

**BABES IN THE WOODS: VISUALIZING THE CHILD IN
CONTEMPORARY RETELLINGS OF *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD***

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Probably no child has been represented in literature more frequently than Little Red Riding Hood. The popular fairy-tale heroine haunts the imagination of authors and illustrators around the globe, and the little girl in red has been portrayed in an endless variety of roles and with a myriad of faces. This paper examines some of these retellings to show how literature's most famous child has been visualized by contemporary authors and illustrators throughout the world. Undoubtedly the most famous images of Little Red Riding Hood are Gustave Doré's powerful engravings in the edition of Perrault's tales published by Hetzel in 1861. According to Jack Zipes, Doré's engravings continue "to frame" the manner in which we see the fairy-tale heroine today [3, p. 357]. Yet the retellings examined here demonstrate that contemporary authors and illustrators tend overwhelmingly not to imitate, but rather to subvert the conventional image of Little Red Riding Hood. Some artists avoid a stereotypical rendition of Little Red Riding Hood by representing her in an abstract manner. A number of visual interpretations of the tale leave readers free to visualize their own heroine by using techniques such as origami and stencils that create a featureless heroine. Other media, such as woodcuts and photographs, have resulted in highly original retellings with very unconventional heroines. Some illustrators revision Little Red Riding Hood through the prism of classical painting. Many artists and authors challenge the conventional image of Little Red Riding Hood by offering multiple and shifting images of the fairy-tale heroine. Contemporary retellings by authors and illustrators around the world illustrate the versatility and universal appeal of Little Red Riding Hood, a literary child whose image is constantly changing to reflect the sociocultural and aesthetic preoccupations of the times.

Key words: child; fairy tale; Little Red Riding Hood; retelling; illustration.

Probably no child has been represented in literature more frequently than Little Red Riding Hood. The popular fairy-tale heroine haunts the imagination of authors and illustrators around the globe, and the little girl in red has been portrayed in an endless variety of roles and with a myriad of faces. I have collected more than two hundred international retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* from Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, and Australia for two books, *Recycling Red Riding Hood*, published in 2002, and *Revisualizing Red Riding Hood for All Ages*, which will appear in 2007. This paper examines some of these retellings to show how literature's most famous child has been visualized by contemporary authors and illustrators throughout the world.

Undoubtedly the most famous images of Little Red Riding Hood are Gustave Doré's powerful engravings of the encounter in the woods and the bed scene in the edition of Perrault's tales published by Hetzel in 1861. Doré portrays a very young girl, still with some of her baby fat, who is dwarfed by the enormous wolf she meets in the woods. Yet the intense gaze that locks her large eyes on the wolf's in this "intimate *tête-à-tête*" has been interpreted by Jack Zipes and others as one of seduction and desire [3, p. 357]. Doré's other celebrated engraving depicts Little Red Riding Hood in bed with the wolf, her hair falling

rather seductively over her shoulders and a bare arm clutching the sheet to her bosom. According to Zipes, Doré's engravings continue "to frame" the manner in which we see the fairy-tale heroine today [3, p. 357]. Yet the retellings examined here demonstrate that contemporary authors and illustrators tend overwhelmingly not to imitate, but rather to subvert the conventional image of Little Red Riding Hood. Beni Montresor imitates Doré's engravings in his *Little Red Riding Hood* (1991), which was intended as a "homage to Gustave Doré," but even he has a parodic intention. His final images present a smiling little girl who floats blissfully and serenely in the red cavity of the wolf's belly, like a baby awaiting birth in her mother's womb.

Some artists avoid a stereotypical rendition of Little Red Riding Hood by representing her in an abstract manner. In *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* published in Paris in 1965 by the Swiss artist Warja Lavater, the fairy-tale heroine becomes a simple red dot. Lavater's "imagerie," which takes the form of an accordion book, retells the story of the little girl in red in what the artist calls "pictorial language" or "pictograms," that is "by using abstract shapes and colors instead of words" [2, p. 186]. A tiny Little Red Riding Hood dot is devoured by a huge black dot/wolf in the climactic scene. This simple form of representation frees readers from the stereotypes of conventional illustration and allows them to imagine their own Little Red Riding Hood. Lavater's innovative approach to illustration, which was quite revolutionary in the 1960s, addresses, at least in part, Bruno Bettelheim's concern that the illustration of fairy tales robs the story of much of the personal significance that it would have if the characters were given substance by the child's imagination rather than by that of an illustrator [1, p. 60].

