

CINDERELLA WITHOUT THE ASHES

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Abstract

The modern success in advertising and in narrative structure of fairytales starts from the way the mythical universe is being organized regarding the tests that the characters have to pass and by which their humble initial condition changes into a marvelous final condition with the help of love, fate and hard-working and their poor clothes become gorgeous.

Keywords: *fairytale, Cinderella, advertisement*

Fairytales belong to a world of fantasy, they are part of our childhood, and in time we discover that they are mirrors of the real life. When we talk about *Cinderella*, we should think not only of an imaginary character, but also of a real one. She is a character that has survived over centuries in space, time and modernity.

Who is *Cinderella*? First, we should think about a girl unfairly treated and tortured by her step mother, a girl humiliated by her family, who had overworked herself near the vital source that is **fire**, the ash pan¹ (actually, in Romanian, her name - *Cenușăreasa* - signifies a household chore², meaning to be covered with ashes, coming from the word "cenușar" - ash pan - with the feminine suffix "easă". In English, the word is also derived from "cinder", which is a burned or partly burned substance, that is not reduced to ashes). The term *Cenușăreasa* - *Cinderella* -, comes from the Latin **cinusia* (< *cinis*). However, in the end of the story, the ash on her clothes is being transformed into a wedding dress with the help of a magical shoe. In other words, the humiliation from the beginning of the fairytale becomes the glory of birds and songs.

With *Cinderella* we can follow the history of communication³, starting from the relationship with her own body (the symbol of the foot), with her clothes and with a social model, young or mature body, naked or dressed. The myth in this fairytale illustrates a model of a human being

who (after having accepted humiliation) will get social compensation -marriage with a prince - owing to her qualities: hard-working and obedience.

This demonstration points out that any communication can be verbal (when information is transmitted in written or spoken form) or non-verbal (when this form of language is not used). With the help of emblems⁴, we can semantically understand many cultures and also the systems that are enclosed in them, we can see the transgressions of dynamic distances and furthermore, different social attitudes that are linked together, by means of a device used in the story.

We must remind our readers that the first element in a fairytale sends us to communication based on gestures, the **distances** that are present in the inter-human space:

- *The intimate distance* is the distance of love, of protection, of caressing, of hugging, of dance and of public distance, but at the same time it is the distance of aggression, of violent clashes. For *Cinderella*, the distance of love had disappeared and was replaced by *the Step-Mother/The God-Mother, the Step-Sisters*. However, at the ball, the distance of dance and embrace was present.
- *The personal distance* is distinguished from the relation of *Cinderella/cinder, ash, from the fire/ family love*.
- *the social distance*, of the *Step Family* towards *Cinderella*, is an arbitrary culturally conditioned distance and can be handled according to the communication intentions with a *Father*, who turns into a protector with the help of hazel nut tree twig/*Absent Mother, as Prince*.
- *The public distance* - *Cinderella/the Prince* is reduced with the help of the glass shoe.

But what do we discover regarding subconscious from this fairytale? The function of “the hero’s departure” corresponds to an action, while the function of “absence, prejudice”, represents a condition, a canonic form of story, as a relationship between characters and as a succession of actions – the narrative scheme is used artistically and practically at present. When she gives up being a Cinderella, we have got a new paradigmatic segmentation or a combination of polar functions:

- leaving vs. returning.
- the formulation of the interdiction vs. the transgression of the interdiction.

There are three main tests that define the canonic scheme owing to their articulations that characterize a (figurative) story:

- the qualification test: the hero is endowed with magical instruments or powers, e.g., he may become invisible, etc.
- the decisive test: the subject fulfills the tasks imposed on him, such as killing the evil forces, the liberation of victims etc.
- the glorification test: the subject is perceived for what he/she is and for what he/she has done (as Cinderella recognized as princess).

Finding a unique partner and trying a shoe on may be either a ceremonious or a ridiculous gesture, like in the American movie, but, at the same time, it represents the transition from a cultural system somehow fixed in time and space (here it is evident the differences between the French and the German version) to a global cultural system, where motives are being organized allegorically, from failure/discomfort/unhappiness towards success / comfort /happiness. On the other hand, from a linguistic and an imaginary point of view, the two versions of the initial story differ:

1. the unique denominator (Cinderella);
2. the relationship with the space of hell and paradise (Mother, Godmother, Step Mother);
3. the relationship with the external and internal duality (the desire for embellishment);

4. the sacred model in discovering fear and wonder (the Birds);
5. the decoding of the paradox in the unity of opposing elements (Fire/ Ashes);
6. the imagery of symbols and metaphors, initiating identity (Princes and Cinderellas)
7. communication with a group of naïve, efficient and competent readers (high heeled shoes ,*Fendi*)

My title, *Cinderella without Ashes*, tries to be a joke, pointing to a Cinderella without clothes, it aims to be an advertisement meant to draw attention to the disappearance of a chromatic final residue, **ashes**, as a symbol of fear in the fairytale.

