Dancing in Glass Shoes: The Use of Narrative in Story Ballets in Ashton, Nureyev, and Marin's Cinderellas

by

Sarah Greizer
Class of 2016

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Dance

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2016
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. Thank you to the Wesleyan Dance Department for helping me grow as a dancer and scholar and for showing me the world in a new light. To Hari Krishnan for teaching me about attitude, presence, and detail; to Pedro Alejandro for forcing me to approach dance from new angles; to Iddi Saaka for giving me a love for dances outside my comfort zone; to Katja Kolcio for helping me grow as a teacher and mentor; to Nicole Stanton for teaching me about history and the broad genres of modern dance; to Susan Lourie for keeping the seniors organized and sane while being a constant person to rely on; and to Michele Olerud for maintaining all the logistics of concerts and schedules. Thanks to Rashida Shaw for being my second reader; it was lovely working with you as my first ever college professor and one of my last advisors.

Thanks to my parents for listening to me freak out when I was stressed and nagging me forwards when I was too relaxed. Without your love and support, I would not have been able to make this work a reality. For the many hours of sweat, blood (from sewing), toil, and tears, you helped me reach my goal.

To all my amazing wonderful dancers (Jessie Abdow, Nicole Brenner, L. QingXian Comins-Sporbert, Rachel Davis, Kira Fitzgerald, Sadie Gregory, Fiona Grishaw-Jones, Anna Krotinger, Shana Laski, Sonya Levine, Cloie Logan, and Maddy Paull), you made my dreams possible. I can't thank you enough for all your hard work and wonderful support. Together we danced, acted, laughed, stressed, and made something beautiful!
Thanks to Sadichchha Adhikari, Shelli Weiner, Griffin Deary, and Jonas Powell for taking such beautiful photographs to document my dances. They came out wonderful!

To my fellow dance majors, it's been a long journey together, and I'm sad to see you all go. I know you will all accomplish incredible things. Thank you for dancing and learning with me, for all your kind and critical feedback, for the many hours of shared sweat and stress, and for the happy moments of community.

And lastly, to my wonderful and fantastic advisor, Patricia Beaman. I could not have made this without you. You understood my views and interests in dance more than anyone else I have encountered at Wesleyan, and you helped me create a scholarly work that aligned with my passions; something I had begun to think would be impossible. You took my extraordinarily broad topic and gave me a direction. From the endless facts and knowledge on dance history to the incredible understanding of storytelling and expression, you gave me my thesis. You pushed me constantly to always make it better, and I'm so grateful for your tough love and support. You kept me laughing and smiling, soothing my worries when I felt lost. We may have both been figuring this process out together, but we did it in the end! My time at Wes would not have been the same without you; you have taught me so much over the past four years. More than advisor or professor, you have been editor, research assistant, confidant, role model, mentor, and much more. I could not have asked for a better advisor and, most importantly, friend.

*With all my love, thank you.*
# Table of Contents

**Introduction:** Once Upon a Time .......................................................... 5

I. **Chapter 1:** Cinderella and her Never-Ending Tale  
   i. Hundreds of Cinderellas .......................................................... 13  
   ii. Dancing in Glass Shoes ......................................................... 20

II. **Chapter 2:** Story Ballets  
   i. The Beginnings of Theatre Dance .............................................. 24  
   ii. Noverre’s Revolution ............................................................. 25  
   iii. The Romantic and Classical Eras ............................................. 30  
   iv. Modern Ballet ......................................................................... 33

III. **Chapter 3:** Choreographers  
   1) Frederick Ashton ......................................................................... 38  
   2) Rudolf Nureyev ......................................................................... 45  
   3) Maguy Marin .............................................................................. 52

IV. **Chapter 4:** The Ballet  
   1) *Scene 1:* The Stepfamily .......................................................... 58  
      i. Ashton’s Bumbling Sisters ...................................................... 60  
      ii. Nureyev’s Cruel Steps ......................................................... 63  
      iii. Marin’s Soulless Dolls ......................................................... 66  
   2) *Scene 2:* The Ball and Midnight .............................................. 70  
      i. Ashton’s Traditional Ball ....................................................... 71  
      ii. Nureyev’s Movie Madness .................................................... 75  
      iii. Marin’s Creepy Celebration ................................................ 81  
   3) *Scene 3:* Realization and Reunion .......................................... 86  
      i. Ashton’s Lasting Love ........................................................... 87  
      ii. Nureyev’s Perfect Partnership ............................................. 91  
      iii. Marin’s Ascent to Adulthood .............................................. 93

V. **Chapter 5:** Choreographed Works  
   1) 2015 Fall Piece: *The Path to Grandmother* .......................... 98  
   2) 2016 Spring Piece: *Cinderella* ............................................ 108

**Conclusion:** Happily Ever Dancing .................................................. 122

**Bibliography** .................................................................................. 128
Introduction: Once Upon a Time

"In the dancer everything must depict, everything must speak; each gesture, each attitude, each port de bras must possess a different expression."

~Jean Georges Noverre\(^1\)

I have always been fascinated by stories, and more specifically, fairytales:\(^2\) the thrill of escaping into another world where anything is possible through the power of words, the joy of thinking that any tragic circumstance can end with a happy outcome, and the tears of sympathizing with the struggle and pain that appears in everyone's lives, from beggar to prince, child to adult, farmer to fairy. Fairytales have always offered me both an escape and a connection to life, just as dance has.

A person can feel free and light while dancing, as though the world's problems have been left behind as one jumps into the air. One can feel structured and grounded while dancing, as though the world's problems are manageable as one strengthens the body. Dance allows us to escape into a world of make-believe, via a stage filled with lights, costumes, and sets where we become performers rather than everyday people. I believe this feeling of escapism is realized in every form of dance, whether it tells a story or not. However, it is the dances with intricate tales that take the audience into the dancers' magical and performative world.

---

\(^1\) Letters on Dancing and Ballets, pg. 99
\(^2\) The genre of fairytale is very difficult to define. What was originally described as "a simple, imaginative oral tale containing magical and miraculous elements and was related to the belief systems, values, rites, and experiences of pagan peoples" (Zipes The Irresistible Fairy Tale 21) has grown to encompass a much larger range of stories and tale types. Known in Russia as simply skazka and German as märchen both of which translate to simply "tale" (Zipes The Irresistible Fairy Tale 61), the genre includes stories of magic or everyday lives, adventures and hardships. They are typically short, straightforward tales that deal with a variety of themes ranging from grief to love to poverty to family.
When you hear the words "dance" and "fairy tale" together, one most likely thinks of such ballet productions as *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Nutcracker*—tales of fairies and princesses and dreams. Ballet has a long tradition of fairytales and royalty that traces back to the royal courts of France in the 1600s. In fact, fairytale scholar Jack Zipes links the importance of court ballets and operas to the history and development of fairytales: "In all the court entertainments in Italy and France during the baroque period, the spectacle was of utmost importance, consisting of magnificent displays based on myths and fairy tales that celebrated the glory as well as power of the court, which was likened to some kind of enchanted fairy realm" (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 26). In more modern times, ballet choreographers began to experiment with more abstract and "plotless" productions; however, the fairytale story ballets remain an important part of ballet companies' repertoires.

I define story ballets as a full-length balletic production (as in lasting longer than an hour with multiple acts) in which a narrative operates as a background for the dancing with plot, characters, and setting. These ballets display their stories through a variety of means, but most importantly through the dance movements themselves. The choreography of these ballets adds to the narrative, creating the action of the plot and conveying the expressions of the characters.

An actor utilizes inflections and dramatic speeches. A musician places all of their emotions into their sound. An artist has color and imagery to display their thoughts and feelings. As a dancer, one has the difficult job of conveying the emotions one feels without any outside help or instruments; it is one’s body, pure and exposed, that must attempt to reach the same level of raw emotion as an inspiring

---

3 Balanchine's preferred term for his shorter ballets without a definitive narrative (McDonagh 1).
monologue, a haunting tune, or a beautiful painting. Although some aspects of life
dance can only hint at, it can invoke feelings unique to the body, connecting to
audience members in ways words never could. Dancers can share their remorse, joy,
love, and anger with their audience, simply through their facial expressions and
gestures. A deeper level of the story, past the words describing the plot, shines
through the movement that can never be fully explained by speech.

One of the most popular fairytales is *Cinderella*. I would be surprised if a
reader had never heard of the little ash girl and her magic shoe. It is a story that
crosses cultures and history, appearing in hundreds of forms. Believed to have
originated as an oral tale sometime during the first century, *Cinderella* has been
adapted into books, plays, films, and ballets. In this thesis, I apply the story of
*Cinderella* as an approach to the use of narrative in ballets.

In my thesis, I will examine how narrative is portrayed through ballet by
juxtaposing Frederick Ashton's traditional and comedic version of *Cinderella* (1948),
Rudolf Nureyev's exploration of the separation between dreams and reality in his
glamorous *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood* (1986), and Maguy Marin's critical and
disturbing view of childhood in her *Cendrillon* (1985). These choreographers
intertwine the story and themes with the choreography, making use of expression,
acting, pantomime, and technique to best portray their individual narratives. Some
research questions I have are how does a choreographer's specific style affect the
narrative (such as plot, themes, characters) of a traditional and well-known story?
How is expression used in dance, and how does its presence or absence affect the feel
of the story? What do each of these choreographers add to the dialogue of the fairytale, and how do their dances fit in the historical discourse of the tale?

These ballets tell their tales not just through a short synopsis on their programs, but through the movement of the dancers. The choreography conveys emotions and plot, as princes declare undying love or commit betrayal with large leaps and sweeping arms, as scullery maids dream of greater futures with dainty feet and graceful turns, and as fairies offer guidance with proud gestures and confident steps. Using *Cinderella* as the base story to compare the different approaches of Ashton, Nureyev, and Marin, I will explore the connection between choreography and theme. Frederick Ashton’s *Cinderella* has become a staple of England’s Royal Ballet. The tale follows Charles Perrault’s version of the fairytale, while also hinting at economic and class distinctions. Rudolf Nureyev’s *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood* is set in a 1930s Hollywood, complete with desperate actresses, eccentric producers, and regal movie stars. His version explores the reality of dreams and the thin separation between our imaginations and the ability to make the impossible possible. Maguy Marin places her *Cendrillon* inside a dollhouse, with each dancer wearing a doll-like mask. Her version offers a view into the minds of children, while also displaying the darker themes of human cruelty and self-doubt that persist in both the young and old.

**Chapter Outline**

In my first chapter, I give a brief description of the history of *Cinderella* and how the tale has evolved throughout time, including its first appearances in ballet. I also discuss some of the more common themes that arise in the fairytale. Chapter Two offers a short history of the development of story ballets, from festivals in
ancient Greece, through *ballet d'action*, and up to more modern choreographers who found narration in other forms. In Chapter Three, I delve into the backgrounds of the three choreographers whose ballets I am examining. Frederick Ashton established a basis for British Ballet and choreographed the earliest of the Cinderella ballets I am comparing. Rudolf Nureyev was akin to a ballet pop star, whose love of extravagance is clear in his choreographic style. Maguy Marin is a French choreographer more known for her contemporary pieces, but her *Cendrillon* is a haunting ballet that displays her tendencies to explore darker themes.

Chapter Four is an analysis of the ballets themselves, and I juxtapose three different scenes that appear in each production. The first scene is the introduction of the stepfamily and their treatment of Cinderella. The second scene focuses on the Ball and Cinderella's midnight flight. The final scene shows the Prince's reunion with Cinderella and their eventual finale. Each scene is examined in all three ballets, as I discuss the importance of the scene to the greater story and how the choreographers wove their respective themes into their dances. Chapter Five is a discussion of my choreographic process, in which I created my own narrative dances telling the fairytales of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Cinderella* to better understand how to best convey a story through movement.

**Methodology**

Throughout my process, I have utilized works by dance historians, theorists, biographers, and fairytale scholars. Most notably, I researched the history of narrative in dance, reading texts by dance historians such as Jennifer Homans and Deborah Jowitt, among others, and the eighteenth-century theories of Jean Georges Noverre. I
have also referenced David Vaughan's *Frederick Ashton and his Ballets* (1999) as well as Diane Solway's *Nureyev: His Life* (1998). Few scholars have studied Maguy Marin, whose dance prestige is more limited to her country of origin, but I have collected several short biographies on her, written by scholars such as Giannandrea Poesio.

For fairytale literary critiques, I have examined works by scholars such as Marina Warner and Joan Gould, as well as Jack Zipes who is renowned in the genre, with over a dozen books devoted to fairytale analysis and critique. I have focused my analysis of fairytales in regards to feminist and economic theories of the story of *Cinderella*. To analyze the choreography of the three ballets, I utilized three video versions of the pieces: The Royal Ballet's *Cinderella*, choreographed by Frederick Ashton and filmed in 1957; Opéra National de Paris' *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood*, choreographed by Rudolf Nureyev and filmed in 2008; and Opéra National de Lyon's *Cendrillon*, choreographed by Maguy Marin and filmed in 1989.

**My Choreographic Process**

In my two dance pieces accompanying my thesis work, I looked at narrative and storytelling from the perspective of a choreographer. How could I convey my story through movement? I did not use a program synopsis, so the story's interpretation was left entirely to the audience and the dancer's portrayal. I chose well-known fairytales, hoping the audience would recognize the basic plot and develop their own view of the theme through my staging.

My first piece, entitled *The Path to Grandmother*, was an exploration of a young girl's journey to adulthood. Using the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, I played
with the theme of cyclic growth: when one person dies, another ultimately takes their place in the role of society and life. The little girl becomes a grandmother herself, after defeating the wolves that lie in her way. My choreography mixed more modern and contemporary elements and defined set movement types for each of the characters.

My second piece, entitled simply Cinderella, was my own interpretation of the timeless tale, as I attempted to incorporate elements and themes I had explored throughout my thesis process. With a twelve-minute time limit, I chose to focus on the thematic elements instead of developing a complex plot or character backgrounds. My choreography used more balletic technique, mixed with little bits of humor and modern to better display each character's unique personalities. Using an all female cast, I equalized the character gender roles and the dancing qualities, having Cinderella and her Royal suitor (gender left ambiguous) alternately support and lead each other in the dance steps. The Stepsisters became less general representations of the faults of womanhood and instead became just two of many differing women onstage, each with their strengths and weaknesses. I also played with the connection of magic in dance and storytelling, utilizing the Fairy as a tool to recognize the fantastical elements of a fairytale that seem possible in a suspended reality of the stage, hinting that the little bit of magic she uses to assist Cinderella is similar to the magic of dance and how it can inspire others achieve their own dreams and happiness.
Once upon a time, in a faraway land...are proverbial words that begin many a fairytale, and explain the genre's lasting impressions on everyday culture and storytelling as a whole. They are stories that transcend borders and eras, unlimited to specific timelines and places. These fairytales can happen anywhere, at any moment, whether it is 17th century France in the royal courts, the early 2000s in a high school, or in a vast country such as ancient Egypt. Cinderella is a versatile tale; when broken down, it simply becomes a story of a young adult's coming of age, surviving through the struggles of an unhappy family to reach her dreams and find a better future. It is a tale of hope and dreams, of magic and reality. Whether a Fairy Godmother appears to help us face our futures, or we decide to take our own action, Cinderella's journey is one we can all relate to.
Chapter 1: Cinderella and her Never-Ending Tale

Hundreds of Cinderellas

Cendrillon, Aschenputtel, Cennerentola, Yeh-hsien, Cinderella: these are just a few of the many names of the little cinder girl whose magical tale is known throughout the world. Whether or not her father is alive, if she has one stepsister or two, if her shoe is made of glass or gold, slipper or sandal, or if her guardian is a beautiful fairy, a kindly old woman, a magical tree, fish, or dove, her story speaks to audiences across cultures and time. Originally, fairytales were shared through oral tradition, passed down through generations, as they constantly evolved and changed with each retelling. For many, Cinderella is one of the most common and beloved stories, appearing in hundreds of variations throughout the world. New versions continue to be created and adapted on paper, in film, and on stage through both theater and dance.

The fairytale that the English-speaking world knows as Cinderella is believed to have originated from ancient Egypt in 3BC as the "The Girl with the Rose-red Slippers." The story tells the tale of Rhodopis, a Greek slave girl taken to Egypt who eventually marries the pharaoh (Green 10). The version most Western cultures associate with today is Charles Perrault's Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper, written in France in 1697. This story contains such elements as the pumpkin carriage and the glass slipper. She is a kind and complacent character, unjustly treated by her cruel and jealous stepsister and stepsisters, until a fairy godmother provides her the
chance to meet and marry the prince, thereby escaping her abusive home. Perrault's heroine is patient and determined, enduring her hardships until she procures the prince's affection. The extensive reach of Cinderella is best exemplified by Marian Roalfe Cox's *Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap O'Rushes*, a collection of Cinderella fairytales composed in 1893. The collection contains cultural folktales from around the world, including England, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Russia, China, Spain, India, and Armenia. It is not surprising that with such a diverse and wide-ranging history Cinderella appears in forms of art outside classic literature. The story crosses into the performing arts world, with numerous choreographers exploring its traditional themes in unique modern ways.

Despite its many versions, the fairy tale of Cinderella typically follows several main conventions. The heroine is a young woman, abused by female family members who are always some iteration of stepmothers and sisters. Occasionally, her father is alive, but he is often ignored in tales or eliminated all together. The heroine is abused by her stepfamily and wishes longingly for a better life. She is often forced into a form of servitude by her family and is always covered in ashes from sleeping by the fireplace. Her stepfamily is invited to an extravagant event, which they forbid the heroine from attending. In the heroine's time of need, a magical guardian appears and offers assistance. This guardian causes some form of a transformation, granting the heroine a beautiful dress and a pair of magical footwear. The heroine then attends the event and falls in love with a wealthy young man, who is often a person of royalty and the host of the event. Typically, there is a midnight deadline that forces the heroine to return home before her magical gifts disappear or her stepmother catches
her. The young man continues to search for the maiden he fell in love with and, using the magical shoe, locates the heroine. And they live happily ever after...

Marian Roalfe Cox identifies Cinderella tales through a list of these conventions. Along with the several hundred Cinderella versions, there is a plethora of Catskin and Cap O'Rushes tales. These fall under the umbrella of a Cinderella-like story, with young heroines forced into servitude, and through disguise and a fancy dress capture the heart of a wealthy man, leading to a life of wedded bliss. Cox separates the Cinderellas from the Catskins (in which the heroine escapes an abusive and incestuous father, wears a fur disguise, and wins the heart of a prince) and the Cap O'Rushes (in which the heroine is banished by her father, disguises herself as a servant, wins the heart of her master, and reconciles with her father). Her list of common incidents in these tales includes help from the heroine's dead mother, some type of villain/nemesis, the flight of the heroine (such as at midnight), a lost shoe and a marriage test using said shoe, and a happy marriage (Cox xxv-xxvi). Cox distinguishes Cinderella tales as being associated with an "ill-treated heroine [and] recognition by means of a shoe" while Catskin tales include an "unnatural father," and Cap O'Rushes have an "outcast heroine" (Cox xxv). Even with these narrowing features, the 345 tales are only cut down to 130 true "Cinderella" tales. Over a century has passed since Cox recorded each of these variants. No other massive record has been made of Cinderella-style fairytales since 1893, and one can only imagine how many other versions have appeared in the past 123 years.

Cinderella is such a popular tale because of its general storyline and themes that apply to hundreds of situations, one of the most important being that Cinderella
must overcome adversity. She rises up from an unfortunate situation and is liberated, finding a life of prosperity. Through the fairytale, audiences relate to Cinderella and her struggle; it is always made clear that the unfortunate Cinderella is a sweet girl who deserves none of the mistreatment she receives. She is depicted as a young woman whose only fault is that her parents are dead; she is "perfect" in every other way. As a reader, one cannot help but feel sympathy for the heroine and hatred for the stepfamily. In the 1600s, where the majority of people lived in poverty, fairytales such as this were seen as stories of hope for a better future. The Cinderella fairytale has become so well-known and loved that it has created its own genre in pop culture. Even in the 21st century, stories about underdogs are referred to as "Cinderella stories," such as *Cinderella Man*, a 2005 Hollywood movie about a male boxer.

