

Revisoning Red Riding Hood Around the World

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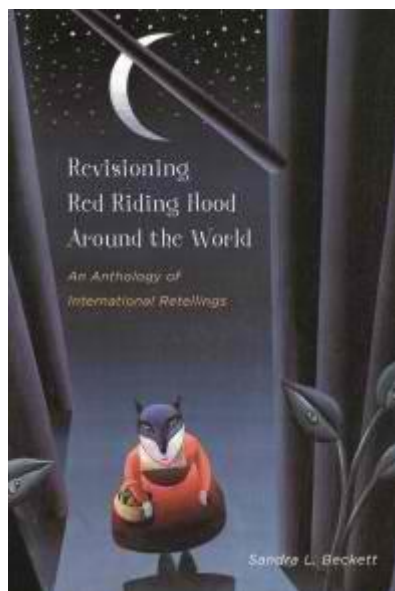
SANDRA L. BECKETT

Revisoning Red Riding Hood Around the World.

An Anthology of International Retellings.

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS (2014)

(416 pages)



In *Revisoning Red Riding Hood Around the World: An anthology of International retellings*, Sandra L. Beckett presents over fifty notable modern retellings, only two of which have appeared previously in English. The tales include works published in 24 countries and 16 languages, in texts that span more than a century, but with the majority written in the last fifty years. They include retellings for children, adolescents, and adults, as well as crossover works intended for an audience of all ages.

The tales in this volume progress from works that recast the story of Little Red Riding Hood from traditional perspectives through more playful versions to more unconventional approaches. Seven sections are arranged thematically: Cautionary Tales for Modern Riding Hoods, Contemporary Riding Hoods Come of Age, Playing with the Story of Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Rehabilitating the Wolf, The Wolf's Story, the Wolf Within, and Running with the Wolves. Beckett provides an interpretative introduction to each text and insightful information on its author and / or illustrator. A variety of genres are represented, including fairy tale, short story, novella, novel, poetry, illustrated books, and picture books.

The retellings in the first section, "Cautionary Tales for Modern Riding Hoods", all draw on the story's tradition as a cautionary tale or Warnmarchen. Charles Perrault penned the first literary version of the tale to warn girls and women against predatory males. Today, "Little Red Riding Hood" can be seen as the archetypal tale of child abuse and rape. In the second edition of *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, Jack Zipes claims that "it is because rape and violence are at the core of the history of Little Red Riding Hood that it is the most widespread and notorious fairy tale in the Western world, if not in the entire world". There are undoubtedly other reasons for its popularity, but this controversial and topical theme certainly attracts a large number of authors and illustrators, especially, but not exclusively, women. Authors and artists who retell "Little Red Riding Hood" as a story of rape or child abuse generally adopt a very serious, even tragic tone, and their reversionings seek to warn both children and adults of the ever – present danger of predatory males.

The second section, "Contemporary Riding Hoods Come of Age", focuses on retellings that interpret the story in the light of feminine initiation and rites of passage. The protagonist may at first resemble the naïve, innocent heroine of the classic tale, but she proves herself to be clever and courageous, saving herself and often her grandmother as well. No longer a passive victim, the active, enterprising protagonist demonstrates her resourcefulness and outsmarts the wolf in his role of seducer.

The section titled "Playing with the Story of Red Riding Hood and the Wolf" is devoted to versions that adopt an essentially playful approach to the tale. They may deal with themes that are considered in other sections, but they do so in a lighthearted, humorous mode. A number of witty renditions adopt a postmodern, metafictional discourse to question the classic tale and its codes and conventions, or even a single motif.

The retellings in the section "Rehabilitating the Wolf" are also, for the most part, in a lighthearted tone even when their authors wish to convey a very serious message. Over the past few decades, the marked attempt to rehabilitate the wolf in public opinion has had a profound influence on the wolf's literary image, especially in contemporary recastings of "Little Red Riding Hood". Contemporary retellings are full of reformed,

vegetarian wolves. Many wolves have already been rehabilitated prior to the start of the story, while others never constituted a threat in the first place. Since the early 1970s the rehabilitation of the wolf has served not solely to demystify children's fears and to reestablish the truth about wolves but more often to address ecological concerns and to present the wolf as an endangered species that must be protected.

The recastings in section 5, "The Wolf's Story", all put the spotlight on the wolf, telling his story from various points of view. This strategy allows authors to lay bare the wolf's soul, to reveal his motives, thoughts, emotions and dreams.

In sections 6 and 7, the wolf element is an integral part of Little Red Riding Hood's own story. The retellings in the section titled "The Wolf Within" present the wolf as a symbol of that which is hidden deep in the human psyche. For a number of Riding Hoods and other characters of the story as well, the wolf embodies the fear of death.

The final section, "Running with the Wolves", contains retellings in which the protagonist joins the wolf in some way. A number of Riding Hoods display wolf instincts. Others decide to live by wolf rules. Or they may set out to tame the wolf. Little Riding Hood has become a match for the wolf, since she now has a wolfish essence of her own. The first four texts in this section are all short stories intended for adults in which Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf become consensual lovers. The final two retellings are picturebook texts which, despite the youthful target audience, are sensual, sophisticated, multilayered works that present disturbingly ambiguous heroines. While these contemporary readings of the tale may retain the traditional sexual stereotype of the wolf, they also portray an empowered heroine in full control of her sexuality.

The number and diversity of retellings in *Revisioning Red Riding Hood* demonstrate the tale's remarkable versatility and its exceptional status in the collective unconscious and in literary culture, even beyond the confines of the Western world. This unique anthology contributes to cross-cultural exchange and facilitates comparative study of the tale for readers interested in fairy tale studies, cultural studies, and literary history. Sandra L. Beckett is professor of French at Brock University. She is the author of *Red Riding Hood for All Ages: A Fairy Tale Icon in Cross-Cultural Contexts* (Wayne State University Press, 2008), *Crossover Picturebooks: A Genre for All Ages*, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, *Recycling Red Riding Hood*, and *De grands romanciers écrivent pour les enfants*, among others. She has also edited several books, including *Beyond Babar: The European Tradition in Children's Literature*, *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a dual Audience of Children and Adults*, and *Reflections of Change: Children's Literature Since 1945*.

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