

2003

Saving "Cinderella": History and Story in Ashpet and Ever After

Elisabeth Rose Gruner

University of Richmond, egruner@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/english-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gruner, Elisabeth Rose. "Saving "Cinderella": History and Story in Ashpet and Ever After." *Children's Literature* 31 (2003): 142-54.
doi:10.1353/chl.2003.0010.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

*Saving "Cinderella":
History and Story in Ashpet and Ever After*

Elisabeth Rose Gruner

An orphan is mistreated by a cruel surrogate family. The orphan is special, however, and with the intervention of kind and magical parental substitutes, rises to dizzying heights and achieves a happy ending. It's a familiar tale, from "Cinderella" to *Harry Potter*—the difference is all in the details. In two fairy tale films of the 1980s and 1990s, those details remove the Cinderella story from the realm of fantasy. *Ashpet* and *Ever After* take pains to "realize" Cinderella—to remove almost all elements of magic and fantasy and to imagine, instead, what might make such a story real. Both incorporate a tale-teller and historical detail to do so, and both, in the process, uncover elements of the tale that may reclaim it for modern viewers. Drawing on a variety of Cinderella themes, both Tom Davenport's *Ashpet*, in his film of the same name, and *Ever After's* Danielle de Barbarac engineer their own destinies, with the significant help of an elder, a storyteller or an artist rather than a magician. Neither becomes that antifeminist archetype analyzed by Karen Rowe and other feminist critics, the passive recipient of the prince's favor.¹ Both stories are also framed by storytelling devices that serve to place the tales in a specific historical time and place; rather than once upon a time, these tales take place then and there, and are bridged to our here and now by the tellers who introduce them. These films replace Cinderella's central image of female competition with one of the storyteller as a guide to young women.² In so doing, they foreground the telling of the tale itself—they become, as it were, meta-tales which, as they tell the tale, also ask us to reflect on what we do as we tell the tales ourselves. The audience thus becomes a part of the meaning of the tale, focusing our attention on the power of narrative to shape our interpretations of reality.

And reality, it turns out, is what Cinderella is about. While many fairy tales, as Bruno Bettelheim and others have noted, deal with standard childhood conflicts symbolically, it takes little symbolic work to see the point in Cinderella.³ Certainly the version the Grimm brothers told had elements of realism in it, despite the magical overlay of

the giving tree and the sliced-up feet; the mother and stepsisters find themselves in competition with a younger, kinder, prettier, woman, and they retaliate as best they can, forcing her into servitude and trying to prevent her from marrying well. The tales told in the two films I discuss here are such tales: tales of familial competition, of dysfunctional families, of competing legacies and conflicting loyalties.⁴ While the tales themselves are clearly fictional, they insist on their status as, if not historical truth, family legend: the kind of truth that empowers and regenerates. Realistically set in recognizable times and places, they remind us that Cinderella may indeed have originated in any number of true stories of mothers dead in childbirth, stepmothers anxious for their own children, families riven over inadequate legacies.⁵

Although I would argue that both of these films are suitable for and perhaps even intended for children, their realism marks them as distinctly different from the typical (i.e., Disney) children's versions of Cinderella, which rely heavily on the technology of magic for their appeal.⁶ *Ashpet* is clearly a children's film, most often found in libraries. (It was never released theatrically and is now only available on video, although it has aired on public television.) Funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts, Davenport's *From the Brothers Grimm* series films are all short enough for classroom use. With little or no violence, overt sexuality, or suggestive language, *Ashpet* would certainly qualify for a G rating were it to be submitted to the ratings board.⁷ *Ever After's* audience is slightly more difficult to assess. The film received a PG-13 rating on its release in 1998; the VHS version (which I am citing here) is rated PG. According to Doug Thomas, Amazon.com film reviewer, the original version was rated PG-13 for "momentary strong language" which was cut from the VHS release; his on-line review rates it as appropriate for the typical Disney audience of five- and six-year-olds. Indeed, my unscientific survey of recent Disney releases intended for children finds that of 36 films released between 1980 and 2000, 20 were rated G and 16 PG—ratings alone, then, are not particularly useful in determining intended audience.⁸ Ratings aside, both films, I would argue, may be thought of as children's films for their use of a familiar tale structure, but also try to reclaim the fairy tale from the nursery for a wider audience, such as the originals had. *Ever After*, indeed, plays with the concept of audience in its opening and closing scenes, as Jeanne Moreau ("the noblewoman") twits the Brothers Grimm about their

preoccupation with children's stories. Implicitly, she reminds us that naming an audience is a political act; calling Cinderella a children's story reduces its significance and, in this case, its historicity. Neither of the films I discuss here is content with such a dismissive categorization.

