"Breaking the Glass Slippers: Examining Gender Stereotypes through a Juxtaposition of Classic Cinderella Tales and Modern Feminist Variants"

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【摘要】

由不同以往女性主義評論家之角度並列閱讀古典與現代«灰姑娘»童話故事，給了讀者一個重新檢視各文本中所呈現性別意識形態的機會；有關性別意識的概念實際上可由多角度切入探討，只從單一角度分析思考往往會顯侷限且造成刻版印象。並列閱讀這些文本，可以使孩童了解有關性別意識形態的演化過程，並且提供其一個再次檢視及批判的機會。

【關鍵詞】

灰姑娘、性別刻板印象、女性主義文學批評、古典與現代童話版本之並列閱讀

【Abstract】

A juxtaposed reading of old Cinderella stories like Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon, or The Little Glass Slipper" (1697) and the Grimm brothers' "Aschenputtel" (1812) as well as contemporary Cinderella variants like Babette Cole's *Prince Cinders* (1987), Gail Carson Levine's *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* (2000), Ellen Jackson's *Cinder Edna* (1994), Donna Jo Napoli's *Bound* (2004) and Margaret Peterson Haddix's *Just Ella* (1999) from another angle different from general feminist viewpoints, helps young readers build the sense that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are not

static and stay unchanged. Re-examining these Cinderella texts together not only introduces school-aged children to the evolving process of the issue of gender, but also provides them with a chance to recognize the fact that the concept of gender can be viewed in alternative angles so as to avoid the establishment of gender stereotypes.

【Keywords】

Cinderella; gender stereotypes, feminist literary criticism, juxtaposition of classic fairy tales and modern variants

> Women in 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 a 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.
>
> -S. de Beauvoir (1949), *The Second Sex*, pp. 271-72

Gender bias toward the depiction of male and female characters can be usually detected in fairy tales. As both M. Lieberman (1972) and R. Bottigheimer (1986) have pointed out, the heroine in fairy tales tends to be weak, passive and lack agency. She always needs the strong arms of a prince to save her. L. T. Parsons (2004) also shares a similar reflection about the general depiction of damsels-in-distress in the traditional tales and states the common image of men as "powerful, active, and dominant" (p. 137). Other than the virtues of being docile and dependent, the fairy tale heroine also has to possess physical beauty as the means leading her to the ultimate happiness while the male hero is usually portrayed as the one with power and in the dominant position of ruling others. Strong women with power do appear in patriarchal fairy tales but they are usually ugly, unwomanly and evil, that is, abnormal.

In other words, only the "well-behaved" female protagonist can be eventually rewarded with the hand of the prince offering wealth, fame and protection. Thus, early versions of fairy tales serve as a stage for projected patriarchal gendered behaviors and relationship. They are, according to J. Zipes (1983), "purposely appropriated and converted" by early educators into "a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social order of that time" (p. 3).

In a sense, such traditional versions of fairy tales are utilized as one of the tools to provide gendered role models for boys as well as girls in their socialization process. V. Walkerdine (1984) mentions in her article "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Young Girls and the Preparation for Adolescent Sexuality,"

> If the heroines are displayed as passive victims of circumstance, all

> bad and difficult actions and emotions are invested in others. The heroines suffer in silence: they display virtues of patience and forbearance and are rewarded for silence, for selflessness, for helpfulness. Any thought for the self, any wanting, longing, desire or anger is in this way produced within the texts as bad. This provides for the readers *a value-system* in which certain kinds of emotion are not acceptable and a set of practices in which their suppression is rewarded by the provision of the longed-for happy family, the perfect bourgeois setting (pp. 172-73, my italic emphasis).

Having a similar idea with Walkerdine, L. Wason-Ellam (1997) states, [m]any tales subtly impart the message that girls are to be sweet, conforming, dependent, and concerned about physical appearance, whereas the message for boys is they are to display strength by being adventurous, strong, rugged, and independent" (p. 430).

Therefore, despite the possibility that the child reader can develop his/her own interpretation of the classic fairy tales without being "manipulated" by the gender relationships presented in them and his/her own life experience also lays influence upon how he/she perceives the tales, the biased gender construction established in the traditional versions may still be treated as "normal" and internalized by the child reader. Being resourceful and active is regarded to be contradictory to the idealization of femininity while being powerless and irresolute can be a sign of lack of masculinity. A. Levorato (2003) also acknowledges the force of fairy tales to "acculturate women to subordinated social roles" under the assumption that children are likely to absorb the behavioral and associational patterns demonstrated in a story (p. 150).

During the past two decades, many revisionist fairy tales featuring strong, active and independent female characters or switching of the primary gender roles established in canonistic stories have been produced. These feminist revisions "seek to empower women, conceive a new vision of the world, value what has been devalued, and give voice to the silenced" (Parsons, 2004, p. 140). In a sense, such contemporary reworked versions, through providing a different gender construction and gendered relationship, present a process of evolution of fairy tales.

