

# Two Picturebook Adaptions of "Cinderella"

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2019

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Učiteljski fakultet**

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-08**

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**MARIJA ŠAREC MIŠKIN  
DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**TWO PICTUREBOOK ADAPTATIONS  
OF “CINDERELLA”**

**Zagreb, srpanj 2019.**

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UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE  
(Zagreb)**

**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

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**TEMA DIPLOMSKOGA RADA:** Two Picturebook  
Adaptations of  
“Cinderella”

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**Zagreb, srpanj 2019.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores picturebook adaptations of the popular “Cinderella” fairy tale. Specifically, the main goal of the thesis is to analyse two modern picturebook revisions of the traditional fairy tale – *Prince Cinders* (1987) by Babette Cole and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* (2011) by Trisha Speed Shaskan and Gerald Guerlais – and examine the ways in which they change and adapt the story for modern child audiences. The thesis discusses the status of “Cinderella” within the canon of children’s literature, its changes through history, and modern adaptations. The thesis begins with an overview of the most influential variants of “Cinderella” (four written and one animated), as well as a discussion about its status within children’s literature, and the positive and negative influences of this story and fairy tales in general on child audiences. The following chapter discusses the concept of adaptation and adaptation strategies used in modern revisions of fairy tales. Special focus is on gender reversal and change of perspective as the two main adaptation strategies used by Cole and Speed Shaskan. The thesis then analyses these two picturebook adaptations and compares them at the level of story with traditional versions of “Cinderella”, regarding the changes in settings, characters, plot, and themes, as well as the role of illustrations. The conclusion summarizes the main findings and provides suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** fairy tale, “Cinderella”, adaptation, adaptation strategy, picturebook

## Sažetak

Tema ovoga diplomskoga rada su slikovničke adaptacije bajke „Pepeljuga“. Cilj je rada analizirati dvije moderne slikovničke adaptacije ove tradicionalne bajke: *Prince Cinders* (1987) autorice Babette Cole i *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* (2011) Trishe Speed Shaskan i Geralda Guerlaisa, te utvrditi kojim se adaptacijskim strategijama služe kako bi priču promijenili i prilagodili suvremenoj dječjoj publici. U radu se govori o statusu „Pepeljuge“ unutar kanona dječje književnosti, njenim promjenama kroz povijest i suvremenim adaptacijama. Rad započinje pregledom najutjecajnijih varijanti bajke „Pepeljuga“ (četiri pisane i jedna animirana), te raspravom o njezinom statusu u dječjoj književnosti, kao i pozitivnim i negativnim utjecajima „Pepeljuge“ i bajki općenito na dječju publiku. Naredno poglavlje govori o adaptacijama i adaptacijskim strategijama, naročito onima koje se javljaju u suvremenim revizijama bajki. Posebna pozornost posvećena je zamjeni rodni uloga i promjeni perspektive kao glavnim adaptacijskim strategijama koje koriste Cole i Speed Shaskan. Rad potom analizira navedene adaptacije tradicionalne bajke „Pepeljuga“, koje se uspoređuju s tradicionalnim inačicama bajke o Pepeljuzi. Posebna pozornost posvećena je promjenama u mjestu i vremenu radnje, likovima, radnji i temama, te ulozi ilustracija. Zaključak sažima glavne spoznaje i nudi smjernice za buduća istraživanja.

**Ključne riječi:** bajka, „Pepeljuga“, adaptacija, adaptacijske strategije, slikovnica

## INTRODUCTION

Why write about picturebooks, and why write about “Cinderella”? As children, the first books we get to read are picturebooks, usually those that retell the most popular fairy tales. The first fairy tale I remember reading as a child (and later watching as an animated film) was “Cinderella”. I chose it as the topic of my thesis because I wanted to learn more about its history, when it was first created and where, how and why it became so widely popular, and what is happening with it today. As a future teacher, I have also found that “Cinderella” and fairy tales in general offer many possibilities for classroom activities, such as teaching children about different variants of the same story, showing them picturebooks, encouraging them to do the research on different stories, and even create their own versions and adaptations.

Marina Warner defines fairy tales as short, “familiar stories that are passed on down the generations” and describe encounters between human and magical characters (2014, p. 18). They originated as part of oral tradition which focused on specific characters (for example, princes and princesses, stepmothers, elves, giants) and motifs (for example, keys, apples, rings, or mirrors; *ibid.*, p. 21). Appearing in different media, fairy tales surround us from the very beginning of our life journey. Even the fairy-tale expert Jack Zipes agrees that we find ourselves in the middle of “a phenomenal surge or tidal wave” of fairy tales and fairy-tale adaptations (books, videogames, comics, movies, animated films, etc.; 2016, p. 1). As we grow older and become more mature, we start to understand fairy tales differently, find hidden meanings in them, and discover more about them (for example, different versions of the same tale). We continue to be fascinated by them because they are so intriguing and offer a lot of different solutions for creating something new. The same can be stated for picturebooks, works of art which combine the verbal and the visual discourses to tell the same story (Narančić Kovač, 2015, p. 7).

The aim of this thesis is to analyse two picturebook adaptations of “Cinderella”: *Prince Cinders* (1987) by Babette Cole and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* (2011) by Trisha Speed Shaskan. More specifically, it focuses on adaptation strategies used by contemporary authors in order to make traditional stories new and interesting to child audiences, such as gender reversal (used in

*Prince Cinders*) and telling the story from a different perspective (used in *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*). The thesis compares Cole's and Speed Shaskan's and Gerald Guerlais's picturebooks to traditional versions of "Cinderella" and discusses changes in setting, characters, plot, and themes, as well as the role of illustrations.

This thesis is divided into four parts: the first part provides a historical overview of the "Cinderella" tale; the second part discusses the status of "Cinderella" within children's literature and the positive and negative views on "Cinderella" and fairy tales in general; the third part is dedicated to literary adaptations and adaptation strategies used in these two picturebook adaptations and the final part compares them to traditional versions of the story. The historical overview presents the four most important and influential printed variants of "Cinderella", starting with Giambattista Basile's "Gatta Cenerentola" (1634), which is the first published Cinderella. The overview continues with Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre" (1697), Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron" (1697), and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Aschenputtel" (1812–1857). Walt Disney's animated *Cinderella* (1950) is also included in this overview because of its immense popularity. The thesis then discusses the positive and negative aspects of the "Cinderella" story and fairy tales in general, especially when it comes to their influence on children. The following chapter explains what adaptations are and what is the purpose of adapting works the audience is already familiar with. Special focus is on gender reversal and change of perspective, the main adaptation strategies used by Cole, Speed Shaskan and Guerlais. The main part of the thesis analyses *Prince Cinders* and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* as two picturebook adaptations of the traditional "Cinderella" story. It compares the two picturebooks to traditional variants of the tale. The conclusion summarizes the main findings and provides suggestions for future research.



## 1. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE “CINDERELLA” TALE

Stories have always been retold and adapted to new, different contexts (Greyling, 2014, p. 171) which often include something that is culture-specific – something new from the language, culture or social circumstances of the author. Tellers intuitively add something of their own when sharing a certain story with their audience; every teller introduces new elements that are essential to his or her version, something unique that makes his/her story slightly different from other versions. When adding culture-specific elements to a certain story, authors create something that folklorists call a new variant of that story. Each variant of the same story “has its own meaning, within a given cultural context” (McCallum, 2015, p. 21). “Cinderella” exists in countless variants around the world, each of which contains something unique to the place and the period when it was created.

