Many are the deceivers

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MANY ARE THE DECEIVERS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the adaptations and disseminations of ancient and modern dominant Western Parables. It investigates both Biblical myths and fairy tales, as they are used as socializing tools, which set standards in Western culture, and prescribe conventions to our children. Within the thesis, themes from Little Red Riding Hood will be extrapolated, and compared to those found in Old Testament tales such as, The Expulsion from Eden, the Deluge, The Ten Plagues, and Exodus.

Throughout the thesis, the history and function of the myth and fairy tale will be defined, and questions will be raised regarding the role of the story and storyteller. An analysis will be made of the Western obsession with using stories as allegorical representations of a culture, and societies need to relate to mythical characters. Specific mythical characters will also be studied for their ubiquitous qualities, their fundamental representations of the human condition, and their incarnations of an iconic individual.

Explanations will be given to the artist’s relationship to multiple medias, and her additional role as author and narrator of a new story. The title of the thesis (Many are the Deceivers) will also be explained, as it is a reference to Anne Sexton’s 1971 poem “Red Riding Hood”. The thesis will describe the artist’s artwork as a visual comparison to Sexton’s literary work, and will reinforce the idea that everyone holds the potential to deceive.
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Chapter 1
The Influence of the Story

As a mythmaker, I am intersecting, unraveling and re-knitting old myths. Through this process, personal ideologies become embedded in the transformation, and allow for the emergence of new mythologies, which question the role of story and storyteller.

Fairy tales and Biblical myths are constantly adapted to suit the needs of modern times. Adults, essentially, use these stories as training manuals for their children, as they can easily be manipulated to represent social guidelines. These stories have become powerful and coercive prescriptions for generations of children learning how to behave in a social environment. With each adaptation, the storyteller reflects the cultural context of a new time and place—representing social dynamics in terms of a particular milieu. Literary storytellers have used morality as a means of justifying indiscretion found in the original context of most adapted tales; thus using morality as a tool to frighten children into conformity, and subverting the underlying intentions of the original myth. However, as one adaptation replaces another, the original goals of the tale become displaced, and characters become tattered, confused and often interchangeable.

The intertextuality of children’s fairy stories and Biblical myths present parallel motifs and structures, and while their cultural audiences are quite different, their messages and intentions are of an educational and moral immediacy. These stories are powerful metaphors of the human condition as there is a cultural need for these stories and a need to relate to their characters. Without necessarily knowing or remembering the entirety of the story, Western Culture is innately familiar with popular characters from
childhood (Noah, Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, etc). These characters provide messages that reflect and direct the standards within a society.

By altering a traditional tale and its meaning for the purpose of reevaluation, I am able to become the author and narrator of a new story that gives attention to the history of its existence, and the societies that have kept it alive. The intersecting of epic Biblical tales with the local, everyday story of Little Red Riding Hood is indicative of their similarities. In this merging of genres, there is a resurfacing and combining of mythologies that suggests equal cultural power and influence, and questions the perpetual manipulation and retelling of such tales.

Through the process of scanning and manipulating appropriated material or drawing from the forms found in picture books, I realize that I too am contributing my personal views through the power of the story. Like all storytellers, I am able to alter mythologies, as I deem appropriate. I am the mythologizing artist, author, narrator and illustrator; however, the narrative I create, is not a didactic tale, but one that allows for how we interpret as a culture to create new meaning. The symbols, characters, and settings are put in place (by me), but meaning is extrapolated from the viewer’s experience. Through the power of the image, the individual can access memories from the past, and may question their innate relationship with the new story and characters.

Image-based communication has changed dramatically over the last 200 years, and the potential for mythological interpretation, on a visual scale, has reached a new level. Artists ranging from Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) to Kiki Smith (1954-)
to Anthony Goicolea (1971-) have analyzed the implications of mythologies and fairy tales from new optical levels, which has affected how we respond to culture and change.

“Besides creativity and reproduction, the other thing we create is technology—we’re technological beings. We create technology and interface with it. All our technologies are vehicles…changing the paradigms of how people are working and thinking, but on another level it’s just a tool, like paint or paper. It’s all just material, though maybe it takes a while to figure out its possibilities…Each medium affords you a different experience. The physical manifestation of it is how meaning is constructed. You have to choose the medium, to exploit its properties…You’re manipulating the world.”

The utilization of multiple mediums (illustration, photography, drawing) within my own work offers the audience various ways of experiencing the shared concept. When viewed together, the pieces play off one another (providing the viewer with an opportunity to garner a greater familiarity and knowledge of its subjects). Through these images, you see the history of mythological representation, the variations of character symbols, race and gender implications, and the power of the image to be seen as truth.

The impetus for creating illustrative work is to juxtapose the moral intentions, social standardizations and cultural powers of the icon and iconic story. Through this juxtaposition, I bring together a collection of Western religious stories and folklore into one epic scene that articulates a landscape of the imagination. This landscape is built from a series of changing events. Each piece becomes a chapter in a greater tale that illustrates the happenings of one, ten or a thousand years.

The appropriated images I use come from widely circulated materials, and are used as evidential support of Western culture’s concerns. This circulation means there is a cultural familiarity with the characters, icons and stories. They are the exact images that are being distributed and permanently instilled in our minds and hearts. Everything constructed within these landscapes is taken directly from the culture that created it, and

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is therefore, reflective of that culture’s concerns. This awareness, and the reconfiguring of familiar tales (The Expulsion from Eden, The Deluge, The Ten Plagues, The Ten Commandments, Little Red Riding Hood), places the viewer in a position to reevaluate normalcy, and question the implications of manipulation.

