

CINDERELLA: The Mythic Lives of Women Law Students

by James R. Elkins

Grimms' Cinderella

A girl of rich parents and old enough to be thinking of going out into the world, finds herself with a stepmother who makes life difficult. The stepmother favors her own two daughters over Cinderella. The stepsisters and stepmother treat Cinderella harshly. The father is gone a lot. The King has announced that his son will take a bride from those who attend a Festival planned by the King. Cinderella's stepsisters, encouraged by their mother, make immediate plans to go. Cinderella asks to go and is cruelly discouraged. By invoking the help of birds and animals (the spirit of her deceased "good mother") she completes the burdensome task her stepmother has devised to prevent her from attending the King's Festival Ball.

The Prince dances with Cinderella, who acquired fine clothes by wishing for them at the hazel-tree which grows over her mother's grave. Taken with Cinderella's beauty, the Prince wants her for his bride, but Cinderella leaves before the party is over. The Prince tries to locate Cinderella, but is unable to do so, even though Cinderella's father, who thinks the young woman who has so charmed the Prince is in fact Cinderella, aides him. The Festival Ball lasts three days and nights. Cinderella attends each evening and escapes each time without the Prince learning her identity. The Prince, increasingly desirous of the young woman who eludes him, sets a trap by placing pitch on the staircase so that Cinderella cannot escape. Escape she does, but leaves a slipper. Now all the Prince has to do is find the young woman whose foot fits the lost slipper.

The step sisters, wanting the Prince so badly, have the shoe fitted to their respective feet by cutting away parts of their feet that do not fit the shoe. They "swallow the pain" of the mutilation in order to get the Prince. Two pigeons sitting in the hazel-tree alert the Prince to the bleeding by crying:

Turn and peep, turn and peep,
There's blood within the shoe,
The shoe it is too small for her,
The true bride waits for you.

The Prince finally tries the shoe on Cinderella, on whose foot it fits nicely, and finds his "true bride." Cinderella rides away with the Prince. At the wedding, pigeons peck out the eyes and blind the two "false brides," thus ending the tale with sordid punishment for "wickedness and falsehood".

On Rereading Cinderella

We all know the Cinderella story, whether it be the Grimms' version or its romantic successors rewritten by Charles Perrault or Disney Studios. It is a fairy tale told to children and a story that lingers as a mythic pattern in adult life. We never escape Cinderella, because its themes--beauty, rescue, marriage, suffering, and abandonment--are a part of our lives. Rediscovering fairy tales and their significance for understanding the mythic dimensions of our lives, I re-introduced Cinderella to law students in a course called Women and the Legal Profession. The purpose was to discover how women becoming lawyers deal with the themes in Cinderella.

Women law students react strongly to Cinderella, thus telling a great deal about the mythic dimension of professional life. Three basic psychological patterns emerge in women law students' response to Cinderella: denial, identification, and ambivalence. The common thread of the three patterns is a persistent misreading of the Grimms' version of the fairy tale. Though assigned to read and write about Grimms' version, students write about a Cinderella of fairy godmothers, pumpkin coaches, glass slippers, leaving the ball at midnight, and "happily ever afters."

The first response to Grimms' Cinderella is "it doesn't fit":

i.

Cinderella has no effect on me or my life,
because the people important to me never treated

me like a Cinderella. They never constrained me to playing the roles which have so long been exclusively acted out by women. Not all women have been given the freedom which I have.

ii.

As I sat and thought about it, I could not seem to connect the tale of Cinderella to my life in any way. In reading the story the only thing I could feel surfacing was the strong difference between myself and Cinderella.

I never liked Cinderella because she was boring; she had no "backbone." She never did anything where any initiative or imagination was involved. She just "wished" that things would happen to her without ever trying to make them happen for herself.

If Cinderella was a real person, she would not be the type of woman I would choose as a friend. She wouldn't have anything to bring into a friendship. She's too shallow.

iii.

My decision to come to law school was a rejection of the role of Cinderella.

Some of the messages in Cinderella are:

Little girls, be good and pious, and the good God (and maybe some man) will always protect you.

Be docile, little girls, accept abuse and injustice without complaint.

Marriage is the reward; the story (and life?) ends with marriage.

A woman's worst enemies are other women.

Physical beauty is most important.

Etc.

