

Juggling Symbolism in Deconstructing the Contemporary Fairy Tale: The Case of “Cinderella”

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Abstract

Symbolism can be easily depicted in the history of fairy tales, especially ones concerned with women's discourse. In the fairy tale cannon, symbolism has been used by patriarchy as a cultural as well as a political tool by authors of the fairy tale genre, so when viewing symbolism in fairy tales, it should be traced back to the values and norms in the cultures behind those tales. However, contemporary feminist fairy tales that portray female characters with a focus on their subjectivity, reject the portrayal of female passivity and weakness found in traditional tales. A major part of the feminist discourse looks at symbols as an agent of women's empowerment. With the emergence of third-wave feminism, writers as well as film authors and directors have started to express women's views through fairy tales. In the light of the modern views about the use of symbolism, I argue that contemporary fairy tales juggle symbolism as a means of resistance.

In the light of the aforementioned account, the present paper examines three contemporary retellings of "Cinderella" including Tanith Lee's short story "When the Clock Strikes" (1983), Emma Donoghue's short story "The Tale of the Shoe" (1993), and Andy Tennant's film *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998). The researcher addresses three symbols, namely "The Symbol of Silk," "The Symbol of Number Three" and "The Symbol of the Clock". Interestingly, findings show that contemporary versions of "Cinderella" reinvent female characters, and revisit them to come up with ways to empower women as a counterattack against patriarchal versions with their oppressed women.

The aim of this paper is to show how fairy tales centre on various symbols creating a network where each tale chooses to alternate meaning according to the writer's purpose of using them. This entails that the meaning behind fairy tale symbols is not a fixed one, but is rather in play with different interpretations, and has a deeper meaning in the context of the whole story. Therefore, analysing and comparing tale variants in regards to symbolism are vital for determining the active aspect of symbols in fairy tales. The present paper analyses the use of symbolism in an attempt to show that feminists explore and reconfigure the classical symbols of patriarchy which devour feminism, with the purpose of focusing on the empowerment of women in fairy tales. The analysis includes Tanith Lee's two short stories "When the Clock Strikes" (1983); Emma Donoghue's short story "The Tale of the Shoe" (1993), and Andy Tennat's film "Ever After: A Cinderella Story" (1998).

Literary symbols are created when writers allot a special, symbolic meaning to something. In fairy tales for example, Little Red Riding Hood embodies the innocence and vulnerability of children, and particularly, little girls. Symbols usually work by association. They usually appear and reappear throughout the work, form some kind of a figurative language, and stand for something principally different from themselves. Alfred North Whitehead argues that "symbolism is on the fringe of life. It has an unessential element in its constitution. The very fact that it can be acquitted in one epoch and discarded in another epoch testifies to its superficial nature" (Whitehead 1). Therefore, symbols appear and disappear according to the focus of a writer and are influenced by the era in which they exist.

The Danish Folklorist Bengt Holbek assumes that the "symbolic" features in fairy tales "convey *feelings* rather than thoughts". He argues that fairy tale features relate closely to the real world (409), which leaves "no room at all for the so-called supernatural beings, the witches, fairies, dragons, ogres, etc." (439), since "*they represent aspects of real persons*" (418). Along the same lines, Alan Dundes says that "folklore provides a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual, direct, way" (36). This shows that fairy tale symbolism is a deep expression of what is normally mundane and ordinary, put in a context to make it sound more profound, giving words new meanings.

Words in fairy tales do have hidden meanings. Maria Tatar explains the metaphorical aspect of fairy tales stating that "the shift from the realistic milieu described in the tale's opening to the marvellous

world of the tale proper is accompanied by a corresponding shift from the figurative meaning of words to the things that those words designate” (Hard Facts 79). She explains that in fairy tales “the figurative or metaphorical dimension of language takes on literal meaning” (Hard Facts 80). Tatar puts it into words that fairy tales narrate “something about the way in which the mind draws on the double movement of language between literal meaning and figurative expression” (Hard Facts 82).

