

Red, green and yellow: *Everything was once upon a time*

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FAIRY TALES have an extraordinary value in child development and, as a rule, they are the child's first contact with the fictional world formalized into narrative. Listening to a fairy tale is the inaugural moment of a process of "organization of experience" (Candido, 1995) that literature provides. It is much more than what the pedagogues call "developing the imagination": we know, especially from Bruno Bettelheim (1980), how fairy tales deal with key issues facing children in their development. In fact, these narratives operate and can define - or restore - a meaning to life situations of each individual, some absolutely baffling, especially in times of inflection in the course of existence.

On occasions we find ourselves somewhat shocked by the degree of cruelty embedded in some fairy tales, and want to "spare" our children the confrontation with this pain, with the cruelty of some characters that inhabit the world of wonders. However, that would mean preventing children from facing symbolic situations - I repeat: *symbolic* - that they experiences in the real world, in which Good and Evil clash, and which fairy tales help them to overcome. In fairy tales children see verbalized - as it is at the word level that things happen - situations of pain, fear, danger, which require from them an effort to overcome them. The character they identify with overcomes obstacles and moves to another level of existence.

Indeed, fairy tales - a kind of repository of folk wisdom passed down from parents to children, or rather from mothers to children through words - have gradually become a precious cultural heritage by conveying human experience. They deal with fundamental issues of children in their development process - which is not without crises.

The importance of these narratives is underscored by none other than Plato who, in *The Republic* recognizes the role of mothers and caregivers in "shaping" (the term is this: shaping) the souls of children, with their tales and narratives, with the "*mythos*".

A comparative study of Perrault's fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697), Guimarães Rosa's *Green Ribbon in Her Hair* (1964), and Chico Buarque's *Little Yellow Riding Hood* (1979) will demonstrate that the Brazilian authors, by establishing an inevitable dialogue with the seventeenth century text, will promote a significant change in direction. It would not be the case, here and now, to delve into the analyzes and interpretations - which are all well known - of

these narratives, especially Perrault's, but rather to provide a comparative approach of the three to show the different views they entail and point out how, in different ways, they are "vehicles of human experience."

For although the three narratives deal with the issue of child development, the child's setbacks and pains of growing up and also the issue of coping with Fear (childish fear, but fear also of the child that lives within every one of us), the focus of each narrative is well singled out, as discussed below.

Little Red Riding Hood

Let us start, chronologically, with the first narrative, which is Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood*. Perrault lived from 1628 to 1703; his tale collection was published in 1697, when they were accounts of oral tradition put into writing - anonymous stories which, at one point, were transformed into written words by an author. A few years later Grimm, in 1812, also published a story entitled *Little Red Riding Hood*, a version in which the girl and the grandmother are eventually saved by the hunter. It is true that in our imaginary, our memory of grown children who probably heard these narratives in our childhood, we have the entwined memory of the two versions - Perrault's and Grimm's. But it is Perrault's that I am going to pursue.

It is the story of the little girl whose grandma, whom she really loved, gave her a red hood, and who is sent by her mother to the nearby village where grandma lives, bringing her gifts: a cake and a little jar of butter. Little Red Riding Hood, who chooses to the longest path through the forest is found by the wolf, who asks her where she is going; and she gives the wolf all the information he needs to find the grandma's house.

We know how the rest of the story unfolds: guided by the girl's precise information the wolf, taking the shortest path, arrives at grandma's house, swallows her whole and barely disguising himself with her cap, lies down on the bed, waiting for the girl. Hood arrives at grandma's house, and is surprised to see her like that, but accepts the invitation of the wolf in disguise to lie on the bed with him. Both start an extremely significant dialogue (as we shall see below), at the end of which the wolf swallows the girl whole.

Importantly, the girl *leaves home*, is "sent" by the mother to another village, almost as if in a rite of initiation. On the one hand, a female line, split into three generations: daughter, mother and grandmother - only women, the father is missing; on the other, the male, but a frightening male: the wolf.

Indeed, this tale (Perrault, 1985), in which literary critics and interpreters led by an individual like Bruno Bettelheim point to the "pedagogical" and moralizing character of a narrative that thematizes the psychological development of children - it shows a girl on the verge of puberty in her confrontations with the masculine, a seductive and menacing masculine, virtually imposes a more psychoanalytic, Freudian approach. A little girl and a wolf.



Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf in the forest (illustration by Gustave Doré).



Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf on the bed (illustration by Gustave Doré).

A “hairy” wolf, says the text, with whom she literally, in the words of the narrator, “gets in bed.”

It is very interesting that the illustrators, with great sensitivity, sometimes penetrate deep into the meaning of the texts and through their drawings reinforce or comment on them. That’s how Bettelheim (1980) says that Gustave Doré draws a little girl in bed with a facial expression between frightened and fascinated, or at least instigated. It is not exactly fear but rather a mixture of attraction and repulsion.

The text says verbatim: “Little Red Riding Hood undressed and crawled into bed, where she was very surprised to see how weird her grandmother was ...” And then the famous dialogue unfolds:

“Grandmother dear!” she exclaimed, “what big arms you have!”