The fairytale of Cinderella may also be interpreted as a story of a hunt for economic security. It is not love that drives the story. Instead, it is her desire for peace and protection as well as an escape from her housemaid duties that motivates her to marry the prince. Love becomes merely the instrument to achieve that security. Cinderella lives in squalor amidst a family who is wealthy and quite capable of sending her stepsisters in moderate finery to the ball. The family even owns "mirrors in which they could see themselves from head to foot" (Perrault 31), a rarity in the seventeenth century. As scholar Judd D. Hubert ascertains, "Perrault must have realized that few if any of his richest readers could afford such a display" (293). Perrault used this detail to show the economic status of Cinderella's family, thereby emphasizing how cruel they were to Cinderella as she is forced to wear rags and sleep by the fireplace, kept away from the riches that should also be shared with her. The
Fairy Godmother presents Cinderella with fancy clothing, jewelry, and one-of-a-kind shoes. It is only with these trappings that Cinderella is able to attend the Ball and catch the prince's eye. She becomes an entirely different person with her new money, and her "fashionably attired stepsisters...fail to recognize Cinderella," as they never took any "notice of a wretchedly dressed slave" (Hubert 294). This emphasizes the importance of money in the fairytale; while Cinderella obtained her gifts through magical means, she would not have gained her happiness without her expensive finery. Cinderella's happy ending is achieving her rightful place in society. She gains back the economic security she should have had at home by marrying someone even richer and higher in social standing. She snags the ultimate prize—the richest man in the land—who guarantees her both happiness and financial security forever and ever.

Fairytale scholars also cite the theme of female treachery in Cinderella, such as Maria Tatar, who posits that within many of these Cinderella fairytales, "the tendency to defame women and to magnify maternal evil emerges" (105). The story is female dominated, with a female heroine, villain, and magical guardian. The Prince is often the only male in the tale, and in many versions he is merely a charming placeholder, a symbol for a better life rather than an actual character. He is rarely named, or given any qualities other than "charming" and "handsome." The Stepsisters, on the other hand, are more complex, and have distinguishing personality traits: ugly, cruel, haughty, spiteful, dumb, clumsy, even occasionally remorseful and ashamed of how they treated Cinderella. The Stepmother abuses Cinderella because of her beauty and is portrayed as jealous and cruel. Despite the fact Cinderella's father married this horrible and abusive woman, Tatar claims his "responsibility for creating
turmoil by choosing a monstrous marriage partner recedes into the background...[while] the foul deeds of his wife come to occupy center stage" (103). Cinderella's father is either long dead or becomes obsolete; he is either never home or, as in Rudolf Nureyev's production, is a useless drunk. It is the Stepmother who takes the full blame as the villain. The Stepmother and Stepsisters are jealous and vindictive; their most noticeable faults are ones that men traditionally assign to women (Hubert 295). These represent the "bad" traits of females: their tendencies to be spiteful to other members of their sex.

Cinderella, on the other hand, is the ideal image of femininity, seen through the male gaze by authors such as Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. She is subservient, kind, and beautiful. She does not break free from her captives, but patiently waits for assistance from an outside source and uses marriage as her happy ending. Tatar claims that her best qualities are her domestic arts, stating that she is "confined largely to sartorial [relating to clothing/dress] and culinary [relating to cooking] arts...the two areas in which women traditionally could distinguish themselves" (105). Cinderella's love for the Prince can also be interpreted as a means of escape. In the 1600s, when Perrault wrote his version of the tale, women had limited rights. Until the French Revolution, women could not inherit any money of their own. One of the few ways they could better their lives was through matrimony. Though they were often forced into arranged marriages, it was still a way to escape their parents' homes. If one was charming (and lucky) enough, a woman could succeed in winning over a suitor she preferred. Cinderella's marriage can be seen as the agency to her happy ending, with the Prince's love as merely a means to an end.
While the stepfamily represents all that is "bad" in women and Cinderella represents all that is "good," the magical guardian is a more complicated character. This guardian is often a symbol of Cinderella's dead mother, or at least representative of motherly traits. In the Brothers Grimm version of Cinderella, the guardian is a bird, residing in a tree above her mother's grave. In this story, Cinderella grieves at her mother's grave:

Cinderella thanked him, went to her mother's grave, and planted a hazel sprig on it. She wept so hard that her tears fell to the ground and watered it. It grew and became a beautiful tree. Three times a day Cinderella went and sat under it, and wept and prayed. Each time a little white bird would also fly to the tree, and if she made a wish the little bird would toss down what she had wished for. (Brothers Grimm 118)

All her wishes are granted by the bird, symbolic of her mother's spirit, which continues to look after her daughter from beyond the grave. The Fairy Godmother is a godmother, performing the motherly duties that Cinderella's Stepmother refuses to do. At the same time, the guardian goes against the wishes of the matriarchal head of the household and sends Cinderella to the Ball without the Stepmother's knowledge or consent. The magical guardian is the most powerful character in the story. She (or it) not only offers Cinderella a way to escape her home, but it is the mysterious shoes the guardian creates that lead the Prince to Cinderella. The Fairy Godmother is the only character with magical powers that extend past the influence of wealth. The guardian acts as both mother and father to Cinderella, presenting her with feminine
dresses and jewels, while also offering means of transportation, something only the breadwinner of the family conventionally provided. Using her miraculous powers, the guardian releases Cinderella from her servitude and presents her to the Prince, much as a father gives away a bride. Perhaps the fact that the magical guardian's persona is more ambiguous and often gender neutral (such as a tree or animal) is because the power the guardian holds surpasses the ideal of a complacent female that Cinderella herself represents.

While *Cinderella* is a predominately female fairytale, the themes it portrays are based more in masculine fantasies. Many modern Cinderella fairytales, such as Gail Carson Levine's book *Ella Enchanted* (1997) and Andy Tennant's film *Ever After* (1998), try to overcome this standard by making the heroine into a more independent woman, one who overcomes her servitude through her own knowledge and resources. However, one cannot judge Cinderella and her subservient attitude too harshly. For many centuries, a young daughter could not blatantly disobey her family, nor did she have anywhere to escape. She simply bided her time, and if she were lucky, an opportunity—dressed in fairy wings—presented itself. Then she might take charge, charm a prince, and find a way to leave her family behind.

**Dancing in Glass Shoes**

As fairytale scholar Marina Warner states, "There's a profound respect in the [fairytale] genre for what words do in the world, as well as in stories" (41). Words are essential to fairytales, with little poems such as in the Brothers Grimm's *Cinderella* calling out for help with "shiver and quiver little tree/silver and gold throw down on

20
me" (119) and other such magical phrases as "Open Sesame" or "fee fi fo fum." How then can a fairytale still tell its story without a single sound of dialogue? This is a problem many choreographers have faced over the centuries challenging themselves to produce a tale both original and meaningful, while still maintaining the recognizable aspects of the story. Cinderella still has magical shoes, even if she cannot recite her little poem to receive them. The audience may not hear the Fairy Godmother speak her warning of midnight, but choreographers manage to convey the cautious message through careful staging and the dancer's acting. The fairytale ballet without words is a genre all on its own, allowing pure movement to retell the stories without using the words that so many have heard over hundreds of years. These written phrases have been told so often that many know them by heart; yet the dancing phrases offer a new medium for these ancient stories that allow audiences to fall in love with fairytales anew.

The earliest known dance production of Cinderella was choreographed by Louis Duport in Vienna in 1813. Eighty years later, Marius Petipa choreographed his own version of the fairytale ballet entitled Cendrillon, but it was not as popular as his other works. The ballet did not become a "classic" until Sergei Prokofiev wrote a score for the fairytale in the 1940s. The first production using Prokofiev's music was choreographed by Rostislav Zhakarov in 1945 for the Bolshoi Ballet in Russia (Vaughan 229). In 1948, Frederick Ashton choreographed his own version for the Sadler-Wells Ballet (later the Royal Ballet of London), also using Prokofiev's score. This version was a tremendous success, and it is Ashton's choreography that is most commonly used in the repertory of ballet companies, such as American Ballet
Theater. Ashton used Perrault's version of the fairytale for his ballet, complete with a pumpkin coach and a kindly fairy godmother. He even choreographed an entire scene based on Perrault's scenario in which Cinderella shares with her Stepsisters the oranges and lemons the Prince had given her at the Ball.

Choreographers Rudolf Nureyev and Maguy Marin both used Prokofiev's music for their ballets in 1986 and 1985; however they also added twists to their stories. Nureyev's Cinderella Goes to Hollywood keeps the basic structure of the fairytale, while setting it in the glamorous days of Hollywood in the 1930s. Cinderella's Stepsisters become actresses (rather bad ones) searching for roles, the Prince is a movie star, and the Fairy Godmother is a producer. Cinderella still goes to the Ball in a pumpkin car (instead of a coach), and an enchanted shoe still unites her with the Prince in Act III. Marin changes the story in another way, taking the fairytale and setting it in a dollhouse. Each dancer wears a mask and dances with doll-like movements. While this is the only change she makes to the plot (it is still Perrault's Cinderella, with Prince, Ball, and magic), it completely alters the feel of the ballet. The story becomes more surreal and fantastical, as though it is only a game a child is playing out with his/her dolls.

The tale of Cinderella has been changed continuously throughout time, and its adaptations in the dance world are no different. Ashton, Nureyev, and Marin all take a classic, well-known story and turn it into three vastly different ballets. The results are each beautiful and unique, with their own characters, personalities, settings, and plots. Despite their differences, any person in the audience can still recognize Cinderella and her struggles for a better life in all three versions. Whether she is searching for
economic security, escaping from her cruel stepfamily, or falling in love, the story of Cinderella is one every audience can relate to, and, through the ballet, experience with her.
Chapter 2: Narrative Ballets

The Beginnings of Theatre Dance: From Dionysus to Louis XIV

Historians and scholars have traced the art of narrative dance back to ancient Greece and Rome, including Selma Jeanne Cohen, who writes about "the Dithyramb, a song and dance performance that was part of the spring festival of Dionysus. At first the celebration was wild and improvised, but in time it began to conform to the more set structure of ritual, using composed songs and dances" (1). This is believed to be the origin of Greek theater, and at the same time, theatrical dance. In Rome, professional dancers wore masks and costumes and used mime to portray characters while performing acrobatic tricks. Cohen states that these ancient civilizations contained all the elements of theatre dance, offering "a performer equipped with movement skills, a role to be played; a stage to play on; music, costume, and decor to enhance the spectacle; and audience to respond to it" (2). These displays of physical feats, dramatic costumes, and pantomime are cited as the beginnings of dramatic dance.

In the late 1500s in France, ballets masquerades were popular aristocratic productions that featured plots combining small scenes of music and dance. As royal entertainment became more refined, the stories emerged as more elaborate tales, and were forerunners to the operas of Louis XIV’s time that depicted mythological gods and magical creatures. Dancers had to portray these characters not just through their elaborate dress and props but by their movement as well. Cohen describes the assertions of Claude Ménestrier, a member of Louis XIV's royal court, saying, "the motions of the body were capable of depicting inner feelings that could be made
known in no other way" (38). As dance continued to evolve, choreographers attempted to emphasize the dramatic aspect of dances, utilizing the steps to tell a story.

In many productions at Versailles during Louis XIV's reign (1638-1715), the king himself was the star and his courtiers were the performers in spectacles that displayed his glory and power and that of the royal family. Louis XIV used dance as a political tool to demonstrate France's cultural superiority, as well as to excise control over his nobles and his kingdom. Historian Jennifer Homans describes *Le Ballet de la Nuit* (1653), a ballet at Louis XIV's court, as an event that lasted through the night and "depicted disruption, nightmares, and darkness, but in the early hours of the morning, Louis appeared as the Sun. Dressed in gold, rubies, and pearls, with bright glittering rays of diamonds...Louis vanquished the night" (13). The court ballets were both forms of entertainment and calculated political messages, combining art and storytelling to convey metaphoric agendas.

**Noverre's Revolution: Birth Through Ballet d'Action**

John Weaver, an innovative English choreographer of the early eighteenth century who advocated for dramatic naturalism in dance, discussed how movement and acting could be used to represent both plot and character in his *Essay Towards an History of Dancing* (1712):

> Without the help of an Interpreter, a Spectator shall at a distance, by the lively Representation of a just Character, be capable of understanding the Subject of the Story represented, and able to
distinguish the several Passions, Manners, or Actions, as of Love, Anger, or the Like. (qtd. in Cohen 40)

Weaver believed that the audience should be able to interpret the storyline and action of the ballet through a dancer's depiction of their character. He felt the movements of the dancer should directly show emotions such as love and anger in a clear way that the audience could recognize. Weaver wanted those watching to be able to understand the work as well as those who were performing it did. To this end, Weaver experimented with new ways to express emotion in his work, *The Loves of Mars and Venus* (1717), by using pantomimic gestures such as "striking the left hand with the right to signify anger, and...averting the face to express detestation" (AU 30).

One of the greatest advocates for meaningful expression in narrative dance was Jean Georges Noverre (1727-1810). He helped to create a new kind of ballet that combined pantomime, dance, and music into a more dramatic genre, which became known as *ballet d'action*. In 1760, Noverre published his *Lettres sur la Danse et les Ballets* (*Letters on Dancing and Ballet*), which called for a number of reforms on costuming, mime, music, and plots. A common practice of the time was for dancers to wear plaster masks, painted to represent different characters. Noverre called for an elimination of these masks, so the dancers could act more expressively while they moved. His ideas significantly changed the dancing of the time, and ultimately led to the advent of *ballet d'action*, in which plot, movement, and theatrical elements propelled a cohesive story to an audience. Noverre believed that dance should be an expressive art form, and that the inauthentic costumes and facial masks of ballet masquerades hindered the possibility of true expression. Noverre ascertained that by
using "characteristic movements and...steps, gestures, and facial expressions to the sentiments [the dancer] desires to express, [the dancer] finds...the means of producing the most astonishing effects" (3).

During the 1700s, dances were primarily performed in courts, and followed strict guidelines within dancing manuals on style and subject matter. Due to the fashion of the era, dancers wore heavy clothing with wired undergarments, corsets, and ornately embellished brocade, all of which severely restricted mobility. It was a convention to perform masked, which hid a dancer’s true facial expression, and the dance included as much codified pantomime as it did structured technique. Noverre wanted to reject these constrictions upon dance. He felt that movement, performed by an unmasked dancer, had the potential to reach a new level of understanding and emotional connection between an audience and a performer—one that could transcend words. In *Letters on Dancing and Ballet*, he states:

> There are, undoubtedly, a great many things which pantomime can only indicate, but in regard to the passions there is a degree of expression to which words cannot attain or rather there are passions for which no words exist. Then dancing allied with action triumphs.

(Noverre 4)

Noverre believed that acting played an important role in dancing, and the audience's understanding of the dance relied upon the dancers' abilities to act.

During the eighteenth century, *ballet d'action* combined elements of drama and dance to display stories through movement and cohesive dramatic elements. Narrative took on a stronger role in dance than it had in the previous centuries as
choreographers began to experiment with more complex plots and theatrical movements. Noverre described ballet d'action as "the art of transferring our sentiments and passions to the souls of the spectators by means of the true expression of our movements, gestures and features" (99). For Noverre, this was not just a physical action of the body: what was crucial was the feeling underlying each gesture, which led dancers to "act." Ballet d'action was about the subtleties behind each tiny step, and the meanings each gesture had the potential to convey. It became important for the dancer to truly embody the themes they were presenting and to impart them to the audience through acting.

One of Noverre's greatest reforms called for the elimination of masks. Often painted a variety of colors—brown for fauns, red for demons, green for sea creatures—masks helped to distinguish the characters, while at the same time offering a sense of uniformity. According to Noverre, masks were also used to "hide the nervous starts and grimaces produced by the efforts called for by a difficult feat of technique" (85), concealing faults and making the dance appear effortless. By hiding the dancers' faces, the masks also hid their human form—a performer could disguise one's identity, and, for a moment, truly become the magical, otherworldly creature they were portraying, unrecognized by the audience as being the same dancer who'd been a simple masked peasant in a previous act.

While masks offered the dancers protection from their mistakes and suspended the audience's reality, they hindered expressivity. In his Letters on Dancing and Ballet, Noverre attacked their use:
As you know, Sir, a man's face is the mirror of his passions, in which the movements and agitations of the soul are displayed, and in which tranquility, joy, sadness, fear and hope are expressed in turn. This expression is a hundred times more animated, more lively and more precious than that which results from the most impassioned harangue [speech]. If one be deprived of the sight of the facial expression of the orator it reassures a little time to fathom his meaning. It requires no time for the face to express its meaning forcibly; a flash of lightning comes from the heart, shines in the eyes and, illumining every feature, heralds the conflicts of passions, and reveals, so to speak, the naked soul. (Noverre 78)

Masks concealed the emotions of the dancer, making everything more mechanical and blasé. For Noverre, the face was an intricate and vital tool for displaying the expressivity of dance. He believed that if a dancer could perform unmasked, the audience would recognize facial expression in a moment.

To project their voices, actors and singers did not typically wear masks, and therefore had a full arsenal of facial expressions to use at their will. Noverre was a colleague of David Garrick, a famous English actor who changed theater from a lower class art to a respectable form of English entertainment. Garrick was a master of expression and captivated audiences through his ability to animate his face to show emotion. Noverre, envious of actors' freedom from masks, dared to ask why they were permitted to show their "natural features" while dancers were robbed of this ability (85). He wanted dancers to be able to display the same full range of emotions
as actors did, for they too were attempting to represent a character and tell a story. For Noverre, the best way to present a narrative was to have the dancers act, using salient movements that included the expressions of their face.

**The Romantic and Classical Eras: The Lasting Fairytales**

The Romantic era introduced such ballets as *La Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* (1841) that are still widely produced today. The intricate footwork and flexible turning out of the legs in ballet were technical characteristics that started in the court of Louis XIV, and were honed to a fine art when dance moved out of the court and on to the Paris Opera stage. The dancers—formerly courtiers, but now highly trained professionals—were achieving technical levels that changed the way dance was performed. In 1832, Marie Taglioni danced in the premiere of *La Sylphide* wearing an early form of pointe shoes, which were made of satin with ribbon laces wrapped around the ankle, a high leather vamp, and a thin line of cloth over the hardened tip. In addition to Taglioni’s strength gained through rigorous training, these shoes allowed her to stand directly on her toes. Dressed in soft white tulle, Taglioni skirred across the stage in her role as an ethereal sylph—a fairy-like spirit of the air. Pointe shoes allowed the dancers to glide across the stage as though they really were fairies twirling in the wind. Cohen describes the sylphs' movements, saying they "float on waves of mist and moonlight, an apparition of loveliness, untouchable and all the more desirable for being unreal" (67). The innovation of the pointe shoe, combined with the magical stories about supernatural creatures, allowed for a new type of characterization in the dancers' movements: a light and airy dancing that began to create the association of ballerinas with fairies and fantastical beings.
No longer was a dancer’s acting and expression coming from just pantomime. Characterization and plot were being incorporated into the technique of ballet, as arm gestures emphasized wings, light feet created flight, and carefully executed balances gave the illusion of floating. As the pointe shoe became engineered to handle more weight, ballet technique became more daring. Once the Classical era of ballet began in late nineteenth century Russia, they were worn by the corps de ballet, not just the soloists. In Lev Ivanov's "Snowflake Waltz" from The Nutcracker (1892), the dancers leap and turn past each other, as though they are caught in swirling eddies of the air, imitating the fall of snow (Jowitt 247). The use of the pointe shoe, the rise in technique, and the use of acting allowed a ballerina to seem as if she were otherworldly.