The use of symbolism is central to the meaning of fairy tales and feminists have employed them as a means of resistance. Dominant feminist symbolism is a rejection of power and hegemony found in traditional fairy tales where men writers have used symbols in favour of patriarchy and its fixed standards. To explain the plurality of meaning when it comes to symbols, Lévi-Strauss sets a notion that a symbol cannot “[signify] anything by itself” (197), but its significance “is always global; it cannot be reduced to the interpretation provided by one particular code” (qtd. in Columbus 38). Feminists use the technique of symbolism to convey their feminist views. That is to say, the title, the images, and the character names all work together to paint the lives of women who resist oppression under male domination. Donald Haase argues that to Freud, “the language of fairy tales ... works symbolically by giving expression to repressed conflicts, anxieties, wishes, and taboo desires” (991). In fact, the use of symbolism in contemporary works has helped shape the formation of female identity away from the patriarchal norms. Feminist writers rewrite dominant symbols in fairy tales, which fail to represent women as they really are, resisting the formation found in traditional tales. These symbols exemplify a certain feminist discourse.

A: The Symbol of Silk

Throughout the Cinderella fairy tales under examination, silk is presented as an important symbol, bearing a great significance that cannot be overlooked. Silk has always been considered a symbol of eroticism. For the Romans, women dressed in silk were seen as women of ill repute indicating moral decadence, given the fact that silk shows more than it hides. Seneca the Elder, a Roman philosopher, says:

I can see clothes of silk, if materials that do not hide the body, nor even one’s decency, can be called clothes. ... Wretched flocks of maids labour so that the adulteress may be visible through her thin dress, so that her husband has no more acquaintance than any outsider or foreigner with his wife’s body. (qtd. in Killion 68)

Peter Frankopan comments on Seneca's stance, observing that Seneca did not consider silk a piece of clothing, for it "hid[es] neither the curves nor the decency of the ladies of Rome" (ch. 1). He adds that Seneca claims that a woman could not deny being "naked" when she wears silk (ch. 1).

Furthermore, Pliny the Elder, a Roman author, naturalist and natural philosopher, also comments on wearing silk, saying that Pamphile's, a Greek woman who is said to be the first to spin silk, invention of weaving silk was "a plan to reduce women's clothing to nakedness" (Burns 9). Pliny adds that the problem of wearing silk originates from a land to the east of the "Cannibal Scythians", known as Caucasus in the present day, where people called "the Seres" are known for producing a woollen material found in forests. After manufacturing such a material it is sold and given to maids in Rome to weave the threads, then Roman maidens would wear such transparent clothing in public. He describes this kind of trade as a threat to civilization just as wild animals may be (Burns 9). Not only in Italy, but also in England, an English preacher explains to his flock that "silken garments, which are fashioned from the entrails of worms – all of which kinds of raiment are now worn rather for vain glory and worldly pomp than for the necessity of nature ... and assuredly most of all to excite lust" (Bowden 80).

Silk is a recurrent symbol in Cinderella's traditional versions, given its Chinese origins. The symbol has been used as a means to galvanise the prince to marry the girl who wears it. Nevertheless, feminists have used the symbol of silk to subvert the old views about it with regards to its seductive aspect. Contemporary feminist writers of the tales under study have deployed silk in order to present a new aspect of it. This has been done in different ways according to the context of each tale, which shows that writers play with a well-engraved symbol in patriarchy to suit the needs of the new views about women and their desires.

In Tanith Lee's short story "When the Clock Strikes", the father, throughout the tale, is always referred to as the "silk merchant". He is given no name to signify how important his trade is. Since the Cinderella story has roots in Chinese culture, it is noteworthy to look back at the traditional views about men involved in the silk trade: "The yoke of Chinese traditional culture relegated those engaged in the commerce or trade of textiles and silk to the lower status, or ranking, in society. Merchants engaged in trade were the branch, and not the root, in Chinese traditional culture" (Killion 174).

The term “Silk merchant” carries some connotation regarding the character of the father figure. When he is first introduced by Lee, he is said to be a “merchant, a dealer in silks, [who is] respected, a good fellow but not wise” (“When the Clock Strikes” 48). If the word “silk” is substituted with “women” in “silk merchant”, this would mean that the father trades his women’s bodies in return for climbing up the social ladder. In this sense, it is evident from the events of the tale that the father aspires for such a status as he fills his house with silks upon receiving an invitation to attend the ball because this will help seduce the Prince into marrying one of his stepdaughters. It is narrated that “[t]he silk merchant received his invitation to the palace ... [As a consequence, his] house had been thrown into uproar. The most luscious silks of his workplace were carried into the house and laid before the wife and her two daughters, who chattered and squealed with excitement” (55). The father regards this ball as a game that involves trading women’s bodies.