“The better to embrace you, my child.”

“Grandmother dear, what big legs you have!”

“The better to run with, my child.”

“Grandmother dear, what big ears you have!”

“The better to hear with, my child.”

“Grandmother dear, what big eyes you have!”

“The better to see with, my child.”

“Grandmother dear, what big teeth you have!”

“The better to eat you with!”

Here, the very corporal nature of the wolf is called in, each member and its function: big arms to embrace, big legs to run, big ears to hear, big eyes to see and ... big teeth to eat. (To eat *you*, says the text). And in that “eat” we must accept the sexual meaning this verb implies in several languages. For indeed the wolf threw himself on Hood and ate her. And so ends Perrault’s tale. In Grimm’s version the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood, as I have already mentioned, after being swallowed whole by the wolf are saved by the hunter, who opens the wolf’s belly and takes them out. It is as if Hood were born again. The wolf swallows them whole - the symbolism of a swallowing throat is unequivocal - but to the extent that the girl can come out of his belly alive (as if in a cesarean section), she has a chance to be reborn to life. The wolf is characterized by voracity (“as hungry as a wolf” is a well-established expression for the superlative of hunger), by the swallowing throat, an archetypal image. It is interesting to note that no one talks about “as hungry as a lion”, the great carnivore, but about as hungry as a wolf. But we know that the throat swallows and vomits or, in another version, the throat swallows, but from the wolf’s belly, cut open by the savior, what had been swallowed can come out, like in a second birth.

“Little *Red* Riding Hood, *Green* Ribbon in Her Hair, Little *Yellow* Riding Hood: the importance of the color - which varies according to each author of the aforementioned tales and their respective focus - is indisputable. In what terms can one talk about a symbolism of colors that have, as we know, a language of their own? “When the artist gets carried away by sentiment, something colorful is announced,” says Goethe (1993, item 863, p.155) in his very interesting *Theory of Colors*. And in a chapter entitled “Sensory-moral effect of colors” he says that the color produces an effect “on the sense that is most appropriate to it, the eyes, and through these on the soul ...” (bid., par.758). And again: “Experience teaches us that individual colors offer particular disposi-

tions” (ibid., par. 762). Indeed the color, linked to the sensory world, the world of the senses, is a quality that emanates from the object, but also our reaction to that object. For Matisse, drawing belongs to the Spirit and color to the senses (apud Arnheim, 1998).

In the case of our first Little Red Riding Hood: Why *red*? The symbolism of colors is sometimes unequivocal: universally, red is a dramatic color: associated first and foremost with blood, with fire (and from there to passion, to revolution). And as in almost every symbolism, with the exception of mathematical symbols, the base is analogy. In fact, *red* refers to sexuality - especially female sexuality: the menstrual blood, the sign of a woman’s organic maturity; and to the blood of defloration, marking the beginning of sexual life. Flushing and blushing are also linked to feelings, to modesty and to an eroticized state. The field of open evocation of red therefore inevitably expands from blood to the blushing of the cheeks; from the blood sexually associated (menstruation/defloration) with shed blood, with wound, with raw flesh. “Carnation”, as it is said of red. The logo of the “Red Cross”, for example, an international society that helps the war-wounded, is a red cross on a white background. It may be the color of the wound, but not of death, which is bloodless, the realm of pallor.

Red is thus the most biologically vital color, the color of blood and of the bowels irrigated by that blood, but also of fire, as I have mentioned, with all its passionate meaning. As one of the most energetic colors, is not by chance the color of the little hood and metonymically of the girl in the tale, dealing with growing up, with her issues, findings and vital decisions.

Green Ribbon in Her Hair (Fita Verde no Cabelo)

Let us move on to the second narrative, Guimarães Rosa’s tale – which obviously will lead to some speculations about “green”.

But initially I will dwell on what in this tale (Rosa, 1992) makes this old story a “new old story”, as incidentally says the subtitle - and some remarks will be required regarding the “strangeness process” that the author confers not only on the language but on all his fiction (strangeness of vocabulary, of syntax, but also of plot - what Alfredo Bosi (1975) calls a “semantics of the unusual”: Guimarães Rosa starts from of an old story, the well-known *Little Red Riding Hood* and recreates it using basically the same plot and the same characters. Breaking an enshrined paradigm will have the effect of attracting the eyes to what appeared inattentively in our field of vision, of de-automating our perception, and thus forcing our attention, or rather forcing us to pay attention. From the opening sentence of the story: let us remember that in Perrault the first three sentences mention the village, the girl, her mother, her grandmother and the little hood the grandmother gave her granddaughter:

Once upon a time there was a girl who lived in a village and was the most beautiful thing ever imagined. Her mother was crazy about her

and her grandmother even crazier. The good old lady had a little red hood made for her ...

How will the narrator in Rosa, in turn, carry out the task?

