

The Fairy-Tale Facade: *Cinderella's* Anti-grotesque Dream

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Cinderella and the prince
lived, they say, happily ever after,
like two dolls in a museum case
never bothered by diapers or dust,
never arguing over the timing of an egg,
never telling the same story twice,
never getting a middle-aged spread,
their darling smiles pasted on for eternity.
Regular Bobbsey Twins.
That story.

(Anne Sexton, "Cinderella")

In "The Model," a fictional tale in Joyce Carol Oates' *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*, Oates employs the simile "as vague and unexamined as a childhood fairy tale" (Oates 111). Certainly, fairy tales can heavily influence early childhood, particularly regarding perceptions of those characteristics and demeanors traditionally considered "good" or "evil." As Madonna Kolbenschlag details in *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, "Fairy tales are the bedtime stories of the collective consciousness.... They are shared wish fulfillment, abstract dreams that resolve conflicts and give meaning to experience" (3). Not just mere short stories with marketable maxims, fairy tales can worm their way into a child's subconsciousness, where images and attitudes can then perpetuate societal standards. "Often despised as silly or grotesque," Alfred Corn writes, "fairy tale is the Cinderella among literary forms, going so much further than its humble origins seemed to promise and providing us with many sharply outlined archetypes and clichéd metaphors (like the Cinderella analogy in this very sentence)" (612). *Cinderella* represents the quintessential fairy tale, with its chaste damsel in distress, wicked steprelatives, patriarchal royalty, and, of course, Prince Charming and the ever-trite wish come true.

As readers and viewers, we tend to identify with the heroine, whose wishes are then projected onto our own. According to one scholar, fond “recollections of the powerful attraction of fairy-tale figures confirm the now-tired cliché that these stories incarnate our deepest hopes and most ardent desires” (Tatar xv). But whose hopes and whose desires are articulated? Undoubtedly, fairy tales have a way of persuading readers that the dreams and rewards, fantasies and fetes of the characters represent our own wishes, too. It is these tales, however, that might actually initiate and then perpetuate such ideals in the first place. We believe the fairy tales express our own desires because the tales themselves have indoctrinated these “traditional” standards ever since we were children. It is not surprising, then, that “as remarriage becomes more and more common, stepmothers find they are tackling a hard crust of bigotry set in the minds of their new children, and refreshed by endless returns of the wicked stepmother in the literature of childhood” (Warner 237). Fairy tales have developed into a sort of collective unconsciousness for contemporary children (and adults, as well, for they, too, were once children exposed to fairy tales and now must recreate these tales for the next generation of eager listeners). The problem, of course, is that we accept the tales and their values as a part of our psyche without questioning their validity; we believe that their status as fairy tales excuses us from asking such questions.

“That story,” as Sexton writes, the perfect example of the land of Happily Ever After, is perhaps the most famous folktale in literary history (Philip ix). Versions from several corners of the world, sometimes dating back to before 8 A.D., have surfaced and evolved, as folklorists have recorded oral renditions in writing. The most well-known forms of *Cinderella* are arguably Charles Perrault’s 1697 *Cendrillon*, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms’ 1812 *Aschenputtel*, and Walt Disney’s 1950 film “Cinderella,” based on Perrault’s story. While each of these stories presents the dream fulfillment of a young, good-hearted girl persecuted by her wicked stepmother and stepsisters, several nuances distinguish the Grimms’ tale from the Perrault version. In the Perrault tale, the king’s son hosts a two-day Ball, which Cinderella attends with the help of her fairy godmother, who provides her with transportation and finery. When the godmother has trouble figuring out from what animal she could create a coachman, Cinderella suggests a rat, and finds the creature herself. On the first night of the Ball, Cinderella entrances the prince, who does not leave her side. She runs home in time for her midnight deadline, just before her sisters arrive to describe the beautiful, unknown princess who captured the prince’s attention. Cinderella slyly asks one sister to borrow a dress for the next night, so that she may see this