Since every folk tale exists in many different variants, they needed to be sorted out and organised. The basic plots shared by all variants of the same tale, called tale types, are listed and described in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index of international tale types, or ATU Index for short, named after its creators Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, and Hans-Jörg Uther (Aarne-Thompson-Uther Classification of Folk Tales). According to the ATU Index, “Cinderella” belongs to the type 510 (which is in the category called “Tales of Magic”), or more specifically, 510A. This is how this tale type is described in the Index (Uther, 2004, pp. 293–294):

Cinderella (Cenerentola, Cendrillon, Aschenputtel). A young woman is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters and has to live in the ashes as a servant. When the sisters and the stepmother go to a ball, they give Cinderella an impossible task (e.g. sorting peas from ashes), which she accomplishes with the help of birds. She obtains beautiful clothing from a supernatural being or a tree that grows on the grave of her deceased mother and goes unknown to the ball. A prince falls in love with her, but she has to leave the ball early. The same thing happens on the next evening, but on the third evening, she loses one of her shoes. The prince will marry only the woman whom the shoe fits. The stepsisters cut pieces off their feet in order to make them fit into the shoe, but a bird calls attention to this deceit. Cinderella, who had been first hidden from the prince, tries on the shoe and it fits her. The prince marries her.

The “Cinderella” story has changed over time and, as Rona May-Ron reports, today it exists in more than 800 variants that have appeared and reappeared across centuries all over the world, in different countries and cultures (2016, p. 145). Each variant contains something new and unique, while still following the same “Cinderella” plot at its core.

Nowadays, we tend to think of Cinderella as a kind girl who loses everything but gets her happy ending by marrying a prince – a typical rags-to-riches fairy-tale plot. However, the Cinderella we know today “is the product of a nearly four-century-long evolution that began with a very different heroine, one who was fully characterized and singularly complex” (Bottigheimer, 2016, p. 27). As Maria Tatar notes (1999, p. 102):

Cinderella has been reinvented by so many different cultures that it is hardly surprising that she is sometimes cruel and vindictive, at other times compassionate and kind. Even within a single culture, she can appear genteel and self-effacing in one story, clever and enterprising in another, coy and manipulative in a third.

Among the most prominent variants of this fairy tale, two are more famous and influential than others: the variants by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm.

The following text discusses four printed variants of “Cinderella”, which present the written beginnings of our heroine’s long literary journey, as well as Walt Disney’s animated adaptation which made the story widely popular.

### **1.1. Giambattista Basile’s “Gatta Cenerentola” (1634)**

According to Roxanne Hughes, who discusses Donna Jo Napoli’s novel *Bound* (a modern retelling of “Cinderella”), the history of “Cinderella” dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the Chinese folk tale of Yexian by Duan Chengshi (2016, pp. 232–233). However, the first printed “Cinderella” story appeared in Italy, in Giambattista Basile’s collection known as *Il Pentamerone o Il Cunto de li Cunti* (The Pentamerone, or The Tale of Tales, 1634–1636). This Cinderella is named Zezolla and nicknamed “Gatta Cenerentola” or “Cinderella Cat”. She is quite different from the Cinderella that is familiar to us today: she is eager to get rid of her stepmother and willing to achieve that goal no matter what. This early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Cinderella manages to kill her stepmother and manipulate her father into marrying the governess, her teacher, who gives her instructions on what to do to make her life better. The story contains some brutal and morbid elements that will later reappear in the Brothers’ Grimm variant (Basile, 2007).

### **1.2. Charles Perrault’s “Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre” (1697)**

Charles Perrault’s “Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre” (Cinderella or the little glass slipper), first published in his collection *Contes du temps passé* (Tales

of Times Passed) in 1697, is the one most people have in mind when they think of Cinderella. Perrault's heroine calmly and bravely accepts her stepsisters' mockery, does all the household chores for them and her stepmother, cries when she is not able to go to the ball (in contrast to Basile's Zezolla, who seeks help from a magical tree), gets help from her fairy godmother who tells her what to do, loses her shoe after the second ball, and marries the prince in the end. Cendrillon also forgives her stepsisters (after they throw themselves at her feet and beg for forgiveness) and finds them suitable grooms – after all, they also get their happy endings. It is important to mention that Perrault adds two morals to the story: the first one emphasises that a woman's beauty is a rare treasure, but then focuses on graciousness, which is a greater and even rarer value; the second one cynically comments on the social circumstances of Perrault's time and points out the importance of godparents, or more generally, good social connections (Lang, 1889).

### **1.3. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron" (1697)**

Perrault's "Cendrillon" was followed by the "long wordy tales of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy", whose "Cinderella story is little known to the general public today and remains relatively unfamiliar even in the academic world" (Bottigheimer, 2016, p. 35). The protagonist of d'Aulnoy's story is Finette Cendron, who is of royal origin and has two older sisters. Finette's parents are not very successful in managing their finances (it can be really exhausting and burdensome to have three daughters) so they abandon their daughters in the middle of the forest. D'Aulnoy's special touch to the story is the encounter with an ogre and an ogress (an element also used by Perrault in his "Little Thumbling"; Perrault, 1900). Finette gets rid of the ogre couple, becomes rich thanks to their treasure, goes to the ball, and finally, has a prince fall in love with her (d'Aulnoy, 1892). Finette Cendron shares similarities with both Cindrellas that came before her: she is "sweetly cunning, wisely manipulative, and patiently calculating" like Zezolla (Bottigheimer, 2016, pp. 37–38), but also humble, patient, wise and sweet, like Cendrillon.

### **1.4. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Aschenputtel" (1812–1857)**

First published in the first edition of their collection of fairy tales *Kinder - und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales) in 1812, the Grimms' version of "Cinderella" is entitled "Aschenputtel" and shares many similarities with

Perrault's "Cendrillon". Aschenputtel is not of royal origin: she comes from a rich family. She is raised to be good and pious, and remains like that throughout the story. Aschenputtel's mother dies at the very beginning and Aschenputtel plants a hazel twig on her grave. The twig grows into a tree which has an important role in the story. The Grimms' heroine is also mistreated by her evil stepmother, and two stepsisters who mock her and turn her into their servant. When a ball is organised, the stepsisters go, but Aschenputtel is left behind. While Perrault's Cendrillon has a fairy godmother who grants her wishes, Aschenputtel receives help from birds: pigeons and turtledoves help her pick out the lentils from the ashes, and a little bird who sits on the hazel twig planted on her mother's grave gives her dresses. Aschenputtel also attends the ball and falls in love with the prince, but the ending is slightly different from Perrault's: the stepsisters have their eyes pecked out by birds – which could be interpreted as a representation of her dead mother (Bottigheimer, 2016, p. 39) – as punishment for all the bad things they did to Aschenputtel (Grimm, 1857). It is also necessary to mention that the Grimms changed the story through the seven editions of their collection, using it to teach young girls to be good and pious. Ruth Bottigheimer points out that Wilhelm Grimm believed that girls and women should be silent and obedient, well-behaved, or even submissive, so the Grimms' Aschenputtel behaves like the prince's possession from the moment they meet (2016, p. 39). The Grimms also changed the plot of the story in different editions: for example, in the 1812 version the mother tells Aschenputtel to plant the tree, while in the 1857 version (the final, seventh edition) she gets the idea herself (François, 2016, p. 102). Furthermore, in the first edition her mother says she will look down on her from Heaven, while later editions accentuate the importance of Aschenputtel being good and pious, and the Lord watching over her (ibid.).