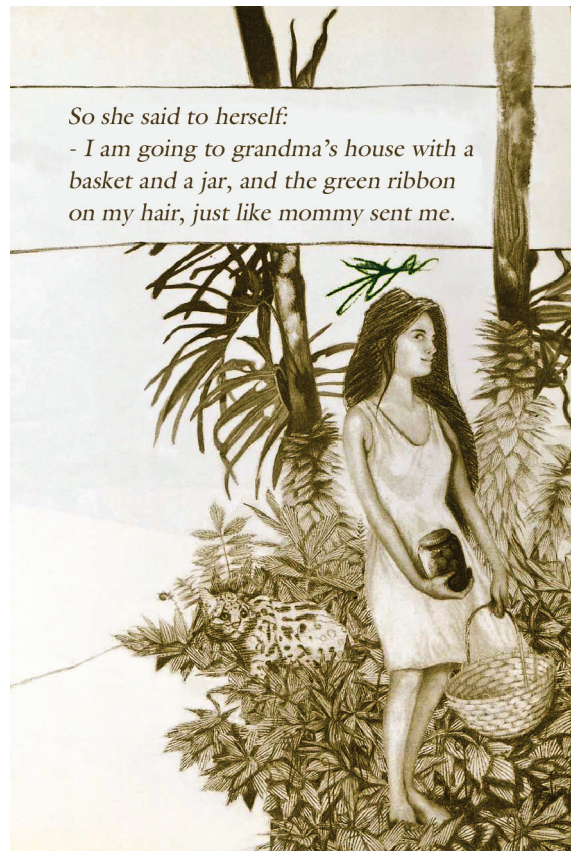
There was a village somewhere, neither bigger nor smaller, with old men and old women who grew old, men and women who waited, and boys and girls who were born and grew up.

Here there is a sudden reference to the age status of Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, the mother of Hood herself. Those living in the village are introduced with their function, or with their primeval existence defined by a verb. In other words, they are characterized by their age status (old, adult, child), gender (male and female) and essential "action". In couples, in pairs "old men and old women who *grew old*" (indicating passivity); "men and women who *waited*" – here an ambiguity is perceived, or rather a non-defined situation, because *wait* has a passive connotation, of waiting for something, and an active connotation linked to the semantic component of "hope" – at the level of desire, of development of a project; "boys and girls who *were born* and *grew up*" (indicating an activity - and a vital one: these are, in fact, the only verbs that have a connotation of real dynamism).

As in Perrault's narrative, Guimarães Rosa's also features the little girl, the mother and the grandmother: the female lineage of a family. The masculine is present right in the first few lines of the story, in the city's population, each specimen with their female counterpart, except for the lumberjacks, who have no feminine. They "lumbered" and "had exterminated the wolf."

The "strangeness" caused by these "old men and old women who grew old" for example, makes us think: Would there not be something more meaningful than "growing old"? Is that why people grow up and gain maturity? On the other hand, what about adults? What were these men and women old enough to be the parents of girls like the one in the tale waiting for? Would they not be in the situation – and old enough - to do something instead of keep on "waiting"?

Incidentally, of the population of this village and their essential actions - for the verb indicates action - the only beings who actually act, as I have said, are the boys and girls, who were born and grew up – they have not (yet) been neutralized by the action of time. Being born and growing up indicates movement, which in turn translates into life. And above all there is the movement of the protagonist, the little girl who leaves the village: "she *left there* with a make-believe green ribbon in her hair." She *left there*, I repeat – in this inevitable thrust towards growing up, which is moving away from under the mother's wing - because "her mother had sent her with a basket and a pot to see grandma ..."



So she said to herself:
- I am going to grandma's house with a
basket and a jar, and the green ribbon
on my hair, just like mommy sent me.

Green Ribbon in her Hair with the basket and the jar in the forest. Illustration by Roger Mello.

And the text continues: “The jar contained preserves, and the basket was empty, because she was going to pick raspberries.” Illustrator Roger Mello, faithful to Rosa’s text, portrays a teenager, a young lady holding a jar and an empty basket. And above her head, hovering over her, is a green ribbon. The girl in the next paragraph will be metonymically named through an attribute based on something she wore: a *Green Ribbon*. Further down the text, another group of characters is introduced: the lumberjacks who lumbered and, as we know, had exterminated the wolf. Here there is an explicit reference to a sort of memory of the original text, with which this one interacts. *Lumbered*: indicates an activity, in general male. Male activism here seems to be emphasized, especially since this category has no feminine.

And an extremely important character from the original story is referred to for its absence: the wolf, “neither unknown nor hairy.” Since there is no meeting with the wolf, it is the protagonist who says in a monologue: “– I’m going to grandma with a basket and a jar and the green ribbon in my hair, just like mommy sent me.”

All critical approaches (cf. Sperber, 1987, p.80) point out to that which, incidentally, can in no way be overlooked in this strange syntax by Guimarães Rosa: “just like mommy sent *me*” - is not specifically the jar of preserves and the

(empty) basket that the mother sends the grandmother, but the mother sends the granddaughter: *sent me*. Jar and basket, figurations of containers and metaphorically, but also metonymically, I would say, feminine: they are “continents”. And the basket was symbolically empty – ready to come back ... full?