The events that take place in most religious or fairy tale stories, by all rational law, are quite unrealistic and inconceivable; however, within the context of the tale, are completely believable. We believe in talking animals, spells, eternal life and super human strength because their validity is necessary to the understanding of the story. In my illustration work, I manipulate appropriated childrens book images to create amalgamations of biblical mythologies and modern fairy tales. In them, I illustrate the new generation (the offspring of Red and the Wolf, of Eve and Adam). They are products of circumstance. The hybrids that are genetically part wolf, part human play with the notion of the unexplainable. Their conception is only logical within the context of this new tale.

These hybrids, among other characters, are also only logical in the context of the drawing. I approach drawing in a docile manner (giving line and color a traditional and safe style). However, the style of drawing is often in opposition to its subject. Historically, we visually communicate to children through illustration. However, my drawings deconstruct and reconstruct these images in a way that more directly addresses the original intentions (the essential, direct elements) of the image by creating a new context and scenario for, not only the gesture, but the emblematic nature of the character.
Contextually, photography grounds the viewer in a present moment. My photographs are literal images that explore the intimate personification of fairy tales. Through the abstracted representations of artificial, toy wolves, I have been able to manipulate the viewer by humanizing an inanimate object (giving life to a commodity). The wolves appear active in seemingly natural environments (which are spaces constructed from their bodies), interacting in ways that suggest both their carnality and sentiment. The viewer, uncertain whether the wolf is real, is given the opportunity to see the wolves as part of a faux reality, rather than as an illustration in a child’s storybook.

Similar to these wolves are the portrait of Little Red Riding Hood. However, these photographs deal with the familial rather than the fictional. They document not only the variations of Little Red Riding Hood as a symbol, but the lineage of the women in my immediate family. By portraying myself, my mother and my two sisters, my purpose was not to record genealogy, but to glorify two generations of women and the characters they represent. Their demure may remind us of Eve or the mother Mary. Each woman contains her own story, which may be received differently depending on the emotional experiences of the viewer. In each of these portraits, we are able to see a bit of ourselves.

Like a prism that refracts light and delivers the spectrum of the rainbow, “Little Red Riding Hood”, splits and reveals the various elements of human identity. The truth is
that…we are all a bit of everything: a spectrum of possibilities, interwoven and interrelated.²

Red Riding Hood is the ubiquitous character (appearing everywhere at once). Her experiences surround aspects of the fundamental human condition (youth, innocence, corruption, sex, knowledge, mortality, evil, etc), and her changes over the years represent the incarnation of an iconic individual.

Chapter 2
Myths and Fairy Tales

A myth is a story that explains a phenomenon of nature, creation, culture, religion, etc. A myth is not always fictitious. The myth explains the sacred and is adapted and accepted by culture as truth (satisfying the need to make logical the illogical within creation, life and death, and often solidifying the miraculous notions of faith). As humans we mold societal structures from the plaster of mythical creatures. Humans take information gathered from the myth and, by through the power of the image it creates, believe it as truth.

Again, not all myths are fictitious. Myths are rooted in reality that culture has etherealized. In the *Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade argues,

> Every myth shows how a reality came into existence, whether it be the total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment…Hence the supreme function of the myth is to ‘fix’ the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities—eating, sexuality, work, education, and so on.\(^3\)

Myths (and fairy tales) are analogies and parables. They build archetypes that become part of cultural signs and symbols. These archetypes are absorbed in the minds of individuals. These symbols of iconic characters found in folklore, are often cross-referential (the snake or serpent is seen in the Bible, in Greek mythologies of Persephone and Medusa, in the Polynesian story of the monster eel, and in the Indonesian tale of Hainuwele, for example\(^4\)). The snake is a symbol of both good and evil in various contexts. In the Bible, the serpent is Eve’s tempter in the Book of Genesis, and in Exodus, the snake is the visual proof of God, as it transforms from Moses’s staff. In


Buddhist texts, the serpent tempts Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) for 7 days. The snake is also seen in numerous nursery rhymes, as well as Aesop’s Fables.

The dominant Western source of knowledge in the 21st century comes from images, signs and symbols represented through the media (magazines, newspapers, television, cinema, the internet, etc). Therefore, entertainment influences knowledge. The moment information is filtered it becomes a story that is depicted based on that culture’s mythologies. These mythologies are established by authoritative figures (whether political or religious leaders, parents, teachers, etc) and are meant to soothe the eagerness of those desiring a generic knowledge of truth and/or right and wrong. When mythologies of the Greek gods or The Odyssey are mentioned, either in Western classrooms or private homes, there is a general understanding that these stories are not to be taken literally. However, mythologies, such as the Ten Commandments, the Deluge or the Ten Plagues are generally considered (by Christians) to be fact, despite the illogical circumstances of the tale.

There is a common misconception that religious stories are not myths. For, due to a lacking knowledge of the definition of a myth, many find that by accepting Noah’s Ark (or any flood myth as they are found in Babylonian, Greek and Norse mythologies…) as part of a creation mythology, it would mean you were questioning your faith. Even though, “In the light of the numerous discoveries…the mythological Creation story in the Old Testament could no longer be accepted as literally true.”⁵ This does not mean the deluge never happened, rather that the deluge mythology is a variation of a past event, of some magnitude, that has, over the years, been adapted, exaggerated and rewritten to

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prove a point. When faced with science and faith, storytellers deny or adapt to the information by reinventing the tale, thus forming a new mythology.

