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The Cinderella No One Knows:

The Grimm Brothers' Tale of Incest, Fur, and Hidden Bodies



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The Cinderella No One Knows: Incest, Fur, and Hidden Bodies

"Cinderella" is beloved the world over. And it, along with other tales we often call "fairy tales," has been re-scripted into many novels, poems, movies and TV shows. These Cinderella stories we know well are usually the versions of the tales that major publishing houses and corporate filmmakers such as Disney have brought to us—and edited. But what of the other Cinderella? The one called "Allerleirauh" or "All Kinds of Fur"?

Disney gave us a Cinderella based on the version published by Frenchman Charles Perrault in 1697—a saucy, teasing version meant for the ears of aristocratic ladies and their daughters. What, though, did Disney not use? The version the Brothers Grimm published 200 years ago in 1812, the one with the magic tree that seems like the soul of Cinderella's dead mother; the one where, in the end, there's no forgiveness: Cinderella's birds peck out her stepsisters' eyes.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Grimms' *Tales for Children and the Home* was second only to the Bible as a best-seller in Germany. The Grimm brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm, turned out seven editions of the *Tales* between 1812 and 1857, constantly adding and deleting stories. By 1857, the *Tales* held 210 stories: 54 more tales than their first 1812 edition.

The Grimms had their own editing practices: they reduced the sex and upped the violence. In their 1812 "Rapunzel," for example, the witch learns about the prince's visits when Rapunzel asks why her dress is so tight—she's pregnant. In later versions, Rapunzel sounds careless and stupid: she asks the witch why she's slower to climb the ladder than the prince is.

Also, the Grimms de-emphasized magic. And, they changed mothers into stepmothers. After all, how would it look to have German mothers killing their children, and the like? So, Hansel and Gretel's mother became a "stepmother" in the second, the 1819 edition. Finally, the Grimms shortened the speaking parts of their heroines and increased the roles of men in the tales.

Today, scholarly collectors of folktales make very few changes in the texts of stories they collect. However, like other writers of their time who assembled collections of folktales, the Grimms freely edited the stories they heard from storytellers. Why?

First, the *Tales* appeared amid the turbulence of the Napoleonic Wars and the French occupation of German principalities. The French presence upset the Grimms, who were in favor of the unification of disparate German-speaking principalities. With the tales, the Grimms worked to articulate what it meant to be German. Second, the Grimms were creating a moral, educational manual for children, and they knew they needed to change the tales' language to suit those sensibilities.

And as tales traveled, they changed, of course. The "Cinderella" story developed into two major variants: one about the stepmother's persecution of a young woman, the other

about a father who wants to marry his daughter. The variant that world cultures emphasize is Cinderella, the one that demonizes the stepmother. And then there's Cinderella's cousin, the Cinderella who rarely appears in books of selected tales, the Cinderella no one knows: Allerleirauh, Donkeyskin, Catskin, Katie Woodencloak, Juleidah.

Here's her story as the Grimms tell it: A dying queen makes her husband promise to marry only a woman as beautiful as she is. Years later, the king declares his intent to marry his daughter. The daughter demands three dresses and a mantle made of a piece of fur from each of the animals in his kingdom, thinking her father will never find such items. But he does. She takes three of her treasured possessions, puts her three dresses in a nutshell, wraps herself in the mantle of rough furs, and runs into the forest. A king's hunters find her; name her *Allerleirauh* / All Kinds Of Fur, and take her to the cook in the castle where she works at dirty tasks for years. When the king holds three balls, she attends wearing the gowns, then disappears, puts her fur mantle back on, and returns to the kitchen. After each ball, the cook tells her to make the king's soup instead of sweeping the ashes. She puts her treasures, one at a time, into the soup bowl. Each time the king finds a gold object in his soup he has her called before him and asks, "Who are you?" The third time, the king sees on her finger the ring he slipped on the beautiful woman's hand when they danced at the third ball. He opens her fur mantle, sees her star dress, declares her to be the beautiful woman at the ball, and marries her.

Most Grimm scholars focus on the incest and on whom the daughter eventually marries: is it her father or a second king? (Regardless of what the Grimms intended, their 1857 text allows this ambiguity to flourish.) My focus, though, is not on whom she marries but on the heroine herself, and her journey through the gendered, sexually redolent landscape of the tale's provocative middle section. It is not the marriage at the end of "All Kinds of Fur"—or "Cinderella," really—that draws people to this story; it's this journeying middle ground.

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