

# Myths & Tales: Cinderella

Everyone knows the Cinderella story, at least *our* classic version, so I won't bore you with going over it here. What I find interesting is the evolution of the Cinderella theme throughout the ages. "Once upon a time never really existed for the Cinderella fairy tale as hundreds of versions have existed throughout time." [<http://www.movabletypemedia.com/2012/12/199/>]

The Cinderella motif may well have originated in classical antiquity. The Greek geographer Strabo recorded in the 1st century BC in his *Geographica* the tale of the Greek slave girl Rhodopis, "Rosey-Eyes", who lived in the colony of Naucratis in Ancient Egypt. It is often considered the oldest known version of the story:

*They tell the fabulous story that, when she was bathing, an eagle snatched one of her sandals from her maid and carried it to Memphis; and while the king was administering justice in the open air, the eagle, when it arrived above his head, flung the sandal into his lap; and the king, stirred both by the beautiful shape of the sandal and by the strangeness of the occurrence, sent men in all directions into the country in quest of the woman who wore the sandal; and when she was found in the city of Naucratis, she was brought up to Memphis, became the wife of the king...*

Herodotus, some five centuries before Strabo, supplied information about the real-life Rhodopis in his *Histories*. He wrote that Rhodopis came from Thrace, and was the slave of Iadmon of Samos, and a fellow-slave of the story-teller Aesop. She was taken to Egypt in the time of Pharaoh Amasis, and freed there for a large sum by Charaxus of Mytilene, brother of Sappho the lyric poet.

Another synopsis is given by the Roman author Aelian (ca. 175–ca. 235), showing that the Cinderella theme remained popular throughout antiquity.

Aspects of Cinderella may be derived from the story of Cordelia in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Cordelia is the youngest and most virtuous of King Leir of Britain's three daughters, however her virtue is such that it will not allow her to lie in flattering her father when he asks, so that he divides up the kingdom between the elder daughters and leaves Cordelia with nothing. Cordelia marries her love, Aganippus, King of the Franks, and flees to Gaul where she and her husband raise an army and depose her wicked sisters who have been misusing their father. Cordelia is finally crowned Queen of Britain. However her reign only lasts five years. The story is famously retold in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but given a tragic ending.



Another version of the story, *Ye Xian*, appeared in *Miscellaneous Morsels* from Youyang by Duan Chengshi around 860. Here, the hardworking and lovely girl befriends a fish, the reincarnation of her mother, who was killed by her stepmother and sister. Ye Xian saves the bones, which are magic, and they help her dress appropriately for a festival. When she loses her slipper after being recognized by her stepfamily, the king finds her slipper and made her his first wife (eventually rescuing her from her cruel stepmother).

The Indonesian and Malaysian story *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*, are about two girls named Bawang Putih (literally "White Onion", meaning "garlic") and Bawang Merah ("Red Onion"). While the two country's respective versions differ in the exact relationship of the girls and the identity of the protagonist, they have highly similar plot elements. Both have a magical fish as the "fairy godmother" to her daughter, which the antagonist cooks. The heroine then finds the bones and buries them, and over the grave a magical swing appears. The protagonist sits on the swing and sings to make it sway, her song reaching the ears of a passing Prince. The swing is akin to the slipper test, which distinguishes the heroine from her evil sister, and the Prince weds

her in the end.

In the Vietnamese version *Tam Cam*, Tam is mistreated by both her father's co-wife and half-sister, who stole her birthright by winning a wager of fishing unjustly proposed by the stepmother. The only fish that was left to her was killed and eaten by her step-family, but its bones served as her protector and guardian, eventually leading her to be the king's bride during a festival. The protagonist however, turns into the antagonist in part two of the story, by boiling her stepsister alive and then fooling her stepmother into cannibalism by feeding her her own daughter's flesh.

There is a Korean version named *Kongji and Patzzi*. It's a story about a kind girl Kongji who was constantly abused by her stepmother and stepsister Patzzi. The step-family forces Kongji to stay at home while they attend the king's ball, but a fairy appears and gives her an attire more beautiful than everyone else. The motif is same as in Perrault, concerning a king falling in love with her. However, the story goes on with Patzzi drowning Kongji in a river and disguising herself as Kongji to live with the King. After the king finds out he puts Patzzi to death and feeds her to the unknowing stepmother.

Several different variants of the story appear in the medieval *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as the *Arabian Nights*, including "The Second Shaykh's Story", "The Eldest Lady's Tale" and "Abdallah ibn Fadil and His Brothers", all dealing with the theme of a younger sibling harassed by two jealous elders. In some of these, the siblings are female, while in others, they are male. One of the tales, "Judar and His Brethren", departs from the happy endings of previous variants and reworks the plot to give it a tragic ending instead, with the younger brother being poisoned by his elder brothers.

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinderella>]