Ashpet: Storytelling and the Maternal Legacy

Davenport's *Ashpet: An American Cinderella* (1989) gives his tale a distinctively Appalachian setting (characteristic of all his fairy tale films) and a World War II period feel. The film is introduced by the voice of Louise Anderson, an African American Appalachian storyteller who also plays Ashpet's "fairy godmother" in the film. This conflation of roles—storyteller and fairy godmother—literalizes an element Marina Warner has suggested characterizes many "old wives' tales." Bridging the role of the lost mother with the fairy godmother, the narrator, Warner claims, "frequently accedes symbolically to the story in the person of the fairy godmother" (215). Anderson, as "Aunt Sally," tells stories to Lily/Ashpet within the film; by serving as the frame narrator as well, the voice who both introduces and concludes the story for us, she brings the audience into the tale in the role of Cinderella as well. We, like Ashpet, are worthy of her tales. The stepsisters, who fear "Dark Sally's" potions, her power, and implicitly her black skin, never hear the stories she tells, nor do they understand her riddles—riddles Ashpet solves with ease because, she says, her mother told them to her. A line of female connection is thus established in the film, bringing Ashpet together with her mother in the person of Aunt Sally.

Early in the film Sally tells Ashpet the familiar folktale of the possum and the snake, in which the snake convinces the possum to carry him, then eats him when he no longer has need of him. Here Anderson takes over the film, telling the old tale animatedly and at some length. Sally's face explodes in laughter at the punchline. As the possum sadly and fearfully asks the snake why he plans to eat him, when the possum has done nothing but help him out, the snake shrieks delightedly, "But you knowed I was a snake!" Ashpet, somewhat puzzled, brushes Sally's hair as she listens. Later, though, she returns home to her stepsisters, who have promised her a chance to go to the dance if she will run one errand for them. The errand completed, they leave her to clean house, gleefully renege on their promise. The parallel to Ashpet (the possum) and her sisters (the snake) couldn't be clearer, but it takes the Cinderella story in a new direc-

tion; Sally wants Ashpet to stop being a possum, to stop taking the abuse and waiting for the rewards. She'll have to do it, at least partly, herself.

Sally does more than tell tales. She serves as Ashpet's fairy god-mother, giving her a potion (though we may suspect it's just soap) with which to wash before the big dance, helping her find her mother's clothes hidden in a secret attic, and performing her chores so that she can escape to the dance unseen. She reminds Ashpet, too, to claim her name (her given name is Lily) and her inheritance—not only her mother's dress and shoes but the house itself, which Sally claims belonged to Lily's mother, not her father (whose remarriage and death have so failed her). Lily arrives late at the dance and entrances all onlookers, including the handsomest boy in town, a soldier boy named William whom the elder stepsister Thelma has had her eye on. Blinded by their own jealousy, the sisters don't recognize Lily, who leaves the dance when William's back is turned. She drops a shoe on the way, and the rest is predictable.

Ashpet is in many ways an entirely conventional Cinderella story. It depicts female competition at its worst, both between Ashpet and her stepsisters, and—more insidiously—between the stepmother and all three younger women in her house, especially her eldest daughter, Thelma. Beauty is rewarded, as Ashpet clearly outshines her sisters (one of whom, as is conventional in Cinderella movies, is overweight and indeed food-obsessed). Love at first sight unites Lily and her soldier-boyfriend, who returns her shoe, jumps a fence to join his comrades, and comes back—we are told—to marry Lily and take her to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon. Yet despite these conventional trappings the film takes on a new meaning, I believe, in its emphasis on storytelling and female cooperation. Lily's transformation in the film involves reclaiming a maternal legacy, and she finds that legacy through Sally; her connection to Sally is a connection to her own maternal past. And the cross-generational tie between Lily and Sally is the most interesting relationship in the film; while Sally looks and talks like a "mammy," and some of my African American students have objected to her simply on those grounds, she is clearly the moral center of the film and the agent of its eventual happy ending.⁹ The storyteller, the keeper of the stories, is central to this version of Cinderella—she builds the bridge for Cinderella to cross as well as the one that unites us with her. As a bridge between past, present, and future, Sally restores Lily to her true identity and to her maternal legacy, assuring us that the two are really one and the same.

