Identity and Identification:
Gender, Rewriting, and Little Red Riding Hood

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly approaches to Little Red Riding Hood texts frequently draw parallels between the texts and a patriarchal ideology of sexuality and gender. There is also a prominent strand of psychoanalytical criticism maintaining that the proliferation of texts retelling Little Red Riding Hood indicates that the story somehow reflects unconscious processes. This thesis is an attempt to reconcile these disparate methodologies.

The influential fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes delineated a Little Red Riding Hood pattern recurring in literature, and made the case that it most often reinscribes oppressive attitudes to gender. Accordingly, I shift the locus of psychoanalytic investigation to the authors of Little Red Riding Hood literary texts. I undertake to reframe the Little Red Riding Hood pattern through foregrounding the circumstances of its production, as it has been rewritten primarily by males, and through paying particular attention to the young girl figure at the tale’s centre. My research explores how the gender norms that Little Red Riding Hood texts display could work to denaturalise the culturally constructed gender binary.

I propose an alternative mode of thinking about the Little Red Riding Hood pattern, centred on the possibility that repeating this story may work through gender anxiety and ultimately confront finitude. To this end, I analyse four literary incarnations of this tale, assessing both their historical context and the unconscious material that may be read in the texts (70%). I also engage with the tale creatively, through a series of linked poems (30%). The poems utilise the ideas and material of the rest of the thesis in a less academically reflexive way. Expanding the discussion of the Little Red Riding Hood texts to include the texts’ male authors, I set out to find how the Little Red Riding Hood pattern negotiates gender, especially in its unconscious material, and to discover what might lie beneath a continued fascination with this pattern.
From the series *Fairy Favorite Cut-Out Dolls* by Margaret Hays (1913).
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

i. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the MA.

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

iii. This thesis is approximately 30 000 words in length, exclusive of figures, bibliographies, and appendices.

Charlotte Marie Chadwick (2014)
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INTRODUCTION

Success in Circuit Lies: Setting Out

Tell all the truth but tell it slant,
Success in circuit lies,
Too bright for our infirm delight
The truth's superb surprise;

As lightning to the children eased
With explanation kind,
The truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.

(Emily Dickinson “Tell All The Truth” Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries 431)

Why Little Red Riding Hood? That is, what is it about this particular tale that demands individual and sustained attention, and to what end? As Catherine Orenstein points out, one feature that distinguishes this story from most fairy tales is that there is no marriage, because there is no Prince; there is not even a brother (120). Setting out, there is just a girl. Yet, so positioned, she is not just any girl. Orenstein also demonstrates how this heroine fits Joseph Campbell’s description of a mythical hero undergoing a rite-of-passage, despite Otto Rank’s insistence that only a male may successfully personify this archetype (81). From this comparison it may be inferred that the story resonates with those eternal themes Campbell’s study The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) found in myth and fairy tale, tragedy and comedy; namely, the “universal tragedy of man” as well its “transcendence” (21). Although ostensibly a figure of children’s literature, the heroine’s influence reaches further than other nursery personifications of girlhood such as Little Miss Muffet and Little Bo Peep, or specific literary characters like Alice, Pippi, and
Heidi. The protagonist, the young Charles Dickens’s paragon of spousal perfection\(^1\), has far outperformed her contemporaries in the degree to which she is entrenched in the popular cultural imagination of the West. Little Red Riding Hood presents girls and boys, women and men, with an easily identifiable, commonly referenced figure of girlhood. Little Red Riding Hood (henceforth LRRH) remains, arguably, the “most popular and provocative fairy tale in the Western world” (Zipes 343), and certainly the “most retold” (Beckett Red Riding Hood for All Ages 1). Yet despite the tale’s diverse manifestations and tenacity in the Western world, its protagonist remains predominantly depicted as a young female, as Glauco Carloni remarks (177), a detail itself noteworthy in a patriarchal society. Existing criticism claims that the heroine and her story cohere with the gender norms of this society (Zipes; Bacchilega; Atwood; Orenstein). This thesis concurs to an extent, finding strong resonances between social constructions of gender and LRRH. However, I do not read these resonances as straightforward indictments of an underlying message about gender and sexuality; rather, I investigate how they might function alongside this tale’s proliferation.

I would like to examine anew the figure of the girl in some examples of LRRH, and the psychoanalytical work this figure might represent, alongside the maternal abject, to discover if that coheres with a broader need to rethink and expand Jack Zipes’s LRRH “pattern”. The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood (1993) plots the tale’s development, presenting it as originating in French oral culture, then being adapted and substantially modified in literary versions by Charles Perrault (1697) and the Brothers Grimm (1812). Zipes identifies a (male authored) “traditional cultural pattern inscribed in the plot” (49) of literary LRRHs, epitomised by the LRRH of Perrault and the Grimms. In Zipes’s telling, the pattern began to show “cracks” (49) from 1919–1945. Zipes describes the shifts in LRRH using this pattern: the modernism of the 1920s and 30s saw writers “tinkering” (50) with it using “humour and irony” (50) and the pattern was being “severely questioned” by 1939 (56). Finally, “options to the traditional cultural pattern...were being formed”, beginning with Catherine Storr’s Little Polly Riding Hood in 1955 (58). These options became “radical currents” which emphasised the independence of the heroine, rehabilitated the wolf, or were “unusual aesthetic experiments”, and all of these converged to critique the LRRH pattern (59). However, it is my contention that the unifying pattern

\(^1\) Dickens famously stated, “Little Red Riding Hood was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss” (Tartar The Classic Fairy Tales 3).
of LRRH does not, in fact, reinscribe normative ideas of gender and sexuality, but rather reveals the contingency of gender and identity, therefore those recent LRRHs Zipes positions as subversive do not challenge the pattern but only continue its tradition. The diversity and multiplicity of contemporary LRRH representations are well charted in Sandra Beckett’s monographs: Recycling Red Riding Hood (2002) documents this tale in children’s literature of the West, while her Red Riding Hood for All Ages: A Fairy-tale Icon in Cross-Cultural Contexts (2008) extends the sample even further. Beckett calls this story, “part of the literary heritage of almost every child in the Western world” (Recycling xx). Yet her studies focus on documenting diverse examples of this tale, rather than theorising what the abundance might mean. Determining what this tale does, then, promises to illuminate the ways contemporary Western culture constructs and relates to the figure of the girl.

I am hardly the first person to make a connection between LRRH and the notion of the girl. Scholarly work on LRRH frequently centres on gender; and although they extrapolated completely different conclusions, two of the most influential readings of this tale both concern the development of the young girl. These two interpretations took divergent approaches: one emphasising the social context of the tale’s emergence, the other informed by psychoanalysis. The first, the aforementioned Trials and Tribulations, asserts that LRRH’s primary function is to encourage girls to conform to socially sanctioned modes of behaviour; to discourage curiosity and independence. For Zipes, the heroine of LRRH serves to model and perpetuate a problematic patriarchal construction of women as sexual objects, rather than subjects. Trials and Tribulations usefully collects a wide range of LRRHs, provides a wealth of information about the context of production; and its attention to the gender politics and sexuality in the textual examples is warranted. However, the tendency of LRRH scholars to instate a “harsh dichotomy between literary and oral” has been decried (Ziolkowski 553), and Zipes’s commitment to his vision of the LRRH pattern forces him to adhere to such a dichotomy. Through this filter, the oral material is privileged, the literary pattern construed as mendacious, and individual instances of LRRH stories must be seen to either perpetuate or subvert the pattern.