princess, too, but the sister refuses the request of the servile “Cinderbutt” (Perrault 14). When Cinderella leaves one glass slipper behind while swiftly escaping the second night’s Ball, the prince, who does not know his true love’s name nor any other identifying information, declares “to the sound of trumpets that he would marry the girl whose foot fit the slipper” (Perrault 15). The sisters “try everything to force their feet into the slipper,” but to no avail—the slipper fits Cinderella’s foot “as if it was made of wax,” and Cinderella then produces from her pocket the matching shoe (Perrault 15). When the fairy godmother appears and turns Cinderella’s garments into attire even more bedazzling than before, the sisters finally recognize their stepsister as the beautiful princess, and beg her for forgiveness. Royal officials take Cinderella to the prince dressed as she is, and because the prince finds her “more charming than ever” (Dundes 21), he marries her. Cinderella is so kind and loving that she takes her sisters to live with her in the palace, where she is nice enough to marry them the same day to “two great lords of the court” (Perrault 15). Although the stepsisters are not provided with husbands in the Disney version, the film basically follows Perrault’s format, with a few modifications that render Cinderella a bit more helpless: the birds awaken her, the rodents sew her dress, both species even bathe and dress her in the morning, and the girl hardly exhibits signs of a brain capacity larger than that of a rutabaga.

In the decidedly more graphic Grimm version, Cinderella—or Ash Girl—goes to the Ball with the help of some friendly birds and her late mother, who has reincarnated into a tree that showers the girl with increasingly fine clothes to wear to the king’s three-day feast. On the third night, the prince coats the palace stairs with pitch, which catches one of Ash Girl’s dainty solid gold slippers; the prince subsequently announces that “Nobody else shall be my wife but the girl whose foot this shoe fits” (Grimm 28). The stepsisters slice off pieces of their feet so that they may fit into the slipper, but Ash Girl’s bird allies alert the prince, in each case, to the blood flooding out of the shoe. When the prince finally finds the right bride, he takes “Ash Girl on his horse and [rides] off with her” (Grimm 29). At the wedding, the friendly birds peck out the stepsisters’ eyes so that “for their malice and treachery they [a]re punished with blindness for the rest of their lives” (Grimm 29).

In each of these versions of *Cinderella*, the lovely heroine attains her dream because she obsequiously obeys her steprelatives, whose selfish and assertive demeanors emphasize their doubtlessly wicked qualities. But this fairy-tale portrayal can give impressionable youth distorted perceptions of gender roles, as the fairy godmother and the prince reward Cinderella’s winsome looks and passive manner with fancy clothes and a

rich man, respectively. *Cinderella* encourages little girls, who usually identify with the “good” heroine (Rubenstein 222), to aspire to become meek and inactive so that they, too, may achieve the utmost wish of someday riding off with the prince of their dreams and thereby escaping the heinous chore of cleaning their rooms.

With her Barbie-thin waist, barely-there nose, and baby-soft complexion, the most widely known image of Cinderella resembles more of a doll than a human being, as Sexton suggests in her poem, “Cinderella.” In the short story “The Doll,” also included in the *Haunted* collection, Joyce Carol Oates’ description of a child’s plaything reflects the image of Cinderella’s flawless features:

One was a girl-doll with shiny blond ringlets and blue eyes that were thickly lashed, and almost too round...and whose complexion was a lovely pale peach.... Their bodies were poreless and smooth and blank, there was nothing secret or nasty about them, no crevices for dirt to hide in, no trouble at all. (Oates 27)

In their complete dearth of dirtiness, these dolls epitomize the direct antithesis of Mikhail Bakhtin’s quintessential grotesque body, fettered with convexities and orifices, and prone to such unheard of, dastardly bodily functions as “eating, drinking, defecation...sweating, blowing of the nose, [and] sneezing” (Bakhtin 318). The term grotesque, according to *A Handbook to Literature*, “is applied to anything having the qualities of grotesque art: bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, fantastic, abnormal” (Holman 220). While this supposedly deviant grotesque body is “open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing,” Mary Russo writes that the classical body is “transcendental and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek” (Russo 8). Likewise, Disney’s cinematic *Cinderella* exhibits this sleek, classical body with no obviously grotesque characteristics.

