



A Postmodern Analysis of the Little Red Riding Hood Tale

Barbara Smith Chalou

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Dr. Chalou's study is a qualitative critical analysis of the Little Red Riding Hood tale, from its oral beginnings to the latest contemporary retellings of the 1990's, examining the protagonist's depiction through both text and illustration. The retellings span six decades and are separated into three distinct categories to correspond with particular intellectual movements to which they conform; Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern. One resource to which children might look for role models is in the available literature. Stereotypically sexist depictions of girls and women in literature may serve not only to reinforce sexist attitudes in society, but also to impact the psychological development of females. Little Red Riding Hood is a classic example of a stereotypically sexist depiction of the protagonist, whose traditional portrayal ranges from polite and naive, to carnal and seductive. This study is a qualitative critical analysis of the Little Red Riding Hood tale, from its oral beginnings to the latest contemporary retellings of the 1990's, examining the protagonist's depiction through both text and illustration. The retellings span six decades and are separated into three distinct categories to correspond with particular intellectual movements to which they conform; Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern. Books which fall into the Traditional category typically have an innocence about them and are written in sugary language. The Modern retellings attempt to break with the traditional versions by updating the story, but the changes are usually superficial ones. The books in the Postmodern category are retellings that make more meaningful changes to the tale by addressing the political implications of the story, taking a critical look at the protagonist's portrayal. This study examines how Little Red Riding Hood's image has changed over time, rather than asking if she has changed. Change is inevitable and not always a forward progression. Change can be a step backward and serve to reaffirm, rather than to dispel sexist stereotypes. When superficial changes to the story are made, depicting the protagonist in contemporary clothing for example, with no regard to her thoughts and actions, the reader receives a mixed message.



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