In my view, this division means Zipes places undue emphasis on those versions and elements of LRRH he deems to adhere to the ideology of this pattern, at the expense of those that seem to fall outside it: for example, dismissing “the parodies of the 19th century” as “exceptions” (43). I would like to propose that the model of the LRRH pattern be extended to include those versions that Zipes regards as exceptions and anomalies.
Furthermore, while Trials & Tribulations notes how elements of LRRH align with dominant constructions of feminine and masculine sexuality, it merely concludes that LRRH is another means of ensuring the continuing oppression of women under the patriarchy; it doesn’t explain why this method in particular should demand repetition. The book does not encompass much psychoanalytical theory; yet as Feona Attwood observes, “the prevalent view (is) that the tale is best psychoanalysed” (96). Indeed, as Attwood states, for most scholars it is the very fact of LRRH’s “persistence” (96) that demands this approach.

For this reason, then, the second extremely influential reading of a Little Red Riding Hood story is psychoanalytical: that of Bruno Bettelheim, in his seminal The Uses of Enchantment (1976). Bettelheim understands fairy tales as reflections of universal unconscious processes. His analysis of the Grimm’s “Rotkäppchen” frames LRRH as a disguised narrative of the experience of the Oedipal girl. According to Freudian theory, in the Oedipal stage (three to five years) the child wants to seduce the parent of the opposite sex and destroy the parent of the same sex. These desires are repressed at the conclusion of the Oedipal stage, but return—in displaced and alienated ways—during adolescence. According to Bettelheim, the pubertal heroine of “Rotkäppchen” acts out a transformed version of these longings: the removal of mother and grandmother represent the banishment of her female parent. The girl fears punishment for her desires, hence the threat of her destruction. She also splits the father into two: the wolf, whom she seduces/is seduced by, and the hunter, who protects the girl from the adult sexuality she is not ready for.

Robert Darnton’s The Great Cat Massacre (1984) uses Erich Fromm’s reading of “Rotkäppchen” to illustrate what he presents as the folly of psychoanalytic readings, such as both Fromm’s and Bettelheim’s. In The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myth (1951), Fromm declares the tale “a story of triumph by man-hating women, ending with their victory” (241), with the monstrous wolf representing the repugnance some women feel towards men and sex, and his death mocking his inability to bear children. Darnton undermines Fromm’s claims for universality by pointing out how many of the symbols that Fromm’s argument relies on are absent from folkloric versions of the tale. However, the imagery that Darnton discounts

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2 It must be noted that after his death it was discovered Bettelheim had committed plagiarism, involving long sections of “The Uses of Enchantment”. See Fraud and Education: The Worm in the Apple (Noah and Eckstein 111). However, for the sake of clarity and expedience, I will credit Bettelheim in this study.
has remained in rewritings of Perrault’s version, since which time it has become popular in literature and other media, and thus still requires careful consideration. Alan Dundes counters such criticism in *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* (1989) by pointing out that “a purely literal or historical approach to fairy tales yields precious little hard data” (213). Building on knowledge accrued by Zipes about the circumstances of production of LRRH stories, Dundes attempts to expand a psychoanalytic reading to include other examples of texts that arguably fall under the banner of LRRH. The monograph assembles a range of interpretations of the tale; including scholars who saw it as an ancient myth explaining natural phenomena (205) or as containing vestiges of ancient initiatory rites (206–7); he also includes psychoanalytic approaches, like Bettelheim’s. Dundes points out that, as Darnton protested, these interpretations were mostly based on partial information, since the trove of oral material featuring a girl who encounters a werewolf was not published by Paul Delarue until 1951 and it was rare that psychoanalytic interpretations would show an awareness of folklore. Therefore, “nearly every psychoanalytic reading of fairy tales uses the Grimm version as the sole point of departure” (197), part of a wider disjunct between the disciplines of folklore studies and psychoanalysis that Dundes laments elsewhere (*The Psychoanalytical Study of The Grimms’ Tales* 54). Géza Róheim’s reading, however, considers oral LRRH variants published in the three issues of the journal *Melusine* (166) alongside the LRRHs of Grimm and Perrault. He compares the Grimm and Perrault versions with this folklore, and the folktale “The Wolf and the Seven Kids”, remarking that all of these tales invoke infant oral aggression. According to Róheim, these texts mirror the stage when, during breastfeeding, discovering its teeth are weapons, “the cannibal child creates a cannibal mother” out of fear of retaliation (164). Róheim detects “aggression…combined with regression” (164) in LRRH, following Sandor Ferenczi’s theories, wherein the tooth may be the child’s means of “boring itself back into the womb” (164). I will build on these ideas in chapter one, which explores individuation in “Conte de la mère grand”.

Moreover, Dundes continues, none of these previous scholars attempted to integrate the stories he regards as “Asian cognates” of LRRH into a cohesive theory. Dundes duly provides his own psychoanalytic reading, which surveys the existing work, then focuses on Delarue’s repository of oral material from France, Tyrol and Italy, considered in conjunction with tales from Korea, China and Japan (192–3). Dundes makes a case for LRRH as a product of infantile fantasy, and argues that these “Asian cognates” make apparent the anal fantasies of the infant, in addition to the genital and oral fantasies
he perceives in LRRH (192). This reading may be reconciled with the elements I observe in the LRRH pattern which relate to subject formation, intersections that will become evident in the following chapter. However, as Zipes observed, Dundes’s reading “is skewed because of a false cross-cultural model that is not related to the European peasant tradition of the 17th century” (3). The similarities between these stories and the LRRH stories are certainly fascinating and deserve further study, but the former involve neither a wolf nor a red hood, a step further away from what is clearly Little Red Riding Hood than is useful for making statements about the LRRH pattern as a whole.