For most of my life I have consciously rejected Cinderella's message of passivity, of docility. I perceive law school as a positive step toward acquiring the means to be an actor, not a receiver.

iv.

I believe the Cinderella mind-set is pathological. It fosters dependency and invites the victimization of women by their parents, peers, lovers, and husbands. It encourages the alienation of women from women.

My story has been a struggle from the imposition of the Cinderella role. It is a liberation from the mind-set that Cinderella, a child, is the essence of woman, and that marriage is a woman's salvation.

Cinderella is a suffering martyr. She is bound by her mother's dying declaration to be "pious and good." The consequence is that she resigns herself to be victimized by her treacherous stepsisters and stepmother.

Cinderella never develops into a real woman. She is forever the innocent powerless child. Her status in life goes from whimpering mongrel to royal pet--a difference without a distinction. She is dependent and passive.

Cinderella's saving grace is that she looks stunning in gold dresses. She is able to attract the prince's attention.

Mama failed.

Mama tried so hard to mold me into a docile, hard-working wife and mother, but I revolted.

I failed Mama.

"Why don't you fix supper tomorrow? Someday you'll need to know how to cook supper for your husband."

"Why don't you get a haircut (change those jeans, quit biting your fingernails)? You'll never get a man looking like that."

"I certainly hope you're a 'good' girl. Boys go out and play around, but when it comes to getting married, they want a virgin. You keep yourself pure and nice."

"What do you need to go to college for? You're only going to get married anyway."

Yes, someday the handsome prince would come along. He'd rescue me and take me to his new little house where I could cook and clean and iron while he was at work each day. In the evening, I'd look ravishing when he came home, with every hair in place and the smell of fresh-baked bread wafting from the kitchen. ("Good kissin' don't last--good cookin' do!") At night, I'd dutifully submit to other mysterious wifely chores. (For a long time, I wasn't sure what those were; I only knew they were unpleasant but something you had to put up with.) Then with time, babies would arrive, one by one, so I could raise a little prince.

I used to believe this fairy tale, but (thank God) I switched tracks along the way. When I started being observant and listened to the messages I was getting, I opted out.

The images that I see in Cinderella make me want to rip the story from a book of fairy tales, as well as from my mind. I don't want to be a pretty possession. I don't want a man to ask "to whom does the beautiful maiden belong?" The fairy tale represents the confusion that many women live with today. Women have been raised with dual messages. We are told to be beautiful and passive.

Mothers still tell their daughters to "endure the pain" in order to become beautiful and thus valued. The mother in Cinderella has no qualms when she hands her daughter a knife and tells her to cut off a piece of her foot in order to wear the good slipper. She tells her daughter to cut and "swallow the pain." Women today are also told to become beautiful and swallow the pain....

In addition, we are told not to argue or raise our voices. If we are harassed on the job, we should swallow the pain. If we are underpaid, we should swallow the pain. If we have married the frog instead of the prince, we swallow the pain. Cinderella, as harmless as the fairy tale may seem, perpetuates these societal messages....

The message of Cinderella is that women lack power. Men are the ones with power. Men attend fairs and festivals and have riches and mobility. The power that women attain is second-hand. The step-mother in Cinderella attained her power by way of the father who lets her dominate the household. She decides who will attend the ball.

Cinderella gains power through her real mother's spirit. Cinderella is able to ask for whatever she needs when she stands near the grave. But why is it that Cinderella only asks

for beautiful clothes so she can attend the ball? Why doesn't she ask for a better life, or to become independent? Why must she follow the Prince?

Cinderella tells me that women are not powerful. No woman in the story provides an example of a person with substance. Instead, the women are powerless--pretty possessions. Thus the Prince can select Cinderella just as one selects fruit at the produce section at the grocery store.

Cinderella presents a disturbing and dissatisfying theme. The idea of finding one's identity through Prince/husband/marriage is no longer palatable. Going to the ball and finding the Prince is no longer the realization of a collective dream for many women. Recognition of one's true beauty via marriage, even to a Prince, is too costly. The Prince and marriage become a trap rather than rescue. Contemporary women are rightfully concerned about the viability of "Cinderella happiness," in which one stakes her good fortune on marriage to the Prince. (The Grimms' brothers never tell us about the Prince.)

