

FROM: The TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS
OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Jack Zipes

✿ Prologue: Framing Little Red Riding Hood ✿

IN 1989, ALAN DUNDES, the renowned folklorist, published *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* with ten different essays exemplifying different approaches to the folk narrative that gave rise to the literary tale of *Little Red Riding Hood*. His concluding essay, "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalytically,"¹ is a masterful summary of the immense scholarship that has sought to explain why we continually retell the adventures of Little Red Riding Hood, and it is also a powerful argument for using psychoanalysis in folklore research. However, since Dundes is concerned primarily with opening the eyes of folklorists to the multi-faceted aspects of the tale and its underlying sexual meanings, he sets a frame for understanding the tale that still needs modification, if we are going to grasp how an oral tale of the 17th century was transformed into a literary tale of rape and violence.

In fact, Dundes obfuscates the issue of both narrative and sexual violence because of his interest in infantile fantasy. Yet, there is a way of framing the origins of *Little Red Riding Hood* in which the theme of literary appropriation and sexual initiation can be linked to rape that, I believe, takes precedence over questions of infantile sexuality. It may not be the only way to frame the story of Little Red Riding Hood, but I want to use Dundes's provocative essay to clarify why it is still important to keep the frame of violence in studying the social history of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Otherwise, "her" history as female object will continue to be violated in the name of a scholarship dominated by men.

Dundes argues that neither folklorists nor psychoanalysts are aware of the possible Asian cognates of *Little Red Riding Hood*, and therefore, their interpretations of the tale have been misleading if not myopic. Using the research of the sinologist and sociologist Wolfram Eberhard, Dundes shows that there is an oral tale type

(AT 123) generally known as "The Wolf and the Kids" that circulated in Asia before or about the same time as the oral tale type (AT 333), "The Glutton" (Red Riding Hood). A literary example of this Asian tale type is Chang Mi's "Goldflower and the Bear," published in both the original and present edition of *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, in which a cunning young girl tricks an ogre/monster/beast by threatening to defecate in bed and saves her siblings.² Given the long oral tradition of cognate *Red Riding Hood* tales in China, Korea, and Japan, Dundes maintains that Western folklorists and psychoanalysts have been too Eurocentric in their approaches and have worked with false premises by using the literary tales of Charles Perrault or the Brothers Grimm as their starting points. It is only by making use of the full panoply of oral texts of *Little Red Riding Hood* in Asia, Africa, and Europe that one can gain a sense of the major conflict of the narrative, the common thread that runs through all the versions up to the present. For Dundes, the tale depicts

essentially an inter-generational conflict between daughter and mother . . . we find tremendous antagonism between heroine and female foe. We begin with a mother sending a hapless girl away from the safety of the home. This enforced abandonment (cf. weaning) leads the girl to take her revenge by eating her grandmother's flesh. If one stops to think about it, one can see that breast-feeding constitutes a kind of eating of maternal flesh in order to obtain the necessary nourishing mother's milk. In oral versions of the tale the heroine eats the flesh and blood of her grandmother, an unquestionably oral, aggressive act on the part of the girl. Infantile regression is also signaled by the desire to defecate immediately after eating. Here we have a series of projective inversions or reversals.³

Certainly, if one accepts Dundes's combination of folkloristics and psychoanalytical theory, his interpretation of the oral narrative paradigm makes sense. However, it makes sense only at the risk of de-historicizing a Western narrative tradition and not focusing enough on the connections between the oral and literary tradition. The fact is that there is absolutely no proof that the Asian cognates influenced the basic tale type AT 333 of *Little Red Riding Hood* or were even known in Europe. Almost all the oral versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* show a remarkable unity in plot and structure that represent a socio-ethnic initiation ritual practiced by women in the southeastern region of France and northern Italy. Therefore, though it is important to consider psychoanalysis for a study

of such tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, Dundes's frame is skewed because of a false cross-cultural model that is not related to European peasant traditions in the 17th century, nor does he discuss the modes of sexuality or ritual that may have influenced the formation of the tale.