Not only do readings such as Fromm’s and Bettelheim’s attempt to extrapolate conclusions about the psyche from a single version of this tale, they also ignore the question of male authorship. Remaining focused on those texts that can be unequivocally identified as LRRH, this thesis views them through the lens of their own abundance. Zipes notes the tale’s ubiquity, but its repetition remains under-theorised in *Trials and Tribulations*. Zipes frames the rewriting of this story as an attempt to naturalise the sexual object/subject division of patriarchy. But if the Grimms edited LRRH to the height of its latent misogynistic content in 1812, while the burgeoning feminist consciousness of the 1970s saw revisionist attempts to reverse the tale’s ideology, then what of the countless other rewritings between these dates? Also, there has been some social progress in gender equality since the second wave of feminism, but the LRRHs of Perrault and the Grimms remain “dominant even now”, as Zipes himself attests (49). Their tenacity points towards a less antithetical relation to female independence than the one he describes. While Zipes’s contribution to contextualising LRRH in terms of its male authors has been immense, I emphasise the importance of reconciling his work with psychoanalytic approaches to LRRH. Feona Attwood has taken some steps towards this. Her 1999 article “Who’s Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood?” assesses “Rotkäppchen” as an exposition of patriarchal fears and desires about women. Attwood explores only the Grimm version, however; in this thesis I would like to extend her approach to encompass the phenomenon of rewriting itself. This thesis therefore offers an alternative framing of the rewriting in LRRH, one that acknowledges the centrality of pleasure to repetition. The primary writer I will draw from to understand this relationship is Kaja Silverman, in her landmark essay “Masochnism and Subjectivity” (1980). I also draw from her superlative monograph on gender and subjectivity, *Flesh of my Flesh* (2009). In this thesis, I am interested in understanding LRRH from a psychoanalytic perspective; but I also take into account the primarily male
Following Attwood’s attention to male engagement with LRRH, my next innovation is to open up the possibility of male identification with the heroine. For this idea I am indebted to the work of Marjorie Garber, who identifies the LRRH pattern as a locus of gender anxiety (375). I foreground the various degrees of theatricality present in LRRH texts and then, with Garber, link this theatricality to a Butlerian understanding of drag: making the performative nature of gender briefly apparent. In “Fairy Gold: The Economics and Erotics of Fairy-Tale Pantomime” (2012), Jennifer Schacker reports that LRRH has enjoyed a lively existence on the pantomime stage and remains one of the most popular fairy tale adaptations in this genre (154), a style of theatre marked by comedy and cross-dressing. Pantomime versions of LRRH in English actually predate the Brothers Grimm story, appearing as early as 1803 (158). Yet these versions eschew what Zipes sees as the “tragic conclusion” (174) of Perrault’s story, and in addition often provide the heroine with a love interest, “Boy Blue”, played as per pantomime convention by another woman. As Schacker puts it, “pantomime form is shaped by a distinct set of aesthetic principles and a pervasive sense of self-parody that complicates histories of the Victorian fairy tale. Self-aware, playful, localized, and addressed to an all-ages audience of adults and children, late nineteenth-century pantomime Red Riding Hoods do not conform to the general vision of the tale offered by Zipes” (159). Schacker’s vision of LRRH corresponds to Garber’s, centring on the capacity of the cross-dressed principal boy and pantomime dame to make gender strange. “These stock characters are…situated in a potentially destabilizing metapraxis of desire—all the more powerful because these sexually ambiguous, intentionally unsettling figures are not intended to ‘fool’ the spectator (to ‘pass’)” (173). At the same time, Schacker notes “the delight and reassurance that audiences seem to derive from the knowledge that the ‘trousers’, functioning here metonymically, are still there under the skirt, that nothing has gone awry in the dominant system of binary gendering” (173). Like Garber’s notion of transvestism, and Butler’s of drag, the gender confusion also serves to reinscribe standards of normality. In this way, I temper Zipes’s characterisation of the heroine as primarily an exemplar of female behaviour by examining other possibilities notions of the girl and the maternal might offer male writers.

In chapter one, I analyse “Conte de la mère grand”, which represents LRRH’s oral tradition, using Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, and the way it is reified through the maternal body. I read this tale for echoes of the pubescent girl experiencing the primal
abjection of infancy, as Kristeva describes it (Revolution 104). The next chapter discusses the differences between the oral and literary manifestations of LRRH. Zipes and Cristina Bacchilega argue that Perrault and the Grimms made substantial editorial changes to the material represented by “Conte de la mère grand”. Zipes posits that the abject elements of the oral material were edited out of literary versions, and Bacchilega details how these differences all relate to the female body. Chapter two proceeds in accordance with their observations, linking the editorial process with the male subject’s relation to the abject as accessed through the maternal body, often conflated with a general female body (Oliver 161). I appraise the LRRHs of Perrault and the Grimms, aiming to build on Zipes’s and Bacchilega’s observations through the theories of Jessica Benjamin, explored in “Deconstructing Femininity: Understanding ‘Passivity’ and the Daughter Position” (2004). In this essay, Benjamin conceptualises the figure of the young girl as a construct for male subjects to contain feelings of passivity, and relates this to the Oedipal boy’s separation from the m/Other. To explain how the gender confusion of LRRH, so well suited to pantomime, might work in the literary texts of my examples, I turn to Silverman’s aforementioned Flesh of my Flesh, which explores how the male subject’s identification with the m/Other might be both enacted and denied through writing. I also discuss Eve Sedgwick’s notion of shame, explained in Touching, Feeling, Affect (2003), as an affect that engages with the internalised gaze of the Other, and that is uniquely entwined with performance. For Sedgwick, shame is “not at all…the place where identity is most securely attached to essences, but the place where the question of identity arises, most originally and most relationally” (37 emphasis original). I examine the figure of the LRRH heroine that Perrault and the Grimms present to us in relation to such a place.

As mentioned, the primary goal of this thesis is to expand Zipes’s definition of the LRRH pattern. The substantial body of pantomime LRRHs Schacker draws on in her article form a vital and varied part of the LRRH pattern, and begin far earlier than the twentieth century modernism to which Zipes attributes subversive currents of LRRH. As Schacker notes, previous research on LRRH tends to be limited to film and literary texts, resulting in a “partial and rather distorted history of the fairy-tale genre” (153). However, while my conception of the LRRH pattern as a whole makes use of Schacker’s work, I, too, limit myself to the literary form in this study, rather than taking the space to contextualize different media. My third text therefore, although literary, comes from what Zipes identifies as one of the “radical currents” he situates in opposition to the dominant LRRH
pattern, which he sees as an amalgam of the Perrault and Grimm versions (49). In Zipes’s account, “(a)ll of these radical currents overlap or merge to form critical statements about the way we view sexuality on the basis of the Red Riding Hood pattern” (59). I question this generalisation by taking Anne Sexton’s poem “Red Riding Hood” as a case study, and highlighting its affinities with my other sample texts.

I interrogate this poem to determine how a woman might mobilise the tale in her confessional poetry in circumstances far removed from educating genteel children, the motives often ascribed to the LRRH of Perrault and the Grimms (Zipes; Tartar, Orenstein). In my view, Sexton’s poem uses the LRRH pattern to undermine gender itself, rather than subverting the active/passive roles patriarchy ascribes to each gender. I posit this as partially due to Sexton’s wider engagement with gender, as described by Elisabeth Bronfen, Rose Lucas and Alicia Ostriker. I suggest this gender instability is in keeping with other LRRHs, both the literary and the oral versions, as well as the theatrical incarnations. In critically assessing Sexton’s poem alongside the work of Perrault and the Grimms, I hope to isolate what these disparate versions of LRRH share, what is consistent within manifestations of the LRRH pattern. For Kristeva, poetry is the closest sort of speech to the rhythmic babble of the semiotic, and since I have read the LRRH pattern as illustrating both desire for, and fear of, primordial unity, I have used poetry in two ways: as a sample text and also as a means of involvement with the psychoanalytical critical theories I mobilise. So, in the fourth chapter I experiment with rewriting LRRH in poetry, to enrich my engagement with these theories, and the shape of the pattern itself.

I have proposed that elements in all these tales strike at the performative nature of gender which, collapsing, reveals a vertiginous abyss: the contingency of the subject. The fear and joy this inspires compels us to return to the scene repeatedly. What is repressed both eludes signification and does everything it can to elicit our attention. It may seem on initial appraisal that individual LRRHs each contain only the slightest note of discordance; however, it is my contention that each rewriting is a testament to the seduction of the subject by the unconscious material sequestered within the LRRH pattern. I suggest while the rewriting of this tale may indeed appear as a continuous effort to enforce normative gender roles, this process is more akin to a lacy bonnet in which LRRH trusses itself up, concealing that which returns in various disguises: the subject’s finitude lying “too bright” beneath.
CHAPTER ONE

The Tail in the Tale: Gender and the Abject in “Conte de la Mère Grand”

