

1st Place

A Tale of Two Brothers

By Vihaan Sinha

My brother is my closest companion

He always makes me so proud

Our souls and minds are like that of no other

We always find comfort with each other around

We swim side by side

And snuggle in our twin blankets, to gaze at the stars - spellbound

Our love for soccer brings out our cold rivalry

But in the end, we hug each other, like brothers newfound

I love my brother with all my heart

Like the deep depths of the ocean so profound

He's my knight in shining armor

One who always inspires me to find happiness abound!

2nd Place

Essay: “Cinderella” Culture Comparisons

By Neiv Sinha

Did you know that different cultures have different versions of many common stories? “Cinderella”, a staple fairy tale today, is one such story. Different cultures, varying from Caribbean to African, have their own versions of this magnificent story. The version I will speak about today is the version from India by Lila Mehta, “Anklet for a Princess”. I will be comparing and contrasting its cultural differences with the modern French version we all know today, written by Charles Perrault in the 17th century.

First, I will provide a basic synopsis for each story, the very ones that we know so well today. The paraphrased storyline goes as follows - young Cinderella grows up with a mean stepmother and cruel stepsisters, and is treated very poorly. When a large ball rolls around, Cinderella wishes to attend, but possesses no ability to go. However, her fairy godmother grants her special clothes and transportation(for a limited time). The prince is smitten, and hunts for the owner of the left behind slipper. After Cinderella tries the slipper and it fits, she becomes the prince’s bride. The Indian version, penned by Lila Mehta, goes as follows - Cinduri grows up with a horrid sister and an equally horrible stepmother, and is left to do all the housework. Soon, it is the last night of the festival of Navaratri, and the famous Prince of Suryanagar will be there. Cinduri wishes to attend, but cannot. However, her adopted Godfather Snake(a powerful Indian lake naga) grants her clothes to attend the festival, including beautiful silver anklets. The Prince is smitten, and vows to have her hand in marriage. When Cinduri tries on the anklet, she is married to the Prince. As you can see, these stories are quite similar, yet have many subtle differences in their own cultural aspects.

Now, I will locate the many contrasting points that show the unique cultures of ancient India and revolutionary France, and the most subtle of details are also the most telltale of signs - indicators of cultural aspects. There are many categorizations of the provided cultural examples, including but not only geography, customs, and economics/power distribution. "Anklet for a Princess" takes place in post-Moghul(pre-Britain) India 1000 years ago. The common method of transportation was on foot, as opposed to "Cinderella" by Perrault, which includes but is not subject to the original horse-and-carriage ideology. Also, most dwellers in "Anklet for a Princess" live on farms, except for royals and nobles, who would live in palaces. Though royals in "Cinderella" also live in palaces, the main difference is that the people of revolutionary France lived in homes(for the most part). There was also a large gap in between farms, which was not quite the case in France. The following traditional/customs aspect includes a lot of details about the daily life of people living in the textual time periods. The first and main look into this is through food. In "Anklet for a Princess", foods such as yogurts, cheeses, rice, and many East Indian sweets. In the French version, the notion of food is not quite as obvious, though there is a subtle reference to pumpkins in Cinderella's garden - meaning many vegetables were typically eaten. Another unanswered detail of "Anklet for a Princess" is the mention of diseases, specifically the waterborne disease of cholera, which killed Cinduri's unfortunate parents, and other villagers. However, there is no mention of sickness or disease in Perrault's "Cinderella".

Next, another subtle detail is the direct relation of the Godparent to the characters' families. For example, in "Anklet for a Princess", Cinduri is adopted by Godfather Snake, whereas the fairy Godmother in Perrault's version is actually Cinderella's Godmother. A key culture indicator(also our next main difference) is attire. In "Anklet for a Princess", Cinduri goes to the festival dressed in a traditional sari(a common type of clothing for Indian women, even today) woven from gold threads, which was obviously very valuable then and now as well. Also, she wore beautiful silver anklets(a type of special Indian "ankle bracelet" worn at festivities that has bells around it, so that when you

