

# TEXTS FOR ANALYSIS

## ACADEMIC PROSE

## THE PHYLOGENY OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

**Abstract**

1 Researchers have long been fascinated by the strong continuities  
evident in the oral traditions associated with different cultures.  
According to the 'historic-geographic' school, it is possible  
to classify similar tales into "international types" and trace  
5 them back to their original archetypes. However, critics argue  
that folktale traditions are fundamentally fluid, and that most  
international types are artificial constructs. Here, these issues  
are addressed using phylogenetic methods that were originally  
developed to reconstruct evolutionary relationships among biological  
10 species, and which have been recently applied to a range of cultural  
phenomena. The study focuses on one of the most debated international  
types in the literature: ATU 333, 'Little Red Riding Hood'.  
A number of variants of ATU 333 have been recorded in European  
oral traditions, and it has been suggested that the group may  
15 include tales from other regions, including Africa and East Asia.  
However, in many of these cases, it is difficult to differentiate  
ATU 333 from another widespread international folktale, ATU 123,  
'The Wolf and the Kids'. To shed more light on these relationships,

data on 58 folktales were analysed using cladistic, Bayesian and  
20 phylogenetic network-based methods. The results demonstrate that,  
contrary to the claims made by critics of the historic-geographic  
approach, it is possible to identify ATU 333 and ATU 123 as distinct  
international types. They further suggest that most of the African  
tales can be classified as variants of ATU 123, while the East Asian  
25 tales probably evolved by blending together elements of both ATU 333  
and ATU 123. These findings demonstrate that phylogenetic methods  
provide a powerful set of tools for testing hypotheses about cross-  
cultural relationships among folktales, and point towards exciting  
new directions for research into the transmission and evolution  
30 of oral narratives.