Lee excludes Ashella from such a play because her aim is not to marry the prince, for she is not to be traded. Her aim is a more profound one to the feminist Lee, who excludes her from having any marriage intentions. As such, the silk symbol is used to highlight the reversal of roles in a new light which shows that the father is a villain, who involves his women in a play-like act which would benefit him socially. This is because dressing in silk is a socially-positioned status of women who belong to a world of civilised eroticism. Therefore, Ashella is featured not in a silk dress like her step-sisters, as she appears at the ball wearing “a gown of apricot brocade embroidered thickly with gold. Her sleeves and the bodice of her gown were slashed over ivory satin sewn with large rosy pearls” (57-8). Satin is significant as its material presents full body coverage, unlike silk. According to *A Dictionary of Science, Literature and Art*, satin is defined as “[a] closely woven silk, generally dressed with gum, especially when intended for ribbons [and] dresses” (348). Being of such nature, Lee makes use of the symbol to shed light on Ashella’s hidden intention not to seduce the prince and reject marriage.

Likewise, the absence of seducing the Prince by wearing silk is a theme based in the Andy Tennant’s film adaptation “Ever After”, and is therefore enhanced by the final dress Danielle wears at the ball. The omission of silk is a factor that shows that her main purpose of going to the ball is to reveal her true self. By this, Danielle is presented as a woman of high honour, refusing any patriarchal oppression legislated by society. Danielle’s dress, which she wears at the ball, is made of materials that do not reveal the body of its wearer. Satin, organza and lace are the main materials of the “Breathe” gown. Unlike her stepsisters, and

throughout the film, Danielle has no intention throughout the film to seduce the Prince with silk clothing, for her only aim is to live the same honourable life she used to live while her father was alive. The dress she wears at the ball is actually her mother's dress, representing her only inheritance along with her mother's shoes. The final touch of two wings put by Leonardo Da Vinci to the dress makes it look more angelic than human. This dress, in turn, distinguishes Danielle, the heroine of the story, from her stepsisters, especially Margret, who aim at gaining the attention of the Prince.

Not only is silk seen as erotic for men, it is also erotic for lesbians. Bearing on the Chinese influence of silk, the most famous established same-sex relationships among lesbians are found in the Chinese sisterhoods. Such sisterhoods emerged in the nineteenth century Chinese province of Guangdong where women who were mostly silk workers vowed to the goddess Guan Yin never to be bound in marriage to a man (Blackwood and Wieringa 421). In this light, Donoghue represents Cinderella, in "The Tale of the Shoe", describing her skin on the night she dances with the Prince as "silk": "That night my new skin was red silk, shivering in the breeze" (6). The enjoyment she feels in wearing silk gives a strong sense of seduction that could be directed to both men and women. After such a night, she leaves the Prince and chooses her fairy godmother instead, showing that her "silk" skin is alluring to the old woman. Being a feminist, Donoghue uses silk to strengthen the bond between female characters in a sexual context that shows that a symbol which is commonly used by patriarchy to serve in favour of male characters can also be manipulated to embark a relationship between two women. This creates a sense of newness to the fairy tale genre where feminists use symbols such as silk, in a deconstructive and resistive manner, to appeal for women unlike the canon where such symbols were only seductive to men.

B: The Symbol of Number Three

Three is known in fairy tales as a practical number in terms of storytelling and orality as it allows for repetition. In fairy tales, three is a symbol which recurrently appears: three sons, three daughters, three pigs, three wishes are just a few examples of this repetition (Rosenberg 111). The rule of three is "a concept in writing that suggests that content or messages delivered in three are generally more satisfying and effective than content delivered in other numbers" (Lewis and Mills 55). Three connotes that the thing has not happened as a single occurrence, or has

not happened twice by coincidence; it has happened three times allowing for the appearance of a particular pattern. Therefore, the rule of three is a universal pattern of development allowing it to suit the development within a certain story or tale or the representation of a process: for example, beginning, middle and end of a plot are a pattern found in any story. A pattern of three allows for recurrence and repetition, which creates a sense of suspense and expectations, while not dwelling too long so the audience/reader would get bored of the storyline. Roy Peter Clark discusses the rule of three in *Writing Tools*: “The mojo of three offers a greater sense of completeness than four or more” (Clark). He goes on to explain how to perfectly use other sets of numbers in comparison to three: “Use one for power. Use two for comparison, contrast. Use three for completeness, wholeness, roundness. Use four or more to list, inventory, compile, and expand” (Clark).

