

Contemporary Values Encounter Classic Illustrations in Rebecca Solnit's *Cinderella Liberator* (2019)

Abstract

Rebecca Solnit's retelling of 'Cinderella' in *Cinderella Liberator* (2019) transforms the fairy tale by infusing a slew of modern ideas into its 'once upon a time'. Cinderella becomes an independent, active, empowered heroine not only freed from servitude, but able to liberate others in her community from oppression. While the rewriting targets the morals and values of traditional 'Cinderella' texts, it is anchored in a specific version of the tale. *Cinderella Liberator* reuses illustrations Arthur Rackham produced for a 1919 *Cinderella* gift book by C.S. Evans. This article analyzes the interplay of text and image in *Cinderella Liberator* to establish how the particularities of the Evans / Rackham version inflect the adaptation's wider discourse on the Cinderella narrative. It focuses on images correlated with the fairy tale's reassessment of the value and significance of work, the separation of social classes, and appearance as an indication of moral values.

Keywords

Cinderella, adaptation, modernization, illustration, Rebecca Solnit, Arthur Rackham

Introduction

Rebecca Solnit's rewriting of 'Cinderella' as *Cinderella Liberator* (2019) strongly deviates from type in major plot events as well as minor details. The protagonist doesn't fall in love with the prince, becoming instead his friend, and that of her stepsisters. Further modernizing shifts can be noted in the background of the action, as for example in the attribution of traditionally gendered professions: Cinderella is driven to the ball by a coachwoman, and the town she inhabits hosts a female painter, blacksmith and farmer, as well as a nonbinary dance teacher. The fairy tale also moves away from gendering altogether: at the ball, Cinderella admires people, rather than men and women – 'people wearing dresses' and 'people wearing jacket and breeches'.¹ Magic is still an important force, with a pumpkin turning into a carriage, lizards into footmen and mice into horses, but the creatures involved now consent to the transformation, and have the option of returning to their original forms.

Because it engages with the well-known character invoked in the title, as well as plot elements commonly associated with it, *Cinderella Liberator* is part of the large network of adaptations that make up 'Cinderella', a collection of texts that adapt the narrative to different media, periods, and cultural contexts. Following the reasoning of Bortolotti and Hutcheon, who present a theory of adaptation modelled on evolutionary success, these many versions are all expressions of the same deep structure of the Cinderella narrative, serving to propagate it in diverse conditions.² The various adaptations entertain an intertextual relationship, referring to and informing each other as they develop and amend 'Cinderella'. At the same time, as Margot Blankier writes, there exist a small number of texts that 'have significantly impacted the formation and evolution of the Cinderella narrative' such as Perrault's *Cendrillon* (1697), the Grimms' *Aschenputtel* (1812) and Disney's *Cinderella* (1950).³ She argues that most modern readers encounter adaptations of 'Cinderella' before any material that can be considered a 'source,' and despite the publication chronology of these three versions, and their own status as adaptations of other texts, they are key points of reference for *Cinderella* revisions. These versions of the fairy tale engage in its critical commentary and transform the values of the source material, confronting the reader's preconceived ideas about the text.

As my brief observations on *Cinderella Liberator* already suggest, the book takes on 'Cinderella' writ large, by repeating the core narrative structure and modifying it so as to touch on a number of issues relevant to a contemporary audience. It shares this aim with Malorie Blackman's *Blueblood* (2020), a retelling of 'Bluebeard,' Jeanette Winterson's *Hansel and Greta* (2020), a reimagining of 'Hansel and Gretel,' and Kamila Shamsie's *Ducking*, a rewriting of 'The Ugly Duckling,' which are also part of Penguin Books' *Fairy Tale Revolution* series. These versions of classic fairy tales by prominent 21st century female authors reinterpret the tales' well-known plot points to challenge the traditional lessons of these texts. They draw attention to the stories' traditional power structures (for example by reversing the genders of the protagonists in 'Bluebeard'), and outfit their heroines with the intellectual framework to navigate hardships (the titular *Duckling* celebrates difference, and is brave and curious). The same modernizing impetus underpins Solnit's *Cinderella Liberator*, which engages with the conventional readings and ideas of its sources. However, despite this broad approach to 'Cinderella,' the book ends up targeting a specific *Cinderella* dating from 1919, published by William Heinemann, with text by Charles Seddon Evans and illustrations by Arthur Rackham.⁴ This version is not one of the defining

Cinderella texts, and its being chosen as source is related primarily to production, rather than creation. Solnit writes that she had always admired Rackham's illustrations and wanted to share his work with a new generation (p. 28), and the work of the Golden Age illustrator was in the public domain.

This article argues that while *Cinderella Liberator* attacks tradition in terms of the values it denotes within 'Cinderella', it claims the benefits of an association with the same through the reuse of Rackham's illustrations. There is a fundamental ideological tension between text and image in this combination. Imagined as a decorative element, the illustrations are desired for their ability to denote the 'classic' character of the volume in which they are featured. The book accords primacy to text as a mode of propagation of the Cinderella narrative, and actively rewrites it, while its approach to illustration demonstrates less overt engagement. When modifications are made, they are minor and transparent in intention. *Cinderella Liberator* inherits an imbalance of text and image from its specific source, which it transforms from a question of the relative commercial and cultural heritage value of the two elements to one of meaning. By analyzing key reused images that are coupled with significant elements of the rewriting, I show that the illustrations allow ideas that the text appears to excise nevertheless to persist in the finished work. The reuse of Rackham's illustrations induces a disjunction between the contemporary feminist discourse Solnit advances in the text and the politics implied by the century-old illustrations.

