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This resource provides relevant background information that students, actors, and audiences may find beneficial as they delve into the play [The Goosegirl by J. Myles Hesse](#), part of the Gitelman & Good Publishers catalog.

"Making Fairytales Take Flight: *The Goosegirl* as Adaptation"

J. Myles Hesse

Fairytales were made to be adapted. Many people are introduced to the most well-known fairytales (*Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, etc.) through animated movie adaptations of the original European tales. In recent years, there has been some discussion about whether fairytales are obligated to remain true to the culture of their source material. However, oftentimes even the source material did not remain true to *their* source material, resulting in a tangled mess of originality and no clear answer to the true origins of many of our favorite stories.

A handful of literary giants dominate the fairytale landscape. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (better known as the Brothers Grimm) were German academics made famous for publishing *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Frog Prince*, and many, many more. Their first collection of folktales, *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (Children's and Household Tales), was released in 1812. but the origins of their stories date back centuries before. The nineteenth century saw the rise of Romanticism—an idyllic nostalgia for the past and a desire for a national identity—and the Brothers Grimm's collection of fairytales was an intentional step towards bringing together disparate nation states into a unified German identity. They gathered folktales from cultures throughout the world—Central Europe, France, Greece, and Spain

all the way to Korea, Vietnam, and China—and imbued them with German values to become a narrative that would work towards unifying their nation.

The Brothers Grimm did not write their own stories; they adapted what was already being told. The earliest known version of *Cinderella*, for example, comes from the Ancient Greeks and tells the story of a maid whose slipper was stolen by an eagle and dropped in front of the king. On seeing the slipper, the king fell madly in love with the idea of its owner and sent servants all throughout the land to find the maid before making her his wife. A Chinese version from the ninth century recounts the story of a girl abused by her stepmother, mentored by a fish who has the reincarnated soul of her deceased mother, and loses her shoe at a festival which leads to the king finding the shoe and falling in love with her. The seventeenth-century French author, Charles Perrault, was one of the first writers to publish *Cinderella* (as *Cendrillon*) along with versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* (*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*), *Sleeping Beauty* (*La Belle Au Bois Dormant*), and many other fairytales which were adapted by the Brothers Grimm more than a hundred years later.

It is through this long tradition of adapting fairytales to suit the needs of the current culture that my adaptation of *The Goosegirl* arises. If you were to read the "original" version of the story, you might not find much in common with my version. In the original, the unnamed princess is a virtuous victim who is bullied by her waiting-woman and is tricked into becoming a goosegirl when she arrives at the castle of her betrothed. I don't know about you, but I don't think we need any stories about the elite being bullied by the working class. So, in my version, the princess becomes a spoiled brat, the waiting-woman a strong-willed heroine, and their swap of identities arises from a bet. The conclusion of the original ends with the waiting-woman's treachery being discovered and she is "put stark naked into a barrel stuck with nails and dragged along by two white horses from street to street until she is dead." Needless to say, I had no interest in telling a story that ended in that fashion. As a result, we find ourselves with *The Goosegirl* by J. Myles Hesse, a heartwarming play about friendship, power, respect, and how far two people are willing to go to win a bet. In short, it is an adaptation that takes what it needs from the original and transforms it into a story that speaks to the present day.