

# What if Cinderella wanted to be a CEO?

Or, Cruella DeVil was not the kind of devil you thought she was? Modern movie retellings of classics are steering perceptions of good, bad and ugly women in a completely new direction. And it's a good thing...

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You don't need to think about the question posed in the headline for too long. Just watch the recently-released 'Cinderella' starring Camila Cabello. An all-out entertainer; it has familiar old and new songs. And it has a Cinderella whose desires run far beyond attending a ball and getting the prince, or everything we've been told so far in the fairy tale. Modern retellings of old classics are not a new trend as far as movies or books (see article below) are concerned.

Right now, let's concentrate on a few movies released in the last few years that show us women protagonists in an entirely new light. Some would say: why change classics when you can create new characters? The simple answer would be creative liberty. An even more straightforward one would be: well, why not? But the one that possibly could be more convincing is that every character in literature is open to interpretation to everyone who reads it.

Here's a bit of background...

In the last few years, fandoms have created a

far larger space online for people worldwide who interact and talk about their favourite books, movies and characters. Whether it's on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Reddit, heated debates, persuasive arguments, and various perceptions of stories and characters in fiction has made the current generation look at old stories in a new way.

Hence, when Cruella breaks the fourth wall to talk to the audience in the film 'Cruella', you sit up and take note. Something has changed. Cruella DeVil's portrayal so far has been primarily one-dimensional – evil and hilarious. The recent film talks to the girls and audience of today.

Here are a few lines to give you an example of what the film stands for: Cruella: "I guess you were always scared, weren't you, that I'd be a psycho...? Hmm? That explains all the 'tone it down, try and fit in' stuff. Love me into shape, I suppose was the plan. And I tried, I really tried... But the thing is, I'm not sweet Estella, try as I might. I never was. I'm Cruella, born brilliant, born bad, and a little bit mad."

Another film with women protagonists that was a hit with critics and audience alike was Greta Gerwig's 'Little Women', which came out in 2019. Now, you would think what could be new in a book that has been loved by women worldwide because of its

strong protagonists? By all means, reread the book, watch the early 90s hit movie version starring Susan Sarandon as Marmee. It's good. But Gerwig's adaptation will feel more familiar to today's audience. The candour in her version of the March sisters will win you over – to the extent that you may forget Louisa May Alcott published 'Little Women' in 1868.

## 'Stories we tell about women and girls'

In a 'New York Times' interview of Gerwig, writer Amanda Hess says: "...the film is less an update than it is an excavation – a kind of literary investigation of the characters, and their writer, and what they all really wanted. The result is a meta tale that cracks open the world of 'Little Women' to make a larger point about the stories we tell about women and girls. Reading the novel again as an adult, Gerwig, who is 36, was struck by how modern its dialogue felt once she brushed away the dusty surrounding material. "Things were jumping out at me that I felt like I'd never heard before," Gerwig said, like Marmee telling her daughter Jo: 'I am angry nearly every day of my life.' Sound familiar?

Here's a dialogue from the film by the protagonist Jo

March, played by Saoirse Ronan: "Women, they have minds, and they have souls, as well as hearts. And they've got talent, and they've got talent, as well as just beauty. I'm so sick of people saying that love is just all a woman is fit for."

In the same vein, when the new Cinderella, whose passion is to be a fashion designer, sees most shops in her village named 'So and So Sons', she is disappointed. She tries but is told off by everyone. She's made fun of. "A woman businesswoman, eh?" followed by laughter is all that she hears. But the smirks don't bother her. She tells the prince she shouldn't have to choose between love and her passion. But let's not get into the details. I don't want to spoil the movie plot. But you get the drift, right?

PS: For more on modern retellings of old classics, see: 'The List with a Twist' and '10 Retellings of Classic Literature Characters' on this page



## The list with a twist

Did you know these cute, romantic films were inspired from classic works of literature?

### CLUELESS

FROM: 'EMMA' BY JANE AUSTEN

Cher (Alicia Silverstone) is a rich high-school student who is learning to cope with adolescence and its problems. She also helps a new student gain popularity, and in the process, discovers her own feelings for someone.

### SHE'S THE MAN

FROM: 'TWELFTH NIGHT' BY SHAKESPEARE

Viola Johnson (Amanda Bynes) is in a real jam. Complications threaten her scheme to pose as her twin brother, Sebastian, and take his place at a new boarding school. She falls in love with her handsome roommate, Duke, who loves beautiful Olivia, who has fallen for Sebastian! Confused enough? There's more to follow...

