

Little Red Riding-Hood

Morna Daniels

Charles Perrault's tale of *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (Little Red Riding-Hood) first appears with four other stories in a manuscript *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*, which was offered to Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans, the niece of King Louis XIV, in 1695. According to Marie-Françoise Quignard, Charles Perrault rewrote tales which had been transcribed from the stories of nurses and old women by his son Pierre Perrault d'Armancour. Charles had the tales beautifully written out, and illustrated them himself with little gouache paintings at the head of each story, but signed the dedicatory letter with his son's name in order to obtain him a post as secretary to Elisabeth Charlotte.¹ The manuscript is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. The tales were intended to be read aloud, as the introduction refers to 'those who listen' to the tales. There are corrections to the manuscript, possibly by Perrault, and, in the story of Red Riding-Hood, beside the last reply of the wolf that his big teeth are 'to eat you with', a note says that these words should be spoken in a loud voice in order to frighten the listening child.

Three more stories were added to the first printed edition *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* published in 1697 by Claude Barbin.² *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* is the shortest story in the collection. The heroine is a little girl who is idolized by her mother and grandmother; the latter making a little 'chaperon' for her to wear. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* of 1694 defines *chaperon* as a padded medieval bonnet, and also as a strip of cloth, in velvet, satin or *camelot* (a material which was a mixture of goat hair, wool and silk), worn by girls and women who were not of the nobility, 'not long ago'. It was therefore mainly ornamental and quite small, very different from the enveloping capes shown in most English language illustrations of the story. The painted illustration (which is coloured) in the 1695 manuscript shows Red Riding-Hood in bed about to be eaten by the wolf, who is emerging from the curtains at the back of the bed. Red Riding-Hood wears a strip of red cloth laid over her head from her forehead back over her hair as far as her neck. In the first printed edition the engraved line drawing by Antoine Clouzier is not an exact copy of the painting. The image is reversed (by the printing process) and one can see more clearly that the wolf is beneath the covers of the bed, as described in the story. The little piece of cloth on the heroine's head is just visible. Speculation that this is a picture of Grandmother, because the wolf has no clothes on, is belied by the presence of the red headdress in the original picture.³ Perrault does not describe the wolf putting on Grandmother's clothes, but he does mention that she is 'en son déshabillé', implying a nightdress or shift. Perrault has not shown this, perhaps for the sake of a clearer image; one can excuse him on the grounds that the wolf was 'showing his true nature'.

The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* also explains that an older woman who wore this type of headdress was known as a *Grand chaperon*, a woman who accompanied young girls, whom we would now call a chaperone. In the eighteenth century a riding-hood or capuchin

¹ *Creating French Culture. Treasures from the Bibliothèque nationale de France* (New Haven, 1995), pp. 312-13.

² For a discussion of early editions and translations see M. Daniels, 'The Tale of Charles Perrault and Puss in Boots', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2002), art 5.

³ Ségolène Le Men, 'Mother Goose illustrated; from Perrault to Doré', *Poetics Today*, xiii:1 (Spring 1992), pp. 17-39.

was a large, soft hood with a deep cape attached, faced with a coloured lining, worn by all classes, and not just for riding. It was generally black with a bright lining.⁴ This is the garment usually depicted in illustrations, but of course red and not black. So perhaps Robert Samber, who first translated the stories of Perrault into English in 1764, thought that a *chaperon* translated as a ‘capuchin’, the alternative name for a riding-hood. The rolling r’s of ‘Red Riding-Hood’ certainly sounded well.

Perrault tells all his *Contes* very economically, in a precise, polished style. *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* is as brutal as the original version of Cinderella. The little girl meets the wolf in the forest, and asks where she is going. On hearing that she is to visit her grandmother, he runs ahead and eats the old lady, and then takes her place in bed. When Red Riding-Hood arrives, he pretends to be the old lady, and the little girl assumes that his gruff voice is due to a cold. He tells the little girl to undress and lie down beside him, a detail which is expurgated in later versions. Then follows the famous exchange of comments on the size of his arms, legs, ears, eyes, and finally teeth. Giving the terrible reply that his big teeth are to eat her with, he promptly gobbles her up. End of story, with no rescue. The verse moral explains that young ladies should be on their guard against human wolves. And the most dangerous sort of human wolves are pleasant and gentle, and follow girls into houses and alleys.