In 1975, ten years after Lavater's version, the French artist Jean Ache uses a strikingly similar visual code, which he calls "narrative abstraction," to illustrate Perrault's *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* in *Le monde des ronds et des carrés* (The world of circles and squares), a bilingual book (in French and Japanese) published in Japan. In Ache's retelling, the heroine is a little red or orange-red dot or circle and the wolf is a black square. While the heroine remains a simple dot, the wolf is a more complex figure: a diagonal, jagged white line represents the wolf's jaws that open menacingly to swallow the little red dot. Two years earlier, Ache had done a series on the theme of Little Red Riding Hood "in the manner of" seven famous twentieth-century artists for the magazine *Pilote*. The variation in the manner of Piet Mondrian, in which Little Red Riding Hood is a red square, undoubtedly led to the abstract version published in Japan.

In the origami picturebook *Akazukin-chan* (Little Red Riding Hood), published in Japan in 1996 by Yoshihide and Sumiko Momotani, Little Red Riding Hood assumes a more human form, but the featureless heroine constructed from red paper remains quite generic. The Momotanis' visual interpretation of the tale leaves readers free to visualize their own heroine. In fact, instructions are provided so that readers can construct their own origami version of Little Red Riding Hood. In the charming French picture-book retelling, *Mon Loup* (My Wolf, 1995), Anne Bertier's Little Red Riding Hood, whose name is Violette, is also a simple silhouette. On the cover, the little black figure of the heroine, in her distinctive pointed bonnet, stares up at her tall, elegant wolf. The simple black and white illustrations, in which stencils were used to create an effect of cut silhouettes, are surprisingly expressive. Throughout the simple love story, Violette can be haughty and distant, playful, sad, angry, sulky, forgiving, sick, caring, enchanting, and loving. Lane Smith makes use of silhouettes in a very different manner in the retelling "Little Red Running Shorts" from *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, the hugely successful picturebook he did with Jon Scieszka. When Jack the Narrator gives the characters their cue, Little Red Running Shorts and the Wolf refuse to tell the story, claiming that the narrator has appropriated their narrative and already told all in his

introduction. Smith's first picture depicts the punker heroine and the executive wolf abandoning the panic-stricken narrator. Their tracks lead back to the opposite page where white cutouts of the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood indicate their absence from this story that ends before it begins.

A number of illustrators have used woodcuts to create memorable Little Red Riding Hoods. The Norwegian illustrator Elise Fagerli presents a heroine whose large red bonnet is the only splash of colour in the otherwise black and white woodcuts. Fagerli portrays a chubby little girl whose gestures at first evoke those of a typical small child. This image is quickly dispelled when the little girl with the vicious baby teeth chomps into the cake and swigs the wine meant for her grandmother. The Riding Hood who confronts the wolf is fearless and mean-looking. Readers may take her sang-froid as a sign of her inebriation, but the following scenes reveal the hungry little girl devouring first the wolf and then her tough old grandmother. The final doublespread depicts a replete, but rumped, Riding Hood letting out a gargantuan burp as she stands before her bewildered mother. Isabelle Vandenebee uses more red in her otherwise black and white illustrations for the Belgian picturebook *Rood Rood Roodkapje* (Red Red Little Red Riding Hood, 2003), Edward van de Vendel's story of a little girl who loves the colour red. One striking woodcut depicts the little girl holding a large, bloody axe behind her back, while red blood fills her grandmother's doorway and flows out into a pool on the ground. The little girl who holds a doll and stares at the huge black wolfskin rug on the floor of her bedroom in the final scene may look like any ordinary child, but she is thinking very unusual thoughts about being free to do "red things" and the limitless possibilities of the colour red.