The general and the specific

As the author of over twenty books on topics ranging from photographer Eadweard Muybridge to arctic expeditions, and the history of walking, Rebecca Solnit is a writer, activist and thinker with many interests. *Cinderella Liberator* is her debut children's book, but despite its intended audience, it shares in many of the principles key to Solnit's work – it is a feminist text that draws its protagonist out of her traditional minority, by allowing her to work through hardship to become a positive, transformative force in her community. By widening the impact of Cinderella's activity beyond the confines of the family circle, Solnit's fairy tale continues her reflection from *The Mother of all Questions* (2017). There, the author proposes that the energy and intense focus that love for one's children entails can also have other applications, and that there is 'other work love has to do in the world'.⁵ Moreover, the desire to rescue and reinvent Cinderella from her traditional obedient victimhood is also closely related to Solnit's impetus to write. In her recent memoir, *Recollections of my Nonexistence* (2020), she observes that her career grew out of the realization that it was still common for people to 'want to harm women, especially young women, that a lot of people relished that harm, and a lot more dismissed it.'⁶ Revising 'Cinderella' is thus an opportunity to take on the fairy tale and its numerous adaptations, insofar as they cast abuse as women's lot.

In the *Afterword* to *Cinderella Liberator*, Solnit casts the engagement of her text with the Evans / Rackham version of the tale as corrective and contemporizing. She explains that she found the sentimentality of the 1919 text dated, as were its equation of virtue and beauty, and the importance it accords to upper-class status (p. 28). Though an accurate assessment of Evans, his version also takes steps to modernize the classic, such as emphasizing the education of the

protagonist, raising the question of her friendship with the Prince, and naming the female characters. In particular, he identifies Cinderella as ‘Ella’, the same name Solnit gives to her heroine. The modern author takes control of this rapprochement by foregrounding the personal significance of the name – it is that of her great-niece, to whom she had also dedicated another volume (p. 29). The explanation of the choice of name is woven into a larger reflection on how elements from the biography of the author’s different female relatives are reflected in the traditional Cinderella’s situation. This bespeaks the new fairy tale’s generational outlook, its desire to relate the past to the present, fiction to real life, old hardships to new, as it prepares a fairy tale fit for the 21st century – one that is still magical but casts a critical eye on the practices of the past, which the retelling of traditional fairy tales normalizes.

The conclusion to be drawn from the author’s cursory reading of the Evans text in this presentation is that it is taken as a representative of the ‘traditional Cinderella’. It is read through, and with, its many other similar versions, its textual particularities close to insignificant. The 1919 story is all but forgettable because it is, to use Jack Zipes’ terms, a *duplicate*, a version of the tale that does not seek to modify its mores or lessons, while *Cinderella Liberator* is a *revision* that seeks to actively transform the tale and challenge the reader through its reinterpretation.⁷ In the paratext, the first category of engagement is implicitly devalued as passive reiteration of ideas that are at best outmoded, and at worst harmful, and the second is positively weighted. Traditional narratives are to be rewritten in light of new realities, or brought to express historical realities they obscured.

There is, however, a key particularity of the 1919 edition that *Cinderella Liberator* does incorporate: its illustrations. As I suggested above, Solnit casts the integration of Rackham’s work into the rewriting as a matter of aesthetics. The illustrations appear as items to import into this new version of the tale, secondary in importance to the text, their function transparent and primarily decorative. They are presented as supporting the story’s new ideas, despite their age. The author underlines this continuity of thought by evoking the modern aspects of the silhouettes – they are less racially determined renderings than other forms of illustration (p. 28), presumably in terms of skin color. Due to their style, they are also less ‘moody’ than Rackham’s other work.⁸ Though not explicitly evoked, a further modern element of the images is their minimalism, which the reproduction further emphasizes by cooling the color palette and replacing the reds and golds of the original through a restrained two shades of blue.

With the continuity of text and image stressed, there is a sense that the illustrations are not amended in fundamental ways. The endpapers of *Cinderella Liberator*, which present author and illustrator together, further underline this even as they mention Rackham having produced the watercolor silhouettes ‘featured in the original edition of *Cinderella*’ (np). Since there have been many editions of the fairy tale before 1919, the use of ‘original’ in this context must refer to the edition to which Rackham contributed being the source text for the current adaptation. But there are also echoes of other positive meanings and connotations of ‘original’ in this awkward attribution – unique, novel, imaginative. These are the reasons for which the 1919 edition was marketed on the strength of its illustrations, and from this point of view, the presence of the images in the 2019 volume functions as a guarantee of the value and importance of the book.

By the start of the 20th century, Rackham ‘was a respected artist [...] able to plan his work over an extended period of time [...] able to turn down commissions and invitations to exhibit, on the grounds of having a full order book’.⁹ He had made his reputation through illustrations of *The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (1900), becoming ‘the premier English illustrator to be called upon for the depiction of fantastic themes’.¹⁰ His work on Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle* (1905), J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1908) had been received as unqualified successes, establishing him ‘as the leading decorative illustrator of the Edwardian period’.¹¹ The *Cinderella* (1919) to which he contributed was an illustrated gift book -- an expensive, richly-decorated object produced using high-quality materials, and meant for display or perusal rather than reading.¹² His collaborator on the project, C. S. Evans, however, was not an equally significant creative force. At the time, Evans was an editor at Heinemann’s, eventually becoming its Chairman and Managing Director, but his work in fiction is limited to retellings of popular stories (such as *Sleeping Beauty* (1920) and *Reynard the Fox* (1921)) and one novel (*Nash and Some Others* (1920)).¹³ It is thus reasonable to assume that hiring Rackham was a larger investment than the in-house author of the text, Evans, and that the commercial value of the book is in the illustrations. The first page of *Sleeping Beauty*, another text on which the two worked together in this period, advertises other titles illustrated by Rackham, making him the lead marketing criterion.¹⁴

The imbalance of text and image in the perceived value and significance of the 1919 *Cinderella* is similarly evident in its French edition. Published the same year, by Hachette, it cites no author for the text of the fairy tale, which is labeled instead as being ‘après Charles Perrault’.¹⁵ The correlation of the volume with Perrault, a literary author and the perceived creator of *Cinderella*, when the text is devalued by being stripped of authorial attribution suggests that it is the illustrations that are seen as continuing the life of the fairy tale in the edition at hand. Indeed, like the English version, the French invests the illustrations with cultural capital by designating the book an object of bibliophilic interest. It is a luxury edition of 500 copies printed on high quality handmade paper, with gilt edges, signed and numbered by the illustrator.¹⁶ Rackham’s work is thus not only presented as being worthy of such material embellishments as those used in the manufacture of the book, it is also paired with the most important writer’s name relevant to the fairy tale. Both 1919 editions thus feature a text the primary merit of which is that it is a retelling of well-known classic (its value is in its provenance, the ‘*Cinderella*’ network of adaptations / Perrault, rather than its current textual incarnation), and a set of illustrations, the value of which is that they are new, elaborate and imagined by a then-current authority.

