


VICTIM, SEDUCTRESS, OR EXECUTIONER? THE AMBIGUOUSLY FEMINIST RECYCLING OF *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD*: FROM CHARLES PERRAULT TO CONTEMPORARY POP CULTURE

¿VÍCTIMA, SEDUCTORA O VERDUGO? EL RECICLAJE AMBIGUAMENTE FEMINISTA DE CAPERUCITA ROJA: DE CHARLES PERRAULT A LA CULTURA POP CONTEMPORÁNEA

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Abstract

Little Red Riding Hood is arguably one of the most famous fairy tales in the world. The tale has traditionally been interpreted as a Freudian learning experience (Bettelheim, 1976), and this popular character as well as its narrative simplicity allowed the renowned scholar Umberto Eco to use it as a parable on the limits of interpretation (Eco, 1994). This article will examine the recycling process that the tale has undergone from Charles Perrault to the present day, spanning various mediums such as comics, movies, anime, or songs from the late 20th to early 21st centuries. The strategies employed to retell and recycle the tale, especially in pop culture (whether from a structural standpoint or under a new conceptual framework), will be studied, along with their implications from the perspective of feminist empowerment.

Keywords: Little Red Riding Hood, Feminism, Recycling Strategies, Empowerment, Narratives, Fiction.

Resumen

Caperucita Roja es posiblemente uno de los cuentos de hadas más famosos del mundo. El cuento se ha interpretado tradicionalmente como una experiencia de aprendizaje freudiano (Bettelheim, 1976) y tanto su carácter popular como su simpleza narrativa permitieron que el célebre Umberto Eco lo utilizara como parábola de los límites de la interpretación (Eco, 1994). Este artículo examinará el proceso de reciclaje que ha sufrido el cuento desde Charles Perrault hasta nuestros días, pasando por diferentes medios como el cómic, películas, animes o canciones de finales del siglo XX a comienzos del XXI. Se estudiarán las estrategias que tienen lugar para volver a contar el cuento y reciclarlo sobre todo en la cultura pop (ya sea desde un punto de vista estructural o bajo un nuevo marco conceptual) y sus implicaciones desde la perspectiva de empoderamiento feminista.

Palabras clave: Caperucita Roja, feminismo, estrategias de reciclaje, empoderamiento, narrativas, ficción.

Introduction

Fairy tales and gender studies are not new to each other: in 1970, Alison Lurie published an article titled “Fairy Tale Liberation”, in which she made the case that fairy tales helped the cause of women’s liberation, because they depicted strong females. She elicited a strong response by Marcia R. Lieberman that came two years later as an article titled “Some Day My Prince Will Come”, denouncing that the most popular fairy tale stories (as portrayed by Disney) do not depict strong female protagonist indeed and the corpus Lurie quoted as representative of fairy tales was hardly known by anyone but scholars. These arguments were seconded by Andrea Dworkin in her book *Woman Hating* (1974), as well as Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). The later argued that *Little Red Riding Hood* was a parable of rape (and we will examine this particular parable in our corpus) and that fairy tales taught women to settle into the role of rape victims. This back and forth on the topic was surpassed in 1979 when Karen E. Rowe wrote the pivotal article “Feminism and Fairy Tales”. She argued that fairy tales showed the concerns of contemporary women and how folklorists could use feminism to understand the genre’s sociocultural meanings.¹

A young, apparently innocent girl meets a predator in the woods. Instead of running away, she enters a conversation with it/him, and she is offered a choice: the way of needles (i.e.: the way of the traditional duty, the safety of their own sexuality) or the way of pins (i.e.: the way of fun, the sexual initiation entering the world of men). The needles represent sewing, and this was a female activity at the time. From a psychoanalytic perspective, pins stand for penises and needles stand for vaginas. She inevitably chooses the way of pins and will face the consequences of her own choice, sometimes learning something, sometimes suffering for it. This choice is what makes Little Red Riding Hood unique (and at the same time, problematic) for it is complicated to cast her irrevocably into the role of a passive victim, all the more having in mind that the girl escapes (or even kills) the wolf in lots of versions. In the words of Natalie Hayton:

The image of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine in folkloristics and Disney has never been associated with Red’s character and situation, and she is typically absent from any academic analysis of this fairy tale archetype. Yet, as a young girl subjected to violence, rape and sometimes murder, her relationship to the traditional list of long suffering females like those mentioned above, is analogous. As Zipes (1993 and 2011) and Marina Warner (1995) assert, the suggestion of her complicity in her own victimisation means that Red can never simply be ‘innocent’. (Hayton, 2013: 16)

The purpose of this article is to examine how the classic character flows between three roles: the of the victim is reinforcing a negative stereotype about independent women making her own, daring choices. The role of the seductress is an ambivalent role, as the act of seduction may be sanctioned for the best or for the worst, depending on the success of Little Red. Finally, the role of the executioner means re-empowering the girl via her control of her own destiny and choices. These projections of the heroine are tied

¹ For a more detailed overview of this process and its fruitful consequences up to the 2000, the reader may refer to *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (Haase, 2004: vii-7).

to textual strategies in the different media we will examine, and it is our aim to decode the strategies operating each time the tale is recycled (i.e. rewritten for different media with new purposes). In order to do so, we borrow the methodological approach from Susana Tosca (see Tosca, 2013²) committed to this approach concerning the recycling of LRRH in digital format. She established four main recycling categories:

- *Multimedial Remediation*: this means transporting the old text into a new platform (2013: 198).
- *New Symbolic Layer*: meaning “most of the traditional plot elements are preserved, but there is an additional layer of meaning added to the text” (2013: 199)
- *Dispersion/Fragmentation*: “LRRH is mixed with several other fairytales in a pandemonium of themes” (2013: 199)
- *Transmedial World*: as opposed to all the other examples and strategies, there is here an extra layer to the interpretive-evocative, as we feel we can navigate the universe of LRRH thanks to the richness of the recreation (2013: 202).

Origins and shape-shifting strategies.

It might seem superfluous to introduce our fairy tale via a brief summary of its plot: every person, whether literate or illiterate, has at some point in their lives listened to some variant of *Little Red Riding Hood* (hereinafter referred to as LRRH). Folklorists have discovered variants of the fairy tale not only in Europe but also all around the world (see Dundes, 1989: 21-63); where Wolfram Eberhard analyses and dissects different versions of the tale in Asia; see also Zipes, (1993), where 38 international versions of the tale are compiled (most of them are European or American, though). Some versions display interesting cultural changes: the traditional Chinese one, named *Goldflower and the Bear*, presents a plantigrade in lieu of the classic wolf and the red color is replaced by gold (283-292); the reader will find in Delarue & Teneze, (1976), up to 35 versions of the tale just in the oral French tradition.

