



A review of
**Retelling Cinderella:
Cultural and Creative
Transformations**

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This volume is a collection of 12 essays which variously present and reflect upon some of the transformations that the tale of Cinderella has undergone in different cultural and geographical contexts.

In their introduction, Nicola Darwood and Alexis Weedon highlight the eclectic and cross-cultural dimension of Cinderella. An ever-present icon that fluidly positions itself within the world of social media, fashion and entertainment, the Cinderella tale has left a legacy in different societies. One of the most interesting sections of the introduction is concerned with a collection of material on Cinderella that has been donated to the University of Bedfordshire. Ranging from books to figurines and merchandise, this collection conveys 'the wide variety of adaptations and performances that the story has inspired' (Introduction, xvi).

In 'The Material Culture of Cinderella: Introducing the Cinderella Collection', Alexis Weedon analyses the nature of objects and artefacts belonging to the Cinderella Collection housed at the library of the University of Bedfordshire, thereby highlighting the multifarious dimension within which Cinderella has been represented, reworked and re-narrated. More specifically, Weedon makes use of technology to trace the global legacy of Cinderella in books concerned with a variety of genres and audiences. In addressing this important aspect of the Cinderella Collection, Weedon argues that the dissemination of Cinderella in the publishing industry is a proof of its 'boundless capacity for elaboration and amplification' (12).

In 'The Transformations of a Disney Princess into its Parodic Meme: A Case Study of the Cultural Transduction of the Cenicienta Costeña', Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and César Mora-Moreo discuss an aspect of the ongoing transformation of Cinderella in social media and the role of users as creative agents of reinterpretation. Presenting the Caribbean city of Barranquilla as their case study, the authors analyse a series of memes exchanged on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger by some young students. This process of cultural transduction has enabled Uribe-Jongbloed and Mora-Moreo to reflect upon the creative

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transformation of a global icon through equally globalised forms of instant communication. Within a specific cultural and geographical context, Cinderella becomes *Cenicienta Costeña* whose features reflect the sociological and cultural shifts of contemporary self and the cultural shareability of Cinderella 'in the most common form of contemporary social subversion and criticism: the meme' (30).

In 'Tinderella, a Modern Fairy Tale of Online Dating and Post-Feminist Media Culture', Marta Cola and Elena Caoduro discuss the relationship between Tinder (an online dating mobile app) and the tale of Cinderella. After providing a detailed analysis of Tinder and its dissemination, the authors analyse the cultural connotations attached to the term 'Tinderella', which was first used in an online video, *Tinderella: A Modern Fairy Tale*. From Cola's and Caoduro's analysis we learn about cultural shifts and adaptations, not to mention aspects of the broader discourse on contemporary selfness, agency, femininity, sexuality, and gender deconstruction. Conversely, the authors highlight that the heteronormative paradigm of Tinder exposes its failure in embracing 'inclusivity' and conclude that, despite their popularity, online dating apps such as Tinder 'have exposed how women and sexual minorities are becoming the subject of aggressive behaviour and language' (44).

Nicky Didicher's 'Losing your Footing: The Transformation of Gender Roles and Gender Ideology in Marissa Meyer's *Cinder*' analyses the process of retelling and adaptation contained in *Cinder*. Part of Meyer's young adults' science fiction and fairy-tale romance series *The Lunar Chronicles*, *Cinder* is the story of a cyborg mechanic living in New Beijing. Didicher looks at *Cinder* from a double perspective. First, she sets a comparative analysis between Meyer's story and earlier versions of Cinderella by Perrault and the Grimm brothers. Second, Didicher argues that, although *Cinder* successfully embraces 'a postmodern Western version of femaleness', Meyer still plays with traditional tropes concerned with 'the values of heteronormativity and weakness', thereby omitting from her series 'any characters who are not cisgendered and heterosexual' (50). In her detailed analysis of the physical and emotional world of *Cinder*, Didicher also reflects upon contemporary philosophical issues concerned with technology, selfness, sexuality, beauty, morality and agency.

Eleanor Andrews's 'Mythic Transformations on Screen: Cinderella Meets Galatea' analyses aspects of the contemporary cinematic revisitation of tropes contained in the Cinderella tale and the myth of Pygmalion. The focus is on five major themes, namely the physical transformation of the female protagonist; the alteration of her status and name; the role of magical/divine intervention in the transformative process; the absence of the mother in the protagonist's life and the role of marriage. Accordingly, Andrews sets an interesting comparison between these tropes and the transformative process narrated in literary and filmic texts such as *Pygmalion* (1938);

My Fair Lady (1964); *Educating Rita* (1983); *Pretty Woman* (1990); and *Nikita* (1990). Cutting across class and different periods in contemporary history, this essay also demonstrates how the idea of transformation embraces a physical, psychological and social dimension that supersedes the world and aspirations of female characters. Indeed, Andrews analyses the often cathartic changes experienced by male protagonists and argues that '[t]his idea of the positive transformation is what makes these narratives popular' (81). Similarly, one may argue that the concept of metamorphoses and its multiple interpretations is also a dimension of *Cinderella* and *Pygmalion* that has stood the test of time.