In Marius Petipa's La Bayadère (1877), the members of the corps de ballet appear on stage one by one, each slowly stepping into an arabesque and leaning into a penché, repeating the movement until the entire stage is filled with graceful ballerinas.⁴ Dressed in white, these ballerinas represent the spirits of dead temple dancers, including the perished heroine. Scholar Deborah Jowitt describes the scene as having a "narcotized slowness and evenness" which emphasizes that the moment is an "opium dream of the bereaved and anguished Solor, who, through opportunism and moral cowardice, has caused his beloved's death" (246). The choreography helps create the mood of the scene, using the dancers' technique to provoke Solor's drug-induced hallucination, as the endless line of beautiful women glide onwards as graceful ghostly dreams, taunting the remorseful hero over what he has lost.

⁴ A penché is a movement where the dancer bends from the waist over one leg while the other rises above them at an angle between 90 and 180 degrees.
The white swan Odette, Petipa's heroine of *Swan Lake* (1895), is actually a princess transformed into a bird. The role of Odette is particularly challenging, as the dancer must be soft and delicate as the swan princess—with the expressive arms of a bird about to take flight—but must also perform powerfully and enchantingly as the seductive Black Swan, Odile. In this dual role, a dancer must strive to show the difference in characterization between the two. The subtleties between the characters are displayed through Odette's soft arabesques and balances and Odile's strong and imposing thirty-two fouettes. Petipa and Ivanov's ballets gave each character a unique personality, portrayed by the differences in their movement qualities. This helped audiences recognize the swans from the sylphs and allowed the viewers to immerse themselves in each dance.

During the Classical era, ballets were still a form of spectacle for aristocrats and wealthy patrons that wanted to see beautiful dancers execute intricate steps. Large sections of ballets were created simply for extravagance, and as the pointe shoe became more prominent, audiences wanted to see the dazzling feats performed by ballerinas poised on their toes. Many *pas de deux*—a male and female duet—were used to demonstrate the love between a heroine and her suitor. However, many others were created just for display, such as the duet in Petipa's *Le Corsaire* (1856) in which the heroine does not dance with her pirate love, but instead performs an intricate duet with her lover's slave, for seemingly little reason (Jowitt 248). It does not add to the story, but instead focuses on showing off the technique of the dancers. Dream sequences were common in these ballets, such as the entire Act II of *The Nutcracker*,

---

5 A *fouette* turn is a movement where the dancer spins on one leg while the other leg alternately swipes through space and snaps back to the knee for each revolution.
in which a horde of sweets, such as the Sugar Plum Fairy, perform one after another for the heroine, and in *Le Corsaire*, when the two female soloists dance with the ballet corps as flowers in a king's dream. These sequences were added to display the technical prowess of the dancers, thereby impressing the patrons and audience members. The stories and plots were important to the ballets, but they shared the spotlight with the impressive technical presentations.

**Modern Ballet**

Another shift in the ballet world occurred at the turn of the twentieth century as choreographers experimented more with technique and choreography. Michel Fokine choreographed several innovative narrative ballets for *Les Ballets Russes*, including such works as *Les Sylphides* (1907), *The Firebird* (1910), and *Petrouchka* (1912). While Fokine believed strongly in the importance of ballet technique, he argued that "Creators of ballets should always endeavor to seek out that form of dancing which best expresses the particular theme, for this principle leads to great beauty" (Fokine 106). He only used pointe shoes when they could add a level of meaning to the dance (Fokine 107), such as in *The Firebird*, in which the lead character is a magical bird that soars through the air, reminiscent of the ethereal sylphs and plunging swans. In Fokine's original choreography, she is the only dancer on pointe shoes, emphasizing her uniqueness as a creature of magic and as one of flight. In the same ballet, the princess in the story dances in flat shoes, as she is a mere human in comparison to the fantastical bird. In *Petrouchka*, the three main characters—Petrouchka, the Ballerina, and the Moor—are puppets that each dance in their own unique way, befitting their character. Fokine used their individual
movements to add to the ballet's story. After seeing Vaslav Nijinsky's performance in
*Petrouchka*, the legendary French actress Sarah Bernhardt declared "I'm afraid, I'm
afraid, for I am watching the world's greatest actor" (qtd. in "An Obituary of Vaslav
Nijinsky"). Historian Lynn Garafola describes the ways in which the uniqueness of
these respective characters is emphasized by their individual dance steps and
statuesque-like posing, known as plastique:

> In *Petrouchka*, psychology dictated plastique: the naïve and guileless
> hero, an introvert, is turned in; the flamboyant Blackamoor, an
> extrovert, is turned out; the Ballerina, a flirtatious empty-headed
> Columbine, prances on pointe like a mechanical doll...Fokine's dancers
> infused his ballets with the same living vitality their peers brought to
> Art Theater productions of Ibsen and Chekhov. (Garafola 24)

Vaslav Nijinksy followed Fokine's lead, choreographing ballets each with
their own movement style based on the themes and plot he wished to portray.

*L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912) (*Afternoon of a faun*) was influenced by Greek art.
The dance is almost entirely performed in profile, reminiscent of paintings on Greek
vases. Nijinksy's choreography creates a unique world for the characters, where even
their movements are dictated by their histories. The plot of the ballet is relatively
short and simple. The Faun is relaxing in the woods when a group of nymphs appear,
one of whom catches the Faun's interest. After the other nymphs exit, the Faun
approaches the main Nymph. The two dance with each other, but the Nymph
eventually exits, ignoring the Faun's advancement. However, her scarf is left behind,
and the Faun caresses it fondly in the closing moment of the ballet.
Nijinsky performed the part of the Faun, incorporating both acting and dancing in showing his sexual desire for the female nymphs. In his quest for authenticity and animalistic movement, he rejected ballet technique, keeping his legs turned in while his torso faced the audience. His duet with the main nymph was filled with sexual tension as the two dancers wove their arms and bodies in and around each other, never quite managing to touch. The final scene of the ballet was not one of grand gesture or technical prowess; instead, Nijinsky lowered himself slowly to the ground on top of the nymph's left-behind scarf, and with an abstracted thrust of the pelvis, scandalously and sexually gratified himself. Diaghilev ballet dancer Lydia Sokolova described the last moment of the dance "just before [Nijinsky's] final amorous descent upon the scarf when he knelt on one knee on top of the hill, with his other leg stretched out behind him. Suddenly he threw back his head, opened his mouth and silently laughed. It was superb acting" (41, emphasis mine). The story of the Faun's sexual desire and attempts to attract the chaste nymphs is made clear through the movements of the dancers, and the theatrical aspect is interwoven with the dance technique.

Other twentieth-century choreographers such as George Balanchine experimented with non-narrative ballets, playing with movement for the sake of movement, such as in his abstract Four Temperaments (1946), which is based on musical scores instead of a theme or plot. As biographer Don McDonagh states, Balanchine, who preferred the term "plotless" over "abstract," replaced stories with a less literal musical score and relied on the relationships between dancers to convey meaning and theme (13). For Balanchine, there was still some vague form of "plot,"
but it was based on the musical variations rather than a specific storyline of action. McDonagh describes Balanchine's ballets as being stripped down to their essence, in which the dancers moved "in direct response to a musical pulse without any literary pretext to get in the way" (13). While Balanchine's ballets became an integral part of many ballet companies' repertoires, such as The Royal Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, the classic story ballets such as The Sleeping Beauty (1890) and Swan Lake remained equally prominent in ballet companies, carrying on the history and tradition of the form within their familiar and beloved storylines.

***

Ballets often use myths and fairytales as the basis for their stories, providing the dancers and choreographers alike with magical fantasies to play upon. Marina Warner states that on stage a "traditional sense of an ancient, oral voice sounds in the libretto or plot: Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake...or a Ballet Russes production such as Firebird, proclaim their roots in unauthored folklore, although they are in themselves unique and original works" (xvii). Many children dream of being the fairies, princesses, and princes they see twirling across the stage, imagining themselves inside the fairytales they so love. It is the narratives that endure. When we witness Siegfried and Odette dying for their love in Swan Lake, or the evil Carabosse cursing Aurora in The Sleeping Beauty, or the triumph of Cinderella as she is reunited with her prince, we feel a deep sympathy and love for the characters.

While more abstract dances can still invoke emotional responses, with story ballets audiences connect at both emotional and conscious levels. We feel for the characters and their joys and anguish, understanding their suffering and triumphs and
loving them all the more for it. At the end of a story ballet, there is some resolution, some way to sigh at the end (with happiness or tears) and leave the ballet with a greater knowledge of life and of ourselves. We know to be wary of undying promises, to persevere despite the hardships of life, and most of all to cherish the fleeting moments of beauty. Audiences may be amazed and moved by the ballets that display technical feats and musical interpretation, but it is frequently the connections we feel with the tradition of the art and the fairytales of our childhood, such as Cinderella, that enable the story ballets to continue to be performed throughout the ballet world.
Chapter 3: Choreographers

Frederick Ashton

Fig. 1 Margot Fonteyn as Cinderella, displaying her vast range of expressions.

Frederick Ashton revolutionized British ballet, brought the Royal Ballet to prominence, and created a lasting legacy that included many narrative ballets.

Ironically, Ashton—who was born in Ecuador in 1904, raised in Peru, and didn't set foot in England until he was fifteen—would eventually set the precedence for the British style of ballet. Ashton's love of dance was inspired by Anna Pavlova, whom he saw perform in Peru when he was still young. It was his first real ballet experience,
and Ashton described how this changed him in a 1971 interview: "Seeing her at that stage was the end of me. She injected me with her poison and from the end of that evening I wanted to dance" (qtd. in Dominic and Gilbert 26). Ashton was poor at schoolwork and struggled to find a job after leaving college. He could barely afford to attend a dance class, but for him it was a necessity that surpassed financial needs. In 1922, he began his first dance lessons with Léonide Massine, who had been the principal choreographer for Diaghilev’s Les Ballet Russes between 1915 and 1921.

Ashton was barely scraping by financially, and his mother tried to stop him from continuing lessons, but Ashton managed to convince her that he would grow ill if he could not continue to dance. When Massine left England, Ashton carried on his lessons with Marie Rambert, a former Ballets Russes dancer and choreographer. Rambert’s school, called the Ballet Club, became an important training center for English dancers such as Ashton and Antony Tudor, who performed in her productions in the tiny Mercury Theater. Both of these early teachers helped shape Ashton as a dancer. From Massine, Ashton learned about style and the beauty of port de bras, while Rambert stimulated his intelligence, fostered his choreographic talents, and cultivated his analysis of dance (Dominic and Gilbert 29). The first dance Ashton choreographed was A Tragedy of Fashion (1926), which was a short, comic piece about a dressmaker who commits suicide. Following this work, Rambert commissioned Ashton to choreograph for her company in many other instances. From early on, Ashton possessed a distinct style that continued to develop throughout his dances. Ashton biographer David Vaughan describes how one of the gestures Ashton used in A Tragedy of Fashion—shaking his head with fists pressed to his forehead—

---

6 Rambert later founded the Rambert Dance Company in 1926.
was even reused in his *Cinderella* (1948) when one of the Stepsisters forgets her steps (Vaughan 13).

Later, in Paris, Ashton joined Bronislava Nijinska's ballet corps. Nijinska, sister to Vaslav Nijinsky, was an innovative choreographer and the fourth in residence for the Ballets Russes, creating important works such as *Les Noces* (1923). Ashton furthered his craft of choreography by constantly watching the prolific Nijinska at work in rehearsal during the two years he worked with her. After leaving Nijinska's company in 1929, he began to choreograph small ballet pieces for Rambert's company, such as *La Péri* (1931), *Façade* (1931), and *Mercury* (1931), the last of which he choreographed for and danced with the Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina. By the mid 1930s, Frederick Ashton had established himself in England as a recognized choreographer.

In 1933, Ashton choreographed *Les Rendezvous* for the Vic-Wells Ballet, his first work for Margot Fonteyn—a young dancer who would later become Ashton's muse and a star of the future Royal Ballet. In 1934, over a decade before Ashton would choreograph his own *Cinderella*, he danced in Andrée Howard's production of the tale as Prince Charming with Rambert's Ballet Club. Vaughan wrote, "It was a classic ballet scaled to the size of the Mercury stage, used with the ingenuity characteristic of all Rambert's choreographers—the stairs were once again in evidence, and before the last scene there was an interlude before the curtain with three courtiers trying the glass slipper on feet that appeared from beneath it" (112). In 1935, Ninette de Valois, the principal choreographer of the Vic-Wells Ballet, invited Ashton to become a resident choreographer, and thus began his shaping of Britain's
ballet world. This presaged the collaboration that would become Ashton, de Valois, and Fonteyn when the ballet received a royal charter in 1946. His first major new work for the company was *Le Baiser de la fée* (1935), and it established Ashton as a major choreographer, with Fonteyn as his muse.

During the years of World War II, Ashton's ballets took on a more patriotic turn, exploring the conflict of good versus evil, such as in *The Quest* (1943) (Vaughan 196). Although he was drafted into the British army, he received several leaves to work on his ballets. The Vic-Wells Ballet, at this point re-titled as the Sadler's Wells Ballet, toured around the country. At the end of the war, the company was officially named the country's resident ballet company. When de Valois was awarded a Royal Charter in 1956, The Royal Ballet was founded.

In 1948, Ashton created *Cinderella*, his first original evening-length ballet, which at the time was the only three-act ballet ever attempted by an English choreographer (Dominic and Gilbert 90). Despite Ashton’s fears of being compared to the greatness of classical artists such as Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, Ashton's *Cinderella* was a huge success and brought prestige to The Royal Ballet. Ashton's *Cinderella* would become a basis of the English ballet style, and a staple of the company's repertoire. Dance critic Edwin Denby described the ballet as being "English in the lightness of its fragrance, the charm it holds is a grace of spirit, an English sweetness of temper" (qtd. in Vaughan 237).

Ashton's *Cinderella* follows the basic storyline of Charles Perrault's classic tale, with a few extra additions for comedy and staging. The Fairy Godmother has many attendants—the main four representing each season—who dance for Cinderella,
each offering her a different part of her outfit for the ball. Ashton curiously chose to eliminate the Stepmother and keep the Father alive. This decision focuses all the attention on the Stepsisters, who are, for all intents and purposes, Cinderella's peers. Their cruelty is heightened by the fact that Cinderella should have the same opportunities as them, but they treat her as a servant. Instead of just being the spoiled daughters of a jealous Stepmother, they become the ones who initiate cruelty towards Cinderella. They also have control over the Father, who they push around as much as they do Cinderella and refuse to let father and daughter be happy together.

To add another layer to the new complexity of the Stepsisters, Ashton has the two characters portrayed by men: Ashton himself originally played the younger, passive sister, while Roger Helpmann appeared as the older, more dominant one. The Stepsisters are comedic and ridiculous, overly exaggerating their movements and dance steps to make the audience laugh. Dance critic Arlene Croce described them as "deliberate, unhurried clowns, and funnier for it" (484). They are also rather ugly "women," as they are played by men with caked on make-up and fake noses (see fig. 4). As Vaughan explains, Ashton and Helpmann were masters of mime onstage and off, who frequently entertained their colleagues with their antics (233). As the Stepsisters, the two hammed up the action by making silly faces, falling over themselves while dancing, and forgetting all their steps. The audience cannot help but laugh at such pathetic creatures. One finds it hard to hate them, especially Ashton's character, who stole the show according to several critics, including Edwin Denby. Ashton saved the choreography of his part until the end of his process. As he had less time to work on memorizing and perfecting his own steps, he made his character silly
and forgetful. This worked both in creating a foil to Helpmann's domineering sister and as a failsafe in case Ashton really did forget his sequences (Vaughan 234). His character is both mean and pathetic, and as Denby so eloquently wrote, "Such a monster wins everybody's heart" (qtd. in Dominic and Gilbert 93). Despite the endearment the audience may feel for the Stepsisters, they are still essentially monstrous in their treatment of Cinderella, and one still wants to see her escape this comedic yet tragic home.

Ashton’s *Cinderella* uses strong mime and acting throughout its scenes, relying on pantomimic gestures that were still commonplace in ballets such as *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Not only do the Stepsisters use pantomime while readying for the Ball, Cinderella also enacts the motions of sweeping and cleaning, and the Prince makes several ardent gestures while declaring his love—clasping both hands to his heart in joy when he recognizes Cinderella during the final scene. There are many lovely moments of technical dancing, including Cinderella and the Prince's *pas de deux* during the Ball. However, it is clear that Ashton wanted to display the expression and comedy that he so preferred himself; perhaps this is because Ashton's technique was never his strongest trait. Michael Somes, a dancer who worked under Ashton at the Royal Ballet describes him as a teacher and choreographer:

Fred was never a ballet master. He had the knowledge, but he wasn't that sort of person. What he could do was show you how to use whatever minimal technique you had to advantage. However tiny your talent, he found something you could do that would look good. (qtd. in Dominic and Gilbert 107)
Ashton preferred to choreograph on his dancers rather than planning the steps out ahead of time (Dominic and Gilbert 94). He worked with them in creating their characters, crafting the choreography to each of their unique styles and strengths instead of forcing the dancers to fit his mold. By working together to create a believable dramatic scene, a deep sense of connection was forged between the dancer and their role, as well as to the story itself. Vaughan claims that it was Fonteyn who brought pathos and playfulness to the character of Cinderella, shown alternately by her duet with a broom as she imagines herself at the Ball and the loving pas de deux with the prince at the end of the ballet (233). Fonteyn was a brilliant actress, and her technique was heightened by her dramatic expressions (see fig. 1), such as when she giggles playfully as she mimics her Stepsisters' terrible attempts to dance. Helpmann used his background in theater to show off his exaggerated character, while Ashton used his own lack of rehearsal time and atypical balletic style to create the character of the pathetic sister. Ashton had a great capacity for comedy, mimicry, and expression. By cultivating these in Cinderella—his first full-length original ballet—he developed a style that became distinctly British.
On March 17, 1938, Rudolf Nureyev, the dancer who would become ballet's first pop star, was born on a moving train crossing the Soviet Union on March 17, 1938. His birth was as free-spirited and exciting as the rest of his life would become. His family traveled across the country when he was still a child, instilling in him, as biographer Diane Solway says, "a permanent sense of rootlessness" (10). Coming from a poor province, Nureyev rose to prominence at the Kirov Ballet in Russia, dancing such classic roles as Albrecht in *Giselle*, the Bluebird *pas de deux* in *The Sleeping Beauty*, and Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake*. In June of 1961, the Kirov Ballet had its debut season in Paris, and featured Nureyev as one of its leading soloists. Nureyev, long fascinated by Western art, theater, and dance, was fed up with the Soviet Union's restrictions and limited opportunities for change at the Kirov. In a nail-biting episode
just before boarding his plane, Nureyev defected by turning himself over to the French police asking for political asylum.

After his defection, Nureyev danced with many different Western companies, from the Paris Opera to The Royal Ballet in London, charming audiences with his flamboyant stage presence and his powerful dancing. At The Royal Ballet, Nureyev partnered Margot Fonteyn for many years, creating a powerful artistic relationship with the ballerina, who was Ashton's muse. Nureyev was seen as the new Nijinsky; Nijinska herself described him as "the reincarnation of my brother" (qtd. in Solway 173). This perception, coupled with his thrilling defection and his frequent diva-like outbursts, created a huge stir both in the dance world as well as in the average populace. Nureyev changed audiences’ views of male dancers and inspired a younger generation of performers. He incorporated his suave style with his impressive classical Kirov training. Solway goes so far as to say that Nureyev and Erik Bruhn—a powerful and classical ballet dancer and both Nureyev's lover and rival—were ballet princes that "even stole the limelight from their ballerinas" (243). Nureyev drew a younger crowd to the ballet world, making it seem "hip" in a time when new artistic styles were emerging in music, studio art, and theater (Solway 244).

Nureyev began to cultivate his choreographic skills by modifying the classics, giving himself stronger and more powerful solos in ballets such as *Swan Lake*, in which the prince previously had danced minimally in the first acts. As Solway states, Nureyev "preferred to look anew at timeworn works, convinced that if these ballets were to resonate with contemporary audiences, he needed to find a dramatic as well as a dancing focus" (247). Not only did his solos demonstrate his astounding
technique, they added depth to the princes he played in works such as *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, or *Swan Lake*, showing off their fickleness or their strength of spirit, their purity or their sexual drive.