Storytellers often create new mythologies when they deny information to children. When retelling tales with violence and death (such as the Deluge), contemporary authors and illustrators generally eliminate any visual element of suffering or death. Thus, masking the fundamental lessons regarding power, greed, love and death. In Fig. 2.1, the reality of the deluge is made noticeable through the manipulation of appropriated children’s book images. The aftermath of the deluge is revealed, and a more honest; however still altered, interpretation of the event is illustrated.

Myths, such as the Deluge, give reason to our existence, and to why and how we function because dominant Western culture wants to be told how to die, how to live, how to act, dress, eat, how to fall in love, who to fall in love with, etc. While, as members of Western culture, we see ourselves as deeply free, we are in fact followers. In order to question this cultural obedience, the social paradigms (established through myths) must be challenged. However, when considering myths, one must have an understanding that
these myths perpetually change, and as Barbara C. Sproul discusses in her introduction to *Primal Myths*, “What is essential to understand is that they [myths] have been challenged not by new facts but by new attitudes toward facts; they have been challenged by new myths.” However, these perceived truths—perpetrated within a myth—are accepted by adults, and redesigned for children as culturally biased socializing tools.

> …the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the ‘nursery’, as shabby or old-fashioned pieces of furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because adults don’t want it, and do not mind if it is misused. It is not the choice of the children which decides this. Children as a class…neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do; and no more than they like many other things.

Children did not ask to be associated with mythologies or fairy tales. However, these stories are a part of culture, and while children are not responsible for their presence, they are affected by their influence.

Similar to the process of filtering information to adults, children obtain knowledge through adult mediation of storytelling (dominant in Western culture are fairy tales and Biblical myths). Both genres contain historical tales that are adapted by adults for children to escape controversy, and imbue a self-righteous moral opinion. Just as mythologies, contain elements of the human condition, so do fairy tales.

Due to the contemporary commodity culture of Disney animations, books and toys, fairy tales appear to be much different than myths. There are many myths that reference the epics of male heroes (the trials of Jesus, Moses, Hercules, Siddhartha, Odysseus, Bilbo Baggins…). However, the contemporary fairy tale canon, in Western culture, focuses on heroines and evil stepmothers or witches (Sleeping Beauty,
Maleficent, Cinderella, Snow White, The Little Mermaid, Ursula, etc). These females, if not inherently evil, are generally perceived as subservient, unintelligent (but beautiful), naïve, etc. They dream of a prince and of marriage, but often must suffer pain or public humiliation before that dream is fulfilled. The reality of the fairy tales is that they are not much different than myths. There are numerous oral and literary fairy tales that depict men as well as women (Puss in Boots, Tom Thumb, Jack and the Beanstalk, Hansel and Gretel, etc); however, the tales now popularly told, have been selected in order to make a profit, and to promote the social standards of the culture, while having no regard to the history of the tale or genre. These female characters have become iconic. They define what men want and don’t want in a woman, what woman desire to become, and what women should strive to never be. They have been mythicized. “…the classical fairy tale has undergone a process of mythicization. Any fairy tale in our society, if it seeks to become natural and eternal, must become a myth.”

Before fairytales were officially a literary genre, they were stories told among groups of people. They were entertainment, and as John Updike describes, they “…were the television and pornography of their day, the life-lightening trash of preliterate peoples”. They are currently fantastical stories that support dreams of female beauty, marriage, escape and privilege. Created originally for adults, these stories were essentially gossip that addressed real superstition, and added amusement to adults and children alike (as they desired escape from the daily boredom of tedious labor.) Stories like Little Red Riding Hood, were intended for a peasant audience, and were later

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redesigned for the bourgeois, and finally have become a didactic tool found in childrearing.

German born author and artist, Hermann Hesse (*Siddartha*, *Steppenwolf* and *Demian*), took his knowledge of religion and folklore, Eastern and Western, and applied them in a way that could not be defined. He created a philosophy that took from life, experiences of disgust, fear and reservation that were a result of the mythologies surrounding him. Hesse wrote fairy tales based on his observations and reluctance towards life in the early part of the 20th century. His tales are defined by diverse characters: a personified mountain that suffers eternal sadness at witnessing cultural traditions disappear, a brave boy who travels to another world and has an epiphanic moment entering a culture at war, as well as even a child, whose altruistic mother makes a wish for everyone to love him, but who grows up without learning how to love in return. Hesse’s fairy tales don’t describe the beauty of the maiden trapped in a tower or the valiant prince. They describe a longing to see goodness in human nature. “Hesse [s fairy tales]…leave us with a sense of longing intended to arouse us so that we might contemplate changing those conditions that bring about the degradation of humanity.”

Many of my drawings were largely inspired by the imagination of Hermann Hesse, and his cynical, but desperately longing view of a better world. In works such as

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seen in Fig. 2.2, I create visual characters, and wonder how they might exist in one of his stories. I question how each hybrid would function in a society obsessed with beauty and conformity, whether they are mistreated or made an outcast. (In this particular image, I’ve illustrated a girl who tries to fit the Western idea of beauty, but is genetically incapable.) Hesse is one of the few authors to take the storybook characters out of their didactic roles, to give life to the story, and to improve humankind through pointing out cultural injustices. However, Hesse contradicts the contemporary canon, and his fairy tales are largely unknown.

