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SMART PRINCESSES, CLEVER CHOICES. THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE CINDERELLA PARADIGM AND THE SHAPING OF FEMALE CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ADULT AND CHILDREN'S CONTEMPORARY REWRITINGS OF FAIRY TALES¹

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The fairy tale, relying on various forms of cultural transmission and ever-changing ideological configuration for its very existence, has pride of place in the system of children's literature. The initiating and socializing function of children's literature, concerned, among other things, with transmitting the cultural inheritance of values, experiences, and prohibitions, makes it necessary to address an audience whose ability to decode must rely on their recognition of familiar genres and narratives—hence the value of retelling as a strategy to activate the implied child reader's often partial competency and this reader's aesthetic pleasure of recognition and appreciation. Even a hasty overview of the rise of the literary fairy tale in Europe reveals evidence of its hybridity and intertextual nature. As we are often reminded, the fairy tale was not originally a genre meant primarily for children, and was appropriated in Europe during the last three centuries by educated audiences who turned the oral tradition into "a type of literary discourse about mores, values and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social code of that time" (Zipes 1991: 3).

Any scholar who handles fairy tales (as folklorists are perfectly aware) must necessarily abandon the idea of a faithful, "original tale" and take the plunge into the wide sea of folklore variants in different countries or centuries, with diverse historical perspectives and ideological conformations. The case of "Cinderella" is emblematic: although it exists in hundreds of versions, as testified by folklore

studies (see, among others, Dundes 1982) one can nevertheless distinguish between at least three notable literary versions, the earliest European Cinderella being Basile's Italian *La gatta Cenerentola* (The Cat Cinderella) of 1634, followed by Perrault's *Cendrillon* of 1697, much concerned with social detail and directed to a courtly audience, and the Grimms's *Aschenputtel* of 1812-1857. Much has been written about the Grimms' variants of the Cinderella tale —see Bottingheimer 1986. According to Neil Philip (1989), the earliest recognizable Cinderella story known to us appears to be Chinese, from the 9th century AD (which would account for the emphasis on the girl's tiny feet) but is present in very definite cultural variations throughout Europe and Asia (initially not native to Africa, Australasia and the Americas, Cinderella tales soon started to be reported from all these areas). In our own time, the younger generation is probably best acquainted with the Disney versions of "Cinderella", only loosely based on the Perrault and Grimms' plots and characterization (with much simplification and reinforcement of stereotypes of female passivity —see Zipes 1979 and Stone 1975).

94 When we analyze folk or fairy tales from the vantage point of children's literature, it is inevitable that we should use an integrated cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approach. In the last few decades, Jack Zipes has focussed critical attention on the social function of fairy tales, thus providing the basis for an ideological critique of dominant cultural patterns in fairy tales, previously perceived as natural, but "which appear to have been preserved because they reinforce male hegemony in the civilization process" (1987: 9. See also Zipes 2000). Feminist critics and writers have collaborated in the critical exposure of fairy tales as narratives voicing, in the main, patriarchal values (for a history of fairy tales and women writers see Wanning Harries 2001) both by providing critical readings which investigate the social construction of gender (for a recent critical survey on feminist fairy tales see Haase 2000), and by rewriting traditional fairy tales in order to produce non-sexist adult and children's versions. However, the compulsion to retell or rewrite fairy tales in order to subvert historically inscribed ideological meanings should not be considered exclusively a contemporary practice. Despite the well-documented English resistance to fairy tales in the 18th century, born out of a combination of Puritan disapproval and a rationalist distrust of the imagination (Zipes 1986), several studies of the British bildungsroman have demonstrated that fairy tales serve as structural devices for canonic novels of the 19th century (such as the "Cinderella" or "Beauty and the Beast" subtexts in *Jane Eyre* or *Great Expectations*) and popular romance (see Moretti 1986 and Ralph 1993). The extraordinary flowering of the fairy tale in Victorian England offered stories which questioned stereotypical gender roles and patterns. In Edith Nesbit's *The Last of the Dragons* (1900), for example, the traditional pattern of "prince rescues princess" is satirically reversed. Though

familiar with endless tales where princesses, tied to a pole, patiently wait for a prince to rescue them from the dragon, the heroine objects to this state of affairs:

"All the princes I know are such very silly little boys", she told her father. "Why must I be rescued by a prince?" "It's always done, my dear", said the King [...] Father, darling, could't we tie up one of the silly little princes for the dragon to look at — and then I could go and kill the dragon and rescue the prince? I fence much better than any of the princes we know" (Nesbit 1985: 10).

