

Comic Book Princesses For Grown-Ups: Cinderella Meets the Pages of the Superhero

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Comic book superheroes and fairy tale princesses are stalwarts of contemporary children's culture.¹ Yet, they epitomise an intensifying gender segregation that is manifested and negotiated even up to the representation of female fairy tale protagonists in adult comics. This article examines the appearances of the iconic fairy tale princess, Cinderella, in twenty-first century adult comics including Bill Willingham's *Fables* and Joe Tyler and Ralph Tedesco's *Grimm Fairy Tales*. The tales of Perrault, the Grimms and Disney have shaped the contemporary iconography of Cinderella, emphasising the heroine's journey from ashes and housework to tiaras and handsome princes. These popular tales, problematised by easy misogyny and patriarchal expectations, have overshadowed earlier versions of the Cinderella story, in which the heroine attacks her despised stepmother and beheads ogresses. Rediscovering the earlier, cunning and feisty incarnations of Cinderella, including Basile's "The Cinderella Cat" and d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron," it can be seen how fairy tales' interests in costume, masquerade and cunning have been readily absorbed into the comic book medium. Agnes B. Curry and Josef Velazquez call superhero stories "the next step in the fairy tale tradition,"² and once we strip the patriarchal trappings from the early tales of Cinderella, the character can bridge this transition. Cinderella may sit as easily upon the shelves in a

comic book store as upon Mother Goose's tongue.

Over a period spanning five centuries, Perrault, the Grimms, and Disney present a Cinderella who defines the rags to riches tale. Grieving and downtrodden by stepmother and sisters, the classic image of Cinderella is of a passive heroine who, by virtue of her kindness, obedience and good shoes, marries a prince. Charles Perrault's "Cinderella" was first published in 1697 during the fairy tale vogue that had swept France under Louis XIV. The vogue was, in fact, dominated by female authors, and Christopher Betts notes that with few exceptions, Perrault's tales, being composed for children, were distinct "from those by Perrault's contemporaries, Mme d'Aulnoy and others, who wrote 'contes merveilleux' (magic tales) for an adult readership."³ Perrault's version of the fairy tale became the basis for Disney's 1950 animated feature, which includes such additions as singing mice and a cuddly fairy godmother.⁴ By this time, fairy tales were firmly regarded as children's entertainment and Perrault's tale, with its glass slipper and pumpkin coach, was dominant. The Grimms' "Aschenputtel" (1812), with its emphasis on the heroine's connection to her dead mother and the physical mutilation of the stepsisters, is less familiar, though the literary activity of the Grimms as a whole was pivotal in the primary association of fairy tales with children that emerges in the nineteenth century.⁵

Jack Zipes notes "the 'proper' fairy tale for children had become a hot commodity used expressly to socialize children in families and at schools."⁶ In fact, the fairy tale became specifically identified with girls, Marina Warner noting "with their pinnacled castles and rose-wreathed princesses, their enchanted sleeps and dashing princes showing a leg, they were also definitely girly."⁷ Unfortunately, the fairy tale likewise became associated almost exclusively with those male authors who largely reproduced patriarchal constructions of female behaviour in their tales. Anne Duggan, for instance, writes: "Perrault's works set the groundwork for and anticipate the bourgeois misogyny of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that sought to circumscribe women's activity to the domestic sphere of the patriarchal family."⁸ Disney's *Cinderella*, based on Perrault, brought this into the twentieth century, Naomi Wood arguing that the feature's theme that dreams can come true "is shaped by the values of self-control and devotion to duty, as defined by a patriarchal order."⁹ Such criticism is not uncommon, nor is the assertion that Disney has become hegemonic, displacing Perrault and the Grimms. In fact, Disney is simply a culmination of this patriarchal incursion in Cinderella's history.

Disney's hegemony, in fact, becomes the locus of an incongruous relationship between the patriarchal text and the female child. The discord

is evident in titles like Peggy Orenstein's 2011 *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, critiquing princess culture and its links to Disney. It is not precisely the tales that have become the focus in the twenty-first century, though they have certainly generated criticism in the past and continue to do so, but the marketing of the princesses themselves as lifted from narrative context.¹⁰ The Disney marketing strategy, originating at the turn of the century, is directed virtually exclusively at young girls under six and features princesses from Disney's animated fairy tale features, including Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, Belle and Rapunzel.¹¹ The product range that features their images includes everything from booster seats and sippy cups to nail varnish and underwear. The Disney princess range coincides with a general marketing trend of increasingly aggressive and exclusive use of pink in toys, media and marketing directed at young girls: pink being used largely to promote domesticity and romance.¹²