Nureyev's large personality is present in his choreographed works, in which drama, passion, and desire were prominent: in his re-staging of *Swan Lake* (1964), the ballet is presented from Prince Siegfried's point of view, and Odette/Odile is a projection of his psychological desires, the pure and carnal duality of his love (Solway 310). As Nureyev often starred in his own productions, he frequently increased the importance of the male roles, offering the characters more depth and complexity. In his *The Sleeping Beauty* (1966), the prince is a playboy who matures due to his love for the sleeping princess Aurora. Nureyev used his choreography to show both Aurora's and the Prince's awakening, both literally and metaphorically. Solway describes how Nureyev conveyed the Prince's state of mind through a long solo full of twists and turns, which helped express the Prince's feelings of conflict and change as he evolved from a playboy to a man of responsibility (330).

After adapting classic ballets, Nureyev staged his first original full-length ballet, *Tancredi* (1966), in which he continued to play with ideas of otherness and isolation (Solway 328). Nureyev followed a similar theme of conflict in his production of *Manfred* (1979), causing Solway to describe his feelings as the "pull between innocence and experience, sacred and profane love" (444). While Nureyev still appreciated the classics and maintained that tradition should be respected, he also believed that tradition should not obscure dramatic meaning: "the valid modern kind that fires imagination" (qtd. in Solway 310). For him, expressive gestures were
preferable to the stylized sign language frequently found in classics, such as the second act mime scene in *Swan Lake* in which Odette explains her curse to Prince Siegfried, which Nureyev deleted entirely (Solway 247). Nureyev was deeply inspired by George Balanchine and other modern artists of the time. While he kept his style heavily rooted in his Russian Kirov technique, he experimented with themes and plots of story ballets, changing the staging to reflect the motifs he wanted to represent. Nureyev once said about himself that "My body has Petipa, my head has Bournonville, and my heart has Balanchine" (qtd. in Solway 462).

On October 24, 1986, Nureyev's lavish production of *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood* premiered at the Paris Opera Ballet. His production took the classic story of the little Cinderella and plopped her in the middle of what Solway describes as the "Hollywood dream factory of the 1930s" (488). It was playwright Petrika Ionesco who suggested that the ballet should take place in a movie studio, an idea that Nureyev initially rejected. But he eventually warmed to the notion and set about to make a ballet with all the glamour of Hollywood. He later said that he tailored his conception to French tastes, creating a production that would cost half a million dollars (Solway 488).

In his version of Prokofiev's classic, Cinderella lives with her Stepmother, an overzealous stage mom, and her two Stepsisters, who are trying to break their way into the film world as actors. The stepfamily is very violent with Cinderella. They not

---

7 Despite Nureyev's many attempts to dance for Balanchine, the Russian-born choreographer refused to work with him, saying "No, no, go and dance your princes, get tired of them, and then when you're tired, you come back to me" (qtd. in Solway 222).

8 August Bournonville was a Danish choreographer for the Royal Danish Ballet from 1830-1848. He developed a unique style of dance still taught today that focused on preparatory arm movements, quick footwork, and never displaying the difficulty of the steps.
only force her to clean the house, but are also physically abusive to her as they literally throw her around. Cinderella's constantly drunk father is of little help to her as he staggers around the stage. When a man enters and crashes his motorcycle, Cinderella offers him her assistance. He turns out to be a film producer and sees star potential in the kind and radiant Cinderella. After the stepfamily leaves for a big audition, the Producer dresses up Cinderella while entertaining her with a fashion show with outfits from each season. Cinderella is sent off to her audition in a pumpkin motor car.

At the movie studio, the audience sees several dance scenes reminiscent of classic films, such as *King Kong* (1933). Finally, the Producer waves his hands and the Ball scene appears. The prince role in the film is played by a huge Movie Star, but his partner is still being cast. The Stepsisters make fools of themselves, yanking the Movie Star around the stage as they fight for his attention and failing to impress any of the film staff. When Cinderella enters in the midst of the chaos, all eyes turn to her. She and the Movie Star have an instant connection and dance well together, pleasing the film staff to no end, but Cinderella is forced to flee at midnight. Instantly, the Producer's magic fades and she is left in rags once more, leaving only her shoe behind. The Movie Star continues to search for his perfect partner, looking in seedy bars and other filming locations. At last, he comes to Cinderella's home, where the Stepsisters attempt to try on the shoe. With the Producer's help, Cinderella comes forward, and she and the Movie Star are reunited. In her happily-ever-after world, Cinderella gains not only her perfect partner, but also signs a film contract with the Producer that promises a life of stardom.
Typically, in Cinderella stories the Fairy Godmother is a representation of the heroine's dead mother; the fairy is there as a support to Cinderella, but the character is typically very one-dimensional. The godmother is not trying to accomplish anything for herself, nor does she have a personality despite that of a helpful guardian. In contrast, Nureyev creates a fully developed character—The Producer—a man who not only wants to help Cinderella, but sees her future as beneficial to his own success. With Cinderella signing a studio contract, the Producer gains a new star and can continue to produce successful movies. Nureyev originally choreographed the role of the Producer for himself, which explains why the role of the Fairy Godmother is more prominent in his version. He wanted to give himself an important and well-rounded character to play. The Producer interrupts Cinderella and the Movie Star in their last *pas de deux*, imploring her to sign a studio contract, so much so that it truly becomes a *pas de trois*, with Cinderella, the Movie star, and the insistent Producer, instead of the romantic finale that typically takes place.

In a similar vein to Ashton's ugly and incompetent Stepsisters, Nureyev's ballet has the character of the Stepmother performed by a man. The Stepmother, dancing in pointe shoes, is a truly terrifying and cruel figure who literally towers over the other women. Nureyev modernizes Cinderella as well, giving her a reason for remaining with the horrible family: she stays because she loves her father, demonstrated by their tender duet. As they hug compassionately, they are physically pulled apart by the Stepmother. Cinderella's resilience is emphasized by her attempts to reconcile her Stepsisters as they fight amongst themselves, only to be slapped by them in response. The ballet is also peppered with film references. In Ashton's
version, Cinderella tenderly dances with a broom, imagining it is her prince—a scene possibly adapted from a similar solo in Zhakarov's original Bolshoi Ballet production, which Ashton had heard account of (Vaughan 229). Nureyev uses a hat-stand instead, as Cinderella performs a Charlie Chaplin impersonation in tap shoes (see fig. 2), which also references Fred Astaire's famous dance with a broom (Solway 489).

Nureyev’s love of theatricality and his own stardom are present in his *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood*. The glamour of Hollywood and the fuss over the Movie Star references Nureyev's own pop-star quality. In a story with primarily female characters, Nureyev equalizes the genders, with the Producer, Movie Star, and Stepmother (played by a man) gaining almost more attention than the Stepsisters or Cinderella herself. His love of mixing modern and classic stylistic elements in his ballets shows through the classical *pas de deux* movements and the stylized prancing and pouting of the Stepsisters. *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood* takes the classic fairytale and modernizes it, just as Nureyev altered the classic techniques of his past into more fervent and expressive gestures. Glamour, beauty, and amazement are all vividly present in his glittering Hollywood spectacle.
Maguy Marin

Fig. 3 Marin's Fairy Attendants (Sylvie Dhuyvetter, Patricia Tolos, Anne-Sylvie Gaches) teaching Cinderella (Francoise Joullié) how to dance

French choreographer Maguy Marin was born on June 2, 1951. She studied classical ballet at several schools in both France and Belgium and danced as a soloist for four years in Ballet du XXe Siècle, the company run by experimental choreographer Maurice Béjart. Marin's *May B* (1981), inspired by works of Samuel Beckett, gained her prestige as a choreographer. She has been recognized several times for her accomplishments in choreography, winning awards such as the American Dance Festival Award (2003) and the Bessie Award (2008). In 1978, she formed her own company, which was based primarily on contemporary dances. Around the mid 1980s, Marin rediscovered ballet technique, and turning away from her more typical contemporary dances she created her *Cendrillon* for the Opéra de Lyon.

Dance reviewers have categorized Marin's performances as "dance-theatre," since she uses a variety of aural, vocal, and visual mediums. Dance scholar Giannandrea Poesio explains that Marin is constantly changing her artistic principles...
as she experiments with forms of expression (150). While her pieces may differ wildly in subject matter and approach, Marin still maintains a specific movement vocabulary, a combination of classical dance and contemporary techniques. Marin's use of theatrical elements in dance stems from her work under Béjart, who was known for his "spectacular performances" (Poesio 150) Marin also works closely with her dancers, and as she states, "I can say dancers, or interpreters or performers but I prefer to say that I work with people. Their spirit is as important as their technique. I appreciate their open mind and strength in working" (qtd. in Dekel).

Marin's most identifiable trait is her ability to create metaphorical images in her choreography. Poesio describes the importance of Marin's symbolism, describing how it "is neither obscure nor self-indulgent but reflects the choreographer's wide range of thematic concerns" (150). In her Cendrillon (1985), Marin's version of Cinderella, the story is a backdrop for a psychological investigation of a child's world. Poesio states that the piece deals with "issues such as children's innate cruelty and children's vision of love and parenthood" (151). Marin does not overpower the audience with her theme, and that theme never steals from the dance itself—it becomes an integral aspect of her piece, just another choreographic variation that makes the dance unique. Her Cendrillon becomes much more than a simple fairytale, playing on children's fantasies and the darker themes that persist in children themselves.

When the Opéra de Lyon premiered Marin's Cendrillon in 1985, it was an immediate and tremendous success. Its avant-garde style mixed ballet technique with modern production elements, such as overlaying the cries of babies on top of
Prokofiev's score, and hiding every dancer behind a doll mask. Marin sets *Cendrillon* in a child’s dollhouse. The fairytale is well loved by many young children, but Marin's staging is in contrast to the childhood innocence of the story. Instead, Marin puts her characters in masks, and they become haunting faceless figures that convey the impossibility of achieving childhood dreams. When dancer's faces are hidden, it creates an expressionless human body [that] resembles a doll or a corpse" (Fokine 108). These masked dolls initially seem as if they are players within a child's fairytale, but in reality, Cinderella's struggles cannot be solved as easily as within a child's game. Darker themes within the story emerge: the stepfamily physically abuse Cinderella continually, even using her as a chair when the Prince comes to visit. Their cruelty hints at the physical bullying that comes surprisingly easy to children, in their the rough and tumble play, mixed with the deeper want to cause pain in someone else.

The strongest element of the ballet is its use of masks, created by Monserrat Casanova. It takes us back to the admonishments of Noverre, who so fervently attacked their use, claiming: "All our movements are purely automatic and meaningless, if the face remain speechless and do not animate and invigorate them" (78). In a time period where masks are now as infrequently used as they were popular during Noverre's life, Marin's decision to use them creates a clear thematic message: she wants to hide the expression and display of emotions. Her dancers are soulless dolls with lifeless eyes and painted smiles who do not have a capacity for tranquility, sadness, or hope. Marin choreographed the dancers' movements to appear automatic
and meaningless. The masks enable the dancers to become less human, more robotic and puppet-like.

By hiding their faces, the audience must interpret the characters' feelings from the physical actions of the dancers' bodies. The cruelty of the Stepsisters is displayed through their physical attacks on Cinderella, not through any maniacal laughing or evil scowling. It is this physicality that is brought to the audience's attention; the movements and gestures become that much more heightened by the absence of the face. Cinderella's despair comes not from a sad pout, but from her repeated falling and inward scrunching of her body. When asked about her use of the masks, Marin said their purpose was to "transcend the limits of traditional pantomime" (qtd. in Poesio 151). While Frederick Ashton takes use of traditional pantomime with his travesty Stepsisters and literal sweeping gestures, Marin experiments with something equally traditional—the use of the mask, which brings a terrifying effect to the forefront of the narrative.

Marin's innovations do not stop with the masks; she experiments with several other changes to the traditional ballet in creating her unique world. The Fairy Godmother is a science-fiction character, complete with flashing lights and robotic stiffness. The set is a child's dollhouse, with raised compartments of separate and divided rooms that each correspond to a different location in the story: Cinderella's home, the Ball, the Prince's room. The action does not flow from one place to the next but is decidedly fractured as the lights come up on each separate scene in a different place on stage.
Marin plays with Prokofiev's original score, adding her own interpretation of how it should be, just as children play with their dolls to create their own version of a fairytale. Electronic sounds and children’s garbled voices are over-laid, adding a level of darkness to the music. The audience hears sounds of crying and whining that foreground the unhappy childhood of Cinderella and the struggles the characters face, while at other moments, laughter emerges. Curiously, the laughter is never used in happier moments, such as when the Prince and Cinderella are dancing. Instead, it appears when the Stepsisters are forcing Cinderella to the ground, or when all the dolls at the Ball begin to fight over lollipops. Marin uses this once more to emphasize the more vicious side children who are often represented as pure, innocent creatures, especially in fairytales. While they may make mistakes in these stories, it is often due to some outside force or through carelessness, never through their own decision. Children are, of course, human, and much more complex than the sweet-tempered image they usually are expected to have.

Choreographically, the hopelessness Cinderella feels is demonstrated by her constant falling. Marin's rediscovery of ballet significantly influenced the piece, and her use of balletic technique and pointe shoes depict a child's dream of becoming a ballerina. Cinderella desperately wants to go to the Ball and dance with the Prince. She constantly attempts to copy the balletic movements of the other dolls, but her inexperience causes her to trip over her own feet. She fails at her dance steps frequently, tumbling down the stairs or slipping as she tries to copy the more balletic movements of the other dolls. She is inadequate to those around her, which makes her more pitiable and pathetic than the kind and endearing Cinderella character typically
portrayed. Her dreams of being a ballerina seem impossible, and yet, in the end Cinderella completes her dance with the Prince; he loves and appreciates her—bumbling dancing and all.

Despite these darker themes, Marin still gives the story a happy ending. Cinderella is reunited with the Prince, and they have many, many babies, shown by a long string of infant dolls that line the edge of the stage in the final scene. The stepfamily is tied up with a rope in the end, and the entire company comes out to stare down the audience. Is this Marin’s happy finale? Or is it a commentary on children’s views of fairytales and ever-afters? In the basic storyline, everything seems to work out, as Cinderella and the Prince are married and the villains detained. But the audience is left with the final image of the dolls staring them down, daring them to ask, is this what you wanted, is this the end of a child's dream, is it ever real? Marin explores the darker aspects of humanity through both children's actions and their viewpoints. Her Cendrillon is a fairytale in the truest sense: it contemplates good and evil, childhood and adulthood, with just a touch of magic.
Chapter 4: The Ballet

Scene 1: Introduction to the Stepfamily

The stepfamily is an integral part of Cinderella's story. Without their cruelty and neglect, there would be no plot. Cinderella needs to experience the struggle and despair before she can grow up and achieve a better life. The Stepsisters are foils to Cinderella's character; their shortcomings are amplified by Cinderella's kindness to them. The Stepmother represents what Cinderella has lost; as the Stepmother dotes on her own daughters and treats Cinderella with cruelty, the audience and Cinderella are made acutely aware of the absence of Cinderella's mother.

The stepfamily's introduction defines their respective characters and how the story will take place: are the Stepsisters and Stepmother bumbling fools, despicable violent women, jealous family members, or soulless inflictors of hate? It is their abuse that drives Cinderella away and into the arms of the Prince. In Ashton and Nureyev's versions, the stepfamily's dance is the first to occur on the stage, setting the scene of the entire ballet. It shows the importance of the family and demonstrates how they are the initiators of all Cinderella's troubles. Marin takes a slightly different approach: her Cinderella has a moment of solitude before the stepfamily comes to disrupt her. In Marin's Cendrillon, the heroine's misfortune does not rely solely on her stepfamily, but is in part due to her own shortcomings.

Fairytales often focus on integral familial relationships, and how the characters deal with the hardships of changing family dynamics. Warner states the importance of family in fairytales:
Behind their gorgeous surfaces you can glimpse an entire history of childhood and the family: the oppression of landowners and rulers, foundlings, drowned or abandoned children, the ragamuffin orphan surviving by his wits, the maltreated child who wants a day off from unending toil, or the likely lad who had his eye on a girl who's from a better class than himself, the dependence of old people, the rivalries between competitors for love and other sustenance. (Warner 76, emphasis mine)

Fairytales delve into the darker aspects of families, using the lighthearted stories and elegant images to shed light on the harsh realities of family life. In Ashton's, Nureyev's, and Marin's ballets, Cinderella must learn to overcome these issues, escaping from her original, dysfunctional family home and working through her failures to create a happier and more loving family of her own.
Ashton's Bumbling Sisters

Fig. 4 Robert Helpmann (left) and Frederick Ashton (right) as the Ugly Stepsisters

Ashton's ballet opens with the "Ugly Stepsisters" sitting together as they
embroider a shawl—a common and respectable pastime for wealthy ladies during the
1600s. These women, however, are not traditional well-bred ladies; they are men
dancing *en travesti*, and they lack the "womanly" skills of embroidery, pricking
themselves and sucking their fingers in pain. From just the first few seconds of the
ballet, the audience already recognizes the Stepsisters' incompetence and foolery by
their failure to perform a simple domestic task.

These characters were originally played by Ashton and Robert Helpmann;
however, in the version I am viewing, Helpmann's character is played by Kenneth
MacMillan. After finishing their work, the two sisters begin to fight over who gets to
wear the shawl. Ashton's character is more passive and easily upset, while
MacMillan's is more dominant and haughty, constantly taking charge and lording it
over her own sister. Ashton's character (hereto referred to as the Passive Sister) admires their handiwork first. MacMillan's character (hereto referred to as the Dominant Sister) becomes annoyed at her sister hogging the shawl and grabs it, holding it against her shoulder as she admires herself. The Passive Sister tries to steal it back, and both sisters spin beneath the shawl as they begin to pull it back and forth between them, calling forth images of tug-of-war. Already, the audience is aware of the sibling rivalry between the characters, and if the Stepsisters are this rough with each other, it's not much of a surprise when they turn on Cinderella in later scenes. The Stepsisters utilize their pantomimic backgrounds throughout the scene, scrunching up their faces in anger and outrage. The focus is on the Ugly Stepsisters' faces, which are elaborately done with make-up, fake warts, and large noses to emphasize both their physical unattractiveness and their dislikable characters. The two dancers use their arms more than their feet, making sweeping gestures that draw attention to their upper bodies and expressions.

As the two continue to fight, the Father steps in between, attempting to reconcile them. Instead he gets caught in the middle, and the two use him as a support while they jump and reach for the shawl. Eventually, they pull him back and forth instead of the shawl, evincing a dysfunctional family to say the least. The fight ends when the Dominant Sister tumbles to the ground, hand against her heart in shock, while the Passive Sister looks ashamed. The two apologize, share a kiss on the cheek, and saunter off stage together, noses held high, hips swishing. All arguments forgotten, they are united in their pride, without even a second glance at their Father, or Cinderella who has been sitting by the fireplace the entire time.
Ashton uses this sequence, in which most of the movements are pantomimed and acted, to introduce his ballet. It sets the tone for the rest of the piece, emphasizing that while it is a ballet, Ashton is choosing to focus on the acting and the humor of the story. Cinderella, who crouches by her fireplace in the background, is barely seen in these first few minutes. Curiously enough, all the action focuses on the Stepsisters’ treatment of each other, not their treatment of Cinderella. They are immature and childish as they fight over a piece of cloth, each demanding that she deserves it more. The audience sees how spoiled, rude, and mean the sisters are. The Stepsisters represent the male view of the worst traits of the female sex. As men portraying women, they focus on what they believe women's faults are: petty and jealous of not only Cinderella but each other, getting into pointless cat fights over the smallest disagreements, and focusing more on their vanity and outward appearances than their personalities as they fight over a pretty shawl.