Under the aegis of these two maternal figures the little girl leaves the village and will have a confrontation, an experience: a) *of loneliness*: “the grandmother was in bed, wrapped up, and that is it”; b) *of time as an agent of finitude*: “while it is time”, “never again”, “never again” – says the text, indicating the inevitability of definitive losses; c) *of denial of life*: thin, trembling hands, purplish lips, unable to embrace, unable to see – all figurations of old age and ultimately of death.

All that frightens the girl, and she expresses that greatest fear that we all humans feel, as fear of the Wolf (with capital L), and shouts: “Granny, I ‘m afraid of the Wolf.” In fact, this is not about any wolf, but about an image of death: “the grandmother was no longer there and too absent, except for the cold, sad and so sudden body.”

Through the mother, who sends her out of her own house, out of her own village, who sends her to the initiatory experience; and through the grandmother, who introduces her existentially, empirically, to the experience of death, Hood reaches another level of knowledge and maturity. It can be said, therefore, that it is an initiation rite, in which a pubescent girl is sent by her mother to confront the realities of life and loses her ribbon - of the “green years” of childhood and hope, and matures, stops being green - “as if she were being sensible for the first time.” Initiation rite: tests and hardships imposed on the hero and which, once overcome, enable their performer to become an adult, or allow them to move to a new stage in life. As in the rites of passage, the little girl struggles and suffers: she was sweaty, starving for lunch, afraid (of the “Wolf”), but there is no longer anyone to hear her externalizing that fear; in an extreme experience she finally faces Death. Incidentally, one thing to note is that here the situation is reversed: it is not the wolf (which actually does not exist) that is hungry, but the little girl. Hungry for experience, perhaps - and this will be provided to her.

The textual dialogue with the original tale reveals some changes. In general, it can be said that with Guimarães Rosa it goes from the “psychological” to the metaphysical. There is an initiation rite, and a passage, from the “green years” of childhood to the world of “reason”; but far from the sexualized dimension of the wolf in Perrault’s tale, the wolf that the girl “gets” in bed with, and that eats her, here unfolds into the metaphysical dimension of a child’s encounter with death and finitude. In fact, this is an experience that is not uncommon in children’s lives: their first encounter with death is often the death of the grandparents. (Especially with children “from the past”, when the grandparents died earlier, i.e., they died when the grandchildren were still very young).

However, all the characteristic elements are maintained, starting with the little girl being “sent” to visit her grandmother, bringing her gifts, something to eat (and in the Minas Gerais version: preserves). Bring gifts: we are in what

anthropologists call an economy of symbolic exchanges, updated on all cultures and civilizations since man has been man.

Let us see the conversation between Green Ribbon and the grandmother, inescapably going back to Perrault's dialogue:

- Granny, your arms are so thin and your hands so shaky!
- It is because I will never be able to hold you again, granddaughter ... – the grandmother whispered.
- Granny, your lips, there, so purplish!
- It is because I will not ever be able to kiss you again, granddaughter ... – the grandmother sighed.
- Granny, your eyes are so deep and still, on that hollow, pale face!
- It's because I will never again see my little granddaughter ... - the grandmother still moaned.

Green Ribbon became even more scared, as if common sense would strike her for the first time.

She yelled - Granny, I'm afraid of the Wolf! ...

But the grandmother was no longer there, and too absent, except for the cold, sad and so sudden body.

From the confrontation with the Perrault's text borrowed by Guimarães Rosa the dialogue retains, literally, the arms and eyes. Skinny arms that will *never again* be able to hold; sunken and still eyes that can *no longer* see, *never again*. The signs of inevitability, of the definitive loss entailed by death will emerge: no longer, never again. And if Guimarães Rosa apparently follows the text closely, we see that here, too, the presence of the corporeal aspect is maintained, but the semantic component of affection distinguishes this dialogue from that of the original text: the embrace, the pain for never being able to see again; and especially the kiss: the lips to kiss replace the teeth to eat in Perrault's text. And the little girl's reaction is different here: her perplexity is not because of the size ("how big ...") of the arms, legs, ears, eyes and teeth of the grandmother-wolf in Perrault's tale but the granddaughter focuses on the various body elements that indicate the end: the arms are "thin", an extension of the "shaking hands"; the lips are "purplish"; the eyes are "sunken and still" on a "hollow and pale face" - all pointing to an imminent and finally established death. The grandmother's answers come in an increasingly weaker voice, in a gradation: she "whispered", "sighed" and "moaned". And Green Ribbon, as if "common sense were about to strike her for the first time", has a glimpse of the true "Big Bad Wolf" of life. In the presence of death embodied in the grandmother, who "was no longer there," she yells "- Granny, I 'm afraid of the Wolf".

There is an intriguing fact: upon arriving at the dying grandma's house, the girl realizes that along the "crazy and long" path she had lost her green ribbon. And she grieves.

Should we go back to the color issue: why *green*?