Concern has been expressed about the gendered nature of princess culture and its effect on girls, with writers including Peggy Orenstein particularly concerned that princess culture leads to greater sexualisation of girls and, consequently, women: "Did playing Cinderella shield them from early sexualization or prime them for it?"¹³ The key element that distinguishes the Disney princess range is the promotion of representation over narrative, focusing attention on female physical appearance and highly feminised dress.¹⁴ The princesses, garbed in pastel gowns, are grouped together in a sorority typified by the production of the Mattel Disney Princess Ultimate Dream Castle, in which multiple princesses "live".¹⁵ The princesses are divorced from the political and social contexts of their individual narratives and blended seamlessly into one pink-tinged aesthetic for the pre-school girl, frozen in smiling poses.¹⁶

A number of fan artists have been taking the representation of these princesses and reimagining them as superheroes, attracting significant internet attention, as evident in links from popular "geek" sites like *io9*.¹⁷ The artists perpetuate the key princess culture constructs: namely, the princesses are more often depicted and arranged as a group of superheroes, rather than as separate individuals, with marginal narrative context. However, they reinvigorate the representation of the princesses by drawing on superhero iconography, which is largely masculine in nature. The superhero, whether female or male, is associated with the predominantly male comic book reader and is viewed as a masculine cultural bulwark.¹⁸ There are few female superheroes: those female heroes who do exist tend to be morally suspect (e.g. Phoenix and Catwoman) or sidekicks and counterparts to more high profile male superheroes (e.g. Supergirl and Batgirl). These few female superheroes are more often

portrayed as the object of male desire: represented in sexual poses with large breasts, long legs and skimpy clothing. Gladys L. Knight notes: "Female superheroes occasionally sparked interest from girls, but were primarily intended to be eye candy for boys."¹⁹ Although Richard J. Gray II argues that in recent representations, the superheroine is "a delicate balance between sex appeal and physical strength,"²⁰ more often than not, the balance is cruder. Girls are offered little beyond a handful of sexualised superheroes and a multitude of ultra-feminised princesses.²¹

The fan reimagining of princesses as superheroes occurs within this paucity/profusion juxtaposition, reflecting these extreme feminine and sexualised models while attempting to refashion them. Although the use of superhero iconography may well be an often successful attempt to provide agency to counter the perceived passivity of the princesses, such attempts are often based in costume adaptations that restyle signature gowns into short skirts and leotards. Anecdotal evidence does show that the worlds of the superhero and princess are nonetheless not so divided and that the connections between their representations are not exceptional. In 2011, *Comics Alliance* published an image of a young girl dressed up as a "Batman princess" for Halloween.²² While illustrating that the boundary between the representations of superhero and princess identities can be elastic, the publication of the image also drew attention to the successful combination of the apparently divergent identities. On *babble*, a year earlier, Lynn Harris noted: "One friend's daughter is cuckoo for Cinderella, but thinks she's a superhero."²³ Indeed, Wonder Woman, the most iconic of female superheroes, is an Amazonian princess who wears a tiara.²⁴ Peggy Orenstein acknowledged in a *New York Times* opinion piece, "What's Wrong with Cinderella?," the viability of the analogy: "The princess as superhero is not irrelevant."²⁵

Comics frequently utilise a wide range of motifs from fairy tale and folklore. Indeed, in 1975 Ronald Baker wrote on folklore motifs in superhero comics.²⁶ Adam Zolkofer took up the theme with a discussion of Bill Willingham's *Fables*, noting a dearth of scholarship on the topic since Baker as "unfortunate" since "comic book creators have been talking a great deal about folklore."²⁷ The *Fables* comic series, beginning in 2002, has won a number of Eisner Awards and been featured on *The New York Times* bestseller lists for graphic books. The series begins in New York, in an enclave called Fabletown inhabited by exiled fairy tale characters, known as fables, who have escaped the Adversary, conqueror of their homelands. As in the case of princess culture, the characters are lifted from their independent stories and combined, but unlike princess culture, in which there is limited, actual interaction between princesses, Willingham

exercises a well-developed narrative intertextuality that draws upon popular and more esoteric knowledge of fairy tales.²⁸ The princes of “Snow White,” “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella,” for example, are combined into one prince, being a triple divorcé and lothario, easily distracted by the next beautiful woman he sees. Snow White becomes a bureaucrat and eventually marries the sheriff/big bad wolf, Sleeping Beauty is independently wealthy and still prone to falling into a death-like sleep, and Cinderella is a spy, helping to topple the Adversary.²⁹ The relations between fables and their traditions are developed in the comics medium, with flashback references to fairy tale events and fables’ personalities and actions explained by their literary history, although the latter is dominated by the versions of the Grimms and Perrault.