### 10 THINGS I HATE ABOUT YOU

FROM: 'THE TAMING OF THE SHREW' BY SHAKESPEARE

Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles) is quite abrasive to most of her fellow teens, and doesn't attract boyfriends. Unfortunately for her younger sister, Bianca (Larisa Oleynik), house rules say that she can't date until Kat has a boyfriend, so strings are pulled to set the dour damsel up for a romance. Sound familiar?

### SHE'S ALL THAT

FROM: 'PYGMALION', GREEK MYTHOLOGY

When high school jock Zach is dumped by his queen-bee girlfriend, he makes a bet with his friends to take geeky Laney and make her prom queen. What he did not bet on was falling in love with her.

### BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY

FROM: 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE' BY JANE AUSTEN

At the start of the New Year, 32-year-old Bridget (Renée Zellweger) decides it's time to take control of her life – and start keeping a diary. With a taste for adventure, and an opinion on every subject, she's turning the page on a whole new life.

### A KNIGHT'S TALE

FROM: 'THE CANTERBURY TALES' BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

This quasi-medieval adventure comedy-romance film written, produced, and directed by Brian Helgeland, starred Heath Ledger as a peasant named William Thatcher. He begins a quest to change his stars, win the heart of a woman, and 'rock' his medieval world!

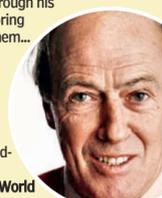
## Happy Birthday Roald Dahl

Born on September 13, 1916 the beloved British novelist gave us amazing nuggets of wisdom through his books and characters which can bring comfort even today. Here are some of them...

### On resolving indecision

"I will not pretend I wasn't petrified. I was. But mixed in with the awful fear was a glorious feeling of excitement. Most of the really exciting things we do in our lives scare us to death. They wouldn't be exciting if they didn't."

— Danny the Champion of the World



### On beauty

**MASTER OF WORDS**  
DID YOU KNOW THE POPULAR AUTHOR INVENTED MANY DELIGHTFUL WORDS?

- **Giganticous**: Something that is grand and spectacular
- **Scrumdiddlyumptious**: It is used for describing food which is utterly delicious
- **Huggybee**: A term of endearment which means as warm as a hug and as sweet as honey
- **Chuckle**: When someone is chuckling and gurgling both at the same time while laughing
- **Horripop**: A blend of the words: horrible and disgusting

"A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely."

— The Twits

**On hard work**  
"Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable..."

— Matilda

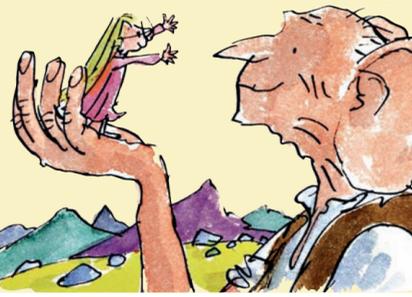
**On handling criticism**  
"I understand what you're saying, and your comments are valuable, but I'm gonna ignore your advice."

— Fantastic Mr Fox

### On the power of magic

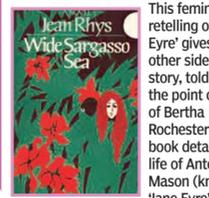
"...And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."

— Billy and The Minpins



## WIDE SARGASSO SEA

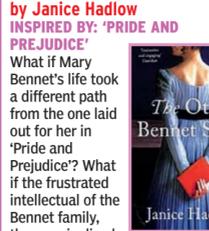
by Jean Rhys  
INSPIRED BY: 'JANE EYRE'



This feminist retelling of 'Jane Eyre' gives us the other side of the story, told from the point of view of Bertha Rochester. The book details the life of Antoinette Mason (known in 'Jane Eyre' as Bertha), a West Indian, who marries an unnamed man in Jamaica and returns with him to his home in England. Locked in a loveless marriage and settled in an inhospitable climate, Antoinette goes mad and is frequently violent, till her husband confines her to the attic of his house at Thornfield.