Linked to the “non-mature” state of things in Nature, this is a color that also indicates revitalization and restoration, a new cycle that begins. This is how in the spring the leaves that had become brown in the fall and fall in the winter sprout again - green. Hence: greening, sprouting again. And according to a universal convention, green is the color of hope.

But green had already interplayed with red in a similar context in another tale by Guimarães Rosa (1972), “*Os cimos*” (The peaks), which also addresses a kind of initiation into the thick forays of experience, also focused on a child (this time a Boy), a turning point in his existence. Indeed, “*Os cimos*”, published in *Primeiras histórias* (First stories, which is from 1962, two years before the publication of “Green Ribbon” on a newspaper in 1964), begins with an emulation of the index-formula of fairy tales: “once upon another time.” The protagonist has a monkey doll with a red hood (explicitly named “the doll’s little red hood” or “red hood”), which he loses and then finds, but which at the end, in his imagination, will turn into a little green hood.

This Boy is submitted the horrible test of being separated from his mother, who had fallen ill; he experiences separation for the first time and, confusingly, the possibility of loss and of finitude. He foresees the imminence of something terrible “it was like that: something greater than all things, could, would happen?” (ibid, p.168). And he is overtaken by the possibility of “bad things (which) were already threatening to happen: they waited for us behind doors” (ibid, p.170). Separated from his mother a “steep departure” by an uncle (who, by the way, owned a green tie), who takes him by plane and gives him “excessively pleasing” gifts, facing a situation that was not verbalized to him, the Boy “suffered in suffering”. He does not understand: “Mother and suffering did not fit together in the space of an instant, they were the opposite side - of the horror of the impossible” (ibid, p.268). And he goes on to build a remorse for carrying in his pocket the monkey doll, his favorite toy, and that it had been given him by his aunt when he left. He wonders if he “should” throw it away, but decides to just throw the little monkey’s red hood away. The Boy’s pain is expressed in fright, insomnia, fatigue, unrealistic controversial decisions “to be close” to his mother, to never play again – until he has a moment of epiphany: “the toucan - flawless - in flight and landing and flight.” The toucan: “all the light came from it.” And the boy fantasizes that the “monkey doll, some day, should be able to get some other little hood, with high feathers; but green, the color of the tie, so protruding, which his uncle, now in a shirt, was not wearing now” (ibid., p.173). But a disturbing telegram, which causes in the uncle an ‘aging of hope’ is followed by another, four days later: “the uncle smiled a strong smile. The mother was well, healed”.

On his way back home, on the plane, the Boy realizes that the monkey doll is not in his pocket, he had lost it. But the pilot’s assistant gives him the monkey’s little red hood which he had thrown away when he flew in. With the little red hood in his hands, he experiences the situations that always change this so uncertain and impermanent life of ours, but of which at least some can be recovered:

“No, his little monkey friend was not lost in the bottomless darkness of the world, never. Certainly he was just strolling out there, by chance and for some time, on the other side, where people and things always went to and came back from”.²

This helped him face times of loss integrated into the continuum of life, in its confusion and uncertainty. And that “organizes” the child’s experience, the structure, and our boy starts to feel “out of the pre-initial chaos, like the dismantling of a nebula.” And he goes back to wondering, and in the final lines of the story we are treated to an absolutely restorative fantasy of the boy, and which will integrate everything, including the toucan and dawn: “As if he were with the Mother, safe and sound, smiling, and everyone, and the little monkey with a beautiful green tie ...”. This is the beginning of a new cycle in his life. The initiatory figure here is neither the Mother nor the grandmother, as in the case of Green Ribbon, but a male figure, his uncle, with his competent tie.

This boy, who experiences separation, pain, impending loss, the possibility of the “aging of hope,” and the need to “pay attention, without mercy, to things as they are”, in the midst of small epiphanies like that of the toucan and the perception of the possibility of restoration - is the male counterpart of the girl in “Green Ribbon” and has its dual metonymic in the monkey with the little red hood / green hood / green tie. No, hope does not age. The final words of the tale “*Os cimos*” apply both to Green Ribbon and the Boy, after their respective initiatory experiences: “and there came life.”

Little Yellow Riding Hood (Chapeuzinho Amarelo)

Finally, the last story in this set of fairy tales dealing with childhood development, is Little Yellow Riding Hood, by Chico Buarque de Holanda (1979). Here we have with transparency the magic value that the author assigns to the word. It is the story of the little girl who had a paralyzing fear of everything:

Era a Chapeuzinho Amarelo

Amarelada de medo.

Tinha medo de tudo, aquela Chapeuzinho.

Já não ria.

Em festa, não aparecia

Não subia escada

Nem descia

Não estava resfriada

Mas tossia

Ouvia conto de fada

E estremecia

Não brincava mais de nada,

Nem de amarelinha.

(Little Yellow Riding Hood

Was yellowish with fear.

She was afraid of everything, that Little Yellow Riding Hood
She no longer laughed.
Partying was not for her
She didn't go up or down a ladder
She had no cold
But she coughed
She heard fairy tale and shuddered
She didn't go out to play
Not even hopscotch.)