Willingham, in turn, explicitly references the heritage and influence of superhero comics in the 2011 *Fables* story arc, invoking nostalgia for post-WWII nationalism in US comics.³⁰ The fables take on retro superhero-style identities and costumes as they face their latest enemy, Mister Dark. The arc makes explicit the similitude between fairy tale and superhero; issue 103, for instance, has a cover reminiscent of Superman iconography, showing a business shirt pulled open to reveal the superhero logo emblazoned on the costume beneath.³¹ Superhero identities are devised by Pinocchio, a proclaimed lover of comics, but the group is led by Ozma. Ozma is based on Frank L. Baum’s Princess Ozma. In *Fables*, she is identified as a witch, although her appearance as a golden haired girl is consistent with Baum. As a superhero, she is costumed in a short skirt, red cape and yellow boots reminiscent of Supergirl. She is seen practising her flying, another reference to Supergirl that marries her “super” qualities as a fable to her assumed identity as superhero. The arc mimics the series’ own intertextual exploitation of readers’ knowledge of fairy tales with Pinocchio’s adaptation of familiar comics tropes, a particular focus being upon visual signifiers.

Comics are, of course, a visual medium. Fairy tale itself has a rich history of illustration, with artists like Gustave Doré, George Cruikshank, Walter Crane and Arthur Rackham. From this tradition, we see emerge contemporary artists like Charles Vess and *Fables*’ own Mark Buckingham, who carry the fairy tale aesthetic forward in books and, specifically, comics. Fairy tale studies has been dominated by literary texts, predominantly Perrault and the Grimms as discussed. Postmodern and genre versions of fairy tale are attracting more academic attention, however, as is work on comics and other visual representations.³²

Zolkover highlights the Perrault and Grimms versions of Cinderella and their descriptions of the princess: “What is being evoked here ... is a

set of rhetorical conventions specific to fairy tales in print. And the overarching descriptive motif among those conventions is the abstract.³³ Perrault provides a literary portrait of female passivity and domesticity, the heroine known only as “amazingly sweet-natured and kind” and “charming.”³⁴ The interpretations of an illustrator, however, also inform the heroine’s representation and can even contradict literary convention. While Arthur Rackham’s *Cinderella* (1933) conforms to the written word, being rather ethereal and dreamy and shown nodding in obedience to her fairy godmother’s wagging finger,³⁵ Walter Crane’s illustrations (1873) emphasise her intelligence and self-assurance. His illustrations depict a darker haired heroine in sensible, neat clothing, often looking thoughtful and speculative. This *Cinderella* is shown putting on her own shoe at the tale’s dénouement, revealing slender ankles.³⁶ The work of these illustrators anticipates the work of comics in terms of representing the fairy tale heroine’s physicality and attraction. Zolkover reflects: “whereas fairy-tale characters tend to be flattened, stylized, stripped of all but the most essential references to the sensual and the psychic, the characters in *Fables* are emotionally complex, sexually explicit, and physically present. In their transition to the comic book page, they are fleshed out, corporealized.”³⁷ Zolkover’s remarks appear, in referencing sexualisation, to reinforce the problem identified with the representational nature of princess culture, yet comics, like Crane’s illustrations, can likewise show the princess as an active individual, producing an image of positive sexuality.

Zolkover articulates the difference between active and passive/negated sexuality, contrasting popular, patriarchal versions of the tales, specifically “Snow White,” and *Fables*: “Whereas the Grimms’ and Disney’s portrayals of Snow White evoke an idealized patriarchal past, a Victorian silence about sexuality and a female passivity, in *Fables* she is active, contemporary, and very sexually present.”³⁸ The sexual presence of female characters in comics is traditionally a patriarchal construct, too, however, which, far from being ‘silent,’ nonetheless renders the female as a sexually posed and available object for a male gaze. This practice is evident in Tyler and Tedesco’s *Grimm Fairy Tales* series, which was first published in 2005.³⁹ Issue 2 features *Cinderella*. The *Grimm Fairy Tales* series is known for Al Rio’s sensationalist covers, featuring scantily clad, buxom heroines in pin-up poses.⁴⁰ The covers deliberately evoke comic tropes of feminine representation. Pramod K. Nayar notes the objectification of the female body: “The emphasis in even superheroine comic books is on the woman’s body,” adding that “the woman is reduced to legs and breasts.”⁴¹ Adie Nelson likewise writes: “[W]omen comic book

superheroes remain rare and, when they do appear, are likely to be voluptuous and scantily clad."⁴² Indeed, the sexual presence of the heroine in comics is an issue of feminist concern.