In 1729 an English translation of Perrault’s stories by Robert Samber was published by J. Pote and R. Montague as *Histories or Tales of Past Times*. Samber translates Perrault’s text exactly; the wolf eats up Red Riding-Hood. The only addition is that he calls the little girl Biddy, and the wolf Gossop Wolfe, a name which in a later anonymous version turns into Gossip Wolf. Samber makes Red Riding-Hood his first story, whereas Perrault begins with *La Belle au bois dormant*, and *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* is second. The illustrations in Samber’s translation, which are copperplate engravings, copy those by Clouzier in the first French edition.

At the cheaper end of the book market in the eighteenth century were chapbooks, very small books on cheap paper sold by pedlars or chapmen, which often contained folk or fairy tales illustrated by rough woodcuts. *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood ... with cuts*, published by F. Houlston and Son in Wellington, Shropshire, in about 1820,⁵ is a fairly straightforward translation (fig. 1). The wolf is given the name Gaffer Wolf in this edition, and the generous illustrations are well above the usual standard for chapbooks. In one, a little girl picks flowers, though curiously without any sort of hood, while the wolf hurries off. A similar item was issued by T. Brandard of Birmingham (fig. 2).⁶

In France cheap, popular editions of books were printed in Epinal in the Vosges region, by a firm created in 1796 by Jean-Charles Pellerin. The British Library holds an edition of Perrault’s tales from 1840. Perrault’s order is changed, with *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* at the end, possibly because she is shown on the back cover, wearing a smart hat with feathers, and carrying a round galette (a type of cake) and a pot of something, and talking to the wolf. The front cover shows an old lady with a spindle of wool telling stories to a group of children. The book’s paper is thin, but the quality of printing and engraving is good.⁷

The biggest change that has been made to the story in its constant re-tellings has been to give it a happy ending. In this respect the later printed versions are a return to the original oral story told in South-Eastern France and Northern Italy in which the little girl saves herself by trickery. She says she has to go outside to relieve herself. The wolf holds her by a rope, but she cuts the rope and escapes.⁸

⁴ C. Willet Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *The Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 161–2.

⁵ British Library shelfmark 012806.de.29(4).

⁶ BL, Ch.820/22(8).

⁷ Charles Perrault, *Contes des fées* (Epinal, 1840?). BL, 12430.aa.14(1).

⁸ Jack Zipes (ed.), *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1993).