Ever After: *Warping History into Story*

Ever After (directed in 1998 by Andy Tennant, whose next project was the revisionary costume drama *Anna and the King*) builds a similar bridge between generations, using a storyteller figure to unite Renaissance humanism with Enlightenment individualism, reinterpreting the past for us and rewriting Cinderella for a feminist, perhaps even a post-feminist, future.

The bridge that this film builds may be a shaky, not to say entirely illusory one. The film is historically inaccurate throughout, compressing events in time so as to make Thomas More, Leonardo DaVinci, and Francis I of France closer contemporaries than they were so that they can meet, as it were, in the person of Danielle de Barbarac, the fictional heroine who becomes the Cinderella of the film. It's no accident that the three men I just named are men, real men, historical men; Danielle is linked to them through "history," as she is also linked to her father through Thomas More and through books and literacy. But she's also linked to her mother, whom she never knows, and to her many-greats granddaughter (Jeanne Moreau's character) through story, through an oral tradition kept alive by old women and servants. While the film honors both history and story—at least to some extent—it finally privileges the story of women over the history of men, the memory and passion of women over the rationalist rulings of men. So there are, perhaps, two bridges to discuss here—the bridge built by narrative history, which the film violates with impunity, and the sturdier, but less well-known, bridge of story, which the film, like *Ashpet*, honors throughout.

Glossier, longer, and more expensive than *Ashpet*, *Ever After* nonetheless resembles it in both significant and trivial ways. Both films, for example, cast one stepsister as fat and "homely," one more conventionally attractive. The homely one is in both at least marginally more sympathetic, as well. This casting potentially undercuts the usual Cinderella message that beauty signifies goodness; while Cinderella, who is beautiful, is good, the link comes to seem incidental if the beautiful stepsister is morally repugnant.¹⁰ Perhaps more importantly, both films connect the heroine with servants. Cinderella herself always figures as a servant in her own household, of course, but both Lily and Danielle also seek out the company of older, female servants with whom they willingly work side by side. Both films, as I've mentioned, employ a storytelling figure (though their use thereof differs

somewhat); both also purge their stories of magic, suggesting that as Cinderella's situation is realistic, her solution might be as well.

The ways in which *Ever After's* plot significantly deviates from the standard Cinderella are few, though as a film instead of a folktale it can embroider and offer detail that in the familiar versions is sparse or entirely lacking. The tale is told from the beginning in the voice of a character credited only as "the noblewoman" and played by Jeanne Moreau. She tells the tale to the Brothers Grimm, whom she has summoned to her chateau in order to set the record straight. Showing them "a gem-studded glass Ferragamo mule" (Wloszczyna 7E), she begins, "Once upon a time there was a young girl who loved her father very much," as we fade into an opening scene between a young girl and her father.

This early scene establishes Danielle's connection to her father: he has just brought her a copy of a new book, Thomas More's *Utopia*. Though her father's early death thrusts Danielle into servitude, his legacy represents both intellectual and political freedom; Danielle will not be bound by the superstitions of the past, nor by the oppression of the present. The book then reappears throughout the film as a talisman—in one scene, she quotes it to the prince, who scorns More as "sentimental and dull," though he later changes his mind. In another scene, the book figures explicitly as a representation of a paternal legacy; the older, beautiful stepsister, Marguerite, threatens to throw the book in the fire if Danielle will not allow her to wear some shoes (yes, the gem-studded mules) left to her by her mother. The stepmother spells it out: "Choose carefully, Danielle: your father's book, or your mother's shoes." Danielle returns the shoes after a long beat; Marguerite throws the book in the fire anyway. The film thus makes it seem that Danielle must choose between legacies, but then suggests that such a choice is not only impossible but untenable—she needs both. We begin to see that the prince may be able to unite her with at least one of these legacies when, influenced by Danielle's love of learning, he plans to build a library where all may have access to the wisdom of past and present.

