



LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

INTERVIEW WITH CÉLESTE GERME

Why did you choose the Brothers Grimm's version of *Little Red Riding Hood* over Charles Perrault's?

Re-reading Charles Perrault's version, I was struck by the guilt it tries to induce in young women. Under the guise of educating them—which also has to do with the time it was written—it reduces its moral to a warning about the dangers to which young women expose themselves if they talk to strangers; in those circumstances, it seems normal for them to end up getting eaten. I wondered about the origins of the representation of this little girl, so present in our collective imagination, and whom we most often see as suspect. Suspect in her desire, when we're talking about a child, and in her intentions towards the wolf. We all know how brutal the ending of this version is: the little girl gets eaten, and the fairy tale ends. On the contrary, in the Brothers Grimm's version, Little Red Riding Hood and her Grandmother are saved by the positive figure of the hunter. This first ending, happy and comforting, allows children to learn a reassuring lesson from this experience of danger. But in that version, the story then starts repeating: Little Red Riding Hood is once again sent to her grandmother's, and she meets another wolf. Her previous experience allows her to hatch a plan and to ambush the wolf. The moral perspective is very different, and guarantees the child her freedom thanks to this intergenerational alliance between women. It's a double ending: a "conforming" ending, because the hunter saves the two women, and a second story that lets the child play an active part in her own experience. It turns the story into an initiatory tale and the little girl into a heroine. In this version, she is aware of the danger, learns to recognise it and to overcome it by defending herself. Within the Das Plateau collective, it was therefore specifically the Brothers Grimm's version we wanted to adapt. We didn't rewrite it, so as to have that second ending play out on the stage, that ending which frees the child from fear. She's a true heroine who's not afraid of going through her own story again to master it and change its ending.

We all have in our heads a very powerful image of that story. How will you translate this well-known tale to the stage?

With the Brothers Grimm's version, we're right in the middle of German Romanticism, which came right before the emergence of psychoanalysis. There's a whole sensory aspect to it, like the light through the trees in the forest... It's beautiful. They give the reader a real emotional description of the landscape. German Romanticism also seems to have played a part in the rise of psychoanalysis. There's a real flow between this text and the stage, where representations from our psyche can materialise. When it comes to creating, I'm fascinated by this dialogue, and it leads to some questions: what do this tale and its adaptation for the stage tell us about our inner lives? In terms of plastic representation, I wanted to reformulate the research we began with *Bois Impériaux (Imperial Woods)* and *Poings (Fists)*, based on texts by Pauline Peyrade. We really liked the idea of using mirrors, including one-way mirrors. This material questions the narrative as much as the unfolding of a dream. On the one hand you have the work on reflection, painted canvases, and slanted surfaces, and on the other the video, which is a projection of images. This game of overlays gives the actors the opportunity to appear and disappear, it makes the story at once physically present and somewhat magical. This spatial elasticity is in and of itself like a framework for imagination: always in motion. The question of what's shown and what's hidden is central to our visual approach. The fragmentation of images and the possibility to have Little Red Riding Hood and the other characters exist in a kaleidoscopic way allow us to work on elusive forms. There's always something elusive about people. You can't ever know someone totally. We suggest their presence, and we let the spectators free to interpret the hidden intentions and characters of each of them.

Your research is unique... How do you organise your time during the creative period?

For years now we have been working with scenographer James Brandily, who helps us give life to our research about ghosts and about the things of the mind. Typically, the scenography of *Little Red Riding Hood* tries to be invisible. Here, we see “through” the locations, which never quite reveal themselves and highlight the mystery of the fairy tale. You have to think about the scenography before you can start working on the dramaturgy, which in turn comes before rehearsing with the actors. We know this space will constrain and even modify everyone’s research. Maëlys Ricordeau, who works with me throughout the conceptualisation phase, uses those explorations for her work as an actress. It’s the same when it comes to Jacob Stambach’s music, who draws inspiration from this space to think about how time will unfold, shift to a unique sound for each location (the threshold of the mother’s house, the forest, the grandmother’s garden, etc.), before coming back to the narrative. The various elements are interwoven, and we add layers of interpretation. It’s a form of craftsmanship. And if the set can seem intimidating, it’s the result of a technical rather than technological reflection. What inspired us most for this creation was *Pepper’s Ghost*, which is an optical illusion technique invented for Elizabethan theatre to reflect something usually made otherwise invisible to the audience. We build illusions, troubling or even scary moments, then we can show what’s behind them to the audience or suddenly move on. The tricks are revealed and the child-spectator remains in control of what he or she sees.

Is it possible to teach fear to children, or to teach them to unlearn that fear?

The Brothers Grimm’s version is about that very question. It’s much more of a reflection about freedom and about how one has to overcome obstacles to grow up. Of course, you have the wolf, which is among our primal fears in our collective imagination, but at the beginning Little Red Riding Hood isn’t afraid of him. He’s not bad, he invites her to wonder at what she encounters on her stroll through the woods. And she trusts him. Her only moment of fright is a justified one: she’s afraid when danger becomes palpable, that is, when she finds the wolf in her grandmother’s bed. The child we see is a very sensible one; she doesn’t fear in advance. And alongside the wolf, there is another educational proposition with the figure of the grandmother, who will accompany the child in her learning so that she can defend herself and “kill the wolf.” Here again you have a very subversive idea which doesn’t exist in Charles Perrault’s version.

Is there a moral to the story?

I don’t mean to replace one moral with another, or to present a contemporary version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. What I wanted to highlight was this palimpsest, the different versions of a single story. The fairy tale forces us to face problems, ambiguities. It will be up to the children to judge, and this judgement can change over time. Our task is to accompany them in this reflection.

Interview conducted by Marion Guilloux