## THE OTHER BENNET SISTER

by Janice Hadlow  
INSPIRED BY: 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'



What if Mary Bennet's life took a different path from the one laid out for her in 'Pride and Prejudice'? What if the frustrated intellectual of the Bennet family, the marginalised middle daughter, the plain girl who takes refuge in her books, eventually found the fulfilment enjoyed by her prettier, more confident sisters? This is

## A THOUSAND SHIPS

by Natalie Haynes  
INSPIRED BY: 'THE ODYSSEY', 'THE ILIAD', 'THE AENEID' AND MORE GREEK MYTHS



From the Trojan women whose fates now lie in the hands of the Greeks, to the Amazon princess who fought Achilles on their behalf, to Penelope awaiting the return of Odysseus, to the three goddesses whose feud started it all, these are the stories of the women whose lives, loves, and rivalries were forever altered by the long and tragic Trojan War. This book is a woman's epic, powerfully imbued with new life.

## 10 RETELLINGS OF CLASSIC LITERATURE CHARACTERS

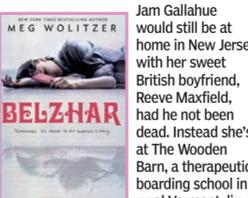


Have you wondered what happened to the quiet sister, Mary Bennet, in 'Pride and Prejudice'? What if Bertha Rochester in 'Jane Eyre' was driven mad because of societal expectations from a woman in her era?

the plot of 'The Other Bennet Sister', a debut novel with exactly the affection and authority to satisfy Austen fans.

### BELZHAR

by Meg Wolitzer  
INSPIRED BY: 'THE BELL JAR'

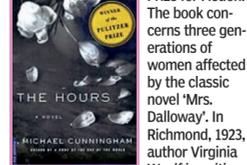


Jam Gallahue would still be at home in New Jersey with her sweet British boyfriend, Reeve Maxfield, had he not been dead. Instead she's at The Wooden Barn, a therapeutic boarding school in rural Vermont, living with a weird roommate, and signed up for an exclusive, mysterious class called Special Topics in English. A journal-writing assignment leads Jam to Belzhar, where the untainted past is restored, and Jam can feel Reeve's arms around her once again. But there are hidden truths on Jam's path to reclaim her loss.

### THE HOURS

by Michael Cunningham  
INSPIRED BY: 'MRS. DALLOWAY'

This novel by Michael Cunningham won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The book concerns three generations of women affected by the classic novel 'Mrs. Dalloway'. In Richmond, 1923, author Virginia Woolf is writing



'Mrs. Dalloway' and struggling with her own mental illness. In 1949 Los Angeles, Mrs Brown, wife of a World War II veteran, who is reading 'Mrs. Dalloway', plans her husband's birthday party. In 1959 New York City, Clarissa Vaughan plans a party to celebrate a major literary award received by her good friend and former lover, the poet Richard, who is dying.

### CRESS

by Marissa Meyer  
INSPIRED BY: 'RAPUNZEL'

In this third book in Marissa Meyer's bestselling 'Lunar Chronicles' series, Cinder and Captain Thorne are fugitives on the run, now with Scarlet and Wolf in tow. Together, they are plotting to over-

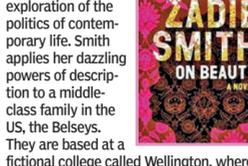
throw Queen Levana and prevent her army from invading Earth. Their best hope lies with Cress, a girl trapped on a satellite since childhood who's only ever had her netscreens as company.



### ON BEAUTY

by Zadie Smith  
INSPIRED BY: 'HOWARD'S END'

This novel by British author Zadie Smith, loosely based on 'Howards End' by E M Forster, is an exploration of the politics of contemporary life. Smith applies her dazzling powers of description to a middle-class family in the US, the Belseys. They are based at a fictional college called Wellington, where



earthy African American Kiki, abstract-and-English-Howard, and their three searching children seem the picture of modern liberal success. Yet in spite of their outward harmony and privilege, all are eagerly pursuing private agendas.

### MEG & JO

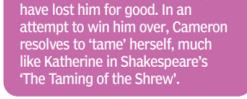
by Virginia Kantra  
INSPIRED BY: 'LITTLE WOMEN'

Meg and Jo is the story of the eldest March siblings, though Beth and Amy also appear. Though it takes place in our contemporary world, it still has the feel of 'Little Women'. In this 'New York Times' bestseller, Kantra captures the heart of the characters, and the essence of the original story, perfectly.