Fairy tales and Biblical myths are the literature Western Culture’s provides their children. They help define the ways in which children should grow to act and behave; however, (as they are widely used) they “… ‘colonize’ the minds of children. Each story that a child hears is like a settlement, that is the narrative settles in the child’s psyche and occupies a role…”11 The role of the artist, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is to parallel him/herself with the fairy tale and with the myth. The artist has a responsibility to understand the archetypes these tales create, and the socializing and dominating functions they maintain in Western culture and why. The artist has a power to influence, and can provide new means of looking, not only at their surrounding environment, but at the culture at large. The artist as storyteller,

…must feel the urge to divulge what it means to live in an age when lies often pass for truth in the mass media and public realm. The storyteller must feel the urge to contrast social reality with a symbolic narrative that exposes contradictions. From this contrast, the storyteller gives birth to light, lightens our lives and sheds light on the different ways in which we can become our own storytellers.12

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The Bible’s significance in Western Culture is inherent, regardless of a person’s religious affiliation. Although for a culturally distinct audience, Little Red Riding Hood is an influential cautionary tale that has equal significance. Fairy tales and Biblical myths are parables full of organizing metaphors of cultural constructs—of which stories from the Old Testament and Little Red Riding Hood are examples. Questions can be extrapolated from these tales, through the knowledge found in their origins and evolutions regarding, not only the adaptations and disseminations of these stories, but the culture that has insisted on having them perpetually rewritten.
Chapter 3

Le Petite Chaperon Rouge

Le Petite Chaperon Rouge (written in the 17th century by Frenchman Charles Perrault and translated as Little Red Riding Hood) is part of a genre of stories deriving from history and lore, and has distinguished itself from the fairytale stereotype. “Fairy tales are told as flights of fancy. They occur outside of history, in an unquantifiably distant past...there is magic, enchantment, talking animals, [and] impossible beasts.”¹³ Little Red Riding Hood is unlike popular fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White or Jack and the Beanstalk. There are no magical beans or mirrors; no poisonous apples or midnight potions, and while there is a talking beast, the beast stems from a very serious belief in werewolves (which will be explained later). Little Red Riding Hood is a story grounded deep in the horrors of reality, and while these other fairy tales have their own cultural impact, Little Red Riding Hood has established itself as an entity outside the classical conception of a mere fairytale and into the realm of the myth.

Little Red Riding Hood takes place within the woods. The most common version begins with a beautiful girl. She is asked by her mother to go into the woods and take her grandmother a basket of food. Red Riding Hood is warned not to stray from the path, and not to talk to strangers along the way. Red Riding Hood meets a wolf in the woods and disobeys her mother by telling him where she is going. The wolf races the girl to her grandmother’s house, and when he arrives, devours the old lady. The wolf then puts on the grandmother’s clothes and waits for Red Riding Hood in the woman’s bed. When

Red Riding Hood gets to the house, the wolf, disguised as her grandmother, welcomes the girl and asks her to join him in bed. Red Riding Hood acquiesces yet asks a series of questions regarding the wolf’s appearance, “Why, grandmother, what big ears you have!”, “What big teeth you have!”, etc. At this time the wolf says, “The better to eat you with!” and gobbles the girl up.

Throughout the story’s history, the fate of Red Riding Hood varies greatly. The tale undergoes a multitude of endings (for example, being pulled out of the belly of the wolf, dying inside the wolf’s belly or rescued by a huntsman). The chosen ending depends on the author’s agenda, audience and message.

Little Red Riding Hood, like other fairy tales and ancient mythologies, has no specific origin. Variations have been identified across the globe, with no apparent correlation; therefore, making it impossible to decipher where and when these stories were first created. However, a French peasant story called The Grandmother’s Tale, is suspected to have a strong influence on the story of Little Red Riding Hood known today.14 Fairy tales were originally told orally to pass the drudgery of the day, ...illiterate peasants sometimes gathered around the fire on cold winter evenings for a veillée, to share gossip, work, and stories. Not stories of fantasy, but of observation. Hunger, infanticide, and abandonment—all the cruel ‘fictions’ of popular fairy-tale plots—were very real in these peasant communities.15

The Frenchman, Charles Perrault appropriated an oral tale closely related to Little Red Riding Hood in the late 17th century, and the story’s audience expanded with the circulating power of the printing press. In 1697, Perrault altered this tale and called it

Le Petite Chaperon Rouge. Perrault created Le Petite Chaperon Rouge for the French aristocracy and the court of Louis XIV, Louis XIV,

...had created an elaborate playpen for the aristocracy...a sort of Vegas at Versailles. Wine, gaming and sexual intrigue...high society prostitutes trained in the arts of seduction...even the architecture of Versailles... facilitated sexual indiscretions, [and even] wives made husbands rich through their extramarital affairs.16

Like those represented in the mythologies of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah or Jericho, the society that was part of this lifestyle regarded it with nonchalance. Their behavior was socially acceptable and gave status to them as individuals. Perrault created his own version of the tale—much like scribes did (intentionally or by accident) during the early translations of the Bible—so that the story fit with his own personal beliefs, as well as entertainment and to warn of the dangers of the Versailles lifestyle. He chose to edit what he felt was inappropriate for the 17th century court. However, he purposefully sexualized the girl’s encounter with the wolf, as she is eaten and killed by the wolf while they are in bed. At the end of his tale, Perrault presents a rhyming moral, claiming,

`Little girls, this seems to say,  
Never stop upon your way,  
Never trust a stranger-friend;  
No one knows how it will end.  
As you’re pretty so be wise;  
Wolves may lurk in every guise.  
Handsome they may be, and kind.  
Gay, or charming—nevermind!  
Now, as then, ‘tis simple truth—  
Sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth!17`