Little Red Riding-Hood

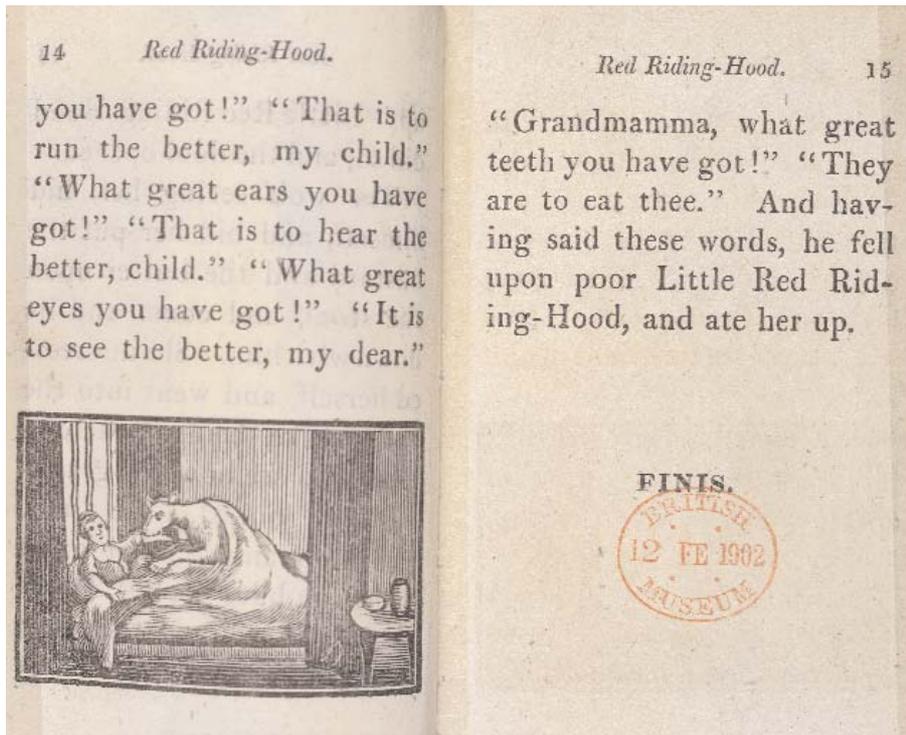


Fig. 1. *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood adorned with cuts* (Wellington, Shropshire, [1820]). BL, 012806.de.29(4), pp. 14-15.

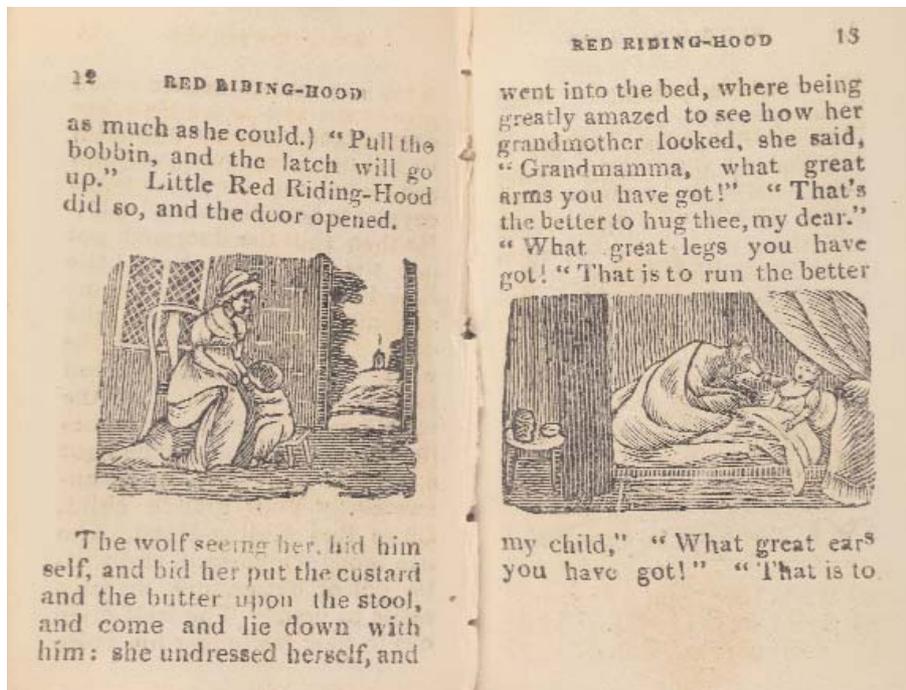


Fig. 2. *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood adorned with cuts* (Birmingham, 1820?). BL, Ch.820/22(8), pp. 12-13.

The German Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck, who wrote a number of fairy tales, published a dramatic poem in 1800 about Red Riding-Hood, *Leben und Tod des kleinen Rotkäppchens*.⁹ An English translation of this was published in 1851 by Groombridge and Sons: *The Life and Death of Little Red Riding-Hood, a tragedy*, by Jane Browning Smith, illustrated by John Mulready. Tieck introduces extra characters, both human and animal. Red Riding-Hood and her friend Jenny blow dandelions to see how long they will live. Red Riding-Hood's seeds blow away instantly, indicating a short life. A dog has a philosophical dialogue with the wolf about the advantages of being a servant and protector of man, or a free agent and his enemy. The wolf hates man because his mate was killed by peasants, and he was ill-treated and hunted. The wolf kills Red Riding-Hood, and is shot by a huntsman, but too late to save her, and two robins mourn her fate (fig. 3).

In their version, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm provide a happy ending. After the wolf has eaten grandmother and the child, a hunter enters the house and cuts open the wolf, releasing them both. The child fetches stones to fill the wolf's stomach, and he dies. The Grimms also provide an alternative ending in which Red Riding-Hood is alarmed by the wolf's fierce expression, and runs to her grandmother's house. They shut the door to keep the wolf out. He waits on the roof, until grandmother fills a trough with the water in which she has cooked sausages, and the wolf, tempted down by the smell, falls in the trough and drowns.