Yet, the comics themselves do give attention to the agency of the heroines. As is the case in many early fairy tale collections, including that of Giambattista Basile's *Lo Cunto de li cunti* (*The Tale of Tales*) (1634–36), Tyler and Tedesco retell the familiar tales within a frame tale, one that explains the import of each tale told. Most commonly, frame tales focus on female storytellers, like Basile's grotesque crones, and these storytellers are invoked in later collections, leading thus to Perrault's Mother Goose or the Grimm's construct of storytellers as old peasant women.⁴³ *Grimm Fairy Tales* features the enigmatic Dr. Sela Mathers, a literature professor, who echoes the scholarly ambitions of the Grimms themselves. The frame tale for "Cinderella" features a young college girl, Cindy, who is rejected by a sorority. The comic consequently focuses upon the female rivalry inherent in the Cinderella tradition. The retelling of the tale itself highlights the hatred and revenge bred in the home between Cinderella and her stepmother and stepsisters, aptly invoking the Grimms' bloody retribution as the sisters have their eyes pecked out by birds, although Cinderella's blue gown, glass slippers and "fairy godmother" actually recall Disney and through Disney, Perrault, revealing inconsistency in the comics' visual and narrative references.⁴⁴ While the visual representations exploit the sexuality of the female characters, the narrative of this Cinderella, nonetheless, does provide the heroine with agency. Unfortunately, her agency is motivated by the desire for a prince, good looks and popularity and ultimately the narrative is thus contained by the patriarchal traditions of the fairy tale.

This does not always have to be the case. The steampunk web comic series, *Girl Genius*, released a short series, "Fairy Tale Theatre Break: Cinderella" (2008).⁴⁵ The series' main protagonist, Agatha Heterodyne, plays Cinderella. A brilliant inventor, Cinderella wants to go to the science fair where the kingdom's maidens will present their projects to the two princes. Cinderella provides projects for her sisters, but just as it looks like she will have a quiet night at home, her fairy godmother insists she attend the fair. Cinderella "improves" her fairy godmother's wand, goes to the fair in a pumpkin dirigible wearing a stunning golden gown adorned in clockworks, and, through various stratagems, becomes ruler of the kingdom through her own scientific know-how and army of mechanical "clanks." Cinderella is represented as a curvy, buxom woman who is not averse to showing off her legs, but, sexually present, she is nonetheless independent and self-possessed and the narrative, though referencing Perrault, honours Cinderella's scientific skill and cunning as well as her

physical attractiveness.

Fables' Cinderella makes her first, brief appearance in the second issue of the series. She is fencing with Bluebeard, honing her own skill with a sword. The two-page spread instantly establishes her as something distinct from the Perrault, Grimms and Disney versions.⁴⁶ She swears, she fights and she sweats. Richard J. Gray II notes "that the 'bad girl' remains an object of interest in post-9/11 superheroine comic book art."⁴⁷ While Cinderella's fencing suit is close-fitting, however, it is no more revealing than Bluebeard's. Her poses stress strength and confidence, not sexual availability. Her "badness" is not simply sexual, but represented in terms of action and speech. Bluebeard's taunts establish that she is no longer with her Prince Charming, allowing her to move beyond the patriarchal roles of daughter and wife. Like the Cinderella of *Girl Genius*, *Fables'* Cinderella steps beyond the patriarchal prescriptions of Perrault, the Grimms and Disney. She has divorced the prince and taken up the sword herself.

The cursing alone distinguishes her from the accepted association of fairy tales with children and marks her out as an "adult" representation of the character. While the two-page spread is the only part of the issue concerning Cinderella, she is featured on the cover and it is here that her history in children's entertainment is apparent: the pale blue dress is easily a reference to the blue gown worn by the Disney incarnation. Her proportions are not exaggerated in her cover pose. She is shown in the grasp of Bluebeard, but armed with a foil, her pose one of action and attack, her other hand holding her glass slipper poised, ready to smash over her opponent's head. As Gray writes: "Images of women with large bust sizes, slim figures, bare legs, and half-naked appearances became enormously popular after the success of Wonder Woman in the early 1940s."⁴⁸ Cinderella's initial appearance is overtly contrary to this trend and, although the glass slipper and blue dress recall the patriarchal versions of the fairy tale, her guile in fact recalls earlier incarnations of the princess in which she exhibits greater agency.

Her *Fables* introduction is an unintentional throwback to Perrault's contemporary, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy. D'Aulnoy in fact coined the term "fairy tale" (*les contes des fées*) and although her tales have slipped from the popular consciousness, they were ubiquitous in the century after their publication. D'Aulnoy's version of Cinderella is called "Finette Cendron" (1697).⁴⁹ Finette, her name translating as "cunning," is abandoned with her sisters by their parents, a dispossessed king and queen. Left to fend for herself and her sisters in a wood, Finette, with the help of gifts from the fairies, discovers a grand chateau. It is inhabited by an ogre and his wife. Finette tricks the ogre into the oven, cooking him alive, and then sweet-

talks his wife into having her hair done, at which point she cuts her head off with a hatchet. Like Willingham's Cinderella, she is a woman of action and wit. She stands out from the tropes of princess culture that group the royal heroines together and divorce them from their cultural context, for as Lewis C. Seifert notes, she is one of the heroines of the time who "stand out as exceptional individuals who defy the definitions of femininity promoted by seventeenth-century French 'moralists' and antifeminists."⁵⁰ Although made to serve her sisters and denied attendance at the royal festival, Finette finds a casket of beautiful clothes and sneaks off anyway. She accidentally loses a red velvet shoe, which is discovered by the Prince. He promptly falls in love with it, having never seen its wearer. D'Aulnoy explicitly rejects the notion that Cinderella's success lay in her appearance, since the prince has not encountered her. Finette takes this chance to claim the shoe and the crown, reinstating the fortunes of her family.