The heroine of "Fita Verde no cabelo" (Green ribbon in the hair, 1970), by the celebrated Brazilian author João Guimarães Rosa, wears, not the traditional red hood, but a large, imaginary, green ribbon in her hair. When Roger Mello was asked to illustrate the existential retelling for a children's picturebook edition in 1992, he decided to use a mixed media of pencil and ecoline, so that his illustrations are in shades of black and white with only touches of green. By depicting only the green ribbon in colour, Mello emphasizes its imaginary status and effectively illustrates, through his technique, the confusion of the real and the imaginary in the young girl's mind. Although Green Ribbon is called a little girl in the text, she is portrayed as an adolescent or even a young woman in the illustrations. She is initially presented as a rather sultry tropical beauty with long dark hair, flirtatious eyes, a curvaceous figure, and bare feet. When she discovers the loss of the green ribbon, the protagonist is depicted as a very mature-looking young woman, who seems to have visibly aged on the way to her grandmother's. This Riding Hood is, in fact, an existential heroine whose encounter with death, in the form of the grandmother-wolf, results in the prise de conscience that brings metaphysical Angst, symbolized by the wolf.

What makes Sarah Moon's version of Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood* so shocking are the black and white photographs of the child model Morgan. Little Red Riding Hood is portrayed as a twentieth-century schoolgirl who encounters a wolf in the form of the invisible driver of a large, black car. Readers of Moon's book will have a strong feeling of déjà vu when they see Robert's Innocenti's 1988 illustration of Little Red Riding Hood, who bears more than a striking resemblance to Morgan running along the brick wall. The disturbing effect of Moon's photographs of Morgan is not unlike that of Anne Kihlef's 1985 film, *La véritable histoire du Chaperon Rouge* (The real story of Red Riding Hood), which casts a seven-year-old actress, Justine Bayard, in the role of Red Riding Hood. The realism of the media used to portray a young, flesh and blood girl in Moon's stark photography and Kihlef's dramatic cinematography accounts for the very powerful, shocking impact that these exceptional retellings have on viewers.

Some illustrators revision Little Red Riding Hood with the aid of past masters. The

Black French artist Kelek visualizes Little Red Riding Hood through the prism of classical painting, as she does all of the fairy-tale characters presented in the plates of her edition of Perrault's *Contes*, published in 1986. Her single plate for "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" transplants the fairy-tale heroine into the Venetian Renaissance interior of Vittore Carpaccio's *The Birth of the Virgin*. The artist's clever appropriation of the elements of the original painting is best indicated by her treatment of Little Red Riding Hood herself. Although the fairy-tale heroine is a reworking of Carpaccio's figure of a young woman in a long red dress, Kelek repositions her in the central position occupied by the baby Mary and the nursemaid in the original. By replacing the almost naked baby Mary of Carpaccio's painting with a Little Red Riding Hood clad from head to foot in a red hood and Venetian gown, Kelek deliberately subverts the image of Doré and so many other illustrators who obligingly reveal the charms of her chubby flesh for the wolf and the viewer.

In a strikingly different mode, Jean Lecointre uses bright-coloured, garish photomontages that evoke the pop art of the 1950s in the French picturebook *Les dents du loup* (The wolf's teeth, 2002). The 1950s heroine, Françoise, is a little girl in a yellow dress and white shoes when she first meets the wolf and promises to give him a candy every evening if he does not eat her. After all his teeth fall out from lack of brushing, it is a very grown-up Françoise who brings a sandwich to the pajama-clad wolf. Dressed in typical 1950s style, a fuchsia pink sweater over a white blouse and a beret topping her long red curls, this Riding Hood with red lipstick and red painted nails caresses the wolf's muzzle rather seductively. Pop culture also inspired the Japanese picturebook *Akazukin* (Little Red Riding Hood, 1991), by Naoki Takei and Tara Yumura, in which Little Red Riding Hood is a stereotypical Western blonde wearing red nail polish, who climbs out of a wolf's belly full of Wriggley's gum, Lifesavers, Clorets, etc.

