

## Cinderella's True Love (?): The Diminishing Presence of the Prince in Cinderella Picture-Book Illustrations

The Cinderella story has existed in world-wide folklore for at least 1000 years. When Charles Perrault wrote his literary fairy tale in the 1690s, he was probably aware of earlier versions, in which Cinderella, often aided by her dead mother, struggles not to find a husband but to regain her lost status, and does so by actively using her wits and seeking out the help she needs. In Perrault's telling, however, Cinderella's agency is significantly diminished. In the mid-1800s, Perrault's Cinderella was adopted by British publishers to the effective exclusion of all others, a choice that Bonnie Cullen attributes to the fact that this submissive, compliant heroine best suited the Victorian middle class. One result of this publishing move is that the most well-known version of the tale today is Perrault's; another is a general perception of Cinderella as a character who is saved not through her own action but by marriage to the prince. Thus, Cinderella's "reward" in common cultural understanding – and hence her aspirational goal – is the prince himself.

In this paper, I address the question of whether this construction of the prince (and his role in the Cinderella tale) is borne out in the texts circulated among children over time. To do so, I analyze the ways in which the prince has been visually depicted in a dataset of more than 700 Cinderella picture books published since 1800. In particular, I examine the *extent* and *strength* of his visual presence in the tale through consideration of the prevalence of his appearance on picture-book covers and the visual depiction of the scenes in which he plays a significant part: the ball in which he and Cinderella fall in love; Cinderella's flight from the ball at midnight; Cinderella's trying on the glass slipper; and Cinderella's wedding to the prince. I argue that, over time, Cinderella picture books have visually diminished the prince and hence his importance to the Cinderella tale – in favor, however, not of a more autonomous Cinderella but of a glamorous one who offers little girls the consumerist "dream" of becoming a spectacular object of adulation.