walk the bells make sounds; primarily worn by women), the equivalent of Cinderella's famed glass slippers. Silver, another of the precious metals was also very valuable at the time. Cinderella from Perrault's version went to the ball wearing a gown of gold and silver(beset with jewels, too) and the famous glass slippers. Glass was also very valuable at the time, as this was when revolutionary France was going through its glassmaking phase, making glass a very valuable substance if you could get your hands on it. Now, I will analyze the royals and their domain. The kingdom of Suryanagar(an old region near present day Bihar and Kolkata) had a Prince of Suryanagar and a King of Suryanagar, the head of the kingdom. There was also mention of other nobles, so there was probably a royal court, too. Another miscellaneous difference was the reference in "Anklet for a Princess" towards religion. It refers to Hinduism(specifically the worship of the goddess of protection, Durga)'s Festival of Navaratri(Na-va-ra-thri), a celebration of the goddess Durga every autumn for nine days(this year it starts on September 29 and ends on October 8). However, "Cinderella" by Perrault has no mention of any religion. This proves that cultures are very unique and they have their own unique influences on all society, which is important around our world today.

Now I will be comparing, or finding the similarities between the cultures, the two stories. Again, I will be doing this in a quite similar fashion - by dividing into three sections, geography, customs, and government/miscellaneous. Both "Anklet for a Princess" and "Cinderella" have rich nobles living in a palace and poor to middle class living simply, to say the least. Cinduri lives on a farm that she must maintain, as she belongs to the lower class. Cinderella's middle class family lives in a simple house. Next, both the Godparents are capable of lots of magic, playing a very key and relevant part in the unfolding of the story. On to customs - first is housework. Both Cinduri and Cinderella have to do a lot of daily housekeeping, revealing that both cultures put a lot into the maintaining of the household. Large parties were also held(balls, festivals, etc.) when there was a cause for celebration. Cooking was also a large part of both cultures, though more so of "Anklet for a

Princess”, as Cinduri cooked all meals. Also, both of the stories’ special clothing items were made of valuable materials of the provided time periods, as well as both major events(Festival of Navaratri and Cinderella’s ball) were of large importance and relevance - displaying much information about the importance of celebrations in each culture. Next, it is clear in both “Anklet for a Princess” and “Cinderella” that the royals live in lavish palaces, but are also kind or understanding, which shows that being kind is also important to each culture. Sadly, there is also reference to abusive actions, be it physical(“Anklet for a Princess”) or verbal(“Cinderella”). In “Anklet for a Princess”, Cinduri’s stepmother tells her, “You will get a beating if you have left anything undone!” This indicates that physical abuse was also an unfortunate part of society back then, which makes it a part of the culture. Similarly, Cinderella’s mean stepsisters called her “Cinderwench”, which is a nasty case of verbal abuse. This may have been a part of their culture. That concludes our comparison of the two texts, revealing many hidden similarities in the cultures of ancient India and new France.

In conclusion, the cultures of both “Anklet for a Princess” and “Cinderella” are different and yet very similar. The cultures of India and France shine through the pages of these centuries old stories, providing a true glimpse of the values and ways of life in these areas and time periods. This very reason was the beginning motive of stories themselves - to convey lessons and morals of life and identity of one’s culture. So, how did your own culture become known to the world? It was probably through stories like these, and real life experiences.

3rd Place

The Nights

By Selomane Thomas

There she has come with her night dress from the bush. The woods were on top of her head. She brought them home for a plea to keep living there. As she arrived, her mother cleared her sight with her hands groping nothing beyond her eyes as the queen has come back home. After she had put the woods down, she was followed by a warm hug from her mother but her father wasn't pleased at all. Because her little princess flew to her prince at the place post the bushes. Prince is a rich young man whom possesses farms and cattle. His father passed away and left him with the wealth. Princess did not like to be treated carelessly and that is what made her come back early. Nonetheless, she was welcomed at home for coming back and she cried softly with tears of joy.