Sally King's 'Tailoring Cinderella: Perrault, Grimm and their Beautiful Heritage' analyses the cultural, ideological and political significance of variants concerned with aspects of the *Cinderella* tale. Specifically, King analyses the changes that occur in the earliest English translations of Perrault's *Cendrillon* and the Grimms' German versions of *Cinderella* by Robert Samber and Edgar Taylor respectively. This essay discusses how these English translations underwent a process of linguistic adaptation that responded to different tastes and audiences, not to mention factors that led to different representations of *Cinderella*'s appearance. Indeed, the author analyses the cultural meaning of sartorial details, thereby explaining that the variety of textiles, colours and fashion embraced in different versions, and translations, of *Cinderella* mirrored the broader cultural, sociological and even political context within which they were produced. Indeed, as the author rightly asserts, in the analysis of 'key moments of the tale's intercultural and interlingual exchange, we learn more about how and why the tale evolved and continues to evolve' (106).

Nicola Darwood's "'A grand Christmas Pantomime": Nancy Spain's *Cinderella Goes to the Morgue: an Entertainment*' analyses Spain's appropriation of the *Cinderella* tale and its pantomime form in the creation of a detective novel. In the first part of this essay, Darwood looks at Spain's personality and biography as influencing factors in the composition of *Cinderella goes to the Morgue*. Arguing that pantomime tropes play a central role in the story, Darwood looks at the historical development of the British pantomime and shows that its roots trace back to the classical *pantomimus* and the early modern Italian *commedia dell'arte* respectively. Embracing pantomime tropes such as cross-dressing, gender ambiguity and comic gags, Spain's novel is located within the broader context of post-war detective fiction, whilst featuring tropes that identify the style of Spain's literary production at large. This essay then analyses the mixed reception that *Cinderella Goes to the Morgue* received on its release and highlights that its hybrid nature, 'while maybe not credible, is definitely, as the full title would suggest, "an entertainment"' (127).

Rebecca Morris's 'Real Princesses in Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *Five Old Friends* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*' discusses the legacy of Perrault's

Cendrillon in Victorian England. Focussing on Ritchie's and Burnett's literary production, the author convincingly demonstrates that, despite Perrault's popularity, 'Victorian authors were influenced by social changes, and incorporated Perrault's tale into their work to critique it' (131). The result is twofold. On the one hand, Morris looks at how Ritchie and Burnett structure their stories by reinterpreting some of *Cendrillon's* themes such as femininity, beauty, and female agency. On the other, Morris uses the two case studies under scrutiny to reflect upon women in Victorian society and highlights the extent to which Burnett's and Ritchie's female protagonists resemble the vicissitudes of contemporary historical figures, namely Queen Victoria's sixth child Princess Louise and, in the case of Burnett's protagonist, Princess Sarah Forbes Bonetta. Within this context, the appropriation of Cinderella is a means to criticise bourgeois attitudes toward femininity, class, family ties and external agency. In that sense, Morris's essay also shows the changing nature of fairy-tale narratives and concludes that 'Ritchie's *Cinderella* and Burnett's *Sara Crewe* both emphasise that the submissive Cinderella figure is an unrealistic aspiration for women and girls' (147).

Maia Fernández-Lamarque's 'Representations of Cinderella as Myth and Folklore in Spanish Versions of the Tale' offers a historical overview of the multiple artistic appropriations of the Cinderella tale in contemporary Spanish culture. Highlighting the absence of Cinderella in Spanish collections of texts circulating between the 11th and 17th centuries, the author analyses literary and cinematic retelling of this famous tale from the 1920s. From Jacinto Benavente's *Cenicienta* (1920) to Juan Carlos Mestre's and Jan Carlos Monedero's *Te cuento ... La Cenicienta* (2015) Cinderella has been the subject of a continuous reworking that mirrors values, expectations and anxieties in contemporary Spanish society. Accordingly, Cinderella becomes a tool to express political dissent; to denounce female oppression during Franco's regime; to challenge traditional views of women as mothers and wives; to give voice to women's fight for sexual and professional emancipation; to reflect upon the impact of the Spanish civil war on the world of women; and to denounce the infamous phenomenon of femicide and sexual abuse in Spain. The result is a compelling analysis of the multifarious reworking of Cinderella as an indicator of major cultural shifts in the lives of contemporary Spanish women. As the author concludes, Cinderella can be viewed as 'the witness, subject and agent to the country's political and social shifts and women's status within those structures' (162).