However, while compared with the traditional fairy-tale versions, these modern feminist revisionist tales, though carrying the features of subverting the former gender

stereotypes, still seem to contain similar ideas promoting gender inequality as their classic ancestors. In other words, although these feminist stories may seem to provide an alternative to the sexist world, they are not powerful enough to disrupt it and in contrast even reinforce certain patriarchal concepts in the classic versions. On the other hand, in spite of the fact that the old Cinderella tales are considered a major force to acculturate children, especially in the aspect of gendered behaviors and relationship, we may still find certain positive portrayals of female agency.

In this paper, I will analyze the gender structure constructed and portrayed in two of the most well-known traditional Cinderella tales—Perrault's and Brothers Grimm's as well as five modern variants of the tale. Through a juxtaposition of these two groups of texts, the transformation of the treatment of gender is aimed to be examined: not only the generally recognized fact that biased gender ideologies in classic versions are subverted by new feminist fairy tales but also the less noticed truth that old tales can still contain positive female models and new stories can produce gender stereotypes. Therefore, in order to fully understand how the issue of gender is presented in fairy tales, a reading method of juxtaposing both conventional and new feminist versions is applied and further proposed for practice by educators of children.

Early Versions of the Cinderella Tale

The earlier versions of this tale most widely known today are those of C. Perrault and the Grimm Brothers (J. and W. Grimm) for their immense popularity in Western culture. N. Philip (1989) states that Perrault's tale, as the first documented version, has actually been deemed as "the archetype, the 'correct' story" because "our literary culture has valued the written words so much than the spoken one" (pp. 1-2). Parsons (2004) suggests another reason to explain the vast acceptance of Perrault's version: "In contemporary Western culture, 'Cinderella' has become synonymous with Perrault's 'Cendrillon,' in large part because it is the version on which the 1950 Disney animated movie was based" (p. 143).

As for the Grimm Brothers, due to the fact that beautifully illustrated editions of their tales can be found in bookstores everywhere (Mieder, 1987, p. 1), their "Cinderella" also has its considerable share of recognition to people of the computer age. P. Gilbert (1994) discusses the phenomenon of certain versions' dominance over

others. She says "some readings of cultural stories become dominant and authorized because they are *constantly repeated.* These dominant readings form the major storying paradigms and are often 'naturalized' as the common-sense lore of our culture. The other 'quieter' stories are more difficult to hear: more difficult to find" (p. 138, my italic emphasis). Doubtless to say, the versions of both C. Perrault and the Grimms are qualified as the so-called canon of the Cinderella tale; as a result, the classic versions I examine in this paper mainly refer to theirs and the stereotypical gender construction which is being contemplated is also largely reflected in these two versions.

"Cendrillon, or The Little Glass Slipper"

Perrault's "Cendrillon," collected in his *Contes de ma mere l'Oye* (*Tales of My Mother Goose*) firstly published in 1697, according to Philip (1989), serves as "the basis of countless retellings" (p. 9) and many fundamental elements we generally associate with this tale, such as the fairy godmother and pumpkin coach, come from Perrault's literary imagination. In this version, Cinderella is portrayed as an extraordinarily kind-hearted girl who is good at various types of household chores and while facing the teasing of her stepsisters, still fixes their hair well before they head to the Ball, without messing it. At the end of the story, when she becomes a queen, she even forgives her stepsisters "with all her heart" and grants them to live in the palace and marry to two great lords of the court (p. 5).

In a sense, Cinderella's tameness and passiveness are celebrated in Perrault's tale as a positive quality which a good woman should possess. Furthermore, Cinderella's exceedingly beautiful appearance is also presented as an indispensible factor to her final glory and fame. In Perrault's tale, Cinderella is described as a girl who "in her rags was still a hundred times prettier than her sisters for all their sumptuous clothes" (p. 11). The good looks of Cinderella naturally guarantee her reward later, despite her previous sufferings.

In addition to natural beauty, a woman is also required to make much effort improving her outward appearance so as to attract men. In the first of the two morals attached to the end of Perrault's story, he mentions it is actually "charm" instead of Cinderella's natural beauty which counts more: "But what's worth more, a priceless pleasure, is charm, which we must all admire (Perrault, p. 15). This focus on the

notion that women should dress properly and improve their appearance in order to attract the attention of males is also revealed through the stepsisters' obsession to choose the clothes and hairstyles which would "show them off best" after they heard the news about the Ball (Perrault, p. 11).

Such descriptions about what female should act and look like in order to be deemed as good in Perrault's tale have been largely treated as harmful for the development of female agency and independence by most liberal feminists since 1970s. K. Rowe (1979/ 2009) mentions the negative influence of this depiction of the "ideal female" upon the readers, especially women:

> Although many readers discount obvious fantasy elements, they may still fall prey to more subtle paradigms through identification with the heroine. Thus, subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice as a female's cardinal virtues. In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate. (p. 342)

However, if we take into consideration the social context in which this tale was produced, we can find that such standards for female behaviors should be highly related to the social norms and regulations for women in Europe in the seventeenth century. J. Yolen (1977) in her article "America's Cinderella," mentions that "Perrault's 'Cendrillon' demonstrated the seventeenth-century female traits of gentility, grace, and selflessness, even to the point of graciously forgiving her wicked stepsisters and finding them noble husbands" (p. 21). Under such a consideration, the quality of "charm" which Perrault emphasized may be considered a particular way for females in the upper class employ in order to obtain something they aspire for; as a result, such a quality can be regarded as a form of female capacity which, although unlike the male physical strength, indicates that women are able to achieve their goal by themselves. Therefore, the commonly-assumed purpose of "reforming" females in this tale may just be a simple reflection of the pervasive cultural atmosphere at that time, so it may not be so "detestable" as known.