Cinderella’s lack of grotesqueness, however, renders her as artificially inhuman as one of Oates’ dolls. Even the cleavage-less Disney heroine’s feet are enclosed exteriors with no lines, wrinkles, or, most notably, toes; furthermore, her infamous slipper is the extraordinary length of the Grand Duke’s index finger. Far from possessing the characteristics that define a person as grotesque, Cinderella epitomizes what could be considered the anti-grotesque. This is not to say that by calling Cinderella anti-grotesque, one relieves her of any grotesqueness whatsoever; rather, she exhibits fewer grotesque qualities than any of the other characters in the tale, and, more importantly, than any of the tale’s readers or viewers. As one scholar notes, “In theory...there is nothing which

might not be regarded as grotesque from some standpoint.... [But] in point of fact it is human nature to regard some things...as being more deeply or abidingly grotesque than others" (Clayborough 109). Indeed, some critics of the tale regard Cinderella as a fantastical archetype exhibiting relatively no grotesque traits; Cathy Lynn Preston writes: "Disney's refined, orifice-less, non-fluid emitting, airbrushed fantasy is a prophylactic against all that is repressed or erased by bourgeois ideology" (32). But although twentieth-century storytellers have sheathed Cinderella—no longer the grotesque "Cinderbutt"—in an airtight seal of anti-grotesque plastic, her unnatural lack of grotesque features does not go unnoticed by readers.

Just as the protagonist in "The Doll" lifts the clothes off of her dolls to marvel at their streamlined (lack of) anatomy, so, too, do readers fantasize about Cinderella's grotesqueries, in an attempt to "lift...the skirts of Cinderella's ball gown to see what, if anything, [lies] beneath them" (Preston 31-32). One popular late twentieth-century joke aims to anthropomorphize the otherwise non-fluid emitting heroine by providing her with a good deal of grotesqueness:

We all know the story about Cinderella, right? Well, just as she was getting into the coach, she felt her period come on, and so she turned to her godmother and said, "Damn. I've got another problem. My period just started and I don't have a tampon."

The fairy godmother replied, "No problem, dear," and she picked up another good-size pumpkin and zapped it into a tampon. Cinderella thanked her, got into the coach, inserted the tampon, and left for the ball. Well, she met the Prince and the two of them were having a great time, when all of a sudden she heard the palace clock start to chime midnight. She buckled over a bit and wheezed, "Oh! I gotta go!" But the Prince wouldn't let go of her hand.

"But I don't even know your name," he said.

Cinderella, trying to pull away, gasped, "It's Cinderella! What's yours?"

The Prince answered, "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater."

Cinderella heaved a great sigh of relief and said, "Thank God!"¹

The intimations of menstruation and cunnilingus in this rather adult joke ground Cinderella to reality with the obvious materiality of her now-grotesque body. The joke's appeal lies in its attempt to humanize Cinderella by attributing grotesque qualities to her unreal fairy-tale body, as her materiality is not only recognized by Cinderella herself, but also threatens to become visible to others. In the same manner, a version of an American children's jump-rope chant dating back to the late 1930s also attempts to reveal Cinderella's human physicality:

Cinderella, Cinderella,
 Went out dancing with the fellas,
 On her way her petticoat busted,
 This is how many men were disgusted,
 1, 2, 3, 4.... (Turner 23)

When the children singing this chant lift Cinderella's gown, unlike the adults who relate the dirty joke, they react negatively to any grotesque characteristics; they present Cinderella as inferior and undesirable because of her exposed materiality. Preferring that the heroine not only remain in her artificially classical body but also keep her clothes *on*, the children, indoctrinated by the fairy-tale feminine ideal of the anti-grotesque and too young to examine the vague fairy-tale impressions on their juvenile subconsciousness, reject any grotesque qualities with disgust.

The anti-grotesque Cinderella supposedly serves as the feminine ideal in that her classically enclosed, unobtrusive body reflects her similarly unassuming disposition. Most of the tale's versions present the princess-to-be as a paradigm of passivity; the subservient cinder-girl silently accepts her servile status without protest. In the Perrault version of the tale, in which the father remains alive but dominated by his assertive—and thus wicked—wife, “The poor girl suffered it all patiently, and didn't dare complain to her father, who would have scolded her, because he was completely under the [stepmother's] sway” (Perrault 10). This sentence alone reveals the fairy tale's perpetuation of a disturbing attitude toward females. Perrault emphasizes the stepmother's assertiveness as a wicked trait serving as a foil to Cinderella's pliant passivity. As every tale portrays Cinderella as the good and honorable role model, the tale's juxtaposition of the assertive, evil woman with the submissive, acquiescent heroine clearly suggests that little girls should aspire to be as tractable and compliant as Cinderella, the exemplary female.