Cover of the book³ **Little Yellow Riding Hood** – illustration by Donatella Berlendis.

First of all, the question resurfaces: why “yellow”? Why is Chico Buarque’s Little Riding Hood yellow? A first interpretation arises: the little girl is characterized by fear, and as the text says, she is “yellow with fear”. Inevitably we remember the word “yellow” used in the workers’ union world, with a derogatory connotation. It is used to describe a union member who “became yellow” in the sense that he, probably for fear, decided to side with the bosses. The physiological reactions caused by fear interfere with blood circulation, with the contraction of blood vessels, the skin pales - acquiring a faded, yellowish hue. But in turn, for Goethe yellow is “the color closest to light”; in fact, yellow is gold and is the sun. Speaking of the qualities of this color in its pure state, Goethe says (1993, p.141) that it can produce an unpleasant effect: “By a slight and scarcely perceptible change, the beautiful impression of fire and gold is transformed into one not undeserving the epithet foul; and the color of honor and joy reversed to that ignominy and aversion.” And as an example he mentions the yellow hat of the bankrupt. Building on this deprecating bias, we could add that along that line the Nazis imposed on the Jews this terrible thing that was the yellow discriminatory star sewn on their clothes.

This gives us (again) the cue for addressing the reversibility of symbols, this capacity they have to stand for something and its opposite. Ambiguity: Little Yellow Riding Hood was “yellow” with fear; but why, after overcoming fear, does she continue to play hopscotch? Hopscotch - this children’s game, full of enchantment, in which one goes go from heaven to hell, and from hell to heaven, introducing us to a learning experience that all, children and non-children alike, need to live (and in that literature, and children’s games, and poetry, and art are essential): managing the ambiguity and contradiction of life.

Back to the tale: Chico Buarque’s Little Riding Hood had, in life, especially FEAR:

*Tinha medo do trovão
Minhoca, pra ela, era cobra
E nunca apanhava sol
Porque tinha medo da sombra
Não ia pra fora pra não se sujar
Não tomava sopa pra não se ensopar
Não tomava banho para não descolar
Não falava nada pra não engasgar*

(She was afraid of thunder

A worm, for her, was a snake

She was never under the sun

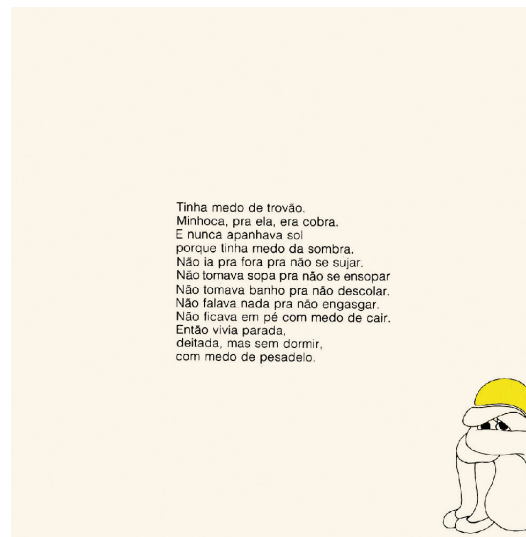
Because she was afraid of the shadow

She would not go outside for fear of getting dirty

She ate no soup for fear of soaking

She took no bath for fear of melting

She spoke no word for fear of choking)



Here the fear that prevents one from living is clear. And shows the children – and us - that reality is contradictory, ambiguous, and that to live we need

to inevitably accept Good and Bad, Good and Evil. In fact, the little girl was not afraid of reality alone, sometimes distorting the scale of things (“a worm, for her, was a snake”), but depriving herself of doing absolutely ordinary things, because they bring an inevitable risk:

Não ia pra fora pra não se sujar

Não falava nada pra não engasgar

Não ficava em pé com medo de cair

(She would not go outside for fear of getting dirty

She spoke no word for fear of choking

She was always standing up for fear of falling down)

In fact, this is the case, with Riobaldo from *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, of saying to our Little Yellow Riding Hood that “living is dangerous.” But she

Então vivia parada,

Deitada, mas sem dormir,

Com medo de pesadelo

(So she never moved,

Lying down, but not sleeping

For she was afraid of nightmares.)

The little girl refuses to face the ambiguity and contradictoriness of things, to recognize that everything has an opposite, that each positive virtually carries its negative, and that Good and Evil are intertwined, bonded, in the fabric of reality. And what summarizes for Little Yellow Riding Hood this paralyzing refusal is:

E nunca apanhava sol

Porque tinha medo da sombra

(And she never basked in the sun

Because she was afraid of the shadow)

What Jungians call “shadow”, the negative side of everything that exists, is formulated here with all the words.

But let us proceed:

E de todos os medos que tinha

O medo mais que medonho

Era o medo do tal do LOBO,

Um lobo que nunca se via.

