THE CHILD VS THE FOREST

Environmental Identity in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms’ “Hänsel & Grethel”, “Little Snow White” and “Little Red-cap.”

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Environmental identity allows an individual to form a self-concept: “a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity that affects the way in which we perceive and act toward the world” (Clayton 45-6).
“… many parts … are well wooded, and adorned with a great number of beautiful seats and villas; but we are sorry to observe such immense tracts of open heath, and uncultivated land, which strongly indicate the want of means, or inclination to improve it, and often reminds the traveller of uncivilized nations, where nature pursues her own course, without the assistance of human art."

(Griffin 142)
Margaret Hunt’s collection is widely perceived as ideal for academic discourse as it is the most definitive edition collated during nineteenth-century England. It contains over two hundred tales from the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as well as ten religious stories for children.

(Kyritsi 28)
“See, Little Red-Cap, how pretty the flowers are about here—why do you not look round? I believe, too, that you do not hear how sweetly the little birds are singing; you walk gravely along as if you were going to school, while everything else out here in the wood is merry.”

Little Red-Cap raised her eyes, and ... she saw the sunbeams dancing here and there through the trees, and pretty flowers growing everywhere ... and so she ran from the path into the wood to look for flowers. And whenever she had picked one, she fancied that she saw a still prettier one farther on, and ran after it, and so got deeper and deeper into the wood. (Grimm 111)
The landscape provides the setting which enables the protagonist to succeed in this endeavor. If Little Red Cap had not engaged more fully in the natural landscape ... gathering beautiful flowers, there would be no story; she would have remained the "little" darling of the village with an external identity (Red Cap) assigned to her by her milieu. (197).
“The grandmother lived out in the wood, half a league from the village, and just as Little Red-Cap entered the wood, a wolf met her.”

(Grimm 110-1 [my emphasis])

• In his work on German legal antiquities, Jacob Grimm wrote: “Wargus, however, signifies wolf and robber because the banished criminal becomes a resident of the forest, just like a predatory animal, and may be hunted, just like a wolf” (qtd in Mueller 224)

• “Outlawing the human convict gave him the status of wolf. Banned from the campfire, he had to live like the four-legged wolf in the dreaded forest, there to die or to be killed. It is this two-legged wolf that we see tromping around the fairy tales.” (Mueller 225)
"What big **eyes** you have!"

"What big **ears** you have!"

"What large **hands** you have!"

"What a terrible big **mouth** you have!"
But now the poor child was all alone in the great forest, and so terrified that she looked at every leaf of every tree, and did not know what to do. Then she began to run, and ran over sharp stones and through thorns, and the wild beasts ran past her, but did her no harm.” (Grimm 208)
Snow White “unbolt[ed] the door” (211), “let[s] herself be beguiled, and opened the door” (212) and opens a window pane to place “her head out the window” to grasp the infamous poisoned apple (213). It is only within the vicinity of the cabin that her trauma transpires.

“The forest is safe and secure ... the human world means danger.”

(Murray & Heumann 69)
When they had walked for two hours, they came to a great piece of water. "We cannot get over," said Hänsel, … [though Grethel answered], “but a white duck is swimming there; if I ask her, she will help us over” (68).

Grethel wept bitter tears, and said to Hänsel, “Now all is over with us.” “Be quiet, Grethel,” said Hänsel, “do not distress thyself. I will soon find a way to help us.” (Grimm 62)

… Hänsel comforted his little sister and said, “Just wait, Grethel, until the moon rises, and then we shall see the crumbs of bread which I have strewn about, they will show us the way home again.” (65).
GRETHEL AS HEROINE
Once upon a time...
Thank you
References