All readers are familiar with this fairytale, they all know that shoes are a paradox of vanity, they catch the attention of an ephemeral prince, who has money and dances; while ladies cannot resist the attraction of a clothing symbol, the shoes, which are not a symbol of hard working, but of vanity, which is more attractive than an academic system.

The linguistic message depends on the image, on the name of the brand, *Fendi*, and also on the verbal commentary:

- the iconic denotative message (the photographic image of the object, quasi tautological in relationship with the real object);
- the iconic connotative message (symbolic for all associations in *Cinderella* represents the image of the product).

The publicity genre has been defined in the light of the complementarity of codes and by making the clear cut distinction between *overt meaning* –shoes help walking – and *hidden meaning* – buy them! There are five types of codifying a message in an advertisement:

- **iconic** (similar to the denotative icon: *a flying shoe!*)
- **iconographic** (based on the cultural traditions and genre conventions, similar to the icon: *a magical shoe*);
- **tropologic** (visual stylistic figures, primarily the metaphor and the metonymy: *high heels make you sexy!*);

- **topic** (the pre-requisites and the argumentative common elements, especially if we consider quantity: *Everyone uses Fendi shoes!* And when we take into discussion quality, it is the uniqueness that matters: *Only Fendi makes you beautiful!*)
- **enthymematic** (actualized narrative structure, based on enthymemes, or mystery, such is the case of winning the prince's heart so that the argumentative efficiency is emphasized).

The communication with one's own body is more or less symbolic⁵, but it is an important part of existence. The happy-ending in *Cinderella*, the main character is rewarded by marrying the Prince, can offer useful pieces of advice to educate its listeners (they could become hard-working and they could start loving birds, maybe a Step Mother and Step-Sisters), but it can also have the role of advertising for women who can buy elegant shoes, in order to create an erotic image.

Actually, a fairy-tale like *Cinderella*, represents a series of features with which some characters are endowed and an analysis of the fairy-tale will reveal the symbolism of gestures.

It seems that this fairytale, *Cinderella*⁶, is characteristic for modern melodrama, because it contains a special polyphonic value, being created as a counterpoint mystery (the characters are arranged in visible and invisible pairs). Nowadays, psychoanalytical comments are often humorous, not only on the *Internet*, but also as they are discussed in certain studies. Shoes become the emblem of this fairytale.

The essential motives are illustrated on four German stamps, with drawings representing the main stages of the fairytale: when she listens to and takes care of birds, the elegant dress, the dance and the lost shoe, the happy wedding.



Clothes play an important role nowadays and fairytales are marvelous opportunities illustrate the symbols of clothing designs. The symbol of clothes may express the opposition between the sobriety and the power that some clothes might have, especially when they belong either to a master or to a servant in a sacred or dangerous space, and the erotic game present also at this level (for instance, Catalin Botezatu got his first success by presenting naked male models, while his second success was linked to his name humorously changed into Catalin Dezbracatu - Catalin Undressed).

The main character with a pejorative nickname, *Cinderella*, assumes necessary humiliation; although she is hard-working, she admires the beautiful clothes of her Step-Sisters. She asks for an apparently insignificant gift, a rod, but with this gift she gets rid of her nickname by attending, for three times, under disguise, the dancing parties in the company of the Prince. *Cinderella* manages to get a husband and is in the position to be generous to her Step Sisters or to punish them.

Like in any fairytale, we have the myth of the male hero, who is rescuing the female character. She is the contemporary symbol of perseverance and dance, despite of the obstacles imposed by fate (her Mother's death, the Step Family) she tries to find a second family (Father remarries); she loses her initial position and there follow some tests (which in fact are mainly for the Prince). We can find here the object of the advertisement – footwear, which becomes active concomitantly by means of:

- the **material** and **semantic** relationship with other distinctive symbols (E.g.: the musketeer boots from *Puss in Boots* are used as an ad for Adidas);
- **material** and **semantic** relationship with groups and series of other symbols (elegant

shoes in *Cinderella*);

- its relationship with **entire systems of symbols** (for instance, various “languages” within the historic language)
- its direct relationship with the **extra-linguistic universe** (*Cinderella* appears as an esthetic and social motif, which has been taken over in various languages and artistic genres, having *carnival structures*; the comic being understood as part of the carnival world, in an upside-down world: animals talk, kings act foolishly, insane people become kings).