Robert Darnton's book *The Great Cat Massacre* argues against a psychoanalytic approach such as that used by Dundes in favor of a socio-historical method that examines folk tales as historical documents. Darnton's preference is for an ethnographical study that investigates the world views or *mentalités* of peasants as expressed through their oral tales. At one point, he uses *Little Red Riding Hood* as an example and interprets it as a warning tale about inexorable calamity that confronted peasants in 18th-century France. According to Darnton, the peasants lived in a harsh world, and one step in the wrong direction could bring about a tragedy. "If the world is cruel, the village nasty, and mankind infested with rogues, what is one to do? The tales do not give an explicit answer, but they illustrate with aptness of the ancient French proverb, 'One must howl with the wolves.'"⁴

Though Darnton is correct in insisting that we look at the material conditions that brought about distinct world views in folk tales, he ironically bungles the task he sets for himself in the area of his own expertise—history. Darnton bases his faulty interpretation of *Little Red Riding Hood* on the following tale that he allegedly translated from Paul Delarue's collection *Le Conte populaire français*:

Once a little girl was told by her mother to bring some bread and milk to her grandmother. As the girl was walking through the forest, a wolf came up to her and asked her where she was going.

"To grandmother's house," she replied.

"Which path are you taking, the path of the pins or the path of the needles?"

"The path of the needles."

So the wolf took the path of the pins and arrived first at the house. He killed grandmother, poured her blood into a bottle, and sliced her flesh onto a platter. Then he got into her nightclothes and waited in bed.

"Knock, knock."

"Come in, my dear."

"Hello, grandmother. I've brought you some bread and milk."

"Have something yourself, my dear. There is meat and wine in the pantry."

So the little girl ate what was offered; and as she did, a little

cat said, "Slut! To eat the flesh and drink the blood of your grandmother!"

Then the wolf said, "Undress and get into bed with me."

"Where shall I put my apron?"

"Throw it on the fire; you won't need it any more."

For each garment—bodice, skirt, petticoat, and stockings—the girl asked the same question; and each time the wolf answered, "Throw it on the fire; you won't need it any more."

When the girl got in bed, she said, "Oh, grandmother! How hairy you are!"

"It's to keep me warmer, my dear."

"Oh, grandmother! What big shoulders you have!"

"It's for better carrying firewood, my dear."

"Oh, grandmother! What long nails you have!"

"It's for scratching myself better, my dear."

"Oh, grandmother! What big teeth you have!"

"It's for eating you better, my dear."

And he ate her.⁵

According to Darnton this tale and its tragic ending was the most common version of its kind in the 17th century and signified the barbarous conditions of peasant life. But this statement is totally false. First of all, we frankly do not know what tale was the most "common" in the 17th century, and the tale that Darnton presents to his readers is, in truth, a truncated translation in which he has willfully omitted the happy ending in Delarue's original version.⁶ In other words, Darnton, like Perrault, has violated the oral tradition by distorting a female perspective as expressed in the oral tale. Secondly, Darnton claims that the majority of the folk tales ended on a tragic note without citing the different collections that he examined. However, in the various French oral collections that I have used, the girl always tricks the wolf and escapes in the end.⁷ In fact, in the very collection that Darnton purportedly used or misused to translate his oral tale, Paul Delarue printed a 19th-century version from Nivernais, included in my essay about the social history of "The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood," that has different components and ends on a happy note. Delarue and other French folklorists and critics have maintained that this version was probably the most typical, because folk tales with a happy ending are more prevalent in the oral tradition, whereas tragic and abrupt endings tend to stem from literature. For instance, Charles Joisten, another gifted French folklorist, collected a group of folk tales in the region of the Haut-Alpines during the 1950s, and he published thirteen dif-

ferent oral versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*, out of which eight portrayed the little girl saving herself. One of the more interesting tales reads like this:

Once there was a little girl in a village, and she was called Red Riding Hood because of the way she adorned her hair with a poppy flower.

One Saturday afternoon, her mother sent her to her grandmother with a pot of honey and some cake. On her way she amused herself by listening to the song of birds and gathering nuts and flowers.

