestic life that binds Cinderella to the hearth, and the patched dress is an emblem of her destitute state in the household. The single slipper nearly glows in its contrast to the dreary life of Cinderella's life.



MAXFIELD PARRISH,
Enchantment, 1914

Produced for a calendar advertising General Electric-Edison Mazda Lamps, this painting, entitled *Enchantment*, illustrates the spectacular allure of Parrish's commercial art. Cinderella, the quintessential fairy-tale heroine, is captured in a moment of dreamy meditation, contemplating the entrance she will make at the ball. The characteristically vibrant blue background, the decorative flowers, and the statuesque beauty of Cinderella combine to cast a spell of enchantment on the viewer.

When the two sisters returned from the ball, Cinderella asked whether they had enjoyed themselves as much as the first time and whether the beautiful lady had been present. They said that she had been there, but had fled when the clock struck twelve. She had been in such a rush that she had dropped one of the glass slippers, the prettiest shoe in the world. The prince had picked it up, and for the rest of the night he did nothing but stare at it. They were sure that he was very much in love with the person to whom the slipper belonged.

The sisters spoke the truth, for a few days later the prince proclaimed, with a flourish of trumpets, that he was going to marry the woman whose foot fit the slipper. His



ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Cinderella," 1919

Decorative borders adorn the silhouettes of Cinderella and the messenger sent by the prince. Accompanied by a Moor servant, the messenger tips his hat and extends the slipper that will elevate Cinderella from her humble condition at the hearth, complete with broom and cat, to the rank of royalty. The statue on the mantelpiece prefigures her new destiny.



ANONYMOUS,
"Cinderella," 1865

Many illustrators, like this one, focus on the moment in the story at which the shoe is fitted to Cinderella's foot. When the drudge in the kitchen unexpectedly turns out to have a dainty foot that fits the glass slipper, those surrounding Cinderella cannot conceal their wonder and astonishment.



JESSIE WILLCOX SMITH,
"Cinderella," 1911

This latter-day Cinderella is assisted with her boots by a young Prince Charming.

men began by trying the shoe on princesses, then on duchesses, then on everyone at court, but in vain. The shoe was brought to the house of the two sisters, who each did her best to get her foot into the shoe, but neither succeeded. Cinderella, who was watching them, recognized her slipper and said, smiling: "Let me see if it will fit me." The sisters burst out laughing and made fun of her. But the gentleman who had been entrusted with the slipper looked intently at Cinderella and, finding that she was very beautiful, said that it was acceptable and that he was under orders to have everyone try on the slipper.

The gentleman asked Cinderella to sit down. He brought the slipper to her foot and saw that it fit perfectly, like a wax mold. The two sisters were filled with astonishment, and even more so when Cinderella pulled another little slipper from her pocket and put it on her foot. Just then, the fairy godmother arrived, and, tapping her wand, she made Cinderella's garments more magnificent than ever before.

The two sisters realized that Cinderella was the beauti-

Surely it's a benefit
 To show real courage and have some wit,
 To have good sense and breeding too
 And whatever else comes out of the blue.
 But none of this will help you out,
 If you wish to shine and gad about.
 Without the help of godparents
 Your life will never have great events.

That's what the fairy in this tale
 Taught Cinderella without fail,
 Here's how she could become a queen
 Teaching lessons, yet staying serene.
 Beauties: that gift is worth more than a dress.
 It'll win a man's heart; it will truly impress.
 Grace is a gift that the fairies confer:
 Ask anyone at all: it's what we prefer.

The beauty of a woman is a rare treasure.
 To admire it is always a pleasure.
 But what they call real grace
 Is priceless and wins any race.

MORAL

ful woman they had seen at the ball. They threw them-
 selves at her feet, begging her forgiveness for treating her
 so badly and for making her suffer. Cinderella helped
 them get up, kissed them, and said that she was willing to
 forgive them with all her heart. She hoped that they
 would love her always. Dressed in dazzling clothes, she
 was escorted to the castle of the prince. He found her
 more beautiful than ever, and a few days later they were
 married. Cinderella, who was as kind as she was beautiful,
 let the two sisters live in the palace and had them mar-
 ried, on the very same day, to two noblemen at the court.

unable to catch up with her. One of the glass slippers fell off Cinderella's foot, and the prince picked it up very carefully.

When Cinderella reached home, she was out of breath. The coach was gone, there were no footmen, and she was dressed in shabby clothes. Nothing remained of her magnificent attire except for one of the little slippers, the mate to the one she had dropped. The guards at the palace gates were asked if they had seen a princess leaving the ball. They said that they had not seen anyone leave except a girl who was poorly dressed and who looked more like a peasant than a lady.



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