In the end the strong, fencing princess and the pale weak prince come to an agreement about the way to handle the dragon, who is easily tamed by the princess and becomes a valuable asset to the court as a sort of scaly aeroplane employed to fly children around the kingdom or to the seaside in summer.

In the second half of the 20th century, the fairy tale, once again crossing the boundary between children's and adult literature, was appropriated by postmodernist and feminist writers like Angela Carter, Anne Sexton and Margaret Atwood, to challenge accepted cultural paradigms which posit passivity, endurance and jealousy as essential qualities for women to be assimilated into the adult community. A similar process is currently taking place in children's literature, where a growing tendency to re-tell princess stories which dispense with marriage-dominated plots and the traditional equation between beauty and goodness, can be detected. In this paper I intend to argue that in both adult and children's modern revisions of princess stories, especially those centred on the Cinderella paradigm, plot patterns (such as "prince rescues princess") as well as characterization ("beautiful princess vs. jealous ugly female relative") are subverted and deconstructed, in order to reshape female cultural identity into that of an independent, liberated and self-confident heroine. "Smart princesses" can oppose tyrannical or stereotyped role models by assuming active roles (e.g. "princess rescues prince") or by considering alternative options for their self-definition as females. Bedelia, "the practical princess" of Jay Williams' collection (1978), for example, is given "common sense" as a birth gift by the fairies, as well as the customary beauty and grace. This will prove crucial when the dragon shows up in her father's reign, greedy for a princess: Bedelia will think of a stratagem to induce the dragon to swallow a straw replica of herself ("Dragons can't tell the difference between princesses and anyone else"), in which she takes care to hide massive quantities of gunpowder:

As the gunpowder met the flames inside the dragon, there was a tremendous explosion. Bedelia got up, dusting herself off. "Dragons", she said, "are not very bright" (Williams 1978: 2-3).

When later on in the story, she is locked in a tall tower by a rejected suitor, she refuses to wait passively for a prince to rescue her: "Now pull yourself together. [...] If you sit waiting for a prince to rescue you, you may sit here forever. Be practical! If there's any rescuing to be done, you are going to have to do it yourself" (10). And while she is at it, she also rescues helpless Prince Perian, who had been held captive in the same tower for many years.

In Munsch's much praised *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980), the resourceful heroine, a brave survivor of the dragon's attack on her castle, by cleverly playing on the dragon's male ego, manages to rescue the ungrateful prince Ronald from his clutches:

He looked at her and said: "Elizabeth, you are a mess! You smell like ashes, your hair is all tangled and you are wearing a dirty old paper bag. Come back when you are dressed like a real princess". "Ronald", said Elizabeth, "your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince, but you are a toad". They didn't get married after all (unnumbered pages).

In other texts, like A. Thompert's *The Clever Princess* (1977) and Katherine Paterson's *The Wide-Awake Princess* (2000), marriage is not even an issue as the heroines' self-fulfilment can be achieved through active involvement in ruling their kingdom and helping their people—quite a striking departure from the model of submissive beauties waiting to be rescued and socially upgraded by a prince.

An almost penitential figure grieving for her mother,² persecuted by her stepmother and stepsisters, the object of much psychological investigation of rivalry and envy (see Cashdan 1999), Cinderella in particular represents an icon of female passivity. As Tatar has observed, referring to the two main strands of the story into which the Cinderella story has been categorized ("Donkeyskin", based on the father's incestuous desire, and "Cinderella")³:

Control of marriage, and hence the regulation of desire and sexuality, are in the hands of her father; the organization of the domestic sphere, which also determines the availability and desirability of daughters, is orchestrated by the mother. It is at just the point when father and mother wield their power to wall the heroine in, to keep her "at home" through an endogamous marriage or through a form of labor that prevents exogamy (by making her as unattractive as possible), that the heroine becomes either a fugitive or a victim awaiting rescue (Tatar 1992: 137).