“Aschenputtel”

In 1812, the Grimm Brothers published a collection of 86 German fairy tales in a volume titled *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*), with the tale of “Aschenputtel” (“Cinderella”) included. In their retelling of this tale sharing a similar storyline with Perrault’s tale, Cinderella is portrayed as a poor girl mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. The concept that women need to maintain/improve their physical attractiveness in order to fit the patriarchal beauty standard is also conveyed in the Grimms’ version.

In Grimms’ tale, the prince chooses Cinderella because of her appearance and small feet, and her stepsisters have to bear the pain of having either their toe or heel cut off in order to fit in the tiny shoe. “Small feet” thus becomes a beauty standard represented by Cinderella’s tiny slipper and only women meeting this standard can be granted a higher rank. As a result, the stereotype that every woman should pursue proper looks (even painfully) in order to please men is also emphasized in the Grimms’ version. Besides, Gilbert (1994) asserts that “[t]he romantic storyline is a powerful one for narrative construction, and it dominates as a ‘logic’ in stories that involves female and male relationships” (p. 133). Cinderella in the Grimms’ version, sharing the “good fortune” with her equivalence in Perrault’s tale, is eventually found by a prince and lives with him happily ever after. Such a common ending is exactly what R. S. Trites (1997) calls a central problem which feminists face: “the marriage plot often signals an ending of the heroine’s independent ways” (p. 14). Hence, Cinderella in the Grimms’ version, like that in Perrault’s, is still imprisoned under the spell of patriarchal values.

However, we can detect differences between the two heroines sharing the same name. For instance, Grimms’ Cinderella is more active in seeking her own happiness: “she begged her stepmother to let her go” and then “went to her mother’s grave under the hazel tree and called: ‘Shake your branches, little tree, toss gold and silver down on me’” (Grimms, pp. 118 & 119). Contrary to such activeness, the passive Cinderella in Perrault’s version, while being asked by her stepsisters if she would like to go to the Ball, she sighs and answers “You’re making fun of me, ladies, that’s not my place” (p. 11). Parsons (2004), on the other hand, mentions certain “commendable characteristics” exhibited by the prince in the Grimms’ version (p. 146)—“The prince danced with her alone, and if someone asked her to dance, he would say: ‘She is my

partner'" (Grimms, p. 120, my italic emphasis). The usage of the word "partner" suggests a sense of equality between the prince and Cinderella and hence provides a relatively positive portrayal of gender relationship in this version (Parsons, 2004, p. 146). In other words, the presentations of both female agency and gender structure in the Grimms' tale are healthier than Perrault's; this may indicate a favorable transformation of social value system for women in the nineteenth century.

To combine what has been mentioned above, we can find that these two earlier versions of the Cinderella story indeed hold several gender stereotypes which play "a major contribution in forming the sexual role concept of children, and in suggesting to them the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person's chances of success in various endeavors" (Lieberman, 1972, p. 187). These Cinderella stories have thus become moral lessons to discipline girls and women, forming a gentle but forcible process of acculturation. However, considering the social contexts in which these two tales were written down, we may also discover a gradual liberating change of social norms and regulations for women in Western culture.

Such a trend has brought up the appearance of numerous variants of the Cinderella tale nowadays which carry the intention to provide an alternative gender structure reflected in earlier versions. In the next section, a discussion of five contemporary feminist variants of the Cinderella tale will be put forth to function as a glimpse of the operation of such a feminist intention.

Contemporary Feminist Variants of the Cinderella Tale

Depending on her pretty looks and the fancy dress granted either by the fairy Godmother or the magical tree, Cinderella successfully attracts the attention of people of higher rank. The slipper left behind on the stairs of the palace at the night of the Ball by her, in a sense, represents not only a means that she can rely on to gain access to wealth and fame but also a gauge set by the royal family to recruit their new blood. However, at the same time, the slipper could also symbolize an imposed curb to confine females; the meaning behind wearing it is that women surrender to the power of patriarchy and are willing to accept to follow all the rules and limits for females.