"Where have you been baby" said her mother. Oh! mom, " I was quite curious to meet Prince and I can't deceive about any of that. I thought I was gonna find peace there because I left with fury here at home. As you can see, I left here so thin as a biltong because father doesn't nourish my heart with custard and chocolate. I need happiness". "Of course my dear, you should find happiness but to flee was never a good option. See now you're back". She lies, "I am just back because I miss my family. It is great there, you should come with me one day". "You're insane, haven't you met some fairies on your way to your prince? I hate them". With a tear droplet, "I met them on the way they sent me to fetch water at night and I found a way to come back home".

I wished like I could demonstrate what exactly happened that night. It has happened unplanned and unconsciously. Also unexpectedly. It is not a deed. Genuinely, I didn't know if there are fairies and wolves in the bushes because I have usually taken the way during daylight. That time it was at

night. The stars were shining so bright and the moon was still sleeping. I swear you could not see a way. You could not see where you're heading to. I was walking and jumping the thorn trees over the night. A frown was bulging larger and larger on my face. My heartbeat was hitting hundred times per minute. So much faster and faster than the tick of a clock. My eyes were blinking and wandering faster than the stars. I was about to pass water in the darkness. And I was drowning with distress.

"Daughter, tell me now. You think dad abhors you?" he said. "Not at all" I responded. "Here at home, everyone must do as I please, I'm the head of this house" he said pointing the roof. "Of course you're the head, but my daughter has the privileges" responded the mother. "The privileges for what? For crawling at night in the bushes? You should think twice" he opposed with anger. "You see mom, I don't have freedom here at home, I wish I could fly back to Prince". "Fly girl! You will regret. Anyway, why don't you tell us what happened on your way back to home? You could have died now. Let's hear" he said with severe curiosity. "It's a long story, ain't you happy as I'm alive?". "You could have died" said the mother. "I know but it was just the fairies and wolves at my back and front".

When it was about time to sleep, I sat cautiously on the stool in the kitchen. I wanted everyone to sleep then I can flee to Prince. They had no delicious food at home and I knew that Prince will welcome me with pizza and soft drinks. Finally, everyone was now groaning like the tractors in the farms of Prince. I went to the door and there were no keys. Oh no! I walked side to side confused. I thought of jumping one of the dining room windows but then there were burglars with narrow spaces. I swear your hand would not fit in there. I thought of searching my father's wardrobe. But that one was never an option. A fairy with a mixture of blue and yellow colors, long black nails and a thin tail at the back, has come.

It was two o'clock in the midnight when the fairy has come to advise me and open me all the house doors. It had opened and we sat on the doorstep. A feeling of guilt came to my lungs as I started to breathe rapidly and infinitely.

And the fairy comforted, " don't be scared, feel free. You have me. I can help you with what you need anytime." I stared the space as I sighed. "Let me fly you to Prince's house" the fairy said. I gave it a long glance. As the corks were about to alarm us, "thanks a lot" I said as the fairy was about to disappear like mist. I closed all the doors and windows and got to my room. I opened my door cautiously and sat on my light brown bed with pink sheets as I entered. I cried silently as the saddest song was playing in my neighbour's apartment. And I got asleep.

Prince called and I was still asleep. He came at home with his brown horse. "Greeting at home, can I introduce myself?" Prince said. "There's no need. I know you, I guess" said the father. " Are you Prince?" asked the mother with a soft tone. " What do you want here?" the father asked with strong curiosity. "Oh! Of course madam, it's Prince. Princess no longer comes to my house since she left and it's been a long time now. I know she was used to flee and come back but now it's like she won't come again. I regret everything. I have gifts in the cart for a precious apology. I have been in love for long with her. I have bought you a mansion in Johannesburg, Sandton. I hope you gotta love it. Can I see her please"

I was still asleep at that time but he waited until I woke up. He conversed some fairy tales on the fire with my parents as a way of convincing them. He wanted to marry me. I finally woke and I heard my parents saying, "you are a rarely found person in the world. Our daughter is lucky to get you". As I appeared wearing my wedges, long earrings and a long white dress, he attacked me. He took my left hand and fitted in a shiny gold ring on my second finger. And we married. My parents were happy as we found happiness.

They moved on to their mansion in Sandton. A week past and he bought them a car as we were about to move in our estate in Los Angeles. We took a flight after a warm goodbye to our parents.