

CINDERELLA IN A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE: A SYMBOLIC RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE TIMELESS FOLKTALE

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A folktale is a story passed on by word of mouth rather than writing and thus partly modified by successive re-telling before being returned or recorded. The folktale of Cinderella has continued to be a part of popular culture & has held the imagination of both the young and old alike. The story of this Greco – Egyptian girl figured more than two thousand years ago and variants of story have been recorded in almost every country, including Vietnam, China, Philippines & the Middle East. This folk tale evokes certain myth element that has made Cinderella synonymous with oppression followed by a significant change of fortune. This binary opposition of oppression and reward has vested this tale with a rich symbolic interpretation of which is part of the endeavor of this present paper. An attempt has been made to reassess the immense popularity of the folk tale through its multiple perspectives in the form of different adaptations, versions, songs, dance, ballet, theatre and cinema.

The oldest version of the Cinderella theme dates back to classical antiquity. The ancient Greek historian Strabo (Geographia Book 17, 1.33) recorded in the first century BC the tale of Greco – Egyptian girl Rhodopis, "Rosy cheeked" who lived in the Greek colony of Naucratis in Ancient Egypt. They tell fabulous story that while she was bathing an eagle snatched one of her sandals from her maid and took it to Memphis. At that time the king was pronouncing justice in the open air, the eagle when it arrived above his head, flung the sandal into his lap. The King having been stirred both by the beautiful shape of the sandal and by the strangeness of the occurrence sent men in all direction into the country in search of the woman who wore the sandal. When the girl was found in Naucratis she was brought up to Memphis and became the wife of King...

The story was first published by Charles Perrault in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* in 1697. The word "Cinderella" has, by analogy, come to mean one whose attributes are unrecognized, or one who unexpectedly achieves recognition or success after a period of obscurity and neglect. Folklorists have long studied variants on this tale across cultures. In 1893, Marian Roalfe Cox, commissioned by the Folklore Society of Britain, produced *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin and, Cap o'Rushes, Abstracted and Tabulated with a Discussion of Medieval Analogues and Notes*.

Over the tides of time, people have painted different adaptations of Cinderella in various forms. In early days the story of Cinderella has been portrayed through Operas- the first one was staged by Jean-Louis Laruelle as *Cendrillon* in 1749 and continued till the last one in 1994 by Vladimir Kojoukharov; Ballet- the folktale was presented as Ballet form first as *Cinderella*

(1893) by Baron Boris Vietinghoff-Scheel and continues till date; Verse- the only verse on Cinderella is *Assepoester* (1981) by Jan Kal; Pantomime and Musical Theaters.

The Musical theatre shows on Cinderella are varied which has been presented over the decades through different media. *Cinderella* by Rodgers and Hammerstein was produced for television three times:

- i. *Cinderella* (1957) features Julie Andrews as Cinderella, Jon Cypher, Kaye Ballard, Alice Ghostley and Edie Adams (broadcast in color, but only black-and-white kinescopes exist today).
- ii. *Cinderella* (1965) features Lesley Ann Warren as Cinderella, Stuart Damon as the Prince, Ginger Rogers as the Queen, Walter Pidgeon as the King, and Celeste Holm as the Fairy Godmother and Jo Van Fleet as the Stepmother.
- iii. *Cinderella* (1997) features Brandy as Cinderella, Paolo Montalbán, Whitney Houston, Whoopi Goldberg, Victor Garber, Bernadette Peters, and Jason Alexander.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein version has also been staged live at times. A successful version ran in 1958 at the London Coliseum with a cast including Tommy Steele, Yana, Jimmy Edwards, Kenneth Williams and Betty Marsden. This version was augmented with several other Rodgers and Hammerstein's songs plus a song written by Tommy Steele, "You and Me" which he sang with Jimmy Edwards. Bobby Howell was the musical director. A 2005 version featured Paolo Montalbán and an ethnically diverse cast, like the 1997 TV version. Broadway Asia Entertainment produced a staged International Tour starring Lea Salonga and Australian actor Peter Saide in 2008.