Correspondingly, it is easier for a storyteller to remember a pattern of three than a pattern for example of seven or nine. In an attempt to explain the significance of the number three, D.L. Ashliman states that:

the most common number in fairy tales is three. Possibly based on structures of the natural world and the human mind, three is universally seen as a special number. A triangle is the most stable of all the simple designs. We start a race with the three-part command “ready, set, go.” The basic family consists of father, mother, and child. And, of course, the Christian Godhead is a trinity, further endorsing the number three’s positive character. Fairy-tale episodes are typically repeated three times. If a set number of wishes is granted, the number is almost always three. (7)

There is a popular theme, in fairy tales, related to the existence of three daughters where the youngest is always set in opposition to the two other daughters. For example, In “Tods and Diamonds” by Charles Perrault, the youngest daughter is blessed with jewels that fall from her lips as she speaks which leaves the other two sisters jealous and eventually cursed with toads and snakes falling from their mouths whenever they speak. In “Cinderella”, the presence of three daughters showcases the difference between the daughters’ personalities. This theory is elaborated by Freud in his essay ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’, in which he considers the general implication of the motif of the third daughter that occurs in King Lear, ‘Cinderella’, the tale of Cupid and Psyche, and the story of the choice between three caskets in Shakespeare’s play which are symbolic of “a man’s choice between three

women” (26). Freud tries to study the hidden meaning of the three sisters and what they symbolize. To find an answer, he relates this motif to dreams and suggests that one of the chief characteristics of the ‘third one’ is her silence or, certainly, her dumbness, a notion that ‘in dreams ... is a common representation of death’ (28). Other features of these tales propose the same theme as Freud:

Hiding and being unfindable – a thing which confronts the prince in the fairy tale of Cinderella three times, is another symbol of death in dreams; so, too, is a marked pallor, of which the ‘paleness’ of the lead in one reading of Shakespeare. (28)

Freud concludes that “the third one of the sisters between whom the choice is made is a dead woman” – and may even represent Death” (29). Andrew Teverson criticizes this conclusion, Freud suggests, indicating that it may introduce a contradiction into the story: “why would the figure of death appear as a beloved object, and why would the protagonist willingly choose death?” (Teverson). This contradiction, however, is solved according to Freud as he notes that “[m]an ... makes use of his imaginative activity in order to satisfy the wishes that reality does not satisfy” (32). Building upon this thought, stories like “Cinderella” and *Lear or The Three Caskets* have emerged “in which the Goddess of Death was replaced by the Goddess of Love and by what was equivalent to her in human shape” (32). Ideas are thus opposed to reality to resolve such a threat, therefore the character that represents death is seen as “the fairest, best, most desirable and most loveable of women” (32). In the case of the “Cinderella” story, this character is Cinderella.

Another aspect that appears in fairy tales in regards to the number three is the three stages a hero goes through. Joseph Campbell argues that “the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit ... a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (27-8). He explains that these stages “help us to understand not only the meaning of [a certain tale] for contemporary life, but also the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes, and wisdom” (28). Therefore, the significance of the use of three stages is to make the audience/reader familiar with what is being heard/read. Ashliman agrees with this same pattern of three suggesting that “[a]lthough fairy-tale formulas are not as reliable and universal as some structuralists might posit, the following outline does apply to a very large number of tales: 1. Separation 2. Initiation 3. Return” (41).

The fairy-tale separation from familiar surroundings can be either voluntary or forced. Cinderella is made to live in the kitchen and is abandoned by all her family members including her father. To Campbell, the hero/heroine is “frequently unrecognized or disdained. He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolic deficiency” (29-30). In the case of Cinderella, it is the loss of her mother and suffering from a long ordeal as a consequence. Yet, usually the hero/heroine of a fairy tale must find his/her new way by him/herself, sought independently away from the customary social structure (Ashliman 41).

The initiation phase of a typical fairy tale is usually full of encountered conflicts. In the case of female characters, they are usually confronted with overwhelming domestic tasks. For example, the stepmother in the Grimm’s version forces Cinderella “to separate peas and lentils from ashes” (Ashliman 41). The initiation phase, being the central stage, is often “further subdivided into episodes, often three in number” (Ashliman 42). Tasks done in fairy tales occasionally come in sets of three or are completed in three days. They are usually repetitive, where the second and third represent variants of the first. This follows the acclaimed concept of a major event happening on the third day/night. For example, in the central part of the traditional “Cinderella”, she goes to the ball for three consecutive nights, where in the first two nights nothing significant happens, but it is on the third night that she loses her shoe, and in his attempt to find the foot that fits the shoe, the prince finds Cinderella whom he marries. Ashliman adds to this idea by further explaining that usually leading characters in fairy tales are only children who become adults in the process of the three stages: “The initiation episodes obviously mark their coming of age. Immediately upon resolving the story’s central conflict, the protagonists marry” (42).

