Clara anderson

Clara Anderson In Her Shoes... In today’s age, most people would attribute their knowledge of the tale of Cinderella to the beloved animated film produced by Walt Disney. Some would even classify Disney’s rendition of Cinderella as a classic, but this would be an injustice to the hundreds of tales across many cultures that also bear Cinderella-esque qualities and would consider their own versions of the tale to be the prototype from which all other adaptations emulate. Of the many derivatives of the “ classic" tale of Cinderella, the one that readily resonates with most audiences is that of a persecuted heroine who receives assistance from magical sources and overcomes her difficult circumstances, as she is finally recognized for her true virtues and marries up in society (“#510"). Though the details of their respective narratives vary from one tale to another, the overarching morals of each tale are actually quite comparable and analogous to one another despite the cultural differences. The Disney version of Cinderella was mostly based on the work of Charles Perrault in 1697. A common myth is that this tale, among other fairy tales, was written for children but, at a time when a genre for children’s literature did not actually exist, Perrault’s intended audience was the noble people of the high French court. Many of the tales in his published Histoires ou contes du temps passé, were not his original work but a modified and elaborated version of those tales to suit the aristocrats’ taste for the embellished (Potts). Thus, Perrault took the stories of folkloric origins, removed the rustic details, and garnished them with brilliant language worthy of the eyes of the attendees of the French literary salons, where his work was popularized. In the class-divided world Perrault was in, the nobility married their like and those of the lower class can only aspire to marry up in status. A girl’s marriageability was of utmost importance and

this was a common theme in Perrault’s work. He advocated the significance of beauty and grace, of humility and patience, all of which are qualities his Cinderella possesses. However tragic her upcoming may be, Perrault’s Cinderella beats against the odds and win the heart of the prince through her grace and angelic disposition. The manner in which her stepmother and stepsisters treat her is beyond contemptible yet Cinderella happily obliges them without a single complaint. Through her beauty and tolerance alone, Cinderella is rewarded by her fairy godmother and attends the grand ball in a magnificent gown, meets the prince who falls madly in love with her at first sight, and they end up together happily ever after. Nowhere does the theme of good versus evil present itself in the plot and readers are led to equate physical beauty with inherent goodness. Cinderella would not even have been recognized if not for her magical makeover, for when she made the mistake of staying at the ball past midnight and left the palace in a hurry, the gatekeepers recount that “ they had seen nobody leave but a young girl, very shabbily dressed, and who had more the air of a poor country wench than a gentlewoman" (Perrault). Even before reading the moral that Perrault serves to readers on a silver platter, one can deduce that his story teaches not how children can be “ good" or well-behaved but for young girls to learn what characteristics are befitting of a woman of French nobility. There are a number of key elements that constitutes a Cinderella tale but one that stands out the most is the protagonists’ reliance on supernatural forces. The magical assistance that many readers are acquainted with is offered by Cinderella’s fairy godmother. In the other versions of the tale, the role of the fairy godmother takes on different forms. Western families influenced by Christianity often share the tradition of assigning a godparent to a child, who

takes an interest in the child’s upbringing and personal development. Given this, a handful of Cinderella tales of western origins feature a fairy godmother bearing magical gifts unto a wretched girl so as to make her the belle of the ball and the envy of all other girls. In eastern cultures, however, the supernatural forces helping Cinderella are usually the spirit of her dead mother (Coburn), in adherence to some eastern beliefs of the after-life, or a variant of Mother Nature, such as the Spirit of the Forest in the Filipino Cinderella (de la Paz). No matter what form the enchanted support comes in, the underlying message is that Cinderella alone is not in charge of her own destiny and has no ability to change her situation despite all the “ good" qualities she may possess. One other feature often identified with a Cinderella tale is that of the main antagonist(s) being someone from Cinderella’s own family. In many variants of the tale, this role is taken on by Cinderella’s evil stepmother and/or stepsister(s), and sometimes even the protagonist’s father himself (Coburn), as in the Cambodian version of Cinderella. A common idiosyncrasy among these stepmothers and stepsisters across different cultures is their envy of Cinderella’s innate beauty. Whether it’s Peony, who is jealous of Pear Blossom in the Korean Cinderella (Climo), or the many sisters, stepsisters, aunts, and female cousins of Settareh who wish to humiliate her in the Persian Cinderella (Climo), the virtues of the protagonist end up causing more trouble for her than it does her any good. These stepsisters always have a scheme to either hinder Cinderella from marrying the prince/king or to pass themselves off as the beautiful protagonist to deceive the prince/king. The idea of female members of her stepfamily and/or her extended female relatives being jealous of Cinderella is not unheard of as this tale depicts the common

aspiration of many girls (before the rise of women’s independence and sexual equality) to marry into wealth. Whether she is family or not, Cinderella, in her grace and beauty, stands in between her malignant stepsisters/cousins and the promise of a happily ever after that comes with marrying the prince/king. Another common ingredient of a Cinderella tale is the shoe that allows the prince to identify Cinderella through a fitting test conducted all across his land. This specific element of the tale can be traced back to what many folklorists consider to be the earliest known version of the story, taken from “ the literature [that] was first recorded by the Roman historian Strabo in the first century BC" (“ The Egyptian Cinderella"). This early rendition tells the tale of Rhodopsis, whose sandal was snatched up by the god Horus in his eagle form while she was bathing and “ carried it to Memphis; and while the king was administering justice in the open air, the eagle, when it arrived above his head, flung the sandal into his lap; and the king, stirred both by the beautiful shape of the sandal and by the strangeness of the occurrence, sent men in all directions into the country in quest of the woman who wore the sandal" (“ The Geography of Strabo"). Whether made of glass, fur, or leather (or not a shoe at all but an anklet, as in the Persian Cinderella), the shoe left behind by Cinderella at the ball or festival is the universal identifier for a Cinderella tale. The shoe is a material thing, bearing no true value besides maybe a monetary one, yet it alone symbolizes the only characteristics a nobleman would seek in a wife: a wealthy and formal upbringing to afford Cinderella the ability to possess an exquisite pair of shoes and small, delicate feet that could only be attributed to her well-formed, slender body. However subtle they may be, all of these shared themes among the cross-cultural narratives serve to deliver the

message to its audience that never on her own actions alone can a girl hope to escape her oppression. No matter what her actual worth is, she can only be validated by a man for her appearance and by all others for her material possessions. When analyzed in depth, the morals of these tales subliminally associate goodness with outer beauty and financial standing with social standing. Through Perrault, these themes were portrayed to an audience who already echo the sentiments of the message behind the tales. The other versions of the Cinderella tale, however, were passed on through oral traditions and were meant to teach children of the lower class to not be discouraged and that hard work and perseverance pays off, although that is no guarantee. For all intended purposes, the tale is likely to have been treated like an anecdote and used as a tool to instill in children the value of hard work, even in light of the fortune of having a magical entity help make your dreams come true. Works Cited “ Book XVIII: The Geography of Strabo. " University of Chicago. Web. 30 Oct. 2012. Climo, S., and R. Heller. The Korean Cinderella. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. Print. Climo, S. The Persian Cinderella. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Print. Coburn, Jewell R. Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella. 1st ed. Walnut Creek: Shen's Books, 1998. Print. de la Paz, Myrna J. Abadeha: The Philippine Cinderella. Walnut Creek: Shen's Books, 2001. Print. “ The Egyptian Cinderella. " Ancient Egypt on a Comparative Method. Web. 1 Nov. 2012 “ Folklorists Criteria for #510. " #510: If The Shoe Fits... Web. 1 Nov. 2012.