Their haughtiness and nasty tendencies are not limited to Cinderella; not even their father can make them behave. It is only until the very end of the scene when one of them almost gets hurt that either shows any remorse for their argument. As fairytale scholar Joan Gould ascertains, the Stepsisters are "Cinderella's counterparts as well as her oppressors" (53). They are equal to Cinderella in birthright, social standing, and wealth; however they act as though they are worth more than Cinderella in each aspect. Yet Cinderella shows kindness to her sisters in later scenes, such as when she comforts the Passive Sister after the Dominant Sister pushes her out of the way. Although she shares no blood ties with them, Cinderella treats her stepsisters
with the same kindness she shows everyone. In contrast, the Stepsisters cannot even treat each other kindly; a sibling rivalry trumps every other connection between them.

By having the Stepsisters open the ballet, Ashton is setting the scene for us to recognize Cinderella's cruel environment. While the audience may not see the Stepsisters being directly cruel and disdainful to Cinderella yet, one does witness how ridiculous and unhappy her home is. Cinderella has to put up with her immature stepsisters every day, who push both her and her father around. The Stepsisters are not exactly evil, just a little stupid and childish, and more annoying than hateful.

**Nureyev's Cruel Steps**

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 5** The Stepsisters (Laëtitia Pujol, Stéphanie Romberg) and Stepmother (Stéphane Phavorin) bullying Cinderella (Agnès Letestu)

In his *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood*, Nureyev takes a slightly different approach with the Stepsisters. Unlike Ashton's Stepsisters, who are *en travesti*, Nureyev's sisters are performed by two females who dance on pointe throughout the entire ballet. While they are still the comedians of the dance, their movements are very technical. Nureyev's Stepmother, however, is played by a man who also dances
on pointe, towering above the others with imposing size and strength. The character's dominance, conveyed through the Stepmother's height as a full-grown man standing on pointe shoes, affects the dynamics of the family, and convolutes the traditional meaning of the shoes. Instead of being a light sylph or ghostly figure, the Stepmother is a terrifying creature. Nureyev's choreography is large and bombastic, playing up a grandiose spectacle of ballet and theatricality. The movements of each member of the stepfamily are large and over-exaggerated as they leap across the stage, filling the large space with their long legs as they play with a billowing scarf.

Nureyev's stepfamily is cruel, power-hungry, and extremely dysfunctional. Critic Emma Manning described them as follows: "the stepsisters are wannabe starlets with the social skills of a drunk on roller blades, and stepmum is a beefed up matriarch from hell—no wonder Cinder's father takes refuge in an alcoholic haze" (23). The sisters and mother all argue with one another, each fighting for control and dominance over the rest. The ballet opens with the same scene as Ashton’s version, with all three characters sewing a long scarf. The Younger Stepsister spitefully and playfully pricks her older sister with her needle, and the Older Stepsister retaliates. The Stepmother, annoyed with both of them, grabs the scarf and leaps to her feat. All three begin to dance around the stage, tossing the scarf into the air. They fight over the cloth, pulling and yanking it from each other with force. Eventually, the sisters rip the scarf in two, tumbling to the ground with each clutching their half of the cloth as the Stepmother walks away angrily. As Cinderella comes to comfort them, the Stepsisters grab her and pull her back and forth. Now that they've lost the scarf to play with, the Stepsisters turn to Cinderella as their amusing new toy, yanking her just
as they did the scarf. They cruelly toss her to the ground, and the Stepmother begins to kick her. United as a front—three against one—they heartily abuse Cinderella, and to add insult to injury, make rude faces at her by placing their thumb on their noses and waggling their fingers as they slowly walk away from her. By the end of the scene, the audience has established a firm dislike of these characters, who are vindictive and rough to not only Cinderella, but to each other. While the actions are comedic, there is an underlying darkness in the stepfamily’s treatment of each other and their inter-personal dynamics.

The stepfamily's relationships are a constant power struggle, mixed with their childish arguments and malicious tendencies. Marina Warner discusses the competitive attitude of families in fairytales, explaining that "Mothers died at childbirth, and large families of step-relations arose as a result, competing for resources" (78). In Nureyev's version, the family is competing for acting roles, placed in another cutthroat and competitive world. The sibling rivalries and power struggles that stem from the fairytale and the characters' search for acting parts is displayed by Nureyev's choreography and the family's relationships. The Stepsisters' cruelty is directly related to that of their mother; they learn from her the skills to survival in a competitive world. When the Older Step sister slaps her younger sister in anger, the younger one runs over to her mother to complain, only to be slapped by her in return. Feeling the need to not be the weakest and lowliest of the family, the Younger Step sister passes the slap on to Cinderella. They are not just spoiled and haughty children, these are mean and spiteful actresses, pushing to get ahead, even if it means injuring their own family.
Cinderella, in contrast, cares less about power and more about family. She makes several attempts to reconcile her stepsisters' argument; however, the sisters ignore her compassion and unite in their spite against her. The audience immediately feels sympathy for the kind Cinderella, who still tries to appease her family and keep the peace, despite their cruel treatment of her. Nureyev's Cinderella is not as helpless as Ashton's; she takes action with her family, attempting to diffuse the troubled situations and establish a loving environment. For Cinderella, all she wants at the beginning of the ballet is a loving family. Gould explains that "more than anything else, an adolescent wants to belong, wants to be admired" (51), and Cinderella just wants a connection with her family and her peers—the Stepsisters. Gould suggests that this need to belong, a wish to have a healthy family and close friends is "why Cinderella is so obsessed with her stepsisters and their low opinion of her" (51). This explains Cinderella's constant attempts at reconciliation and compassion. She wants to be a part of the action, even if it always ends in physical pain; at least, for one moment, she can feel a connection.

Marin's Soulless Dolls

Fig. 6 Stepfamily (Dominique Lainé, Danièle Pater, Jayne Plaisted) intimidating Cinderella (Françoise Joullié)
Marin's ballet goes the opposite direction of the others, focusing on the dark aspects of the story instead of playing up the humor. All the dancers wear masks with either grotesque grimaces or blank faces; none have sweet smiles or pretty features. In Marin's version, it is Cinderella, instead of the Stepmothers, who fails at her dance steps and adds a more comedic element to the dance, creating a sense of endearment for her mistakes, much in the same way the audience sympathized with Ashton's Passive Stepmother. The stepfamily is anything but comic—they are cruel, harsh, and violent. Marin does not open the ballet by introducing the stepfamily. Instead, Cinderella is peacefully alone and dances a small introspective solo in which her movements are mostly turned in and contorted. Broken and sad, she sits on a stool, running her inwardly twisted foot along her leg. Marin sets up the ballet as Cinderella's story, in which her misfortune comes not just from her family but from her own shortcomings. The stepfamily is a secondary aspect; they represent all that Cinderella must face throughout her life—jealousy, anger, hatred, and general dislike and adversity—but they are only one of the obstacles keeping her from a happy life.

After Cinderella's short solo, the stepfamily enters dramatically; as the music swells, they creep up behind Cinderella from the shadows. Their movements are harsh and stiff, like the mechanical dolls they portray. They waggle their fingers at Cinderella, teasing her and treating her as a plaything. She lets them lift her up, disillusioned by some false sense of security, and the Stepmothers proceed to toss her into the air. Cinderella lands in a fetal position, remaining curled into a ball on the ground while her stepsisters point and laugh at her. Marin uses the stepfamily to explore innate cruelty in children. As Warner discusses, "Some children in Victorian
fairy tales are bad seeds, but most of them hold up ideals for a better world” (104). Marin abandons this stereotype, choosing to show that all children, not just a few bad seeds, have a deeper spiteful personality. Her stepsisters are selfish and rude, as are all the Ball Guests later in the ballet. They push others down in order to gain their own prominence, which is exemplified when the Stepsisters throw Cinderella to the floor so they can be the first to receive the Father's attention and gifts when he enters.

The Stepsisters are ungainly and fidgety, similar to children that have not yet grown into their bodies. Their bent arms and wiggling torsos also call to mind grotesque and misshapen dolls. One sister's mask has a maniacal smile, the other an ugly scowl, and the Stepmother's is a scrunched and terrifying grimace (see fig. 6). They are one-dimensional characters, representing horrible traits to have in a family: joy at the pain of others, constant annoyance and disapproval, and a true hatred for one's children (or stepchildren). They are unfeeling and unchanging; they are dolls, not humans. The scene ends as the three advance on Cinderella predatorily, maliciousness in their slow and calculated movements. They force Cinderella to dance with them and continue to jump in her way and push her to the ground. For them, it is a game, a chance to play around with Cinderella, perhaps seeing how far they can push before she breaks.

***

Each choreographer creates unique versions of their stepfamilies to better emphasize the themes of their ballets. From bumbling idiots, to snobby mean girls, to cruel heartless dolls, the stepfamilies abuse Cinderella with neglect and physical harm. Fairytales are not the fluffy, lighthearted stories that some artists, such as Walt
Disney, portray them to be. As Warner explains, they "speak of poverty, scarcity, hunger, anxiety, lust, greed, envy, cruelty, and of all the grinding consequences in the domestic scene and the larger picture" (74). Fairytales show families as gritty and complex as they are in real life, with power struggles, jealousy, cruelty, neglect, and a simple wish to be loved. The three ballets depict their dysfunctional families through a variety of techniques, but each displays the same ultimate message of family. The choreographers use physicality, pantomime, and expression to convey the commonality of a difficult family life, and how vital love is to one's future happiness and success—whether that love comes from one's family or some outside source such as a prince. The stepfamily refuses to share their love with Cinderella; she must find her happiness elsewhere. Her cruel family pushes Cinderella to her limits, until she has only dreams to live for.
Scene 2: The Ball and Midnight

The strike of a clock at midnight has always been a magical time. Known as "the witching hour," anything can happen at this time in the dead of night. Cinderella's fear and disappointment at the strike of twelve is one all of us have felt: the sadness at the end of an exciting event, the anxiety of running out of time, and the dread over what's to come. Act Two of Cinderella is the Ball scene, in which the audience is introduced to the Prince and all of the attendants at the Ball. One of the most striking moments in the ballet is when the clock strikes midnight. Prokofiev's music rings twelve times, signifying the chimes of midnight as a constant ticking plays in the background, reminding us of the inevitable passage of time. It is both mechanical and fluid and effectively embodies the fear, magic, and dreamlike quality of the scene. This is Cinderella's defining moment: will she make it out of the ballroom in time before her stepfamily recognizes her and before the Prince sees her in rags? Does she lose a shoe in her haste, or purposefully leave it behind? Does she look longingly back at the Prince or rush out immediately, believing it can't last? Her actions depict the deepest parts of her character: is she lead by fear or love, is she lucky and clumsy or clever and determined, and is she content with one night of happiness or desperate for more.

Cinderella goes through two transformations: before she can arrive at the Ball and again at the stroke of midnight. This is not just an external transformation of clothes but an internal change of Cinderella's self-esteem and fortitude. Joan Gould explains that "In fairy tales as in life, a change of clothing or house is never trivial" (xxiv), but that it is a sign of the transformation of the character's strength. It is not
about Cinderella impressing a prince with her finery, but finding her own sense of self as she encounters the world. The Ball allows Cinderella to grow up, to view the world outside of her depressing home and to find companionship in life. Cinderella does not just fall in love with a prince; as Gould explains, "Cinderella falls in love with herself, which is the necessary prelude before she can be loved by anyone else. Her fairy godmother has filled her with pride, which shines through her body and looks from the outside like a gold-and-silver gown" (68). Cinderella takes charge of her life, and with a little confidence boost in the form of a fancy dress from the Fairy Godmother, Cinderella is able to join in the fanciful Ball as her dreams begin to come true.

**Ashton's Traditional Ball**

![Cinderella (Margot Fonteyn) arriving at the Ball](image)

Ashton's Ball scene is reminiscent of the one in Perrault's classic eighteenth-century fairytale, in which finely dressed courtiers dance in pairs around a grand
ballroom. The Ball is an elegant affair in which Cinderella and her Prince fall immediately and deeply in love after dancing with one another. Ashton uses more technical ballet steps in these scenes, connecting ballet's history with its royal beginnings. The comedic elements are still present, as the Stepsisters each have their own respective absurd *pas de deux*, in which they attempt to perform traditional movements such as a virtuosic classical fish dive, but trip over themselves instead. However, the comedy is toned down as Cinderella and the Prince begin to dance, and Ashton uses the choreography to focus on their love. His use of traditional ballet technique allows the audience to recognize the images of a prince and his love, as the steps are so frequently used in classical and romantic ballets in similar fashions. The movements are tender and soft, such as when Cinderella caresses the Prince's cheek as he performs a ballroom dip with her, sweeping her in a romantic fashion. Vaughan describes the Ball scene as a display of the "birth and flowering of love" between the two protagonists, the Prince and Cinderella (230). The dancing is in contrast to the earlier pantomime and buffoonery of the Stepsisters, and the increased technique gives the dance a more magical and regal feel. The audience is awed by the beautiful dancing as Cinderella and the Prince show their love through their expressions: eyes and smiles wide with wonder and happiness.

While the tender and beautiful choreography displays the characters' love, there is another underlying message behind all the gorgeous ball gowns and jewels. Ashton's *Cinderella* premiered shortly after the end of World War II when many people in England were still recovering from the years of fear and poverty. According to Homans, during the war Ashton was "obsessed with mysticism and ideas of
dedication and divine love” (425). Perhaps this stemmed from a need to escape into a more magical and beautiful setting filled with compassion while, in reality, Europe was stuck in a cruel atmosphere of violence and hate. Whatever the reason, Ashton retained some of this theme, and his Cinderella and Prince have a truly beautiful romance. However, Ashton no longer needed an escape. His *Cinderella* had to appeal to the common people and the current difficulties they were facing as they recovered from the war as a nation. Homans explains that due to the war and postwar legislation, "disparities in wealth really had diminished" (427) and Ashton's fairytale became a more realistic tale of economic class distinctions that were slowly fading away.

Ashton's Cinderella follows a long tradition of average, hard-working heroines. As Warner states, "fairytale protagonists are recognizably ordinary working people, toiling at ordinary occupations over a long period of history, before industrialization and mass literacy" (76). These fairytales allow the common people to see themselves in magical stories of advancement and dreams, giving them hope and escape from their dreary lives. Margot Fonteyn was the inspiration for the character of Cinderella, and although she was not able to dance in the premiere due to injury, her later performances in the role were what gave the character life. She played up the economic aspects of the story, displaying the struggle of a working-class girl who obtained her wealth and prince through hard work and self-sacrifice. She discarded the original costume of a cute frock, and instead donned a "soot-stained dress and kerchief tied around the back of her head" which Homans describes as "reminiscent of London's working classes, still suffering the effects of rationing,
shortages, and wage freezes" (427). The Ball in Ashton's *Cinderella* represents the past glory of England, with its rich history of royalty and prestige. It is a dream for those struggling through poverty and hardship, a dream of magic and princes and riches.

When midnight strikes, the magic of that dream is broken, and the beautiful ballroom dancing suddenly ends. Cinderella abruptly stops mid-*pirouette*, and the choreography returns to more gestural and pantomimed movements. Cinderella presses her hands to her cheeks and widens her mouth in shock, displaying her anxiety and distress as her magical time comes to an end. As she searches for a clear path out, she reaches to each side, the Prince's arms still encircling her as he refuses to let the dream fade. But gone are the elegant *arabesques* and dips of their *pas de deux*; Cinderella pushes aside his arms and dashes away, the dream gone, the dancing done. Frantic not to let her dream prince see her in the reality of her poverty and rags, Cinderella rushes out of the ballroom and down the stairs, leaving a single shoe behind. The Prince bends down to the shoe, and in a grand and romantic gesture—fit for any traditional royal prince charming—raises the shoe into the air, gazing at all that's left of the magical night.

Midnight, instead of being the cause of magic and fanciful occurrences, becomes the end of a dream. The regal and precise dancing, the extravagant costumes, and the large leaps and tender embraces all fade away. The magical show returns to a more realistic environment as the dancers return to more acting, pantomime, and gestures. The fancy dresses and unattainable riches fade away with the dream, and Cinderella is left with the harsh realities of her rags and poverty once
again. The ballet at the Ball was a display of both the royal backgrounds of the Prince, and the dreams of Cinderella. But after their time runs out, life returns to normal, represented by less extravagant dancing and more simplistic gestures. Ashton's midnight sequence is short, depicting how quickly and easily dreams can end. The balletic dream lasted for an entire act, but the return to reality is abrupt and harsh. However, the audience, along with Cinderella, has witnessed a world of magic and beauty and can no longer be content without it. Ashton leaves one unsatisfied, wanting more with life. Cinderella knows that a brighter future is available to her, and she is sure to get it.

**Nureyev's Movie Madness**

![Cinderella's (Agnès Letestu) arrival at the Ball with the Paparazzi](image)

Nureyev's Ball scene occurs on a set on a Hollywood film lot, wedged between a fake prison and a giant plastic King Kong. Cinderella literally steps into another world, one fabricated by the Producer and his team. Nureyev's Ball scene, like Ashton's, embodies a sense of magic and dreams. It is the world of movie magic,
where anything the film crew deems possible is attainable: Cinderella can escape her abusive family and dance the night away in a glittering ballroom, albeit a fake one. However, it remains an impossible dream, a suspended reality made of actors and cut out walls. Just as the audience recognizes the ballet itself is unreal, Cinderella knows her movie set is fabricated, and the stroke of midnight reminds her of the world she must return to.

The reality and magic of story and stage begin to blur during Nureyev's Ball Scene, as the characters act for the film they are making, and it becomes unclear what they are really feeling versus simply performing. Is the story as unreal to the characters as it is to the audience, or are they also pulled into the magic of it all, experiencing and feeling every moment as reality? Warner explains that the intertwining of "ballet with enchantment does not entail that we who are listening [or watching] submit to any particular cosmology invoked by the story—the deus or dea ex machina is not brought before us to invite our belief in their existence beyond the stage" (162).9 We know that these stories are unreal, made up by performers and suspended in a set place and time. Like written fairytales, we know the ballet and Cinderella's movies are make-believe, yet they still have a ring of truth to them that captivates us: the feel of magic and possibility that entices Cinderella to acting and her movie star, and the power of perseverance that enables people such as Cinderella to achieve their impossible dreams.

There is no actual magic in Nureyev's story. Cinderella's dress is given to her by the Producer, not conjured out of magic fairy dust. The "fairy godmother" is a

9 *Deus ex machina*: a person or thing (as in fiction or drama) that appears or is introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty (Merriam Webster Dictionary).
flesh and blood person with his own desires. The Producer wants Cinderella in his movies, so he can achieve his own dream of producing amazing films. Cinderella's transformation does not rely on magic, only on the availability of friends, such as the Producer and his team of designers, and her own hard work. But that doesn't mean the flowing, pink Hollywood dress will last any longer. As soon as the filming of the Ball scene is completed, which is exactly at midnight, Cinderella is reminded that it is all make-believe. She is overwhelmed by the implications that such a life of happiness might be just as unrealistic for her, so she flees the set, shedding her beautiful dress and leaving behind a sparkling shoe.

Nureyev's Ball plays with reality and dreams, merging the two into a seamless form as movies mix with ballet and the characters' emotions mix with their acting. As critic Roslyn Sulcas states in her review of the ballet, "you never know if you are watching a film or supposed-reality." It is unclear to the audience whether the sequences are a part of the film, or if they are the characters' real interactions since they all start to blend together. Reality and dreams become interchangeable, not just for the audience, but for Cinderella as well; her hopes of gaining stardom are coming to fruition. Her dreams of starring in film are as real as the set where the movies are made, while the reality of it all is as fleeting as a dream that only lasts the night before one is forced to wake up.