“Instead of really warning girls against the dangers of predators in forests,

[Perrault’s] tale warns girls against their own natural desires which they must tame...”18

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In its original context, the oral story (which we have access to) proclaimed the girl’s cleverness and wit, as she proved herself worthy of transitioning into adulthood by outsmarting the wolf. Much like primitive practices of subincision and other coming of age rituals\(^{19}\), the tale becomes a mythology and signifier of maturation. However, in Perrault’s tale, the girl, “is raped or punished because she is guilty of not controlling her own natural inclinations.”\(^{20}\) Red Riding Hood’s naivety places her in bed with the wolf, and when she realizes the wolf is not her grandmother, she is killed. The fact that she is eaten becomes a tongue-and-cheek reference to a sexual maturation rather than a cruel murder (despite the fact that Perrault ends the tale with a didactic lesson). Red Riding Hood’s death is thus justified because of her idleness and natural childish curiosity. The symbolism of the wolf was also subverted by Perrault, as the wolf no longer represented a fear of werewolves, but a symbol of Red’s sexual desire, “In the common slang of the day, even in scholarly works of Charles Perrault, when a girl lost her virginity it was said that elle avoit vû le loup—‘she’d seen the wolf’.”\(^{21}\) Or in Italy, lupus in fibula (wolf in the fairytale) was also translated as speak of the devil.\(^{22}\) As families moved out of the country and into urban areas, many were surprised by the unfamiliar concept of violence. Children and women were often the


targets, and their attacks were often blamed on wolves. At one point in Europe, a wolf head was considered an adequate tax payment (see Fig. 3.1).

Perrault (as well as other authors who turn fairy tales into literary works) had very specific goals for his audience; therefore, it is important to know that at the time Perrault was writing Le Petite Chaperon Rouge and other fairy stories, the Reformation taking place in Europe was influencing France to create a new image and way of life that that was to be exemplary of all Western Culture and the world. Louis XIV needed support from people like Perrault who could circulate his new social conventions through the literary medium, and Perrault used the fairy tale to convey these guidelines, and to establish conformity on a large scale. Also, at this time in Europe, there was a widespread call for a reevaluation of religious, moral and political practices. The accessibility of reading materials, by means of the printing press, allowed individuals for the first time to make their own judgments regarding these subjects.

Children in the early 17th century were not generally considered a separate class of people. The death rate was extremely high for the young, which is why families had so many children (that the more children you had the better chance you had of having one live). Before the Industrial Revolution, children were not considered valuable culturally or economically. They did not fit the,…living conditions or theological standpoint… [and]…the periods of birth, life and death. [This]…was no doubt strengthened by the poor chances of survival of children…children who survived the first dangerous years of life could not remain children long, and were quickly forced to enter the adult world.…

Therefore, by the time they reached an age when death no longer seemed imminent, they were considered adults, and were immediately married. However, as cities grew and

technology advanced, there were new opportunities for employment. Children became a commodity; tools of labor and wealth. The idea of the nuclear family strengthened at this time, as families grew smaller and young adults, needed for work, were marrying and leaving home at an older age.²⁴ Children specific literature became a means of childrearing. Children of a higher social class, whose families could afford the books, would be taught how to behave, how to look and what to dream through fairy tales.

We must remember that the fairytale for children originated in a period of absolutism when French culture was setting standards of civilité for the rest of Europe...In this regard fairy tales for children were no different than the rest of the literature (fables, primers, picture books, sermons, didactic stories, etc) which conveyed a model of the exemplary child that was to be borne in mind while reading.²⁵

Perrault, as well as other literary storytellers through the 1800s took advantage of the enthralling power of the fairytale, and used it to promote “good” behavior, morality and social prejudice. As seen in Fig. 3.2, the power of the image (introduced to children through illustration) is that anything is believable within the context of the story and visual representation. In this particular drawing, I offer an alternative perception into the tradition of Christian mythology (directly questioning the malleable nature of myths, and how they can be easily manipulated).

The Brothers Grimm were among the first storytellers to turn stories like Little Red Riding Hood into literary works that were written specifically for children. As storytellers, the Grimm brothers often promoted the theme of good versus evil (rewarding characters of “good” Christian behavior), and set standards of behavior for children (taking out or adding aspects to historical

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tales as they deemed necessary). Widely known today, the Brothers Grimm started their careers in the 1800s with the intention of preserving Germany’s folkloric history. Only with the rising demand for child specific literature did the brothers see an opportunity to profit by readapting stories (from their research) into children’s tales. In their many variations of the adapted tale Rotkäppchen (Little Red Cap), the brothers introduced several violent elements to the tale (including the cutting open of the wolf’s belly and killing him by inserting stones), while leaving out any previous sexual innuendos.

The Brothers Grimm changed elements of the story, so it was, again, more appropriate for a 19th century European audience. Written stories became less expensive to reproduce during the industrial revolution, circulation increased, and more parents found the Grimm’s tales to be suitable for their children. First published in 1812, the Grimm’s collection of *Children’s and Household Tales*, which includes *Little Red Cap*, has continued to be one of the most widely circulated books in the world. In Germany, it has been number 2 (second only to the Bible)\(^\text{26}\).

