

Serie Caperucita

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One must reach the wolf's age in order to assimilate the teachings of Little Red Riding Hood.

There would be no use in trying to explain it: the readers, the people –children, mothers, hunters, woodcutters and teachers- are all closer to Little Red Riding Hood's age than they are to the time of death –that is, the wolf's. This is why they, without being fully aware, are able to understand the story, whose artistic achievement is to erase the traces of which it foretells, regardless of the will of the storytellers and the listeners.

It's no use saying it: in the History of all Tales no child was unfamiliar with the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Also, no child has been willing to avoid, for the umpteenth time, the opportunity to listen to it again. It would seem that humans have an innate predisposition to listen to it. Or could it be that the time accumulated by the tales rear a predisposition to the birth of children...?

Everything is whimsical, just like the infinite mutations which each narration inflicts on the stories, their episodes and landscapes. However, there is a lot in Little Red Riding Hood that remains intact, and the wolf will forever be the wolf, and the little girl and her story will always have a mother, a grandmother and the color the riding hood, the cloak, the beret, the cap or –as tradition and the Anglo Saxon translation would have it- its red riding hood.

Someone must have written it before, but the first literary version is that of Perrault's. Comparing this version, published under the Enlightened Despotism of late 17th century, with the successive versions and adulterations of the luminous following centuries, only comes to prove the Spanish writers' contention: we are better writers under Franco.

Perrault, a member of the French court, Catholic and wishing, above all things, to tell a morality tale, established the truth of the story. In his version, the little girl is drawn to bed by the wolf's voice, and no sooner does he ask to lay by his side that she obediently undresses and gets ready to be devoured. And thus Little Red Riding Hood dies, with no one to assist her and bring her back to life. In Perrault's version there is no room for justice or reparation. The tragic final fades into the scene in which the voice of the moral is clearly heard: "beautiful, gentle girls must be aware that, when I say wolf I mean all kinds of wolves and that, from among them all, on the trail and in the houses, the most delicate-looking ones are the most dangerous. In Perrault's story fear appears only in the scene of the seduction. It is the wolf that is afraid to be seen by the woodcutters and thus proposes a race to grandma's: a way to go separately and unnoticed.

In the Grimm Brothers' version fears is displaced: it is the girl who is afraid. She is not afraid from the wolf, but rather of something strange she perceives upon entering the house, and she is so taken by surprise that she is even scared by her own fear. In this 19th century tale, the little girl does not undress, nor does she lay in bed with the pretender. The classic questioning scene takes place by the bedside. Like the girl in Perrault's and all other versions, the Grimms' character ask questions about the size of the body parts, threading the children's terror of the disproportionate female fascination with male genitalia. The thematic difference between the two questionings is clear: the Grimms' substitute hands for arms; they avoid references to the legs, which would indicate that the wolf has pulled of Grandma's sheets or bedcovers; and replace the threatening teeth with the less aggressive reference to the mouth. The wolf's mouth is very dark, but less scary than the teeth which irreversibly tear the body apart.

For Perrault, four characters suffice: mother, girl, grandmother and wolf, even if his retelling of the seduction in the wood would suggest the remote presence of a group of woodcutters. Grimm adds a woodcutter-obstetrician who recovers the bodies –still alive and intact- of the girl and her grandmother, by cutting open the belly of the wolf, anesthetized by so much satiety. There is no morality or moral in the Grimms' story, and this renders it innocuous, like a version of sanitized story to be told in the darkness of the night.

Little Red Riding Hood has endured not so much on account of the color or the articulation of social family roles, or the confrontation between human kind's innocence and the beast's shrewdness, but rather because the narration is set to become the theatrical scene of the questioning. Regardless of the succession of questions, they always go in crescendo, traversing the senses –touch, hearing, sight and taste- to culminate in the revelation of the truth of the desire to eat. Under the pretext of scaring, entertaining and teaching children a moral lesson, *Little Red Riding Hood* tests the faculties of the voice, modulated between narrations and representation. Within that representation, the question scene represents the accents and the roles of the antagonic worlds of children and adults, humans and animals, males and females, perhaps good and evil, and all of them confronted by the struggle between the wish to know and the wish for power.

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