But if Prince Henry reconnects Danielle to her father, her maternal legacy proves more elusive. Most readings of Cinderella find the maternal legacy in the fairy godmother, and we see this clearly in *Ashpet*, in which the fairy godmother figure of Sally tells Lily stories about her mother and restores her mother's possessions to her.¹¹ In *Ever After*, however, the fairy godmother figure is not an older woman but the

artist Leonardo DaVinci, toward the end of his life on a brief sojourn in the court of Francis I, Henry's father. (This detail is historically accurate, though the characters of Francis and Henry bear little resemblance to their historical models.) DaVinci, though he is older than Henry's parents, represents the Renaissance future to their medieval past, bringing with him the seeds of humanism sowed already in Italy and not yet spread to France. He encourages individualism over corporate identity, personal freedom over courtly responsibility. When he opens a door for Danielle, actually taking the cellar door off its hinges to allow her to attend the masked ball, he downplays his achievement, but the metaphorical door that he opens is to the future, a future we recognize as our own. *Ever After* manipulates historical time here, allowing Danielle to read *Utopia* (published in 1516) as an eight-year-old, but to meet DaVinci, who died only three years later, at eighteen. The compression works, however, as both More and DaVinci represent the future that Henry and Danielle will embrace. Historical detail serves not narrative history, in this case, but story, the story of transformation and redemption that remains at the heart of the Cinderella tradition.

Ashpel's use of history is more conventional. The film's narrator, Aunt Sally, can easily be thought of as co-existing in our time, or some recent past, as she is telling a tale only fifty-some years old. And the World War II setting, conveyed primarily through costume and music, provides a shorthand significance to the tale. William is a member of what we are now calling "the greatest generation." Though we can see him as a warrior prince, he is also a soldier in America's last ethical war, the representative of an earlier, purer America, one from which we all implicitly long to be descended. His musical skill—he plays "Stormy Weather" on the sax—mitigates his uniform, marking him as an artist rather than (or, as well as) a fighter. When the stepmother's beau Norman, urged on by Thelma, accosts him, cutting in on his dance with Lily, William resists the invitation to fight. He's no belligerent, just a good kid off to do his duty. He and Lily, then, are well-matched; though both are "nice" in every sense of the word, neither will become the possum of Sally's cautionary tale, bitten for extending a kindness in the wrong direction. Significantly, the film does not award a husband to Thelma; Sally tells us she and Sooe (the "ugly" sister) are both living with their mother, now married to Norman. We may speculate then, that the stepmother is still enmeshed in competition with her daughter; Lily, however, has transcended competition and, in so doing, "won."

Movie-Making and Tale-Telling

Ever After refuses the quick closure offered by *Ashpet* and instead adds a coda to the traditional "recognition scene." Although Danielle appears in fairy-tale regalia at the royal ball, paving the way for her engagement to the prince, the film engineers one more obstacle for her as her stepmother reveals her to be a servant, masquerading as a noblewoman. The charge is true, of course, and serious; sumptuary laws prohibited commoners from impersonating their "betters." This Cinderella is not, quite, the story of nobility redeemed that so many versions are—Danielle is not noble, not a princess at all.¹² Her marriage, then, requires the prince to renounce his "duty" to an arranged marriage, to hereditary aristocracy, to tradition, and instead to embrace the liberatory potential of an Enlightenment which in reality has not yet reached France. The film uses Leonardo DaVinci to push the point. As Henry bitterly assesses his future—a future without love, without Danielle—he explains himself to Leonardo with a line we've already heard (both his mother and Danielle have uttered versions of it): "I have been born to privilege and with that comes specific obligation." When Danielle said it, she was urging him to take an interest in his people; now, he uses the claim to justify his rejection of her as a commoner. Leonardo replies, "Horse shit," neatly undercutting Henry's revived arrogance. While it takes several more scenes for Henry to get the point, he finally does, rejecting the arranged marriage his parents (themselves rather unhappily married) are urging, and riding off to rescue his beloved, who has been "sold" to a rapacious nobleman, LePieu, to cover her stepmother's debts.

Danielle, of course, needs no rescuing. Henry arrives at LePieu's chateau, carrying the shoe, just as Danielle is walking out, and her incredulity ("You? Rescue me?") is palpable. Her surprise here recalls the earlier scene in which Danielle has, in fact, rescued the prince. The two have been waylaid by gypsies who take the prince's horse. They agree to free Danielle, telling her that she can take anything she can carry with her. Without a second thought she heaves the prince over her shoulder in a fireman's carry and walks off, to the amusement of the gypsies. Admiring her pluck, they invite her (and the now-chastened prince) to feast with them before allowing them both to return unscathed. The only time Danielle needs rescuing in the film, when she is locked in the cellar, it is DaVinci, not the prince, who frees her—suggesting that art, not love, is her true salvation.