A fairy tale’s third stage is defined by the return of the hero or heroine back to society. However, this phase does not mark a circular pattern of events. The standard pattern for fairy tales is not marked by the protagonists’ return to their original home, but rather the incorporation into a new communal world, “and nearly always in a much more powerful and prestigious role” (Ashliman 42). For instance, “[h]eroines move from kitchen to castle (42). Campbell elucidates the third stage by affirming that typically in this stage “the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph ... [for example] the younger or despised child who becomes the master of extraordinary powers – prevails over his personal oppressors” (Campbell 30). Like in the fairy tale “The Three Little Pigs”.

The rule of three is present in Donoghue's short story "The Tale of the Shoe" where Cinderella encounters more than one incident, in the stage of initiation, categorized by a repetition of three times. First, she dances "three times with the Prince" (5) who does not seem to fascinate her. Donoghue uses the rule of three to show that something can happen for three times and the outcome is still the same, breaking the power it has in traditional tales. The episode of the ball is repeated three times and is dealt with mockery and irony by the narrator as the musicians play "the same tune over and over (6), and Cinderella dances "like a clockwork ballerina," smiling "till [her] face twisted" (6). She dances mechanically like a doll, a mere dead robot. This creates a sense of discomfort that the heroine feels in relation to the repetitive pattern of the tale which shows a deviation from the social and common convictions of patriarchy. However, Donoghue uses the same rule in showing that the third time can present a change in the life of the protagonist when Cinderella goes to the ball three times and the godmother comes to her and asks her the first two nights the same question of "[h]ad enough" (4-5). On the third night, the godmother does not ask Cinderella if she had enough or no, but rather Cinderella realises on her own that she has started to fall in love with the godmother. Cinderella narrates asking "[h]ow could I not have noticed she was beautiful?" (7) connoting the beginning of a love relationship. The stage of return to society happens when she starts this relationship and not when she marries the Prince. In the short story "The Tale of the Shoe" Cinderella regains her liveliness when she returns to the fairy godmother. By this, Donoghue deconstructs the idea that the return to society has to be dependent on being saved by a male character. Although there is no arranged marriage, it is obvious that Cinderella shall live a happy life.

In the short story "When the Clock Strikes" Freud's notion of "The Three Caskets" is prominent. Ashella is set apart from her sisters who seem to be very nice characters in opposition to traditional versions. She is described as death more than once, suggesting that Lee wishes to subvert the idea of overcoming inner fear, illustrated by Freud, by making death contradict its nature. Unlike traditional versions, Lee reinforces the fact that death is a fearful thing that people should dread and shows, throughout the narrative, that the third sister can be in fact destructive and not at all nice and passive.

Also, Lee uses the rule of three in Ashella's initiation stage when she is at the ball. Ashella does not go to the ball three times like the customary pattern, but rather goes once, which shows how powerful she is. She does not need to repeat the same act three times in order to

achieve her goal. However, Lee uses the rule of three in another manner in which Ashella curses the prince more than once, with the third time defined by cursing him “in the name of those that [his] father slew” (58). Hence again, the rule is not used in favour of patriarchy, but in favour of the female protagonist who attempts to kill the Prince.

In Andy Tennant’s film “Ever After: A Cinderella Story”, the three sisters, Danielle, Marguerite, and Jacqueline are framed in a reversed outlook with regards to Freud’s “The Three Caskets” within the initiation phase. Freud interprets the third sister, namely Cinderella, as a weak character who is silent and immature. However, the film proposes a different stance of Cinderella, featuring Danielle as a very powerful character who, in three significant situations, proves to be strong. Danielle first accidentally encounters the prince at the backyard of her house where he is spotted stealing a horse from the stable. Once noticed, Danielle runs at him and starts throwing apples at his face and body. This shows that she is a person who feels a sense of belonging and protection for the place she has grown in to be a young adult. This contradicts the fact that protagonists usually seclude themselves from society, waiting passively to be saved. The other incident is when she goes to the palace to free Maurice, her servant, from being exiled. Again, she is not a passive character, but rather a very eloquent one who stands up for the right of others. The third and most significant situation is when she carries the prince on her back when asked by the gipsy man to carry whichever she can. All these situations have proven to the prince that she is not a woman of ordinary attributes who seeks a domestic life like her stepsisters, but rather a young woman who believes in her inner strength and capabilities. These three repetitive incidents that happen with the Prince show how Danielle is far from being a stereotypical female protagonist. They are set in contrast to the normal encounter which appears in traditional versions where Cinderella goes to the ball for three nights, wearing and looking her best to please the Prince, gaining his love, and eventually marrying him.