The carnival represents the manifestation of a deep pulsation towards freedom and subversiveness, towards revolution (in Romanian fairytales the symbol of the leg: the taste of flesh from the leg, as with Zorila Mireanu which sacrifices a piece of flesh from the sole of his foot to feed the eagle; in *Patru Fat-Frumos*, the witch is given to eat “nine barrels of wine, nine ovens of bread and nine fat bulls” and finally she claims flesh from the hero’s sole).

Moreover, the non-verbal language about shoes offers different congruent or incongruent messages, especially related to the economic system, where clothing plays a vital role. The general nucleus of the story, the hero’s performance, is being validated after we have discovered that we deal with an initiatory text in happiness and work. The world has a dual character: material, partly intelligible, and spiritual, unintelligible.

Mirror writing and the fairytale, a crystal faceted by means of eloquence, introduces readers into the structure of the text. The mirror mystery helps us measure the distance and the illusion, makes us understand the mechanics of things, as signs and icons, as a mirror reflects the world in an upside-down way. Every epoch is characterized by such elements: the moral mirror, mirror and beauty, mirror and courtesy, mirror and theatre, mirror and false or essential contemplation.

Furthermore, I have chosen this fairytale for the special clothes. Not only is it an element that our female readers are fond of, but it is also important in the carnival organized in

contemporary world. With the help of the metaphor of *theatrum mundi*, we have a continuous and theatrical change of masks, of a melodramatic type, a metaphor that is present more than ever in different types of advertisements.

We also find the carnival motif reflecting the romantic type of dream, which mingles good and evil, which mocks destiny, which encompasses an **upside-down world**, while **dialogues have an extra-linguistic character**. Gestures in this fairytale reveal synthetically a sexual semiotics. The thematic structure of the fairytale is based on binary oppositions, and those who read/watch/listen to the story enjoy it. Even when we talk about the German version or the French one, people like this text.

However, *Cinderella* has a sexual connotation as it is evident in the symbol of the leg and mirror. The fairytale assumes a secret: the art of being loved, the artifice, magic, an abstract or concrete fantasy, but the portrait triumphs over the body and thus it introduces the utopia of transparency.

The discourse in advertisement is related to fiction, to the universe of desire, it may be a projection of the Ego in a mythic universe, where the hero may be the Shoe, the Prince or Cinderella. Also, the ad discourse reflects a playful universe of puns, of irony, of rhyme and symmetry, in which we discover a **complicity of pleasure**.

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Endnotes

- 1 In Romanian, we have the expressions: *A (se) preface în cenușă (to burn to ashes) = to be completely destroyed (by fire); A nu avea nici cenușă în vatră = to be utterly ruined, A-i lua/a-i vinde cuioa și cenușa din vatră (to eat somebody out of house and home) = to have nothing left, to be very poor, A trage cenușa/spuza pe turta sa* to look after number one = to think first of yourself, *A-și pune cenușă în cap (to do penance in sackcloth and ashes) = to be sorry for one's acts, to show humility; in Antiquity, the Jews were showing their grief by tearing off their clothes and putting ashes on their heads. Cinderella can be considered as a sign of mourning. Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan”, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1998.*
- 2
- 3 The first version of this fairytale is the one from 1697 of Charles Perrault, *Cendrillon, ou La petite Pantoufle de Verre*; in Spanish we have *Cinderela, A Gata Borrallheira*; in Portuguese *Cenicienta*, and then we have the Grimm's versions from 1812, *Aschenputtel*. In Romania it has got various folk versions. We should keep in mind that in Charles Perrault we have the Godmother, and that the glass shoes are in fact fur shoes; in the German version we have doves and the step sisters are being punished.
- 4 For instance, the ash-color is a color obtained by mixing white and black, gray. Figuratively, gray expresses someone or something that is lacking expressivity.
- 5 Annick de Souzenelle, *Simbolismul corpului uman*, translated by Margareta Gyurcsik, Amarcord, Timișoara, 1996, p. 101.
- 6 Cinderella's name differs from one culture to another: *cendrillon, Cenușăreasa, Óóá÷ôïďýôá, popelka, lapsipuolen, assepoester, cinderella, kopciuszek, cinderela, askepot.*