Disenchanted with the rescue fantasy lying at the heart of their reading of Cinderella, most women law students deny they are Cinderella. Law school and the world that it stands for seem distant from Cinderella, who relies on magical powers to bring her beautiful clothes so that she can go to the ball. Women do not come to law school to find a Prince (i.e. a man) (This does not mean that women do not take advantage of a Prince who comes along.)

A second pattern is identification:

The only vehicle of escape is marriage to the handsome prince, and you can attract the prince only if you are irresistibly physically attractive. When I go out on a first date, I usually feel that I have to buy something new. I spend hours in the bathroom primping, making up my face, fixing my hair. Has nothing changed since Cinderella?

ii.

When school is at its worst (about every other day), or when I attempt to figure out what I am going to be doing in eight short months, I try to comfort myself saying: "Just play the game. Don't make waves. Something or someone will come along and make all of this worthwhile." I fantasize about having a loving, intelligent, successful husband, beautiful children, and satisfying career which will make my life complete.

Third, women react to Cinderella with ambivalence. They find Cinderella operative as a mythic pattern in their lives but struggle to overcome the "rescue me" trap:

i.

Cinderella lives...I suddenly realized why this fairy tale is so vivid and real for me--my mother lived it literally.

The themes of Cinderella play in my mind like the refrain of a popular song, over and over and over. I ask myself, do I look pretty today? If I don't, I feel that I won't be as powerful in my interactions with others. Men are taught that "Might makes right"--Cinderella teaches that for women "Pretty makes right."

ii.

I don't remember an exact afternoon or evening when I was read Cinderella as a little girl. Yet the story has always been with me. Its message corresponded neatly with the one I received from my parents and society at large. I was both entranced and repulsed by the images I saw in Cinderella. Thus my life has consisted of unconscious attempts both to live out the fairy tale and to run away from its message.

I feel a great deal of conflict now, when I think of Cinderella. In some ways my life has been patterned after hers. As a young girl I was taught to be obedient and polite. Expression of anger was virtually forbidden. And I was always treated differently from my brothers. They were encouraged to be part of the rough and tumble; I was not. I began to feel as though their world was better than mine. Embarrassing as it is, I remember sitting on the toilet backwards and trying to spit through my teeth, obviously an attempt to be like the males around me. All of this horrified my mother, and I soon learned that little girls didn't do that sort of thing. Being athletic was all the maleness I was allowed. My envy of my brothers grew as my father's treatment of us became increasingly disparate....As I grew older I retained my yearning for the male world--yet I didn't know quite how I wanted to get there. I daydreamed a lot about finding the "perfect" man, marrying, and having children.

iii.

On the day Buckingham Palace announced the engagement of Prince Charles and Lady Diana, I called a friend. "Our mothers will be very disappointed when they hear the news," I said to her. "They've always had plans for us to marry the Prince." You see, each of us grew up with the expectation that "someday the Prince would come." There was only one small problem: Prince Charles had never heard of the town of Weirton, West Virginia, and it's young maidens. Alas and alack, what is a mother to do?

Now as an adult, Cinderella reminds me of the dual messages I received as I was growing up. On one hand, I was told to be self-reliant, independent, and powerful in my own right. I learned through subtle (and not so subtle)

messages to set goals, strive for achievement and success. On the other hand, the message was "wait for the Prince." Wait to be discovered and then be rescued. I was not supposed to act independently. Nor was I to gain power and recognition through my own acts.

I would gain status when I married the prince. In the meantime, while I waited for discovery, like Cinderella, I only had to be good, dutiful, submissive, docile...and attractive."

iv.

I do not know if I will ever be capable of completely freeing myself of Cinderella and other similar fairy tales.

v.

The Cinderella story that I grew up with presented the traditional view of womanhood. If I was modest and did all the right things, someday I would be fortunate enough to marry someone important and live happily ever after. My life would be meaningful through his accomplishments. Like Cinderella, I was waiting for my "prince" to come. However, when this finally happened, I knew that I could never live through someone else's accomplishments, and allowing him to guide my destiny. I was the only one who could make things happen for me.

vi.

The Cinderella myth plays a role in every woman's life. It embodies the notion of romantic love. It embodies the idea of a woman's passivity and a woman's happiness inextricably tied to the desires of a man.

As most women, I seek romantic love. The desire for that kind of love has been the biggest obstacle in my goal to realize who I am and to learn how to care for myself.

In high school I gave up private schools and trips to Europe so I wouldn't be separated from my boyfriend. My college education was delayed many years because I became pregnant and left school to follow a man I loved. Love meant being cared for by a man and in turn, giving up personal ambitions as secondary.