C: The Symbol of the Clock

Time is central to narrative, which is simply the orderly description of the progression of events. In fairy tales, time is equated with meaning. A clock represents the passage of time. It is well known that often deadlines are set at midnight, so the clock and midnight represent a strong motif that appears in fairy tales related to time limits allotted for protagonists to complete certain tasks. Realistically, midnight or twelve

o'clock on the clock is when the day officially ends and another day begins. Also, midnight is possibly the most substantial hour of the day for the world of the supernatural. It is always said that "Midnight is Magic". Witches, ghosts, and hags are at their highest from sunset till midnight. On an inner level, it marks a new phase of one's life where there are new chances for a new beginning. In fairy tales, change is brought about at midnight, and important decisions are taken. Clocks are common to fairy tales, as they have appeared in various tales throughout the ages.

The clock appears in Cinderella represented in the fairy godmother's advice to Cinderella that she has to return from the ball before midnight or all the magic will disappear. This warning can be interpreted on a deeper level. She must win the Prince over before midnight because she has to abide by the curfew hour of twelve. In an interpretation of Melies' cinematic of "Cinderella," Zipes reads the clock as an "overbearing and ridiculous symbol of order and duty plays no role in the end" (*The Enchanted Screen* 40). This puts pressure on the heroine in exerting an effort to please the prince in a short time and win him over. In patriarchal versions, midnight is when Cinderella finds her acclaimed true love. In an article on black adaptations of Cinderella, Marleen S. Barr describes the clock as follows: "The iconic clock striking twelve ... is the fixed definition that temporarily thwarts Cinderella" (95). Cinderella fears the loss of her dreams at the stroke of midnight, undermining her in a state of weakness where all she thinks about is the possibility of getting married to the prince.

Old versions of "Cinderella" convey the psyche of men. If Cinderella stays, she will not be appealing to the prince; the prince will not chase her; she will not be wanted; she has to flee in order to achieve the patriarchal vision of a woman. Patriarchy retains control over women as long as they retain control over time and women's actions in relation to it. The image of the clock intensifies the pressures of time. In different versions of "Cinderella", time frames the life of the heroine. Analysing the existence of the clock, Mary Ellen Snodgrass, an American author, argues that "[t]he symbolic clock represent[s] coercive deadlines that [control] artistic output" (74). Being conscious of the passing of time and its consequences burdens Cinderella in realising that if she passes midnight, all her dreams would fade away. "I see in the European tale another important theme, which is enacted by the two-move structure: the Dream Coming True. The best example for this is set in Perrault's version where Cinderella "can 'have a ball' only till the witching hour of twelve o'clock" (Ramanujan 270). Everything returns to the same state that she has always lived in, so leaving before midnight saves her from being

discovered as the ragged girl diminishing her chance to be loved by the prince.

Through their rewriting of the canon, feminist critics reimagine the way Cinderella deals with such pressure. Cinderella's life before the clock strikes twelve differs from her life after twelve. There is a great discrepancy between old and contemporary versions of Cinderella. In the canonical tales, Cinderella is not in control of her state after twelve, while in the new versions change is brought about by midnight and Cinderella embarks on a new life. Feminists see that "[t]he clock is less of a symbol of empire's control over historical transformation and more a battleground for the representation of voices, bodies, stories, and rhythms struggling to find expression" (Barrows 134-35). Therefore, the clock resembles the life of Cinderella and her choices. In the case of the tales written from a feminist perspective, its either that they leave her the choice to live a life away from the prince, or they focus on the impact of choosing to marry the prince.