The French folktale “Conte de la mère grand” was reportedly collected in Nièvre by Achille Millien in 1885, although it was not published until 1951, by Paul Delarue. The tale bears remarkable similarities—and not a few startling differences—to the Little Red Riding Hood story familiar to modern audiences from Western children’s literature. Charles Perrault’s 1697 “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” and the Grimm Brothers’ 1812 “Rotkäppchen” are generally accepted by scholars as the primary influences on contemporary versions of the LRRH story (Beckett xvii). However, while Perrault’s is the first literary incarnation of the tale, most scholars surmise that Perrault was directly inspired by earlier oral folklore (Zipes 7; Orenstein 152; Dundes 3). “Conte de la mère grand” (henceforth “Mère grand”) is often presented as a specimen of this oral material, as it combines most elements not found in “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” but present in the thirty-five related oral folktales Delarue collected from France, Tyrol and Italy. In this chapter, I will follow this precedent: primarily focusing on “Mère grand”, but occasionally referring to the other folktales classified by Delarue as the same type (AT-333 according to the Aarne–Thompson system of classification). However, the exact permutations of the oral tradition and the ways it intermingled with literary LRRH stories both remain open to speculation, with some scholars disagreeing about the primacy of the oral material (Alexander Hagerty and Stith Thompson in Dundes 199; Hanks and Hanks 76–77, n. 2; Ziolkowski 554). Accordingly, Alan Dundes admits, “one cannot insist too much” on the precedence of this material to Perrault’s version (17–18). Therefore, rather than placing undue emphasis on the somewhat hazy chronology of LRRH texts, this thesis will follow most scholars (Bacchilega; Dundes; Orenstein; Tartar; Zipes) in treating the oral material as a point of origin, but with an important caveat: only inasmuch as it demonstrates the gender instability and images of primordial unity recurring in LRRH rewritings.

I would like to frame the impulse to retell Little Red Riding Hood as an ostensible effort to reconcile this universal experience of the primal abjection with a binary model of
gender, for the male subject to deny his affinity with the experience analogised in “Mère grand”. Gender roles are the positions this binary model requires us to take up in relation to the repressed knowledge of our finitude. These positions are further shaped by narrative tropes; as Kaja Silverman writes in “Masochism and Subjectivity”, our culture’s on-going attempt to align the masculine with the symbolic entails asserting the otherness of the feminine and the universality of the male subject, thus denying the finitude of the latter (8). However, as I will discuss later, this is alignment is not quite congruent within individual texts bearing the LRRH pattern. This thesis further posits, in fact, the ensuing unresolved tension provides the crux of a fascination that has seen this tale become the most rewritten in the canon (Zipes 343).

“Rotkäppchen” has been read as a girl’s initiation into adulthood (see Dundes 206–7), and Yvonne Verdier and Catherine Orenstein have noted the motifs of women’s work in this tale, which indicate the female subject attaining social, as well as sexual, maturity. Bettelheim also sees the tale as expressing the unconscious of the pubertal girl, as she graduates from pleasure principle to reality principle (160–191). Yet it is equally important to recognise aspects of this tale noted by psychoanalysts like Róheim (161) and Dundes (226) which echo (non-gender specific) psychic processes of infancy, especially oral, genital and anal desires. As Alan Dundes writes, “a particular tale could catch both pre-Oedipal, and Oedipal elements” (222). It might equally catch moments from the pre-Oedipal chora alongside those from adolescence. As I will detail, the toddler-rope, toilet training and appellation of the heroine in the LRRH pattern all support Dundes’s case for infantile fantasy in the tale; however, it is not necessary to ignore those elements of adolescence and initiation that are present in order to sustain theoretical congruence. This chapter will posit that “Mère grand” operates in a dual temporality. Julia Kristeva categorises adolescence as a time of “psychic reorganization” (Adolescent Novel 8). As Kristeva explains, the girl remains closer to the semiotic because of her identification with the mother, and during adolescence, which is a second process of individuation, she must return to this state and again undergo abjection (Revolution 104). For Kristeva, writing is “a semiotic practice which facilitates the ultimate reorganization of psychic space” (10), suggesting that literary efforts to rewrite this tale might bear parallels to the process of reunion with and separation from the semiotic that the adolescent girl undergoes, as I will explore in the next chapter.

This chapter, however, focuses on how those elements of the tale that have been read as pertaining to infants, and adolescent girls, resonate with the process of the subject
separating from the m/Other, described by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982) as the primal abjection. Theorists working in the Freudian tradition hold that the subject’s entrance into a world restricted and reproduced by language (in Kristevan terms, the Symbolic Order) happens at around six months of age. This entrance means relinquishing the feeling of omnipotence previously experienced. That which is termed lack, or “castration”, is the baby’s realisation that it can only belong to one gender, that it is not all-powerful, and that it is finite. During the stage prior to castration, the Semiotic, the child did not experience itself as separate from the m/Other, and its existence was mediated only through its drives and desire. Kristeva explains that discovering its own autonomy also leads the subject to construct boundaries, to understand the m/Other as abject, and that all other encounters with the abject following this re-energise this first, primal, abjection. Because abjection is intertwined with the child’s separation from the mother, the abject Other is therefore aligned with the maternal. Barbara Creed mobilized Kristeva’s theories to catalogue the presence of the maternal abject in the horror film genre, a phenomenon Creed termed “The Monstrous-Feminine” in her influential 1993 book of the same name. An encounter with the abject in the form of a monster imbued with maternity is thus a kind of recognition: the subject must confront his or her own repressed castration.

The heroine of “Mère grand” does not wear a red hat or hood, and her appearance and personality are not described\(^3\). She leaves her mother’s house to take milk and hot bread to her grandmother. At the crossroads she meets a loup-garou or a bzou (both terms for a werewolf). The bzou asks her where she is going, and if she will take the path of needles or the path of pins. She picks one (accounts vary as to which), and the bzou takes the other. By the time she gets there, the bzou has killed the grandmother and turned her body into food. The bzou encourages the heroine to eat the “meat” (flesh) and drink the “wine” (blood). The girl does, while a little cat appears and calls her a slut for doing so. The bzou tells the girl to undress and get into bed with him, and she obeys. In the first call and response dialogue, the heroine asks “what shall I do with my (apron)?” and the bzou replies, “throw it on the fire, my child, you won’t be needing it anymore”; this is repeated for each item of clothing until the girl is naked, rather like an auditory striptease. Once in bed, the girl remarks on the appearance of the bzou, in a very similar dialogue to the “what big…you have” “all the better to…you with” exchange extant in contemporary Little Red

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\(^3\) All the details relayed in this story may be found in the translation in Zipes (21).
Riding Hood stories. Finally, the girl expresses the need to go to the bathroom, and despite the bzou’s proposal that she just do it in the bed, insists on going outside. The bzou ties a rope to her foot, but once outside the girl ties it to a tree and runs away. The bzou asks if she is “making a load” (defecating) but, when he gets no response, realises he has been duped. He gives chase but she has a head start, and arrives back at her mother’s house just in time to shut the door in his face.

Kaja Silverman writes, “(t)he first serious challenge to the infant subject’s omnipotence and omnipresence comes when it registers its mother’s absence as an absence” (Flesh 93 emphasis original). The infant then imagines the m/Other as something akin to a detachable part of itself, responsive to its every need. Eventually, “(w)hen the sands of dissatisfaction start to jam the gears of this illusion, the child does not moderate its expectations; instead it attempts to take up even more space, so as to incorporate what it needs to be complete” (93). Dundes links this “enforced abandonment” (223) to weaning. But also the child’s attempt to take up space is discernible in the abandonment’s reversal. The way it is presented in the story makes the girl responsible; although the mother sends the heroine to grandmother’s house, the girl is the one to physically depart.