Thanks to the folklorists’ research, the plot can nowadays be trimmed down to its most basic form, from which all other versions seem to have sprung. Folklorists name this structure *ur-plot* (*ur-* meaning primitive, original) borrowing the concept from Vladimir Propp, who famously studied the morphology of Russian fairy tales back in 1928. The reader interested in tracing back the genesis and variants of the tale around the world may refer to Jamshi Tehrani (2013).

Presenting the dramatic structure of the tale could prove, however, more interesting for our study: for Catherine Orenstein, the core of the story lies in the fact that “Opposites collide -good and evil, beast and human, male and female. How the heroine negotiates this clash determines her fate” (Orenstein, 2002: 4). The author argues that it is this simplicity that allows for the tale to become “the quintessential moral primer”. Indeed, it is this simplicity that makes it possible to strongly convey almost any moral teaching for children, particularly girls, via the fairy tale: the story is about a simple choice and a simple consequence following the choice almost immediately.

² Available online: <http://www.neliufpe.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/11.pdf>

Despite the apparent simplicity of the plot structure, the tale has indeed elicited countless interpretations since Charles Perrault wrote it for the first time in 1697, echoing the French oral tradition in the anthology *Contes de ma mère l'oye* (*Tales of Mother Goose*). In this version, the tale ends abruptly for the modern reader when the wolf devours LRRH. We can read next the moral of the story in which the wolf is equaled to a sexual predator.³ There is undoubtedly something captivating about the tension underneath said simplicity: Erich Fromm famously stated that the red in the hood symbolised menstruation and the bottle of wine that Little Red Riding Hood carries in the basket was actually her own virginity (see Fromm, 1951: 235-240). None other than Umberto Eco used the fairy tale to illustrate the limits of interpretation and overinterpretation in his essay *Six walks in the fictional woods*, where he argues that we could interpret LRRH from multiple points of view, but the consistency of the text forbids us to use it to force a chemical interpretation where LRRH would be cinnabar and the wolf would be mercurous chloride (see Eco, 1994: 91-92). The power of the tale lays in the fact that it is both simple and deep enough to suggest lots of interpretations, and this is what interested Eco.

The object of our study is not the different versions of LRRH per se, but rather the mechanisms of cultural recycling lying underneath some pop milestones in the last three decades and how they project a different ideological meaning for the heroine of the tale, be it through empowerment, overt sexualisation or victimisation. Tracing down versions or variants is certainly a task that has been undertaken by scholars countless times. Thus, Amie A. Doughty establishes the distinction between *retellings* (which include minor differences, due for instance to nuances in translations or even the iteration of the oral retelling itself which would vary some details) and *revisions*. According to this difference, “revisions of folktales, however, are versions of folktales, usually written, that take traditional tales, often well-known ones, and alter them in a much more elaborate manner than retellings” (Doughty, 2006: 14). These are revisions that we are naturally interested in, as they may accommodate new meanings, such as the new symbolic layer, the dispersion/fragmentation or the transmedial world. Doughty does not seem very much interested in transmedia, which is understandable, since she focused on stories updated for children, and as such, she just considers film adaptations in one chapter. Orenstein, on the other hand, offers an exhaustive compilation of retellings, ranging from traditional versions (Perrault, Grimm’s brothers, etc.) to films, rock songs, LRRH in advertising and even porn. She is, however, mostly interested in ideology, as the subtitle “Sex, morality and the evolution of a fairy tale” declares.

We borrow the concept of cultural recycling from Jenkins (2013) and Reynolds (2011). They stress the idea of old content being re-entering the circuit through new media and acquiring new meaning not only because of the media itself or the new distribution model (which is different from the “retro” or “nostalgic” aspect), as McLuhan famously declared in his quote “the medium is the message”, but also because minimal changes could point to important ideological shifts in the tale. For instance, the Grimm brothers invented a woodman that saved both LRRH and her grandmother in the end. This implies ideologically that only a man can redeem LRRH and provide a happy ending, despite her mistakes.

³ This was the part most criticised by Bruno Bettelheim, as he argues that giving away explicitly the moral of the story removes the power of the imagination from children, which need to draw the conclusion and extract the meaning by themselves.

Another interesting example happens when the tale is transposed to an iconic media, such as comic or cinema: the author(s) needs to choose which parts will be explicitly represented and which ones will happen through ellipsis or off-screen. In the end it all comes back essentially to the *version* as understood by Dougherty; Cristina Bacchilega points in the same direction as she speaks of *rewritings* (see Bacchilega, 1997: 50):

[R]ewriting need not be simply a stylistic or ideological updating to make the tale more appealing to late [...] adult audiences, [...] it involves substantive though diverse questioning of both narrative construction and assumptions about gender. Postmodern revision is often two-fold, seeking to expose, make visible, the fairy tale's complicity with "exhausted" narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working from the fairy tales' multiple versions, seeking to expose, bring out, what the institutionalization of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexploited.

Our focus will be not on what changes are made from one version to another, as much as why and how these changes are done (i.e. the recycling strategies operating in each version), as well as its consequences for a gender studies' reading of the version. Why does Neil Gaiman uses a metafictional approach to takes us back to the Perrault's version? Can LRRH lure the wolf into a trap when the tale is transported to a futuristic, dystopian Japan? What happens if we present LRRH as a deranged sociopathic killer and the wolf as a victim? What if LRRH was read as a detective story instead of a cautionary tale? What lies beneath Lady Gaga's *Monster*? Why does the singer avoid any explicit reference to LRRH? These questions will be examined and answered through the next sections of this paper.

The Sandman (Neil Gaiman, 1990). LRRH as metafiction: revealing the "true nature" of the tale.

Neil Gaiman often builds his short stories and novels upon or around a shocking discovery that horrifies the reader. He is also a very efficient connoisseur of the fairy tale structures: if the reader would need proof, they can refer to his poem *Instructions* (Gaiman, 2010), in which, in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, he gives pieces of advice for characters in fairy tales, such as: "do not touch anything", "eat nothing", "trust those that you have helped to help you in their turn" (2010: 3-38), playing around the traditional tropes and events. In our example, however, we will study his perhaps most famous work as the scenarist of the acclaimed series of graphic novels "The Sandman". The series (published by DC Comics' Vertigo from 1989 to 1996) is celebrated for the unique blend of myth, fantasy and horror, and tell the story of "Dream", one of the god-like endless beings, and his adventures.