Therefore, it seems interesting to explore what thoughts were held in Cinderella's mind when she finally gets the chance to try on the glass slipper she

leaves on the stairs of the palace. Reading Perrault's and the Grimm Brothers' versions of the tale, we all undoubtedly assume that she must have thought joyfully that "my prince has finally come to rescue me"! However, is this really the case? The psychoanalytic researcher and children's author J. Viorst (1982) has once imagined an alternative possibility when Cinderella tries to put her foot into the shoe held in the prince's hand:

> "I really didn't notice that he had a funny nose.
> And he certainly looked better all dressed up in fancy clothes.
> He's not nearly as attractive as he seemed the other night.
> So I think I'll just pretend that this glass slipper feels too tight."
>
> -"…And Then the Prince Knelt Down and Tried to Put the Glass Slipper on Cinderella's Foot," 1982

I think there might be a better choice for Cinderella than this pretense—to break both the glass slippers so that she can be free from the fate of being required to be a submissive girl trapped in the palace during the rest of her life and also protect other women from suffering from the same destiny.

To subvert the projected gender construction and gendered relationship manifested in both Perrault's and the Grimms' Cinderella tales, some contemporary revisionists have written variants of this fairy tale, carrying a feminist, rebellious spirit and serving as a critical lens of examination. H. S. Crew (2002) indicates the political function of such reworked versions: "Feminist rewriters of fairy tales have reworked the conventions of the genre so as to encode discourses that contradict or challenge patriarchal ideologies that are increasingly viewed as anachronistic in today's society" (p. 77).

Thus, as a forum through which the patriarchal gender construction is critiqued and reexamined, these feminist revisionist tales are intended to offer alternative versions of gender relationship. The common impression which people hold toward such stories would be those with strong, resourceful, independent, and active females who are capable of solving problems of their own or of others. Indeed, there are quite a few instances of feminist fairy tales including such female characters. Three of the modern variants I will discuss below, E. Jackson's *Cinder Edna* (1994), D. J. Napoli's

Bound (2004) and M. P. Haddix's *Just Ella* (1999) all contain resourceful heroines who are not silenced. In addition, according to the definition made by Trites (1997), texts containing feminist elements such as feminist children's novels, are those in which "the main character is empowered regardless of gender" (p. 4). Therefore, stories replacing the original heroines with heroes as the central characters can also be considered texts with feminist elements. The other two books under scrutiny in this paper, B. Cole's *Prince Cinders* (1987) and G. C. Levine's *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* (2000) belong to such type of feminist variants of the Cinderella tale, using men as the "Cinderella" characters.

Cinder Edna

In both Jackson's *Cinder Edna* and Napoli's *Bound*, there is a heroine who, unlike her Cinderella precedents, develops talents and capacity to accomplish difficult tasks and make a good fortune for and by herself. Jackson's picture book presents a parallel story of Cinderella and her neighbor Cinder Edna. Contrary to Cinderella with pretty looks, Cinder Edna possesses a plain countenance; as the verbal text of the book indicates, she is not "much to look at." Furthermore, different from Cinderella who is the traditional passive heroine, Cinder Edna does not rely on the help of a fairy godmother; she buys herself a dress with the money she makes from cleaning parrot cages for rich ladies and wears a pair of comfortable loafers instead of glass slippers to the party. Such female agency may be regarded as a replication of the activeness presented through the heroine in the Grimms' version. Cinderella in Jackson's story, on the other hand, "could only sway a bit to the music" because she is afraid of mussing her hair and breaking the fragile glass slippers if she dances too hard. Such a parallel functions to ridicule the foolish tameness and superficial focus on physical appearance presented through Cinderella and give credit to the smartness and independence manifested through Cinder Edna.

The ways that the prince Randolph and his brother Rupert find their brides-to-be are drastically different. Following the method applied in the traditional versions, Randolph intends to use the glass slipper by saying "[t]his is how we'll find them. We'll try these shoes on all the women in the kingdom. When we find the feet that fit these shoes, we'll have found our brides-to-be!" However, Rupert disputes

such an idea: “Rupert looked at his brother with disbelief. . . ‘the most amazing dumb idea I’ve ever heard. You could end up married to a toad!’” Thus, at the end of the story, Randolph does find Cinderella through the glass slipper she leaves on the stairs of the palace so she “ended up in a big palace” with “endless ceremonies” during daytime and “her husband’s perfect profile” and mumbling talks about “troops, parade formations, and uniform buttons” at night.

On the other hand, the prince’s brother Rupert does not recognize Cinder Edna with neither her loafer nor her face—the nearsighted Rupert without glasses sees Edna as “a large plate of mashed potatoes”; he simply asks a question related to the conversation he and Edna have had in the ball. Such a design indicates that their affection for each other is actually established on their mutual understanding instead of mere physical attraction. Cinder Edna’s happy marriage with Rupert “in a small cottage with solar heating” also confutes the notion that women have to rely on their beauty to gain true love and joyfulness. Even though she does not possess an attracting appearance, she can still makes a good match.

Generally speaking, Jackson’s story presenting a contrast between a traditional, passive Cinderella and an independent Cinder Edna full of female agency poses an immediate challenge to the conventional ideal image of females. Such an arrangement of putting together opposite female representations can be seen as a nice practice of the notion made by Elizabeth Marshall (2004) that “children’s literature arise[s] as sites of power/knowledge through which to investigate often contradictory discourses about sexuality, gender and childhood” (p. 262).