But time passed so quickly that it soon became night, and she began to walk rapidly through the forest. However, she met the wolf, and the wolf asked her:

"Where are you heading, my little girl?"

"I'm taking a pot of honey and some cake to my grandmother who lives in the first house of the next village," she answered.

So he asked her, "What path are you taking?"

"The path of needles to mend my dress which has a hole in it."

The wolf left the little girl and took the path of pins which was shorter. When he arrived at the grandmother's house, he tapped at the door, "Tick-tock," and the grandmother said, "Pull the latch, turn the knob, and the door will open."

Later, when Red Riding Hood arrived, he said to her, "Well, light the fire. There's some blood on the side of the chimney, and I want you to cook it."

So Red Riding Hood lit the fire, put the pan on top, and poured the blood into it. While the blood was cooking, the wolf said to her:

"Grubby grub, grub

It's grandma's blood."

"Ah!" the little girl said. "Did you hear, grandmother, what I heard?"

"Oh, those are just the evil spirits in the chimney," the wolf responded.

When the blood was cooked, Red Riding Hood ate a little of it, but she did not like the taste and stopped eating. Then she went and lay down beside the wolf, believing that he was her grandmother.

"What a large head you have, grandma!" she said.

"That's because of old age, my little one."

"What large legs you have, grandma!"

"The better to run, my child."

"What long hair you have, grandma!"

"That's because of old age, my child."

"What big arms you have, grandma!"

"The better to catch you with, my child."

"What big teeth you have, grandma!"

"The better to eat you with, my child."
But he was still digesting the grandmother, and the little girl now knew it was the wolf.
"I want to go pee pee, grandma," she said.
"Make pee pee here," the wolf responded.
"Oh, but I've also got to make cacka, grandma."
"Make cacka here," the wolf responded.
"Oh, that will smell bad," the little girl said. "If you're afraid that I'll escape, tie a rope around me, and you can hold me."
So the wolf attached a rope to her, and the little girl went outside, where she took a small knife out of her pocket, cut the rope, and escaped.
The wolf ran after her in pursuit, but he met up with a hunter, who killed him. Then Red Riding Hood returned home to her mother and told her the story.

This tale was related to Joisten in July of 1952 by François Armand, sixty-six years old, in Clémence-d'Ambel, and it is significant for a variety of reasons. Told in a region where the majority of oral versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* have been found, that is, in the Southeast of France and the North of Italy, this tale retains most of the older motifs that date back to the 17th century such as the paths of pins and needles, the blood of granny, the defecation in bed, and the escape of the girl. At the same time it reflects the influence of the literary tradition—the name of the girl, the cake, the gathering of nuts and flowers, the pulling of the latch, and the killing of the wolf by a hunter. As a French regional tale, it is a fascinating combination of oral and literary motifs that reveals a great deal about ritual and culture in France as well as sexual fantasies. Moreover, it provides us with important clues about the origins of the oral and literary versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* that neither Dundes nor Darnton follow, even though they ask some important questions. As I have shown, the oral tale emanates from a region in Europe during the 17th century where sewing was a major home industry, and women told tales representative of their sexual and social initiation. And, interestingly, the 1952 tale collected by Joisten keeps alive older motifs from the seventeenth century and combines them with literary motifs from Perrault and the Grimms.

Neither Dundes nor Darnton take into consideration the perpetuation and preservation of the oral and literary tradition of *Little Red Riding Hood* in their studies. And, though there is some validity to their very different approaches, they use false models to argue for their interpretations and thus distort the frame of the narrative tradition. However, the tale collected by Joisten is a correc-

tive to their approaches, for it demands that we pay more attention to the historical intersection of the oral tradition with the literary.⁸

Though I have argued this point in the first edition of *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, I want to reiterate and refine it in light of the recent counter-arguments of Dundes, Darnton, and others. In essence, I begin with the premise that the literary origins of all our canonical fairy tales in the West mark the culmination of an oral tradition in history but certainly not its end. As historical culmination, the literary fairy tale regulates an oral folk tale thematically and stylistically, possesses it, passes it off and on as its own, and thus does violence to it. Therefore, it is at the intersection of the oral with the literary that we can begin to trace the cultural significance of a fairy tale as it makes its mark through word of mouth and in print.