Moreover, the fairy tale intimates that such a humble display of femininity will result in the fulfillment of one's wishes. In the Disney movie, the narrator, after detailing Cinderella's status as “abused, humiliated, and finally forced to become a slave in her own house,” praises: “And yet, through it all, Cinderella remained ever gentle and kind, for with each dawn she felt that someday her dreams of happiness would come true.” The illustration that Cinderella's acceptance of her abuse, humiliation, and slavery results in her happiness encourages a skewed sense of solace and a dangerous attitude in young females. While psychiatrist Ben Rubenstein remarks, “Cinderella accepts her miserable lot because

there is no doubt that she will win her prince” (Rubenstein 224), who is to say that any human female’s fantastical prince will ever truly come to her rescue? Essentially, the tale intimates that if a woman patiently tolerates abuse without objection, she will be rewarded with a patriarchal prize: a man.

It is interesting to note that early versions of the story do contain some instances in which Cinderella demonstrates an intelligence or inventiveness; however, Disney and other twentieth-century storytellers have erased any semblance of the heroine’s having a brain. In the Perrault tale, “As her godmother was having difficulty finding something she could turn into a coachman, Cinderella said, ‘I’ll go and see if there is a rat in the rat-trap, and we can make a coachman out of him’” (Perrault 12). Cinderella formulates an innovative idea to improve her situation; in the Disney version, Cinderella is too preoccupied with her inappropriate, tattered clothing to assist her godmother with other matters. In addition, Perrault details Cinderella’s sly interrogation of her sisters about the ball and the allegedly unknown princess, as, all the while, the girl smiles to herself because she was indeed in attendance. But when the story reached the twentieth century, “things began to happen to the hardy Cinderella. She suffered a sea change...aggravated by social conditions.... Hardy, helpful, inventive, that was the Cinderella of the old tales, but not of the mass market in the nineteenth century,” Jane Yolen writes (Yolen 300). Yolen blames Disney for the most recent development of Cinderella into a detestable female role: “The final bit of icing on the American Cinderella was concocted by that master candy-maker, Walt Disney.... Since then, America’s Cinderella has been a coy, helpless dreamer, a ‘nice’ girl who awaits her rescue with patience and a song” (Yolen 296). Cinderella’s fawning kindness may encourage her to dream of this rescue, but it is her external transformation that allows her to achieve it.

While already erasing materiality from Cinderella’s body, folklorists further the facade by masking her low-class status with fanciful finery. The moral from one translation of Perrault’s version of the tale reads:

Beauty in woman is a very rare treasure:
Of it we can never tire.
But what’s worth more, a priceless pleasure,
Is charm, which we must all admire.

That wise instructress, the godmother,
While dressing her fit for a Queen
Was giving her power to charm another;
That is what this story means. (Perrault 15)

While an initial reading of this moral may seem to reveal a focus on the importance of cultivating one's *inner* beauty as a driving force to lead one to a higher status, in actuality, Cinderella depends on her exterior as much as her sisters rely on their own looks. Perrault implies this latter interpretation in that the godmother gives Cinderella the "power to charm another" by altering her appearance. By masking suggestions of the girl's lower-class upbringing, the "instructress," whose description renders her a modeling-school matron, hides any possible aspect of the grotesque qualities associated with the lower class, for, as Thomas Mann notes, "The grotesque is the genuine anti-bourgeois style" (Van O'Connor 5). Unlike her stepsisters, Cinderella ascends class stratum because her godmother disguises any possible symptoms of the grotesque with high-class fashion. Preston comments that "Cinderella's rags are transformed into a ball gown, thereby mapping bourgeois hegemony over that bodily and social (class and gender) topography marked as low and dirty" (32). Furthermore, by concealing the residue that exposes Cinderella as a worker—the antithesis of the upper-class leisure lady—the godmother also suggests that exemplary feminine charm denotes a life of idleness. This moral, then, suggests that a female's charm is proportional to her physical looks and attire; this charm, refined through idle hours and Cinderella's perpetual state of dreaminess, can be achieved only by veiling lower-class grotesqueries.