### IF I'M BEING HONEST

by Emily Wibberley and Austin Siegemund-Broka  
INSPIRED BY: 'THE TAMING OF THE SHREW'

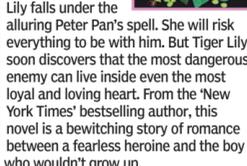
High school senior Cameron Bright is smart and mean. She's the queen bee at her private school – beautiful, talented, and notorious for her brutal honesty. So when she puts her foot in her mouth in front of her crush, Andrew, she fears she may have lost him for good. In an attempt to win him over, Cameron resolves to 'tame' herself, much like Katherine in Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew'.



### TIGER LILY

by Jodi Lynn Anderson  
INSPIRED BY: 'PETER PAN'

In the forbidden woods of Neverland, Tiger Lily falls under the alluring Peter Pan's spell. She will risk everything to be with him. But Tiger Lily soon discovers that the most dangerous enemy can live inside even the most loyal and loving heart. From the 'New York Times' bestselling author, this novel is a bewitching story of romance between a fearless heroine and the boy who wouldn't grow up.





# TRIUMPH OF THE WILL

Overcoming adversity is tough. To look beyond a handicap, and excel at an international level for the country, amidst the toughest of competitors, takes more than just training and practice. Will power, determination and the hunger to beat all odds to triumph is what sets these athletes apart. A look at a few who made their mark at the Tokyo Paralympics...

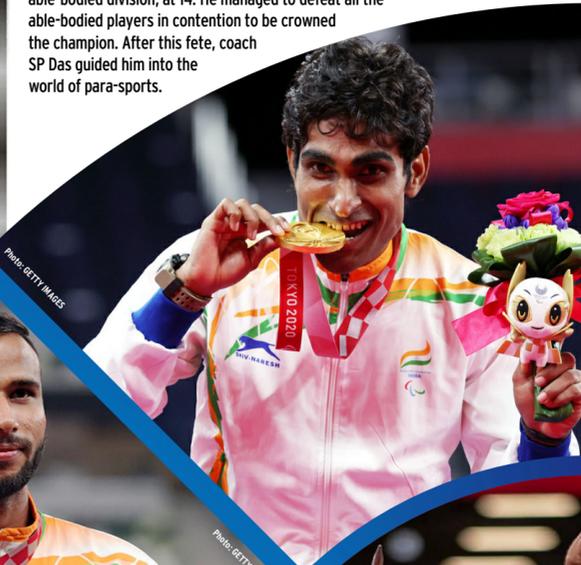
## PRAVEEN KUMAR - THE BOY WHO JUST GOOGLED IT

Unlike others, Praveen Kumar credits his entry into para-sports to Google. The high jumper, who won a silver medal in the Tokyo Paralympic Games, used to spend hours together googling high jump videos. Although volleyball was his first love, he happened to participate in a high jump contest under the able-bodied athletics competition. He later found out about the sports for the physically-challenged through Google. The 18-year-old who competed in his debut Paralympics set a new Asian record with a 2.07m jump.



## PRAMOD BHAGAT - THE INVINCIBLE SHUTTLE

Pramod Bhagat handed India its first Paralympic gold in badminton, in men's SL3 singles. His journey towards being a great athlete began in 2002. Pramod, who was struck by polio when he was five, took part in a district-level tournament, in the able-bodied division, at 14. He managed to defeat all the able-bodied players in contention to be crowned the champion. After this fete, coach SP Das guided him into the world of para-sports.



## AVANI LEKHARA - DOUBLE TREAT

Double Paralympic medalist Avani Lekhara took up shooting after reading Indian Olympic gold medalist Abhinav Bindra's autobiography. After a fateful car accident in 2012, the teen sustained spinal cord injuries which left her wheelchair-bound. In 2015, she took up shooting because her father was persistent. Today, Avani is the first Indian woman to win two Paralympic medals in a single Game.



## YOGESH KATHUNIYA - THROW OF FAITH

From being a naughty child to being fully paralysed, to finally winning a discus throw silver from a wheelchair in the F56 class, Yogesh's journey has been inspiring. Doctors had almost given up when Yogesh was diagnosed with a rare neurological disease. But his mother, Meena Devi, kept faith. Continuous treatments, and physiotherapy led to partial recovery. At college, athlete Sachin Yadav and Asian medalist Neeraj Yadav guided him towards para-sports. Starting off in standing category, he did not make much headway, but the wheelchair gave him the impetus he needed to get rolling.