### **1.5. Walt Disney's animated *Cinderella* (1950)**

“And yet, through it all, Cinderella remained ever gentle and kind. For with each dawn, she found new hope that someday her dreams of happiness would come true” (Disney, 1950). With these lines there begins probably the most famous film adaptation of “Cinderella”, the one made by the Walt Disney Animation Studio. Disney's 1950 animated version is based on Perrault's text, but adds some innovations to the plot. With anthropomorphised animals, lots of songs (the movie is an animated musical), a singing fairy godmother (Perrault does not provide any detail

about this character), the evil stepmother being named Lady Tremaine, and her daughters Drizella and Anastasia (they are not named in Perrault's text), and Cinderella attending only one ball instead of two, Disney introduced his version of "Cinderella" to a large audience of both children and adults.

## 2. “CINDERELLA” AS A CANONICAL PIECE AND AN EDUCATION TOOL

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Charles Perrault’s “Cendrillon” includes two morals (Lang, 1889, pp. 70–71):

Beauty in a woman is a rare treasure that will always be admired. Graciousness, however, is priceless and of even greater value. This is what Cinderella’s godmother gave to her when she taught her to behave like a queen. Young women, in the winning of a heart, graciousness is more important than a beautiful hairdo. It is a true gift of the fairies. Without it nothing is possible; with it, one can do anything;

and:

Without doubt it is a great advantage to have intelligence, courage, good breeding, and common sense. These, and similar talents come only from heaven, and it is good to have them. However, even these may fail to bring you success, without the blessing of a godfather or a godmother.

Perrault’s “Cinderella” was written as a guide for young children – more specifically, young girls – on how to behave. It gives them instructions they must follow in order to achieve their life goals and get their ‘happy ending’. However, at the same time, Perrault is being very ironic by saying that a girl must be well-connected in order to achieve something. So, it is hard to say whether he accentuates the didactic note of the story (like the Grimms do in the final version of the collection which highlights that Aschenputtel is good and pious) or he just mocks the society and social circumstances of the period he lived in. Cyrille François argues for the first option: “Cendrillon could be seen as an example of a good girl rewarded for being virtuous” (2016, p. 100). However, he later explains that Perrault writes not only to educate but also to remind people of the importance of social connections: “it is well and good to tell girls how to behave, but if they have no godmother or godfather, it will be of no avail” (ibid.).

There are two opposing views on whether “Cinderella” and fairy tales in general are good for children. On the one hand, fairy tales contain some brutal elements (such as Aschenputtel’s stepsisters having their eyes pecked out), so some believe they should be adapted before they are read to children. Traditional fairy tales have also been criticised for promoting gender stereotypes (see Haase 2000): for example, the girl/princess always has to be saved, while the man/prince ends up being a hero. On the other hand, fairy tales offer a lot of space for creativity as well as an escape from reality.

Leslie Rutland and Katie Chancellor, co-founders of the *Learning Through Literature* website, write about the positive influence of fairy tales on children. Their arguments in favour of fairy tales are the following: fairy tales are usually oversimplified, the characters are either good or bad, and good always conquers evil. In this way, they teach children universal truths. Fairy tales also teach children that actions always have consequences and determine one's fate: for example, in the Grimms' version, Cinderella is rewarded for being good, humble and pious, while her stepsisters are punished for their wickedness and malice. Furthermore, fairy tales promote the message that great obstacles can be overcome by ordinary people, not superheroes: for example, an ordinary girl, who is not of royal origin, can become a princess. Fairy tales enrich children's imagination and promote creativity: no matter how old they are, children can always do something new, fun and interesting with the fairy tales they are already familiar with, such as enjoy listening to their parents read their favourite fairy tale or compare different variants of the same story (Rutland & Chancellor, 2018).

All these positive attributes may have resulted in the inclusion of "Cinderella" in the Central European elementary school curriculum in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where it has remained ever since (Bottigheimer, 2016, p. 40). Even today, fairy tales (including "Cinderella") are part of obligatory reading lists for children in lower grades of Croatian elementary schools (Vican & Milanović Litre, 2006). As one of the most popular fairy tales in the world, "Cinderella" can be used in many different aspects of education. Margaret Atwood, the author of (among other novels) *The Edible Woman* (which is inspired by "Cinderella") suggests some topics that can be further examined and discussed in connection to this fairy tale, such as:

the social devaluation of women who do not fit the mold, the binary distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' girls, the cultural silencing of women, the patriarchally regulated rivalry among women, [...] and the phallogocentric view of marriage as women's ultimate goal in life (as quoted in: May-Ron, 2016, p. 144).

Writing about the negative influence of fairy tales on children, Kay Stone (1975) claims that fairy tales (including "Cinderella") present young girls with a completely wrong picture of what to expect from life. She claims that fairy tales may be described as 'training manuals' for passive behaviour and that many women probably form their ideas about what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behaviour would be rewarded or punished based on their favourite fairy tales.

Disney adaptations of popular fairy tales have been especially criticised for promoting false expectations and encouraging young girls to want to become “princesses”. Peggy Orenstein (2006), for example, harshly criticises the influential Disney Princess brand. Because so many little girls encounter Disney’s Cinderella (and other princesses) in their childhood, they might, Orenstein believes, want to become like her when they grow up.

Parental care and children’s obedience is another aspect of “Cinderella” some find problematic. Daniel Aranda points out that Cinderella’s escape from home to go to the ball might give young children the wrong idea, because she manages to sneak out and return back home without anyone noticing it (2016, p. 128). Some authors adapting the story do not appreciate so much freedom and liberation, and are “reluctant to offer young readers, and young female readers especially, a model of a female character who acts too freely and independently” (ibid.).

It is really difficult to be completely objective and decide whether fairy tales are good for children or not. There are so many things that can be learned from fairy tales, but also so many things that can be overanalysed and understood differently when you know some background information about a certain story. As a child, I never got the idea to run away from home from “Cinderella”; I saw her sneaking out to go to the ball as a chance for her to have that special moment with the prince. In my opinion, “Cinderella” gives reader hope and the courage to have big dreams and shows us that miracles are possible.



### 3. LITERARY ADAPTATIONS

What are adaptations? Who creates them? Which works are and which can possibly be adapted? Linda Hutcheon answers these questions in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, where she states that

adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. 2).

An adaptation can be seen as

an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, or an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (ibid., p. 8).

Adaptations are “secondary creations” which have a strong relationship with the texts that were created before and which they are based on, called “sources” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. 4). When adapting a story, the adapters are (usually) open about their relationship with the source text (ibid., p. 3). However, some believe that the source text is always superior to its adaptation (its idea and originality): this idea of “source-adaptation hierarchy” promotes negative attitudes towards adaptations (Stam, 2000, p. 58). Hutcheon disagrees, posing the following question:

If adaptations are, by this definition, such inferior and secondary creations, why then are they so omnipresent in our culture and, indeed, increasing steadily in numbers? (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. 4).

The answer is: there are works that are simply worth preserving and in order to be preserved they are re-created and re-interpreted for new audiences (ibid., p. 8).