Certainly, Cinderella sets the standard by which all of the other females in the tale measure their own appearance, as "All the ladies studied her hair and her clothes, to have copies made the next day" (Perrault 13). The anti-grotesque becomes the charming archetype to which all females must aspire, despite the artificial fairy-magic means by which Cinderella rises to such status. In another translation of this moral, Perrault reveals the purpose of such an appealing "charm" of form and face:

'Tis that little gift called grace,
Weaves a spell round form and face...
And if you would learn the way
How to get that gift today—

How to point the golden dart
That shall pierce the Prince's heart—
Ladies, you have but to be
Just as kind and sweet as she! (Kolbenschlag 72-73)

Apparently, a woman should refine her looks and clothing—preferably fabricated from expensive, gold fabric—so that her dreams, her aspira-

tions, and her wishes may come true. This well-earned fulfillment will be realized, of course, in that necessary caregiver known as a man.

The men in *Cinderella* illustrate that the supposed “power” of a woman’s charm can obtain her the coveted position to which all females doubtlessly aspire: the procreator of more men. The oldest male and most patronizingly patriarchal figure in the Disney movie—the king—clearly assigns women to this one demeaning and mechanical role, although the film never once alludes to the traditionally grotesque images of pregnancy, labor, or biological motherhood. The Disney king justifies his arrangement of the bridal Ball to the Grand Duke by asserting, “I want to see my grandchild before I go,” and proceeds to issue a royal *command* that all eligible women in the kingdom must attend the Ball. During the procession, when each woman curtseys to the prince in the hope that he will find her attractive enough to offer more than just a bow, the frustrated king hisses, “I can’t understand it. There must be at least one who would make a suitable mother.” The prince, then, must choose a woman to bear his children solely on the basis of her looks. Truly, the movie tells us that the prince has fallen “madly in love” with a girl, although he does not even know her name—he is only familiar with her fair features and Saks Fifth Avenue apparel. In versions in which the prince himself canvases the kingdom for the perfect foot, “Even face-to-face with the Prince, she is unrecognized until she dons her magic ballgown. Only when her clothes are transformed does the Prince know his true love” (Yolen 302). Disney, in particular, suggests that a woman’s function in society is to wait prettily in a passive and docile manner until she is chosen—based on her appearance—for motherhood.

The marriage-market method of determining a mate not only resembles a cattle market or slave auction, but also furthers the view that one should breed a woman for a man, because she is incomplete without a male other. David Pace observes, “The removal of a male at the beginning of the story (through the death [or undeveloped character] of the father) created an initial imbalance which could only be rectified by the introduction of a new male (the prince)” (Pace 253). Marriage is the rescue that Cinderella so patiently awaits; it is the means by which she can escape her low social status. The conspicuous Disney depiction of this marriage market is particularly disturbing, as every eligible female in the kingdom *must* present her goods (her body) with the eager desire for marriage. The tale presents these single females as unwhole entities in dire need of a union with a man; the women try to sell themselves with their pretty practiced pouts and their perfectly pleated petticoats. Sylvia Plath’s “The Applicant” neatly captures this concept of self-marketing:

Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.
Well, what do you think of *that*?
Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
In fifty, gold.
A living doll, everywhere you look....
My boy, it's your last resort.
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it. (Plath 221-22)

Of course it is the living doll—the anti-grotesque female—whom the prince chooses to marry, marry, marry. The bride-show is reminiscent of reported customs of early-millennium treatment of women, “whereby emperors or kings seeking a bride would supposedly order a number of eligible young girls to be assembled. From the group of candidates, the royal bachelor would then select one to be his bride” (Dundes 98). Disney’s adherence to this patriarchal practice simply attempts to undermine the feminism of the forties with an encouragement of age-old objectifying perceptions. Disney, in essence, furthers the “woman problem” that Betty Friedan exposes in her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*:

Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity.... Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him...how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting. (Friedan 15)