Bound

With the setting of a northern province in the Ming Dynasty of historical China, Napoli’s story carries certain resemblance with the oldest recorded Cinderella tale originating from China “Yeh-hsien” (850); in both tales, the ill-treated heroine has a fish representing the incarnation of her deceased mother to accompany her. However, Napoli takes a step further to embed the ancient Chinese custom of foot binding so as to elaborately incorporate the beauty standard of small feet into her juvenile fiction. Napoli’s protagonist Xing Xing has a stepsister named Wei Ping, who suffers great pain from having her feet bound by her mother in order to grant herself a chance to marry a rich person. Xing Xing does not have the privilege to have bound feet

because she is considered by her stepmother unworthy to gain an access to a decent mate. As a result, her capability to accomplish various tasks and freedom to go anywhere she wants makes her remain a self-reliant figure, without any help of magic.

Contrary to Xing Xing, Wei Ping's two toes get bitten off by a raccoon because of the stink from her bound feet. Furthermore, her monstrous mother even cleaves her other two toes—"Let's be smart, Wei-Ping; now your feet will be much smaller than we'd dared to hope" (Napoli, p. 42). Such a plot shares a great similarity with the Grimms' tale in which Cinderella's two stepsisters had either their toe or heel cut off in order to fit in Cinderella's slipper. It suggests the inhuman and cruel concept imposed by patriarchal power and internalized by women to pursue physical beauty to please men and guarantee a good future.

Xing Xing, in contrast, is blessed with no having to suffer such a pain and gets the chance to cultivate herself by learning calligraphy and composing poems. At the end of the story, Xing Xing does not easily yield herself to marry the prince: "'There are important things about me that you need to know,' said Xing Xing… 'I don't want to be bought or sold'… 'I can read and write'…'My feet are not bound'" (Napoli, pp. 183-184). In a sense, Xing Xing is presented as a woman who holds her own voice and agency, the power to control her own fate and make choices for herself.

In a word, the two protagonists in Jackson's and Napoli's retellings, far from being merely submissive females, are strong and independent women who hold full control of their lives and decide whom to marry in order to ensure their future blissfulness. To them, happiness is not given by any rich princes but created on their own. Doubtlessly, the two heroines have set up a fresh role model for women, forming a distinctive contrast to the ancient passive Cinderella. Just Trites (1997) describes, "[t]he most powerful way that feminist children's novels reverse traditional gender roles, however, is by their reliance on the protagonist's agency. In these novels, the protagonist is more aware of her own agency, more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions, at the end of the novel than she has been at the beginning" (6).

Just Ella

Haddix's fiction *Just Ella* posed a skeptical question to discredit the

generally-recognized "happily-ever-after" ending of getting the opportunity to become a member of the royal family in classic Cinderella versions. The story begins with the life the heroine Ella Brown has in the palace after she is engaged to the handsome prince; unfortunately, such a life is similar to a canary kept in a golden cage—"I stood like a statue every morning while yards of satin and lace were pinned around me. I sat like a porcelain doll every afternoon while the royal hairdresser piled curls atop my head and combed and brushed and braided until my hair looked more like a woven basket than real hair" (Haddix, pp. 100-01).

However, the seemingly wealthy and luxurious life contrarily makes Ella become unhappy and even miserable. The daily lessons of embroidery and etiquette she is required to take bore her; her scheduled meeting with the prince everyday is supervised, destroying all her dreams about romance and love. In one of the occasions in which she thinks she finally gets the chance to be outside the palace to view a tournament, she is confined instead in a striped tent with four "cloth walls," with only "a half inch of sunlight at the bottom" at the open side (Haddix, p. 86). She is warned by her instructor of etiquette, Madame Bisset after her protest, "Silence! You are a disgrace to your *gender*. Do you not understand? You are here to *beautify* the tournament. And yet, if you were visible throughout, you would distract riders and wrestlers" (Haddix, p. 87, my italic emphasis). This incident certainly serves as a strong criticism on the deep-rooted stereotypes of what a woman should be. The objectification of women is considered natural and inevitable; women with beautiful looks merely function as a decoration of the patriarchal culture symbolized by the male-dominant tournament.

Nevertheless, Haddix's heroine does not surrender herself to such an imposition—"Have I gotten too accustomed to having people fawn over me? 'Oh, Princess, you're so beautiful.' 'Oh, Princess, your hair curls so perfectly.' 'Oh, Princess, you'll make the loveliest bride. . .' Had I actually believed all that?" (Haddix, p. 116). After contemplating and realizing this is not what she wants, she decides to withdraw from the marriage. However, she is imprisoned in the dungeon by Prince Charming who could not bear Ella's crazy thoughts. Finally, she manages to escape from the palace to seek the commoner life she really wants and her true love.

The first-person narration of this story[1], different from the traditional versions[2], is surely an indication that the female protagonist is bestowed with the power to voice for herself. Trites (1997) mentions that "[c]losely related to the feminist protagonist's agency is the issue of her voice, for voice often serves as a metaphor for female agency" (6). This is also what Crew (2002) describes as important issues for feminists to address—to give "voice, agency, and subjectivity to those who have been previously silenced and objectified" (p. 79). Hence, this reworked version of the Cinderella story subverts the old concept that gaining a position of higher rank and wealth serves as the only way to lead a woman to achieve happiness. "Happily-ever-after" does not necessarily mean to live a wealthy life with a handsome prince. It also provides a portrait of a resourceful woman possessing the ability of self-realization and determination.