It has taken me a long time to realize that a man and woman must meet as equals. A woman must not lose sight of herself and her goals when she falls in love.

As the Cinderella myth is part of the reason my education has been delayed, a rejection of the myth has been connected with my decision to come to law school. The Cinderella myth was replaced by images of strong, independent women, such as Jane Eyre, who would be with Rochester only on equal terms and by Virginia Woolfe who believed in the importance of women having independent incomes and rooms of their own and an identity of sisterhood. Women authors such as Margaret Atwood, May Sarton, Doris Lessing have taken women out of society and stripped them of their traditional roles, in order to redefine the female image.

Cinderella's escape by rescue remains a powerful motif in the lives of professional women, yet it must be rejected at the conscious level. And even as the professional woman rejects the rescue fantasy, it is still a part of her life. As one woman wrote: "To this day the escapist in me truly enjoys Disney's version of Cinderella, with all its beauty, glamour, and pagentry. Much as I would deny it, if asked, I must admit I carry this within me to this day." We all need to escape. Cinderella symbolizes escape for women. Women are working hard to find new stories which offer alternatives to their childhood understanding of Cinderella.

A strong undercurrent of self-rescue fantasies fills women's writing about law school:

i.

The biggest difference between Cinderella and myself is that Cinderella waited for her Prince Charming to find her; I found myself.

ii.

I refused to be a victim. I fought tooth and nail for control of my life. I didn't wait for a savior to marry me and take me away from my plight. Somehow I always knew that if I was ever going to "make it," I'd have to work it out for myself.

No longer a flesh and blood Prince who will take her away, the object of longing is independent power and strength, her own voice, finding her masculine within.

When women speak about their fantasies of becoming lawyers, the mythic Cinderella themes (escape/rescue) emerge as courageous acts of self-rescue. The rescue, without the Prince, requires one to hold on to the power and strength she already has. Knowledge that one is indeed a princess (good and pious), without the embellishments of a professional identity, is an elusive knowledge.

Women law students help us see that Cinderella seeks more than a Prince. The Prince is a symbol for love and affection, escape from a world where no one cares and nurtures, and the possibility of healing the wound of abandonment. A professional career may be the most dazzling Prince of all. Do they give up the conscious desire for rescue by men and replace it with the hope and dream of rescue through professional life?

In the fragments of stories which follow, women describe what they are escaping from, what they are trying to protect, and what they are moving toward:

i.

I like the idea of being able to make enough money on a part-time basis to support myself.

I also have a strong desire to protect myself, my family, and friends. I have

experienced intimidation by lawyers hired by high-powered corporations and persons. The law has been very complex and mysterious to me and I have seen this complexity used to take advantage of many people. I feel that as a lawyer I can be of service which satisfies my altruistic nature and will be able to earn a good living which satisfies my desire to keep the wolf from my door.

ii.

The legal profession has always represented independence and freedom to me. And that independence, that freedom, is lifeblood to me. I don't want to be shackled by anyone else's idea of perfection and I equate being a mere employee with being chained.

iii.

My husband and I would talk for hours about what it would take to give me a sense of achievement in life. He saw a need for an identity of my own. I have never been satisfied with being someone's daughter, wife, mother. He suggested that I think about law school. At first, becoming a lawyer sounded exciting to me, but then the reality of it hit me. Going to law school seemed too much of a commitment for me to undertake while raising a family. The inner struggle began. Deep down, I knew that I had always wanted it all, a family, yet something more. I needed control over my life and the opportunity to become an independent human being. The excitement and challenge of law school won out over the traditional comfortable role that I had carved out for myself.

Law school was the answer to an identity crisis for me. No matter what uncertainties remained for me, I would at least know who I was. I would be a lawyer.

iv.

Even now, it is difficult for me to admit that I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a particular kind of a lawyer, a good, really good, criminal attorney.

v.

I wanted to escape what seemed like a drudge of an existence. I wanted to be looked up to as someone important, and I wanted to be able to support myself without depending on a man--in a comfortable fashion. I still want that. I want power. I want to be able to educate myself about the intricacies of the law so I can protect myself.

vi.

Law school became for me the passage from a powerless, amorphous, "female" profession--social work--to the power wielding, ordered "male" profession--law.