Warner tells us that fairytales themselves are dream-like: "they're disjointed, brilliantly coloured, they overlook rational cause and effect, they stage outlandish scenes of sex and violence, and they make abrupt transitions without rhyme or reason" (117). Nureyev's Ball also has a sense of disjointedness to it. The Ball
switches rapidly from one scene to the next, and dancers move across the stage in fast-paced ensembles, only to pause and let the character soloists alternately perform the loving duets of the Movie Star and Cinderella and the comedic bumblings of the Stepsisters. The constant changes between reality and the movie blend together, until dream is indiscernible from real life. Nureyev's movie scenes may not have the sex and violence, but they are certainly extravagant and lack cause and effect, switching from one film cite to the next, showing a prison and a jungle before finally arriving at the Ball. Even in the Ball, one moment everyone is dancing together, the next everyone has disappeared except for the Movie Star and Cinderella. The Stepsisters' roles in the movie are unclear. The Producer offered them costumes, but every time they come on set, he angrily ushers them out. Is this just another part of the movie? Are the Movie Star and Cinderella truly in love, or are they just acting? What is real and what is the dream? Nureyev leaves the answers up to the audience's interpretation.

Nureyev's Act Two begins not at the ballroom, but at the filming site, where we see the Producer dictating orders from his chair while a director and assistant scurry about. The dancers perform several scenes in homage to famous old movies, such as a prisoner locking up his guards, men performing a baroque dance in drag, and a group of virgins being offered to King Kong. These scenes offer comic relief and help create the setting of the film studio. The dancers perform over-exaggerated and stylized movements, such as the prisoner pretending to trip very gracefully while his guard vaults over him. These suggest the style of silent films, when every movement was made larger and more exaggerated to make up for the lack of sound.
At last, as the lights come up on the ballroom, the *corps de ballet* is dancing in rows reminiscent of Hollywood musical chorus lines. During the Ball scene, the stepfamily makes fools of themselves as they constantly interrupt the filming to the chagrin of the Producer. Some bit characters—a director, assistant, and dancing master—also add to the comedy as they fight with each other and dance with the sisters. Nureyev's story does not differ much from Ashton's in this sense, as the dancers perform multiple comedic vignettes mixed with more traditional choreography for the *corps*. Nureyev's choreography is much more elaborate than Ashton's, and the plethora of technical steps mixed with overly elaborate movements and flourishes call to mind exuberant Hollywood productions filled with masses of extra performers in dance scenes.

The stepfamily's attempts for power are present once more in this scene. The Stepsisters are as absurd as ever, demanding attention as they push each other out of the way in their eagerness to be on film. The Stepmother is controlling and overbearing, grabbing the Movie Star and forcing her daughters into his arms. In contrast, Cinderella enters and her very presence demands attention. She does not need to force herself into the Movie Star's path; instead she has gained confidence through the Producer's encouragement, and commands the attention she so often craved at home. Everyone stops to watch as she enters—a regal and powerful figure who walks on the backs of a crowd of paparazzi (see fig. 8). Gone is the timid and abused girl from before. Here she is confident and dazzling, for at the Ball, Cinderella is in her element. She can act and dance to her heart's content, unhindered by her stepfamily's criticism and abuse. The pride she gained from the Producer, her fairy
godmother counterpart, shows in every movement. She has had her transformation and no longer needs to insert herself into her stepfamily's arguments just to gain some form of attention or connection. She commands it all on her own.

As midnight strikes, everyone collapses to the ground, exhausted from a long day of filming, while Cinderella looks on worriedly. Twelve "clock men" enter, each with a number on their chest. Cinderella weaves between them, while the rest of the cast remains frozen on the ground, suspended in time. The dream is ending, and only Cinderella is able to distinguish that reality has overtaken the dream world once more; she must return to her actual life, far away from the magic of movies. The clock men continually block her path as Cinderella tries to leave, which perhaps is a manifestation of her own wish to stay forever in the dream. But Cinderella knows that even if her real life is harsh, it's better than pretending to live in a fantasy, and she pushes aside the clock men to run off stage. Each clock man jumps up on a sound of a bell and rolls off stage, signaling the twelve chimes of midnight. At the last stroke, the rest of the corps unfreezes and Cinderella re-enters, having changed back into her rags. It was not magic that forced her out of her ball gown, but her own worries at the fantasy and impermanence of it all. In her rush to leave, she drops a shoe. The Movie Star, distraught by her disappearance, picks it up tenderly, while the Producer looks on with a thoughtful expression, contemplating a new perfect duo between Cinderella and the Movie Star.

Nureyev's Cinderella does not rely on magic to help her reach the ball; it is her own kindness and talent that get her there (albeit with a fancy outfit from a lucky encounter). The real magic occurs between the audience and the performers. As
Warner states, "Magic, being a compact between practitioner and client, requires an audience for its accomplice; it depends on the consent of the participants" (42). Warner explains that the audience must agree to suspend their disbelief, to understand that while reality and the imagination are inherently separate, they continue to influence each other. The true magic for Cinderella is the suspended reality of the movies. She can escape into a world different from her impoverished and unhappy home, just as an audience can escape from their dreary lives into one of color, beauty, and excitement. The magic of the movies forces Cinderella to face the reality of her life. She must overcome her insecurities if she wants to accomplish her dream and participate in the magic of movies every day. One must risk failure rather than run away from the dream before it spoils. Nureyev's Ball takes the more realistic problems Cinderella faces and frames them against the glamour of his movies, combining the idea of movie magic with reality.

**Marin's Creepy Celebration**

![Cinderella (Francoise Joullié) and the Prince (Bernard Cauchard) at the Ball](image)

The Ball scene in Marin's *Cendrillon* follows the darker themes of natural human cruelty and constant failure portrayed in the earlier scenes of her ballet. The
pushy and rude courtiers start a brawl over some lollipops on the refreshment table, roll around on the floor, jump on each other, and even claw at each other's faces.

Marin's depiction is far from Ashton and Nureyev's dream-like scenes; it is a dream turned into a nightmare. Cinderella and the Prince, however, are a still-point of calm, and their pas de deux is simple and soft. They start in first position, gently circling their torsos and bending their legs in a manner that is quiet and contained, as if to show that their love doesn't need to be extravagant and grand; instead, it is a quiet, tender love of two people in harmony with one another.

In opposition to Ashton's use of balletic technique, Marin mixes more modern elements into the dancing at the ball. The dancers move mechanically as dolls, often standing in parallel, jumping up and down in anger, and contorting their bodies as they alternately waltz and fight. The courtiers' movements are similar to those of the stepfamily, so much so that it is difficult to distinguish the characters from the ensemble. The stepfamily fades into the background; they are unimportant to Cinderella's dream. It shows that the stepfamily is not the only problem that Cinderella faces; there are cruel people everywhere in her world. When Cinderella trips and falls flat on her face in the middle of the ball, all the courtiers turn to laugh at her. The Prince is the only one to show her any concern as he helps her to her feet. It is his kindness that causes her to fall in love with him. Marin's Cinderella—the least graceful of all the characters—is the only one to make mistakes or fall down. When Ashton and Nureyev's Stepsisters make choreographic mistakes, it is amusing, and the audience laughs at their failures as the choreographer intended. When Marin's Cinderella falls, the audience becomes acutely aware that someone's mistakes are not
to be laughed at. It is because Cinderella is so imperfect that we are able to sympathize and connect with her. Jack Zipes insists that "we are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in" (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale 2*), which is why fairytales are so relevant to people. Fairytales often show the protagonist as an outcast of society, and they must either evolve to fit with that society, or provoke the society to change to fit them. Zipes explains that "fairytales are informed by a human disposition to action—to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world" (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale 2*). Marin's Cinderella must learn to dance properly before she can fit in with the high society courtiers. Before she can find her happiness, she must become comfortable with herself; she must find the pride that the Fairy Godmother attempted to bestow upon her.

Marin's Cinderella may go through a physical transformation by simply pulling on a pink skirt with flashing electric lights, but her internal transformation takes much longer. It is not until the very end of the ballet that she finally dances with confidence. However, this allows the romance between the Prince and Cinderella to feel more realistic. The Prince falls in love with her for who she is, not for her beautiful dancing skills, unlike Nureyev's Movie Star, whose vague impressions of love could be due to Cinderella's personality or merely an attraction to her acting skills. Marin's Prince accepts her, despite her failings and shortcomings, before she can even accept them herself. Instead of a world of magic and fanciful ballet moves, Marin shows the rawness of human nature, both through its cruelty and its kindness. As Zipes explained, it is the *human disposition* to act in fairytales that
drives the story. The other characters of Marin's *Cendrillon* are more doll-like than human; they can only display specific one-dimensional aspects of human nature. Cinderella and the Prince are the closest to real humans as they try to accept themselves and others, learning from their environments and evolving as people. Marin's Ball is not merely a dream, but is Cinderella's attempt to explore the world outside her home, to take action and grow up. It is a realistic vision that audiences can relate to.

It is Marin's midnight that becomes magical. As the midnight music begins to play, at first nothing changes. The dancers continue to waltz around each other in a circle, trading partners and playing patty cake, calling forth images of childhood play instead of a sophisticated adult ball. Gradually, the dancing becomes more frenzied and hurried as the Fairy Godmother, with glowing eyes, orchestrates the chaos in the back by circling her wand as a clock hand. Having switched partners around the circle, at last Cinderella and the Prince come face to face. Everyone freezes in the middle of a patty-cake motion, except for Cinderella. She begins to twist downward, turning her torso inward and jutting out her head, creating an uncomfortable and contorted image. She sinks to the ground and slides down the stairs, and her shoe slips off as she painfully bumps along the steps. She must descend from her happiness, back to her home of abuse and servitude, for Cinderella has yet to accomplish her full transformation. Gould explains that "Transformation is what we long for—we can't be satisfied with who we are. We want to become more centered, more purposeful, steadier in our sense of what we are meant to do in the world" (78). Cinderella is not yet "steady." She must become sure of herself before she can remain
with the Prince, steady on her feet and in her heart. Cinderella must grow from a child into a woman, accepting her body and the way it moves before she can achieve her happily-ever-after.

***

As Gould states "...in fairy tales as in life, nothing comes to us until we are strong enough to ask for it. To know what we want, we have to know what's wanting in our lives, but we also have to know that we are entitled to get it. Transformation rests in our hands" (63). Each heroine in these ballets ultimately makes their final transformation on their own. Ashton's Cinderella works diligently to overcome the class boundaries between her and the Prince, relying on her perseverance and fortitude to establish a life as happy as the past, much as the citizens of London did after World War II. Nureyev's Cinderella must choose to be an actress and decide if she herself is capable of making her dreams into a reality. Marin's Cinderella struggles with self-doubt and hatred from her peers, and while the Prince offers her acceptance, it is ultimately her belief in herself that will complete her transformation into a princess. These Cinderellas must choose their futures, working towards their transformations of a better self. In Stephen Sondheim's musical Into the Woods, after Cinderella has just fled the ball, she contemplates her future and the choices she must make by telling herself, "Make a decision." Sondheim's lyrics explain her dilemma as she wonders aloud, "How can you know who you are till you know what you want, which you don't?" (86). Cinderella must first decide what she wants in life, be it a rich prince, a successful career, or self-esteem, before those dreams can be realized. Only then, can her glorious transformation be complete.
Scene 3: Realization and Reunion

When Cinderella finally tries on her shoe for the Prince, it's one of the most romantic and fulfilling moments of any fairytale: at last, the Prince recognizes that the beautiful princess he danced with is actually a dirty cinder girl, at last, the jealous stepfamily are left in shock, and at last, Cinderella has realized her dream and will gain a better life. And the audience is left with the idea, that they too, can pursue their impossible dreams. The ending of Cinderella is not about fitting into a specific shoe size; it's about the magic of a singular identity, in which only one person can fit the image the Prince has in his head—only one girl can be the true princess in the tale.

Warner describes the importance of objects, such as Cinderella's shoe, in fairytales: "Animist vitality endows inert objects with active power...fairytale magic works through the uncanny activity of these inert objects, and it deepens the sense that invisible powers exist around us, and intensifies the thrill, the strangeness and terror of the pervasive atmosphere of enchantment" (30). Cinderella's shoe is a gateway object for all the magic and wonder within the fairytale. By placing such importance on a commonplace item, we are able to imagine the same magic and wonder in our own commonplace lives. The magical world seems a little more ordinary, and the ordinary world seems a little more magical.

The Prince and Cinderella have a deep connection, one that surpasses the obstacles of class, family, insecurities, the uncertainty of dreams, and the hardships of life. The Prince feels that no other person in all the land would ever be able to replace Cinderella; he'll only be happy if they are together, and so he uses the only clue he has—a magical shoe—to identify her. Cinderella's feelings, on the other hand, are
more complicated. Does she truly love the Prince in return, or is he simply a means to an end—a way to escape her horrifying home? Ashton, Nureyev, and Marin all take slightly different interpretations of the relationship between the Prince and Cinderella, culminating in their final scenes when the Prince realizes Cinderella is the same maiden from the ball, and they reunite in the final *pas de deux.*

**Ashton’s Lasting Love**

![Fig. 10 Cinderella (Margot Fonteyn) and the Prince (Michael Somes) reunited while the Stepsisters (Frederick Ashton, Robert Helpmann) watch with disappointment](image)

Frederick Ashton takes the traditional route of the story, with Cinderella and the Prince as each other's one true love. Staying true to Perrault’s version, the Prince falls madly in love with Cinderella at the ball, and goes searching for the mysterious maiden whom he knows nothing about, except her foot size. The love between the characters is portrayed through their facial expressions as they dance. They gaze at each other longingly during their duets, and appear genuinely devastated when the
other is absent. Once Cinderella has left the ball, the Prince is shown pining for her, dancing forlornly about with his subjects as he cradles Cinderella's shoe.

Ashton eliminates the Prince's Search, which is traditionally a chance for the ballet to display a set of national divertissements that was common in traditional ballets, such as in Ivanov's *The Nutcracker*. While this section of the story does not add much by way of plot, it does help show the Prince's desperation as he searches for his love. By eliminating it, some of the Prince's character development is lost. The audience does not get to see the extent of his love for Cinderella, how he would search the entire world for her, only recognizing her as his true bride. However, it can also be said that Ashton's Prince is smarter than the princes in many versions of the fairytale. He doesn't need to search the world for Cinderella; he knows she must live nearby since she attended his Ball, which lacked foreign dignitaries. Thereby, he travels immediately to the wealthy homes of the neighboring area—for Cinderella's finery suggested she came from a rich family—and comes upon her house. Perhaps he tries the shoe on her Stepsisters just to humor them and coax Cinderella out into the open.

Ashton chooses to focus on the stepfamily and the humor of the scene, rather than upon the love of the Prince. The shoe is tried on both Stepsisters in a hilarious pantomime as they attempt to shove their feet into the dainty pointe shoe. The Dominant Sister slides into a split by accident and makes a face in pain. The kind-hearted Cinderella rushes forward in concern, and the Prince at last recognizes her. Cinderella originally fled the Ball not just because the magic had ended, but to achieve this moment. As Gould explains, Cinderella "has outgrown her job as a
scullery maid and acknowledged the princess in herself, but in spite of the Prince's flattery she cannot feel sure of him before he sees her and accepts her in the old gray bedgown, her dreariest self, which is one of the selves that a husband must live with on a daily basis" (70). Cinderella needed the Prince to recognize her in her rags, to choose the real her not the magical image created by her fairy godmother. She can only love the Prince if he can love her true self; if he can recognize the richness of her character despite the rags. As Cinderella kneels in front of him, he lifts her chin, gazing into her eyes at an even level, asserting the equality of their love. By this action, he recognizes her true self as a kind and hard-working woman, and Cinderella is able to accept his love. She places her shoe on her own foot, taking control of her destiny and agreeing to a future with the Prince.

At last, two protagonists dance their romantic final *pas de deux*. The finale of a ballet often holds a lot of pressure. It must resolve the plot of the story, and at the same time leave the audience with a sense of wonder and awe. The finale is often where the music surges, yet, in Prokofiev's score, the build-up to the finale falls short. As Vaughan explains, "the brevity of the *pas de deux* in Act II makes the end of the ballet disappointing as an expression of love's fulfillment...but the fact remains that there is no music for an extended *pas de deux*" (230-231). Ashton does his best with what is present, but the emotion of the previous pantomime scene gives way to the traditional ballet ending. The fairies and *corps de ballet* enter the stage to celebrate as well, and Cinderella and the Prince have only fleeting moments. As Vaughan states, "Perhaps more is needed to say 'and they lived happily ever after' than the ballet's
quiet finish (hardly an apotheosis), with Cinderella and the Prince getting into a boat and sailing away, or in the later revision, simply walking off together" (230).

While the ending might seem brief and disappointing, it also suggests that the happy reunion is not what the ballet was about. It isn't a story of love and princes and magic. It's a story of a young woman overcoming class boundaries, economic hardship, and a neglectful family to find love and happiness in a world that had previously shunned her. The ballet is about Cinderella, not Cinderella and her prince. Ashton even changes his ballet to be more about the stepfamily and Cinderella's background. While the love between the characters is clear in Ashton's version, he suggests that it is not the important element of the story, merely a support to the larger theme of personal struggle and growth.

Gould explains that during Charles Perrault's time, class was something one was born with; one could not be taught the grace and pride that came from nobility (81). Therefore, in Perrault's story, the Prince recognizes Cinderella as a woman of higher class because she could not have been anything else. Ashton changes this. The Prince does not immediately recognize Cinderella until she presents herself to him. She must take the initiative to prove her worth, and he must put aside status for love. Gould ascertains that in present day "the sole boundary between social classes is money—not even money so much as the impression of having money" (81). This is the greatest obstacle for Cinderella and the Prince. Cinderella must overcome her poverty and develop "her strength through the rigorous exercise of learning what she can live without" (Gould 42). Only then, can the importance of money become obsolete. The Prince must learn to see a princess through the rags and accept the
virtues of Cinderella's lower class upbringing and working attitude. Only then can they recognize each other—and themselves—for their true selves; then they can share true love.

**Nureyev's Perfect Partnership**

Nureyev's Movie Star and Cinderella are the perfect film couple, and the Producer makes sure that Cinderella signs his studio contract to continue the couple's existence. What is never quite clear is if they are just a pair of well-matched actors, or there really is some budding romance. The two characters never kiss, and while their final *pas de deux* is very tender, it could represent both their blossoming love or a blooming friendship and partnered career. Their true relationship is left up to audience interpretation. It is both enjoyable to imagine the romance between them and thrilling to witness a Cinderella who found joy in a career rather than a man.

When Nureyev's ballet premiered in 1986 at the Paris Opera Ballet, the feminist movement was alive and well. The previous decade had been filled with laws advocating for women's rights in France, such as the Veil Law legalizing abortion in
1975 and Yvette Roudy's law against sexism in 1983. It was in this atmosphere that Nureyev turned to a traditional fairytale, one that has been both praised and attacked by feminists. He adapted the complacent serving girl into a stronger and more independent woman, searching for her future instead of love. However, Nureyev was a huge romantic, and his love of dramatization and the romantic classics is evident in his *Cinderella Goes to Hollywood*. The Movie Star is still an object of desire, and his insistent searching for Cinderella does suggest his initial attachment to her, whether this attachment is his love or a belief that Cinderella will help him become even a greater name in Hollywood.

The Reunion scene opens as the stepfamily drags Cinderella off stage, pulling her by the arms as she writhes on the ground trying to break free. Prevented from presenting herself to the Movie Star as she wanted, she is forced to wait in the wings. The Movie Star enters and attempts to fit Cinderella's lost shoe onto her stepsisters. After both fail the test, the Stepmother demands to try it herself, even grabbing the Movie Star's thigh in an absurd and hysterical attempt to appear sexy and desirable. With everyone's attention focused on the Stepmother as she makes a great show of attempting to shove the dainty shoe onto her manly feet (the character is portrayed by a man with much larger feet than the ballerinas), Cinderella remerges from backstage and steps forward to proudly place the other shoe in front of the Movie Star.