In her *Fairy Tales Transformed?* (2013), fairy-tale expert Cristina Bacchilega writes about modern, 21<sup>st</sup>-century adaptations of fairy tales, especially literary and cinematic ones. Like Hutcheon, Bacchilega poses an interesting question at the very beginning of her book: “How and to what uses are fairy tales being adapted in and to the twenty-first-century?” (Bacchilega, 2013, p. 6). She explains that all texts (oral and written), participate in a web of intertextual relations (ibid., p. 19). Building on this idea, she proposes a new method for analysing fairy tales and their adaptations, the so-called intertextual fairy-tale web of reading and writing practices. She agrees that the Perrault-Grimms-Disney canonised stories are still being re-created, but points out that they are no longer the main sources (or pre-texts) for modern

adaptations as many new stories have been popularised since the 1970s<sup>1</sup>. Bacchilega demonstrates that fairy-tale adaptations were present even in the past, among the most prominent creators of fairy tales (ibid., p. 197):

Straparola created the form. Basile provided much of the content that later authors adopted. Together, they created the basis for Europe's fairy tale tradition. French authors, Charles Perrault and the aristocratic women fairy-tale writers of the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, borrowed from and edited the Italians, and the brothers Grimm in nineteenth century perfected this tradition of collecting and rewriting 'oral' tales.

In their article about the process of adapting traditional stories, John Stephens and Sylvie Geerts (2014) mention the process of conceptual blending (used in contemporary adaptations of children's literature), which refers to the mind's capacity to creatively connect and integrate both similarities and differences. The authors point out that a particular retelling is not just an adaptation of a single source text, but "a part of a larger process of adaptation in which many other retellings and intertextual affiliations lie between a common source text" (Stephens & Geerts, 2014, p. 193). In this manner, some works present a conceptual blending of both traditional texts and their 21<sup>st</sup>-century adaptations, which produce a completely new, "third story". This is similar to Bacchilega's (2013) concept of the intertextual web. Modern generations of readers are more oriented towards online (multi-modal, intertextual and politically charged) versions of stories, which invite readers to "question the role of traditional narratives in contemporary society" (Stephens & Geerts, 2014, p. 211).

We live in an online era when everything is possible, and children can access immense amounts of information. In such a period, modern authors/adaptors have a very difficult task of creating something that will entertain modern child audiences, who "require texts of a kind which adapt the cultures of the past to engage with the diffuse nature of contemporary textuality and information flows" (Stephens & Geerts, 2014, p. 211). It is therefore up to contemporary authors to get children's attention by re-making traditional fairy tales in an interesting and engaging way. The rest of this chapter explores the different adaptation strategies used to re-make fairy tales. Specifically, the focus is on the main strategies used in *Prince Cinders* and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Hutcheon relies only on canonical works as pre-texts (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013).

### 3.1. Adaptation strategies

In order to survive, the fairy-tale genre needed to be adapted and modernised so it could keep up with contemporary trends. Thanks to the ever-growing number of their retellings, the traditional tales managed to survive over centuries (Joosen, 2011, p. 2). Since the 1990s, fairy tales have often appeared in the form of revisionist picturebooks, which rewrite traditional stories in new and interesting ways (Joosen, 2018, p. 479). Since picturebooks are a blend of the verbal and the visual, it is both the author of the text and the illustrator who introduce the changes: for example, the change in the setting of the story can sometimes be seen only in the illustrations (ibid., p. 480). According to Kevin Paul Smith, revisionist fairy tales are stories which put “a new spin on an old tale” (2007, p. 10), for example, by giving the female character a more active role. For him, every new version of a fairy tale counts as a revision, whether it is a Disney animated movie or a picturebook (ibid., p. 34). Both picturebooks analysed in this thesis – *Prince Cinders* and *Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* – are revisions of the traditional “Cinderella” tale. However, they use different adaptation strategies: the gender reversal (*Prince Cinders*) and the change of perspective (*Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*).

#### 3.1.1. Gender reversal

Many contemporary “Cinderella” revisions are inspired by the feminist movement (Riggs, 2016, p. 180). Responding to criticism of the main character as passive and dependent, they aim to create a more active heroine by making her stronger and less dependent on the prince. Some revisions offer gender-reversed stories in which the role of Cinderella is played by a male character. According to Jennifer Orme (2016, p. 221):

Sex reversals of characters as well as gendered-trait reversals were and are common techniques to make fairy-tale picture books more acceptable to parents concerned with gender inequality. Simply making girls into a rescuing princess and/or giving girls “masculine” gender traits and behaviour, such as creating and implementing rescue plans, physical acts of bravery, and athleticism, are assumed to be enough to make feminist icons of them.

Babette Cole uses this strategy in her *Prince Cinders* by creating a male Cinderella who looks weak and needs to be rescued from his miserable life. Cinders marries Princess Lovelpenny, an active and completely independent female character who

takes things into her hands, which shows that women are not just pretty objects who passively wait for their prince to arrive.

According to Vanessa Joosen, “the reversal of gender characteristics is a popular strategy in feminist retellings, in which former negative and positive features are redistributed among male and female characters” (2011, p. 292). It is also one of the “earliest, simplest, and most popular strategies to correct the patriarchal model of representation in traditional fairy tales” (ibid., p. 86), commonly used in picturebooks due to the humorous tone it adds to the story. Cinderella is not the only fairy-tale heroine whose gender is changed in fairy-tale revisions: for example, *Sleeping Beauty* becomes *Sleeping Boy* (written by Sonia Craddock, 1999) or *Sleeping Bobby* (written by Will and Mary Pope Osborne, 2005), while *Little Red Riding Hood* becomes *Little Red Riding Wolf* (written by Laurence Anholt, 2004). Similar to Riggs (2016), Joosen (2011) also claims that these revisions are inspired by the feminist movement, since they want to correct the gender stereotypes found in traditional stories and show female characters in a more positive light.

### **3.1.2. Different point of view: Changing the narrator**

Another adaptation strategy used by contemporary authors is the inversion of the position of the narrative voice in relation to the story. Heterodiegetic narrator is placed outside the story and often referred to as third-person narrator, and homodiegetic narrator is placed inside the story and participates in it and is usually referred to as the first-person narrator. When this homodiegetic narrator-character tells the story about him/herself, and becomes the hero, the protagonist of the story, the narrative voice becomes an autodiegetic narrator (Gérard Genette, as quoted in Narančić Kovač, 2015, p. 27). Authors can choose either a personal (first-person) or an impersonal (third-person) narrator (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 174). Changing the narrator can make the story more humorous and explore things that did not get much attention in the traditional version (McCallum, 2008, p. 181). This strategy is used by Trisha Speed Shaskan in *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*, published in the series of picturebook revisions entitled “The Other Side of the Story”. Each of the verbal texts of the picturebooks in the series is written by a first-person narrator, who is also a character. That is how the reader is exposed to the point of view of one character from a traditional fairy tale: for example, one of the dwarves from “Snow