Because of mass media indoctrinations such as Disney’s, Simone de Beauvoir notes mid-century that “Parents still raise their daughters with a view to marriage rather than to furthering her personal development” (de Beauvoir 137). Tales such as *Cinderella* brainwash young female readers into believing that if they mimic the heroine’s tolerant, submissive behavior, they, too, will win their prince. Social psychologist Judith Long Laws asserts, “Passivity is expected of the sex object. While we have seen that she actively strives to attain the role of object, once she has ‘arrived’ she must wait to be noticed, to be approached, to be asked, to be chosen” (181). As *Cinderella* suggests, a woman should improve her looks—for a man, refine her “charm”—for a man, and then lead her life patiently dreaming of that day when her wish will be granted and she will be rewarded—with a man.

Indeed, the male characters themselves further the notion that a female must be passive to obtain this man. *Cinderella*’s praiseworthy

passivity surfaces once again during the Grimms' version of the story, in which "The king's son went up to her, took her by the hand, danced with her, and wouldn't dance with anyone else. He never let go her hand, and when anyone else came to ask her to dance, he'd say, 'She's *my* partner'" (Grimm 26, emphasis mine). Moreover, the women have no choice concerning the man they will marry; rather, the men alone make the decisions and order the women to comply. De Beauvoir observes:

Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants, she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits. (de Beauvoir 271)

As the Disney movie's royal decree declares: "If one can be found who the slipper fits, by the king's command, that girl shall be the prince's bride." When a man demands the hand (or, in this case, the foot) of a woman, she not only readily accedes, but, more distressingly, she jumps at the opportunity. Most versions of the tale end with Cinderella's marriage to the prince and the assumption that they will live happily ever after.

But Laws notes, "As Cinderella and the Prince fade into the Happily Ever After, our attention is diverted from the leftover and mangled step-sisters. However, I think of them a lot" (233-34). Certainly, both the stepmother's and stepsisters' plights fade from the tale as *Cinderella's* finale focuses on the nuptials of the living doll. Because folklorists expect readers to identify with the anti-grotesque, they subordinate the grotesques and leave them lingering in a literary limbo. Mid-to-late twentieth-century versions of the tale, such as Disney's movie and the ensuing film-based books, put particular emphasis on the stepsisters' exaggerated grotesque characteristics as a tool to stress their wickedness and overall negative qualities. In the Disney movie, as the narrator introduces the stepsisters, Drusella conspicuously wipes her nose with her finger; in a later scene, she scratches her buttocks. Additionally, one can hear deep snoring from the stepmother's dark room, while Cinderella merely awakens sweetly and bursts into song, accompanying the cheerful cheeping of the alarm-clock birds. Most importantly, of course, in contrast to Cinderella's dainty feet, Disney animators present those of the stepsisters as oversized, protruding units, complete with the crooked toes that Cinderella lacks. Bakhtin emphasizes protuberances such as the buttocks, the nose, and the toes as important grotesque images, because the grotesque "is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that

seeks to go out and beyond the body's confines" (Bakhtin 316). But *Cinderella* deems any female's attempt to transcend the confines of her gender stereotypes, physically or mentally, as inherently evil. The caricature-like accentuation placed on the antagonists' bodily functions implies a direct association between evil and the grotesque because of the juxtaposition with the decidedly anti-grotesque fantasy prophylactic that is *Cinderella*.