Prince Cinders

Cole's picture book *Prince Cinders* switches the original female underdog with her male counterpart. Reversing the common image of princes in traditional fairy tales a big, handsome and strong, Prince Cinders is described in Cole's story as "small, spotty, scruffy and skinny." He is always left behind by his elder "big and hairy" brothers and cleaned up the mess after them. The characteristics of submissiveness and passiveness which seldom appear in male characters of fairy tales are possessed by him. Besides, Prince Cinders is good at all the housekeeping work which is commonly deemed as a feminine skill. As a result, the traditional concepts of what a man should be and do are revised and presently alternatively in this book. As Crew (2002) states about some stories with unconventional male protagonists, they are usually "presented as loving and compassionate" (p. 83); Prince Cinders is certainly one of such unusual heroes to pose a challenge to Western patriarchal stereotypes of masculinity. He is nothing like the standard prince who is handsome, physically strong and powerful; however, his timidity and weakness lead him to gain happiness.

At the end of the story when the Princess Lovelypenny puts out a proclamation

[1] Among the five contemporary feminist variants discussed in this paper, only this book assumes a narrative perspective of first person.

[2] Almost all the traditional versions of fairy tales were written through a third-person narration.

to find the owner of the trousers which Prince Cinders leaves at the bus stop, all the other princes travel for miles to try to squeeze themselves into the trousers. The replacement of the glass slipper with a pair of jeans without doubt forms a hilarious reversal of the original gendered relationship presented in the classic versions. Princess Lovelypenny holds the authoritative position of choosing among the princes; after Prince Cinders at last gets the chance to try on the trousers after his brothers and fitted in them, she immediately proposes to him. Such a twist overturns the fixed concept of women as the weak and passive one who receives the rewards and men as the giver of fame and glory so as to present another form of gender structure.

Cinderellis and the Glass Hill

Cinderella's male replication also appears in Levine's fiction *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill*. The hero of this story, Ellis, gets the nickname "Cinderellis" from his two older brothers, Ralph and Burt, who always tease and ignore him—"Burt said, 'but you're no farmer, Cinderellis.' 'Not like us,' Ralph said. He smiled his special smile at Burt, the smile that made Cinderellis ache with longing" (Levine, p. 7). Despite this, Cinderellis still acts like what Crew (2002) characterizes as unconventional male characters in fairy tales who "demonstrates through their actions and their discourse a commitment to family and loving relationships" (p. 83). He tries very hard to impress them with his various inventions such as flying powder and extra-strength powder for plants but his efforts are still in vain.

On the other hand, the princess Marigold is half-deserted by her own father King Humphrey III because of his continuous quests for bizarre and rare things. Finally, during his latest quest, he is cursed by an imp of not going for any quests for five years. Not being able to search for a husband for his daughter, he comes up with an idea to "make lots of lads come to him" (Levine, p. 39). Therefore, the glass slipper primarily representing patriarchal power is transformed into a glass hill in this story as the king proclaims: "'Dear friends,' he began. 'Tomorrow our Royal Glass-workers will begin to create a giant hill in the shape of a pyramid. It will be made entirely of glass…The brave lad who rides his horse up to [the princess] and takes three apples will have her hand in marriage" (Levine, p. 45). The glass hill thus becomes an obstacle for all the male challengers who want to pursue fame and glory. As a result, instead of the females who need to strive for fitting the shoe, it is the

males whose ability is tested and qualification questioned through the means of the glass-hill impediment.

Among the lads who come from all sorts of places to take this contest, Cinderellis is the only one who does not aim at becoming the prince winning the hand of Marigold—"Cinderellis didn't want to become a prince and marry a princess he'd never even met. He just wanted to see if his sticky powder would take him and one of the mares up the glass hill" (Levine, p. 48). Such a plot disrupts the regular storyline of the classic fairy tales in which a commoner is supposed to make most efforts to gain wealth and fame through building a linkage with the royal family. The princess Marigold, during her coincidental encounter with Cinderellis when she pretends to be a Royal Dairymaid, is impressed by him for his honesty and kindness when she asks him what he would do if he became the "prince Skiddle and Luddle and Buffle"—"'I don't know.' He wished he had a good answer. 'I don't want to be a prince.' Ah. What a good answer. 'But if you had to be?'. . . 'I guess if I were prince, I'd create inventions that would make my subjects' lives easier.'" (Levine, p. 54). Cinderellis, on the other hand, is also amazed by the Royal Dairymaid—"Cinderellis had never so much fun in his life. This Royal Dairymaid was splendid!" (Levine, p. 57).