In the modern context, Cinderella has been tailored in a large range, making it far more interesting and popular among all age groups especially kids and teenagers. Thirty-five songs have been released related to Cinderella, some of the sung by any prominent singers like Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Britney Spears, the cheetah girls, Tata Young and even Snoop Dogg and Eminem. Also a small number of jump-ropes have been composed for toddlers, a few lines for the most popular version are: *Cinderella dressed in yell'a, tell me the name of your sweet fella a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k,,l,m,n,o,p,q,r,s,t,u,v,w,x,y,z* (The jumper runs out when the first letter of their crush or boyfriend/girlfriend's name is called and shouts their name at the same time).

Many novels have also been written on this theme like *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine, *Nine Coaches Waiting* by Mary Stewart, *The Glass Slipper* by Eleanor Farjeon, etc. Amusingly, some comic books like *Cinderella: from Fabletown with Love* and *Cinderella* by Junko Mizuno has also characterized Cinderella in a humorous way. The most recent form of adaptation of Cinderella is the videogames. In 2005, Disney released *Disney's Cinderella: Magical Dreams* for the Nintendo Game Boy Advance. Cinderella was also featured in Disney's / Square's video game Kingdom Hearts where she is one of the seven princesses of heart which are needed to open the door to darkness. She, along with her entire world, also is in Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep.

Over the decades, forty-seven films have been made that are either direct adaptations from Cinderella or have plots loosely based on the story. Almost every year at least one, but often several such films are produced and released, resulting in Cinderella becoming a work of literature with one of the largest numbers of film adaptations ascribed to it. A new film on this theme is in the making which is scheduled to be released in 2013, titled Cinderella starring Amanda Seyfried.

I have tried to emphasize on two such modern illustrious films based on the story of Cinderella, which has established the fact that Cinderella still continues to be one of the most popular folktale throughout the globe. The first film which has been taken up for this paper is Ever After - A Cinderella Story starring Drew Barrymore as Cinderella and Anjelica Huston as a memorable wicked stepmother. The world's favorite fairy tale has once again provided rich source material for a big production. The filmmakers have included the best lessons from the classic tale. The film has been directed by Andy Tennant and Mireille Soria and produced by Tracey Trench. The film was released on July 29, 1998. The budget of the film was \$ 26 million which made a whopping box office business of \$ 98 million. Cinderella is an orphan story; in which the unfortunate girl loses her parents and copes with the grief and dislocation that follows such a loss. This movie departs from the familiar story in significant details, while maintaining the spirit of the original.

In this film, the storytellers emphasize the girl's great love for her father. When the father dies, his wife cries out, "You cannot leave me here." Anjelica Huston shows us that the stepmother's distress is enormous as she has to run the household and raise three girls as a single mother. In one scene, when the girl appears ungrateful for the life as a servant, the stepmother says wearily, "After all that I do." It is one of those moments when the oppressor twists things around to feel like the victim.

The lost true parents have been represented as inner sense of safety and self-acceptance. Cinderella has no memory of her mother and yet the mother has a presence. In the course of the adventure, our heroine uses her mother's name. People say that she looks like her mother. The dress and glass slippers were her mother's and now wait in the girl's trousseau stashed away in a hope chest. It's as if the story is suggesting that we each have two inner mother-images to choose from. The shift to the step-mother symbolizes falling into our fears and self-rejection. In the classic version, Cinderella resolves this emotional dilemma by bonding with the Fairy Godmother. We can see this as a rediscovery of the sense of unqualified acceptance that came from true parents. The implication is that we all have this potential to accept ourselves if we can just find it within.

The story shows us how it feels when the shelter of childhood is lost. The widower's daughter is working like a servant in her own house. The household chores make her ragged. This sounds like the real life we all know well. The mundane tasks never end. To live with a hopeful spirit in the face of all the chores is a considerable challenge. There are always step-sisters within -- inner critics ready to find fault with everything we do. It is easy to project this -- so that we imagine that others think badly of us. Dealing with the mean step-sister voices within is a struggle for most people.

The Fairy Godmother and the familiar magic tricks of the tale have been removed from this movie. There is a mentor figure in place of the Fairy Godmother -- and the movie's handling of this is a fine surprise. The crucial role of a mentor character in the tale reaffirms the central notion that we all get our parenting where we can. The presence of a mentor also suggests that we have an inner wisdom that will be of assistance if we know how to get in touch with it. There are aspects of each person that are more mature than the other parts -- and these qualities can come forward at crucial moments.