In volume number 2, the story follows Rose Walker, a young girl in search of her lost little brother. She rents an apartment in a block full of queer people (the character named Gilbert is one of them) and her journey takes her to a motel where she asks his new friend, Gilbert, to tell her a tale to calm her down.

At this point, the very process of folktale researching underlies the strategy adopted by Neil Gaiman, since the writer will take his model reader by surprise when Gilbert proceeds to recite a version of LRRH in which she eats her mother's flesh, drinks her blood and is finally devoured as the ending:



Fig.1: Sandman LRRH01

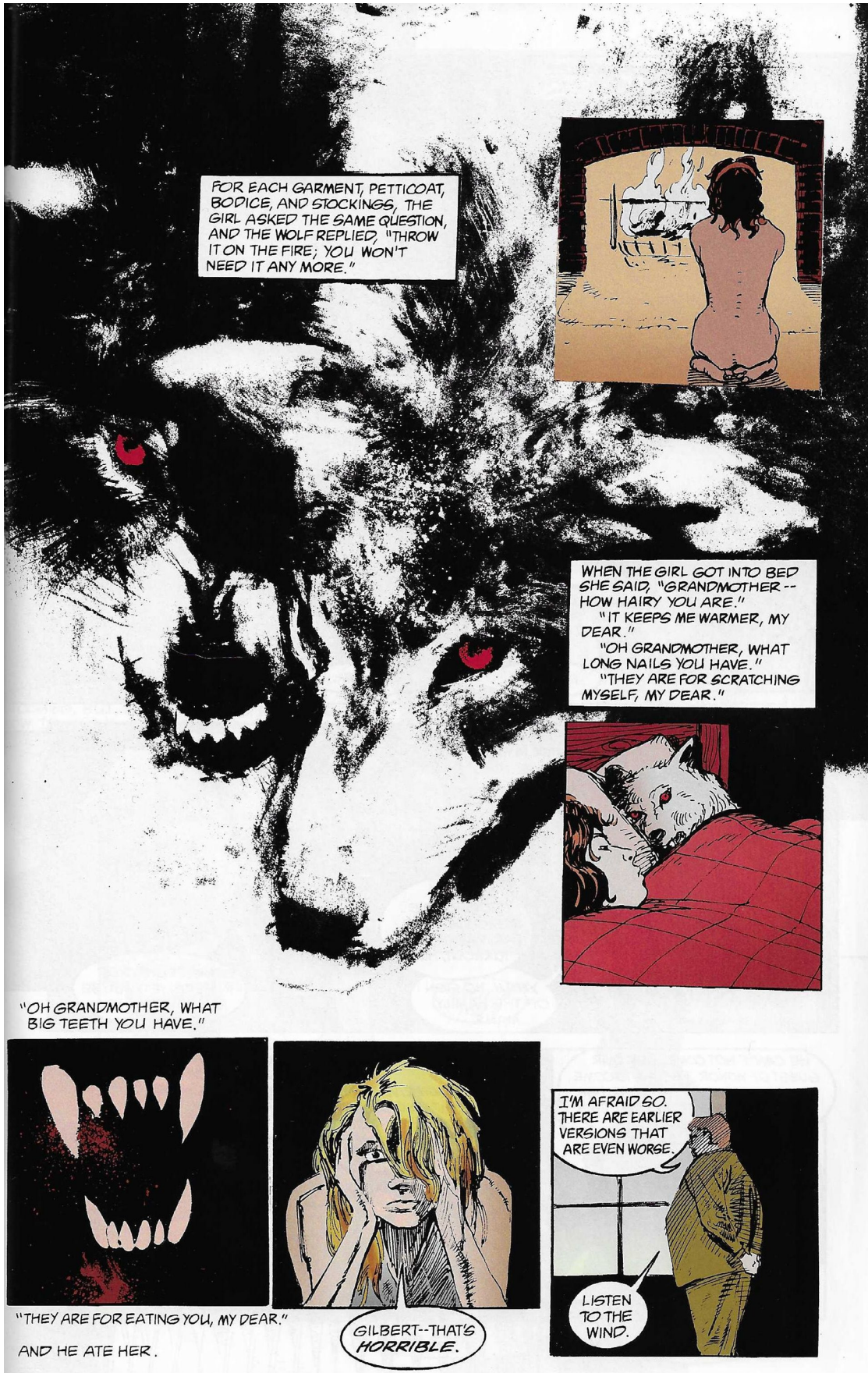


Fig. 2: Sandman LRRH02

The shocking reveal is that LRRH is not a tale suitable for kids, and although the sexual nature of the tale is unequivocally depicted, the metaphor linking the tale to the meta/ frame story is not that Rose is sexually inexperienced as much as the fact that Rose is a naive young girl totally unaware of the mortal danger she is currently in, as she has checked in in a motel hosting an undercover convention of serial killers. The beautiful composition of the page closes the tale with a close up of Rose holding his head and whispering horrified: "Gilbert... that's horrible!". "I'm afraid so. There are earlier versions that are even worse", Gilbert replies. In fact, Gaiman pretty much twists the genesis of the tale: in French oral traditions LRRH usually escapes her doom on her own or is even rescued by other women, as Pilar García-Carcedo studies in her compilation (see García-Carcedo, 2022).

This metafiction is a perfect example of the process of legitimation the graphic novel underwent through the last decades of the 20th century: blurring high-brow and low-brow culture, the graphic novel will appeal to the casual reader (who knew about the canonical Grimm's version) as well as to the scholar's interest in the tale (who will be delighted in Gaiman's divulgation of knowledge). For the figure of LRRH, however, this strategy implies reframing her ideologically from her role of survivor and recasting her into the role of victim. As she dies in the end and is no longer able to escape her fate, the tale is setting the example on a world where women pay for the "crime" of experiencing sexuality in a playful manner, implicitly advising little girls to keep their submissive role in a society led by men, whether in the 17th century where Perrault manipulated the formula or all the way through 1998. The addition of the lumberjack saving the day⁴ reinforces explicitly the implicit meaning of roles under the patriarchy, as pointed out by Bacchilega (1997: 58-59): both versions are cautionary tales, as:

Whether she survives her journey into the outer world or not, the girl is *inside* when the tale ends -inside the wolf's belly for Perrault, or her grandmother's home for the Grimms. Devoured or domesticated, charged with sin or in charge of the feminine hearth, in the library fairy-tale tradition Red Riding Hood is subjected to the laws of one deliberative masculine body. When the wolf punishes the girl's curiosity, and when the hunter saves her and the grandmother, males determine feminine limits.