Reused in *Cinderella Liberator* 100 years after ‘the original’, the silhouettes are symbols of the fairy tale’s past: they represent its tradition of adaptive success. They serve the same purpose as the invocation of Perrault’s name in the 1919 edition, namely, to bestow upon it the glory and renown the label had acquired with the passage of time. A century after 1919, Arthur Rackham is a famous master of the Golden Age of Illustration. In addition to the aesthetic benefits of integrating his work into a book, the 2019 edition also alludes to the ability of his contribution to define it as a ‘classic.’ His silhouettes are used to consecrate the rewritten text of *Cinderella Liberator*, denoting it as one that stands to redefine ‘*Cinderella*’ for a current age to the same degree that previous ‘classic’ iterations did for their time. However, reading the content

of the images, rather than their signification, together with the text reveals some important points of disjunction. Rackham's images are an interpretation of a different text, the ideas of which they continue to communicate. At important points in the narrative, they act against the rewriting, rendering what was a superficial disparity between the cachet of text and image in the 1919 editions a deeper problem related to the meaning of the fairy tale.

Illustration as adaptation

Kate Newell describes the role of images in illustrated books as that of a gateway: they allow readers to be drawn more closely into the text, or to be taken out of it.¹⁷ This is a question of the book becoming multi-modal, requiring the reader to alternate between strategies employed for reading words to those for reading images.¹⁸ It is also a matter of information being transmitted, since 'illustrations in illustrated novels are coded to elicit particular readings that can impact readers' interpretations of a work through the resolution of ambiguities'.¹⁹ From this point of view, text and image possess similar powers of communication, and in the context of the illustrated book, generally act in accord with each other. The cooperative view of text and image fits Solnit's take on the illustrations for *Cinderella Liberator*, and that of the volume's reviewers. Whether praising the book for its progressive values and didacticism ('hands down, a wonderful book',²⁰ 'Every possible moral lesson is explicitly spelled out'²¹) or finding it a 'wordy, lecture-laden narrative',²² reviewers agree that Rackham's silhouettes are a great companion to the text. For example, Kelly Barnhill writes that "the decision to use Arthur Rackham's original cut-paper silhouette illustrations was a brilliant choice" and Julie Buntin notes that "Arthur Rackham's timeless silhouettes elevate this picture book into an art object."²³

Rackham, too, believed that an illustrator should be a partner to the author, and in an address to the Author's Club in 1901, indicated that most illustrations were complementary to the text, echoing in an interesting manner what had already been stated by the writer.²⁴ More important functions of illustration, however, were to illuminate the text, explaining 'what the author failed to say clearly'.²⁵ It is thus a question of illustrations' active support of the text, and their ability to communicate with readers, resulting in their better understanding of the prose. Lastly, Rackham identifies the best type of illustration as coming 'of the expression by the artist of an individual sense of delight or emotion aroused by the accompanying passage of literature'.²⁶ This casts the illustrator both as a reader of the text and its co-author, sharing in the responsibilities of both parties, which leaves the images best poised to mediate between them.²⁷

In *Cinderella* (1919), the interpretive or illuminating aspect evident in Rackham's illustrations is their use of physical appearance to convey moral qualities. While this is in keeping with traditional fairy tale logic whereby good characters are also beautiful, it does not follow closely Evans' text. The author is very brief on the protagonist's appearance: the reader learns only halfway through the story that Cinderella is beautiful, and no further details are provided. In the illustrations, however, Cinderella's positive qualities are coded in a specific body: youthful, thin, and with a harmonious profile. Her youthfulness is conveyed by maintaining roughly the same profile, hairstyle, and costume for the character despite her

evolution from a child into a young woman. Her figure is correlated with her age, as all younger human characters are presented in thinner bodies than the older human characters. In contrast, the fairy tale's main antagonist, the stepmother, is portly, her bulk echoing her overbearing personality.

Since Rackham is using silhouettes, body shape and movement are the primary methods of communication. The protagonist's figure represents an idealized feminine beauty, her grace evident despite her circumstances. His Cinderella is frequently represented in motion, her limbs lithe and elegant in the poses they adopt. When in a curtsy (Evans, *Cinderella*, p. 26), or playing in the garden (Evans, *Cinderella*, p. 11), her movements are rendered through curved lines, in contrast to the more rigid bodies of other characters such as her father and stepmother (Evans, *Cinderella*, p. 26-27).²⁸ Through this, Rackham is alluding to her spirit and resilience, and even when representing her distress, such as in the illustration of Cinderella mopping the floor (Evans, *Cinderella*, p. 39), the image maintains an echo of the poses that denoted freedom— her right leg is curved as the rest of her body is performing the chore. The protagonist's ideal nature endures despite mistreatment, though it is somewhat obscured by the visual signifiers of her suffering (rags, mops, irons, etc).

It is in the representation of antagonists that text and image grow closer together. Evans correlates specific facial features with the stepmother and stepsisters' unpleasant character, and Rackham reproduces these traits. We learn that their mother 'was fat and stumpy, with more than one chin, and she had cross, crafty eyes set very close together over a big hooked nose' (p. 27), the first daughter 'had inherited [the] big hooked nose, which made her face look rather like that of a horse, although no horse could possibly have worn so bad-tempered and discontented an expression' (p. 29), and the second 'she had a little red nose that was turned up in the most comical way' (p. 29). As the last citation indicates, these traits are meant to be read humorously, but the ridicule they invite is related to the personality characteristics they are thought to denote at the time. Starting in the late 19th century, the pseudo-science of physiognomy proposes an index of personality types through their correlation with specific facial features. Leslie Atzmon argues that Rackham's illustrated fairies draw on the visual vocabulary of this domain, referencing Victorian ideas of animalism in the construction of their otherworldly nature.²⁹ She argues that in addition to utilizing physiognomic ideology to codify the multiple characters of his fantastical illustrations as normal or abnormal, Rackham endows them with specific characteristics such as brutish sexuality, lack of intelligence, or propensity for violence through the facial features he designs.³⁰ The profiles of the antagonists in *Cinderella* are similarly imagined. They strongly resemble the conventional types possessed of animal passions³¹ and nervous appetites, or cunning, rapacious and treacherous types, as visible in William Rimmer's pedagogical text *Art Anatomy*.³²

