



A review of
**ALL KINDS
OF FUR:
Erasure Poems &
New Translation
of a tale from the
Brothers Grimm**

Sara Cleto

ALL *KINDS OF FUR* by Margaret Yocom is, at its heart, a story about who gets to tell stories. In simplest terms, it is a series of erasure poems conjured from a translation of Jacob and Wilhelm's fairy tale 'All Kinds of Fur' or 'Allerleirauh'. The poems, beautiful and spare, are written from the perspective of the heroine, a resourceful and enigmatic figure who speaks few lines in the tale itself. The craft that Yocom – 'poet, folklorist, feminist' (81) – harnesses to create these poems reveals her power as a storyteller and as a scholar. The erasure poetry is supplemented by an 'Afterword: tale/ translation/ erasure', an artist's statement that addresses the history of the tale and its variants, her own interest in the tale, and the narrative of how the book came to be. The book also includes a rich list of references that span erasure poetry, folklore, fairy-tale studies, and more.

Everyone knows the story of Cinderella (ATU 510A: The Persecuted Heroine), in which a young girl escapes a life of abuse and drudgery when she dances with a prince at a ball, loses a shoe, and marries into royalty – though elements of the tale, including the protagonist's gender, can vary from culture to culture. Her narrative sister (ATU 510B: Unnatural Love) is much less famous, though she goes by Cap O' Rushes, All Kinds of Fur, Donkeyskin, and many other names around the world. In these tales, the heroine must evade the horrifying, incestuous overtures of her father, the king. Armed with a strange disguise – usually some kind of cloak – and beautiful dresses, the heroine runs away, finds work in a kitchen, and reclaims her original status through dances and eventual marriage with another king in another land. In her Afterword, Yocom traces a brief

history of this tale type and illuminates the many voices that have shaped the story as we know it today.

ALL KINDS OF FUR's genealogy runs through the Grimm version of the tale. Knowing well that translations (re)shape a story in a multitude of ways, Yocom begins with the Grimms' German text, noting that they first heard the tale from a woman named Dortchen Wild, whom Wilhelm Grimm eventually married. The full fairy tale presented in *ALL KINDS OF FUR* is Yocom's own translation of the text into English. Issues of gender and social context are highlighted and supported by Yocom's translation. For instance, the heroine becomes a gender-neutral 'child' or 'it' instead of a girl or woman when she dons her cloak, a choice that arose from the neutral German grammar in the Grimms' own version. Likewise, Yocom refers to the heroine as the 'king's daughter' instead of a princess, emphasising her relationship to her father and her role in the social order.

In addition to providing a new translation of the Grimms' 'All Kinds of Fur', Yocom creates an entirely new intertextual narrative through erasure poetry, one that provides a voice and first-person account for the heroine. Erasure poetry is 'the deliberate obscuring of selected words of a text to reveal new poetry composed of those words which remain' (82). Many strategies have been adopted to represent erasure poetry visually on the page. Some authors have chosen to black out the unused words or to cross them through with a black line, while others have left blank spaces where the omitted words once existed. Others have left the original text unaltered but placed a transparent overlay with only the chosen words atop the page. In *All Kinds of Fur*, Yocom has chosen to leave the full text wholly visible but presents the obscured or unused text in grey while the words that make up the erasure poetry are highlighted in black. This choice facilitates a dialogue between the full version of 'All Kinds of Fur' and the erasure poems. Each page can be read two ways: as the Grimms' version and as erasure. By arranging the text in this way, the resulting 'visual poetry enabled [Yocom] to show All Kinds of Fur's own words rising out of the Grimms' text, and it set [her] on the path to discover just what this young heroine would say if her words could rise from where they lay hidden' (82). Yocom allows the heroine to speak back to the Grimms and to tell her own story, one that intersects with the Grimms' words even as it contradicts, expands, and complicates their fairy tale.

Yocom's training as a folklorist and skilled ethnographer is apparent not only through her deep knowledge of the fairy tale but through her thoughtful use of ethnopoetics when conceiving the book. Ethnopoetics, or the practice of visually presenting words in a way that foregrounds how they sound when spoken aloud, can be achieved through unusual spacing, bolding, italics, or by using symbols with a key that indicates how they should be understood. In *All Kinds of Fur*, Yocom deploys spacing and paragraph breaks to suggest pauses, hesitations, and momentum in the text, in both the full fairy tale and

the erasure. The result is erasure that demands to be spoken while offering a glimpse of the heroine's interior and her struggle for survival.

ALL KINDS OF FUR is a tour-de-force that demonstrates the utility and power of combining academic experience and creative writing. Yocom's knowledge of folklore and gender studies elevates her translation and her poetry, and her abilities as a storyteller shine as she bridges voice, modes, and perspectives: between scholarship and art, continuity and creativity, the Grimms and their heroine, and the heroine and her audience. The poem ends with an invitation for the reader to 'tend' their own lives and relationships along with the heroine, a move that resists the closure of ending and breathes continued life into the story, on and off the page.

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