In Donoghue's short story "The Tale of the Shoe," the confinement set by the fairy godmother that Cinderella is not to stay out past midnight disappears. Despite the famous controlling demand that appears in almost all of the "Cinderella" variants, it disappears in this feminist version, where Cinderella is left to decide her own fate all by herself without any restrictions or pressure. On the first night at the ball, Cinderella is not fascinated and she willingly leaves the ball "at ten to twelve" (4) where the female "stranger" awaits for her "down the steps" (4). They both leave and enjoy each other's company as they do. On the second night, Cinderella again leaves willingly, but this time "at five to midnight" (5) because she feels uncomfortable at the ball as her feet start to ache. She waits for the godmother on the bottom step. She knows the godmother will come to take her. She is after all her rescuer and her guide to the new life she wishes to lead. In the classical version, the clock could possibly symbolize the woman's biological clock. This, in turn, is subverted in the re-written versions: a clock that ticks urging her to get married.

On the third night, as the midnight bell begins to toll, the Prince proposes, leaving Cinderella no choice but to run away from the ball, but this time not for fear of being disenchanting and losing her beautiful dress, but rather because she wants to get away from the Prince and all what he represents. She narrates that "just then the midnight began to toll out the long procession of years, palatial day by moonless night. And I leaped backward down the steps, leaving one shoe behind" (7). Midnight marks

a transformation in the life of Cinderella. In this sense, Cinderella starts afresh at midnight. Her choice to go back to the old woman who has helped her regain her sense of confidence serves the lesbian romance Donoghue stresses in this version by bringing together the heroine and the helper. Donoghue defies the norms that dictate that women are to love men of a higher status and to live happily with them enabling Cinderella to explore the possibility of a happy ending with a person whom she had known for a while and not a person whom she has just seen at an arranged ball for marriage purposes. The symbolism of the clock striking twelve lies in Cinderella's transgressive desire to begin a relationship with the godmother, therefore allowing her to profoundly depart from the traditional plot ending and exploring an alternative while protesting against the socially approved attitude related to marriage at first sight proposed by the dominant male discourse.

Tennant's cinematic adaptation "Ever After: A Cinderella Story" presents midnight and its confinement away from the traditional views related to Cinderella. Here, Henry the Prince is pressured to announce a bride at the stroke of midnight. Despite Danielle's disappointment, she shows up at the ball. Although, no bells toll at the stroke of midnight, however, Danielle shows up, marking a change in the course of the film. As it always does, midnight brings about change, and here the change is to the worse which happens to intensify the plot marking the climax of an anxious ballroom sequence. The stepmother realizes that the girl in the beautiful dress is her stepdaughter, and therefore tries to stop the Prince from proposing to her by humiliating Danielle in front of all the attendees, for she wishes that the prince marries no one but her eldest daughter. The omission of the strike at midnight happens as the path to happiness is blocked not by seconds and minutes but by social forces that play a major role throughout the film. Also, the clock striking twelve is always present when the Prince is dancing with Cinderella, therefore omitting it from the film is relevant since they do have the chance to actually dance with each other, but rather engage in falling under the trickeries of the stepmother. The effect of midnight is severe on Danielle, and does not let the plot end the way it always does. In traditional versions, Cinderella would go to the ball; the prince would fall in love with her; they marry and live happily ever after; however in "Ever After" Danielle has yet to face another obstacle before she is bound to the Prince through marriage. She is punished by her stepmother as she is sold to the marquis who chains her for fear of her escape.

The symbol of the clock in Lee's "When the Clock Strikes" is a vital one representing the course of Ashella's life. The clock is hinted at

throughout the story to trace the maturation process the heroine goes through. The narrative begins two hundred years after the clock has last struck twelve (47), so the events of the story are set in relation to the clock which gives it significance from the very beginning. It is said that “the image of the clock [is] an animate object which emblemizes change” (Moen 117). Therefore, the clock is symbolic of transformation. The transformation is based on Ashella’s intentions towards the royal family. The clock is described as having its hours in the shape of figures which begin with “a girl-child” and end with “Death” (47) giving a sense of degradation as the day passes. The reader is left feeling uneasy reading the first lines in the tale which describe the clock as death is brought about more than once in the story.

Throughout the tale, Ashella changes from an innocent young girl to becoming a witch. This witch is capable of destroying the lives of others in an attempt of vengeance. In fact, “Lee’s Cinderella version, “When the Clock Strikes,” rewrites the Cinderella figure as a manipulative and vengeful witch, whose traditional fairy-tale ability to bewitch the prince in a few hours becomes considerable more sinister” (Tiffin 150). At the great ballroom, the clock represents a silent witness to the events that are about to happen. Ashella arrives at the ball when the hour of the hag strikes on the clock (59). This is noteworthy because Ashella is in fact a witch, so she arrives at the hour of the witch which is the eleventh night. In a way, she takes control over the situation with the use of the clock. The clock seems to be a helping hand to Ashella creating some kind of bond between her actions and the hours on the clock. However, full power is attained at the stroke of midnight because “[a]t twelve o’clock [a person is] back in charge of the controls” (Ramtha 64).