As a social worker and a woman, I was at best humored and at worst ignored. All the frustrations attendant on almost ten years of social work, all the exasperation at having no weapon to deal with the injustice, evil, and pain were supposed to find relief and release in law school.

I came to law school: to get tough, to be precise, to speak with the authority of judges and lawmakers, to be heeded.

Women law students, like Cinderella, find themselves unloved, unappreciated, unheard. The decision to come to law school is an effort to be seen and heard as the person whom she knows (hopes?) herself to be.

Throwing out Cinderella poses a danger. As one of our most popular fairy tales, women (and men) carry it as an archetypal pattern which must be confronted.

Cinderella, like Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Little Red Riding Hood, and Hansel and Gretel contain images of the feminine (and masculine) spirit. They reflect the kinds of mothers and grandmothers, sisters and cousins, that we have known, and they provide images of the mother and daughter that men relate to. So Cinderella represents a cultural pattern for feminine energy. Like all forms of energy, it has positive and negative qualities. Contemporary women are rightfully concerned about the viability of "Cinderella happiness" in which one stakes her good fortune on marriage to the Prince. Yet, a meaningful transformative side of Cinderella is all too easily discounted. In the face of adversity and testing of her strength and courage, Cinderella maintained her connection to the good mother, to a form of feminine consciousness that served as a vehicle for growth and transformation. Cinderella is not simply an escape/rescue fantasy, but growth which she engineered. Cinderella did not wait by the hearth in the presence of uncaring sisters and a bad mother to be rescued. She found her way out by doing what she could, utilizing skills and power. One student writes:

I never saw Cinderella (myself) as powerless, as a result of being a victim. The powerlessness I attributed to Cinderella, was born of possessing a power I was afraid to use. Cinderella was no fool for taking insults without returning meanness in kind. She was wise not to use her power in that way, for power used to harm eventually cuts the wielder.

Cinderella, viewed from childhood experience, tells a story of true beauty being discovered by a Prince and her rescue from an evil stepmother. So, on the surface, we deal with making ourselves beautiful enough to be rescued. The Cinderella fantasy--being discovered by a charming Prince and living a life of happy contentedness--is a fantasy about the tale, more what we want the story to say than what it does. The Grimm's version of the story indicates nothing of what happened to Cinderella after she married the Prince. The story vividly describes what happens to the step-sisters, but we don't know about Cinderella.

One way to read Cinderella is to focus on the pain, suffering, loss, and abandonment rather than the beauty, the ball, and the marriage. What does a woman do when her mother dies and her father leaves her with those who mistreat her? What do we do when parents no longer literally support us? Where do we turn; what do we do; how can we go on when we need love, care, and nurturing, and both the good and bad parent, as well as everyone else, seem to have abandoned us?

The basic themes of the Cinderella fairy tale parallel the mythic dimension of women's presence in law school. The beautiful Princess finds herself in a home where she is no longer appreciated, her beauty unrecognized. The strong, powerful, confident woman makes her way to law school only to find that her strength and power (necessary to get to law school) were illusory, and her confidence fails her. Like the Princess, a woman in law school may be self-confident, knowing that as a strong person, she has power. The problem is that no one seems to recognize her strength and courage during the first years of law school. Her power, strength, and self-esteem go underground--they are still there, but like Cinderella's beauty they serve no purpose.

Cinderella was given a series of burdensome, odious, and dirty tasks to fulfill before she would be permitted to attend the King's Festival and vie for the Prince with the other young women. The experience of women in law school, especially during the first year, parallels the trials of Cinderella as she was put through the paces of the uncaring stepmother and stepsisters.

They took her pretty clothes away from her, put an old grey bedgown on her, and gave her wooden shoes. "Just look at the proud princess, how decked out she is!" they cried, and laughed, and led her into the kitchen. There she had to do hard work from morning til night, get up before daybreak, carry water, light fires, cook and wash. Besides this, the sisters did her every imaginable injury--they mocked her and emptied her peas and lentils into the ashes, so that she was forced to sit and pick them out again.

Women who write about their law school experience described it as hateful, awful, alien, foreign, shocking, frightening, narrowing, constraining; they describe a Cinderella-like experience. Listen to the following accounts:

i.

My first year I felt like an insignificant, unintelligent, unattractive, unloveable human. I cried all the time and quit school every day.

ii.