Despite the fact that *Sandman* stands out for its openness on gender issues throughout the saga, Red Riding Hood is played here for its sheer shock effect, and, as a result, lacks any powerful denunciation: Rose stands for LRRH and she has been successfully terrorised by Gilbert (which, by the way, is a transcript of G.K. Chesterton). The man, in contrast, stands firmly and plays the role of wise counselor (i.e. the male authority) instilling fear where it should be felt, as determined by him. Coming back to Tosca's classification, there is a new symbolic layer to be found for the casual reader, as they will reinterpret the tale as a horror story instead of a happy ending. The scholar reading through a gender perspective will also find another representation of patriarchal control, so as Jean-Baptiste Karr famously stated, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (Karr, 1849).

⁴ Which is a later invention by the Grimm brothers, as Gilbert points out.

Jin-Roh (Hiroyuki Okiura, 1999): inversion of the inversion.

Inversion is a trope/variant long known for the tale, often tied to a humorous twist or empowering LRRH, or both, such as in Roald Dahl's poem *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf*, in Tex Avery's short cartoon *Red Hot Riding Hood*, or even the ancient version of the tale, where LRRH cleverly escapes. *Jin-Roh* is an anime film (directed by Hiroyuki Okiura, and written by Mamoru Oshii, 1999) that will surprise the spectator with an expected twist followed by an unexpected one. The plot is quite complex, and we may offer just a summarised version and commentary: in a dystopian post World War 2 Japan, Germany has won the war and Japan is ruled by authoritarian political forces, which used the special militarised unit *Kerberos Panzer Cop* (literally "Dog Armoured Police") to crush dissidence and rebels. This unit wears a characteristic armour and helmet allowing night vision and suited to fight by night or in dark places such as the sewers. The helmet displays yellow glowing "eyes" for night vision, thus reinforcing the metaphor of the wolves' evil eyes glowing in the dark⁵.



Fig. 3: *Jin-Roh* helmets.

The story follows Fuse, a young member of the unit, which experiences a traumatic event when, fighting a riot in the sewers, he is confronted by a young girl. We have been previously informed that the rebels use them as couriers for moving bombs, and dab them "Little Red Riding Hoods": terrorised, the girl begins to pull the plug for the bomb she is carrying, in front of the heavy armored Fuse, which instead of killing her on spot, is paralysed because of the horror of the suicide. Fuse can just mutter "Don't!" and then "Why?". Looking for a rationale behind radical, brain-washed actions, and acting guided by compassion and dialogue rather than orders or brutality, we empathise

⁵ This is a trope cleverly used for instance in the classic, fantasy-horror movie about LRRH *The company of wolves* in 1984, based mostly on one of the tales included in *The bloody chamber* by Angela Carter (1979). The terror provoked by the monster is greater, as the form is nearly indistinguishable in the dark, but its presence is undeniable, as shown by the glow in its eyes.

with him immediately. The girl blows herself up nonetheless and Fuse's colleagues and superiors put him under surveillance while he is in rehabilitation to heal his wounds. The fact he refused to kill the girl is regarded with suspicion.

Looking for closure, Fuse visits the grave of the girl and meets Kei, a girl who carries a book about LRRH and tells Fuse she is the girl's sister and that she (the late sister) always loved the tale. They quickly become friends and Fuse begins to heal thanks to their friendship, but we will learn eventually that Kei is manipulating Fuse in order to gain intel for the *Metropolitan Police Public Security Division*, a rival organisation that intends to discredit and disband the *Kerberos Panzer Cop* and is aiming to gain political power in the process. Kei is not even related to the suicidal girl. In other words: Kei is apparently the cunning tool of the internal affairs police, while Fuse is the traumatised victim of a brutal, unaware military police force unit. At this point we are led to believe that *Jin-Roh* is an inversion of the classic fairy tale: the wolf, Fuse, is indeed the innocent LRRH, while the girl, Kei, would be in fact the cunning predator who kindly seduces and tricks her prey. As Fuse and Kei become close, fragments of the original story (apparently from the Grimm's version, as it is written in German in the anime) are read aloud by Kei to Fuse, which in turn remembers them with Kei's voice over from time to time.

The film, however, has in store more than meets the eye: rumors of the existence of a mysterious intelligence unit of its own, inside the *Kerberos Panzer Cop*, named "Jin-Roh" (literally "Man wolf" in Japanese, i.e.: 'werewolf') or *The Wolf Brigade* are hinted at. We learn at the end of the film that not only this mysterious division does indeed exist, but it also has been operating and plotting since the very beginning of the incident: in reality, Fuse faked his trauma in order to be approached by the cover *Metropolitan Police*, expose them and annihilate them once and for all. He is thus a soon-to-be member of the *Wolf Brigade*.

This is all revealed when the *Metropolitan Police*, along with the rebels, set up an ambush to trap the *Kerberos Panzer Cop*, ignoring they are the ones being ambushed for real.

Before the ambush of the *Metropolitan Police* will be frustrated in a battle in the sewers, we learn that Fuse will be the one charged with the brutal massacre of everyone in the know of the plot. As his companions dress him on their armoured uniform, the mask (obviously echoing also a nazi helmet) is donned and the yellow lights on his eyes are switched on. His boss informs Kei, who is now being held prisoner: "Now you can see the real face of Fuse. We are not men disguised as mere dogs [alluding to the Kerberos name of the unit]: we are wolves disguised as men". In the film, then, the wolf doubles down as the total dehumanisation of a moral being, as the merciless predator, any beast opposed to a human, a thing (or a machine), in short.

After the massacre, only one loose end remains: the existence of Kei, which, we are informed, had no actual choice nor say in her part of the plot, as she was all along a terrorist previously sentenced to death. It is Fuse who is ordered again to finish the job and kill her as the final action in the film. This is all the crueller since Fuse couldn't help but to develop sincere romantic feelings for Kei, even though he knew everything was staged from the beginning: he is thus forced to choose between his authentic, impossible feelings and his cruel, rational duty. The wolf then falls victim to his own trap, victim and executioner at the same time.

