

hemispheric or global numerical composite, the authors say, but still are revealing. “The picture emerges from many localities” that the Little Ice Age and the Medieval Warm Period were indeed “widespread” phenomena, even if not “precisely timed or synchronous.”

As for the rising thermometer readings of the 20th century, say Soon and his colleagues, they appear in historical perspective “neither unusual nor unprecedented.”

Tree ring chronologies in one study “show that the Medieval Warm Period [was] as warm as, or possibly even warmer than, the 20th century,” at least for a region of the Northern Hemisphere.

The authors agree that human activity has had a significant impact on some local environments, but just how big a role humans have played in heating the atmosphere in recent decades remains up in the air.

## ARTS & LETTERS

### *A Cinderella Story*

“For Whom the Shoe Fits: Cinderella in the Hands of Victorian Illustrators and Writers” by Bonnie Cullen, in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (Jan. 2003), Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218-4363.

As if Cinderella didn’t have enough hardships in her storied life, it now appears that she’s also been a combatant in a centuries-long culture war. The Cinderella we know from the 1950 Disney movie and kindred print versions of the tale is not at all the girl she once was, writes Cullen, an art historian studying at the University of London.

Over the centuries, more than 300 Cinderella-type stories—with “an abused child, rescue through some reincarnation of the dead mother [such as a fairy godmother], recognition, and marriage”—appeared in Europe and Asia, Cullen notes. The earliest known version is from ninth-century China.



*Cinderella stands submissively to the side in a classic 1882 depiction of the tale by Thomas Seccombe.*

The Cinderella story that won out and became the basis for the now standard account in English was a French story about “Cendrillon,” which first appeared in English translation in 1729. Charles Perrault’s witty tale, which included “barbs at female sexuality and matriarchal figures,” was intended mainly for sophisticated adults, Cullen says, but by the late 18th century, “it had been watered down.” The trials and triumphs of Perrault’s long-suffering Cendrillon, a noble exemplar of grace in adversity, came to be enjoyed by both children and adults.

Yet Cinderella was still not ready for prime time. First she had to beat out two rivals, the Grimm brothers’ rustic heroine “Aschenputtel” and “Finette Cendron,” the more spirited Cinderella of a feminist French author, the Countess d’Aulnoy. Feisty Finette “engineers daring escapes” for her sisters and herself after they are abandoned by their parents, notes

Cullen, and later “refuses to marry the prince” until her parents’ lost kingdom is restored. But she was apparently no match for the bland Cendrillon.

Generous, charming, and good-humored in even the most difficult circumstances, Cendrillon was “the ideal bride, from the gentleman’s perspective,” Cullen maintains. And as 19th-century (male) illustrators and writers made her into a “vehicle for Victorian notions of femininity,” Cinderella became even more of an ideal. No longer did she make joking suggestions to her fairy godmother, and she averted her eyes when she took the prince’s hand. As a midcentury edition explicitly said, Cinderella “made a most excellent wife.” Instead of nobility, her youthful beauty became her chief asset, and her stepsisters—never ugly in Perrault’s original treatment—turned into repellent hags. Cinderella was finally ready for Disney.

## *Bright Lights, Broken Dreams*

“An Empirical Study of Factors Relating to the Success of Broadway Shows” by Jeffrey S. Simonoff and Lan Ma, in *The Journal of Business* (Jan. 2003), Graduate School of Business, Univ. of Chicago, 1101 E. 58th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

The business of Broadway is as dramatic as anything that appears on the stage. In 1999, theatergoers bought more than 11 million tickets to the Great White Way’s dramas, comedies, and musicals, yielding gross revenues of more than \$550 million. Yet all too often failure waits in the wings: More than half of the 91 Broadway shows that opened in the three seasons from 1996–97 to 1998–99 closed after 10 or fewer performances. Only six shows, all of them musicals, ran for more than 800 performances: *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Ragtime*, *The Lion King*, and *Titanic*. Such winners can rake in profits of \$50,000 per performance, but investors in a loser can see their entire investment—as much as \$10 million for a musical—go right down the drain.

The rise of the musical is familiar to anybody who follows theater, but there’s another, less familiar story: the declining clout of the drama critic from *The New York Times*, that august personage who once held an almost absolute power of life and death on Broadway. After studying three Broadway seasons in the late 1990s, Simonoff, a professor of statis-

tics at New York University’s Stern School of Business, and Ma, a professor at Rider University, in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, found that many of the shows “got poor reviews in the *Times* but were very successful. [And] several shows getting very positive reviews closed very quickly.” Overall, the authors conclude, reviews in the *Times* had no impact at all on a show’s longevity.

That contrasts with favorable reviews in the tabloid *Daily News*, which were statistically associated with “a significantly more successful show,” report Simon and Ma. Of course, that may only mean that the *Daily News* is more in step with popular tastes, not that it is wielding *Times*-like influence.

Winning major Tony Awards can work wonders at the box office, Simonoff and Ma found. But winning a Tony nomination and then losing the award apparently hurts, as the producers and cast of *The Wild Party* learned during the 1999–2000 season. Nominated for four major Tony Awards, the musical won none. A week after the awards were announced, the show went dark.