

## **Women's Role Patterns in Fairy Tales: "How does Cinderella find her boots today?"**

Márta Várnagy

### **Short description:**

This workshop will make participants sensitive to the problem of the traditional gender roles represented in tales. Female archetypes in literature strongly influence our ideas about gender roles. During the teamwork portion of the workshop, the participants are investigating female aspects of fairy tales and their effects on the everyday choices of our life. Based on the Cinderella story: changing the subject of a story can mean being able to change the subject of our own lives.

**Participants:** 5-10 enthusiastic people.

**Tools:** A set of pictures showing skinny models, pop stars, businesswomen cut-out from lifestyle magazines, scissors, paper, glue, a blackboard or large piece of paper.

**Duration:** 90 min (or as long as the discussion takes).

### **Introduction: A journey based on a personal story of the workshop leader explaining the premise of the workshop (example below).**

During the Christmas fever I had to look after the sons of my friend. After eating the obligatory ice cream we went in a shopping centre to hide from the cold winter wind and to have some fun. As a practicing nanny, I made a huge mistake: I suggested going into a toyshop. The boys were lost, they wanted to have everything, and they kept me asking whether Jesus could bring them this match box or that Lego pirate island under the Christmas tree and if yes how does he or his angels manage to do this. As they were asking me these complicated questions we were walking between the shelves; the boys consequently just skipped and ignored the right side. The right shelves were painted pink; they were full of Barbies, gold glittered horses and tiny, shiny jewellery. I asked them why do they not choose something from there too, and they answered with the self-confidence of five and seven year old boys: These are girlie things; we don't care about stuff like that. Sadly enough, it is not only them who do not care about girlie things. It is actually not their fault that those shelves are separate, and the choices to make what and how to play are given

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from adults. That is how the representation of the gender has been working for centuries. Its deepest roots are planted in the archetypical patterns, in the collective consciousness of the human race, in tales, in ancient stories and as a result: in toy shops too! The following workshop reflects these patterns and tries to show them through the following tasks into our consciousness.

## **The workshop made up of three main interactive parts:**

### **1. Story-telling**

In the first part, the participants should retell the tale of Cinderella in small groups. After, the groups should share the details that were common or different from the others versions according to their memories about the tale. This exercise will help the group collect the most important motifs such as the helping characters, the enemy and the main conflict of the tale. (Write the results on a large piece of paper or blackboard).

### **2. When the prince comes... everything will be just ok?**

A short scene or trailer should be shown from a romantic movie. I would suggest films like *Bridget Jones' Diary* or *Pretty Woman*. After watching have a discussion with the entire group using the following questions:

- What are the similarities between the movie and the tale?
- How is the female role in the two stories represented?
- What should women be like?
- How is love/God's love present in those stories?
- What does it mean for the main character to find her love?

### **3. Imagine**

At the end the participants should choose among pictures from magazine photos for each category (motives, characters, enemies etc.) of the tale. The more modern and provocative pictures that are collected by the leader of the workshop, the better! After gathering the pictures each person should find a calm corner in the room and write a new story with the

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help of the Cinderella tale and the chosen photos. The participants should form groups and introduce the new story in an artistic way to the others. (For example: a puppet show, play or dance).

### **Sharing the experiences**

Once all the groups have introduced their new version of Cinderella, they should discuss why they chose to play a certain character or motive and how it felt. At the end of the workshop time should be ensured for discussing the possibilities of modern varieties of fairy tales' expectations in life and how the new stories remind them of something that they experience from their everyday life or if they are general stereotypes transferred by the media.

Hopefully the questions in the workshop both will go beyond given time limit. I wish thoughtful and interesting discussions for everyone. If you use this resource please let me know how the workshop went; suggestions, experiences and eventually the modern versions of the tale are very welcome too!

### **About the Author**

When Márta is not reading, hiking or planting, she is studying an International Relations Masters in a German language University in Budapest, writing articles and taking a slow speed PhD in literature theory in contemporary feminist literature criticism. Márta serves as well as the gender programme coordinator on WSCF European Regional Committee. Email: [eventscoord2@wscf-europe.org](mailto:eventscoord2@wscf-europe.org).

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