In the case of *Little Red Riding Hood* it is with the remembering and writing down of some oral version by Charles Perrault in 1696/97 and the publication of this tale with the en-gendered and loaded title, *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, that the history and destiny of the narrativized girl is conceived. That means, it is the collusion of the oral and literary traditions within the hands of Perrault that gave rise to further versions within the civilizing process of the Western world. It is from Perrault's version that we can look backward and forward in history. From all the evidence gathered by folklorists, ethnologists, and historians, we know that there was indeed a separate oral tradition, controlled by peasants and most likely by women, before Perrault adapted the story of the girl who went into the woods to visit her grandmother for an upper-class audience in France at the end of the 17th century. But once he appropriated it as his own, and in the name of a particular sex and social class, it became practically impossible for either oral storytellers or writers not to take into account his version, and thus storytellers and writers became the conveyors of both the oral and literary tradition of this particular tale. They debated her body, the fate of her body, who would control her destiny.

The crucial point here is that, though the debate was volatile and the discourse multi-faceted, Perrault fixed the ground rules and sexual regulations for the debate, and these were extended by the Brothers Grimm and largely accepted by most writers and storytellers in the Western world. My thesis is that Perrault transformed a hopeful oral tale about the initiation of a young girl into a tragic one of violence in which the girl is blamed for her own violation.

Little Red Riding Hood is thus the tale of a double violence. As Theresa de Lauretis has persuasively argued in her essay "The Violence of Rhetoric," the representation of violence cannot be understood unless we grasp the techniques and discursive strategies by which gender is constructed.⁹ Perrault's writing is en-gendered violence because he conceived a strategy that violated an oral (female) perspective and fostered notions of violence through this strategy by treating the girl in the tale as a sadomasochistic object. This argument is the impetus behind the social history that I presented in the first edition of this work. It laid the framework for my discussion of the different literary and oral versions of the tale. But the beginning of the frame was prompted by the contemporary appearances of Little Red Riding Hood in all sorts of forms in comic books, cartoons, greeting cards, plays, videos, films, and advertisements that prompted me to look back in history and make connections between the various cultural manifestations of the tale over the past three centuries.

What attracted me to *Little Red Riding Hood* in the first place was "her" commodified appearance as sex object, and how I was socialized to gaze at her gazing at me. Three ads from the United States, Germany, and France illustrate to what extent Red Riding Hood has become an iconic sign of the seducer, the femme fatale, who lures men and thus must bear the consequences of her heedless acts.

In the 1962 American ad for Hertz [Figure 1], first printed in *The New Yorker*, Red Riding Hood is a beautiful young woman with an inviting gaze. In the 1982 German ad for Renault [Figure 2], printed in *Der Stern*, the seductive Red Riding Hood has already lured the wolf. Finally, in the 1983 French ad for Johnny Walker printed in *100 Idées* [Figure 3], we are informed that without red, nothing will work. However, red is not only the color of Johnny Walker's red label, it is also the label of sin and blood. Here we have a girl who does not have the required sexual allure to entrap the wolf, and therefore, he will have nothing to do with her.

Of course, there are numerous modern versions like the playfully erotic *True History of Little Red Riding Hood and her Grandmother and the Big Bad Wolf* (1979) by Jacqueline Loumaye that reveal, as the cover illustration shows [Figure 4], that both grandma and granddaughter have a great amorous interest in the wolf and take great delight in sleeping with him.

Almost all the commodified forms of Little Red Riding Hood as sex object portray her as thoroughly grown-up and desirous of some



FIGURE 1.

kind of sexual assignation with the wolf. At the same time, there are numerous illustrated books, records, and films for children that sanitize the sexual innuendos in an effort to cleanse the tale of its erotic components. Nevertheless, they always imply that, if Red Riding Hood herself had not strayed off the straight path to her grandmother's house, to domesticity, she would not have brought about the

SO SIEHT CHARLOTTE MARCH DEN RENAULT 4.