I was surprised when law school turned out to be so dull. Law school was a very formal, dull process.

I decided that law school was going to be my basic training. If I did everything in the proper regimented fashion, I could become a lawyer.

iii.

After entering law school, my self-confidence became shaken. It seems that law school breeds isolation. The law school experience centers around the theme of "Divide and Conquer." In the past I had gained strength and understanding from other women, sharing experiences. However, I lost that when I entered law school.

The trials and tasks of law school give rise to thought of quitting, leaving, finding a life that makes sense, a place where one is not demeaned and devalued. We don't know whether Cinderella lost hope. We aren't told the details of how Cinderella experienced her suffering. We can imagine that it was intense and prolonged. To be uncared for, unappreciated, unloved, demeaned, discounted, and devalued leads to pain and suffering.

Cinderella is the archetypal casting-out into the world. The Biblical story of Adam and Eve is another casting-out

story. The world no longer provides pleasure. Satisfaction of our wants is now subject to a new reality; Freud called it the reality principle. We can't get what we want, when we want it, from whom we want it. We have to wait, be patient, work. The real world of work--adulthood--replaces the polymorphous erotic play of childhood. The pleasure principle and the reality principle now operate to produce a tension, which a productive, creative life lives out. Cinderella's casting-out, being cut off from nurturing parents, is the fate of the human race, a fate each of us experiences and builds a life around.

As I work with Cinderella, a story of feminine energy and pathology, I realize how it provides mythic depth in my own life. While teaching Cinderella I write in my own journal:

Cinderella is a story of suffering and wounding. Cinderella weeps at her mother's grave. She must have asked, "Mother, how could you leave me? What will I do now? What will happen to Father?" I live with a woman who leaves. I can't imagine going on without her. I ask myself (and her): "How can I live in this house without you? We have done too much together, cared too much, dreamed of a future. How can you leave me now? We have a history, a past. What will happen to that? You won't leave, will you?" And then comes the pain when the Mother is no longer there, when the lover leaves. I, like Cinderella, weep.

When we are away from those we love, the world seems harsher, crueler, too real. Like Cinderella, we don an "old grey bedgown." We lose interest in how we look, how others see us. We work, like Cinderella, from morning to night so we can forget Mother's death and Father's strange behavior. I have trouble eating at the house and spending time there, so I live in my office. I try to work the grief into submission. So we "do hard work from morning till night, get up before daybreak, carry water, light fires, cook and wash." We do the dirty work, the work that fits our mood. Life becomes all too real. When life is too real we need a story like Cinderella.

During the grieving, cast out, abandoned, depressed

period, how are we injured and how do we suffer? The sisters did Cinderella "every imaginable injury." What injuries have we imagined and experienced?

It is hard for us to sit by and witness the wounding of a young woman, a wounding made more painful because her own family, those around her who should have been caring for her, imprisoned her. Cinderella suffers bad treatment from the cruel stepmother and stepsisters, but is also wounded by an absent father. When Father does not shield us from the cruelty of others (journeying off to the plant, the office, the job, or "being away" in the psychological sense of being distant and cool, unemotional) wounding occurs. There must have been times when fear gripped her: "What if...."

While the power of the connection to the good mother is strong, who among us never doubts self or loses confidence? Cinderella is a story of abandonment and finding one's way when loved ones can no longer help, or must help from a distance.

Suffering can pointlessly destroy identity. It can also lead to growth. Sometimes suffering is a prelude to growth. Without suffering there is no consciousness of the wounding, no way to see or feel what is happening. Cinderella did the burdensome work, picked the peas and lentils from the ashes, received the slights and insults of her stepsisters. Figuratively speaking, so do the rest of us.

The issue is whether one has the strength to do the burdensome task, do that which is being asked, to master the system, learn what needs to be learned, be a good law student, test-taker, wife, home-maker, friend. It can get to be too much. Does any one person have the strength to do it and to survive with her soul intact?

To understand Cinderella, we must see that Cinderella, the Prince, the stepsisters, the stepmother, and the abandoning father are all a part of a person's personality, representing the many selves each of us harbors. Reluctance to read a Cinderella-like tale in this manner is understandable. The images are too painful: abandonment, absence of love, cruelty, mutilation, jealousy, a family that does not nurture, women that must be rescued. The problem in identifying with Cinderella is that the woman must accept that part of herself which is weak, passive, dependent, and unimaginative. As one of my students said, "Cinderella is dangerous."