As for Kei, she experiences the same problem when she falls for Fuse, but hers is not a dilemma at that point: since she's reduced to the position of victim, she doesn't make any choice in the climax of the film and must be content to reciting in tears "Mother, what big teeth you have...", while she embraces Fuse, knowing too well in advance the certainty of her demise. We realise in shock that she made her choice (the opposite one of Fuse's) previously in the film, when she proposed several times to Fuse to just run away together, trying to escape their position as pawns in a game and live their love: Fuse refused, as he is conscious of his true mission, but at that point the spectator is not, and believes the wolf has been duped all along and is about to fall into the cleverly laid trap. In the end, Fuse grinds his teeth, moans, cries and as the film's shot focuses cleverly on his canines/ fangs, a gunshot is heard, and we become aware of he has effectively shot Kei to death while she was embracing him.

The moral of the story is cruel: despite our hopes, the wolf will always win; but was it really a victory for the wolf or rather for the pack? The public may find little comfort in the fact that, had not Fuse executed Kei, they both would have been assassinated immediately, as a sniper holstering his gun is revealed after Fuse pulls the trigger and Fuse's boss closes the tale reciting "And the Wolf ate Little Red Riding Hood": it was, ultimately, Perrault all along, and not the Grimm's version, in an inversion of the (un) expected inversion we hoped for. Not a fairy tale, but a horrifying *Bildungsroman* in a film, since the protagonist was not Kei, but Fuse, and his journey was about becoming part of the pack, losing any remaining inch of humanity along the way.

Several categories of Tosca's analyses apply here: as *Jin-Roh* is in fact an adaptation of the manga *Kerberos Panzer Cop* by Mamoru Oshii (1988-2000) and additionally it is the third film in the Kerberos Saga after 1987's *The Red Spectacles* and 1991's *StrayDog: Kerberos Panzer Cops*, the story is indeed a multimedial remediation and part of a transmedial world. The new symbolic layer is absent, however, and its absence constitutes the *tour de force* of the film: an inversion of the tale would mean a solid empowerment of LRRH (this is exactly what will happen in our next piece of corpus, the film *Hard Candy*), as Kei could have earned her revenge through the manipulation of the toxic, abusive, violent and military oriented *Kerberos* organisation (no women are represented as members of this corps, contrary to the *Metropolitan Police*). We may ask ourselves, nevertheless, if Kei executing or betraying Fuse would constitute a true happy ending and a lesson on a positive view of female power.

In my opinion, there is a deeper gender reading inside the beautiful anime: in the context of Japanese culture (see Napier, 2005 and particularly 2006), it is again no coincidence that women are associated with sentimentality (Kei dreams of escaping with Fuse because she has fallen in love with him for real) and men are associated with stoicism (Fuse has maybe fallen in love with her, but resists the "temptation", as duty comes first and completely annihilates his "feminine feelings"). The happy ending could have happened only through the acceptance and reciprocity of love, in other words, through embracing his "female side". The refusal of love grants Fuse the rank he so desperately desired but closes the door forever on happiness, and even more: only a chaste kissing in the underway (a classic romantic move that will find an echo in Lady Gaga's *Monster*, as we will see later) is shared between our protagonists all along the story. The rejection of Kei by Fuse means not only the fear of romantic love (a feeling associated with the female role), but also the rejection of sex: Zipes studied how the literary version of LRRH became

“a male creation and projection [that] reflects men’s fear of women’s sexuality -and of their own as well” (Zipes, 1993: 80-81).

Hard Candy (David Slade, 2005): blurring the moral lines.

In this film, a cyber date leading to a date in the real world is the setup for a child stalker and molester to meet his young prey. Jeff (Patrick Wilson) introduces himself to Hayley (Elliot Page), who is presented maybe too in the nose carrying a red coat with a hood,, and takes her to his home, but little does he know that Hayley is anything but a defenseless victim: she is indeed his nemesis in the etymological sense of the word.

Hard Candy may seem at first like an inversion in which LRRH kills the wolf, a figure which has been produced countless times before (such as in the film *Freeway*, 1996), and in fact it was what the viewer expected from *Jin-Roh*, but here the narrative of the girl is questioned for a good fraction of the film, leaving us to decide whether the girl is a psychotic, sadistic paranoid teenager who is about to emasculate and then kill an innocent man, or rather feel empathy for a courageous avenger who takes on a much more intimidating and dangerous foe. In a roller coaster dynamic, Hayley captures Jeff, questions him about the raping and murder of a girl, then Jeff denies everything, escapes and controls the situation, trying to capture the girl, only to be recaptured by her several times. The cat and mouse game is actually always controlled by Hayley (we learn this after several iterations), and we wonder if we should actually feel pity for an innocent man or despise a murderer, but we realise that after each escape, Jeffs admits a bit more and becomes more violent against Hayley. In a rather anti-postmodern turn, the film ends rallying the spectator with Hayley’s version (Jeff confesses and commits suicide), as she dons the red hood and continues her journey, dissipating who’s the heroine and who was the villain. It seems then like a wasted opportunity, since the inversion is a recycling strategy that has been executed over and over, unlike the fracture of the truth and thus the blurring of the moral line: Catherine Orenstein ends her essay with the description of her favourite toy as she was a girl: a transformable doll which could become LRRH, the Wolf or granny. This symbolic conclusion points to the interpretation of the tale as the metaphor of a human journey in which any one person could be in turn LRRH (as kids), the Wolf (as teenagers), the Woodsman (as adults-fathers), then Granny (as elders), so judging any character from a moral perspective would be, at the very least, naive, if not pointless. *Hard Candy* leaves us then again with the simplest inversion of forces and unique moral truth, dissipating any postmodern flair which could have enriched the film.

As for Tosca’s categories, the inversion of LRRH provides naturally a new symbolic layer in which the symbolic castration and induced suicide of Jeff is presented as pure justice not only upon a singular sinner or a psychopath, but also upon a masculine figure. We learn at the end of the film that Hailey has enacted the same vengeance previously on Jeff’s accomplice and she is planning on keeping on: her donning of the red hood represents the acceptance of a mission of justice and reparation for the female victims who no longer can seek them on their own. It constitutes also a “dispersion and fragmentation”, as the tale does present an open ending and it is largely based of the intrigue of a narrative starting *in medias res*, where other LRRHs have been eaten

previously by the wolf. This ending empowering a successful LRRH contrast heavily with Gaiman's version in which Rose stood terrified, as opposed to Hailey when continues along the road with her red hood, not scared a bit to take on the next predator.