Chapter 4

The Bible and Fairy Tales

Throughout the history of the Bible and Fairy Tales, aspects of information have either been edited or exaggerated. While the stories are intended for different cultural audiences, the influential power and socio-historical ramifications of these genres are quite similar, “Like the Bible…[the fairy tale collection]…has…transcended its specific social function nationally to appeal to readers throughout the world…In each country the tales function differently, and the way they are used and received in each country indicates something about the national character of the country.”27

These two genres of tales have become modified and consequently rewritten in translation, for religious, social and parental concerns, as well as for general worries associated with teaching and reading to children: “…these tales indulge in the same need to promote a safe docility while also participating in the cultural project of stabilizing gender roles.”28 Epic tales of the Bible (the Fall from Eden, Noah’s Ark, the Ten Plagues, etc.) contain plots that are deeply rooted in deceit, greed, death, murder, rape, starvation, horror, sex, incest, love and birth. These complex stories are often condensed into 10 pages for the entertainment of children. The pertinent details of suffering and the honest vision of reality has been stripped away, disassociated and simplified: “Progress as the advancement of machines and technology for production has become identified with the

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power of the capitalist system to dominate and manipulate humanity and nature. Both reason and imagination have atrophied.”

Storytelling is innate to every culture because it satisfies a human need to question. The fact that incarnations of the same story are found in disparate civilizations and societies is only to be expected. Joseph Campbell describes how contradictory mythologies can stem from a single psychological inheritance, but are “…always rendered by way of local ethnic ideas or forms…and…are locally conditioned and may reflect attitudes either of resistance or of assimilation”.

People of different cultures can see or hear of a similar event (for instance a devastating flood) and may mythologize the event in a story that best offers an explanation of the unknown or gives reason to a particular tragedy. While their languages are different, their mythologies can be the same because they share a desire to create stories that provide them with metaphorical answers to ubiquitous questions.

Historically, Western Culture has anthropomorphized not only their deities, but also their fears. It is not only inherent within Western Culture to create mythologies, but the symbols within them, generally, must take a human form. In Eden, Adam and Eve were essentially non-humans. After eating the apple, they became humbled, and suffered

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the woes of earthly people. What they faced was temptation and, like Little Red Riding Hood, they chose to stray from the path in order to gain knowledge. The converging themes of Adam and Eve and Little Red Riding Hood, is indicative of the similarities between the characters and stories. As seen in Fig. 4.1, I suggest that Little Red Riding Hood is no different than Eve nor is the Wolf different from Adam. All are iconic characters, which (through their obtainment of knowledge) have become human symbols of disobedience, corruption, power, deceit and youth and old age.

When comparing Little Red Riding Hood to the story of Adam and Eve, we see two stories surrounding the ideas of knowledge and awareness, of which they give rationalizations for atrocities. These stories are popular mythologies whose characters have become symbols of the human condition. Adam and Eve remain iconic representations of betrayal, temptation and suffering, while also being the universal mother and father. Red Riding Hood “…has always been used as a warning…a symbol and embodiment of what might happen if [girls] are disobedient and careless. She epitomizes the good girl gone wrong…yet she may be a victim of circumstantial evidence”.31 In Fig. 4.2, the hybrid Little Red Riding Hood is punished for an unknown reason (as we see a spell placed on her as frogs come out of her mouth). The red of the cap also becomes a reference the Eve and her red apple. Eve is the same archetype. She is the perfect creation born from man that

ultimately becomes his downfall. Both Red Riding Hood and she are simultaneously the deceivers and the deceived. They were punished for their natural, childish curiosities (as Eve was essentially a child since she had no knowledge of the world) and humanistic temptations. They are warnings of the consequences of ‘bad behavior’ (which—in both tales—is disobedience). Their mistakes became our lessons. Their stories are tools for setting forth the rules of behavior that have become our social commandments.

Little Red Riding Hood has become a didactic tale much like its Biblical counterpart. Competing as one of the most highly circulated children’s stories in Western Culture, Red Riding Hood is distinct from her competitors, such as Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty because of her story’s comprehensible quality. Its obscure narrative allows the tale to be manipulated to a greater degree. This level of abstraction and ambiguity, similar to the vague nature of many Biblical tales (unexplained phenomenon, miraculous conception…), allows a greater potential for more influential, adaptable and reproducible stories. The traditional tales of Western culture are popular because they possess a quality that allows them to be reproduced and adapted in disparate and changing societies. Therefore, what must be realized is that, “…for every tale you know you must also remember that there are “eighty-seven Danish versions, twenty-eight Hungarian versions, twenty-nine Russian versions…” and so on.32

Maria Tatar proclaims, “NO FAIRY TALE text is sacred. Every printed version is just another variation on a theme—the rewriting of a cultural story in a certain time and place for a specific audience.”33 Essentially, no story is sacred, and since history is

taught through mythology, history is not sacred (every mythology is added to by the person who last told it). The Bible (like fairy tales) is a collection of many oral tales translated into a literary work, after the death of Christ, by disciples, scribes and priests. Gospels were excluded by the Vatican, Kings influenced the church, and translation errors were made by scribes (accidentally and intentionally). Similarly, many of the nuances found in stories we know today are derived stories from alterations made through translation. In the fairy tale Cinderella, Cinderella’s slipper was originally made of fur rather than glass. The word vair for fur was often confused in translation for verre meaning glass, which explains how Western culture has come to remember Cinderella’s iconic glass slipper.34

Like the books from the Bible, generations of Little Red Riding Hood, include variations of manipulated text. The historical process of disseminating these tales explains their present significance. Both the Bible and fairy tales were born during a time of large-scale illiteracy. People were forced to rely on the literate. They did not have the advantages of text or alternative voices of opinion. What was learned either of religion or folklore was once an oral tradition, and was edited and censored by those who told it (religious stories were told by men on a pulpit, while folktales were told by peasants around a fire or spinning wheel). However, once translated through the written word, many of these tales were transformed into children stories.