In the series *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* "in the manner of...", published in 1973, Jean Ache's masterly recastings pastiching celebrated painters illustrate eloquently the versatility of the fairy-tale heroine. The prolific French bande dessinée artist single-handedly offers seven *Little Red Riding Hood* masterpieces, cleverly imitating the art of seven renowned and very different artists, Le Douanier Rousseau, Fernand Léger, Bernard Buffet, Pablo Picasso, Giorgio de Chirico, Joan Miró, and Piet Mondrian. These reworkings are done with striking fidelity to the style of each artist and "co-signed," tongue in cheek, by the pastiched artist and Jean Ache. We have already mentioned the abstract, geometric Little Red Riding Hood à la Piet Mondrian. Miró's surrealist Little Red Riding Hood is a whimsical, playfully distorted human form with odd geometrics, while Pablo Picasso's heroine changes forms in every sequence to reflect the artist's evolving style. In the strange dream world of Giorgio de Chirico, Little Red Riding Hood is a shadow running through the familiar piazza Vittoria Veneto, whereas Fernand Léger's heroine, a double of the angular, barefooted girl from his painting *Leisure, Hommage to David*, goes to granny's on a bicycle. It is not a *Woman in Red* that is portrayed in the lush forest of Le Douanier Rousseau's pastiche (one of his paintings is aptly titled *Woman in Red in the Forest*), but a naive little "girl in red." Bernard Buffet's rendition depicts an elongated, spiky figure outlined in black with the lonely, melancholic look so typical of his subjects.

Many artists and authors challenge the conventional image of Little Red Riding Hood by offering multiple and shifting images of the fairy-tale heroine. The German-born American multimedia artist Kiki Smith presents a very diverse range of images in a wide selection of media. *Companion*, an accordion book published in 2000 that, like Lavater's, appeals to collectors and children alike, depicts a freize-like procession of Little Red Riding Hoods and wolves. The unique book culminates in a pocket with a memento of the fairy-tale heroine, a red hood, folded up inside. *Telling Tales*, published in 2001, is a picture story, as well as a catalogue for an exhibition by the same name. A series of colour

photographs of multiple images of Red Riding Hood painted on glass portray an innocent young girl, with a naive expression, setting out on her journey. The artist offers a more troubling image of Little Red Riding Hood in the sculpture she titles *Daughter* (1999), an enigmatic and complex life-size figure that is part girl and part wolf. Her face, which is tilted up questioningly toward the viewer, is unexpectedly covered with dark hair or fur, as if the little girl is metamorphosing into a werewolf. Smith casts Little Red Riding Hood in a variety of different roles that foreground her complexity.

The Alsatian author-illustrator Tomi Ungerer has provided a number of subversive and sometimes controversial portrayals of the fairy-tale heroine. The bold, independent heroine of "Little Red Riding Hood," from *A Storybook from Tomi Ungerer* (1974), chooses to defy social conventions and family obligations to go and live in the sumptuous castle of a lonely wolf-Duke with a very bad reputation. The Red Riding Hood Ungerer depicts on a poster he did for the 1992 exhibition *Le Petit Chaperon rouge dans tous ses états* has even less inhibitions. As a lascivious-looking wolf scrubs her underclothing, a buxom Little Red Riding Hood wearing only a red bonnet and stockings, hangs her red panties on the clothesline.