UND WIE SEHEN SIE IHN?

Renault veranstaltet einen großen Gestaltungswettbewerb. Jeder kann mitmachen. Dann es wird in sechs verschiedenen Kategorien bewertet: 1. Karikatur, 2. Illustration, 3. Foto, 4. Film aus Filmen, 5. Comic, 6. Montage, 7. Kinder-Gemälde. Was ist Ihre Phantasie freier? Jede Bedingung. Der Renault 4 muß in Ihrem Kunstwerk eine Rolle spielen. Jeder kann gewinnen, unter ganz Teil nehmen werden für Renault 4 in Kategorie einen Renault und in der Kategorie 6 "Kinder-Gemälde" 10 Cross-Räder.

Und wenn Ihr Kunstwerk zu den lustigsten oder originalsten gehört, wird es mit Ihrem Namen und Ihrem Foto in der Zeitschrift "Jugend" und der "Photo Revue" abgedruckt. Und bei allen Renault-Händlern in Deutschland ausgestellt. Obendrein werden DM 5.000,- Verleihungsmünzen. Sie haben schon eine Idee? Dann gehen Sie gleich zu einem Renault-Händler. Er hat die Teilnahmebedingungen. Oder schreiben Sie an: Renault AG, 51043 Löh, Postfach. Einsendeschluß: 1. April 1982.



FIGURE 2.

trouble she experiences. Whether sex or sanitized object, Red Riding Hood is compelled to assume responsibility for the "predatory acts" of her creators themselves and the assortment of wolves created in illustrations and narratives that are only too willing to eat her.

One can joke about this, as numerous cartoonists have,¹⁰ and one can dismiss the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* as only a fairy tale that, any way you look at it, has a good warning for girls when you consider how widespread rape is in our culture. However, the tale as it is



FIGURE 3.

used in most commodities and books today (and probably in oral versions as well) still reinforces the notion that "women want to be raped." As Diane Herman has pointed out in her important essay, "The Rape Culture," "the imagery of sexual relations between males and females in books, songs, advertising, and films is frequently that of a sadomasochistic relationship thinly veiled by a romantic facade. Thus it is very difficult in our society to differentiate rape from 'normal' heterosexual intercourse relations. Indeed, our cul-

L'histoire VRAIE du PETIT CHAPERON ROUGE de sa Mère-grand et du grand méchant Loup

Dessins de Jean-Lucas
Texte de Jacqueline Loumaye



FIGURE 4.

ture can be characterized as a rape culture because the image of heterosexual intercourse is based on a rape model of sexuality."¹¹

There are few women these days who do not arrange their days with the possibility in mind that they may be raped. "There is what might be called a universal curfew on women in this country. Whenever a woman walks alone at night, whenever she hitchhikes, she is aware that she is violating well-established rules of

conduct and, as a result, that she faces the possibility of rape. If in one of these situations she is raped, the man will almost always escape prosecution and the woman will be made to feel responsible because she was somehow 'asking for it.'"¹² Written in 1974, this statement is still unfortunately true and might even be expanded to indicate that, even with strong social movements against sexual harassment, it does not matter when a woman leaves her house, she must be prepared for violence.

As I began writing this prologue, the police in the city of Minneapolis have finally arrested a man suspected of raping fourteen women during the past two years. During that time the women in this city became increasingly frightened, if not terrified, and were compelled to place pressure on the police to form a special investigation squad. Of course, those fourteen rapes were not the only ones committed in Minneapolis in the past two years. There has been a steady increase of violence. Women must constantly be on their guard, and it is not safe to walk the streets at night in unprotected areas.

But it is not only in real life that rape permeates the daily routines of women. It is in fiction, newspapers, journals, film, and TV. Again, as I began writing this prologue, one of the women lawyers of the TV series *LA Law* was being stalked by an unknown assailant. The stalker sent her three fairy-tale "gifts" threatening her life. The first one was a red hood with a note—"the better to eat you with"; the second, a glass slipper; the third, a bleeding heart from some animal. Ironically, the assailant turned out to be a "crazed" woman. But the gender of the assailant is not important here, for males have engendered this stalker, who like many female slashers, represents male violence more than any threat that women pose to other women. As figments of the male imagination, women slashers represent the male fear of women taking their lives into their own hands. What is crucial here is the fear socially and culturally produced by men and the fear that women feel in our society, the manifold ways in which they (and men, too) encounter the possibility of rape. And, in this particular TV case, a commonplace, we see how even fairy tales can be used for gruesome ends.

