

**Analysis and Assessment of Cinderella**  
*A Comparison and Examination of Three Cinderella Tales*

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In her book *Children's Literature: A Brief Guide*, Charlotte Huck provides a method and standards by which to evaluate traditional tales (Huck, 2010, p. 101). By analyzing the source note, plot, language, themes, illustrations and the cultural communication of the tale by Huck's standards one can judge the validity of the tale. Huck asks those who provide these tales to children to ask themselves the following questions:

“Is there some mention or citation of the original source...?”

Is the plot simple and direct?

Is the language lively and engaging and in keeping with the oral tradition?”

Does a theme emerge from the telling of the tale?

-If so, what is the story's message or moral?

Do illustrations add to and extend the story?

-Are illustrations and details true to the culture represented?

Does the represent cultural norms, or is it rewritten to conform to Western mores?” (Huck, 2010, p. 101)

It is through these methods we can examine a tale, as well as compare and contrast it with those of a similar motif (MacDonald & Sturm, 2001).

The stories analyzed were selected through the help of Margaret Read MacDonald's *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*, which categorizes folktales by title, motif and subject. Cinderella stories are there own motif and can be found under the heading R221.A. After gathering titles from *Storyteller's Sourcebook*, I examined the source notes of each book through a series of methods and criteria established by

Betsy Hearne's in her two-part article written for *School Library Journal*; these criteria are explained later on (Hearne, 1993a, 1993b).

The tale of *Cinderella* is said to have originated with Charles Perrault, a French poet known for his collection of stories that are widely known today as fairy tales. Perrault's stories include those now known as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Little Red Riding Hood* amongst others. With Huck's guidelines, the author will analyze three versions of *Cinderella*, all from different cultures, as well as compare and contrast them to one another.

The traditional, Charles Perrault version of *Cinderella*, is expressed in the same titled piece illustrated and edited by K.Y. Young. In her author's note, Young talks of the story's origins, citing its birth place in Arthur Rackham's *Fairy Book* and Andrew Long's *The Blue Fairy Book*. She does state that her text is drawn mainly from Charles Perrault's *Cinderella*. Young also makes note of changes she has made to the story, the adding of the bluebird, which originated in the Brother Grimm's version called *Aschenputtel*. The honesty of the storyteller in with regards to changing tales is a point of extreme importance in authenticating a folktale, as expressed in Betsy Hearne's article "Cite the Source" (Hearne, 1993a, p. 24). On the ranking scale of source notes established by Hearne in "Cite the Source", with five being the worst and one being the best, K.Y. Young's source note would receive a one (Hearne, 1993a, pp. 23-24).

With regards to plot, the story is thorough but direct. Of all three of the tales analyzed this had the simplest plot in the author's opinion, however this is because

as a Westerner, this is the story that she is most familiar with and believes that children are most familiar with, as it is similar to the plot publicized by Disney.

The language of the story is extravagant. The abundance of words and the vocabulary used provide an image of a more fanciful time when monarchies were more common. Themes of faith in oneself and others, humility and forgiveness of those who mistreated you appear throughout this version of the classic tale, however in this and the others there are no clear-cut moral lessons, like there are in other traditional tales.

In a latter article, also about authenticating written folklores and folktales, Betsy Hearne writes about the importance of authentic illustrations that further the story and tell a story about the culture the tale originates from and honors them (Hearne, 1993b). Young's illustrations accomplish this task beautifully. In the source note at the beginning of the tale, Young writes how all of the illustrations are intended to be from the time of Voltaire. This is important, as Voltaire lived both in France, which is believed to be the origin of *Cinderella*, and during the time period of the story's creation. A review of what we learned in history class about France during this time period, as well as French art reveals that Young's pieces reflect the period perfectly, even down to the architecture. In addition to meeting Hearne's criteria, the illustrations achieve Hook's standards as well; extending the story beyond the words and creating beautiful imagery.

With regards to cultural norms, Young's illustrations as well as the language she used to depict the tale are reminiscent of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century France. As the story has Western origins, there was no changing of tale for the sake of conformity.

The second version of *Cinderella* hails from Japan and is titled *Benizara and Kakezara*. In her under-developed source note, author Margaret Read MacDonald makes mention of Japanese and the holiday, Girl's Day but talks little of the story's origin. MacDonald makes some mention of how another author translated the story, but these facts combined with her lack of explanation for how she may have changed the story provide her source note a four on Hearne's scale (Hearne, 1993a, p. 23). As Hearne states, the only way an author's source note could be considered a five is if they did not include a source note at all.