D'Aulnoy's play on the shoe, which suggests the prince has an extreme shoe fetish and is only interested in the wearer to the extent that she has the matching shoe, is likely a playful response to Basile's "The Cinderella Cat." The heroine of his Cinderella tale, named Zezolla, murders her first evil stepmother by dropping the lid of a chest on her neck, a violent action that actually finds a corollary in the Cinderella issue of *Grimm Fairy Tales*, where the heroine shuts her injured stepmother in the dark cellar to die.⁵¹ Zezolla's beloved teacher weds her father, but turns on her, installing her own daughters in Zezolla's place and reducing the heroine to rags. Zezolla calls on the fairies and is provided with the wardrobe to attend the ball, where the King falls in love with her, a love that finds its voice in effusion over her patten (a form of overshoe), lost as she slips away: "O lovely candlestick that held the candle that consumes me! O tripod of the charming cauldron in which my life is boiling! O beautiful corks, attached to the fishing line of Love used to catch this soul!"⁵² His eloquence finds its comedic culmination in d'Aulnoy's prince, with his shoe fixation.

The key motif of the Cinderella tale is the shoe. The shoe functions generally in the same way as a superhero's costume, providing a performative identity. Vicki Karaminas suggests: "The superhero wardrobe speaks of the wearer's identity and serves to highlight the supernatural abilities and attributes of his heroic status. As part of an iconic signifier, the superhero garment and its accessories ... separate those with superhuman strength from 'mere mortals' and set the costume wearers apart from conventional society."⁵³ If understood in superheroic terms, the simple proposition that the shoe will fit *only* her foot distinguishes Cinderella from every other woman and, as Seifert suggests, indeed makes her exceptional. In Perrault's tale, the shoe even becomes interchangeable

with Cinderella—Perrault entitles his tale “Cinderella, or the Glass Slipper”—and can act in her absence as an identifier. Perrault’s glass slipper is frequently referenced in *Fables*: Cinderella owns a shoe store called “The Glass Slipper” and Bluebeard introduces her by berating her, “[Y]ou aren’t back in your glass slippers.”⁵⁴ Bluebeard suggests that she has moved beyond the delicacy of the feminine construct of Perrault, yet the shoe itself has always been iconic of Cinderella, literally lifting her above “mere mortals.” As Basile indicates, it is the “tripod” on which she stands. Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil note: “The inferior social and cultural position imposed on women for centuries is refused by engaging with the acquisition of one of the most important symbols of movement, richness and worth: shoes.”⁵⁵ Willingham’s Cinderella actively performs the symbol.

A shoe icon visually frames the two-part story “Skulduggery,” appearing in issues 71 and 72 of *Fables* and pencilled by Buckingham.⁵⁶ The icon also appears on items of Cinderella’s clothing, representative of her identity. In the story, Cinderella acts with a ruthlessness evident in her ancestor, Finette: poking out an enemy’s eyes, shooting to kill and even throwing one of her signature heels at a guard’s face. When she first attempts to seduce the guard, he demands to know where her “Christian modesty” is.⁵⁷ Cinderella neatly overturns her patriarchal inheritance from Perrault, the Grimms and Disney by asserting: “Squandered *long ago*, buddy.”⁵⁸

“Skulduggery” also showcases Cinderella’s fashion sense, featuring striking black-and-white coat dresses, matching sunglasses, fur-lined coats and stylish footwear. Cinderella has always been a fashion leader. D’Aulnoy describes Finette’s attire: “[E]very item was so fashionable that all the ladies dressed themselves in imitation of Finette.”⁵⁹ D’Aulnoy notes that even without a mask, Finette is unrecognised by her sisters and regarded as the most glorious princess. Fashion is Cinderella’s superheroine guise. Karaminas notes: “[T]he superhero costume sets the wearer apart from a society that is predicated on conventional fashion, marking the costume wearer as a member of a particular group.”⁶⁰ While Cinderella’s sense of fashion is not precisely contrary to society’s, it is exceptional, marking her out not as superhero, true, but as Queen.

It is oddly impossible to identify Cinderella when she is not wearing her ball gown—Finette’s sisters manage to describe the mysterious beauty at the ball without ever realising that it is Finette herself, and the sisters of Perrault’s Cinderella even share an orange with her without realising she is their stepsister—much as, taking off his tights, Superman cannot be recognised as Clark Kent. Karaminas points out that “[i]f Superman is super, it is in large part a dialectical creation based on the stumbling

borderline-incompetent Clark Kent.”⁶¹ Although later their identities are merged as Cinderella, Zezolla and Finette enact identities in a similar dialectical relation, but between performed feminine identities, those of passivity and obedience within the home, and of cunning and authority outside the home.