At the end of the story, after Cinderellis proves the effectiveness of his sticking powder by getting the three apples, he does not rush to the king to claim his rewards. However, after he realizes that the Royal Dairymaid is actually the princess, he admits he is the one who gets on the top of the glass hill. Although the story ends with a happy marriage as well, it is neither a blind love-at-first-sight one nor a deliberate means of transforming the poor into the rich.

Classic Versions vs. Modern Variants

The power relationship of gender construction in classic Cinderella versions by Perrault and the Grimm Brothers has already become a fixed concept for the child reader. As D. Hurly (2005) has pointed out, "[t]hrough the ages, children have formed mental images of the princesses and other characters depicted in these tales from their representation in the written text as well as in the illustrations that have often accompanied those texts. [Classic] fairy tales, therefore, have an important role to play in shaping the self-image and belief system of children" (p. 221).

The modern variants, by keeping the old skeleton storyline but adding certain feminist concepts, provide alternative versions of gender structure of the tale "Cinderella." On the surface, these contemporary feminist Cinderella tales can provide a better version of gender structure and relationship for our modern context. In spite of this, we must also pay attention to whether these contemporary retellings are truly subverting gender stereotypes established in the classic versions or on the contrary reinforcing them or even creating new ideologies which cause more imposition upon women. M. Orellana (1995) cautions that "dominant gendered discourses may appear in new ways even in spaces that look like they are challenging traditional approaches to gender" (p. 703). Thus, these contemporary variants of the Cinderella tale discussed above, in spite of containing certain feminist elements to provide alternative versions of gender structure and female characterization different from that presented in either Perrault's or the Grimm Brothers' story, still possibly serve as the soil for old gender stereotypes.

Taking one more look at the contemporary Cinderella tales under examination earlier, we may find in *Cinder Edna*, although the idea that gaining happiness doesn't necessarily require a pretty appearance has been validated, there is still a problematic and rigid portrait of females: beautiful women are never intelligent and smart and powerful women are never good-looking. Cinderella with pretty looks is portrayed as superficial and weak while her counterpart Cinder Edna is described as having no physical attraction even though she is smart and independent.

In the illustrations of this picture book, Cinderella is a beautiful girl with blond hair and blue eyes, a typical beauty from a Western beauty standard. On the other hand, Cinder Edna, possessing short brown hair, looks like a tomboy type of girl even while wearing a dress (an over-sized one) to the ball. Such way of portraying females with agency may cause the danger of reinforcing "the notion of oddness of female physical strength" A. Trousdale (1995) detected from a young girl's response to strong heroines in fairy tales (p. 175).

As for *Bound*, despite the fact that Xing Xing is both bright and lovely, she is portrayed as a girl naturally born with small feet; therefore, she could wear the tiny shoes without any difficulty, while her stepsister has to bear the pain of foot binding and even having her foot cleaved but is still unable to fit in the slipper. While holding the golden shoes her feet-bound mother leaves to her, Xing Xing, without bound feet,

expresses her fear and hesitation of the possibility that they might not fit: "If only these perfect shoes would fit. Her breath suspended, Xing Xing gingerly tried one foot in a shoe. . . She put the other one on and walked softly around the cavern room" (Napoli, p. 154). Such a plot reinforces the importance of having small feet, one of the female beauty standards set by men and accordingly forms more pressure upon women.

Despite that *Just Ella* poses a challenge to the happy ending in which Cinderella marries the prince and lives a pleasant and prosperous life in the palace, its actual ending still runs into another "trap" of romance. In Parsons' analysis (2004) of *Just Ella*, she indicates that although the book can be considered a feminist novel with a resourceful and active heroine with power to determine her future, its resolution with Ella finally following her true love Jed, her former instructor of religion and philosophy in the palace, to be of service in the refugee camp during the Sualan War, still falls into the hole of "romantic ideology" (p. 151). Choosing to accomplish the life goal of the one she loves instead exploring her own, Ella is criticized by Parsons to "submit to someone else's passion" in spite of her strong and assertive personality (p. 151). From this viewpoint, Ella actually behaves similarly to her Cinderella ancestor in the Grimms' version in which the initially resolute heroine, being deprived of her resourcefulness, is overtaken by the romance with the prince at the end.

Furthermore, examples which still emphasize men's superiority over women can be found in both books containing a male Cinderella, for the princess in each story is still the rescued one and prince as the rescuer. Princess Lovelypenny thinks Prince Cinders has saved her by frightening away "the big hairy monkey" which the clumsy fairy turns Prince Cinders into. Eventually when she finds her rescuer Prince Cinders through his lost trousers, she marries him without hesitation. In the illustration showing the "happy" and "luxurious" life Prince Cinders lives after marrying Princess Lovelypenny, he is the one who lies on the couch while she stands beside him, handing a cluster of grapes to him. Hence, although the princess is showed to be the one who holds the wealth and power, she still yields to her husband in her marriage.