If we agree with the assumption that gender has a cultural character, we should not underestimate the impact of fairy-tale characters or circumstances in the formation of a psycho-sexual concept of the female self. Feminists and critics alike have challenged the notion that fairy tales embody timeless and ageless truths by providing critical and often subversive retellings of traditional stories. In

contemporary (often consumer)⁴ culture the story of Cinderella has been rewritten, refashioned, restructured and defamiliarized, while Walt Disney's mass-market version continues to advertise the passive and "good" princess of the original movie (see Wood 1996), whose "willing acceptance of a condition of worthlessness and her expectation of rescue (as a reward for her virtuous suffering) is a recognizable paradigm of feminine socialization" (Kolbenshlag 1979: 73). More recent retellings stage the refusal to internalize the consciousness of being a victim and explore the symbolic undertones of Cinderella's family politics. The adult and children's rewritings of Cinderella which I am about to discuss (a selection from among the ever-growing number of Cinderella adaptations in the English language), often share formal changes (setting, place and theme, focalization) which inevitably lead to an ideological and parodic reorientation of the tale, as well as to an investigation of the female role in society. At the same time, however, Cinderella-based texts intended for an adult audience tend to explore symbolically the relationship with the dead mother (whose impact appears to have been removed in children's versions), while retellings for a younger audience tend to be more playful in tone, despite constant overlappings as to the implied readership of adaptations, which in more than one case could be grouped indifferently under both adult and child audiences (distinguishing, as Barbara Wall (1991) has suggested, between a *single*, *double* or *dual* address), although the issue of identifying narrative for children and distinguishing it from narrative for adults is extremely complex and still very much a matter of debate.

I shall start precisely with an example of a text, liminal with respect to age, directed towards a "young adult" audience (which seems to co-exist with the indication 8+ on the book cover), and which represents an expansion, in novel form, as well as a rewriting, of the Cinderella story, Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted* (1996). In addition to an absent yet authoritative father, a horrid stepmother and manipulative stepsisters, Ella, who is also the intrafictional narrator, has the added misfortune of being the recipient of a fairy's gift of absolute obedience:

Anyone could control me with an order. It had to be a direct command, such as "Put on a shawl", or "You must go to bed now". A wish or a request had no effect. I was free to ignore "I wish you would put on a shawl", or "Why don't you go to bed now?" But against an order I was powerless. If someone told me to hop on one foot for a day and a half, I'd have to do it. And hopping on one foot wasn't the worst order I could be given. If you commanded me to cut off my own head, I'd have to do it. I was in danger at every moment (Carson Levine 1996: 4-5).

While on the one hand Ella's plight in life may seem even more hopeless than the usual one—as if the modern version would sadistically pile up new obstacles on the girl's path to independence—on the other hand the heroine's weakness and

desire to please (ultimately to be controlled) of the traditional story are projected outside by a spell—which she embarks on a quest to break. Whereas Cinderella obeys her stepmother because she is incapable of doing otherwise, chained by her own low self-esteem to her humble status of a servant by the hearth, Ella reacts to the injustice of her situation, challenges the fairy openly, wins confrontations with ogres and giants, and ultimately manages to break the curse (for the prince's sake) by sheer will power.⁵ By making Cinderella's obedience a concrete external obstacle rather than an ingrained mental attitude and by having the whole plot centre on the attempt to free oneself from the enchantment in order to take responsibility for one's own decisions and choices, the emphasis is lifted from the rescue-and-marriage plot to a plot of personal development,⁶ where the heroine pursues the road to self-sufficiency rather than dependence: "decisions were a delight after the curse. I loved having the power to say yes or no" (Carson Levine 1996: 231-232).⁷ Adult versions of "Cinderella", whether serious or humorous, tend to question stereotypical female roles in the tale by highlighting unsuspected tensions and/or unsuspected forms of bondings among the female characters involved. In Emma Donague's "Tale of the Shoe" (1997) the Cinderella character, after having realized that she is not really interested in the fairy tale paraphernalia (dress, coach, ball, castle) as she is supposed to be, is not able to give the prince the expected answer, but experiences instead a form of metafictional detachment from her role in the story:

The Prince came to propose. Out on the steps he led me, under the half-full moon, all very fairy-tale. His long moustaches were beginning to tremble; he seemed like an actor on a creaking stage. As soon as the words began to leak out of his mouth, they formed a cloud in which I could see the future. I could hardly hear him. The voices were shrieking yes yes yes say yes before you lose your chance you bag of nothingness. I opened my teeth but no sound came out (Donague 1997: 7).

The story ends with a twist as Cinderella decides to go and live with her fairy godmother instead: "I had got the story all wrong. How could I not have noticed she was beautiful? [...] So she took me home, or I took her home, or we were both taken to the closest thing" (8). The relationship between women totally erases the male figure of the prince, who is perceived as a representative of an old-fashioned fictional (and sexual) order.

Stepmothers stand as an endless source of evil in fairy tales—invariably identified with the villain (see Tatar 1987). As traditional psychoanalytic interpretations run, the wicked witch and the dead idealized mother would be the result of the child's mental splitting the mother into two psychic entities: a gratifying good mother and a frustrating bad mother (see Cashdan 1999). But what happens if it is Cinderella's own mother who takes the role of the wicked witch? This is precisely what happens in Tanith Lee's "When the Clock Strikes" (1983). In this very complex rewriting

an internal narrator plays on the narratees' and readers' expectations of the tale by recounting a gothic story where Ashella is an evil character who has sworn allegiance to the devil and her dead witch-mother and has sworn to carry out her revenge on the unwary prince. The relationship between mother and daughter is depicted as a conspiracy of hatred and death. The hazel branch, which in the Grimms' version is a symbol of the mother's spirit as a magic provider, turns into a token of witchlike practices and satanic rites. A strong bond between dead mother and daughter, although utterly devoid of evil connotations, also characterizes Angela Carter's "Ashputtle: or, the Mother's Ghost". In order to help her mourning daughter to obtain food, clothes and ultimately a husband of her choice, the mother's spirit possesses in turn several animals, leading them to exhaustion and then to death, as in the case of the bird:

The ghost of the mother left the cow and went into the bird. The bird struck its own breast with its beak. Blood poured down onto the burned child under the tree. It ran over her shoulders and covered her front and covered her back. She shouted out when it ran down her legs. When the bird had no more blood, the burned child wore a silk red dress. "Make your own dress, next time", said the bird. "There's no blood left" (Carter 1993: 302).

Ashputtle appears as a sort of vampirish character who draws on her mother's last drop of energy to provide her with the necessities for a successful, if traditional, acculturation into the female role (which, incidentally, will involve rivalry with the stepmother rather than the stepsisters over a man, the ultimate object of desire). In a ritual re-enactment of the bond between mother and growing foetus, Carter's Cinderella must feed on her mother's body in order to develop an adult female body she can be proud of:

"Now I can go to sleep" said the mother's ghost, "Everything is all right now" (303).

Even more playful adult rewritings of Cinderella (such as Binchy 1985) stress the solidarity among women, rather than rivalry, on which traditional psychoanalytic approaches have based their interpretations. J. Finn Garner's "Cinderella" humorously deconstructs the myth of beauty as politically incorrect in the description of the stepsisters getting ready for the ball:

They began to plan the expensive clothes they would use to alter and enslave their natural body images to emulate an unrealistic standard of feminine beauty. (It was especially unrealistic in their case, as they were differently visaged enough to stop a clock) (Garner 1994: 31-32).

At the ball, Cinderella is the object of the erotically charged male gaze: "The men stared at her and lusted after this woman who had captured perfectly their Barbie-

doll ideas of feminine desirability" (33). Suddenly the prince, as well as every other male in the ballroom "in a vicious display of testosterone" enters a massive fight over Cinderella which ends tragically for the men involved. The ladies' reaction is to loosen up and strip off their tight garments for comfort, and dress the dead men in their discarded dresses, thus exposing their cross-dressing tendencies to the media. The happy ending based on the marriage to the Prince is here deconstructed and reframed as the success for an all-female enterprise: a clothing cooperative that produces comfortable clothes for women ("Cinder Wear").