Solnit reads Rackham's depiction of Cinderella's stepsisters as a negative aspect of his work, noting that the modern edition 'didn't use those' illustrations (p. 28). This is accurate in the sense that *Cinderella Liberator* adapts the image of the stepsisters to its new context by addressing their representation as 'awkward, ugly creatures' (p. 28). In the image on p. 23, the sisters' noses and lips are touched up, their profiles rendered more similar to each other, and more neutral in appearance. It is not my intention to suggest that certain profiles are more attractive than others, but since Evans' text had identified the features as unattractive, and the

modern edition had noted Rackham's rendering of the same, it stands to reason that the edited profiles are meant as an improvement. The intention behind this modified illustration is to suggest that the characters are not ugly by the ideological standards of the rewritten text.³³ It no longer invests physical appearance with importance, and by the time this image appears in the modern fairy tale, this is the lesson the characters have also learned. Their modified profiles indicate that they are no longer antagonists, because they share in the beliefs of the protagonist, which the narrator denotes as good. However, in this example, the illustration runs counter to the desire to modernize the text. In correcting the appearance of the characters to denote they are redeemed, the silhouettes still codify positive and negative qualities through physical traits – the only difference is that the specific qualities have changed. If appearance is no longer the indication of inner qualities, the sisters' original profiles could have served the narrative just as well as their improved ones.



Figs. 1 and 2. Cinderella's stepsisters in *Cendrillon* (Evans / Rackham (Hachette, 1919), p. 77, public domain), and as reprinted in *Cinderella Liberator* (2019, p. 23).

Solnit moves away from correlating physical appearance and morality in reimagining the text, and the selection of images included also attests to this tendency. The 2019 fairy tale doesn't comment on Cinderella's appearance, or that of her sisters, making only the very general statement that 'there are so many kinds of beauty' (p. 4). The book also omits silhouettes of the stepmother and Cinderella's father, as well as the coachman, which leaves all remaining characters similar in body type. The now homogenous representation of the characters removes the ability of physical appearance to express anything other than existence. Cinderella's being youthful and slender is no longer a distinctive characteristic in the terms defined by Rackham. What's more, the modern version pictorially invests the protagonist with new meaning. The final image inserted in the text (p. 27), borrows an illustration from the Evans / Rackham *Sleeping Beauty* (1920) to cast Cinderella as a master storyteller.

The source image represents an older woman surrounded by children who appear enraptured with her words, in an imitation of the frontispiece engraving of Perrault's *Histoire ou contes du temps passé* (1697).³⁴ The figure of the storyteller is used to denote the fairy tale's provenance, its strong tradition developed through 'les générations de conteuses anonymes qui auraient transmis oralement un folklore immémorial'.³⁵ Though not historically accurate, this argument was needed to support Perrault's side in the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.³⁶ The edited image replaces the storyteller's head with Cinderella's, redefining her exemplarity in terms that valorize her actions, and her ability to transform her environment. The image echoes the modern text's emphasis on the importance of taking action and helping others: children love Cinderella 'for her cookies and kindness and her stories about what it means to be free' (Solnit, p. 27). The protagonist taking control of the storytelling is representative of the new values of the fairy tale, which reinvent her previous identity as model of traditional feminine obedience. Evans had already taken steps in this direction, endowing Cinderella with intelligence in addition to beauty, modesty, and a long-suffering nature, but Solnit's adaptation views the rewriting of the fairy tale on larger scale. Her version goes beyond redefining the heroine along modern lines to examining the conditions that had produced the traditional heroine. Exploring the environment of this character, *Cinderella Liberator* focuses on the narrative presence of class structure and the value of labor.

Work and leisure

In the traditional 'Cinderella', the change from a life of leisure to one of work represents the protagonist's peripeteia. It is a complete reversal of fortune that brings her misery after a period in which she had been very happy. Perrault and Evans' texts depict her chores as profoundly unappealing and demeaning. Housework and cooking are punishment inflicted by the antagonists, and they denote her degradation from a member of the higher social class of the fictional universe to a lower class. The work itself, however, and Cinderella's particular position within the household staff, are less significant than her being a servant.³⁷ As Sarah Maza's research shows, 17th and 18th century servants were first and foremost outsiders with a precarious status: 8/10 came from a rural environment to work in an urban environment, and they formed a distinct and downtrodden class.³⁸ Many ended up in service after having left the provinces because of poverty and experiencing homelessness in the city. For these reasons, 'as strangers living and working in an unfamiliar environment, servants were continually exposed to the suspicions and sometimes even hostilities of the native town dwellers', in addition to those of the masters.³⁹ Women servants were sometimes subjected to abusive sexual relations by the masters, and illegitimate children were abandoned, or also placed in service.