As culture changes, and stories are rewritten, the underlying principles remain the same. However, certain cultural nuances are no longer understood. For example, in the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son, a son leaves his father and squanders his inheritance only to find himself poor and wanting to return home to be one of his father’s servants.

At a homily in Church the story was told that, in a poignant moment of return, the father goes out to greet his son (dressing him in the finest robe and slaughtering a calf in his honor). However, what would have been recognized by the culture as normal, at that time, was that before reuniting with his father, the son was beaten with sticks by the community members, and as the father reaches the son he is beaten as well.\(^{35}\) The finest robe is in fact then ruined and covered in blood. The prodigal son told today does not mention this aspect of the original tale. The cultural nuances are no longer understood, as this type of behavior is no longer accepted as a cultural norm.

During the time Little Red Riding Hood was originally told, there was a fear of wolves that was quite real; however, this context was lost in later generations, as the culture became more sophisticated. The wolf then became a symbol of sexual desire and intellectual buffoonery because it no longer made sense to warn children of the threat of werewolves.

As stated earlier, these perpetually told stories are not necessarily fictitious. Myths do not necessarily represent facts rather than perceived facts (the truth can easily be manipulated). Myths are used to encourage a point of view, and to supply universal meaning within divergent cultures,

Even so, they are often accepted without question, by adults as well as children, as ‘the way things are,’ as ‘facts’…myths are true to the extent to which they are effective. (In as sense, myths are self-fulfilling prophecies; they create facts out of the values they propound…)\(^ {36}\)

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\(^{35}\) This information was provided in a priest’s homily, and the cultural edition of this story becomes a new myth, to some degree, on its own.

Without necessarily being aware that the ‘facts’ are part of a mythology, Western culture often accepts the ‘facts’ as truth. What adults fail to realize is that they are often deceived by the same culture that disseminates the ‘facts’. These misconceptions are often disseminated through variations of Biblical stories and fairy tales—imbued with the same politically driven, socializing agendas.
Many are the Deceivers

The suburban matron,
proper in the supermarket,
list in hand so she won’t
suddenly fly,
buying her Duz and Chuck
Wagon dog
food,
meanwhile ascending from
earth,
letting her stomach fill up with
helium,
letting her arms go loose as
kite tails,
getting ready to meet her lover
a mile down Apple Crest Road
in the Congregational Church
parking lot.

Two seemingly respectable
women
come up to an old Jenny
And show her an envelope
full of money
and promise to share the booty
if she’ll give them ten thou
as an act of faith.
Her life savings are under the
mattress
covered with rust stains
and counting.
They are as wrinkled as prunes
but negotiable.
The two women take the
money and disappear.
Where is the moral?
Not all knives are for
stabbing the exposed belly.
Rock climbs on rock
and it only makes a seashore.
Old Jenny has lost her belief in
mattresses
and now she has no
wastebasket in which
to keep her youth.

The standup comic
on the “Tonight” show
who imitates the Vice
President
and cracks up Johnny Carson
and delays sleep for millions
of bedfellows watching
between their feet,
slits his wrist the next morning
in the Algonquin’s old-
fashioned bathroom,
the razor in his hand like a
toothbrush,
wall as anonymous as a urinal,
the shower curtain his slack rubberman audience, and then the slash as simple as opening a letter and the warm blood breaking out like a rose upon the bathtub with its claw and ball feet.

And I. I too. Quite collected at cocktail parties, Meanwhile in my head I’m undergoing open-heart surgery. The heart, that eyeless beetle, enormous that Kafka beetle, running panicked through his maze, one hour after the other until he gags on an apple and it’s all over.

And I. I too again. I built a summer house on Cape Ann. A simple A-frame and this too was a deception—nothing haunts a new house. When I moved in with a bathing suit and tea bags the ocean rumbled like a train backing up and at each window secrets came in like gas. My mother, that departed soul, sat in my Eames chair and reproached me for losing her keys to the old cottage. Even in the electric kitchen there was the smell of a journey. The ocean was seeping through its frontiers and laying me out on its wet rails. The bed was stale with my childhood And I could not move to another city Where the worthy make a new life.

Long ago there was a strange deception: a wolf dressed in frills, a kind of transvestite. But I get ahead of my story. In the beginning there was just little Red Riding Hood, so called because her grandmother made her a red cape and she was never without it. It was her Linus blanket, besides it was red, as red as the Swiss flag, yes it was red, as red as
chicken blood. But more than she loved her riding hood
she loved her grandmother who lived far from the city in the big wood.

This one day her mother gave her a basket of wine and cake to take her grandmother because she was ill.

Wine and cake? Where’s the aspirin? The penicillin?
Where’s the fruit juice? Peter Rabbit got camomile tea. But wine and cake it was.

On her way in the big wood Red Riding Hood met the wolf.
Good day, Mr. Wolf, she said, thinking him no more dangerous than a streetcar or a panhandler.
He asked where she was going and she obligingly told me. There among roots and trunks with the mushrooms pulsing inside the moss he planned how to eat them both, the grandmother an old carrot and the child a shy budkin in a red red hood.