Children's versions also challenge the value of beauty as the most crucial asset for a girl, whose happiness depends on her ability to attract a man. These rewritings suggest alternatives to our common picture of Cinderella as a defenceless and submissive young woman. Humour is largely relied upon to ridicule outmoded notions about the nature of female personality and desirable female behaviour. Jane Yolen's "Cinder Elephant", an outsized kind-hearted girl with huge feet, is teased by her skinny stepmother and stepsisters. In this version, however, being thin and fashionable equals being mean: "they had thin smiles too. And thin names: Reen and Rhee. And hearts so thin, you could read a magazine through them" (Yolen 2000: 18). The twittery bluebirds that help Cinderella to the ball, a satire of the Disney Cinderella's bird helpers, are only able to concoct a dress made of feathers and twigs so that Elly ends up looking like a huge hen. Lucky for the girl that Prince Junior is fond of birdwatching: "I want to marry the hen who fits this grass slipper". In the end Cinder Elephant marries her prince, and the stepsisters are even invited to the castle "but they never came. Their lips were too thin to ask for forgiveness, and their minds too mean to understand love. Moral: if you love a waist, you waste a love" (28).

In Mike Thaler's 1997 *Cinderella Bigfoot*, the whole story centres around the extraordinary size of the heroine's feet, which are considered hazardous for the royal ball and prevent her from getting an invitation. But her dairy godmother, a magic cow, (like other retellings in the "Happily Ever Laughter" series, this version of Cinderella is characterized by humorous punning as well as comic exaggeration) provides her with a dress and glass sneakers in size 87. The whole issue of sibling rivalry and domestic slavery is totally absent, as Cinderella's stepfamily is actually very kind while, by contrast, prince Smeldred is weird in appearance and behaviour (the final marriage of such freakish characters appears somewhat appropriate).

A rejuvenated Cinderella is the protagonist of *Cinder Elly* (Minters 1994), set in contemporary New York city, where the object of desire is not the ball, but a basketball game, which Elly is considered too young to attend. The focus here is age: the sisters' detached and teasing behaviour toward Cinder-Elly may thus come to represent the younger reader's anxiety about being "left out" of fun, the feeling

of exclusion experienced by a younger sibling (in this version Cinder Elly's family is natural and the conflicts between sisters that are portrayed are those commonly found among siblings). The fairy's gift discloses the possibility of gaining access to the world of teenage courting rather than marriage. The action, told by an external narrator, is counterpointed by a chorus of children who comment on the action and in some cases explicitly address the reader in a strategy of involvement as in the ending: "I am so glad everything turned out all right. Aren't you?" (unnumbered pages).

Shorto's *Cinderella. The Untold Story* (1990) gives us Cinderella's "real" story from one of the stepsisters' point of view. Cinderella is presented as a dreamer and storyteller who likes to spice up reality, as she does when she dances with the prince at the ball:

"I am a princess from a faraway kingdom" she told him. "In fact, my kingdom is in the clouds. I came to earth on a magical moonbeam" (Shorto 1990: 7).

When Cinderella eventually tells the prince that she is just a common girl who likes to fantasize, the prince in his turn confesses that he has also pretended to be someone else:

I am not the Prince at all, but only his second cousin. You mistook me for a prince at the ball, and I couldn't help but pretend. You see, I also have a habit of making up stories (15).

Such a well-matched pair with an uncommon talent for storytelling will inevitably thrive in the fairy-tale business, with the narrator claiming that they even invented the usual closing line ("and they lived happily ever after"). In this version the reader is invited to reflect on the basic literary conventions of fairy tales, like the need to fictionalize common events in order to render them special and meaningful. Cinderella is portrayed by her stepsister as the author of the classic story we all know, which she has enriched and made more attractive than her "real-life" adventure, by adding the supernatural machinery in the person of the fairy godmother, a more handsome prince than the plump real-life version described by her stepsister, reserving to herself the role of the ill-treated heroine in a rags-to-riches plot. Once again, the canonical story of Cinderella is exposed in all its fictionality and fake romance, while the heroine has embraced a more ordinary if happier lifestyle as story teller and entrepreneur.

