

4.5 *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*

The existence of an extensive, largely speculative body of secondary literature devoted to the interpretation of 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) provides ample opportunity for parody, as does the fact that preformed material from the tale has been appropriated for a variety of purposes, interpretative and ideological. In *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*,¹ Heinrich Kühleborn presents an ironic response to 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) and its interpretations from within a fictional frame which exploits and subverts the conventions of academic writing, adding another dimension to possible understandings of the text of 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) through parody of the text and its associated secondary literature.

The text divides into three main sections which intertwine overtly fictional material with fictional material presented as nonfiction, and numerous forewords, afterwords and compressed biographies following similar principles. In the first, supposedly nonfictional section, a contrast in 'codes' is set up through constant self-reference from within the text to the conventions of academic writing used in the writing of the text:

Vorworte sollten textlich und stilistisch knapp angelegt sein.²

Gelehrte Abhandlungen sollten mit Fußnoten beginnen.³

¹ Heinrich E. Kühleborn: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe: von Märchenfälschern und Landschaftszerstörern*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1982.

² Kühleborn: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*, p. 7.

A comic discrepancy is created between the preformed 'code' of the conventions involved in the presentation of academic writing as univocal and intended nonfiction, such as use of the passive voice, assumption of the univocality of author and narrator, and the convention of reference through footnotes, the reader expectations involved in the perception of academic writing as such, and the subversion of these conventions and expectations through the parodic 'code' suggested by these metafictional signalling devices. Since these conventions are signalled, and reader expectations evoked from within the narrative frame, the distinction between the total intentionality of nonfiction and the practice of fiction, where there is no authorial obligation to intend, is undermined. The text can thus be read with reference to the contrasts and discrepancies between fictional and nonfictional 'codes' as drawing attention to the knowledge claims being made by the narrator, to the very distinctions between fiction and nonfiction which the narrator's statements call into question, and thereby to the epistemological situation of reading. The contrasts between 'codes' are further supported through the use of obscure, unnecessarily latinised terminology such as 'dekonfusiologische Narrativik', neologisms such as 'entwirrende Erzählforschung' and their tautological combination:

[...] Denn anti-chronologische narrativische Präzision, oder anders ausgedrückt: präzise anti-chronologische Narrativik liegt in der Absicht der Darstellung.⁴

The incommensurable premises for the argument presented in this first section of the text, that both fictional and nonfictional

³ Kühleborn: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*, p. 9.

⁴ Kühleborn: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*, p. 15.

accounts of the 'Rotkäppchen' tale are interpretative, and that every fiction has a core of truth, that is, that truth is fiction and fiction is truth, are ironically supported by this blurring of intentionality, and through metafictional signalling and contrasting of nonfiction and fiction. They are also taken issue with by being carried to their obscenely logical conclusion in the second, overtly fictional section.

The central section of the text consists of the narrated expedition of a certain Professor Wainbrasch (=brainwash) in a Hessian forest, and his supposed discovery, with the aid of the infallible tracking skills of his dog Fidus, of artifacts and documents which trace the origins of all variants of 'Rotkäppchen', including Grimms' version, to a 'true' historical event. The Professor reconstructs an *Urfassung* of the 'Rotkäppchen' material, which tells of the seduction by the aristocratic Wolff von Staufenberg of the bondswoman Kätchen Rödekopf, and her subsequent death during childbirth. The vaguely archaeological methods employed by Professor Wainbrasch invite comparison with those presented in an earlier parody of secondary literature relating to the *KHM* by Hans Traxler, *Die Wahrheit über Hänsel und Gretel*,⁵ in which the fictional archaeologist Georg Ossegg purports to have discovered the geographical location of the house of the Witch by reading 'Hänsel and Gretel' (*KHM* 15) as a historical document, and thus proposes to reconstruct the 'true' course of 'Hänsel und Gretel' (*KHM* 15) using archaeological methods. The similarity of method is indeed explicitly referred to in the introductory section of the text. At the same time, the destruction of the forest ecology, and the evidence to support Professor

⁵ Hans Traxler: *Die Wahrheit über Hansel und Gretel*. Frankfurt am Main: Bärmeier und Nickel 1963.

Wainbrasch's claims at the hands of 'progressive', bureaucratic Hessian planning is depicted.

The 'serious' analysis of these fictional research efforts which follows, and comparison of the 'true' historical events with a number of versions of the 'Rotkäppchen' material, continue to exploit and blur the basic difference in intentionality between fiction and nonfiction, primary and secondary literature, for comic effect. The text of 'Rotkäppchen' (*KHM* 26) is quoted in full, with the graphic device of Gothic script utilised to distance and date the preformed material critically.⁶ The authority of Grimms' version of 'Rotkäppchen' is undermined, since it is presented as merely another inauthentic variant of a 'true' story. The material is also recontextualised, presented as an object of study, but the context in which it is presented is itself undermined through the parodic use of scholarly conventions and style.

As a result, the text can be read as taking issue with attempts at presenting 'truth' through fiction, and conversely, with attempts at finding 'truth' in fiction, on several levels. The text can be read as taking issue with the idea that interpretation aims to arrive at an unequivocal 'truth' or meaning, or that it is possible to interpret *Märchen* unequivocally, since the text presents Professor Wainbrasch's overtly fictional discoveries as 'truth', and then proceeds to interpret them as nonfiction. On this reading, the text also takes issue with the idea that interpretation aims to arrive at an unequivocal 'truth' through parody of the univocality of academic writing, emphasising moments of heterogeneity and discontinuity which contrast with and oppose the expected intentionality of nonfiction. It can also be read as taking issue with the idea that fiction contains a core of

⁶ Kühleborn: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe*, pp. 43-47.

truth, by presenting an overtly fictional story as 'truth' in the third section of the text, whilst undermining the claim to nonfictionality through metafictional comment and parody of scholarly devices and conventions. These general criticisms can further be read as being directed at attempts at interpreting *Märchen* as social documents, and at attempts at writing *veränderte Märchen* for the purpose of making social comment, especially in conjunction with the arbitrary and overtly fictional nature of Professor Wainbrasch's research efforts.