* * * *

Cinderella is a part of women's lives, and increasingly a part of my own. Cinderella tells us something about beauty, rescue, marriage. It is also a tale of cruelty, abandonment, suffering, work, disguise, escape, mothers and absent fathers, choosing a spouse. Cinderella is so close to the way we live, it cannot be escaped. We can misread the story, run from it, deny it's mythic pattern, and look for more hopeful stories, but it follows us still. The story is there, each of us must live it, or rewrite it in our own lives.

A Woman Law Student's Contemporary Cinderella

Once upon a time in a typical American town, nestled in the hills, a daughter was born to a humble, hard-working couple. As she was their first born, she was loved and adored beyond measure by grandparents, aunts, and uncles. She was treated just like a princess.

As the years drifted by, the little princess, who was very bright and inquisitive, grew accustomed to the companionship of her doting family. But she was painfully shy with strangers and rarely played with other children. Instead, she preferred to have adults read to her or tell her stories, or to invent her own imaginary playmates. The princess was a quiet, obedient child, who never got her clothes dirty.

When the princess was five years old, an event occurred that changed her life from that moment forward: a new baby girl entered the household--a baby with enormous blue eyes and golden curls. This new child was much fairer than her older sister. So the princess lost her royal structure.

Time came for the former princess, now known simply as C, to enter school. She did remarkably well and was a favorite with teachers. After all, she was an expert in pleasing adults, eagerly seeking praise as if it were treasure. C was quite competitive with certain classmates, especially a boy named A. She despised it when A made better grades than she, because he was such an arrogant little twerp. On more than one occasion, she kicked him in the shins during recess. This she could get away with, because she was bigger and could run faster than he. But

for the most part, C did not interact much with her classmates. She was serious and introspective, even at that tender age.

During her early teenage years, C channeled her energy into intellectual activities. In the summertime, when other children were at the pool or playing softball, she was holed up in her room, reading books like Wuthering Heights and The House of the Seven Gables. C's mother warned that she would ruin her eyes. In school she won numerous honors and awards, and continued to please her parents, who by this time expected her to excel. It was assumed that one day she, unlike her parents, would go to college. She had always heard that a woman should have some sort of career to fall back on, just in case.... C was a perfectionist, blessed with success. To her, the possibility of failure was only a bogey-man that lurked beneath the bed at night.

By age seventeen, C had grown weary of being a compulsive over-achiever. She wanted to see herself as an ordinary person, just like her peers. She began to feel as if she had created a monster by fulfilling her parents expectations for so long. She began to resent their stifling over-protectiveness. She wanted to experience life first-hand, not through the pages of a book. So she found a boyfriend who played electric guitar. Her parents were definitely not pleased.

As time passed, C's desire to escape from her parents' dominance grew. They could not or would not recognize her need to be independent. To them, she was still the same little girl. It was always they who decided what was best for her. She yearned to break free, but she did not know how. There were many angry confrontations.

And so, during her second year of college, C eloped with a handsome prince. Her parents were not pleased, for although this prince was handsome, he was poor and his blood-line wasn't pure enough. But C cared not. She loved him and believed that the two of them would dance through life just as they had done in their courtship. Imagine C's astonishment when after only a few months, she looked at her prince and discovered he was a toad.

The story became repetitious: a succession of seemingly charming princes, all turning into toads. Foolish C. Why did she keep looking for a prince? Why didn't she learn a lesson? She was an intelligent person. It disturbed

her that she could not answer the questions that plagued her.

Eventually C became tired of toads and low-paying jobs. For a number of years she read feminist literature and participated in consciousness-raising groups. She began to develop some fulfilling friendships with other women. She learned that some of the problems she experienced were shared by other women. She became less frightened and less alone. But when she told herself she didn't care whether she ever met another handsome prince, she lied.

At age 30, C looked around, concluding that the elusive prince was nowhere on the horizon. The chances of suddenly being rescued from a life of drudgery were indeed slim. C deduced that she would simply have to rescue herself, so she decided to go to law school. Her parents were once again pleased, although quite incidentally this time. C dreamed of being able to buy a big old house in the country with plenty of land.

Understand that her dream did not particularly include living there by herself. If perchance a prince should wander by, he would be welcome to stay. But if the castle were hers, she could throw the bastard out if he began to look the slightest bit warty.