The stepsister's sarcastic nickname for her is Cinderella. In the classic tale, she gets sooty from cleaning out the ashes. Either way, the symbolism is clearly about grief. Ashes often represent the realm of the dead. Mourning rituals from many traditions involve wearing ashes.

An underlying theme in this story is bereavement. After a death, it is rare to feel that things are quite right for a long time. The impact of both parents dying shapes the drama of Cinderella's life. A story about the effects of untimely losses has insights for us all. We all suffer setbacks and must face many challenges if we are to regain a sense of place and purpose.

The announcement by the king is the call, the moment that offers the possibility of something out of the ordinary. In personal psychology, this is when we realize our routine perspectives can give way to new ways of seeing ourselves. What he offers is a great ball at the castle as he wants his son to choose a bride so that the kingdom can go on. The King has invited Cinderella to a dimension beyond her dreams. Such transcendent characters call us out of ordinary experience. Symbolically, they suggest an opening to our higher selves.

The king invites all eligible women to the ball. The excitement spreads quickly. The stepsisters want to go, and so does our heroine. The stepmother will permit this if Cinderella completes all of her chores in time. Of course, this is a cruel trick. When it is time for the ball, the stepmother has found reasons to withdraw permission. The stepmother is a marvelous symbol for harshness. Psychologically, she would represent our capacity to treat ourselves badly -- and cheat ourselves out of radiant opportunities by postponing the enjoyment of life. One of the stepsisters has every intention of winning the Prince's favor. This step-sister may represent our vain qualities and self-importance. The part of the personality that believes in control tends to value comparisons, power, status, and competing.

Another recent film based on the story of Cinderella is a Hollywood American romantic comedy film titled *A Cinderella Story* directed by Mark Rosman, which was a commercial success starring the pretty Hilary Duff as Cinderella. She is Samantha Montgomery in the film. She works in a diner which was owned by her father. Jennifer Coolidge was as Fiona, the stepmom with Andrea and Madeline as stepsisters. Regina Kings as Rhonda has painted the character of the fairy godmother who works as the chief waitress of the diner. The diner was owned by Samantha's late father and afterwards captured and renamed by her stepmother as Fiona's. Chad Michael Murray Stars as Austin Ames, the high school football champ and the so called "Prince".

The traditional symbols have been changed into the modern context in the film- the ball has been replaced by a Halloween party, the glass slippers has been changed into a cell phones which Samantha left at the party, fairy godmother is a black waitress of her diner instead of the angelic figure of myths and legends. The chariot has been transformed into her best friend's Mercedes. Time represented by the midnight bell in the folktale has been altered by the deadline set for Samantha to return to her the diner and complete her work.

The story of the film closes with a similar ending as the original that there is a turn in the fortune of the unfortunate girl, but here, it is in a new dimension. Samantha gets admission into Princeton University aspiring for better prospects in life. She inherits her father's property i.e. the diner and the house gives a role reversal to her oppressors, the mom and her twins. Austin becomes her boyfriend. Finally Cinderella symbolizes the aspirations and dreams of every girl to live happily ever after with her Prince Charming.

Conclusion

Through the folktale of Cinderella I have tried to emphasize the fact that how the story of Cinderella in its various forms and adaptations have reverberated in the minds and hearts of millions of people around the world through the ages. This story which has been told and retold in different ways, innumerable times and establishes the fact that the basic human instinct of

getting recognition in life due to a sudden turn of fortune, makes the folktale of Cinderella relevant not only in the antiquity but also in the contemporary age. It has a permanent appeal to all masses alike – both illiterate and the literate, which makes the story alluring in every period of history and contemporary times. The pitfalls which every person undergoes and the windfalls which he aspires for in his life can be co-related with the unfortunate and the sudden turn in fortune of the little girl Cinderella by the fairy godmother is symbolic in every age. This makes the folktale close to every reader's/viewer's heart asserting the fact that Cinderella still continues to influence popular culture internationally. Finally Cinderella symbolizes the aspirations and dreams of every girl to live happily ever after with her Prince Charming.

Workcited

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