Cinderella's status in the fairy tale represents the opposite of these circumstances: she is one of the masters and her father's legitimate child.⁴⁰ The significance of her demotion within the household is to communicate to the reader that her new status is 'unnatural' and consequently cannot be permanent. Though Perrault had affirmed in the introduction to his volume that the texts saw virtue rewarded and vice punished,⁴¹ Cinderella's social class is an equally important part of her character, since injustices against this status cannot stand. As Marc Fumaroli observes, the audience of Perrault's fairy tales was aristocratic, educated and feminine, and in

key texts such as *Les Fées*, his heroines' distinctive qualities are predicated on salon culture. Like Cinderella, the poor daughter of this story is well-spoken, demonstrating the period's prized sociability, 'douceur,' alliance de délicatesse morale et de séduction esthétique'.⁴² Her reward is 'l'ascension sociale, [...] l'admission aux honneurs de la Cour'.⁴³ As publishers first began adapting Perrault's fairy tales for a child audience in the latter half of the 19th century, the texts' positive representation of high social status remained a constant⁴⁴ even as their transformation otherwise entailed 'an ideological project and a moral one, aimed at achieving at least a partial readjustment of the values and practices offered to the young reader'.⁴⁵

This aspect of the protagonist is pictorially underlined by Rackham, whose illustrations of the ball depict Cinderella's integration into nobility as natural and rightful. Though her transformation by the fairy godmother from a servant into an elegant aristocrat is a magical element, the protagonist is depicted as reverting to her true nature at the ball. In a two-page spread dedicated to this event, she appears graceful and at ease in her uniquely elegant clothing (Evans, *Cinderella*, pp. 62-63). Her movements, already dance-like earlier in the book, are more restrained, denoting womanly elegance and self-assuredness in this new environment. Other participants in the ball are depicted as less graceful, through exaggerated movements (Evans, *Cinderella*, p. 67). There is an element of comedy in Rackham's rendering, more so than denigration, as the characters appear caught up in the fun, and less aware of their bodily expression. At the same time, dancing is depicted as the nobles' essential activity: both sets of endpapers show them engaged in this as they traverse all available space.⁴⁶ This framing suggests that their existence is one of leisure, and unaffected by the rest of the story, providing a pleasant, desirable constant in contrast to Cinderella's changing fortunes.



Fig. 3. Endpapers showing nobles dancing (Evans / Rackham, *Cendrillon*, 1919, np., public domain).

As expected, Solnit's retelling does away with the master / servant power structure, but more importantly, it reinvents the relationship of work and leisure. In *Cinderella Liberator*, work is invested with positive meaning, and this, rather than marrying into a higher social class, is the key to the protagonist's happy end. From the beginning, Cinderella's work is not represented as endless drudgery, so it doesn't form a neat opposite to leisure, the state fairy tale logic suggests she should be experiencing given her status. Even when she is performing unpaid labor for her stepmother, Cinderella enjoys meeting people at the market, and she enjoys baking, which is one

of her responsibilities. When freed from household duties at the end of the story, she opens her own bakery. The happy end is thus personal to the protagonist, as it is tied to her passions and abilities. Though the bakery might appear a smaller reward than joining the royal family, it has a significant impact on the protagonist and her community. The shop becomes a meeting point, which allows Cinderella to build a wide network of friends who help her help others. As the title indicates, the greatest consequence of her activity is that she assists others in becoming free. She is not only an exemplar, but actively invested in constructing her significance. Solnit's protagonist is thus able to effect change in her neighborhood and beyond: in the final pages, the reader learns that Cinderella houses and aides refugee children from other lands.

A reference to current events that is used to signal the contemporaneity of the retelling, this detail can also be interpreted as a recuperation of the servants from the traditional text. 18th century servants had much in common with refugees – both groups are destitute, vulnerable, and living far from their homes and families. From this point of view, the modern Cinderella is acting to address the root causes of the inequalities of the past, which had shaped the earlier narrative. As discussed earlier, the book's final image fittingly shows the protagonist taking over as storyteller, but the presence of these children adds a further layer of significance to the illustration. Rackham's silhouette adapts its source, the frontispiece to Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697), by removing the spindle the storyteller was holding but maintaining her raised fingers. He renders this position similar to the upward-pointing fingers of Socrates in Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Socrates* (1787) or Plato in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1511). In those contexts, the fingers denote their possessors' distinctive knowledge – the first gestures 'toward the space of metaphysical [...]. Unchained at the moment of death, Socrates will accede to the metaphysical and prove the 'immortality of the soul'⁴⁷ and the second 'is pointing upwards beyond the limits of pagan philosophy toward an eventual Christian revelation that he alone can vaguely sense'.⁴⁸ While Rackham's adaptation may have been meant humorously, since the storyteller is not discussing philosophy, but mere fairy tales, the transformation of the image in *Cinderella Liberator* infuses it with new meaning. Not only does the protagonist-turned-narrator have unique knowledge to impart, but her audience stands to draw significant benefits from her talk, much like that of the ancient philosophers.



Fig. 4. The storyteller and her audience in *La Belle au bois dormant* (Evans / Rackham, Hachette, 1920, np, public domain).

Pleasurable work that builds on one's interests and aptitudes is also the key to Solnit's rewriting of Cinderella's stepsisters. Not only is there no moralistic condemnation of these characters' hobbies like in Evans or Perrault, but they are transformed into professions. The first sister, who would do 'her best to pile her hair as high as hair could go' (Solnit, p. 3) becomes a hairdresser, while the second, who was focused on 'having the fanciest dress in the world' (Solnit, p. 4) becomes a dressmaker.⁴⁹ Though they have moved from leisure to work, the transition is not jarring, and they have not abandoned the practices that were important and enjoyable to them. In terms of rewriting the traditional tale, the change is one from practicing for real life (doing all they could to be beautiful so that they could marry well) to living. The three sisters all finish in the same, positive place as small business owners and friends. The happy end casts willingness to work as an essential part of the fairy tale's modern values, and it also implies that in this new environment, one's efforts are justly rewarded.

The book's conclusion emphasizing the liberating and equalizing potential of work is visually epitomized in a 2-page spread (Solnit, pp. 24-25) showing a cross-section of a castle featuring numerous characters. It is quickly clear why the illustration was chosen: it is playful and full of activity, and appears modern in design. It has a comic-book feel thanks to its organization in strips, and the different rooms pictured can be said to form panels. Upon closer inspection, the illustration proves challenging, since it does not support the usual Z reading pattern, and it is not evident whether the actions represented are sequential or simultaneous. The starting point is the lower left corner, which depicts a royal couple, the king heading up the stairs, and inviting the viewer to follow through the positioning of his hand. Across the expanse

of the illustration, the upper right corner is the final panel, and it represents a princess about to enter an off-screen space. Making up the majority of the image are a number of renderings of people at work. We are able to glean their identity from the stereotypical rendering of their activity, and to a lesser extent their costume – we recognize a jester, housemaid, lady's maid, stableboy, all servants in a royal household.