White” (*Seriously, Snow White was SO Forgetful!* by Nancy Loewen and Gerald Guerlais, 2013) or the sorceress from “Rapunzel” (*Really, Rapunzel Needed a Haircut!* by Jessica Gunderson and Denis Alonso, 2013). Other titles in the series are *Believe Me, Goldilocks Rocks!: The Story of the Three Bears as Told by Baby Bear* (2011) by Nancy Loewen and Tatevik Avakyan, *Honestly, Red Riding Hood Was Rotten!: The Story of Little Red Riding Hood as Told by the Wolf* (2011) by Trisha Speed Shaskan and Gerald Guerlais, *Trust Me, Jack’s Beanstalk Stinks!: The Story of Jack and the Beanstalk as Told by the Giant* (2011) by Eric Braun and Cristian Bernardini, *Truly, We Both Loved Beauty Dearly!: The Story of Sleeping Beauty as Told by the Good and Bad Fairies* (2013) by Trisha Speed Shaskan and Amit Tayal, *Frankly, I Never Wanted To Kiss Anybody!: The Story of the Frog Prince as Told by the Frog* (2013) by Nancy Loewen and Denis Alonso, *No Kidding, Mermaids Are a Joke!: The Story of the Little Mermaid as Told by the Prince* (2013) by Nancy Loewen and Amit Tayal, *No Lie, I Acted Like a Beast!: The Story of Beauty and the Beast as Told by the Beast* (2013) by Nancy Loewen and Cristian Bernardini, *Believe Me, I Never Felt a Pea!: The Story of the Princess and the Pea as Told by the Princess* (2016) by Nancy Loewen and Cristian Bernardini, *No Lie, Pigs (and Their Houses) Can Fly!: The Story of the Three Little Pigs as Told by the Wolf* (2016) by Jessica S. Gunderson and Cristian Bernardini, *I’d Rather Spin Myself a New Name!: The Story of Rumpelstiltskin as Told by Rumpelstiltskin* (2016) by Jessica S. Gunderson and Janna Bock, *Honestly, Our Music Stole The Show!: The Story of the Bremen Town Musicians as Told by the Donkey* (2018) by Jessica S. Gunderson and Cristian Bernardini, and *Truthfully, Something Smelled Fishy!: The Story of the Fisherman and His Wife as Told by the Wife* (2018) by Jessica S. Gunderson and Gerald Guerlais (The Other Side of the Story n.d.). This series is aimed at educators, i.e. teachers, to read with their pupils, and it is rather popular.

This strategy allows readers to get to know that character’s thoughts, desires and wishes. Speed Shaskan rewrites the “Cinderella” story from the point of view of the “evil” stepmother, who represents her own character as good (the character says that about herself; Speed Shaskan, 2011) and explains the events from her own perspective. The stepmother wants to share her story, her hopes and dreams, and teach readers a valuable lesson: that there are always two sides to every story.

Revisions of “Little Red Riding Hood” are often based on this strategy: by telling his side of the story the wolf becomes the main character and is often shown as the hero, rather than the villain (McCallum, 2015, p. 182). The strategy is used to reveal the wolf’s motives, thoughts, emotions and dreams, which give the authors of such revisions the chance “to lay bare the wolf’s soul” (Beckett, 2014, p. 9).

#### 4. *PRINCE CINDERS*

*Prince Cinders* is a picturebook created by Babette Cole, published in 1987. Babette Cole (1949–2017) was a British writer and illustrator of picturebooks for children. She won many awards for her illustrations and became widely recognised for her sense of humour, witty and original stories, and her brilliance when it comes to handling so-called sensitive (controversial or even taboo) topics, such as puberty, death or divorce. Many of her books became bestsellers; some of the most celebrated ones include *Mommy Laid an Egg* (1993), which was translated into 72 languages, *Hair in Funny Places* (1999), and the fairy-tale princess series, which includes *Princes Smartypants* (1986), *Long Live Princess Smartypants* (2005), and *Princess Smartypants Breaks the Rules* (2009). Being part of such interesting and, in a way, different stories, her characters could be described as

caricatures, outlandish, ridiculous, and often grotesque; [...] their adventures tend to transgress the bounds of childhood purity and innocence so desired by adults for children's literature (Orme, 2016, p. 219).

Babette Cole turns fairy tales upside down, thus creating something new, interesting and appealing for modern generations. One of these “upside-down” fairy tales is the picturebook *Prince Cinders* (Herbert, 2016).

This picturebook is recognised as one of the most famous feminist fairy-tale revisions and one of the most popular parodies of the well-known “Cinderella” tale (Orme, 2016, pp. 220, 221). According to Jennifer Orme (2016), *Prince Cinders* could be described as a response to feminist debates about fairy tales that were quite vocal at the time of its publication (ibid.). Donald Haase (2000) summarizes early feminist criticism of fairy tales, which questioned the influence of female characters in traditional fairy tales on the gender identity and behaviour of their child audience. Feminist criticism changed the way fairy tales are “produced, received, studied, and taught” (Haase, 2000, p. 41), and influenced their modern adaptations. Since *Prince Cinders* addresses gender and sexual identity, it can also be connected to queer/trans discussions about fairy tales. Queer studies, which recently appeared in the context of fairy-tale studies and other areas of research, show that old stories may contain new – queer, trans – meanings. Their focus is on “the tales’ internal struggles, suggestive of multiple and more complex desires and their perversely performative nature” (Turner & Greenhill, 2012, p. 3).

According to Jack Zipes,

the purpose of producing a revised fairy tale is to create something new that incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes of audiences. As a result of transformed values, the revised classical fairy tale seeks to alter the reader's views of traditional patterns, images, and codes (1994, p. 9).

In that sense, *Prince Cinders* responds to feminist fairy-tale criticism by subverting traditional masculine and feminine gender norms, and patterns of behaviour.

#### **4.1. Summary**

At the beginning of the picturebook, we are introduced to Prince Cinders, who, at first glance, does not look like much of a prince: he wears jeans, a white shirt, untied sneakers and an apron since he does all the household chores. He does not look particularly “manly”, especially when compared to his three big hairy brothers who resemble the stereotypical macho men with long black moustaches from Mexican telenovelas. Unlike them, Cinders is “small, spotty, scruffy and skinny” (Cole, 1987, [n.p.]). He also wears a small crown (which signifies his royal status), while his brothers, in accordance with their size, wear big, rich crowns. The brothers set off to the disco with their blond princess girlfriends in modern cars, while Cinders stays behind to clean their mess. A fairy pays him a visit (she comes in through the chimney) and grants him three wishes. First, she transforms an empty can into a car – although, a toy car. Cinders's next wish is to have a nice suit, but the fairy makes a mistake and transforms his rags into a swimsuit. Finally, Cinders wishes to become big and hairy like his brothers; yet again, the fairy does not quite make his dreams come true – instead, she transforms him into a big hairy monkey! Cinders is not aware of his new looks (that is how the magic works) and goes to the disco. He does not fit through the door, so he decides to take the bus back home. At the bus station, he meets a princess named Lovelypenny, who is really afraid of the big hairy animal. As the clock strikes midnight, Prince Cinders is transformed into his old self. The princess thinks he is the one who saved her from the monkey, but Cinders is too shy to continue the conversation and runs away. While running, he loses his trousers, which Princess Lovelypenny uses in her “husband search”. Every prince in the kingdom tries on the trousers, but no one can fit into them. Finally, Prince Cinders tries them on, they fit him, and Princess Lovelypenny immediately



proposes. They get married and live happily ever after. At the very end of the story, the big hairy brothers are turned into house fairies (Cole, 1987).

## 4.2. Analysis

*Prince Cinders* mostly follows the pattern of the traditional “Cinderella” story (with elements from both Perrault and the Grimms) but sets it in a new context and plays with traditional gender norms to depict unexpected and funny characters. As the illustrations suggest, the story is set in a rather contemporary context, both in terms of time (possibly sometime between 1980 and 1990, when the book was first published) and place (a modern town). Instead of going to the ball (typical for the time in which the traditional versions were first published), Cinders goes out to the disco.