Red Riding Hood knocked on the door and entered with her flowers, her cake, her wine.
Grandmother looked strange, a dark and hairy disease it seemed.
Oh Grandmother, what big ears you have, ears, eyes, hands and then the teeth.
The better to eat you with, my dear.
So the wolf gobbled Red Riding Hood down Like a gumdrop. Now he was fat.
He appeared to be in his ninth month and Red Riding Hood and her grandmother rode like two Jonahs up and down with his every breath. One pigeon.
One partridge.
He was fast asleep, dreaming in his cap and gown, wolfless.
Along came a huntsman who heard the loud contented snores and knew that was no grandmother.
He opened the door and said,
So it’s you old sinner.
He raised his gun to shoot him
when it occurred to him that
maybe
the wolf had eaten up the old lady.
So he took a knife and began cutting open
the sleeping wolf, a kind of caesarian section.

It was a carnal knife that let
Red Riding Hood out like a poppy,
quite alive from the kingdom of the belly.
And grandmother too
still waiting for cakes and wine.
The wolf, they decided, was too mean
to be simply shot so they filled his belly
with large stones and sewed him up.
He was as heavy as a cemetery
and when he woke up and tried to run off
he fell over dead. Killed by his own weight.
Many a deception ends on such a note.

The huntsman and the grandmother and Red Riding Hood
sat down by his corpse and had a meal of wine and cake.
Those two remembering nothing naked and brutal from that little death,
that little birth,
from their going down and their lifting up.³⁷

“Clearly, mythology is no toy for children.”  

In her collection of fairy tales called *Transformations*, Anne Sexton returns fairy tales to their former mature audience. She “…question[s] the illusion of happiness and universality…and makes us realize how far we have yet to go to bring the anticipatory illuminations of concrete utopia to fulfillment”. Sexton writes eloquent but raw and complicated poetry concerned with societal demands. Her intentions lie not in the entertainment of the fairy tale, but in the fairy tale as the allegorical representation of a culture.

In her version of Red Riding Hood, Sexton generates reflections on cultural deceptions (gender expectations, the nature of humanity, the falsity of appearances and perceived truths, the presence and lure of death and the memories of childhood). Sexton made herself vulnerable and controversial through her honest account of a harsh reality.

Kurt Vonnegut describes in his foreword to *Transformations*, “Anne Sexton…domesticates my terror, examines it and describes it, teaches it some tricks which will amuse me, then lets it gallop wild in my forest once more. She does this for herself, too, I assume. Good for her.”

Red Riding Hood, cradling her cape—as it is her “Linus blanket”, the usefulness of wine and cake, disillusionment of TV icons, pressures of suburban motherhood, materialists and swindlers. All of these represent the deceivers and the deceived of a specific culture and time.

Even Sexton found herself part of this false reality (“…nothing haunts a new house”). In her poem, she considered the history of Red Riding Hood, and of the elements that have been perpetually placed out of context and unexplained. Sexton uses

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Red Riding Hood to comment particularly on human intrusion into nature. At the end of her poem, neither Red Riding Hood, the Huntsman nor the grandmother feel remorse for the macabre events of the wolf’s death. Nor does anything seem strange about their survival (“nothing naked and brutal, from that little death, that little birth…”\textsuperscript{41}). The wolf lies “wolfless”, innocent, and as a result of his natural, carnal intuition, is cut open and maliciously stuffed with rocks. Even his death is blamed on him, as it was his fault he attempted to escape, while his belly was full (“Many a deception ends on such a note”\textsuperscript{42}). Sexton did not attempt to change the characters in the story nor alter their injustices. Instead, she integrated them—and all their vague attributes—with aspects of modern time to make a statement and to question the ideals of American culture.

A culture is critiqued through objects, information, standards and observations, taken directly from that culture, altered and presented back into the public. Illustrations appropriated from a popular book or reconstructed drawings and photographs from circulated tales, expose what is important and acceptable within a culture’s social conventions (dress, promiscuity, weight, race, vocation, etc.), and can be seen as a visual comparison to Sexton’s literary work. Not only does what’s exposed define such standards, but what’s eliminated. What someone has chosen to subtract from a tale sets a precedent for future stories.

“Many are the deceivers”. Without saying whom, the deceiver as the subject becomes an implied investigative element. As author, artist, illustrator, performer, teacher, suburban mom, corporate leader and so on, we hold the potential to deceive. The fact that Little Red Riding Hood and Biblical tales are both stories told then and now is

powerful. The aspects of our ancient myths continue to dominate and color our contemporary culture, but it’s the hand of doubt that is central to learning how to relate to them. As members of Western culture, we grow up in layers of belief systems. There is an abundant exchange of information found in religion and folklore that form highly popular organizing metaphors, setting the standards for our culture, and prescribing conventions to our children.

Roland Barthes once asked, “…is there a mythology of the mythologist? “43, and I believe there is. The entire history of Western Culture continues to be written by its conquering people. Native American history is taught in schools through books written from the perspective of the dominant culture. Fairy tales and Christian traditions, rooted in Pagan ritual, have been bent to promote social and religious order (what was once Pagan was made to look exclusively Christian, and Pagans became taboo).

As a mythmaker, I intersect variations of the same, as well as different, ancient and modern tales. By placing Red Riding Hood in the epic of the Biblical deluge (for example), I generate value that lies in understanding the idea and power of image-making, and questions the way we utilize images to depict history.

History has become more mythology than fact. Humans bend information for their individual purposes, and so long as the manipulation is subtle, others will believe it. Over time, truth has been hidden by constant manipulation. Very little can be identified as absolute truth and purity, as history continues to be altered by people. It is human nature to distort information, whether in fairy tales or Biblical myths, and as a culture we are easily deceived.

Endnotes

35 This information was provided in a priest’s homily, and the cultural edition of this story becomes a new myth, to some degree, on its own.
Bibliography