Fig. 5. The castle at work (*La Belle au bois dormant*, 1920, p. 60-61, public domain).

Through this identification, the illustration brings back social stratification and the theme of servants' lack of freedom in choosing a profession that Solnit's rewriting had so skillfully addressed in the text. The work depicted here is not liberating, nor is it justly rewarded, as is labor in *Cinderella Liberator*. The activities of masters and servants are presented as fully separated.⁵⁰ The king and queen are looking for their daughter, traversing the castle, passing through the activities of the servants without paying them attention. The source of the illustration, a version of *Sleeping Beauty* (Evans / Rackham 1920), further underlines this separation: it can be argued that the protagonist in this fairy tale is punished by falling asleep for a hundred years because she engages in an activity reserved for lower classes (spinning). Despite the presence of fairies in this story, the object that the protagonist is fated to injure herself with is worldly. Moreover, in Evans' text, it is explicitly associated with the lower classes: the king's proclamation calling for objects used for spinning to be surrendered can't be read by those it targets (p. 48).

Class distinction is the original source of enchantment in Perrault's tales, as Daphne Hoogenboezem argues. The fantastical aspect of his fairy tales is their showing charming scenes from a peasant milieu within a text aimed at high society.⁵¹ The 17th century illustrations, in particular, serve to convey the rustic nature of the texts, though it is factitious. They are purposefully naïve in their sparse renderings of people and places, even though they are produced using then-current technology of copperplate engraving, which would permit a higher

level of detail to be rendered.⁵² Rackham's take on *Sleeping Beauty* similarly delights in fantastical domesticity, with the castle staff being the subject of many humorous, energetic silhouettes. The repetitive, unpleasant nature of their jobs is treated as spectacle, such as, for example, when portraying the castle's return to life is illustrated through the reprisal of chores (Heinemann, 1920, p. 101-102).

In addition to reaffirming class structure and its significance, the illustration imports the genre's traditional female protagonist into *Cinderella Liberator*. *Sleeping Beauty* perhaps most clearly represents the character as being beautiful and resigned to inaction, her freedom decided by outside forces, her very life and happiness dependent on marriage. Like 'Cinderella,' 'Sleeping Beauty' is also a collection of adaptations of a core narrative which the reader 'remembers' rather than precisely identifies with a particular source. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère finds that within this collection of retellings, which includes Evans', romance and marriage are much more pronounced than in Perrault's version.⁵³ There is little to prevent the reader from identifying the princess in the illustration of the castle with Cinderella in *Cinderella Liberator*, and her pictorial promotion to a higher aristocratic rank brings forth again the issue of marriage. This is a further point of division between text and image, since Solnit's rewriting performs a feminist critique of the traditional incarnation of this institution.

The 2019 text suggests that Cinderella's stepsisters are so invested in hair and dresses because they believe these attributes ensure a positive life outcome: 'having the tallest hair in the world would make you the most beautiful woman, and being the most beautiful would make you the happiest' (Solnit, p. 4). Though Solnit doesn't mention marriage, the superlatives sought by the sisters echo the reasoning behind the traditional fairy tale, in which physical appearance is the reflection of inner qualities, the best of which are rewarded with social ascension through matrimony. As Patricia Hannon puts it, fairy tales share in the representation of '[w]omen's inferior position in the marriage hierarchy' which 'results from their identification with the body as opposed to the mind, which, since Plato and Aristotle, had been equated with men'.⁵⁴

Solnit's innovation is to make explicit the economic reasoning behind this fairy tale standard. Beauty and the family name are the most visible, public face of what women have to offer to their partner; they are an integral part of their marriage exchange value. *Cinderella Liberator* folds this notion into a wider commentary on the value of labor, unfairly rewarded in the past, and appreciated and justly compensated in the retelling's idealized present. It explains that the stepsisters are mean to Cinderella because 'their mother had told them there was not enough for everybody and they needed to take things from other people to have enough for themselves' (Solnit, p. 18). The stepmother appears to believe in a narrative of acerbic economic competition that leads her to blindly promote the interests of her family above those of all others, and regardless of the consequences for the wider community. In Marxist terms, her world is one of haves and have-nots, in which profit and accumulation are supreme virtues. She is a keen capitalist, whose gains are possible through the exploitation of the workers. Coupled with the stepmother's domestic domain, this establishes a link between marriage and economic exploitation in a manner reminiscent of Beauvoir's critique of the institution, among those of other feminist thinkers, who found that it allowed the appropriation of women's labor.⁵⁵

The narrator does not endorse the stepmother's worldview, noting that 'there was plenty for everyone, if you share it properly, or if it has been shared properly before you got there' (p. 18). Despite the modern retelling's desire to be kind in its representation of all characters, this antagonist is not redeemed, and only metaphorically liberated – consumed by her obsession, she becomes the wind. The narrator leaves her to recede into the background, to whisper 'mine, mine, mine' (Solnit, p. 22) even as the fairy tale universe moves on to more enlightened thinking. The inexcusable in this retelling of *Cinderella* is thus the misappropriation of labor and the misrepresentation of its value. The protagonist's suffering in this text was not social descent but having her work stolen, and the celebratory illustration borrowed from Rackham's *Sleeping Beauty* doesn't correct this. The reader's likely identification of Cinderella with the princess in this image is counterproductive to the text's erasure of class structure. Thus, while the lexical part of *Cinderella Liberator* moves away from upwards social movement to fulfilling work as the protagonist's happy end, the image harks back to the traditional heroine waiting to be rescued through marriage.

Conclusion

Despite careful selection, the illustrations *Cinderella Liberator* borrows from Arthur Rackham's early 20th century fairy tales bring forth ideas that do not support the retelling in key points. Rackham's images are interpretations of Evans' traditional text, and they invest even more strongly than it in ideas such as the separation of social classes and the correlation of physical appearance and moral qualities. His silhouettes use a graceful feminine body to denote both Cinderella's virtues and her high birth. In contrast, her stepsisters' representation features physiognomically determined traits to show their unpleasant qualities. By correcting their profiles, the modern edition continues to codify positive and negative qualities through physical characteristics, even though the particular traits signified have changed. Solnit takes on the fairy tale's romanticizing of class divisions and its painting over the oppression of women, both as daughters and servants, by rewriting the value of work. Whereas in the traditional fairy tale, Cinderella's labor is punishment meant to denote her loss of social status, work is positively weighted in *Cinderella Liberator*. Through her efforts, the protagonist is given the power to transform the world, rendering it more just and equitable. This is communicated visually by adapting one of Rackham's illustrations to depict Cinderella as a master storyteller. Having the protagonist take over for the narrator highlights the text's emphasis on taking action and helping others.