Hoodwinked! (Cory Edwards, Todd Edwards & Tony Leech, 2005) and *Red Riding Hood* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2011): crossing genres.

Hoodwinked! is, contrary to *Hard Candy*, "a 2005 American computer-animated musical comedy mystery film. It retells the folktale Little Red Riding Hood as a police procedural, using backstories to show multiple characters' points of view".⁶ The story here revolves around who stole a book of family recipes from LRRH's grandma. Despite its nature as a film for kids, *Hoodwinked!* takes the chance *Hard Candy* let pass the same year and deconstructs the story about a thief stealing a recipe in the way the classic *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950) did: by beginning the tale *in medias res* and then multiplying perspectives on the truth, as every character will tell the police a new version of the incident, increasing our knowledge of the general plot as well as questioning other versions. The film itself alludes to the strategy with the tagline "Not your usual suspects", in a nod to the famous film *The usual suspects* by Brian Singer (1995), which in turn was an homage to *Casablanca's* ending (1942), in which the French policeman Jean Del Val closes the film saying the celebrated sentence: *Round up the usual suspects*.

The recycling strategy is obvious for the spectator who has watched the film: LRRH has been contaminated with the postmodern way of storytelling, which could be seen as the natural evolution from the meta-textual strategy observed in Gaiman. Robert Scholes (see Scholes, 1979) related metafictional practice to the impossibility of arriving to any satisfactory definition of the concept of reality. Underlying this impossibility is the arbitrary nature of language, underlined by structuralist and post-structuralist theories (see Derrida's *Marges de la philosophie*, 1972), as well as the collapse of nineteenth-century positivist and realist discourses, which Lyotard ironically called the rejection of meta-narratives in *La condition postmoderne* (1979).

The film *The company of wolves* (1984) creates (and accumulates) poetic meaning over poetic meaning, encapsulating one story into the next one. As mentioned before, it is an adaptation of the classic *The bloody chamber* (1979) by Angela Carter. The protagonist, Rosaleen, dreams about a tale in which she is told a tale or in which she will tell a tale, etc., but it does not multiply perspectives nor questions any truth dependent from a point of view, except maybe for a brief moment when the mother tells Rosaleen "Your grandma doesn't know everything: for each animal inside a man, there's an animal inside a woman too". The story is about fear of the wolf as well as fascination and attraction to it: some tales inside the film are about fear, others are about passion and sexuality. In the end, Rosaleen wakes up but ends up being devoured by a real wolf and the spectator is left wondering what it means as a conclusion. The tales are intertwined and thematically connected, but not depending on any truth whatsoever.

⁶ As quoted from Wikipedia.

Hoodwinked! could be seen as the logical next step. Of course, *Hoodwinked!* finally offers an objective solution, as is to be expected in a film for kids, but we can nonetheless enjoy the ride and give it a pass considering its juvenile nature. The second interesting feature in the film is the cross-genre strategy: transforming LRRH into a police procedural is, again, not very original, but it can be done with humour or talent (in the end, it can be argued that it is not an easy task, since the tale does not leave up much to be resolved in terms of mystery), or without them.

Red Riding Hood (directed by Catherine Hardwicke, 2011) chose the second route, transporting Little Red Riding Hood into a detective-horror *whodunnit*: the main goal is to guess who the werewolf is. In this film, Valerie (Amanda Seyfried) will have to choose between two lovers and at the same time find out who was responsible for her older sister's murder. The romantic plot follows closely the triangle in the *Twilight* saga (2008-2012) and it is no coincidence: Hardwicke directed the first film of the franchise too. The two plots converge as the film progresses: one of the two love interests of Valerie is assumed to be a werewolf and thus her sister's killer. The answer to who the wolf was, is as Lacanian as lazy: in the end, neither love interest was the werewolf, but Valerie's own father, who takes too little part in the film to be considered a successful detective story. In the end, Valerie refuses to embrace her wolflike side and join her father as a partner in crime: the sexual subtext in the film is they will mate with her father and she will replace her long dead mother.

Detective stories, werewolves, crossing genres and meta-narratives have been combined previously to notably much more success, so we may mark this one sadly as a failed attempt too. As for the character of LRRH, she navigates the troubled area of being the chaste and innocent object of desire of two "alpha males" while trying to empower herself as the clever sleuth⁷: this feels like a regression when compared again to even older versions of the tale, as she barely surpasses the category of victim.

The figures of Multimedial Remediation, New Symbolic Layer, Dispersion/Fragmentation and Transmedial World play here at their best (particularly in *Hoodwinked!*), as these versions constitute parodies, homages, and pastiches in which characters cross archetypes and genre's, empowering LRRH via her role in a *whodunnit* (which is arguably a classic male role).

Monster (Lady Gaga, 2009): making the implicit explicit, implying the explicit.

We can move now into a very different media (the pop song)⁸ to explore how Lady Gaga managed to retell the tale in 2009 in a way so subtle for the main public that so far it has eluded the inclusion into Wikipedia's entry "Adaptations of Little Red Riding Hood"⁹.

⁷ A task in which she fails, as the revelation of the murderer had to take the spectator by surprise, thus undermining the intelligence of the heroine.

⁸ LRRH has been sometimes explored in music: Orenstein studies the most famous case, *Li'l Red Riding Hood* (by Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs, 1966) which can be heard playing at the end of the episode evoking the mass murderers' convention in *The Sandman* adaptation series for Netflix (2002).

⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptations_of_Little_Red_Riding_Hood

The real talent of the song lies in how Lady Gaga manages to convey the implicit sense of sexual threat in the tale (at least in the iterations in which LRRH takes off her clothes, one by one, and gets in the bed with the wolf) in an explicit way, while the singer manages to keep to a minimum the episodic nature of the tale, hiding LRRH and the wolf's identity under figures of speech. Lady Gaga adheres then to the psychoanalytical interpretation of the tale as exposed by Fromm (1951) or Bettelheim (1976): that is, the wolf stands for a rapist, LRRH stands for the victim that accepts the sexual initiation into the male world [the way of pins] and it is consequentially punished for it. The twist happens when the supposedly hidden, deep sexual meaning is openly declared, dissipating the sexual mystery and replacing the deep meaning with the arch famous tale's identity. As Martin Gardner sarcastically put it in his column about LRRH (see Gardner, 2000):

One of the funniest of all games played by Freudian literary critics is that of finding sex symbols in old fairy tales. It is a very easy game to play. Freud is said to have once remarked that a cigar sometimes is just a cigar, but psychoanalysts who write about fairy tales seem incapable of seeing them as just fantasies intended to entertain, instruct, and at times frighten young children.