Cinderella is confident in both her identity and in her appeal to the Movie Star. As Gould states, the moment of change for Cinderella is "not when a man kneels down to fit the slipper onto her foot, but when she recognizes that she has turned into the princess [or actress] she was always meant to be" (xviii). Cinderella's ascent to
stardom comes from her own dreams and hard work. She takes matters into her own hands, and does not wait to be "summoned" by the prince's question, "Don't you have another daughter?" (Grimm 121). She wants out of her troubled home and knows the Movie Star is her key to finding her own career, financial support, and possibly a loving and caring relationship she has so lacked.

Once Cinderella is reunited with the Movie Star, they dance for only a moment before the Producer approaches them. Cinderella rushes into his arms, reminiscent of a father supporting his child, the opposite of an earlier scene with Cinderella and her real father who fell on her in his drunken state. The Producer pulls out a contract, and at first Cinderella refuses. While she has dreamed of this moment, the reality is too frightening; there is too much at stake, too many risks and unknowns. But, together, the Movie Star and Producer manage to convince her, showing her with their kindness and tender dancing that they will act as Cinderella's new family and help her achieve her dream.

Marin's Ascent to Adulthood

Fig. 12 The line of baby dolls filling the stage in the last moment of Marin's Cendrillon
Marin's finale is about growing up; Cinderella at last separates from her family and finds a new life with a man, creating a family of her own. The last image of the ballet is a seemingly endless line of baby dolls trailing behind Cinderella and the Prince, depicting their growth from being children to having children of their own (see fig. 12). Marin's ballet, with dolls and childhood images, focuses on what it means to be a child. Naturally, the ending shows the results of Cinderella leaving her childhood behind, perhaps inferring that she can only become an adult when she has children of her own to fill her place. As Joan Gould explains, in fairytales, "transformation is basically a kind of body magic that a mother spirit transmits to a child, who develops her own ability to nurture so that she will become a woman and mother in her turn" (62). Cinderella is transformed from a ragged serving girl into a beautiful maiden; this transformation is representative of Cinderella's growth, her change from child, to woman, to a future mother.

As the Prince arrives at Cinderella's house, the Stepmother sits on Cinderella, hiding her beneath her legs and her womb. Although Cinderella did not emerge from this woman, this dominance is indicative of the power that the Stepmother has over Cinderella. The Prince attempts to fit the shoe on both Stepsisters, but when both fail the test, he mounts a wooden toy horse to leave. Just as he begins to exit, however, the Fairy Godmother raises her glowing wand, and Cinderella, compelled by the magic, emerges from beneath her stepmother, defying her family's wishes. She humbly puts on the magical shoes and accepts the Prince's hand. Now that Cinderella has disobeyed her family and found her Prince, she can become a full-grown woman. Gould pertains that it is the wicked stepmother who grants Cinderella the opportunity
for adulthood, as the Stepmother "is the agent of growth, propelling the girl [Cinderella] out of maidenhood and forward into sexuality" (4). Once Cinderella has left all familial ties behind, she finally steps into the world of adulthood.

Cinderella and the Prince perform a duet together, as the three ballerina fairy attendants do the same with their partners. At last, Cinderella performs the dance steps perfectly, just as gracefully as the fairies who taught her to dance earlier in the ballet (see fig. 3), thereby showing her the means by which she will grow up and escape her childhood home. Cinderella, finally comfortable with her body and her identity, is able to dance without fear or awkwardness. Gould explains that Cinderella typically "earns her keep, which means that she needn't depend on anyone to support her. If this self-reliance isn't materially necessary in later life, it will provide emotional strength" (42). Marin's Cinderella, however, has struggled with self-reliance throughout the ballet. She does not have the self-confidence of most traditional Cinderellas; she is afraid of her stepfamily and timid with the Prince. But in the final scene, Cinderella loses her low self-esteem. No longer shy and fearful, she disobeys her family and presents herself to the Prince. Her confidence enables her to dance with the adult-like fairies without making any mistakes. Cinderella has at last grown into her body and can now be the perfect dancing partner for the Prince.

The Fairy Godmother marries Cinderella and the Prince, confirming their legal ascent into adulthood. After they share a kiss, the entire company turns to stare at the audience and walks forward in a foreboding line with hands outstretched along a transparent screen that creates a literal fourth wall between the audience and the stage, separating the dolls from reality. The dolls seem to tell the audience that they
know they are unreal, trapped in a box of childhood dreams. Playtime is over, and Marin has stopped playing with her dolls, for the fairytale has ended, everyone—Cinderella, dancers, audience, Marin—has grown up.

The challenges of adulthood lie ahead, for Cinderella and the Prince must struggle through parenthood, nurturing their own children into healthy adults. All the dancers, except for the stepfamily, turn to exit, re-entering in couples, and drag large toys after them. These toys are symbols of their childhoods ending, as those childhood toys are physically left behind, no longer prominent parts of their life. The stepfamily, in contrast, has not grown up. They are left staring at the audience, unsure how to continue now that their childish games and cruelty have been forced to stop. They remain stuck in the dollhouse, unable to leave their child fantasies and parental relations behind. Cinderella, however, has abandoned her old life and family for a new one, and it is her children that fill the stage up for the final image of the ballet. The members of the stepfamily are the only characters left on stage, showing they are no different from the many baby dolls that appear. Due to their refusal to stop their childish cruelty and leave their family, they are stuck as children forever, no more developed than Cinderella's baby dolls.

***

Cinderella faces different obstacles in each ballet, be it class, family, or the insecurities of childhood. Each heroine manages to take her destiny in her own hands, presenting herself and the second shoe to her prince, before he even thinks to approach the poor girl by the fireplace. In Ashton's ballet, the magical shoe is a plain pointe shoe, unadorned and simple. It shows Cinderella's true and basic nature, a
ballerina princess at heart but without any extra trappings or sparkles. Nureyev's shoe is much more glamorous: a sparkling silver character shoe. It shows his Cinderella's connections to Hollywood with ballroom shoes and the sparkle of the silver screen of movies and represents all Cinderella's hopes and dreams. Marin's shoe is a jeweled magenta pink pointe shoe—both a little traditional and yet completely unique, with the bright shade of pink and sparkles. Marin's Cinderella strives to be the perfect dancer, to be worthy of the magical shoes she was given, to wear them proudly as a grown-up ballerina in the end. The shoes represent the most important aspects of the ballets and each Cinderella's character, offering a window into their dreams and desires. Most importantly, the finale of each Cinderella shows the audience that impossible and magical dreams really can be accomplished.
Chapter 5: Choreographed Works

2015 Fall Performance Piece: *The Path to Grandmother*

The Story of Little Red Riding Hood

The story of *Little Red Riding Hood* is a classic fairytale, and similar to *Cinderella*, can be traced back to many cultures throughout history. There are hundreds of versions of the story, ranging from cautionary tales warning children of strangers, to bawdy sexual ballads, to cute fables about family and growing up. Girls are often warned of evil wolves, which come in many forms, shapes, sizes, and kinds. Some fairytale historians argue that the story was not initially a warning tale;\(^\text{10}\) it was simply an exciting firelight story filled with sex and blood that could keep adults warm on cold winter nights. Maria Tatar explains that fairytales were passed down through oral tradition "in an age without radios, televisions, and other electronic wonders," and story tellers used "fast-paced narratives with heavy doses of burlesque comedy, melodramatic action, scatological humor, and free-wheeling violence" (Tatar 32) to entertain their audiences.

The story of a little girl on her way to her grandmother's house has many adaptations, most notably Charles Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) and the Brothers Grimm tale of *Little Red Cap* (1812). In *The Story of Grandmother*, an oral version of the story believed to predate Perrault's charming fairytale, the little girl is "unwittingly eating 'meat' and drinking 'wine' that turns out to be flesh and blood of her grandmother" (Tatar 32). Perrault's version is much more family friendly, with a

---

\(^{10}\) Warning tales, called Warnmärchen, are a specific genre of Germanic folktale tradition (Bacchilega 55).
moral at the end stating "children, especially pretty, nicely brought-up young ladies, ought never to talk to strangers" (Perrault 3). These are just two examples of widely different interpretations of a tale that is retold over and over again throughout centuries. It has been converted into many forms: novels, picture books, children movies, horror/thriller movies, musicals, stage productions, but into surprisingly few dances. Aside from a tiny cameo in Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty*, the girl in the red cape is absent from traditional ballets, and only a few modern choreographers such as Austin McCormick have done their own interpretation. Unlike the story of *Cinderella*, which has been interpreted by many ballet and modern companies, *Little Red Riding Hood* is just another of the many other classic fairytales that elude the dance world.

**My Choreography**

For the piece I choreographed in the fall semester of 2015, I created my own version of the fairytale. Using elements from both ballet and modern techniques, I developed a ten-minute dance interpreting the story of Little Red Riding Hood. I cast three dancers as the following characters: The Girl (L. QingXian Comins-Sporbert), The Wolf (Kira Fitzgerald), and The Grandmother (Sonya Levine). I wanted each of the characters to remain nameless, more as symbols for general characters than specific people, a common practice in fairytales. As Angela Carter states, "the technique of the folk tale demands [the protagonists] exist, in some degree, as abstractions. Red Riding Hood, Hop o' my Thumb, Cinderella and Bluebeard are all descriptions rather than names, nicknames that tell you what a person is rather than

---

who he is. The folk tale tends to define identity by role" (75). Each of my characters remained descriptions of a general type, their identities relying solely on their relationships and character archetypes, not on their individuality. This helped me play with the universality of the story. For two months, I worked with my dancers as we explored the characters and the plot of the story. I focused on characterization, trying to show the different characters' personalities through their movements. The Girl performs playfully in an energetic manner, jumping buoyantly with pointed toes and her head held high. The Grandmother is slow and creaky. Her movements are more legato and careful, fluid at times and stiff at others, as if she is unable to exert herself. The Wolf is powerful and conniving with flexed feet, bent legs, a hunched torso, and hands shaped as claws, alternately executing large jumps and prowling in a menacing crouch. We worked on specific movement phrases for each character, exploring their personalities and feelings. These phrases are used throughout the piece, incorporated into duets or solos.

I was drawn to explore how the different characters would perform the same movements. We choreographed a "traveling phrase" which is a simple walk in different directions. I then had my dancers play with how each character would interpret the phrase by changing the tempo, dynamic, and shape. It was thrilling to have the Wolf and the Girl walking together; although they perform similar steps, their movements were so different on their respective bodies that the characterization was amplified, and heightened the tension and conflict between the two.
The dance begins with the Girl standing upstage right and the Grandmother downstage left, sitting in a large armchair. They start out in unison, reaching towards each other across the space, running toward each other's arms but never quite touching. Then the choreography breaks into a canon in which the Grandmother initiates the movement and the Girl follows with a more energetic variation of her Grandmother's actions. This initial phrase demonstrates familial love and their tender relationship, despite the distance between them. The section ends as the Girl and the Grandmother reach out to each other then pull away, smiling at the thought of the person they care about.

The scene then changes: the chair disappears and the lighting darkens, depicting the woods. The Girl cheerfully dances around the stage, exploring the dark forest as she takes her time on her way to Grandmother's. As the Girl jumps around the stage, tapping her toes along the ground and swirling her red cape as she clutches her basket, her character phrase demonstrates her innocent joy. The Girl ends downstage left, where she kneels on the ground and mimes picking flowers. The light darkens as the Wolf enters, ominously tapping her fingernails along the ground as she
stealthily crawls downstage. She kicks one leg high with a flexed foot, demonstrating her beastly power and dexterity, then falls back to a crouch and begins to slowly circle around the Girl. The Girl, still oblivious to the Wolf, circles back around the stage and begins to meander through the woods. She repeats parts of her character phrase mixed with the traveling phrase and keeps her gaze frontward and raised while skipping in a light-hearted manner. The predatory Wolf dances behind her, stalking the child like a wild beast contemplating a potentially savory meal. While the Girl's arms reach out gracefully, filling the space around her, the Wolf's gestures are more inward and grounded: she crawls along the floor, keeping her limbs close to the body and the upper torso hunched in. Finally, the Wolf encircles her arms around her prey, just as the Girl takes notice, and leaps back in reaction.

The music changes to a happy, playful tune, and the Wolf begins a small hopping step as she looks back at the Girl, enticing her to follow. They dance a playful duet that allows the Wolf to gain the Girl's trust. The Wolf adjusts her movements to reflect the bouncy and light ones of the Girl. However, the Wolf is still in control, looming behind the Girl rather than dancing next to her. Some movements call to mind the image of a puppet and its master instead of merely playful mimicry. As the Wolf persuades the little Girl to dance around the stage again, the Wolf slinks off, her fingernails clacking against the ground as she crawls back into the shadows. The Girl continues to explore the woods as the music tempo swells to a climax, oblivious of her new friend's dangerous nature or of her mysterious disappearance.
Fig. 14 The Grandmother (Levine) moves stiffly because of her age, clutching her hip in a moment of pain.

The light comes up on the Grandmother sitting in her easy chair, alone on stage. She rises up from the chair and gradually makes her way to the center of the stage. Slowly, she begins to dance her own character phrase, then repeats the Girl's phrase, in a slower, more timid fashion. This calls to mind the Grandmother's memories of being a young girl herself, but she stops abruptly, unable to continue the energetic phrase due to her old age and frail body. She carefully makes her way back to the chair and curls up to sleep.

Fig. 15 The Wolf (Fitzgerald) advances on the Grandmother (Levine)
Into a pool of light encircling the sleeping Grandmother, the Wolf's hairy foot slowly appears before her whole body emerges into the space. Anticipating a juicy meal, the Wolf creeps around the slumbering woman and strokes her shawl. Startled, the Grandmother awakens. They move around the chair as the Grandmother tries to avoid the Wolf, but the Wolf blocks all paths of escape. Their dance becomes more confrontational and for the first time in the piece, the dancers have physical contact. The Wolf pushes and pulls the Grandmother, lifting her and then throwing her to the ground. The Grandmother, who can barely fight back, mostly falls and stumbles as a result. The Wolf yanks the shawl off the Grandmother, and she tumbles to the ground. The Wolf jumps into the air over the Grandmother as the stage goes dark. This darkness allows the audience to fill in the story using their imagination: the Wolf pouncing on the Grandmother, killing her, and then devouring her.

Figure 16 The Wolf (Fitzgerald) hides her ears while the Girl (Comins-Sporbert) gestures inquisitively
The Wolf quickly disguises herself, covering up her ears with the Grandmother's shawl as the Girl skips on stage towards her Grandmother's house. Entering, she goes to the armchair. She is immediately suspicious of the Wolf, and cautiously gestures to the Wolf's claws, as though stating the traditional, "Grandmother, what big hands you have." For a moment, the Wolf responds, hugging her arms to her chest as she inches closer to the Girl, as though explaining the claws away with the traditional answer of "The better to hug you with, my dear!" Suddenly, the Wolf throws off the shawl and pounces on the Girl. Their duet is almost identical to the Grandmother and Wolf's confrontation, only the Girl is able to push back against the Wolf and manages to jump away as she kicks the Wolf off her. In a parallel to the Grandmother's death, the Wolf yanks the red cape off the Girl, but the Girl holds onto it. The Wolf becomes entangled in the cape; she slowly collapses to the ground and chokes to death. The Girl, no longer sheltered by her childhood cape, walks over to the easy chair and sadly picks up her Grandmother's shawl, holding it to her cheek.
In the last scene, the Girl wears her Grandmother’s shawl, and a new young girl (played by Levine, the same dancer earlier on as the Grandmother) enters in a hooded red coat. The two repeat the beginning of the dance, this time roles reversed, as the Girl has become a Grandmother herself. Each begins their own character phrase as the Wolf inevitably slinks back on stage, slowly crawling downstage center as the lights fade.

This final scene represents the timeless circle of life and death, growing up, and overcoming our personal demons. I wanted to explore the ideas of a universal story, such as this fairytale, that remains relevant throughout time. The saga of growing up, as well as facing our interior and external wolves never really ends. We continue to grow and change, hopefully learning from the mistakes of those before us, but often face the same problems and challenges as our predecessors.
Fairytales have existed for so long because of their universal themes and their ability to evolve with societies and cultural movements. Artists are constantly adapting and changing these stories, setting them in modern eras, while at the same time holding on to the original storylines, characters, and themes. We learn these stories as children, and these messages become ingrained in our minds. If one is kind and hard working as Cinderella, eventually one will find their prince, or one should be careful of strangers and wary of the unknown, or risk being eaten by a wolf as Little Red Riding Hood and her Grandmother did. As we grow up, we begin to understand the deeper messages hidden in these tales: the sexual innuendos, the more violent subplots, the occasional tragic endings, and the reality of the stories. If you strip away the cape and the fur, the tale of Little Red Riding Hood becomes nothing more than a coming of age story of a little girl growing up and facing the death of her beloved grandmother. Through this endless cycle of life and death, of growth and change, these stories change with us; they teach us about our own lives and how people overcame their life challenges in the past.
2016 Spring Performance Piece: *Cinderella*

**Females in Fairytales**

While the exact origin of fairytales is often disputed by scholars, many still believe they were created largely by women: either kindly old nannies telling bedtime stories to little children, or more educated aristocratic ladies who wrote the stories as commentaries on their lives. Warner states that during the 17th century, "Fairy tales were taken up most enthusiastically by chiefly independent minded women of courtly, elite society, conteuses, salonnières, and bluestockings who embroidered and expanded the general plotlines and characters, adding rococo ornament to biting satire about domestic cruelty and political tyranny" (46). If one looks at older fairytales, the split between gender is rather equal, and the Brothers Grimm collection has just as many clever or lucky boys as beautiful and hard-working girls. Fairytales were described as "old wives' tales," told to entertain or frighten children, and many written collections have male authors but retain female narrators in the story (Tatar x).

While women held great importance in the creation of fairytales—such as Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, who wrote the version of *Beauty and the Beast* that is most widely known to Western cultures, *La Belle et la Bête* (1757)—it is male authors such as Perrault and the Brothers Grimm whose versions are most recognized. In European patriarchal society, their stories held more sway than the "wives tales" of women. However, their tellings did not limit their female characters to such narrowing perspectives as more modern artists have, such as Walt Disney, who Gould describes as "the most patriarchal of all tale-tellers," for he shifted the focus in his fairytales "from the heroine's transformation to the hero's courage, as hero and witch
do battle for possession of the girl...[and] the girl's best hope for survival is that 'Someday my Prince will come'' (xx). In fact, Zipes maintains that Perrault's collection of fairytales dealt with a wide variety of female characters all of whom are in "desperate situations, and how their qualities enable them to triumph and find their proper place in society under masculine domination" (Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Other Classic Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, xvii). His women may not always have the means to kill Bluebeard as the heroine's brothers do, or trick an ogre as Hop o' My Thumb does, but they manage to make their way in the world through their own wits and talents. Zipes explains that "more than any of the important male writers of fairy tales before him...Perrault initiated a male discourse about gender relations that became foundational to the rise of the literary fairy tale as genre and cultural institution" (Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Other Classic Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, xvii). Gender remains a significant field of study in fairytales, and many scholars have scrutinized the gender stereotypes and roles in these traditional tales.

Females dominate the fairytale world, from beautiful princesses to hard-working serving girls, from kindly old ladies to wicked stepmothers, and from evil queens to powerful fairies. As feminist scholar Cristina Bacchilega states, "for girls and women, in particular, the fairy tale's magic has assumed the contradictory form of being both a spiritual enclave supported by old wives' wisdom and an exquisitely glittery feminine kingdom" (5). The stories offer a refuge from the drudgeries of normal life and create beautiful dream-like worlds for women to escape to in their imaginations. These tales emphasize important skills in order for women to survive in
a male dominated world, such as how to act resourcefully and carefully, and how to catch a rich husband in times when women had no financial means of their own. They also warn of villainous men such as Bluebeard (who murdered his wives) or sexual predators as the Wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*. At the same time the stories perpetuate patriarchal views of womanly virtues through the presence of meek serving girls or princesses with more beauty than substance. Females are the characters in the roles of the most known fairytales, whether they are the beloved heroines (Cinderella and Snow White) or the dastardly villains (the Wicked Stepmother and the Evil Queen). Mass media has also linked fairytales with young girls. Disney markets its "princess line" only to little girls, making everything pink, sparkly, and only appearing in the girl toy aisle.