The film ends with a final scene in “historical time,” when we see Leonardo present them with a portrait as Danielle teases her prince, “You sir, are supposed to be charming.” He replies, “And we, princess, are supposed to live happily ever after.” Laughing, she asks him, “Says who?” And he responds, “Do you know, I don’t know.” The exchange reminds us—in case we had forgotten—that this is a fairy tale after all.

And, though the protagonists do not, we as viewers do know who says “happily ever after,” for we know who is telling this tale. We return to Moreau’s noblewoman at the end, as she closes the film with a close-up of the DaVinci portrait of Danielle which we’ve already seen in the opening. As the camera pans out to follow the Grimm brothers out of the chateau and back into their carriage, we hear Moreau say, “My great-great-grandmother’s portrait hung in the university up until the Revolution. By then the truth of their romance had been reduced to a simple fairy tale. And while Cinderella and her prince did live happily ever after, the point, gentlemen, is that they lived.” Thus while the “story” ends with arch references to fairy-tale conventions, the film ends by calling them into question again.

So is it a fairy tale, or isn’t it? Both films distinguish themselves from the traditional Cinderella tale by their rejection of magic, by an insistent realism throughout. Though Aunt Sally and DaVinci fulfill the role of the fairy godmother in their respective stories, they do so without supernatural intervention. Ashpet rides to the dance on her father’s old horse, not in a pumpkin-turned-carriage; Danielle, wearing her mother’s dress, has no magic disguise to prevent her stepmother from recognizing her. While Aunt Sally’s love sachet and DaVinci’s butterfly wings may appear magical, they rely on human craft for their effects. Sally’s “magic” imparts confidence, DaVinci’s, beauty—but in both cases, the magic doesn’t wear off at midnight.

Aunt Sally as godmother gives Lily her identity, returning to her the lost or misappropriated aspects of selfhood that her stepmother and stepsisters have denied her. As she returns to her both the name and the clothing that her mother gave her, she speaks in the language of ‘80s feminism and self-esteem: “Don’t let nobody call you Ashpet.” She reminds us, then, of a fact my students often forget about Cinderella; the nickname is an insult. (I’ve had students claim it’s a pretty name, and I believe Davenport’s use of “Ashpet” rather than “Cinderella” reflects that awareness, though it is also, of course, the traditional Appalachian name, a descendant of the German

"Ashputtle.") When the "ugly" sister Sooeey dumps ashes on her stepsister's head and calls out "Ashy face!" she literalizes the nickname and her sister's position in the family: the despised servant, not the beloved daughter. Sally gives her back her familial role, her position, her self.

Ever After's daring use of DaVinci in the godmother role subtly suggests a more complex negotiation of roles than Ashpet's simple reclamation project. Danielle, after all, has already been using her mother's name, "passing" as a noblewoman in court with borrowed finery and a pseudonym. She is playing a role when she meets Prince Henry; the role, however, is at least as "true" as the position she "really" inhabits at home. That is, while she is literally a servant (as her stepmother reveals at the ball) she is also really her mother's daughter. Her masquerade thus in some sense reveals, rather than conceals, her true identity. DaVinci, the artist, helps her reclaim or play the role that best suits her. This play with identity is underscored at the end of the film, when we see Henry and Danielle with a "portrait" of Danielle, ostensibly painted by DaVinci. Henry claims it doesn't resemble Danielle, yet Moreau displays it to the Grimms as a true likeness. Which is real, then, the masquerade or the image, the servant or the noblewoman? The complex negotiations of identity are not simplified in this film but vexed, unstable yet sufficient.

Though film can of course make "magic" happen, the choice to eschew it in these films seems of a piece with the revisionary impulse animating them. The films imply that what appears to be magic can in hindsight be explained by attention to local detail and to specific context. In a word, to history—to the family history of old wives and fairy tales, to history, that is, mediated by art.

And this kind of history is represented, in *Ever After*, most clearly by the tale-teller. This post-Revolutionary noblewoman (impossible that she's only four generations removed from the sixteenth-century Danielle) glides briefly over the Revolution, which could be seen as representing the fruition of the seeds Danielle has sown of individual rights, challenge to the sacred authority of the crown, and personal freedom. Yet her story, implicitly, has died without issue; though Moreau tells the tale to the Grimms, we in our seats know that they either don't believe her or don't care, for this is not the story they collected, not the story we've ever heard before. The noblewoman has offered them a new version, but they don't collect it. Their masculinist version emphasizes docility and goodness, not learning

and courage; they have removed the details that might make the story “real” and have settled for romance instead. Silencing the brothers, Moreau’s storyteller invents a female-centered story that values female cooperation—between Danielle and the servants and Danielle and her less-favored stepsister, Jacqueline—over competition, the individual over the role.