But let's take a step back and frame everything in its context. The second album from the singer, *The Fame Monster*, is conceptually a continuation of her previous Album, *The Fame*. We could be led to believe thus that the international recognition Lady Gaga achieved is the real monster, but the monster is actually more complex than that, considering her own statement in an interview (see Gray, 2012: 5):

I have an obsession with death and sex. Those two things are also the nexus of horror films, which I've been obsessing over lately. I've been watching horror movies and 1950s science fiction movies. My re-release is called *The Fame Monster* so I've just been sort of bulimically eating and regurgitating monster movies and all things scary. I've just been noticing a resurgence of this idea of monster, of fantasy, but in a very real way. If you notice in those films, there's always a juxtaposition of sex with death.

We may then wonder what exactly "The Fame Monster" is: is it fame, death, sex, horror movies...? If we turn to the actual track titled *Monster* in the album, we could find an interesting answer. We reproduce here some fragments of the lyrics for further analysis:

Don't call me Gaga
I've never seen one like that before
Don't look at me like that
You amaze me

Our theme begins with four phrases spoken (not singed) in a tone of confidence that suggest the intimacy and context of sexual flirtation. The interpretative framework, therefore, is explicitly provided for us. The first verse, "Don't call me Gaga", introduces us to a situation of intimacy and vulnerability, in which the protagonist (we assume that the lyrical-self coincides with the singer's identity) renounces her "official" serious identity, or her stage name, to move into the familiar realm of confidence (her real name, however,

is not revealed to us). The second verse overtly and seemingly innocently evokes surprise at the sudden sexual discovery. The nervous laughter introduced between this line and the next (which is repeated on successive occasions between the lines that follow) confirms this atmosphere, somewhere between relaxed, falsely innocent and provocative play of seduction. The last two lines, "Don't look at me like that" and "You amaze me" further reinforce the idea that flirting is taking place in which the protagonist's voice is comfortable and enjoys herself. Then takes place the first refrain, which reads:

He ate my heart, he a-a-ate my heart (You little monster)
He ate my heart, he a-a-ate my heart out (You amaze me)
He ate my heart, he a-a-ate my heart
He ate my heart, he a-a-ate my heart

We must interpret these verses as a prolepsis that will take on its meaning once we have reconstructed the story chronologically.

Look at him, look at me
That boy is bad, and honestly
He's a wolf in disguise
But I can't stop staring in those evil eyes

The narrative proper begins. The man is presented with an external focus: through the dialogue between the protagonist and another interlocutor who could well be her friend or girlfriend, or us as listeners. The dominant semantic field is visual, thus evoking the classic fairy tale in its passage "what big eyes you have, granny". The first impression of the story's antagonist is offered by implicit comparison: "Look at him and look at me"; it is deduced from the juxtaposition of characters that our protagonist is good, as opposed to the definition of the boy as "bad" and, more explicitly, "a wolf in disguise". The presentation of the antagonist closes with the fascination (and therefore irresistible attraction, tempting despite its inappropriateness) exerted by his hypnotic and equally evil eyes. At this point, the listener will take the expression "a wolf in disguise" as a figure of speech, and the song will continue with this wordplay, the double meaning until the literal, brutal reality will take over the rhetorical meaning.

I asked my girlfriend if she'd seen you round before
She mumbled something while we got down on the floor baby
We might've fucked not really sure, don't quite recall
But something tells me that I've seen him round before

These interesting verses that allude to bisexuality and to a previous rape repressed in memory (signs that the protagonist should have taken into account, as in the traditional tale, but opts for dismissing them, causing her downfall). The psychoanalytical approach mentioned previously is explicitly addressed here: the comfort and security was found in the female sexual or romantic world; as the listeners, we cannot but be surprised by the mention of the girlfriend of the lyric self: the protagonist asks her for advice and then

proceeds to abandon her safety zones besides another woman in order to dare into the male territory, that is the heterosexual flirting in a disco.

He's a monster m-m-m-monster
That boy is a monster m-m-m-monster (x3)

The explicit denunciation of the man as a monster comes in this stanza, although it is not clear who assumes the enunciation of the phrases: it certainly cannot be the protagonist's friend, since this explicit statement contrasts with the latter's dubious evocation of a casual sexual encounter. The narrator/protagonist is still far from knowing such a revelation, so it may be either a refrain that no character assumes (remediating the chorus of Greek tragedy) or another prolepsis that foreshadows the conclusion of the story, like the stanza "(he) ate my heart" at the beginning and which follows now as well.

He ate my heart (I love that girl)
He ate my heart (wanna talk to her, she's hot as hell) (x2)

The refrain "he ate my heart" is repeated here, but with an interesting novelty: it is the first time that the "wolf" is given voice. Musically, the lines corresponding to the wolf are not sung by the female vocalist, but by a male. His tone is coated with a metallic filter that contributes to dehumanising the voice of the wolf, depriving it of the shades of feeling that we might perceive in favour of the impersonal image of a machine devoid of human emotions. This is perhaps the only radically novel twist that is presented as a variation on the classical tale: not only is the antagonist animalised, but also objectified: postmodernity has introduced the duality man/machine as a dynamic opposition (as we saw in *Jin-Roh*), which could not be present, for obvious reasons, in the oral tradition.

He licked his lips, said to me
Girl you look good enough to eat
Put his arms around me
Said "Boy now get your paws right off me".

The first three lines insist on the idea of the mouth as sexual devourer: the tongue licking the wolf's lips evokes appetite, both metaphorically and sexually, and then we are offered the first interaction in the form of explicit dialogue from the boy: "Girl, you look good enough to eat". The statement is accompanied by the strongly physically invasive gesture of wrapping his arms around her, thus moving from verbal to physical attack and symbolising the trap closing on the prey. As if this were not enough, the last verse confirms that the advance is not desired, but that the girl is expressing her explicit rejection: "I said: boy, get your paws off me". The term "paws" explicitly confirms for the second time the wolfish identity of the attacker. The latent tension of the tragedy heading towards its climax lies in the fact that the revelation of the imminent threat takes again the form of figurative content. The listener initially receives these references as figurative language, when we would do well to perceive them as non-figurative language in order to identify the rapist (real, not figurative) as the wolf in the story. After a first listening to the song,

successive listenings will give the appropriate (non-figurative) value to the expressions that animalise the song's antagonist.