In the early nineteenth century 'Gothic' romances, rather tongue-in-cheek horror stories, became fashionable, and were satirized by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. Matthew Gregory Lewis published *The Monk*, a Gothic tale, in 1795, and achieved instant fame. He later published *Tales of Wonder*, a collection of ballads, some with supernatural themes, including *The Water-King*. An anonymous burlesque of this style of ballad, though of inferior literary quality, was published in 1801, and includes a version of Red Riding-Hood entitled *The Wolf-King: or Little Red Riding-Hood*, dedicated to Matthew Lewis. The most gruesome verse hardly scans,

He tore out bowels one and two,
— 'Little maid, I will eat you!'—
But when he tore out three and four,
The little maid she was no more!

It ends with the warning verse to children:

With custards sent nor loiter slow,
Nor gather blue-bells as ye go;
Get not to bed with grand-mummie,
Lest she a ravenous wolf should be!

Perrault's interpretation of the wolf as a seducer was not forgotten. The French composer François Boieldieu (1775-1834) composed an opera based on Perrault's story in 1818, with a convoluted plot about a pure young girl and a would-be seducer. The British Library holds a piece of sheet-music, *The Red Riding-Hood Quadrille*, by Leopold Stern, published in Brighton in 1859, which depicts on the cover a young woman being paid court by an elegant man¹⁰ (fig. 4).

⁹ *Ludwig Tieck's Schriften*, vol. ii (Berlin, 1828), pp. 327-62. BL, 12251.g.

¹⁰ *Red Riding-Hood Quadrille* (Brighton, 1859). BL, h.866(3).



Fig. 3. Jane Browning Smith, *The Life and Death of Little Red Riding-Hood: a tragedy*, adapted from the German of Ludwig Tieck (London, 1851). BL, 11746.d.27, facing p. 59.



Fig. 4. Leopold Stern, *Red Riding-Hood Quadrille* (Brighton, 1859). BL, h.866(3), cover.

In 1808 the children's publisher Benjamin Tabart issued *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood in Verse* in his Juvenile Library (fig. 5).¹¹ The anonymous author follows Perrault quite closely, but omits the sexual implications, and the moral at the end is to children not to trust strangers. The rhymes are laborious, as in

The basket she took, and then briskly set out,
To see her sick Grandmamma anxious, no doubt.

It ends when the wolf

... without further delay or advice,
Ate Little Red-Riding-hood up in a trice.

The book is handsomely illustrated with hand-coloured engravings, with plenty of red paint for the hoods.



Fig. 5. *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood in verse* (London, 1808). BL, 12804.a.37, pp. viii-ix.

Another straightforward translation, *Little Red Riding-Hood and the Wicked Wolf*, was published by George Routledge and Sons in 1867. The anonymous wood engravings are rather crudely printed in colour by Kronheim, but the wolf has a certain wicked charm, and the portrait of defunct Grandmamma on the wall is a delightful touch (fig. 6).¹²

In the first half of the twentieth century nursery literature had to be cosy, and most versions of the story had happy endings. Huntsmen, woodcutters or Red Riding-Hood's father rescue her. Frank Adams (1871-1944) was a prolific artist, who illustrated many books for the publisher Blackie, including an undated version, deposited under the Legal Deposit obligation in 1918. At the end of the story, Red Riding-Hood is rescued by her father, a woodcutter.¹³ The same text was illustrated for Blackie by John Hassall (1868-1948) and issued in 1919,¹⁴ a tribute to the enormous output of Blackie and Sons, and the enduring popularity of Perrault's story.

¹¹ *The History of Little Red Riding-Hood in verse* (London, 1808). BL, 12804.a.37.

¹² *Little Red Riding-Hood and the Wicked Wolf* (London, 1867), BL 12806.i.36.

¹³ *Red Riding-Hood* (London, [1918]). BL, YK.1996.b.16407.

¹⁴ *Red Riding-Hood. Illustrated by John Hassall* (London, 1919) BL, YK.1996.b.9146.



Fig. 6. *Little Red Riding-Hood, and the Wicked Wolf* (London, 1867). BL, 12806.i.36, facing p. 6