Ella Jackson's *Cinder Edna* (1994) is more subtly constructed than other Cinderella-based stories in that it provides no less than *two* Cinderella characters, Cinder Ella and Cinder Edna, whose very different personalities and choices produce two separate Cinder plots and endings. Given similar backgrounds and

starting points, Cinder Edna's determination, energy and optimism make her a perfect foil for Ella's more characteristic passivity and self-pity:

Once upon a time there were two girls who lived next door to each other. You may have heard of the first one. Her name was Cinderella. Poor Cinderella was forced to work from morning till night, cooking and scrubbing pots and pans and picking up after her cruel stepmother and wicked stepsisters. When her work was done, she sat among the cinders to keep warm, thinking about all her troubles. Cinder Edna, the other girl, was also forced to work for her wicked stepmother and stepsisters. But she sang and whistled while she worked. Moreover, she had learned a thing or two from doing all that housework —such as how to make tuna casserole sixteen different ways and how to get spots off everything from rugs to ladybugs (Jackson 1998: unnumbered pages).

Ella embodies the archetypal fairy tale beauty to whom Kay Stone's remarks on beautiful heroines can be applied:

Heroines are not allowed any defects, nor are they required to develop, since they are already perfect. The only tests of most heroines require nothing beyond what they are born with: a beautiful face, tiny feet, or a pleasing temperament (Stone 1975: 45).

On the other hand, Edna, the antiheroine, "wasn't much to look at. But she was strong and spunky and knew some good jokes" (Jackson 1998: unnumbered pages). The device of juxtaposing the canonical story with the politically correct version also has the effect to highlight differences in time and class. While the Cinderella story unfolds in a timeless and aristocratic context, with Ella wearing the impractical clothes and the notoriously uncomfortable glass slippers conjured up by her fairy godmother and destined later lead an uneventful court life, Edna's plot is set in a realistic context in which ball gowns are bought with savings, buses stop running at midnight and refreshments at the castle are enthusiastically approached. A new creative configuration of Cinderella, with counter-cultural patterns which dispense with the supernatural is therefore fused into the familiar configuration. Readers can reflect, for example, on the different degrees of freedom and independence of the two heroines or draw parallels between the two princes, the handsome narcissistic heir to the throne who will marry Ella versus his environmentally aware and fun-loving brother who falls in love with Edna. At the end of the story the reader is called on to judge which marriage is more likely to be successful in the long run:

So the girl who had once been known as Cinderella ended up in a big palace. During the day she went to endless ceremonies and listened to dozens of speeches [...] at night she sat by the fire with nothing to look at but her husband's perfect profile

[...]. And the girl who had been known as Cinder Edna ended up in a small cottage with solar heating. During the day she studied waste disposal engineering and cared for orphaned kittens. And at night she and her husband laughed and joked, tried new recipes together and played duets on the accordion and concertina. Guess who lived happily ever after (unnumbered pages).

The coexistence of the canonical and the modernized version in Jackson's text is a very interesting attempt to produce an ironic distancing from the conventional regressive morality of the original tale, without rejecting it entirely. It is a fact, however, that the constant restructuring and rewriting of traditional tales in order to adapt them to the new social and moral requirements of contemporary audiences, has had the effect of preserving and encoding traditional fairy tales within the canon so that they are still widely read, alongside more challenging and subversive versions.⁸

The coexistence of both canonical tales and subversive versions of princess stories in contemporary culture highlights, among other things, the ambivalence in society towards accepted and "safe" female cultural identities and new empowering female roles. If some adult rewritings explore the dark side of the relationship with the natural mother and question the helpless role of victim waiting for no less than a royal rescuer, many adult and children's versions tend to reshape princess stories (among which *Cinderella* seems to be the most emblematic) in the direction of personal fulfilment through active involvement into one's destiny and clever choices. In rewritings where smart princesses are able to break free of fixed patterns of personal and fictional development, fairy tale discourse can become emancipatory and innovative, rather than a reinforcement of patriarchal culture.

Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was delivered at the International Conference on "National and Cultural Identity in Children's Literature and the Media" which was held at the University of Reading on April 5th-8th, 2001.

2. "Cinderella is a child in mourning for her mother, as her name tells us; her penitential garb is ash, dirty and low as a donkeyskin or a coat of grasses, but more peculiarly the sign of loss, the symbol of mortality, which the priest uses to mark the faithful on Ash Wednesday, saying: "Dust thou

art, and to dust thou shalt return"". (Warner 1995: 206).

3. "The stories that make up what has been called the Cinderella cycle, like many of the most frequently told and recorded folktales, explore from various angles the knot or cluster of tensions inherent in the nuclear family. There are numerous ways of categorizing the Cinderella variants, depending on the nature and the order of the incidents. Many areas have distinctive traditions. But it is essentially true to say that

there are two main strands of the story: one in which the girl is mistreated and humiliated because of her stepmother's jealousy, and one in which her suffering is caused by her father's incestuous desires. In many ways the emotional patterning in each of those two story types mirrors or echoes that in the other. The first may be represented by Perrault's "Cendrillon" or "Cinderella"; the second by Perrault's "Peau d'Ane" or "Donkey-Skin". (Philip 1989: 3).

4. Conservative voices about the cultural and commercial exploitation of fairy tales should also be taken into account. For example, Rudolf Schenda (1986: 90) has written: "Changes in the form of communicating fairy tales show that this genre, far more than others, has been subject to overuse and fatigue. It is to be heartily desired, perhaps even to be publicly demanded, that the production of culturally related consumer goods based on the seven dwarves, the seven kids, and the seven league boots be given a long rest".

5. Colette Dowling (1981: 31) has called The Cinderella complex "a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting

for something external to transform their lives".

6. As Jack Zipes (1979: 32) has remarked: "The structure of most of the feminist tales is based on the self-definition of a young woman. The female protagonist becomes aware of a task which she must complete in social interaction with others to define herself".

7. It is interesting to notice that in a later rewriting of Cinderella, by the same author, *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* (2000) the male protagonist is endowed with (minor) magical powers. While the female heroine has to overcome additional obstacles in order to achieve her goal, the hero's task is facilitated.

8. As Jane Yolen (1982: 295) has remarked: "It does no good for purists, academic folklorists to deplore the changes in folklore as departures from the good old oral versions of yesteryear. The point is that folklore changes, with or without the folklorist's blessing. And that is why it is essential that folklorists study the popular versions of Cinderella, including the version's appearing in children's books and animated cartoons. For it is those changes, some subtle, some not, that provide invaluable clues to understanding the world of today".

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INTO THE HEART OF THE LABYRINTH: THE PURSUIT OF MANNERIST TRADITIONS IN JOHN BANVILLE'S *ATHENA*

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In 1981 John Banville referred to his readers as "that small band" (Imhof 1981a: 12) and Rüdiger Imhof, the German Banville specialist, commented that "John Banville's work has so far only attracted scant attention" (Imhof 1981b: 52). Since then Banville has received international critical acclaim with numerous magazine and newspaper reviews, scholarly essays, literary prizes and translations of his novels into many languages.¹ In a number of articles, Banville's work has been classified as postmodernist, exhibiting the characteristic traits of postmodern literature or metafiction.²

Athena (1995), the focus of this study, *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and *Ghosts* (1993) are referred to as a trilogy in so far as these three novels all revolve around the same character, Freddie Montgomery, who is gradually transformed into a fine arts specialist. The three texts consequently trace his development from a scientist to murderer, made so by his obsession with a beguiling painting of a young woman (*The Book of Evidence*). While in prison he becomes an authority on Dutch painting, then serves as an assistant to a famous art historian in *Ghosts* and finally is called upon to authenticate a number of paintings in *Athena*.

Athena, which to my knowledge has received little, if any, critical response thus far, is a text which shows the most commonly mentioned characteristics attributed to postmodern fiction, such as self-consciousness, self-reference, (self-) parody, playfulness, excess, intertextuality, scepticism about the validity of *mimesis* and