The twelfth hour causes a change in Ashella’s psychology, being much focused on her target that she ignores all what the prince says. It is evident that “the midnight chiming of the clock as the symbol of the division between good and evil” (Ricci 19). The stopping of the clock at the twelfth hour evokes a sense of groan, such as one in which evil forces have taken control of the situation in front of the eyes of important city courts men and women giving them a lesson about the consequences of usurping a throne. As mentioned in the above paragraph, Ashella is in full control of the situation after twelve; she takes power over the whole situation, while the effect of her cursing continues after the ball to spread for days until the prince is finally dead. In this way, Lee rewrites the well-known tale from a grim point of view tackling the possibility of darkness associated with female characters. Lee turns the fairy tale into a tale of

horror. It is no longer a fairy tale which ends on a happily-ever after note, but is subverted to become a horrifying story altogether.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion of three notable symbols – namely silk, number three and the clock – in the different reinterpretations of “Cinderella,” it is noted that writers of contemporary fairy tales weave symbolism into narratives to re-envision the dominant patriarchal versions. Using symbols to depart from the old narrative structures attacks the fixations that have influenced readers/viewers in understanding the tales. Feminists have retained or omitted symbols according to their scope of narrative, using symbols only when they serve their rebellious nature against the canon. Their attempt to subvert the well-known symbols stems from the urge of wanting to change social standards in a way that would eventually empower women into thinking that they are capable of leading a life based on their true will and inner strength, while shedding light on the consequences of the domestic sphere propagated by patriarchy.

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ملخص

من اليسير تصور أعمال "الرمز" على مدار تاريخ القصص الخيالية، خاصةً في تلك التي تتمحور حول الكتابات النسائية؛ فقد ظل أعمال الرمز أداةً ثقافيةً و سياسيةً يستخدمها مؤلفو القصص الخيالية، و لذا أصبح لزاماً تتبع أعمال الرمز في تلك القصص بالنظر إلى القيم و العادات الثقافية التي تتناولها كل قصة على حدة.

و مع ذلك، ترفض القصص الخيالية المعاصرة التي تنتمي إلى الأدب النسوي و التي تصور الشخصيات النسائية بالتركيز على ذاتها، ترفض الصورة التي قدمتها القصص القديمة عن المرأة لما فيها من سلبية و ضعف؛ فالغالبية من الكتابات النسوية تنظر للرمز على أنه عامل من عوامل تمكين المرأة، و قد بدأ الكتاب و مؤلفو الأفلام و المخرجين مع بداية ازدهار ما عرف "بالصحة النسوية الثالثة"، بدأوا في التعبير عن آراء السيدات من خلال القصص الخيالية، و في ضوء الآراء الجديدة حول أعمال و استخدام الرمز، أي أن القصة الخيالية المعاصرة قد بدأت تُعمل الرمز وسيلةً للمقاومة.

و تأسيساً على ما سبق، و في ضوئه، تُمعن الورقة البحثية طي النقاش النظر في ثلاثة تأويلات معاصرة لقصة "سيندريللا"؛ تضم ما قدمه تانيت لي في القصة القصيرة تحت عنوان "حين تدق

الساعة" عام ١٩٨٣، و ما قدمته إما دونوجو في القصة القصيرة تحت عنوان "قصة حذاء" عام ١٩٩٣، و أخيراً ما قدمته أندي تينانت في فيلم "قصة سينديلا" عام ١٩٩٨.

و تتناول الباحثة من خلال هذه الرسالة دلالات رموز ثلاثة؛ ألا و هي دلالة رمز "الحرير" و رمز "الرقم ثلاثة" و أخيراً رمز "الساعة"، و قد جاءت النتائج مشوقةً حيث أوضحت أن النسخ المعاصرة من قصة سينديلا قد أعادت رسم الشخصيات النسائية؛ بل و أعادت النظر فيها لتخرج بطرق جديدة لتمكين المرأة و تدعيمها ، و ذلك بوصفها مضاد على النسخ الأقدم الداعمة للنظرة الذكورية و التي حوت شخصيات نسائية مقموعة.