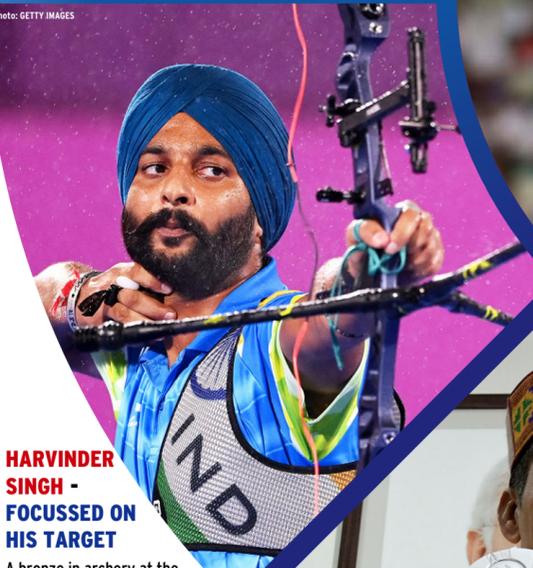


## SUMIT ANTIL - SHIFTING GEARS DID THE TRICK

After losing his left leg below the knee in a motorbike accident in 2015, life changed for this aspiring wrestler. After healing, he got his prosthetic leg from the Artificial Limb Centre in Pune. In 2017 Antil shifted discipline and started training in javelin throw, in Delhi, and competed in several national and international championships. On August 30, 2021, Antil scripted history when he broke his own world record thrice. He won the gold with a world record throw of 68.55m in F64 class at the Tokyo Paralympics 2020. Antil however, feels it was not his best and the competitors around had made him a little nervous.



Photo: GETTY IMAGES  
 Photo: PTI



## HARVINDER SINGH - FOCUSED ON HIS TARGET

A bronze in archery at the Paralympics is no mean feat. At the age of one, the medicine he was administered for dengue fever led to an adverse reaction and his legs stopped functioning. Coming from a modest farmer family, life was not easy with an impairment in his left leg. The 2012 Olympic Games acted as the catalyst for him to take to sports. At the 2018 Para Asian Games, he was ready to hit the mark. But 20 days before D-day, he lost his mother. He took the blow in his stride and won a gold medal. Since then he has kept his focus on the target.

## DEVENDRA JHAJHARIA - THRICE SUCCESSFUL AND STILL MOTIVATED

Jhajharia is the only Indian to have won two individual gold medals at the Paralympics, at 2004 Athens Paralympics and at Rio in 2016. He lost his left hand when he was 8, after accidentally touching a live electric cable. That didn't stop him from channeling his energies to excel at javelin throw. What makes the 40-year-old's efforts incredible is his ability to keep balance and achieve the speed needed for throws with one arm. With Covid-19 disrupting practice, he had to settle for silver in F46 class in Tokyo.



## MANISH NARWAL - KICKED ADVERSITY TO HIT BULLSEYE

The 19-year old shooter shot a total of 218.2, Paralympic record, to claim gold. Manish has a congenital impairment in his right hand due to which he cannot raise it. This put paid to his dream of becoming a footballer. However, his left arm was enough to hit bullseye and clinch the gold, in mixed 50m Pistol event. Narwal's triumph was all the more sweet because from being on the verge of elimination he fought back with remarkable composure and bagged the gold. He also overcame disappointment of losing in the P1 category, despite topping the qualification.

## SUNDAR SINGH GURJAR - TWO-PRONGED BATTLE

Till 2015, Sundar was an able-bodied competitor, even training with the likes of Neeraj Chopra. But at 25, life took a cruel turn when he lost his left hand after a tin sheet fell on him. He fought back, and qualified for the 2016 Rio Paralympics, only to be disqualified because he reached the call room a few seconds late. He was left battling loss of a limb and suicidal thoughts. But he had his coach Mahavir Saini and others to thank for pulling him back on track and transforming his life, to win the javelin bronze in F46 class at Tokyo.



## OTHER MEDAL WINNERS

**KRISHNA NAGAR** - men's badminton singles - **GOLD** | **NISHAD KUMAR** - men's high jump - **SILVER** | **MARIYAPPAN THANGAVELU** - men's high jump - **SILVER** | **SUHAS YATHIRAJ** - men's badminton singles - **SILVER** | **SINGHRAJ ADHANA** - Shooting mixed 50m pistol - **SILVER**, men's 10m air pistol - **BRONZE** | **BHAVINA PATEL** - table tennis women's singles - **SILVER** | **SHARAD KUMAR** - men's high jump - **BRONZE** | **MANOJ SARKAR** - men's badminton singles - **BRONZE**