In *Fables*, Cinderella’s “home” is Fabletown itself and issue 22, “Cinderella Libertine,” begins here with Cinderella sitting in a diner with the other ex-wives of Prince Charming.⁶² She performs as a superficial fashionista, an identity that evokes the problems of commercial princess culture itself with its focus on clothes and appearance. The meeting of the various fairy tale princesses is less an invocation of princess culture, though, than it is analogous to contemporary performances of adult feminine sexuality, as in HBO’s *Sex and the City*.⁶³ While not strictly passive, her performance as a mistreated and unhappy ex-wife does conform to the patriarchal type. As a spy, however, she is by and large a shrewd, independent figure. In issue 51, “Big and Small,” she oversees diplomatic negotiations between Fabletown and the giants of the cloud kingdom.⁶⁴ Cinderella herself plays upon her patriarchal history, invoking with overt irony the feminine purity highly prized by Perrault, the Grimms and Disney: “I’m smart and lovely and clearly the leading lady of this particular tale. And my heart, as always, is pure.”⁶⁵ She transforms herself, seeks medical assistance for a giant, and skydives with *joie-de-vivre*. The emphasis is fully on her actions, recalling Finette Cendron, particularly with regard to her stealth and cunning. Cinderella’s success may not make her Queen, however, but it does earn her a spin-off comics series, *Cinderella*.⁶⁶

Cinderella has always been an exceptional fairy tale princess and an iconic heroine. The problem has been that all too often, she has been represented as a beautiful wife-to-be in good shoes, and her early history of craft, guile and violence has been forgotten. A comic series like *Fables* returns to those earlier incarnations of the princess and presents a heroine who is more than simply an object of male desire upon the comic book page. The problem with the fairy tale princess is not that she is ubiquitous, but that the patriarchal representation of her has been all too popular and infantilised. A grown up, independent Cinderella is required for the twenty-first century.

NOTES

- ¹ I would like to thank Zachary Kendal, who co-presented the conference paper on which this article is in part based and who offered much valuable advice in its revision for publication.
- ² Agnes B. Curry and Josef Velazquez, "Dorothy and Cinderella: The Case of the Missing Prince and the Despair of the Fairy Tale," in *The Universe of Oz: essays on Baum's series and its progeny*, eds. Kevin K. Durand and Mary K. Leigh (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 45.
- ³ Perrault, Charles, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. & intro. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xxiii.
- ⁴ *Cinderella*. Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske. 1950. United States: Walt Disney Productions.
- ⁵ Editorial changes between editions of the Grimms' collection of tales are motivated by the growing popularity of their fairy tales as reading matter for children.
- ⁶ Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 5.
- ⁷ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), xiii.
- ⁸ Anne E. Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 147.
- ⁹ Naomi Wood, "Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20.1 (1996): 27.
- ¹⁰ Critique of patriarchal constructs in Disney animated features is widespread and authors writing to the issue include Jack Zipes, Henry A. Giroux and Laura Sells, among many others.
- ¹¹ The line has included heroines who are not technically princesses. Mulan, Tinkerbell, Pocahontas and Tiana have all at times been featured. See the official website at <http://disney.go.com/princess/#/home/>.
- ¹² Campaigns like Pink Stinks (<http://www.pinkstinks.co.uk/>) have drawn attention to the ubiquity of gender-designated products for girls. However, it is worth noting that pink itself can be used in positive gender representations and was itself only marketed as a colour for girls in the twentieth century.
- ¹³ Peggy Orenstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches From the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture* (New York: Harper, 2011), 6.
- ¹⁴ Mulan, for example, is often marketed in a pink dress, although in *Mulan* (1998) she rejected such attire, asserting that she would never be an ideal girl. Over time, her dress has become "poofier" and progressively more Westernised to conform to the gowns of her princess peers.
- ¹⁵ See <http://shop.mattel.com/product/index.jsp?productId=11694902>.
- ¹⁶ Wohlwend's work on kindergarten girls playing with Disney products "shows that

when girls played with Disney Princess dolls and repeatedly enacted the associated film texts, they rewrote plots they knew by heart and subtly altered character roles to take up more empowered identity positions in child-ruled imaginary spaces." Karen E. Wohlwend, "Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts Through Disney Princess Play," *Reading Research Quarterly* 44.1 (2009): 58. Wohlwend's study notes that the girls reintroduce narrative elements from the Disney animated features and elsewhere in their play. Books, DVDs and other story material related to the princess range also contain narrative content, but often excessively simplified and marketed within the princess aesthetic.