Nevertheless, class division reemerges pictorially in the book's conclusion. While the text celebrates the new lives the protagonist, her stepsisters, and the prince have built through work, the illustration drawn from Rackham's *Sleeping Beauty* reiterates the separation of masters' and servants' domains. His depiction of the ball, elements of which are repeated on the endpapers of *Cinderella Liberator*, pictured leisure as the nobles' exclusive sphere, and the same ideas underpin this image. Servants are defined through the tasks they perform, while the fruits of their labor are enjoyed by the masters. Borrowing from *Sleeping Beauty* is moreover problematic in the context of the rewriting since its protagonist is most unlike Solnit's Cinderella and will be identified with her by the unaware reader. *Sleeping Beauty* is an inactive heroine,

whose life is her marriage. This is one of the key issues reimagined by the modern text, which engages in a feminist critique of marriage as part of its probing of the economic organization of the fairy tale's fictional universe. Through the antagonist, Cinderella's stepmother, Solnit establishes a link between marriage and economic exploitation. She both espouses a capitalistic worldview, and is the source of traditional notions of women's value being their physical appearance.

Thomas Leitch writes that 'a new set of illustrations can provide new marketing opportunities for a pre-sold lexical text'.⁵⁶ *Cinderella Liberator* shows that the reverse is also true, with pre-sold illustrations also presenting advantages to the texts in which they are reprinted. In addition to their aesthetic merits, Arthur Rackham's illustrations are reused in this book because they are 'correctly' positioned in the past – they are old, but not too old. They have the venerable patina of age given their publication date, but are modern enough to be easy to integrate in a 2019 text. Their distance in time from the present edition, 100 years, also seems fateful: positioned behind *Cinderella Liberator*, this century suggests that the current edition stands to become a defining 'Cinderella'. But in this context, the illustrations serve a different purpose than in their text of origin. In the 1919 edition, the value of the text was derived from its association with tradition, while that of the illustrations was that they were new, and showcased the interpretation of a Cinderella narrative by a leading artist. By the standards of the rewriting, the value of the text is in its going against the traditional lessons of the fairy tale, and that of the illustrations is that they are the classic work of an old master. This denotation eclipses the specific meanings of the images. Although this pairing of text and image is more unusual than the re-illustration of a classic text, it may well become common as the number of high-quality classic images in the public domain grows larger every year. Similarly, the market for ideologically refreshed retellings of hyper-adaptable texts and characters shows no signs of abating. The example of *Cinderella Liberator* serves as a case study of the relationship between a new text and recycled images and the complex and conflicting ideologic coding that can emerge from this combination.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Cinderella Liberator* (Haymarket Books, 2019), p. 12. Further references will be given in the text.

² Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, 'On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success': Biologically', *New Literary History*, 38. 3 (2007), 443–458.

³ Margot Blankier, 'Adapting and Transforming "Cinderella": Fairy-Tale Adaptations and the Limits of Existing Adaptation Theory', *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, 31.3 (2014), 108-123 (p. 116).

⁴ C.S. Evans, *Cinderella* (London: William Heinemann, 1919).

⁵ Rebecca Solnit, *The Mother of All Questions* (Haymarket Books, 2017), p. 9.

⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of My Nonexistence* (Penguin Books, 2021), p. 47.

⁷ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* (Kentucky UP, 1994), p. 9.

⁸ Atzmon, for example, describes Rackham's illustrations as anxiety-provoking because of their use of numerous, involved lines to create writhing backgrounds, their propensity to include sharp angled-objects and human-animal hybrid characters. See Leslie Atzmon, 'Arthur Rackham's Phrenological Landscape: In-Betweens, Goblins, and Femmes Fatales', *Design Issues*, 18.4, (2002), pp. 64–83.

⁹ James Hamilton, *Arthur Rackham: A Life with Illustration* (Pavilion, 1990), p. 79.

¹⁰ John D. Niles, 'Picture as Story: Arthur Rackham and the Ballads' in *The Nordic Storyteller*, ed. by Susan Brantly and Thomas A. DuBois, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 211–244 (p. 7).

¹¹ Derek Hudson, *Arthur Rackham: His Life and Work* (Heinemann, 1974), p. 57.