In *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill*, despite that the men have to take the challenge of reaching the top of the glass hill instead of the women being tested to see

if they can fit into the glass slipper, the form of the challenge is still within the patriarchal standard—men are examined by their physical strength instead of their looks or appearance. On the other hand, Princess Marigold has to be trapped on the top of the glass hill, waiting for Cinderellis (or any other lads) riding a horse to reach her so as to end her passive stay on the hill. Being a princess, she still does not have enough agency to choose the man she really wants and to resist the imposing control of her father to decide her fate of marrying any man who wins the challenge. At the end, Cinderellis not only finishes Princess Marigold's miserable wait on the hill by reaching the top successfully, but also rescues her from the control of her father-king by marrying her. Like Princess Lovelypenny, Princess Marigold also marries her rescuer, jumping out of the fatherly control into another form of being under domination.

In a word, these so-called feminist Cinderella tales which seemingly carry subversive elements to overturn the biased gender ideology prevailed in the classic versions of the tale may still fall into the trap like their precedents and hence form a target of criticism. As V. Joosen (2005) points out, "Emancipatory feminists have reacted against the lessons that the Grimms' or Disney's fairy tales teach, but they do not usually react against their didactic potential or use as such. Instead, many feminists have taken advantage of the didactic potential in the narrative to convey their own ideology" (p. 130). Rowe (1979/2009) also points out an alerting situation faced by the former movements of feminists:

> While feminist political movements of the last century may seem to signal women's liberation from traditional roles, too often the underlying truth is far more complicated: the liberation of the female psyche has not matured with sufficient strength to sustain a radical assault on the patriarchal culture. Despite an apparent susceptibility to change, modern culture remains itself stubbornly antithetical to ideals of female and male equality. (p. 358)

Furthermore, the transformation of the notion of "feminism" needs to be considered in order to construct a truly ideal feminist fairy tale. In his book *Relentless Progress*: *The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling,* Zipes mentions that "[i]t is impossible today for anyone, male or female, whether

heterosexual, transvestite, androgynous, lesbian, sadist, masochist, straight, black, yellow, white, tan, or rainbow, to write a serious artful fairy tale, even comical or farcical, without taking into account the vast changes wrought by feminism in the last forty years" (2009, p. 121). However, the changing definition and meaning of "feminism" needs to be taken into consideration as well in order to prevent biased views from being established

Juxtaposition of Traditional Fairy Tales and Contemporary Retellings

Contemporary retellings of traditional tales have occupied an indispensible part of the transformation or evolving process of the genre of fairy tale. From examining both types of works, we get a glimpse of the cultural context in which these stories have been produced, for instance, the changing representations of gender structure and gendered relationships in them. In the diversity created by the feminist reworked tales, according to Gilbert (1994), "lies space for alternative constructions to be made of being a 'woman,' alternative stories to be told, and alternative forms of female 'desire' to be constructed" (p. 138). In these modern feminist variants, a new form of socialization/acculturation process from standard children's books is being constructed (Zipes, 1983, p. 60). In order to examine if such a form is still problematic in certain aspects, we need to compare the new tales with the old ones. As Levorato (2003) puts, in order to fully understanding the meanings carried by the modern variants rely heavily on the reader's previous knowledge of earlier versions because they are built on prior texts (p. 193). Hence, it can be said that only through the comparison and juxtaposition of classic and modern texts of tales can we accentuate the conservative quality of the older versions and the alternative values or further imposition produced in the newer retellings. An examination of the gender construction in both old and new Cinderella tales can help us gain a full understanding of how the issue of gender is differently treated and demonstrated in accordance with the change of the culture context.

Just like Marshall (2004) mentions about the advantage of assuming a poststructuralist feminist perspective to evaluate the issue of gender in literary texts, "[w]hereas sex-role theories posit gendered identities as stable category,

poststructuralist approaches search for gaps and contradictions in discursive representations. The construction of the girl . . . relies on *competing discourses rather than on a unified discourse of femininity* (p. 268, my italic emphasis). In other words, from alternative angles to examine the old and new Cinderella texts, the images for both masculinity and femininity become changing and unstable, rather than fixed and at the two ends of a binary opposition. As a result, while introducing the Cinderella tale to children, educators or teachers alike may hold such a concept in mind to better benefit children by providing them both classic and modern versions for comparison of gender relationships presented in them so as to show children that the concept of gender roles are among a great variety. Through such a juxtaposing reading of old and new fairy tales, young readers "can take up a range of both masculine and feminine positionings in contexts where that multiplicity is constituted as non-problematic. Within poststructuralist theory the individual is no longer seen as a unitary, unproblematically sexed being, but rather as a shifting nexus of possibilities" (Davies, 2003, p.12).

Modern feminist tales have begun to subvert and transform the gender stereotypes constructed in the earlier ones but some of the concepts in them are still confined within the old gender structure. Under such a premise, we may consider the old gendered structure in the traditional versions to be the glass slipper Cinderella leaves on the staircase of the palace which the prince representing the patriarchal power uses to search for a proper and submissive wife; on the other hand, the other slipper Cinderella keeps with her can embody the new gender concept created in modern Cinderella tales to be the force enhancing the patriarchal dominance. Therefore, to release Cinderella from the track of the prince and the imposition of patriarchal values, breaking both the glass slippers can serve as one of the better solutions.

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