- ¹⁷ The fan art site, deviantART, features popular artwork of Disney princesses as superheroes. For example, Melissa Erickson (kreugan) <http://kreugan.deviantart.com/gallery/?1071387#/d2mngwi>, Steevinlove <http://steevinlove.deviantart.com/gallery/23384510>, ladyadler <http://ladyadler.deviantart.com/gallery/28630737#/d32wkxo> and Rebecca (Red4316) <http://red4316.deviantart.com/favourites/4488108>. DeviantART also features the Disney princess superhero cosplay of carladawn <http://carladawn.deviantart.com/gallery/32529338>.
- ¹⁸ Recent statistics are still relatively rare, but male dominance in comics is consistently regarded as a given. This has spawned activity like *Girls Read Comics Too* (<http://girlsreadcomics.com/>), which actively promotes women in comics and positive representations of female heroines, and comics writer Paul Cornell's efforts in 2012 to promote gender parity on convention panels.
- ¹⁹ Gladys L. Knight, *Female Action Heroes: A Guide to Women in Comics, Video Games, Film, and Television* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 30.
- ²⁰ Richard J. Gray II, "Vivacious Vixens and Scintillating Super-Hotties: Deconstructing the Superheroine," in *The 21st Century Superhero: Essays on Gender, Genre, Globalization in Film*, eds Richard J. Gray II and Betty Kaklamanidou (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc, 2011), 81.
- ²¹ The 'reboot' of DC Comics titles in 2011, for example, included *Red Hood and the Outlaws #1*, in which established character, Starfire, appeared in a bikini, desiring sex. The character has previously appeared in the children's cartoon, *Teen Titans* (2003–2006). Michele Lee published an *io9* piece on her seven year old daughter's disappointed response to Starfire's representation in the reboot. Michele Lee, "A 7-year-old girl responds to DC Comics' sexed-up reboot of Starfire" *io9* (Set 27, 2011), <http://io9.com/5844355/a-7-year-old-girl-responds-to-dc-comics-sexed-up-reboot-of-starfire> Some comments on the piece suggested that the comic was simply inappropriate for a girl of that age, inferring that the overt sexualisation of the superhero was actually appropriate for adults. Part of the problem in the debate is that sexualised content is often excused as "adult," rather than as simply exploitative of women.
- ²² The image can be viewed at <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/10/30/batman-princess-halloween/>.
- ²³ Lynn Harris, "Raising a Daughter in Princess Culture: Does it really affect girls' gender roles?" *babble* (Oct 27, 2010), <http://www.babble.com/kid/child-development/defending-princess-dressup-parties-girls-gender-roles/>.

- ²⁴ A popular image on Deviant Art is a cartoon of Wonder Woman as a Disney princess, asserting that she has “already slayed the dragon, defeated the evil queen and saved the kingdom.” Bill Walko, <http://n8twing.deviantart.com/#/d4nqgbo> (January 28, 2012).
- ²⁵ Peggy Orenstein, “What’s Wrong With Cinderella?,” in *The New York Times* (Dec 24, 2006), <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/24princess.t.html?ex=1324616400&en=8e5a1ac1332a802c&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=1>.
Orenstein continues: “Some scholars I spoke with say that given its post-9/11 timing, princess mania is a response to a newly dangerous world.” The superhero trope itself has been a response to war. Wonder Woman, as a topical example, was created during World War II. Yet princesses and superheroes continue to be popular in less dangerous times.
- ²⁶ Ronald L. Baker, “Folklore Motifs in the Comic Books of Superheroes,” *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* 41.4 (1975): 170–4.
- ²⁷ Adam Zolkover, “Corporealizing Fairy Tales: The Body, the Bawdy, and the Carnavalesque in the Comic Book *Fables*,” *Marvels & Tales* 22.1 (2008): 39.
- ²⁸ At the time of writing, the first comic of the *Fables* spin-off, *Fairest*, is being released. The new series is publicised as focusing on female fairy tale heroes, playfully referencing the archetypal refrain “fairest in the land” in the title. The spin-off actually mimics princess culture—down to the focus on appearance in the title—but for adults, promoting developed narratives for each princess. A previous spin-off series, *Cinderella* (2009–10), focused, naturally, on Cinderella, and will be reportedly absorbed into *Fairest*.
- ²⁹ In *Fables*, Snow White has a sister, Rose Red, with Willingham combining two Grimms’ tales, “Snow White” and “Snow White and Rose Red.” The two tales are, aside from their collection by the Grimms, unrelated, and Willingham’s intertextual sleight of hand relies on the English translations of Snow White’s name, *Schneeweißchen* in the latter and *Schneewittchen* in the former.
- ³⁰ Bill Willingham, *Fables Vol 16: Super Team* (New York: Vertigo, 2011).
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² See, for example, Cristina Bacchilega’s *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), Jessica Tiffin’s *Marvelous Geometry: Narrative and Metafiction in Modern Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), and Susan Redington Bobby’s essay collection *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).
- ³³ Zolkover, “Corporealizing Fairy Tales,” 41.
- ³⁴ Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 130.
- ³⁵ Arthur Rackham, *The Arthur Rackham Fairy Book: A Book of Old Favourites With New Illustrations* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1933).
- ³⁶ Walter Crane, *Cinderella* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1873), 7.
- ³⁷ Zolkover, “Corporealizing Fairy Tales,” 42.