The plot of *Benizara and Kakezara* is simple, short, and easy to follow. Similar to Young's *Cinderella*, a bird serves as the "fairy godmother" like character for Benizara who provides her with a beautiful red kimono- just as Young's provided Cinderella with a golden dress. Furthermore in both the stories, the Prince/Daimo's son only recognizes the girl when she is out of her rags in a more visually appealing outfit. While the Prince/Daimo's son recognizes the young woman for her other characteristics, it is her superficial beauty that he identifies his love by. However, the similarities end there. Unlike in Young's version, the Japanese "Cinderella" has no coach, no ball, no midnight curfew. After her friends help her clean, Benizara leaves for the village festival with them and is even recognized by her sister whom she throws pieces of candy at from across the way in order to share them with her. When the festival is done, Benizara returns home and quickly changes into her dirtier kimono, before her stepmother and sister return home. There is no shoe to be left, the Daimyo's son discovers where Benizara lives, simply by following her home.

The language of *Benizara* is simple and plain, opposite of *Cinderella*. The language of both stories also caused them to sound as though they came from a written tale when read out-loud, rather than an oral tradition.

The humility and forgiving natures of the Cinderella-type characters in each of the two stories was also a commonality. It was hard to discern any other themes from MacDonald's work. As this story is part of an anthology that MacDonald wrote, the only illustration is a sketch of a girl in a kimono at the beginning of the chapter. Additionally, the story has not been westernized. It truthfully reflects aspects of Japanese culture, including traditional dress and village festivals.

The third and final tale originates from the Ojibwa tribe of the United States. Retold by Robert D. San Souci, the story's source note is thorough and clear. The note explains the origin of the story as well as cites numerous written sources as well as Native American storytellers he consulted in compiling this tale. Unfortunately, San Souci does not say how he may have changed the story, and as a result, his source note receives a two, based on Hearne's scale (Hearne, 1993a).

The plot of *Sootface* is long and thorough, but easy to follow. Another version of the story is called *The Rough-Face Girl*, told by Rafe Martin. While Martin's version may be shorter, the two have a very similar plot and San Souci's telling fills in many of the holes and missing details that Martin's readers may be confused by. Compared to *Cinderella* and *Benizara and Kakezara*, there are many differences. In the previous two tales, each of the Cinderella-type character's have a being that comes and provides them with some sort of gift of clothing to wear to impress their potential suitors. In *Sootface*, Sootface is her own godmother- making herself a new

dress out of the bark of the birch tree and a necklace of shells. Additionally in the other tales, the suitor recognizes the girl for her superficial beauty. In *Sootface* the Invisible Warrior and his sister recognize Sootface for her inner beauty- it is only after the Invisible Warrior has recognized Sootface to be his wife that her physical appearance changes. Sootface's father is also present in the story, though she has no mother or step-mother, just two mean older sisters who take advantage of her while their father is gone. In *Cinderella* and *Benizara*, the father's had passed away and left their daughter in the care of their wicked stepmother.

The language and vocabulary in this book is simple, but the story is long and not precise. Similar to the other tales, the language of this folktale reflects that of the written tradition, not the oral.

One theme that appears in *Sootface* as well as the previous tales is that of humility. Throughout each of the three versions, the protagonist is humble: she neither complains or objects and makes no effort to outshine her siblings all though she is quite capable of doing so. Unlike the other tales though, there is no mention of Sootface forgiving her sisters for their mistreatment as there is in *Cinderella* and *Benizara and Kakezara*. *Sootface* also differs as it has a theme and a moral that the others do not. Throughout the tale and especially at the end, the reader recognizes a theme of self-confidence and learns that as long as you believe in yourself, anything is possible.

Similar to Young in *Cinderella*, San Souci mentions the illustrations in his source note. San Souci writes that the illustrations within *Sootface* are based on extensive research done at the University of California and that all of the details with

regard to clothing, setting and traditional design depict an 18<sup>th</sup> century Ojibwa village. This historical accuracy and homage to a culture is specifically what Hearne's writes about in "Respect the Source" (Hearne, 1993b).

Through the use of Charlotte Huck's extensive criteria as well as Betsy Hearne's high standards and clear definitions with regards to authenticity, one can evaluate and analyze folktales from many cultures, regardless of the author. A standard form of assessment allows for the comparing and contrasting of numerous tales sharing the same motif.



### Works Cited

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