To tell a story is to take control of a sequence of events, to shape and direct the meaning others will make of the events. Moviemakers, like all narrative artists, do this all the time. But by putting their familiar fictional narratives in the mouths of familial fictional characters, Davenport and Tennant distance themselves from the position of controlling authorial voice and grant the authority not only to tell a story but to (re)make history to an “old wife,” the discredited source of gossip and innuendo. The two films not only locate a fairy tale in history, they make an implicit claim that the history of school textbooks is partial, incomplete without the narratives of family, of love and loss, that characterize the old wives’ tale. While they may not go so far as to claim that schoolbook history is a fairy tale, they do claim that the fairy tale—as, for example, Robert Darnton would say—is a significant part of history.

Marina Warner has suggested that “the old wife of the old wives’ tale . . . may be offering herself as a surrogate to the vanished mother in the story” (215). We see this function of the storyteller clearly with Louise Anderson’s Sally in *Ashpet*; both the framing storyteller and a character in the film, Sally unifies the tale and provides Lily with both the maternal care and the happy ending she desires. As Jack Zipes notes, Davenport’s film “shows how storytelling can lead a young woman to recover her sense of history and give her the strength to assert herself” (“Foreword”). In *Ever After* the suggestion is more intriguing. Danielle’s deepest unfulfilled desire in the film is for the maternal love she’s never known. Though Henry offers an implicit substitute for her father, no maternal substitute emerges within the film. But the “noblewoman” who frames the tale figures, I believe, as both progenitor and descendant, violating historical time to realize and redeem a woman’s truth. Linked through the artist’s portrait, Danielle and the noblewoman switch places as the older woman “mothers” her ancestor into being through story. Moreau’s storytelling provides an alternative version of history—inaccurate, but “true” to a different sense, to Danielle’s ideals of humanism, individualism, and personal freedom and to the goals of feminist daughters. As fiction

and historical truth cross and recross, the film ends, leaving us not back in the past, but moving forward, into our own time; we, Moreau's auditors, become the new folklorists, the new Grimms, charged with again retelling an old tale in new clothes.

Notes

1. Feminist critiques of Cinderella are almost too numerous to mention, but generally follow the line established by Karen Rowe, who lamented the tendency in so many folk- and fairy tales for the heroines to be rewarded with marriage for their passivity and good looks. "The tales," Rowe argues, "implicitly yoke sexual awakening and surrender to a prince with social elevation and materialistic gain" (333).

2. I'm indebted to Julie Pfeiffer for this phrasing.

3. "By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind, these stories [fairy tales] speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious or unconscious pressures" (Bettelheim 309). Though Bettelheim's generic child is gendered masculine here, elsewhere he makes it clear that both girls and boys benefit from the symbolic work of fantasy.

4. Alan Dundes, compiler of *Cinderella: A Casebook*, makes the related claim that "This tale was meant to show children that their concerns about the parent-child relationship and sibling relationships are in fact standard, that other people feel the same tension and stress about leaving their mother or father and finding the right mate" (qtd. in Givens YO 5). While I'm skeptical about our ability to uncover the tale's original intent, it's clear that these films engage familiar family issues at their cores.

5. As Marina Warner puts it: "While certain structural elements remain, variant versions of the same story often reveal the particular conditions of the society which told it and retold it in this form. The absent mother can be read literally as exactly that: a feature of the family before our modern era, when death in childbirth was the most common cause of female mortality, and surviving orphans would find themselves brought up by their mother's successor" (213).

6. See Naomi Wood for a helpful discussion of Disney's Cinderella (see esp. p. 30 for the emphasis on technological magic).

7. Davenport has noted, however, that "his dramatic works were not children's films but rather were *marketed* to children's institutions" ("Ashpet: An American Cinderella").

8. Ratings information is derived from listings on the Internet Movie Database, <<http://www.imdb.com>>. The 36 films surveyed do not represent all children's films in the period, nor indeed all of Disney's children's films, but include the most popular and widely-advertised films for children, including *Hercules* (G), the *Honey, I shrunk the . . .* series (PG), and *James and the Giant Peach* (PG), to name several almost at random. More often the animated films are rated G and the live-action films PG, although this distinction is not watertight.