(And of all the fears she feared

The more than fearful fear

Was the fear of the WOLF

A wolf that was never near)

Hood did not know, but we are afraid especially of the unknown. When the confrontation is imperative ... the object of that fear emerges in its real dimensions. So: finally she finally meets the wolf face to face - a kind of ghastly incarnation of her fears – Hood is no longer afraid.

*Do medo do medo do medo
De um dia encontrar o lobo.
Foi passando aquele medo
Do medo que tinha do lobo.
Foi ficando só com um pouco
De medo daquele lobo.
Depois acabou o medo
E ela ficou só com o lobo.*

[...]

*E o lobo ficou chateado
De ver aquela menina
Olhando pra cara dele,
Só que sem o medo dele.
Porque um lobo, tirado o medo
É um arremedo de lobo.*

(For fear of the of the fear
Of one day meeting the wolf.
She began to lose the fear
Of the fear she had of the wolf.
She felt only a slight
Fear of that wolf.
Then all the fear was gone
And she was left only with the wolf.

[...]

The wolf was upset
To see that little girl
Looking at him face to face,
But with no trace of fear.
Because a wolf that no one fears
Is but the imitation of a wolf.)

And the Wolf, disappointed to see he no longer caused any fear, transformed into “the imitation of a wolf,” tries desperately to get back the fear he commanded:

*Então gritou bem forte
Aquele seu nome de LOBO
Umás vinte e cinco vezes
Que era pro medo ir voltando
E a menininha saber
Com quem não estava falando:*

(So he yelled out loud that
Name of his – WOLF
Some twenty-five times
For the fear to come back
And the little girl learn

Who she was not talking to)

LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO-
LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LOBO-
LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO- LO-BO-LO... ..

But at the cost of repetition, LOBO (WOLF) becomes BOLO (CAKE). With his own name reversed, the situation is also reversed: now it is he who is afraid of being eaten. So, here we have something that is both very simple and very profound: naming something (even if unintentionally, as is the case of the wolf) means summoning, creating the reality of the thing, or rather, recognizing this reality. It is the magic value of the word, the power of the word, of the effective word. At the end of the tale the girl continues to play with the words that used to terrify her, thus definitely getting rid of the fear:

Mesmo quando está sozinha, Inventa uma brincadeira.

E transforma em companheiro

Cada medo que ela tinha:

O raio virou orrái, Barata é tabará,

A bruxa virou xabru e O diabo é bodiá.

(Even when she is alone,

She invents a game.

And transforms into a friend

Every fear she had:

O raio virou orrái, Barata é tabará,

A bruxa virou xabru e

O diabo é bodiá. ^{TN}

We know how much for the old folks the name, rather than a conventional designation, expresses the being itself. If the name makes the entity present, and calls upon it, acting on or even pronouncing it means being able to “have it” in hand and, in a sense, having power over it.⁴ In other words: by changing the name we change the being, by virtue of the force of the significant. *Lo-bo-bo-lo-lo-lo-bo-bo. Lobo* (Wolf) “becomes” effectively *Bolo* (Cake), because the word in poetry (as well as in magic, in religion and in psychoanalysis) is effective. And if, as says Lacan (1978, p.230), “the signifier actually penetrates the signified”, *lobo* (wolf) actually loses its power and turns into *bolo* (cake). Therefore, the archaic and magical power of the word is restored here.

Thus, here too there is an apology of the Word; we outskirt the importance of language, this primeval symbolic practice that essentially distinguishes human society from animal societies. The human being is a being of the word, or: the word lays the foundation for the human.

From this perception that she would have “overcome fear” through the

^{TN} In the last four lines of the poem, the author changes the meaning of the words that represented things the girl feared into other, meaningless words, by merely reversing them. Thus “raio” (lightning) becomes *órrai*; “barata” (cockroach) becomes *tabará*; “bruxa” (witch) becomes *xabru*; “diabo” (devil) becomes *bodiá*. All the reversed words (in italics) are meaningless, the product of a child’s fantasy.

word, Little Yellow Riding Hood will apply this same resource to her other fears: not only LOBO/BOLO (WOLF/CAKE), but also DIABO/BODIÁ (DEVIL/BODIÁ), BRUXA/XABRU (WITCH/XABRU), etc.: It is a word game, something playful which, however, is not without consequences. Let us examine more closely one of them: Diabo/Bodiá (Devil/Bodiá): technically this is an anagrammatic procedure, the creation of a word by the transposition of the letters - or in this case, the syllables - of another word. This is an intervention in the body of the word, by dismembering it and ... overcoming its negativity. By breaking the backbone of the significant we affect the signifier; *bodiá* removes the terror contained in the word *diabo* (devil); but substantially, the recreated word continues to resonate in the word “bode” (goat), which has to do with the diabolical world ... We cannot forget that we are in the waters of poetry, in which the word counts as a “thing”, in the materiality of its sign, creating a world of suggestions. Incidentally, in the other creations/reversals of Little Yellow Riding Hood something unsettling always remains from the original word, but its virulence is softened: for example, “xabru”, the reverse of “bruxa” (witch) echoes “chabu”; “*dar chabu*” means to fail, to go wrong.