When it comes to characters in Cole’s picturebook, they are not as flat as traditional fairy-tale characters – in other words, they are not just good or bad. While Prince Cinders and Princess Lovelpenny are the protagonists, and the three brothers are the antagonists, they are somehow more than that. Cinders is good, slightly naive, and insecure, lacks some traditionally masculine characteristics, but eventually finds happiness, both in love and the social sphere. Princess Lovelpenny also has more attributes than just being good: she is active, brave, and does not wait for things to just happen: she acts in order to make them happen. Cinders’s brothers are also not just mean to Cinders: they have rich love lives and social lives (they go to the disco in their modern cars and take their blonde girlfriends with them), they are good-looking and very masculine (in Cinders’s eyes), and after all, they are the ones Cinders looks up to (along with the bodybuilders in the magazines he reads). Although they mistreat him and make him do everything around the house, Cinders still really wishes to be like them. According to Orme, the clumsy fairy is a queer figure in the text as she “disfigures and undoes naturalized gender identities and sexual politics” (2016, p. 226). The fairy is depicted as a small child wearing a school uniform (plus her looks makes her not feminine at all, in contrast to all the fairies from the Disney movies), comes down the chimney in a cloud of ash, performs all the magic in the wrong way, and is shown in a parodical and humorous way.

The simple illustrations accentuate the parodical and humorous elements of the story, such as Cinders's looks, the brothers' masculinity, Princess Lovelpenny's courage and the fairy's clumsiness. The picturebook does not come with a clear moral at the end (as Perrault's story), but there is more than one message that can be extracted from the story: for example, not to try to be like somebody else and instead to be true to oneself; or, sometimes you need to take matters into your own hands in order to make them happen). Like most picturebooks, this one is written for children, but can also be appreciated by grownups: it is a "politically correct" picturebook that can teach children to value certain things (for example, to appreciate every human being, whether they are skinny and spotty or big and hairy, and learning that those who love them will love them for their actions and behaviour, and not their looks) and teach grownups to open their eyes, expand their horizons, and step out of the box.

When compared to Perrault's and the Grimms' stories, *Prince Cinders* is a parody full of humorous elements and different types of exaggeration. Just like Cinderella, Prince Cinders wears rags, bravely accepts his brothers' mockery and all the teasing about his looks; he does all the domestic chores and gets help from a magical character; he goes to a "ball" (the disco), meets a princess on his way home, and loses his trousers instead of a shoe, which the princess then uses to find him. Like Cinderella, Prince Cinders gets his happy ending. The two balls mentioned in Perrault's story are replaced with one visit to the disco, but that one visit is enough for Cinders to find happiness. *Prince Cinders* does not mention the main character's parents and replaces the two stepsisters with three brothers. Furthermore, as the title suggests, Prince Cinders is a prince (even though he does not live like a proper prince), meaning he is of royal origin. In contrast, Perrault's and the Grimms' Cinderellas both come from rich families, but do not have any royal connections before marrying the prince. Cole borrows the character of the fairy godmother from Perrault and turns her into a dirty, dusty, clumsy helper. The end of the story combines elements from both Perrault's and the Grimms' "Cinderella" stories: the brothers are punished and turned into house helpers (just as the evil stepsisters in the Grimms' "Aschenputtel" are punished by having their eyes pecked out), not by the birds or with the help of a magical tree, but by the clumsy fairy inspired by Perrault

(the idea of punishing the brothers comes from an agreement between the fairy and Princess Lovelpenny).

Cole's re-vision of the classic "Cinderella" tale is based on gender reversal (Joosen, 2011): Cinderella becomes a man, the stepsisters become brothers (or stepbrothers, but we cannot tell for sure), and the main character marries a princess. Prince Cinders is presented in a funny way: he is not too bright, and he is very passive and shy (he runs away when a girl tries to talk to him and takes orders from the princess). This is similar to the way in which female characters are presented in traditional fairy tales: they are kind and patient, usually need to be saved, and are sometimes so passive they need to be kissed to wake up from a long dream by a handsome prince, who ends up being the hero (Stone, 1975). Cole transfers these traditionally female characteristics to a male protagonist and switches the gender of the central protagonist, which is one of the adaptation strategies for creating a revisionist or "fractured fairy tale" (McCallum, 2008, p. 181). Although Cinders is male, he is actually the one who needs to be saved: a proper "damsel" in distress. Portrayed as small and weak, mistreated by his big brothers, unable to defend himself, and forced to do all the domestic chores, Prince Cinders escapes from this course of life by marrying Princess Lovelpenny, who becomes "the agent through which his heterosexuality (or masculinity he desires so badly) is both created and affirmed" (Orne, 2016, p. 223).

Prince Cinders is not the first example of a male Cinderella in world literature. On the contrary, the character can be traced back to old Norwegian folk tales about a boy named Askeladden, or the ash-lad. Although the first Askeladden stories were published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some say they date back to the Viking period (Brunvand, 1959). The story follows a boy who is the youngest member of the family, and lives with poor parents and two older brothers. Just like the traditional Cinderella, he is mistreated by his brothers and made to sleep in the ashes, but later proves to be smart and intelligent enough to gain wealth and esteem. There are four characteristics of almost every Askeladden story: his nickname, the ash-sitting, the poverty of his family, and the rivalry between the brothers over inheritance (Brunvand, 1959). At some point in the story, Askeladden's brothers leave home in order to take part in a competition announced by the king, in which the main prize is the princess's hand. Askeladden is left behind, but eventually also leaves to try his

luck at marrying the princess. On their way, the three brothers encounter different obstacles, such as wild animals, or old people asking for food and offering advice or help in return. While his older brothers are not keen on helping anyone, Askeladden reveals his true, good and kind nature, and receives magical rewards for his good deeds. Askeladden appears in different versions of the story, which show him as he takes part in different kinds of adventures; but whether he is fighting a troll, or verbally outsmarting the princess, he stays kind and humble until the very end (von Krogh, 1989) – just like Prince Cinders.

From the perspective of the feminist criticism, Princess Lovelypenny has a significant role in the story. At a time when many were questioning whether fairy tales are good or bad for children, authors like Babette Cole and Robert Munch (*The Paper Bag Princess*, 1980) created heroines who are completely unlike their classical (good, kind, and passive) predecessors, meaning “strong, active and intelligent female protagonists” (Orme, 2016, p. 220). The classical predecessors are the princesses already mentioned – the ones who are kind to everyone, good and pious, and usually very passive, only waiting for Prince Charming to come and rescue them (from an enchanted tower, a 100-year-long dream, a glass coffin, or a miserable life with an evil stepmother and her two daughters). Cole’s Princess Lovelypenny presents

a typical gender-reversal style re-vision; she is active, independent, and perceptive. After she provides Cinders with his happily ever after by marrying him, she also instigates a punishment for Cinders’s big hairy brothers by whispering something to the fairy about them (Orme, 2016, p. 221).