9. Tina Hanlon notes that "Sally's magic comes from deep wisdom combined with good humor, matriarchal strength, and family and community history" (231).

10. It may be worth noting here that while Perrault describes the stepsisters as ugly, in the Grimms' version they are beautiful; indeed, the Grimms do not describe Cinderella herself until she appears at the prince's ball (de Vos and Altmann 44; Tatar 117-22).

11. Of course in the Grimms' version the link to the mother is through the magical tree, planted on her grave, which performs the same function in the tale as the god-mother in the French version. Tina Hanlon reads Davenport's *Ashpet* in this German tradition; Sally "reinforces the heroine's direct links with the beneficent influence of her dead mother, a theme emphasized in the German 'Ashputtle' and other old tales,

when she gives Ashpet beautiful clothes and jewelry that had belonged to her mother" (231).

12. This detail allies *Ever After* with the American Cinderella tradition, typified by Anne Sexton's satirical retelling in *Transformations*: "from toilets to riches," "from diapers to Dior," "from homogenized to martinis at lunch," and "from mops to Bonwit Teller./That story." Jane Yolen insists, "'Cinderella' is *not* a story of rags to riches, but rather riches recovered; *not* poor girl into princess but rather rich girl (or princess) rescued from improper or wicked enslavement; *not* suffering Griselda enduring but shrewd and practical girl persevering and winning a share of power" (296). Yolen's insistence that America's Cinderella is *not* the "real" Cinderella misses, I think, the point of how folklore works: while Europe's Cinderella was indeed the heroine of a tale of riches recovered, America's Cinderella, seen in the countless retellings Yolen herself relays, often is precisely a rags-to-riches story. The two films I discuss here borrow heavily from both European and American variants.

Works Cited

- Ashpet: An American Cinderella*. Dir. Tom Davenport. Screenplay by Roger Manley. Davenport Films, 1989.
- "Ashpet: An American Cinderella." *Davenport Films and From the Brothers Grimm*. 26 Nov. 2002. <http://www.davenportfilms.com/pages/fbg_ashpetpage.html>.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. "The Struggle for Meaning." *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Knopf, 1976. Rpt. in *Folk and Fairy Tales*. Ed. Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek. 2nd ed. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997. 306–24.
- Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic, 1984.
- de Vos, Gail, and Anna E. Altmann. *New Tales for Old: Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1999.
- Ever After: A Cinderella Story*. Dir. Andy Tennant. Screenplay by Charles Perrault, Susannah Grant, Andy Tennant, and Rick Parks. 20th Century Fox, 1998.
- Givens, Ron. "Tale Spinners." *New York Daily News*. Rpt. in *The Houston Chronicle* 30 Jul. 1998. YO 5.
- Hanlon, Tina L. "Strong Women in Appalachian Folktales." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.2 (Apr. 2000): 225–46.
- "Ratings Information." Internet Movie Database. <<http://www.imdb.com>>.
- Rowe, Karen. "Feminism and Fairy Tales." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 6 (1979): 237–57. Rpt. in *Folk and Fairy Tales*. Ed. Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek. 2nd ed. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997. 325–45.
- Sexton, Anne. "Cinderella." *Transformations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.
- Tatar, Maria, ed. *The Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: Norton, 1999.
- Thomas, Doug. Editorial review of *Ever After*. By Andy Tennant. amazon.com. 22 Jul. 2002. <<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/6305265488/103-6113787-9507066#product-details>>.
- Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994.
- Wloszczyna, Susan. "'Ever After' no Stock Cinderella Story." *USA Today* 31 Jul. 1998. 7E.
- Wood, Naomi. "Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20.1 (Jan. 1996): 25–49.
- Yolen, Jane. "America's Cinderella." *Children's Literature in Education* 8 (1977): 21–29. Rpt. In *Cinderella: A Casebook*. Ed. Alan Dundes. New York: Wildman P, 1983. 294–306.
- Zipes, Jack. "Foreword." *From the Brothers Grimm: A Contemporary Retelling of American Folktales and Classic Stories*. By Tom Davenport and Gary Carden. Fort Atkinson, WI: Highsmith P, 1992. 26 Nov. 2002. <http://www.davenportfilms.com/pages/cl_zipespage.html>.