

CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN'S TALES — TEST-CASE: "LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD"

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This paper discusses the linkage between changes in cultural conceptions of childhood and changing versions of fairy tales in the course of the past three centuries, with "Little Red Riding Hood" as the case in point.

Taking Aries' description of the development of the conception of childhood as a point of departure, the linkage is examined in two aspects: (a) The way assumptions about the child as reader determine the character of the text and how historical changes in those assumptions are manifested in the changes those texts underwent; (b) the way the child is represented in the texts and how changing conceptions of childhood modify that representation.

The article goes back to Perrault's late seventeenth-century text, when his putative reader, the child, was just gaining recognition, but was still regarded as a source of amusement for adults. Fairy tales were then in fashion among the intellectuals, but they considered them only as part of the culture of the lower classes and children. Perrault manipulated his audience's feigned credibility and produced a sophisticated and ironical text ostensibly for children.

The second known written version of the text, that of the Brothers Grimm, appeared almost a hundred years later. During that century

educational conceptions were evolving *vis-à-vis* the child, and the family began to emerge as the core of society. Consequently, Grimm's version of the tale differed in the following aspects: the text had to be adapted for children; family relations, which hardly existed in Perrault's version, are underscored; strong erotic elements, dominant in Perrault's version, have totally disappeared from Grimm's tale. New elements such as school and child education now appear, transforming the text from a satire on the gentleman who takes advantage of a country girl into a moral story about reward and punishment.

Nineteenth and twentieth century notions of childhood are also briefly examined as responsible for different adaptations of "Little Red Riding Hood". While nineteenth century rejection of fairy tales eliminated them entirely from children's literature, in the twentieth century they were rehabilitated to fit "protective" attitudes toward the child. Hence, despite the revival of fairy tales in children's literature, their specific character is largely determined by pedagogic considerations, which this article analyses in a sample of modern texts.