Donna Gilligan's 'Helped by a Honeybird, Clothed in Catskins, and Swallowed by a Whale: Exploring the Irish Variants of the Cinderella Tale' looks at the presence of the Cinderella tale in Irish legends and folktales. Gilligan first analyses the preservation of the tale's motifs contained in international classifications, and then identifies specific tropes that feature in Irish variants of Cinderella. The case studies

presented here interestingly reveal local adaptations of Cinderella's tropes. These include the replacement of the ballroom with a church; the appropriation of supernatural tropes (the clock of darkness) as originating in other Irish folktales; the recurrence of themes concerned with the animal world and its magical influence on the heroine; not to mention the problematic dynamics of family ties. As the author rightly states, '[t]he Irish Cinderella accounts can be seen to demonstrate the blending of Irish mythology and folklore with the conventions of the worldwide tale, producing a distinctive and fascinating variant of the narrative' (182). Gilligan's essay also shows the cultural permeability of Irish mythology. Indeed, the syncretic process between local and external historical influences sheds light on the existence of contacts, human and cultural mobility, not to mention the role of both oral and written communication in the creation of collective myths, legends and tales.

Vanessa Marr's 'Creative Reflection: Cinderella – The Ultimate Domestic Narrative' approaches aspects of the Cinderella tale through the lens of material creativity. By reflecting upon Perrault's, the Grimms' and Disney's narratives, the author views Cinderella models 'as the ultimate domestic archetype' (233). As an artist, Marr has reflected upon the concept of domesticity in her creations. The latter employ the materiality of textiles and embroidery to reflect upon contemporary perceptions of the role of women in the home. Thus, hand-embroidered dusters and rubber gloves become symbolic statements to praise feminine history and female empowerment, whilst functioning as platforms to voice discontent against passive domesticity. Marr's artistic creations are not confined to, nor remain within the realm of subjective creativity. Instead, she has launched a project of community outreach 'that explores the relationship between women and domesticity' (191), by asking people to communicate their experience through thread. Ultimately, Cinderella is viewed as a symbol of empowering change that modifies itself according to historical circumstances and cultural shifts.

Lesley McKenna's "'Prom Night: Cinderella Gets a Gun": A story and creative reflection' explores the endless potential of the Cinderella tale. In this story, the author employs traditional tropes such as the shoe, the metamorphic process of the female character, female agency, family dysfunctionality and the male world to experiment with the horror genre. The result is a story of contemporary pain, suffering and disturbed emotions in which violence and death are represented as ultimate channels for cathartic transformation. Ella, the female protagonist, is an orphan neglected by her father and stepmother, and sexually abused by her stepbrothers. The deep pain that Ella experiences finds apparent relief in a same-sex relationship with Faye, a disturbed character that appears to embrace the duality of Eros and Thanatos. The tragic events that unfold in this story culminate in Ella's killing her parents first and then her two stepbrothers at the prom night. McKenna

ultimately transforms the Cinderella tale into a story of dystopian disillusionment in which victimisation and injustice function as an epitomised deconstruction of the 'lived-happily-ever-after' trope.

Retelling Cinderella: Cultural and Creative Transformations is an interesting volume that brings to the attention of the scholarly community the Cinderella Collection hosted at the University of Bedfordshire. As the editors explain, the miscellaneous nature of this collection constitutes a multidisciplinary research tool to explore contemporary representations of Cinderella in books, objects and images. Moreover, with their multidisciplinary and transnational perspective, the essays in this volume variously analyse the pervasive legacy of Cinderella in literature, folklore, cinema, theatre, social media, online apps and art. Although this volume provides examples of the sociological impact of Cinderella in our times, it does not engage with key sources with sufficient depth. Some of the essays rightly highlight the historical significance of Perrault's, the Grimms' and Basile's versions of Cinderella. It is in the historical analysis of these sources that the imbalances within this volume becomes apparent. Despite the attention devoted to Perrault and the Grimms, some of the contributions would have undoubtedly benefitted from a closer analysis of Basile's *The Cinderella Cat*. Were Perrault's and the Grimms' adaptations of Basile's tale the result of a cultural involution in the representation of the female world or an attempt to reorder the deconstructive nature of Baroque literature? Would the absence of these later mediations in the reception of Basile's *The Cinderella Cat* have created a different cultural history of this Neapolitan character who does not hesitate to kill her stepmother and whom Basile compares to a prostitute? These are only some of the historical intricacies that make the history of Cinderella an open scholarly debate that rightly continues to stimulate further research.

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