The French author and editor Christian Bruel has also offered numerous, varied portrayals of the fairy-tale heroine in his innovative works. In the enigmatic textless picturebook *Vous oubliez votre cheval* (You are forgetting your horse, 1986), illustrated by Pierre Wachs, all that is visible of Little Red Riding Hood, whose hooded red coat hangs from the bedroom doorknob, are her bare legs and feet. They evoke images of a completely naked Riding Hood sitting on the bed, as the wolf, like a well-trained dog, or even an obliging lover, brings her granny's slippers. Little Red Riding Hood appears as a very small child in *Rouge, bien rouge* (Red, very red, 1986), a textless picturebook that Bruel did in collaboration with Didier Jouault and Nicole Claveloux. Claveloux's cover illustration of a little girl dressed in red from the top of her head to her galoshes-shod feet is taken from a doublespread that appears exactly at the midpoint of the book, playfully turning Little Red Riding Hood into a kind of overdressed, underage centerfold, posing against the backdrop of a huge, crimson curtain. Bruel and Claveloux offer a variety of intriguing images of Little Red Riding Hood in their versatile textless picturebook *Petits Chaperons Loups* (1997), which opens up to reveal two separate books, one devoted to Little Red Riding Hood and another to the wolf. On the cover of the Riding Hood book, a chubby little heroine dons a wolf costume, apparently to play the role of the wolf, who, in turn, is dressed as Little Red Riding Hood. The images of the two books can be mixed and matched to show Little Red Riding Hood as a nurse preparing to give a needle to a very bandaged wolf in a hospital bed, or bending over her basket while a macho wolf enjoys the view leaning on a pinball machine that displays a very sexy, Betty Grable-like Riding Hood in a slinky red dress, or slyly holding out a pen and document to be signed by a wailing, illiterate baby cub whose paws are visibly inked to make his mark.

Jean-Loup Craipeau and Clément Oubrierie's *Le petit chaperon bouge* (Little Red Riding Hood moves, 1997), an innovative French picturebook that allows readers to reconstruct 121 variations of the familiar tale, presents a Little Red Riding Hood whose role and appearance are constantly changing. On some pages she resembles the traditional heroine, despite her modern cell phone. Other illustrations depict a comic-book superheroine in a red cape and helmet and armed with a laser gun; the heroine of a thriller, in red high heels and bright red lipstick, taking out a contract on her grandmother's life with a seedy underworld wolf; or the heroine of an adventure story, swimming up an African river in a red bathing cap, goggles, and fins.

In the sophisticated French picturebook *Mon Chaperon Rouge* (My Red Riding Hood, 1998), by Anne Ikhlef and Alain Gauthier, Red Riding Hood is a complex,

multifaceted character cast in a variety of conflicting roles, effectively exploding the stereotypical image of the classic fairy-tale heroine. The evocative cover illustration presents a young girl whose red dress is an elegant, swirling extension of the lascivious wolf's red tongue, making it impossible to say where the wolf ends and Little Red Riding Hood begins. On one page, the tiny figure of a prepubescent, flat-chested Red Riding Hood is held in the arms of a curvaceous, full-figured mother with moon breasts. On the next, the young girl falls asleep in a book/cradle in the middle of her mother's story (Perrault's tale) and dreams with a contented smile that she is Little Red Riding Hood. She is a naive young peasant girl in clogs who recites nursery rhymes as she walks through the woods. A decapitated Red Riding Hood seems to have been punished for her unwitting act of cannibalism. She smiles enigmatically at the man-wolf as she shrugs one shoulder out of her red dress in the ritualistic striptease. A nude Red Riding Hood lies on top of the wolf, her head very close to his and her hair falling seductively onto him, while their eyes lock in a powerful gaze. Ikhlef and Gauthier's Riding Hood becomes, in turn, an object manipulated by the wolf—a Red Riding Hood cello played by a Picasso-like wolf, a courageous heroine who saves herself by impaling the wolf, a serene young girl who sleeps peacefully on the wolf's back, a diabolical creature with devil's horns, a temptress in the form of a new Eve, and a mysterious girl-wolf.

Little Red Riding Hood continues to inspire a whole new generation of young authors and illustrators. The exhibition at the Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse (Children's books and magazine fair) in Seine-Saint-Denis, France, in 2004 provided a foretaste of the Red Riding Hood images that the future holds in store for audiences around the world. The exhibition featured the best works of the nearly 2,000 young artists from every continent who participated in the unique biennial international illustration competition *Figures futur*, whose theme in 2004 was *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. The forty-one young artists whose works were chosen by the jury to be included in the exhibition rendered the fairy-tale heroine in every medium and mixed media imaginable, including India ink, crayon, pen, pencil, charcoal, pastel, watercolour, acrylic on celluloid, oil, collage, montage, modeling, peelings, plants, dyed fabrics, yarn, embroidery, woodcut, engraving, monotype, silkscreen printing, photographs, Photoshop enhanced painting, digital print, computer graphics, and interactive media. In 2003, twenty-one Japanese illustrators participated in a workshop organized in Tokyo by the innovative Spanish publisher Media Vaca. Although the starting point was Perrault's version of the tale, Media Vaca encouraged the illustrators not to limit themselves to the classic version, but to feel free to change it as they saw fit. The result was an entire volume of highly original retellings, which was published in Spain under the title *Érase veintiuna veces Caperucita Roja* (Once Upon... Twenty-one Times, Little Red Riding Hood).