After the child has realised it can neither be, nor have, everything, the primary caretaker is made culpable, in the infant mind, for this painful but necessary realisation. For Silverman, “(t)he extraordinarily difficult task imposed on the child’s primary caregiver not only by culture but also by Being itself is to induct it into relationality by saying over and over again, in a multitude of ways, what death will otherwise have to teach it: “This is where you end and others begin” (94). However, this lesson is not easy to learn, and it is more convenient to “keep alive that tacit believe that she could satisfy our desires if she really wanted to.” (94 emphasis original). The cruel mother who seems to impose our finitude is present within the bzou, but at the same time as she destabilises and threatens to consume the heroine, the lure of the idyllic state of chora remains. For Kristeva, following the primal abjection, the newly autonomous subject retains the memory of the blissful state of chora, but simultaneously fears “falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (Powers 13). Thus the mother who abandons in the tale is also the mother who wants to engulf the subject, a liminal creature whose very nature exposes the terrifying finitude of being.

Furthermore, the girl desires to re-enact this union with a love object, with whom she attempts to replace the mother, to compensate for this first loss. For this reason, the
heroine is drawn to the masculine bzou. In “Mère-grand”, the bzou’s masculinity does not neutralize the maternal also present in him, or render him decisively male. Rather, I contend that taken as a whole, the co-existence of these gendered traits in his characterization mean that the bzou inhabits both genders, just as a werewolf is both human and animal. This indicates the transgression of boundaries that the bzou embodies, in line with Creed’s discussion of androgyny (The Monstrous-Feminine 11). Phillip A. Bernhardt-House’s “The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves’ (2008) discusses the werewolf’s history as a figure that erodes the hierarchical relationships underscoring power distribution within Western culture, including gender.

“Mère grand” has been translated into English as “The Story of Grandmother” (Zipes 21) or “The Grandmother’s Tale” (Orenstein 65–67). The title of this tale means it could be either told by, or about, grandmother. Marina Warner describes male writers like Perrault impersonating female storytellers, and Feona Attwood agrees, extending this notion to LRRH in particular (103–104). However, since this tale is generally read aloud to children (as even Perrault envisaged) it is the parent who assumes the position of Grandmother storyteller, or Mother Goose, which may also involve physically acting out the wolf’s gobbling up of the child, a dramatic flourish described by both Perrault and Angela Carter (Carter 240). Also, grandmother, the bzou, and the mother are never present at the same time as each other. All this indicates a divide between the characters, severing the protagonist from the other three figures, who I suggest all exist only in relation to her, and who are all forms of m/Other, the big mother of the title 4.

Marina Warner’s From the Beast to the Blonde (1994) draws attention to one of the most puzzling aspects of Little Red Riding Hood stories, including “Mère grand”, which is the fact that the heroine does not immediately distinguish her grandmother from a beast. In tales from other cultural contexts thought to be related to LRRH, a swallowing monster is often referred to as “she”5. Bruno Bettelheim notes the links between the mother and grandmother (176), while other analysts also interpret the grandmother as the mother imago (Dundes 223, Carloni 180). The bzou in “Mère grand” assumes a maternal role, feeding the girl and having her lie in bed next to him. The girl is supine and naked and the sexuality of the scene is clear, but the girl is also positioned much like when she was an

4 These are the only characters who always appear. The cat and the hunter will be discussed later.

5 These other AT-333 tales, while not the focus of my study here, feature Ogresses (Calvino 116), as well as a Tiger-Aunt in Chinese. Korean and Japanese stories (Eberhad 21–63).
infant, in bed with her mother. Barbara Creed observes that even though werewolves are usually male, they are ruled by lunar patterns, as menstruation is (Dark Desires 64). The litany of observations made by the heroine not only record her growing fear and suspicion, but also recall the mother and baby gazing enraptured at each other’s forms. That the central concern of this tale is the mother is also hinted at in Zipes’s observation that the three “major scenes” depicted in illustrations of the LRRH tale tend to be the mother speaking to the girl; the girl first meeting the wolf; and the ending, with the girl either gobbled up or saved (355). This may be seen as establishing the mother’s presence, then having her become the bad mother, after which she either engulfs the subject or is replaced by a heterosexual love object.

The difference between grandmother and bzou/wolf is negligible. Cristina Bacchilega’s Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies (1997) follows Marina Warner in linking the grandmother to witches, who were credited with shape-shifting, and even becoming werewolves (Bacchilega 169). Yvonne Verdier sees the heroine’s descriptions of the bzou’s body as consistent with the body of the post-menopausal woman, which is culturally rendered abject. “How hairy you are!” exclaims the heroine, then expresses her surprise for the bzou’s big nails, shoulders, ears, and nostrils. Bacchilega believes these descriptions depict “the post-menopausal woman” as “masculinised” (159). I reverse this to suggest the heroine is duped by the (grand)motherliness of the bzou. While the hairiness is remarked upon by the heroine, there is a further emphasis on the size of the body; but largeness is not particularly associated with elderly women. The bzou’s explanations are also incongruent with the post-menopausal body Verdier perceives; for example, her big shoulders are for carrying firewood, explains grandmother/bzou, not a task immediately associated with elderly women. It seems to me that the contrast between what the heroine expects to see (the grandmother) and what she actually discovers (the bzou) works to underline the extent of the heroine’s credulity, while the unexpectedness of these bodily features, and the combination of increased size and sudden hirsuteness could reflect the bodily changes of puberty. In concert with the increasing sense of impending danger the bzou provokes, the girl’s body, defiantly claimed for herself at ego formation, is now changing to demonstrate its maternal function, as if the mother is taking it back.

Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) famously postulated that representations of sexuality in Western culture generally position women as the object of the desiring male gaze. Feona Attwood and Jack Zipes claim that this “male
gaze” defines LRRHs from Perrault onwards (Attwood 98, Zipes 362) and reflects the misogynistic nature of Perrault’s revisions. Yet I would like to draw attention to the unheralded presence of this gaze in “Mère grand” and suggest that the bzou’s masculinity allows the adolescent heroine to rehearse the adult female role of object. The sexuality of the encounter between girl and bzou is repeatedly established in an otherwise succinct tale. First the bzou asks her to do “undress…and come to bed beside (him)”. The action is relayed in detail: she removes “all the clothes”, we are told, and these items are also listed individually (“apron…corset, dress, petticoat, stockings”. The heroine is a “little girl”, yet it is difficult to read this strip-tease any other way than in terms of the bzou’s very adult sexual desire for her. This confusion echoes the state of the adolescent body itself, fulfilling Kristeva’s definition of the abject, in its liminal, transitional state. Additionally, I suggest that the presence of the “male gaze” in this context is practice; just as she learnt to cook and sew, the heroine more indirectly learns the subject/object division of patriarchy upon entering adult society.

Crucially, the impulse to monitor and control female sexuality, which Zipes presents as an innovation of Perrault’s tale, may also be found extant in “Mère grand”. The girl’s sexuality is linked with the threat of death in this tale as it is in Perrault’s, and it is also tied to cannibalism. Glauco Carloni’s “La fiaba al lume della psicoanalisi” (1963) builds on Géza Róheim’s work, which analyses both folkloric and literary versions of LRRH. For Carloni, the bzou eating both girl and grandmother implicates the mother and daughter in sexual rivalry, a hint sometimes made overt in later LRRH stories where the bzou/wolf compares their tastes aloud (180). In the oral material, the girl eats a cannibalistic meal, an unpleasantly literal incorporation of the mother imago, as Verdier suggests (110). Carloni proposes that this act also represents a general exploration of the body (181), in keeping with the newly mature body and energised sexual “appetite” of the adolescent. The girl’s ambivalence about these developments is demonstrated not just by the taboo nature of the meal, but by a cat or bird, which appears, explains what she is doing and insults her for it. In “Mère grand”, this cat is called “une petite chatte”, which is a pun on a slang expression for female genitalia. The cat says that she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny is a “salope”. The word salope, like the English slut, conveys dirtiness and lack of respect for the laws of society as well as lack of sexual restraint. This last meaning is the most emphatic, and this choice of insult directly links the girl’s transgressive cannibalism to her sexuality. I suggest that this represents the girl’s self-perception in a phallocentric
culture, as well as unconscious guilt towards her mother. The link between the heroine’s sexuality and the negative feelings it awakens in her is compounded when, in some versions, the bzou tells the girl to throw her cap or shoe at the creature. To banish the bird or cat, the heroine divests herself of her cap or shoe, which is soon followed by the rest of her clothes, through the striptease, before she joins the bzou in bed. It is her undressing, her literal preparation for sex, which serves to temporarily silence the creature. Thus her desire makes it possible for her to suppress the guilt she feels for having abandoned her mother to attain autonomy, and for preparing to repeat this by separating a second time.

