

Little red riding hood: a comparative analysis of two cross- cultural retellings e...

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Different versions of Little Red Riding Hood have been retold throughout written history. Each retelling was written in a culture of its own, which holds its own philosophies on each of the continuing main ideas in each version. One integral philosophy is their principles of femininity. Because so much time had past from the original work to the time of the newer retelling, the newer version had to be rewritten to tell a different tale, distinguishing the principles of femininity that the two cultures contrasted. Two versions that contrast very well are Brother Grimms Little Red Cap and Tanith Lees Wolfland. They offer different positions of femininity, one representing the innocence of the earlier 19th century, the other representing the dominance of the late 20th century.

In Grimms traditional version, the femininity of Little Red Cap and her grandmother is a rather fragile one. Little Red Cap is an innocent character. She sees no danger in giving detailed information about the location of her grandmothers house, her destination, to a complete stranger: Her house is right under three large oaks. You must know the place from the hazel hedges near it (Grimm 620). She is also a naïve character, following the advice of the wolf to gaze upon the flowers and birds in the woods, without ever thinking about his intentions, as she should not have listened to anyone: Little Red Cap, have you seen the beautiful flowers all about? Why dont you look around for a while? I dont think youve even noticed how sweetly the birds are singing (Grimm 621). Little Red Cap and her grandmother are submissive to masculinity. In this particular version, the grandmother is eaten by the wolf, and later Little Red Cap. Furthermore, both women in this story are rescued by a man. A protective huntsman checking up on the

grandmother cuts open the wolf and rescues both women from the wolf's belly (Grimm 620). A huntsman happened to be passing by the house just then and thought to himself: How the old woman is snoring! You'd better check to see what's wrong (Grimm 621).

This story is appropriate for its culture, as it depicts the time period in which it was written. During this time, men were very dominant figures over women. The wolf dominated Little Red Cap by tricking her by distracting her, and both Little Red Cap and her grandmother by eating them. Men dominate women when they follow them into their own homes and harm them. Also, women up until recently weren't expected to defend themselves — they had to be defended by men. The huntsman is the person who eventually saves Little Red Cap and the grandmother from the wolf. He pulled out his musket and was about to take aim when he realized that the wolf may have eaten Grandmother and that she could still be saved (Grimm 622). In earlier times, women were expected to be very prude, and sexually repressed. Besides the huntsman and wolf, there is no mention of any other men in the story.

The story needed to be rewritten to relate better with contemporary readers. Tanith Lee's post-modern *Wolfland* bridges the gap between readers of the earlier 19th and late 20th century. In more modern households, women have become more dominant figures in families, and sometimes even the head of the family altogether. In *Wolfland*, Anna the Matriarch not only maintains her own household, but controls that of Lisel's in her youth: Even in her absence, Anna had always had a say in things. A recluse, she had still manipulated like

a puppet master from behind the curtain of the forest (Lee 623). Women have also become more independent from the security of men. Anna the Matriarch, in her wolf transformation, killed her abusive husband: The final thing he sees through the haze of his own blood are the eyes of the wolf, gleaming coolly back at him. He knows they are the eyes of Anna. And that it is Anna who then tears out his throat (Lee 624).

In conclusion, Little Red Cap and Wolfland portray two very different concepts of femininity. One way which this is done is through the innocence and consciousness of Little Red Cap and Lisel. Another is by the delicateness of Little Red Cap and her grandmother, yet the independence of Anna the Matriarch. They also demonstrate the different attitudes in each story's society. Because of the great difference in culture, it was necessary that the story be retold, so that readers can identify better with the characters and plot of the story.

References:

Grimm, Brother. "Little Red Cap." *Retellings: A Thematic Literature Anthology*. Ed. M. B. Clarke. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003. 619-623.

Lee, Tanith. "Wolfland." *Retellings: A Thematic Literature Anthology*. Ed. M. B. Clarke. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003. 624-643.