Despite the marketing of fairytales for young girls, the stories themselves carry a strong male voice. The heroines are always pretty and sweet, mastering domestic skills above all else. They are more often than not damsels in distress instead of knights in shining armor: Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Rapunzel, Little Red, and Cinderella all typically wait for a man to save them from their problems. Many modern authors and storytellers have tried to rectify this, such as Angela Carter in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and feminists have been examining the genre for several decades. As Bacchilega explains, "Feminists can view the fairy tale as a powerful discourse which produces representations of gender...and studying the mechanisms of such a production can highlight the dynamic differences and complex interdependence between 'Woman' in fairy tales and 'women' storytellers/writers and listeners/readers" (10). Modern retellings of traditional fairytales such as *Cinderella*
continue the main themes of perseverance and hope that persist in the early versions of the story while offering them a new framework of feminist power and initiative, allowing Cinderella to take charge of her own story and future.

**My Own Cinderella**

For my second dance piece comprising my thesis work, I created a twelve-minute ballet, *Cinderella*. The story of *Cinderella* has always been female dominated, with mother and daughter figures dictating the action. Cinderella's mother is the driving force of the magic and her daughter's future, while the father often disappears from the story entirely. The Prince is a symbol of Cinderella's future rather than a real character. I chose to focus on this aspect of the tale using an all female cast. The Prince became "the Royal," allowing the audience to make their own interpretations on his/her ambiguous gender, and the Ball Guests still danced in traditional waltz pairs despite everyone having the same gender. The absence of men allowed a greater level of equality, especially in the dance steps themselves. There was no traditional male ballet dancer, throwing the ballerina into the air and supporting all her body weight. Instead, my two main protagonists, Cinderella and the Royal, were both young woman of similar height who physically supported each other in a more balanced fashion, alternating the leader throughout their dances.

Perrault's *Cinderella* displays the traditionally worst traits of women as seen through the male gaze by use of the stepfamily. I wanted to move away from this view of the story; however, in a twelve-minute dance, there was not enough time to

---

12 Jessie Abdow (Ball Guest; Saturday Show) Nicole Brenner (Ball Guest), L. QingXian Comins-Sporbert (Royal), Rachel Davis (Stepsister), Sadie Gregory (Ball Guest), Fiona Grishaw-Jones (Ball Guest), Anna Krotinger (Cinderella), Shana Laski (Fairy), Cloie Logan (Ball Guest; Thursday/Friday Shows), and Maddy Paull (Stepsister)
give the Stepsisters a more complex background to explain their actions and treatment of Cinderella. I unfortunately did not have time to present them as more human representations as a means of combating the traditional jealous, spiteful stereotype. Instead, I decided to retain their mean and haughty traits and change the significance of these by using them as foils to the other characters in the story. As there are no men in my version, the Stepsisters are not fighting over the attention of one man, they are instead acting this way purely for their own advancement in society. It is not based on a competition of females for male attention, but a normal sibling rivalry, albeit a nastier one than simply competing with a sibling to get the last cookie at dinner or better grades in school. The pettiness and greediness of the Stepsisters became less a trait assigned to all women and was due to their individual personalities instead of their gender. There are many other types of women in my Cinderella, from the hopeful yet frustrated Cinderella, to the bored and dutiful Royal, to the spunky and playful Fairy, and even the simple one-dimensional Ball Guests. Cinderella and the Stepsisters no longer represent the only two aspects of female behavior, kind versus mean, sincere versus petty, and hard working versus lazy. Instead they are just three different women among the nine on stage, each with an individual personality.
My Choreography

My ballet opens with Cinderella sitting alone on stage, scrubbing the floor. She slowly rises and dances about the stage with a dream-like quality in her soft balances and turns as she imagines a better life. She is snapped out of her daydreaming by the appearance of her stepsisters and quickly returns to scrubbing the floor.

Fig. 18 Cinderella (Krotinger) wistfully thinking of a better life

Fig. 19 Stepsisters (Davis, Paull) sit on Cinderella (Krotinger)
The Stepsisters dance about, swaying their hips and showing off, each attempting to outdo the other as they step in front of each other and alternately display their high leg extensions. They notice Cinderella on the floor and begin to bully her, pushing her around the stage and then sitting on top of her. Once they've had their fun, they leave her on the floor and prance about with each other before leaving for a grand ball. Cinderella rushes after them in frustration, throwing her apron to the ground in anger, but they have already left. She sinks to the ground, unhappy with her lot in life.

![Image](image_url)

*Fig. 20 Fairy (Laski) playfully approaches Cinderella (Krotinger)*

The lights change to a magical purple, and the Fairy bursts onto the stage with a large leap, sparkling in the light and swirling her silver wings as she smiles knowingly at the audience. The Fairy turns to look at Cinderella who sits alone in despair, and then winks at the audience, giving a cheeky promise that she can fix this. As she dances exuberantly, she tosses Cinderella's offending apron off stage, and then waves her arms over the girl as if casting a spell. Eventually, the Fairy makes herself known to Cinderella, and as she dances with her to lift her spirits, she quite literally lifts Cinderella in the air several times. Cinderella mimics the Fairy's movements and
jumps into her arms as the Fairy offers her support, joy, and just a touch of magic. A pair of sparkling blue pointe shoes descends from the air, and as Cinderella spins around, the Fairy reverses the girl's skirt, transforming it from a drab brown to a glittering blue. Cinderella is ushered offstage to prepare for the Ball. With a wave of the Fairy's arms, the scene changes to a magically lit ballroom, complete with Ball Guests.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 21** A Stepsister (Davis) dances for the uninterested Royal (Comins-Sporbert), while the other Stepsister (Paul) impatiently awaits her turn, and the Ball Guests continue to waltz in the background.

The Royal, whom I will refer to as female for consistency, makes a grand entrance by performing powerful jumps and welcoming gestures to all her guests. The Stepsisters rush in, having changed into their Ball finery of tutus and large net hats. Everyone curtsies to their partners and begins to dance. As the Ball Guests perform waltz steps in pairs, the Stepsisters alternately pull the Royal back and forth between

---

13 Due to a technical difficulty, Cinderella's shoes were not used on the night of dress rehearsal when the photographs were taken and are not pictured in the subsequent images. The shoes are shown in fig. 24.
them as she tries to waltz with each of them. The Stepsisters each try to show off for the Royal, with each performing a series of complex jumps and large flourishes. Annoyed, the Royal looks on as they fight over her and rolls her eyes as she's pulled between the two. The Stepsisters tap their feet in frustration whenever the Royal switches partners, and the dancing becomes more frantic as the Ball progresses. In contrast, the Ball Guests continue to waltz in the back, oblivious to the action downstage. The Ball Guests and the Stepsisters then join by forming two circles around the Royal just as the Fairy enters with Cinderella in tow, who wears her sparkling shoes and a mask to hide her identity. The Stepsisters find themselves dancing with the Ball Guests, and are disgruntled as they discover that this newcomer is an obstacle and they have been left in the background. To their consternation, Cinderella and the Royal begin a romantic duet.

![Image of Cinderella and the Royal dancing](image)

*Figure 22 Cinderella (Krotinger) and the Royal (Comins-Sporbert) alternately support each other*

The Royal and Cinderella waltz with one another as the Ball Guests remain one phrase behind them in their dance. Their duet is tender and well balanced, each alternately turning the other and offering their support as they *penché* into or jump off
each other. They twirl around center stage while the Fairy conducts the action from the side, in her own small pool of light. The Fairy walks off stage, arms held in a clock formation, signifying a warning of the time. Cinderella, dreamily lost in her dancing with the Royal, suddenly hears the strike of the clock; midnight has arrived.

As the music chimes out the twelve hours, the lights dim to a surreal setting, and everyone except for Cinderella continues to waltz in a mechanical fashion. The Royal moves as though Cinderella is still dancing with her, as all the dancers become stuck in a time loop, unaware of Cinderella and her inner turmoil. Cinderella tears off her mask and worryingly moves about the stage, circling around the Royal and backing away from her Stepsisters. The rest of the dancers move their arms like a clock hand, faces expressionless and mechanical, showing the never-ending progression of time. Cinderella, knowing she must leave before her Stepsisters recognize her, starts to exit and looks back at the Royal. As she does, she catches sight of her shoe, and in a spur of the moment epiphany, leaves it at the Royal's feet as a small clue to her identity.
Once she departs, the lights return to normal, and the Ball Guests waltz offstage oblivious to the strange hole in time they were just in. The Stepsisters make one last whirl around the Royal before they too exit, unaware of what has transpired. The Royal spots the shoe and holds it close to her chest, the only remnant of the wonderful woman with whom she has fallen in love.

![Cinderella (Krotinger) in ball gown and shoes; detailed view of shoes](image)

The Royal moves about the stage, gesturing with the shoe as she laments the loss of her mystery woman. The Fairy enters and circles behind the Royal, flinging her arms behind her as though giving the Royal an idea to search for the foot to fit the shoe. The Ball Guests enter in a line and the Royal hurries down, repeatedly attempting and failing to get the shoe on any of their feet. Each Ball Guest reacts differently, either crying in defeat, stomping their foot in anger, scoffing in offense,
or sighing with despair, representing myriad attitudes and versions of disappointment people face in daily life. They run off together with all hope lost as the Royal also looks unsure of where to go next. But the Fairy once more approaches her, and the two exit together to find Cinderella.

The lights reappear on Cinderella who, as she reminisces of her time at the ball, performs smaller versions of her duet with the Royal and dreamily gazes into the distance. Once more, the Stepsisters interrupt her reverie, and toss her to the ground. They waltz with each other as they laugh at Cinderella, cruelly rubbing the fact that she was unable to attend the ball in her face. They push her around again, returning to their favorite pastime of bullying their stepsister. Cinderella is still stuck at their mercy, but the audience begins to see her anger and determination to leave them behind. Once more they sit on her, just as the Royal enters with the shoe. Cinderella attempts to gain the Royal's attention, but her Stepsisters push her back and block her from view. The smaller one steals the Royal away, dancing with her and trying to
capture her attention, while the taller one uses Cinderella as a stepping stool to remove her own shoe. The taller one rushes over to the Royal to try on the magical shoe, while Cinderella rushes off stage to fetch its matching pair. The Stepsisters fail to shove their feet into Cinderella's shoe, and in desperation begin to grab for it, shoving the Royal in their haste. Cinderella re-enters and pulls the Stepsisters off the Royal. They move to yank her back and she once more pushes them off, giving them a look of defiance. In shock, the Stepsisters move away and begin to cry over their failure, collapsing in a heap of tears.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 26 Cinderella (Krotinger) and the Royal (Comins-Sporbert) are reunited, while the Ball Guests waltz in the back and the Stepsisters (Davis, Paull) cry off to the side.

Meanwhile, the Royal recognizes Cinderella as she places the shoe on her foot. They dance together tenderly once more, and the Ball Guests enter and dance with them, sharing their joy. The Fairy enters and jumps to center stage, where she winks at the audience, proving that her work is done. She throws her arm up and releases a small handful of glitter, letting the last of her magic settle. The lights dim and she flicks her wrist, signifying the story has come to an end as the lights drop to
black. The magic is over, and the story has ended, the suspended reality of the fairytale disappearing with the dance.

***

The greatest challenge of this piece was working within a short time limit. I did not have an hour to focus on the characters' growth and change, nor was there time to explore the history of each character's background and personality. I had to rely on the archetypes of the fairytale and the knowledge that the audience would recognize the basic plot. Instead, I focused on the themes and representation of the fairytale. My use of an all-female cast helped to equalize the characters and allowed me to represent individuals rather than gender stereotypes. I also played upon the similarities between the magic of the stage and the magic in a fairytale. The Fairy often broke the fourth wall, acknowledging the audience with a wink or smile as she performed her playful magic. She knew it was a story, but one that she would help come true. Her magic allowed Cinderella's dreams to be realized, much as the magic of stories and the stage can help inspire people to achieve their own dreams. The spell of this fairytale dance may end, but the enchantment of story and dance never does. It continues to entrance audiences, pulling them into that narrative world where performance, reality, and magic all begin to blur. The Fairy ends the piece signifying that she has done her job, but her knowing wink and toss of glitter also hint that while the magic here might be done, it continues elsewhere in our lives.
Conclusion: Happily Ever Dancing

Ballets such as The Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake, The Firebird, Giselle, and many more "are essentially fairy tales, composed by bricolage with features that define the genre: supernatural and mysterious beings, a prevailing atmosphere of enchantment and vulnerability to destiny, and opening onto another, imaginary world that is only accessible through the work of art...Both as an artifact and as a process, a fairytale ballet reveals the reason that the [fairytale] genre is hard to pin down: it is a narrative, the labour of many hands in constant action over time, not tied to a specific medium, and its manifestations are fluid; they do not keep still." ~Marina Warner

Throughout my thesis, I have explored the use of choreography in conveying the theme of a story. Choreographers such as Ashton, Nureyev, and Marin have all infused their narratives with their own personal styles and histories.

Cinderella is a varied tale that has taken thousands of forms throughout the years, from oral tellings, to written short stories, to novels, to films, to dance. Over time it has garnered both praise and criticism from feminist scholars who discuss the merits of Cinderella's humility and obedience versus her hard work and perseverance. Is Cinderella a helpless damsel who depends on a fairy godmother to gain her freedom? Or is she an industrious young woman who overcomes an abusive family to find a true sense of self? It all depends upon who is telling the tale.

Ashton's Cinderella can be seen as a rather traditional heroine, waiting for help from others before taking action. She may be kind and beautiful, and at times playful, but she has little agency in her own life. But can we blame her for her inaction? Where else would Ashton's Cinderella go? In the late 1940s, when Ashton

---

14 Once Upon a Time: a short history of fairy tale, pg. 160
created his ballet, women rarely held jobs or supported themselves financially. Cinderella had little choice but to live with her family and appease her stepsisters, lest she be thrown to the street. Economy kept her from leaving home or rebelling against her family. All her wealth lay with her father, who let the Stepsisters push him around. Cinderella was forced to wait until her "societal patron" came to offer her guidance. Ashton's tale stays true to Perrault's version, in which the fairy godmother is less a creature of magic but more of societal importance. Warner explains that Perrault believed it was crucial for every person to have a societal patron in their lives, and in his *Cinderella*, Perrault "shifts the origin of her [the fairy godmother's] powers from supernatural to social: from gods to patricians" (30). Cinderella is a woman of her time, struggling through the patriarchal world that keeps her dependent upon her father's home and her prince's love. Ashton's ballet gives humor to Cinderella's misfortune, allowing the audience to view the difficulties of poverty and class boundaries in a lighthearted and entertaining display.

Nureyev's heroine is slightly more active: she achieves the career of her dreams by the finale. While his Cinderella finds her happiness with a man, it is left ambiguous whether she finds love or just has great chemistry with her new acting partner. Cinderella spends a great deal of time dreaming and wishing about her future, performing a tap dance as she imagines herself as Fred Astaire, or repeating the steps she learned at the filming as though her mere memory of them can bring the happiness of it all back (in some ways it does). Cinderella dreams big and is rewarded for her kind heart and graceful dancing, but is it Cinderella herself who garnered her own happy ending? Once again, Cinderella's patron, the Producer, causes the events
to unfold, presenting Cinderella with all the right opportunities. The Producer leads her to the set and convinces her to sign the studio contract leading her towards a successful career. Is Cinderella's tale a realistic outcome? Would she have accomplished her dreams without outside help? It is uncertain if Nureyev's Cinderella had the power to make her own dreams come true, but what matters is they did come to fruition. As Warner states, fairytales "are messages of hope arising from desperate yet ordinary situations" (96). Just as Nureyev's own success came from one snap decision mixed with luck that enabled him to leave behind his home country and transform himself into a ballet superstar in the Western world, Cinderella is just an ordinary person who reached her dream and freedom through help and a little luck. Nureyev's ultimate message is that her tale of success is possible, and it could happen to anyone, no matter how hopeless one's situation might be.

Marin's ballet tells a tale of childhood and growing up, defeating one's self doubt and the darkness that may surround one in life. Her Cinderella, so awkward and uncoordinated, is not the graceful princess Perrault and many others imagined her to be. Despite her doll-like appearance, this Cinderella is real and human. She struggles not only with an abusive family and a difficult home, but with her own failures and faults. Marin's Cinderella has far less blessings than in Ashton or Nureyev's versions—no playful grace to win a prince's love, nor beautiful dancing and acting talent to gain a studio contract. She has only her still child-like appearance and abilities, as well as the insecurities of an adolescent. She cannot charge forth into the world to make her own destiny, not because of money or lack of opportunity, but due to lack of confidence. After years of abuse from her stepfamily, both physical and
emotional, she no longer sees the worth in herself, so she must wait for someone else to recognize it for her. She must wait for a prince, for a fairy godmother, or for any form of love, and as Gould describes, "while she waits, she works her way through the darkness of depression" (4). Her fairy godmother makes her feel beautiful and grown up, and the Prince gives her love and friendship. With the help of those around her, Cinderella is finally able to shed her insecurities and become a true heroine and princess, someone of kindness, grace, love, strength, and hope.

Through my own choreography, I have learned about characterization through movement and how to best portray personalities through differing technical styles. I have also played with mixing theme and plot to best convey a seamless narrative. My dances allowed me to investigate common themes in fairytales, such as the cycle of generations and passage of time along with female power and the connection between fantastical events in life and on stage. I explored the use of familiar fairytales to help the audience understand the basic plot of the story while adding my own interpretations and insights to the original narratives.

For further research on the subject, I would examine more current choreographers, such as Matthew Bourne, Mats Ek, and Austin McCormick whose innovative interpretations of classic narratives are shaping the ongoing world of ballet. Another relative topic would be how choreographers have approached other classic narratives outside of the fairytale genre, such as Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2011). I would also research how dance has been

---

15 Bourne's *The Sleeping Beauty* (2012) mixes gothic vampires with the traditional tale. Ek has reinterpreted many classics, such as *Juliet and Romeo* (2013), focusing on the underlying emotions of the tales. McCormick's Company XIV has adapted several fairytales such as *Snow White* (2016) and *Cinderella* (2015) with mixtures of burlesque and baroque technique.
used to convey narrative in other cultures and dance styles, such as in Bharata
Natyam, a classical South Indian dance form, and in companies that contemnorize the
form, such as Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, who in 2015 choreographed her
interpretation of Petipa's La Bayadère.

The three ballets I have examined are more than just a set of technical steps
and movements. They are journeys that evoke feeling and response, causing the
audience to experience love, sympathy, joy, anger, despair, excitement, and hope.
They resonate with audience members and their own lives by connecting them to
worlds of magic, fantasy, and beauty. Through pantomime, expression, and
technique, different characters and personalities are created: Ashton's Passive
Stepsister and Marin's awkward Cinderella fail to complete their balletic steps, which
induces sympathy in the audience. Both Ashton and Nureyev's playful and dreamy
Cinderellas dance with a broom or tap with a hat stand, allowing the audience to
dream with them. The cruel Stepmothers make gruesome faces or gestures with their
bodies, creating a sense of fear and hatred, and amplifying the absence of a loving
family. And the beautiful leaps and turns that Cinderella and the Prince take as they
find love and happiness display the achievement of what seems impossible.

***

When I was little, I used to imagine myself as a fairy princess, dancing across
the stage in a frilly tutu and glittering tiara. Now, my dreams have changed, but even
if they seem impossible some days, I know that with a little perseverance and hard
work, those dreams can still come true. As Gould so wisely explains, perhaps the
story of Cinderella is so beloved and well-known "because all of us, male and female,
have known despair—and will again, several times in a lifetime—seeing ourselves as unwanted, looked down on by others, forced to do work that is beneath us, even as we remain hopeful that sooner or later we will rise above our circumstances” (39). Fairytales have taught me to believe in the impossible. Ballet taught me to love reality. Together, they offer not just entertainment, but hope for our futures and the possibility of the impossible.
Bibliography