For Bettelheim, the mother and grandmother’s house are the same place, “experienced quite differently because of a change in the psychological situation” (172). I suggest the grandmother’s house mirrors the mother’s house, as the state of chora in female adolescence mirrors that of infancy. According to Joan Gould, in *Spinning Straw into Gold: What Fairy Tales Reveal about the Transformations in a Woman’s Life* (2005), the grandmother’s cottage “is also the witch’s body [the way the house represents the woman’s body in so many other stories]” (300). Thus crossing the threshold foreshadows being swallowed. Much is made of the importance of this threshold: the heroine receives instructions to push the door, a “formula” imparted from the grandmother/bzou to “find her own way in” (Verdier 116), emphasising the heroine’s agency in this geographical transition, which is also a transition from liminal territory into a space where she is unequivocally in danger. Carloni similarly argues that LRRH contains traces of initiation rites, and sees the dialogue between grandmother and girl at this point as a remnant of ascertaining that the initiate is ready (181). The moment of the heroine’s entry into the house is followed by her unwitting ingestion of her (grand)mother. The mother’s body now completely engulfs the protagonist, breathing through the walls of the house and settling within the walls of her stomach. As Kristeva writes in “Stabat Mater” (1987), Western culture often conflates “the maternal” with “the feminine” (163), particularly through Christianity. The gender of the protagonist means that the maternal abject, the m/Other, is thus discursively constructed as infusing, as well as surrounding, her body.

Kristeva defines the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order […] and does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*Powers* 4). The disruption of normality is illustrated through the (grand)mother’s house. The food from the heroine’s mother finds its ghastly reflection in the bzou’s offering, just as the starting point of the good mother’s house recalls the contentment of the mother/child union before the primal abjection.
Dundes sees “reversals” here: the child’s insistence on not defecating in the bed as reverse toilet training, or the hunger of the bzou as reversed oral aggression, for example (225). Dundes argues that such reversals indicate that infantile desires are projected onto the parent. However, these reversals may also be apprehended as a clear inversion of the order represented by the normal mother and her nice house at the story’s beginning. The monstrousness of being forced to confront one’s lack is evident here in the bzou’s inability to be contained within the gender divide, or human/animal divide. Kristeva defines the abject as “(t)he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Powers 4). The transgressiveness inherent in the bzou finds its apotheosis in the cannibalistic feast he prepares for the heroine. Food, according to Kristeva, is “perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection” (Powers 2). The heroine delivers good food from the good mother, which finds its nightmarish reflection in the food the bzou offers the girl. The bzou is a male, doing woman’s work, inside a woman’s house, and bed. He is a man who can pass as a woman, and a beast that can pass as a man. He blurs the boundaries between human and animal not just in his persona, but also through serving the Grandmother as if she were meat. At the same time, Carloni follows Röheim in raising the notion of infantile oral aggression here (182), as does Dundes (214, 225). Carloni and Röheim refer to Sandor Ferenczi’s notion of a tooth as a knife to pierce the mother and regress back into the womb, which accords with my theory of the pubescent girl’s conflicted longing to return to primordial unity, and her fear of the very same thing. The heroine ends her description of the bzou by remarking upon the bzou’s big mouth, an observation common to all variants of LRRH. The metaphoric resonance between mouth and vagina is well-established in our culture, and the mouth of the bzou (in his incarnation as “wolf” in later versions of this tale) is a mouth Barbara Creed specifically references in her explication of the motif of the vagina dentata: the ultimate castrating vagina (Monstrous Feminine 108). The (hetero)sexual overtones of naked bed-sharing seem evident enough, and, as I have explicated, are intensified by the bzou’s gender; yet it seems difficult for those who would present the bzou/wolf as unambiguously masculine to ignore the connotations of the enormous mouth ready to devour the protagonist.

Scholars such as Vladimir Propp (1946) and Alfred Winterson (1928) have read LRRH stories in terms of residual initiatory rites, with a liminal period (the woods), initiation test (being swallowed) and rebirth (from the wolf’s stomach), as Dundes relates (206–7). In Little Red Riding Hood Unboaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale
Catherine Orenstein’s account of the tale reads it similarly: the protagonist of “Mère grand” and other oral tales leaves her home to confront a monster, who represents “not only …physical danger, but…inner demons, one’s doubts and weaknesses” (80) before returning with newfound wisdom and maturity, echoing the mythic structure identified by Joseph Campbell’s Hero Cycle (79). Terri Windling points us towards versions of “Mère grand” which finish with the bzou in pursuit of the heroine, only to be drowned by a group of women doing laundry (1–2). The bzou is thus defeated through a community of women, implying that despite the peril and uncertainty of entering adult life, the adolescent girl’s new social role brings strength through camaraderie. In “Mère grand” related folklore, the food in Grandmother’s house reflects local specialities, which only adult women would have the knowledge to prepare; this strengthens the link between mother and monster, and adds to the sense of “Mère grand” as initiatory, as Christine Bacchilega has pointed out (159). Yvonne Verdier’s “Little Red Riding Hood in Oral Tradition” extensively discusses the initiatory elements of the tale. Verdier ties the path of needles and the path of pins in “Mère grand” to rites of passage in the rural French areas she had studied. According to Verdier, the time the girl spent with the local seamstress “had less to do with learning to…sew and use needles than with refining herself, with polishing herself and learning to adorn herself and dress up” (106). This finishing school of sorts was called “gathering pins”, while needles also carried menstrual connotations (106). For Bruno Bettelheim, these pins and needles represented the heroine sewing (rather than tacking) material together, which demonstrated another sort of maturity: that the child has accepted the reality principle. However, the girl does not always choose the reality principal, and in one oral tale she declares that she likes the road of pins “with which you can dress up better than the road of needles for which you must work” (qtd in Verdier 105). While Bettelheim’s comparison seems apt, I suggest the girl does not seem to have accepted the reality principle at the crossroads and will not do so until she is reborn.