The retellings examined in this paper demonstrate the protean nature of a heroine who is as at home in the world of the twenty-first century as she was in Perrault's seventeenth-century France, the Grimms' nineteenth-century Germany, or the timeless past of her origins. Little Red Riding Hood offers an image of the child that is constantly changing to reflect the sociocultural and aesthetic preoccupations of the times. The representation of the fairy-tale heroine in contemporary literature provides an endless range of images of the child: innocent peasant girl, naive country boy, tomboy, gypsy, immodest country wench, futuristic superheroine, celebrated rock star, rapper, punker, budding actress, helpless victim, dangerous hood, murderous fiend, belligerent warrior, war victim, diabolical temptress, femme fatale, ugly duck, babe in the woods, or sexy babe. Little Red Riding Hood is a malleable figure that can be reshaped and refashioned to adapt to all audiences, cultures, and periods. She effortlessly crosses temporal and cultural boundaries to assume the identity of a child of the Venetian Renaissance, traditional Japan, tribal

Africa, or contemporary New York or Paris. In short, Little Red Riding Hood is a universal child.

1 *Bettelheim, Bruno*. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Random House, 1975.

2 *Lavater, Warja*. "Perception: When Signs Start to Communicate." In *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johann Caspar Lavater*. Ed. Ellis Shookman. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993. 182–187.

3 *Zipes, Jack*. The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context. 2d ed. NY: Routledge, 1993.

НАЇВНІ ЛЮДИ: ВІЗУАЛІЗАЦІЯ ОБРАЗУ ДИТИНИ В СУЧАСНИХ ОПОВІДЯХ ПРО ЧЕРВОНУ ШАПОЧКУ

Сандра Бекет

Мабуть, жодна інша дитина не представлена в літературі більше, ніж Червона Шапочка. До популярної героїні казок часто звертаються письменники та ілюстратори усього світу, і дівчинка в червоному капелюшку зображена в безлічі ролей та у величезній розмаїтості образів. У статті досліджено деякі з таких обробок, щоб показати, як сучасні автори та ілюстратори усього світу уявляють найпопулярнішу дитину в літературі. Безперечно, найзнаменитішими портретами Червоної Шапочки є величні гравюри Гюстава Доре у збірці казок Шарля Перро, що вийшли у видавництві Гетцеля (1861). На думку Джека Зайпса, гравюри Доре "формують" і сучасний погляд на цю казкову героїню. Проте обробки, розглянуті в цій статті, засвідчують, що сучасні письменники та ілюстратори здебільшого мають тенденцію не до наслідування, а радше до руйнування традиційного образу Червоної Шапочки. Деякі митці уникають стереотипного зображення Червоної Шапочки, трактуючи її абстрактно. Подавати читачам власну героїню дає змогу низка образотворчих інтерпретацій казки, що застосовують техніку оригамі й трафарет, які й надають образу аморфності. Застосування інших засобів, як-от гравюри на дереві та фотографування, дало доволі оригінальні обробки і нетрадиційне трактування героїні. Деякі ілюстратори подають Червону Шапочку крізь призму класичного малярства. Інші художники та письменники замість традиційного образу Червоної Шапочки пропонують численні динамічні образи казкової героїні. Сучасні обробки письменників та ілюстраторів усього світу демонструють універсальну симпатію до Червоної Шапочки – літературної дитини, образ якої зазнає постійних змін, відображаючи соціокультурні та естетичні почування усіх часів.

Ключові слова: Червона Шапочка; обробка; образ; трактування; погляд.