I wanna just dance but he took me home instead
Uh oh! There was a monster in my bed
We french kissed on a subway train
He tore my clothes right off
He ate my heart and then he ate my brain
Uh oh uh oh (I love that girl) (Wanna talk to her, she's hot as hell)

The resolution of the episode is narrated in this verse abruptly and we instantly understand several unknowns that the song had presented us with up to that point: the first verse finally gives full value to the adverb "instead": our protagonist only wanted to dance, but "instead" he took her home. Once again, we are presented with the contrast between the innocent plan and the final result, the product of an elaborate and violent plan. This is followed by the interjection "Uh oh", which expresses astonishment and discomfort at an unpleasant surprise, and "there was a monster in my bed" is repeated, although one might still believe that the expression is intended to be comical, metaphorical or hyperbolic. The following line constitutes an analepsis with respect to the previous one, since it returns to the episode chronologically prior to the arrival at the house and the bed, narrating with a brushstroke the journey by metro to the house, where the couple kiss in the metro: nothing, then, of an unexpected, violent, or overtly sexual nature, but rather evoking romanticism.

It is worth noting at this point that it is precisely in the middle of this verse that we could place the dialogue with the interlocutor in absentia with which the song opens in spoken form: "Don't call me Gaga / I've never seen one like that before / Don't look at me like that / You amaze me". By removing this dialogue, the transition and contrast between what the protagonist would like to do and what finally ends up happening is even more savage, brutal, and unexpected, with no apparent continuity, only the impact of violence and destruction.

This brief narration of the underground kissing episode, an activity more typical of lovesick teenagers than adults, contrasts brutally with the resolution of the episode in the last two lines that follow: "he tore my clothes off, ate my heart and then my brain". At this point, the evocation of rape is already evident: in contrast to the adolescent innocence of the kisses in the underground, we find the violence of the clothes ripped off by force, which is already without any doubt a first full-fledged sexual assault. The assault culminates in the metaphor "he ate my heart" which the song announces from the beginning, but now adds an additional element: "and then he ate my brain", which ends the actual narrative (after which only the refrain is repeated). In other words, the victim is completely destroyed, annihilated not only sentimentally, but also intellectually, since the experience of which she has been a victim will undoubtedly condition all future emotional, but also intellectual, interaction with the male gender (possibly indicating here that she will never trust anyone again).

It is worth noting here that the last word in the form of dialogue we hear is from the wolf, with his "I want to talk to her, she's hot as hell", in an echo of Perrault's ending of

the tale in which the wolf devours LRRH ending the story, with no woodsman to come to the rescue. A voice that we could identify as an omniscient narrator repeats over and over again the refrain that now acts as a moral for the listener: “that boy is a monster”; that is, there are wolves out there and young girls should be warned. The moral of the story thus coincides with its original sense in presenting the young girl purely as the victim and the boy as the aggressor, without any further nuance.

In Tosca’s analysis, this constitutes a multimedial remediation, as the dramatic effect is conveyed through words in the lyrics, sound effects¹⁰, tone¹¹ and music¹². The reader may be surprised by the fact that the song involves also a cathartic experience of denouncing not only rape culture, but also a particular rape experience: Lady Gaga was indeed raped when she was 19 (multiple interviews about the subject may be found in YouTube, although we will quote an article in *The Guardian*, see Beaumont-Thomas, 2021). The listener may retain both the physical and mental destruction of the victim (as they are the final words in the song), but Lady Gaga kept fighting on and producing art through pain (she was raped by music producers), to rise to stardom not only in pop music but also in the film industry¹³. The lyric self may finish aligned with Rose in Gaiman’s version, but the real person is more akin to Hayley in *Hardy Candy*.

Conclusion

LRRH remains a phenomenal case of study for gender studies: since one of the most prevalent readings of the tale is as a sexual learning experience, this immediately opens up the space for gender studies and examine the gender roles in the adaptations.

We have seen LRRH as a pure victim in Perrault and Gaiman, ending the tale with her demise and thus remarking the cautionary tale aspect. We have seen a frustrated attempt of empowerment in *Jin-Roh*, as she fails to become the wolf and is murdered nonetheless despite her momentary, illusory seduction. We have seen her finally taking control and becoming a cold executioner in *Hard Candy*, which echoes the oral tradition in which she escapes her fate or even kills the wolf. We have seen her escaping her own fairy tale in order to become a detective (a traditionally male-oriented profession) in a crossing genre experiment. We finally see her dancing in a disco, unaware of the modern wolf but this time denouncing that the fault is not hers, as rape culture is as prevalent today as it has always has, so she should have the chance of choosing to have fun without enduring unwanted pain.

These recycling strategies cast her into the light of either a heroine¹⁴, or a victim¹⁵ but there is always (we think) dignity in her choice. Even when the textual strategy suggests that she should have chosen the way of needles (that is, to not experiment in the sexual

¹⁰ Which are very important as they confer the sense of fear through the predator’s metallic voice.

¹¹ Gaga’s voice mimic a dramatic crescendo that reflects the inevitable distress.

¹² Ascribing the song to the pop genre has meaning in itself.

¹³ Lady Gaga famously supports the LGBTBI+ cause and is banned in Russia because of this.

¹⁴ In case she prevails over the antagonist, be it through cunning speech, moves, or sexual seduction.

¹⁵ In case she ultimately meets her demise.

playfield),¹⁶ and thus conveys a reproving moral, every feminist rewriting of the tale empowers LRRH and reaches a happy ending. This empowerment happens sometimes via force and violence on her part, sometimes via cunning solutions to escape the danger, sometimes via dialogue and peaceful resolutions.

For our part we feel the need to add that choosing the way of needles, staying at home or successfully bringing the basket to grandma thanks to avoiding conversation with the wolf would constitute a very poor tale indeed. Maybe even the most boring in the world, as it would be a tale without dangers to overcome: implying this tale would be desirable is to imply that life should be gray and boring. Even if LRRH is unsuccessful in the least feminist versions, at least she is always in for the adventure, come what may, and this is definitely something to be admired nowadays.

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¹⁶ Of course, the pivotal point in the debate about the morality of the tale is whether her choice is informed or not: rhetorically, and literally, it is not. Metaphorically, on the other hand, it is. This ambivalence turns the debate into an impossible dilemma.

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