The little girl’s increasing autonomy, which will culminate with her rebirth, is a strong counterpoint to the motifs of union and consumption in “Mère grand”. The heroine is initially located and named purely in relation to her mother. Inside her mother’s house the heroine is clearly defined by the role of daughter, but out in the world her relationship to her environment is not yet fixed. It is outside the home that the heroine is

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6 First published as “Le petit chaperon rouge dans la tradition orale” in Le Débat (1980); however, I work from the 1997 English translation in Marvels and Tales.
referred to not as “her daughter”, but “the little girl”. It also is worth noting the development of the girl’s speech in the tale. Firstly, when asked where she is going, she repeats her mother’s phrase almost verbatim. Then she responds to the bzou’s question by parroting back one of the options put to her. However, at the bzou’s prompting, the girl is now expressing an intention to carry out an action that stems from her autonomous desire. His question “which path are you taking?” forces her to choose, and his next statement “all right then, I’ll take (the other)” reinforces that it is her choice by making it clear he is acting in response to her. In “Mère grand” the initial encounter with the bzou happens at a crossroads, which lay out geographically a significant choice to be made on the part of the protagonist. Verdier mentions oral tales including garments made of iron, which the heroine has to wear down before she is allowed to return home (105). The needles and pins could likewise serve to demonstrate the hardship and painful nature of the separation from the mother. The Oxford English Dictionary Online cites a 1786 use of the term “on pins and needles” to denote “in a state of agitated suspense or extreme uneasiness”. Also, as Verdier states, whichever road the heroine takes, the wolf always takes the road she disdains” (105), a hint that the bzou/wolf is imbued with the appeal of the road not taken, his presence recalling that impossible desire to be infinite that the subject forwent at individuation.

Here the bzou also plays the fantasy of the ideal object. Since the bzou is aligned with the m/Other and the house with the mother’s body, at the crossroads the bzou is the m/Other outside of the maternal body, someone who will love the subject once she has endured the pain of separation from the chora. The bzou’s appearance gives the girl a choice, opening up space in the story for the heroine’s desire. In this way, speaking to the bzou amounts to her acquiescence to the process of separation, choosing a love object besides the mother. Alongside its initiatory associations, a needle also held “emphatically sexual symbolism” according to Verdier (106); hence the choice offered to the girl, of a path of needles or pins, is suggestive of sexuality. I propose that the masculinity of the bzou works to establish his otherness from the heroine, and additionally draws attention to the sexual dynamic of their relationship. With Verdier and Orenstein, I see the inception of adult womanhood unfolding in “Mère grand” and propose that the heterosexual relation that characterizes the tale for many scholars (Zipes, Bettelheim, Bacchilega) is thus overlaid onto the primal abjection, just as for the adolescent girl; a male love object usually replaces the primary love object, the mother.
The love object shifts from the mother to the bzou, but will then return in the (grand)mother's form, in (grand)mother's house (body), the enraged maternal figure who is out to wreak revenge on the subject for daring to separate. The girl's decision, and her literal speaking out, represents her first flicker of autonomy, which turns the familial home from safe womb space into topsy-turvy carnivalesque house of horrors. Once she comes in she will repeat again her mother's phrase, but over the course of the story the girl will speak back more. She begins to ask clarifying questions in response to the orders she receives—when told to undress, she asks, “Where should I put my apron?”—then she progresses to making unsolicited observations—“What big eyes you have!”—then asks for something from the bzou (to go outside)—then insists, bargains with and finally deceives the bzou, or mother. Kristeva states that liars are abject beings because they “(draw) attention to the fragility of the law” (Powers 4). A lie about identity is at the core of “Mère grand” and is framed by the girl's honesty on the one side, which endangers her, and her deception on the other, which liberates her. The child who is obedient and frank at the beginning of the tale learns to deceive, and thus survive. As Adam Phillips paraphrases Freud: “If...the child’s first successful lie against the parents is his first moment of independence—the moment when he proves to himself that his parents cannot read his mind and so are not omniscient deities—then it is also the first moment in which he recognises his abandonment” (87). It is the autonomy of the subject that enables her to deceive. Both her bodily functions and her intentions are separate, and secret, from the bzou. The bzou thinks the child really does need the bathroom, and intends to return. This deceit allows her to live (become a separate subject) but it also makes her become like the bzou, a deceiver. The heroine who escapes is now wiser but also a tiny bit monstrous herself. Here we can discern the residual guilt and pain of the subject who is forced to expel the m/Other from herself. Truth and lies respectively endanger and free the heroine, reflecting the initial stage where the child believes its parents may read its thoughts, and followed by the triumph of the lie, welded together with the bitter recognition that she or he is alone.

At the moment of abjection, Kristeva explains in Powers of Horror, one comes face-to-face with one’s mortality. Contra Verdier's and Carloni's accounts, where the body of the grandmother and girl exist in comparison with each other, I would like to re-envision this connection as an act of haunting. As the girl feels alienated from her increasingly maternal body, she is aware that one day it will transform into that of an elderly woman, and then a
corpse; in “Mère grand”, the deceased grandmother lingers to remind her of this. Alan Dundes also briefly mentions the Danish scholar Axel Olrik, who discusses “various examples of the swallowing-monster narrative” in a range of folklore, including LRRH, concluding that the monster represents death (206). Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) suggests that death and the semiotic are conflated: “if, as George Bataille argues in *Death and Sensuality*, life signifies discontinuity and separateness, and death signifies continuity and non-differentiation, then the desire for and attraction of death suggests also a desire to return to a state of original oneness with the mother” (28). This nostalgia for semiotic unity is thoroughly embroidered with motifs of death: the tale revels in the details of the (grand)mother’s body in its posthumous state, while its affinity to the girl’s own mortal body is emphasised through gender, familial ties, and the imminent danger presented by the bzou. Furthermore, since the corpse is for Kristeva “the utmost of abjection” (*Powers* 4), it stands to reason that the meal the bzou offers the heroine is cannibalistic. The heroine’s cannibalism therefore represents her own wolfishness, as the connection between the adolescent’s changing body and the maternity she expelled at infancy becomes increasingly clear. The way the heroine apprehends the bzou is comparable to the ghoulish way people flock to the sites of accidents, without desiring those accidents. Kristeva explains, “(o)ne thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones” (*Powers* 9). In English, as in French, naming the mouth cuts through the rhythm of the previous four exclamations about pairs of things—shoulders, nostrils, ears—with its different article, a/cette. The repetitious dialogue works to create this sense of inevitability and fascination, and the shift in rhythm conveys a jolt of terror, the sudden singularity of the mouth prefiguring the impending union of these two figures.

Despite the girl’s longing for the chora, she needs to preserve her unique subjectivity. According to Alan Phillips, “getting out involves, whatever else it involves, not going on looking at what you don’t want to see” (130). After seeing what is there, the heroine does not want to continue to experience her mother as the maternal abject, nor is it possible to continue in such a heightened state; so she leaves the situation where the abject maternal might consume her, and returns home, presumably to the safety of the “nice” mother. The abjection necessary to do this is replicated in the motifs of excretion and escape. The yarn, which the bzou ties to the girl, is untied by her, representing the severance of the umbilical cord. The girl claims she needs to defecate, expelling the
grandmother’s body from which she has presumably got all the nutrition (nurture) that she can. For Kristeva, bodily wastes are conflated in the infant’s mind with the maternal body as it becomes Other. But true to the confluence of sexuality and the abject in this tale, sexuality is once again invoked, and linked with the abject through the bzou’s question “Tu fous donc des cordes?” The bzou asks if the girl is defecating, but this French expression also has a sexual connotation: Francisco Vaz Da Silva translates it as: “Are you fucking ropes?” (135). The heroine leaves the grandmother’s house, passing again through the liminal space of the forest as a means to return to the mother’s house: the regulated relationship to the maternal which was at play at the beginning of the tale. Again, this psychical process is represented geographically. For Kristeva, the final part of the abjection process is a reinscription of borders. This separation of the subject from the m/Other is discernable through “Mère grand”, yet the social ramifications of this separation saturate the primal abjection seething underneath this tale with a specifically female sensibility. The paradox of these competing tides echoes the push/pull magnetism of this story, continuing to fascinate over centuries, engendering constant rewriting and revision; it also points towards the co-existence of both culturally specific factors and enduring psychical processes in the tale.
CHAPTER TWO

