Rapunzel’s Body Language
An Analysis of the Treatment of Female Bodies in the Rapunzel Fairy Tale Genealogy
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The Roots

Petrosinella by Giambattista Basile
1634; Italian

Persinette by Mlle. de La Force
1698; French

Rapunzel by Friedrich Schulz
1790; German
Petrosinella (Basile)

Petrosinella's body is acted upon in ways she agrees to

She uses her wits to escape the Ogress

The chase scene at the end allows for agency
Persinette (de La Force)

Persinette is “beautiful as the sun,” obedient, and quite naïve.

Sudden marriage before subsequent pregnancy. Both of which Persinette is shown to be ignorant.

Her hair is used throughout, and cut off by the Fairy at the end as punishment.

She saves the Prince with her tears and the Fairy is redeemed at the end.
Rapunzel (Schulz)

Direct translation of the French *Persinette* into German with two subtle additions to the tale:

- A hook is added for Rapunzel's benefit, to help her pull the Fairy and the Prince up the tower.
- Rapunzel comments that "all her dresses were becoming too tight".

Ignorance of her body

Physical and mental weakness associated with Rapunzel.
The Grimms’ Seeds for the Future

First Version of the Rapunzel tale by the Grimms
1812

Second Version 1857 of the Rapunzel tale by the Grimms
1857
First Version in 1812

No sudden marriage in this tale, but Rapunzel still becomes pregnant.

The Fairy cuts off Rapunzel's hair as punishment.

No redemption of the Fairy at the end of the tale.
Second Version in 1857

Reinstate the sudden marriage before Rapunzel becomes pregnant

The Sorceress cuts off Rapunzel’s hair as punishment

This is the most influential version of the tale
What’s kept? What’s edited out?
The Modern Branches

Rapunzel by Anne Sexton
1972

Disney’s Tangled directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard
2010

Rapunzel, Rapunzel by Nikita Gill
2018
Rapunzel (Sexton)

Rapunzel's body is objectified and sexualized, not by the Prince, but by Frau Gothel.

Possession of Rapunzel's body is central to this poem.
Tangled (Disney)

Tangled is loosely based on the Grimms’ version, with many differences

What stays:
- Rapunzel’s naivety
- Rapunzel’s hair is cut off by hands that are not her own
- Rapunzel’s tears heal the Prince-figure

Reinstate the chase scene
- Does this give Rapunzel agency again?
“Rapunzel, Rapunzel, ask yourself why you let down your hair. Ask yourself, would anyone who truly loves you ever allow it to be subject to such wear and tear?”

(Gill, 84)

Rapunzel realizes that her body should not be used by anyone
She cuts off her own hair and uses it to escape and free herself
All she needed was “hiding in the marrow inside [her] own powerful spine, [her] own bones“ (Gill, 84)
Conclusion

Petrosinella (Basile)
Persinette (de La Force)
Rapunzel (Schulz)
Rapunzel (Grimms)
Rapunzel (Sexton)
Tangled (Disney)
Rapunzel, Rapunzel (Gill)
Works Cited