Only a poet, someone who lives with the word, and who is aware of its power would be able to come up with a tale like this.

* * *

Little Red Riding Hood, Green Ribbon in Her Hair, Little Yellow Riding Hood. What are the elements common to these three tales, and what are the great modulations?

As we have seen, the emphasis is on the decisive feature of fairy tales, all of them: to raise issues that confront children in their development process and to offer them the level of the symbolic, so that they can deal with these issues. There is the character of initiation rite: the tests to which these beings in development will be submitted in the turning points of their existence, to move to another stage in life, to grow up. Children need to change to overcome something that hinders their development; they have - as the saying goes - “to change what is in their heads.” Not by accident the title character is named by the three authors based on something they carry on their heads: hoods and ribbons; it is the colors that change. In all three cases it is a metonym. We learn in grammar: metonymy is the use of the part for the whole, of the possessor by the thing possessed, etc. The hood comes to name its owner. But both the hood and the ribbon represent, by contiguity, the head and thoughts.

Concluding: although the three narratives deal with the issue of child development, the struggles of the child to grow up, especially the vital issue of coping with Fear (childish fear, but also fear of the child that lives within every one of us), we have seen that the modulations of each story are well singled out: a “psychological”, moralizing and pedagogical approach in Perrault’s tale (the dangers posed by child’s disobedience, the issue of sexual initiation); metaphysical bias in Guimarães

Rosa's tale (confrontation with finitude and death, passage from the psychological to the metaphysical plane); the focus on the symbolic efficiency of poetry in Chico Buarque's tale (victory over childhood fear through the power of words).

We have here a paradigmatic case of textual dialogue, in which the texts are generated from each other – integrating a long chain of human transmission of values, experiences, anxieties. Even Perrault's text, which was addressed here as paradigmatic, does not have in itself the starting point, but goes back to the past, it was created from oral traditions. "Tradition": let us take this term in its full etymological sense: tradition comes from the verb *tradere* = drag; carry, move forward dragging something. And then we realize that in the human adventure we need the Other.

Notes

- 1 The original images of Perrault's tale were in black and white: the coloring was done by Pedro Bezerra de Meneses Bolle.
- 2 Like the child's game, which Freud (1969) addresses in "Beyond the principle of pleasure", and which is known as the text on the "*fort-da*", a game invented by a small boy, accompanied always by the same joyful exclamations, the terms in German "*fort*" (gone) and "*da*" (here), and that consisted in throwing a wooden spool with a piece of string tied around it, and that thus disappeared into the mosquito net of his little bed; but then the child pulled the string and the spool reappeared. "This was the complete game: disappearance and return," says Freud. This game of disappearing and returning helped the boy – by playing it – to understand and work on his mother's absence, and her subsequent disappearance from sight, giving him a glimpse that, like the spool, she would also return at a later time. But back to our story: just as the little monkey's hood that the boy had thrown away (*fort*) and then was returned (*da*) to him by the pilot's assistant, the little monkey itself disappeared – and, of course, the Mother, who had been ill and had healed – could be "where people and things always went to and came back from." And what's very interesting is that Freud comments on the fact that the child had turned his experience into a game also for another reason: "at the beginning, he was in a passive situation, he was dominated by experience; but by repeating it, however unpleasant it may have been, as a game, he took an active role."
- 3 In its first 1979 edition.
- 4 In this context of thought and sensitivity lies the issue of the unpronounceable name of Iaweh, the Unnamable – who is designated as "He who is."

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ABSTRACT – Fairytales, orally passed down from parents to children, have become a precious cultural asset over time, conveying human experience and perhaps even representing an inaugural moment of “organizing experience” for children, a possibility offered by literature. Our proposal here is to carry out a comparative study of the tales *Little Red Riding Hood* by Perrault, *Fita Verde no Cabelo* [*Green Ribbon in her Hair*] by Guimarães Rosa and *Chapeuzinho Amarelo* [*Little Yellow Riding Hood*] by Chico Buarque, considering that both Brazilian authors have established an inevitable dialogue with the source text, which dates from the 17th century. Indeed, though all three narratives focus on the issue of child growth, the different views conveyed by each of them will be pointed out: 1. The moralizing and pedagogical approach of Perrault’s tale (the dangers of child disobedience, the issue of sexual initiation); 2. The metaphysical bias of Guimarães Rosa’s tale (confrontation with finitude and death, going from the psychological to the metaphysical plane); and 3. The focus on the symbolic efficiency of poetry of Chico Buarque’s tale (victory over childhood fears through the power of words). All of this is done taking Goethe’s statement in his *Theory of colors* into account: “When the artist gives over to his feeling, it immediately gives rise to a colored object”.

KEYWORDS: Literature and “organization of experience”, *little Red Riding Hood* (Perrault), *Fita Verde no Cabelo* (Guimarães Rosa), *Chapeuzinho Amarelo* (Chico Buarque), Goethe and the psychology of colors.

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