All this talk, my talk of rape and violence, is not an endeavor to incriminate *Little Red Riding Hood* in all the rapes throughout history. Nor do I want to ban or censor *Little Red Riding Hood* in any of its versions. I am more concerned about how an initiatory ritual concerning women has been played out in the genre of the fairy

tale in the West, how and why it was transformed into a story of rape, and why we frame the tale as we do. In short, I am interested in the rhetoric of violence in and about *Little Red Riding Hood*, its history as neglected history, to understand how we are compelled to comply with narrative prescriptions that many contemporary authors have been trying to revise and reappropriate in the name of feminism. It is through the frame of "The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood" that, I hope, we can review and appreciate how writers and illustrators have brought about the necessity to re-frame the oral tale and restore some sense of a happy ending that ironically keeps all endings open.

Notes

1. See *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 192–236.
2. Recently Ed Young has written and illustrated another fine adaptation of this oral tale for children: *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China* (New York: Putnam, 1989). Winner of the Caldecott Medal in 1990, this book has of course done away with all the scatological motifs, but it does retain the basic plot of the Asian cognate of *Little Red Riding Hood*.
3. Dundes, pp. 223–4.
4. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 55.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
6. As the source of his translation, Darnton cites pp. 373–81 in volume I of Paul Delarue's *Le Conte populaire français*. However, I have looked high and low for the tale that he translated, and I cannot find it. There is only one oral version printed in Delarue's volume, and it is the one which I translated and included in the original edition of *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* and which has been reprinted in the main text of my social history.
7. I have used the following collections: A. Millien and P. Delarue, *Contes du Nivernais et du Morvan* (Paris: Erasme, 1953); Paul Delarue, *Le*

Conte Populaire Français, vol. 1 (Paris: Erasme, 1957); Charles Joisten, *Versions populaires Haute-Alpines des Contes de Perrault* (Gap: Ribaud Frères, 1959); Charles Joisten, *Contes Populaires du Dauphiné*, vol. 1 (Grenoble: Publications du Musée Dauphinois, 1971). In all these works, the majority of the *Red Riding Hood* tales end on a happy note. However, to tell the truth, the matter at hand is not a question of quantitative analysis. As Steven Swann Jones has pointed out, "From our familiarity with the prevalence of happy endings in folk fairy tales (they are in essence a definitional feature of that genre), it seems more reasonable to conclude, as Soriano does, that the motif of the heroine's scatological escape and happy ending are authentic components of the folktale in oral tradition (given the folk's proclivity for scatological humor, also, which is more pronounced than in the literary tradition's use), and that the abrupt endings with the heroine's death are either literary adaptations or oral tales of a different variety, moral tales designed to teach an explicit lesson." See "On Analyzing Fairy Tales: 'Little Red Riding Hood' Revisited," *Western Folklore* 46 (1987), 99.

8. For two exemplary studies concerned with the interaction of the oral and literary traditions, see Catherine Velay-Vallantin, *L'histoire des contes* (Paris: Fayard, 1992) and *La fille en garçon* (Caracassone: Garae/Hesiod, 1992).
9. Theresa de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations on Representation" in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 239–258.
10. Cf. Wolfgang Mieder, "Survival Forms of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in Modern Society," *International Folklore Review* 2 (1982), 23–41, and Hans Ritz, *Bilder vom Rotkäppchen: Das Märchen in 100 Illustrationen, Karikaturen und Cartoons* (Munich: Heyne, 1986).
11. Diane Herman, "The Rape Culture," in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Jo Freeman, 3rd Ed. (Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1984), p. 21.
12. Andra Medea and Kathleen Thompson, *Against Rape* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), pp. 4–5.