However, even though Lovelypenny acts like a strong, independent woman, she starts the conversation with Cinders, finds him and proposes to him, she does not get her “feminist” happy ending. After they get married, the illustrations show her bringing Cinders food while he is enjoying his time resting on a sofa, which might suggest that she is subordinate to him. A more fitting ending would more clearly show them as equals, perhaps cleaning or hanging out together. A different solution could be changing this illustration and showing Princess Lovelypenny resting on the sofa, happy and satisfied with what she has achieved, all thanks to her bravery and actions, while Prince Cinders is at her disposal and grants her every wish. However, in this situation, Cinders’s life would not really change much for the better.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

*Prince Cinders* is a picturebook that promotes diversity, unity and equality, showing us that we all deserve to love and to be loved. It shows that masculinity is not a synonym for being big and hairy, but also small, weak, spotty and skinny; that sometimes it is okay not to be able to defend yourself, because there is always someone who will do it for you. It also shows us that everyone can do anything: a man can do all the house cleaning and a woman can be her own hero, take matters into her own hands and propose to a man. Gender roles are somehow forced upon us, since we live in a world full of stereotypes, but this picturebook is a great example of stepping out of the box and crossing boundaries. Finally, this picturebook provides an important lesson: trying to be someone else will lead you nowhere, because people who love you and support you will love you for who you truly are.

## **5. SERIOUSLY, CINDERELLA IS SO ANNOYING!**

First published in 2011, this interesting picturebook was created by American picturebook author Trisha Speed Shaskan and by Gerald Guerlais. Speed Shaskan wrote more than 40 books for children and teenagers, and loves spending time with children – as a teacher, educator, or life coach. In addition to writing children’s books, she has taught storytelling and creative writing to groups of students from kindergarten to graduate-school. Some of her most notable picturebooks are *Punk Skunks* (2016), which was illustrated by her husband Stephen, and a number of “fractured fairy tales” published in an ongoing picturebook series “The Other Side of the Story”. All picturebooks published in the series use the same strategy of adaptation, which is writing traditional fairy tales from a different perspective, which makes the familiar stories more interesting and adds a humorous tone (Kujundžić, 2016, p. 88). Speed Shaskan’s books in the series are inspired by famous fairy-tale heroines such as Little Red Riding Hood (*Honestly, Red Riding Hood Was Rotten!*, 2011), Cinderella (*Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*, 2011), and Sleeping Beauty (*Truly, We Both Loved Beauty Dearly!*, 2013). Speed Shaskan does not address revolutionary or thought-provoking themes like Babette Cole or put traditional characters into new settings, but tells traditional stories from different points of view. For example, *Honestly, Red Riding Hood Was Rotten!* is written from the wolf’s point of view, and in *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* we get the idea how Cinderella’s stepmother felt since she is the one telling the story (Speed Shaskan, n.d.).

### **5.1. Summary**

On the front cover of the picturebook, right under the title, it says: *The story of Cinderella as told by the wicked stepmother*, so the reader immediately gets the idea who the main character is. The “wicked” stepmother begins her story by explaining that she is not wicked at all – it is just one more of Cinderella’s wild stories. She wants to share her version – the real and true story – with the readers. The stepmother talks about her dreams of getting married, and while talking, calls Cinderella “Cindy”; the “wicked” stepmother from traditional versions of “Cinderella” would probably never give Cinderella a sweet nickname like this one. She continues the story by describing how she married Cindy’s father and later

moved into his house along with her daughters. However, as soon as the father leaves for business and the girls stay home alone, Cinderella starts telling her stories. She tells all kinds of stories, all the time. She even talks about animals that help her clean, and the stepmother, while she likes a good story, still “prefers facts to fiction”. The stepmother gives Cinderella different chores just to keep her occupied (in other words, quiet), and Cinderella really does all the cleaning (together with her stepsisters). However, thanks to her animal helpers she is done very quickly and still has plenty of time for her stories. Time passes by, but Cindy never stops telling stories: she tells them in the garden, in the kitchen, while mopping the floors or doing the laundry. She talks nonstop, not minding when someone asks her to stop. One day, a letter arrives inviting the girls to the king’s ball. The stepmother is sure the prince will marry one of her daughters. Cinderella also wishes to attend the ball, so she shares that with her stepmother. But at that very moment Cinderella loses her voice! The stepmother is sure that this is caused by her nonstop storytelling, so she advises Cinderella to stay at home and rest. Here, the stepmother admits how hard it actually is to be a stepmother and leave Cinderella all alone. The stepsisters have a great time at the ball, when a strange girl enters the room wearing a magnificent dress. No one recognises her, but the stepsisters are left prince-less, since the prince dances only with the beautiful stranger. After the ball, the prince announces that he has found a lost shoe and will marry its owner. The stepsisters think this is their chance to win the prince. Cindy also wants to try the shoe, and it fits! She starts telling a story about a pumpkin, mice, and a fairy godmother, but the stepmother does not believe such nonsense. Cindy and the prince get married, and the stepmother and her daughters also live happily ever after, because they no longer have to listen to Cindy’s stories (Speed Shaskan, 2011).

## **5.2. Analysis**

It is not specified when and where the story takes place, but – judging by the illustrations, which show an environment that is rather traditional – one can assume it is around the same time, or rather undetermined, as traditional versions of “Cinderella” (for example, Perrault’s). Also, the characters attend the ball announced by the king, which also follows the traditional versions of the story. All the characters that appear in the picturebook are characters from traditional versions, but with slightly different characteristics. Being the main character in this picturebook,

the stepmother is portrayed as a victim and, as she states at the beginning of the story, not wicked at all. She may be the antagonist in almost every version of “Cinderella”, but here, she shows her good side. Her husband, Cindy’s father, leaves home for business as soon as the girls move in, leaving his new bride all alone with their three daughters. She is quite reasonable, listens to Cindy’s stories as much as she possibly can, but snaps at a point and tells her to stop talking. She even feels sorry for Cindy when she gets sick and is unable to attend the ball, and when she is obliged to advise her to stay at home and rest.

Usually, fairy tales include flat characters with “almost no depiction of internal states”, who are usually either of royal origin or beggars, and are either “completely good or utterly evil” (Lipman, 1999, p. 76). The stepmother in Speed Shaskan’s picturebook, however, is not the flat character typical of traditional fairy tales; instead, we get the idea how she feels throughout the whole story, what she thinks about certain things, her dreams and desires. Cinderella, or Cindy, is portrayed as an annoying girl who always tells stories and never listens to anyone, even when they tell her to stop talking. She is quite different from the traditional Cinderella who is always good, pious, humble and – in the Grimms’ variant – quiet. The stepsisters are not described very much in the text, but there is one interesting detail: they are the ones who actually clean the house – or they try to help, but Cindy is just faster with all the help she gets from her animal friends. The prince is also not described in detail: he just dances with Cindy, finds her after the ball and they get married in the end. The only character from the traditional versions which does not appear in the picturebook is the fairy godmother (or a similar magical helper). Cindy does mention her in the last of her stories, while trying on the shoe, but she never actually appears.

When it comes to illustrating revisionist fairy tales, contemporary illustrators have a really important task since it is their duty to find an original approach among the vast number of styles and images that already exist (Joosen, 2018, p. 473). Their job is to make a familiar story interesting by combining the old and the new in an attractive way (ibid.). The cartoon-like illustrations in Speed Shaskan’s picturebook are pretty vivid and bold; they follow the text nicely and accentuate the humorous elements of the story, especially the characters’ facial expressions. The stepmother’s every emotion is clearly displayed, her face reflects her thoughts and statements; Cindy’s face (more specifically, her smile), on the other hand, is the same in every



picture, except for three moments: when she loses her voice, when she cries because she needs to stay at home and rest, and when she wants to try on the shoe. In those moments we can see changes in her facial expression (she is not smiling but is rather sad and shocked). Cindy's smile really fits in the story as it shows her not being bothered by anyone or anything; she always keeps telling her stories in the same annoying way. The illustrations do provide some details that are not mentioned in the text. For example, when asked whether the house is clean or not, Cindy says she does not know, but we can see the dust and spider webs all around the house. Cindy's father is drawn as being very happy when he leaves the house, creating the impression that he cannot wait to be gone from the house full of women. One more interesting detail that accentuates the humorous note of the story is the stepsisters putting different vegetables into their ears so they would not hear Cindy's nonstop storytelling.

