



Freud and Fairy Tales

Sigmund Freud believed that, like dreams, fairy tales are a window into our unconscious. According to Freud, fairy tales reveal our unconscious desires, fulfillment fantasies, and fears. Carl Jung took this a step farther and applied it to his idea of the "collective unconscious"—a set of archetypes, forms, and symbols shared by all individuals which shape our unconscious minds. Fairy tales are an arena in which we can play out social taboos and reckon with our carnal ids.

The story of "Little Red Riding Hood" is, although unsettling, essentially a cautionary tale for children. Or is it? Here's a part psychoanalytic, part structuralist reading of the old story.

Once upon a time, there lived a sweet little girl called Little Red Riding Hood—so named because of the fetching red cloak she was fond of donning on her walks through the forest. One afternoon, Little Red Riding Hood decided to visit her ill grandmother who lived a few miles away. Although Little Red Riding Hood knew it would get dark before she arrived, and although she knew the woods could be a dangerous place for a young girl, she decided to set off anyway.

A few minutes into her journey, Little Red Riding Hood met a wolf. Having never met a wolf before, Little Red Riding Hood was not the least bit frightened.

"How do you do?" she said, dipping into a dainty curtsy.

The wolf had never before seen such a tender creature, and said, somewhat awe-struck, "Hello! Where are you off to this evening?"

"To my grandmother's," said Little Red Riding Hood lightly, "to bring her some food—she's ill, you know!"

"I did not know," said the wolf, who was beginning to hatch a plan. "Where does your grandmother live?"

"Just on the other side of the wood," replied Little Red Riding Hood.

"Don't you think your grandmother would like a small bouquet of flowers? Why don't you pick some for her?"

Little Red Riding Hood was thrilled with the idea, and, having said goodbye to the wolf, ran off to collect a small nosegay. Meanwhile, the wolf ran to the grandmother's house. The house was easy to find, and it only took the wolf to devour the ill grandmother, who lay helpless in her bed.

After picking a fresh little bunch of posies for her grandmother, Little Red Riding Hood quickened her pace, hoping to reach her grandmother's house by nightfall. When she arrived, she knocked on the door, and her grandmother called out to her in an oddly gravelly voice.

Little Red Riding Hood pushed open the door and saw her grandmother lying in bed. However, her grandmother looked very strange, and despite her dainty manners, Little Red Riding Hood could not help but comment.

"Oh Grandmother! What big ears you have!" she exclaimed.

"The better to hear you with, my plump little pet!" said the grandmother, really, of course, the wolf dressed in her nightgown and bonnet.

"Oh Grandmother! What big eyes you have!" said Little Red Riding Hood.

"The better to see you with, my juicy little dear!" growled the wolf.

"But oh, Grandmother! What big hands you have!"

"The better to hug you with, my tasty little darling!"

"And oh, Grandmother, what large teeth you have!" said Little Red Riding Hood, with a gasp.

"The better to eat you up!" said the wolf, and immediately lunged at the little girl and devoured her as well.

His belly filled with the grandmother and her little grandmother, the wolf soon fell asleep on the grandmother's bed. A hunter soon passed by, and seeing that the door to the old woman's house was open, decided to check in. He found the wolf in a deep sleep, and immediately deduced what had happened. So, taking his sharp knife, he cut open the wolf's belly. Out jumped Little Red Riding Hood and, a little worse for wear, her grandmother.

Little Red Riding Hood thanked the hunter, and made him a gift of the wine and cakes that she had brought for her grandmother.

"I will never again walk through the woods alone, or speak to wolves again!" she pledged. And indeed, she never did, and lived to an age as ripe and old as her grandmother.

Forest=human psyche? Society?

Red=sexuality? sin?

LRRH's id/sensory pleasures?

Sexual innuendo? LRRH's id-driven desire?

Temptation? Fertility?

cannibalistic impulse → taboo

heimlich/unheimlich= home but not home → the uncanny

appealing LRRH's id?

pregnancy; wolf is phallic mother or cannibal

Father figure?