Too, folklorists present the stepsisters' dominant personality traits—their assertiveness, rivalry, and overall focus on themselves—as abnormally grotesque and undesirable. But are the sisters truly so abnormal? They exhibit humanly bodily functions and engage in typical sibling rivalry, yet folklorists display them as beings more grotesque than the doll-like *Cinderella*. The stepsisters embody the exact type of women whom Dorothy Allison's female youth aspire to be; the "mean sisters" who can endure, survive, and live their lives not for men, but for themselves (Allison 212). But *Cinderella*'s stepsisters, whose realism absurdly renders them grotesques, are nonetheless sentenced to embarrassment and spinsterhood. Not only do the sisters' stories end in humiliation, but also their drastic attempts to make themselves desirable are futile. Although in the Perrault version, "The sisters went nearly two days without eating, they were so excited, and they broke more than a dozen corset-laces pulling them tight to get a wasp waist, and they were always at the mirror" (Perrault 11), they still are not, in fact, presented as attractive or possessing the beloved "charm" of their plasticized half-sister. When Disney's *Drusella* and *Anastasia* demonstrate their assertiveness, even during their constant bouts of sibling rivalry, they appear to be simply hideous creatures, just as, while the tale illustrates that the control men exert over females is ideal, the assertiveness displayed by the stepmother over her husband is a wicked and decidedly undesirable trait. For example, when the royal official attempts to fit the slipper onto *Drusella*'s comparatively large foot, the stepsister asserts her independence by exclaiming, "I'll do it myself." But Disney presents this statement as an impolite utterance for a female, as *Drusella* proceeds to hit the official as her mother chides her lack of manners. The other characters treat *Drusella*'s exhibition of a decidedly impassive stance as an unfeminine, certainly not "charming," and therefore unattractive attitude. Kolbenschlag remarks that "The sisters' frantic efforts to mutilate their own feet in order to diminish their size [is] symbolic of their aggressive, masculine traits" (Kolbenschlag 74). In *Cinderella*, foot size itself is symbolic of one's femininity, even though the decision to marry a woman according to the small size of her feet is ludicrous.

In "The Princess' Forum," a feminist rewriting of fairy tales, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, and *Cinderella* discuss this inane

move by a fairy-tale male: "I'm sick of that lunatic with the foot fetish," Cinderella says. "Imagine selecting your life partner on the basis of her shoe size? How could any self-respecting woman cope with a man like that?" (Kavanaugh 34). Apparently, *Cinderella* expects women to respect men more than themselves, as the sisters in *Aschenputtel* mutilate their feet in order to fit into the slipper. When the older sister "couldn't get her big toe in, for the shoe was too small for her," the stepmother hands her a knife with the words, "Cut the toe off; once you're queen, you won't have to walk any more" (Grimm 28). When birds alert the prince to the blood dripping from the older sister's slipper, the younger sister cuts her own heel off, in the same manner, to fit into the impossibly bite-size shoe. During the ride to the castle, the prince notices the "blood oozing out of the shoe, dyeing her white stockings red," and promptly returns the second girl to her home as he did the first (Grimm 28). The materiality of the stepsisters' bodies cannot be disguised, as their bodily fluid, their lifeblood, betrays the passivity of their chaste-white facades, for, as Plath notes in her poem "Cinderella," "That is the way with amputation./ They don't just heal up like a wish" (Plath 258).

This scene recalls the Chinese practice of compressing or binding women's feet because of the belief that foot size indicated a degree of femininity, a custom dating back to the tenth century. A Chinese woman reveals in a statement taken by H. A. Giles in the late nineteenth century that the size of a woman's foot significantly affected her existence at that time: "If a girl's feet are not bound, people say she is not like a woman, but like a man; they laugh at her, calling her names, and her parents are ashamed of her" (Bourboulis 104). Likewise, the stepsisters in *Cinderella* must force their feet into the tight fit of the ideal feminine image. By either disguising or mutilating their symbols of masculinity—grotesque in the gender ambiguity—the stepsisters attempt to mask or erase their grotesque qualities with the slipper just as Cinderella's fairy godmother hides evidence of the girl's low-class status with formal wear.

But the grotesques have no fairy godmother.

Laws notes the irony of the "familiar image of Cinderella's stepsisters industriously lopping off their toes and heels so as to fit into the glass slipper (key to the somewhat enigmatic heart of the prince)—when of course it was never intended for them anyway" (Laws 233-34). The grotesques in *Cinderella* aspire to a role they can never obtain, no matter the extent to which they try to stuff themselves into the plastic mold of the anti-grotesque. Just as the stepsisters feel pressured to fit into an unrealistic and unintended role, so, too, do young females receive the impression that they are to aspire to the role of the anti-grotesque—a

role that was never realistically intended for them anyway. Thus, the fairy tale of *Cinderella* presents a Happily Ever After ending to a living-doll existence, a misleading story suggesting that a young girl's dream to star as her own Cinderella will, in fact, never come true. That story.

Note

'This joke is an edited and condensed version of the joke that appears in Preston's "'Cinderella' as a Dirty Joke: Gender, Multivocality, and the Polysemic Text." See Works Cited.

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