The main topics of this picturebook include understanding and respecting others' wishes, merging two families into one, accepting others, and the importance of communication. All these topics are slightly different from those addressed in traditional versions of the story (for example, Perrault's story is about social connections and the status of women in that period, and their ultimate goal of getting married). Speed Shaskan's picturebook mostly follows the traditional "Cinderella" plot: the stepmother and her two daughters move in with Cinderella and her father; the father leaves; the king announces a big ball to find a bride for his son; Cinderella is told not to attend the ball, but then magically appears there; she loses her shoe; the prince uses the shoe to find Cinderella and they get married. The only differences are that Cinderella does not attend the ball because of health reasons (not because she is forbidden to do so) and there is one ball instead of two. Changing the number of balls from two to one is a common thing in contemporary adaptations: the Disney movie also has one ball (Disney, 1950) and Prince Cinders goes to the disco only once (Cole, 1987). The fairy godmother, who is one of the key characters in Perrault's story, does not physically appear in Speed Shaskan's picturebook: she is only mentioned in one of Cindy's stories, which no one pays much attention to (the stepmother does listen, but does not actually believe it). Finally, the ending of *Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* is slightly different from traditional versions of "Cinderella". The story does not end with the usual "And THEY lived happily ever

after”, but instead with: “WE, on the other hand, lived happily ever after” (Speed Shaskan, 2011, (n.p.), emphasis added). This is another humorous element of the story: the stepmother and her daughters are not sad because they have lost in the race for the prince; on the contrary, they are happy because someone else will listen to Cindy’s stories. Cindy gets help from her animal friends whenever she does the house chores, an element which is borrowed from the Disney movie (and can also be connected to the Grimms’ variant and the bird helpers), but these events do not appear in Perrault’s story.

As mentioned above, Maria Nikolajeva lists several types of narrators, including the first-person and third-person narrator (2005, p. 174). Traditional fairy tales are usually told by a third-person omniscient narrator, meaning an impersonal narrator who literally knows everything and can enter the characters’ minds (*ibid.*, p. 175). In contrast, Speed Shaskan’s story is told in the first person – by the stepmother. In this way, the stepmother becomes the main character, we get her side of the story and insight into her mind as she shares her dreams, hopes, and thoughts with the reader. This adaptation strategy is popular among authors who rewrite or adapt traditional fairy tales. Sandra L. Beckett (2014) collected 52 different retellings of “Little Red Riding Hood” from all around the world into her anthology, dividing them into categories based on the main adaptation strategy. One of those categories includes changing the focus from the protagonist to the antagonist or changing the point of view so that the wolf becomes the main character and/or the narrator. Authors who use this strategy “put the spotlight on the wolf, telling his story from various points of view” (Beckett, 2014, p. 9). Beckett explains that the narrator-wolf tries to portray himself as a positive, good character, and somehow justify his behaviour and actions (*ibid.*, p. 10). This is also the strategy Speed Shaskan uses in her picturebook: she tells the “wicked” stepmother’s version of the story to make her look good instead of wicked, to justify what traditional versions present as her mistreatment of Cinderella, and make her look like a victim of an annoying stepdaughter who does not want to listen to the members of her new family.

The story does not have an explicit moral (like Perrault’s story) or a didactic note that would teach young girls to be good and pious (like the Grimms’s version). However, it has lots of educational potential. This is a book for young children (because of the nice illustrations and simple language), which can be used in

different situations in class. The author herself offers a number of suggestions for additional creative activities. The back cover contains some questions and prompts for further discussion. Readers are encouraged to compare Shaskan's story to more famous, traditional versions of "Cinderella" and come up with their own alternative versions of different stories or tell the same story from different points of view (Kujundžić, 2016, p. 89).

### **5.3. Conclusion**

This picturebook offers a valuable lesson by explaining that there are always two sides to the same story, and one must take both into consideration before making any assumptions or conclusions. Also, it teaches children that it is up to them to finally decide which side of the story is true, and which one is not. *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* puts a new spin on the classic story we all thought we knew; it offers something modern and refreshing while being rooted in something canonical. With its humorous elements, colourful and vivid illustrations that complement the text, and main characters with slightly changed characteristics, this picturebook contributes to the affirmed status of the "Cinderella" tale and its status within children's literature.

## CONCLUSION

Reading and writing about “Cinderella” has been, above all, a very interesting journey. I have learned and discovered many things about fairy tales I never thought existed. The fairy-tale genre is so complex, yet intriguing: for centuries, it has had the power to attract masses of people, from children to grownups. One does not have to believe what is written in fairy tales or use them as “life manuals”, but there will always be something appealing about them, something mysterious and magical, something that will always be modern, regardless of when these stories were first created.

The “Cinderella” tale has changed through time: it exists in different variants around the world as well as in modern adaptations and revisions. The authors (together with the illustrators if we are talking about picturebooks) of those modern adaptations and revisions have a very difficult task of preserving the traditional stories. *Prince Cinders* and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!* are just two among the many examples of adaptations of traditional fairy tales, but they are really good examples of putting a new spin on an old tale and in that way making something interesting and appealing enough for modern child audiences. Picturebooks like these show readers that creativity has no boundaries and can go in many different directions. By addressing different types of criticism of the fairy tale (e.g. feminist criticism) and using different adaptation strategies – specifically, gender reversal (*Prince Cinders*) and changing the narrator (*Seriously, Cinderella is SO Annoying!*) – Cole and Speed Shaskan create new Cinderellas, who inhabit different settings, assume different genders and appear as either kind and lovely, or utterly annoying.

Cinderella was the first fairy tale character I remember from my childhood, either from animated films or picturebooks, which is why she holds a special place among other fairy-tale heroines. Some believe “Cinderella” promotes negative types of behaviour, such as sneaking out from your own house, or marrying a man you barely know; others claim it is a wonderful story that makes you believe in yourself and cherish your own values. For me, Cinderella is a story that makes you believe and hope; a story that will not let you stop dreaming, but make you think that

anything is possible. Sometimes, all you need is a bit of magic – and fairy tales have plenty of that.

Contemporary picturebook adaptations of “Cinderella” and other fairy tales is an interesting topic that can be studied in many different ways. For further research, I would like to propose a study that would show how children respond to picturebooks like *Prince Cinders* and *Seriously, Cinderella Is SO Annoying!*. Reading these stories and discussing them with children would provide insight into how they feel about the different versions and approaches to the traditional story. It would also help us understand how the story can survive and maintain its popularity in the digital era.

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## **Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada**

Izjavljujem da sam ja, Marija Šarec Miškin, studentica integriranoga preddiplomskoga i diplomskoga studija primarnoga obrazovanja s engleskim jezikom Učiteljskoga fakulteta u Zagrebu, samostalno napisala ovaj diplomski rad uvažavajući komentare i izmjene mentorica.

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Potpis

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