- ³⁸ Ibid., 43.
- ³⁹ Joe Tyler and Ralph Tedesco, *Grimm Fairy Tales Volume One*, ed. by J.C. Brusha (Horsham, Pennsylvania: Zenescope, 2011).
- ⁴⁰ Al Rio actually worked for Disney in Brazil.
- ⁴¹ Pramod K. Nayar, *Reading Culture: Theory, Praxis, Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2006), 114.
- ⁴² Adie Nelson, "The Pink Dragon is Female: Halloween Costumes and Gender Markers," in *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities* (2nd Ed.), eds Joan Z. Spade and Catherine G. Valentine (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2008), 228.
- ⁴³ While the mythology of the Grimms promotes the idea that they recorded tales from old peasant women, in fact, very often, they were sent tales by educated, middle class women.
- ⁴⁴ The ghosts and spirits in the dark cellar also ironically reference the mice in Disney's film, calling the heroine "Cinderelly" (Tyler and Tedesco, *Grimm Fairy Tales Volume One*, 39). The first trade paperback features a letter from the editor, Joe Brusha, who asserts that "fairy tales have been around for hundreds of years, handed down from generation to generation and finally recorded by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm in the early 1800s" (Ibid., 167). The assertion is incorrect, though it conforms to popular misconceptions. Nonetheless, many authors recorded tales in the centuries before the Grimms. Brusha also notes the work of Disney, which is explicitly referenced in the comics' fairy tale aesthetic, but which also draws upon Perrault. Brusha singles out Cinderella as "the best-known fictitious story in the history of the world" (Ibid., 167).
- ⁴⁵ Phil Foglio and Kaja Foglio, "Fairy Tale Theater Break: Cinderella," *Girl Genius* (2008), <http://www.girlgeniusonline.com/comic.php?date=20081121>.
- ⁴⁶ Bill Willingham, *Fables Vol. 1: Legends in Exile* (New York: Vertigo, 2002), 34–5.
- ⁴⁷ Gray, "Vivacious Vixens and Scintillating Super-Hotties," 75.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 78.
- ⁴⁹ Jack Zipes, ed. and trans., *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales* (New York: Nal Books, 1989).
- ⁵⁰ Seifert likewise notes that such heroines nonetheless conform to the values of their society, succeeding by being exceptional rather than revolutionary. Lewis C. Seifert, "On Fairy Tales, Subversion, and Ambiguity: Feminist Approaches to Seventeenth-Century *Contes de fées*," in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 62.
- ⁵¹ The Grimms' Aschenputtel never acts against her stepfamily, necessarily conforming to models of feminine passivity. Although revenge is bloody and violent in the Grimms, it is "natural" in this tale, being performed by the birds rather than by the princess.
- ⁵² Giambattista Basile, *Giambattista Basile's The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*, trans. Nancy L. Canepa (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2007), 87.
- ⁵³ Vicki Karaminas, "Übermen: Masculinity, Costume, and Meaning in Comic Book

Superheroes," in *The Men's Fashion Reader*, eds. Peter McNeil and Vicki Karaminas (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 179.

⁵⁴ Willingham, *Fables Vol. 1*, 34.

⁵⁵ Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers* (London: Berg, 2011), 12

⁵⁶ Bill Willingham, *Fables Vol. 11: War and Pieces* (New York: Vertigo, 2008).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁹ Zipes, *Beauties*, 413. Perrault likewise notes that the ladies at the ball seek to copy Cinderella.

⁶⁰ Karaminas, "Übermen," 180.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶² Bill Willingham, *Fables Vol. 5: The Mean Seasons* (New York: Vertigo, 2005), 7–10.

⁶³ Although "Cinderella Libertine" features one of Cinderella's missions, she is more sexualised in this than in other *Fables* stories. Her mission is to seduce an agent of the Adversary and she playfully refers to her boss, Bigby, as "master" at one point. The mission is a "blip" in terms of her largely active representation in *Fables*, although it is consistent with her representation in the spin-off series, *Cinderella*.

⁶⁴ Bill Willingham, *Fables Vol. 8: Wolves* (New York: Vertigo, 2006).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁶ I will not discuss the spin-off series. Although it evokes motifs from the fairy tale, it draws more heavily upon James Bond mythology and as a result, Cinderella becomes an increasingly sexualised figure and less a heroine of action.

Comic Book Princesses for Grown-Ups: Cinderella Meets the Pages of the Superhero. Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario. Colloquy 24 (2012).
Psychoanalysis Meets Analytic Philosophy: Linda W. Brakel: Unconscious Knowing and Other Essays in Psycho-Philosophical Analysis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 170pp, £34.99 PB.
Brian Garvey - 2013 - Metascience 22 (1):129-132.