- ¹² Michael Felmingham, *The Illustrated Gift Book, 1880-1930* (Scolar Press, 1988), p. 2.
- ¹³ Alexandre Fachard, 'Twenty New Conrad Letters to Sydney S. Pawling and Charles S. Evans.' *The Conradian*, 38.1 (2013), pp. 135–159 (p. 138-139).
- ¹⁴ C.S. Evans, *Sleeping Beauty* (London: William Heinemann, 1920), np.
- ¹⁵ Despite the text's lack of attribution, the story is very similar to Evans', so it is likely a translation. The 1926 German edition of *Cinderella* featuring the same illustrations states this explicitly (C.S. Evans, *Aschenbrödel* (Munster Presse, 1926), np). A distinctive element of the French version is that it identifies the material of Cinderella's slipper as *vair* (a type of squirrel fur), rather than glass. The detail is not drawn from Perrault, but from the well-known 1862 Hetzel edition illustrated by Gustave Doré. Used in the 1919 version as an archaism, it may have been meant as a further, though factitious, tie to the fairy tale's illustrious past.
- ¹⁶ The English and German are also limited editions, signed and numbered by Rackham.
- ¹⁷ Kate Newell, *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 64.
- ¹⁸ Heidi Peeters, 'Multimodality and Its Modes in Novelization', *Image & Narrative* 11.1 (2010), 118–129 (p. 125).
- ¹⁹ Newell, p. 65.
- ²⁰ Kelly Barnhill, 'Fairy Tales', *New York Times Book Review*, 16 May 2019, p. 26.
- ²¹ *, 'Feminist Folktales', *Publishers Weekly* 266.8, Feb. 2019, p. 80.
- ²² *, 'Cinderella Liberator', *Kirkus Reviews*, 10 May 2019, np.
- ²³ Barnhill, p. 26 and Julie Buntin, 'Cinderella Liberator Turns the Fairy Tale Upside Down – for Kids and Adults', *Datebook, San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 May 2019, np.
- ²⁴ Hamilton, p. 91-92.
- ²⁵ Hamilton p. 92.
- ²⁶ Hamilton, p. 92.
- ²⁷ Rackham's negotiation of the illustrator's two positions didn't always work out to an equilibrium. For example, his work on J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* attests to a strong personal interpretation that does not also suit the author's take on the text. Rackham and Barrie diverged significantly over which version of the protagonist was more important to the emergent Peter Pan myth, that of the child spirit in Kensington Gardens, or that of the boy in Neverland. See François Fièvre, 'Réenchanter le monde: Barrie lu par Rackham', *Belphégor*, 10-3 (2011), np.
- ²⁸ The stepmother's posture is described by straight lines and hard angles that emphasize her authoritarian personality. For example, on p. 22, her outstretched arms indicate she is tense with rage, and her body leans over her husband's, as though she were chasing him out.
- ²⁹ Atzmon, p. 64.
- ³⁰ Atzmon, p. 67.
- ³¹ The animals transformed into humans by the fairy godmother have similar profiles with exaggerated features. In this case, the details explicitly recall their non-human provenance.
- ³² William Rimmer, *Art Anatomy* (Dover Publications, 1962), p. 63.
- ³³ One review of *Cinderella Liberator* touches on the question of the sisters' profiles being different than Cinderella's in Rackham's rendering, but does not mention that this was corrected. See Letitia Montgomery-Rodgers, 'Cinderella Liberator', *Orion Magazine* 38.1 (2019), 77–78, p. 78.
- ³⁴ A detailed discussion of the original illustrations of Perrault's tales can be found in Le Men, Ségolène. 'Mother Goose Illustrated: From Perrault to Doré' *Poetics Today*, 13.1, 1992, pp. 17-39.
- ³⁵ Daphne M. Hoogenboezem, 'Magie de l'image: Alterité, merveilleux et définition générique dans les contes de Perrault.' *Relief* 4.2 (2010), 1–26, (p. 6).
- ³⁶ Two sources that discuss Perrault's fairy tales in the context of the Quarrel are Marc Fumaroli, 'Les Contes de Perrault et leur sens second : l'éloge de la modernité du siècle de Louis le Grand', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 114.4 (2014), pp. 775-796 and Lydie Jean, 'Charles Perrault's Paradox: How Aristocratic Fairy Tales Became Synonymous with Folklore Conservation.' *TRAMES* 11. 3 (2007), pp. 276–283.
- ³⁷ Even when Cinderella is assigned a function by Evans, 'scullion' (p. 32), the specificity loses its significance since all the other servants leave, and she takes over their duties.
- ³⁸ Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in 18th-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton UP, 1983), p. 30.
- ³⁹ Maza, p. 54.

⁴⁰ In Evans' version, her happy end is directly tied to this status being restored. The fairy godmother advises the stepsisters that 'She is the daughter of the house, but you robbed her of all the joy that should have been hers. Now she shall be the greatest lady in the land' (p. 106).

⁴¹ Charles Perrault, *Contes* (Gallimard, 1981), p. 51.

⁴² Marc Fumaroli, *La diplomatie de l'esprit: de Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris : Gallimard, 1998), p. 455.

⁴³ Fumaroli, *La diplomatie de l'esprit*, p. 457.

⁴⁴ Daniel Aranda, 'Moral Adjustments to Perrault's Cinderella in French Children's Literature (1850-1900)', in *Cinderella across Cultures: New Directions and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère et al., (Wayne State University Press, 2016), pp. 124–140 (p. 129).

⁴⁵ Aranda, p. 125

⁴⁶ The frontispiece and the title page show Cinderella and the prince, as well as her stepsisters and their husbands joining in the nobles' permanent dance, echoing the idea that the protagonist's social ascension is just. In *Cinderella Liberator*, this image is reprinted on the endpapers.

⁴⁷ Satish Padiyar, 'Who Is Socrates? Desire and Subversion in David's "Death of Socrates"(1787)', *Representations*, 102.1 (2008), 27–52 (p. 36).

⁴⁸ Glenn W. Most, 'Reading Raphael: 'The School of Athens' and Its Pre-Text', *Critical Inquiry* 23.1 (1996), 145–182, p. 165.

⁴⁹ Amazon Studios' *Cinderella* (2021) film follows a similar path, by having the protagonist dream of running her own dressmaking business.

⁵⁰ Rackham's illustrations of the ball in *Cinderella* also show the world of servants and masters as separate. Servants are comical in their seriousness and engrossed in their work, their postures are stiff and silhouettes structured on sharp angles. Thus, even though they are also present at the ball, their experience of the event is very different; the servants are consumed by their activity, and fully defined by it.

⁵¹ Hoogenboezem, p. 19.

⁵² Hoogenboezem, p. 21.

⁵³ Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, "'But marriage itself is no party": Angela Carter's Translation of Charles Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant"; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping Beauty Myth', *Marvels & Tales*, 24.1 (2010), 131-151, p. 132.

⁵⁴ Patricia Hannon, *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France*, (Rodopi, 1998), p. 27.

⁵⁵ This issue is discussed in a nuanced manner in Debra B. Bergoffen, 'Marriage, Autonomy, and Feminine Protest', *Hypatia* 14.4 (1999) 18-35.

⁵⁶ Thomas Leitch, "Adaptable Alice" in *Tantalizing Alice: Approaches, Concepts and Case-studies in Adaptations of a Classic*, ed. Nadia Butt and Sissy Helff (Trier: Trier Verlag, 2016), pp. 11- 28 (p. 24).