Writing Little Red Riding Hood:
Deception, Shame, Denial, Repetition

The two versions of LRRH that initially secured this tale in popular consciousness were literary: Charles Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” in 1697, followed by the Grimm version “Rotkäppchen” in 1812. This chapter examines the differences between these texts and the oral material from a standpoint that stresses the centrality of pleasure to repetition. Scholars often read the discrepancies between versions as a process of editing or even erasure (Bacchilega 55–57; Tartar The Classic 4–5; Zipes 348–9). The male authors are portrayed as revising the oral tale to better suit pedagogical aims, and the texts, consequently, as imparting patriarchal values. However, it is my contention that although the elements that remain may model dominant norms of gender and sexuality, they also destabilize them. Like “Mère grand”, these texts speak of unity and the liminal, continuing both to present and conceal the moment of separation from the m/Other. The unconscious material returns in another disguise despite these revisions, however, and this time the process of separation is discernable principally in the shame that marks the texts. Filtered through the male subjectivity of the texts’ authors, the repression of this separation also influences the depiction of LRRH’s protagonist, who becomes imbued with passivity: the passivity the male subject remembers experiencing at separation, disavows, and projects onto the figure of the young girl.

The pattern of LRRH as we know it today is largely derived from “Le Petit” and “Rotkäppchen”. Victorian notions of LRRH owed much to these two versions, as indicated by Maria Tatar using the sole examples of Perrault’s “pretty village girl” and the Grimms’ “dear little girl” to contextualise Charles Dickens’s conception of “Little Red Riding Hood” (3). Other scholars such as Zipes, Orenstein, Dundes, Bacchilega and Beckett agree that LRRH’s contemporary incarnation is “often a sanitized version that frequently combines elements from both [Perrault’s and the Grimms]’ tales” (Beckett xvii). Thus these two stories provide two important points of entry into the LRRH pattern as it exists now. Neither “Le Petit” nor “Rotkäppchen” depicts the heroine unwittingly eating her Grandmother, nor does either feature a lengthy undressing, or a choice between the
path of needles and the path of pins. The back and forth dialogue (“What big eyes you have”) remains central to both versions, and events in the two tales progress in a very similar fashion until the climactic moment where the girl recognises the wolf as he throws off his disguise and pounces. “Le Petit” concludes here; the heroine consumed by the wolf, no recourse in sight. The narrator then directly addresses the audience, advising them to learn from the heroine’s fate and declaring the “most dangerous” wolves to be “docile ones with winning ways”7 (93). The ending of “Rotkäppchen” sees a hunter intervene, and free the girl and her grandmother. As Zipes’s work shows, Ludwig Tieck first included a hunter within the tale in 1800, along with a menagerie of other characters such as “dog”, “cuckoo” and “peasant” (99). However, it is the Grimms who are “generally known” (32) for introducing this figure as a saviour. This ending gained popularity and was widely adopted, with the hunter later manifesting as a woodcutter on occasion, for example, in Walter de La Merc’s 1927 version (208).

This chapter discusses the way the differences between “Mère grand”, “Le Petit”, and “Rotkäppchen” have been understood, and proposes an alternative model of interpretation. Rather than establishing the heroine’s guilt (Zipes 357), I see these stories as displaying shame, which, as I will elucidate, recalls the formation of the ego and individual identity. Thus “Le Petit” and “Rotkäppchen” appear to renounce a state of union with the m/Other, punishing gender ambiguity and denying cross-gendered identification with the heroine. Yet I will draw attention to elements of the tale that continue to evoke the liminal, and discuss this aspect of the rewritings in tandem with Jessica Benjamin’s idea that the figure of a young girl may function as an elaborate denial of male passivity and masochism. Zipes describes the rewritings of LRRH as centuries-long “colonising” process (28). I posit that, if these divergences can indeed be thought of as revisions, they maintain the destabilisation of the self at the core of “Mère grand”. The literary LRRHs effect this through “space of possibility” that Marjorie Garber suggests transvestism and gender ambiguity instate. Lauren Berlant regards the masculine subject position as particularly vulnerable to unsteadiness; since, “(t)he price of privilege is the instability at its foundation” (57). I suggest, correspondingly, that while male authors of LRRH seem to insist on a gulf between narrator and heroine, they simultaneously disclose this instability. Narrative fiction can speak in a coded way of the repressed. As Berlant explains, “the censored material is

7 This quote, and all references to “Le Petit” and “Rotkäppchen” are Zipes’s translations (91–93, 135–138).
written down in monuments like the symptoms that represent on the body, in archives of memory and seemingly impersonal traces that take on uncanny values, like childhood memories, in the presumptions of language and tradition, and in narrative norms” (57–58). In this way, it seems to me, the male narrators’ denial of affinity with the heroine of LRRH conversely reinvigorates this “space of possibility”, contributing to the fascination of the LRRH pattern. Thus the changes made to LRRH do not actually align the tale with hegemonic constructions of gender, but continue to speak of the finitude of the subject through revealing the artifice of gender; sounding a note of discord that ensures the continued drive towards its rewriting.

i. DECEPTION

Perrault’s moral does explicitly compare the wolf to society gentlemen who ruin naive virgins; however, I contend that it is possible to make this association without confining the evil the wolf embodies to this context, and without blaming the young girl. Perrault’s narrator laments, “But alas for those who do not know that of all the wolves, the docile ones are those who are the most dangerous” (93 emphasis added). Despite Zipes’s contention that Perrault’s heroine is made complicit in her own rape, it is perhaps abstruse to take this (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) requiem as an accusation. The threat represented by the canny wolf, throughout Perrault and the Grimm’s tales, continues to be comparable to that of a liar, as I posited in the previous chapter. According to Kristeva, the liar is abject because he shows the extent to which the law is arbitrary (Powers 4). I maintain that this deception is the defining feature of the exchange between girl and wolf; sex is only a means of its expression. Zipes reads LRRH alongside eighteenth century morality plays that showed the devil working through bourgeois aristocrats to ruin young women (77). However, he overlooks the religious aspect of these plays. I maintain that the destructive forces the wolf represents do not pertain only to sexuality, but rather, deploy sexuality to illustrate the fear of being deceived, which in turn speaks to the terror of finitude.

With Carole Hanks and D.T. Hanks Jr., I concur that Perrault’s tale demonstrates the presence and seemingly arbitrary nature of evil. Their article “Perrault’s ‘Little Red Riding Hood’: Victim of the Revisers” (1978) notes the parallels between “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” and the biblical story of Job. The Hanks do not deny the sexuality of “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge”, which they say “is centered on an erotic metaphor” (69).
However, the exchange between the wolf and girl should not be reduced to a sexual one. “This is not to say, however, that the tale is simply a metaphorical seduction—even though the wolf does indeed lure Little Red Riding Hood out of her clothes and into bed”; instead, “the basic theme of the tale is akin to that of Job; innocence, beauty, and goodness are destroyed by their opposites” (73). The Hanks’s conclusion also coheres with the religious tale that Jan M. Ziolkowski posits it as a version of LRRH in his essay “A Fairy Tale from before Fairy Tales: Egbert of ‘De puella a lupellis seruata’ and the Medieval Background of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’” (1992). In Egbert of Leige’s tale from 1022–1024 (556), a lisping little girl, baptised on the Pentecost, is miraculously spared by wolf cubs due to the holiness of her red wool tunic, a gift from her godfather (559). This story, frequently overlooked in the development of the LRRH pattern, might be further illuminated through comparisons with the tradition of Christian mysticism, for example, that of Simone Weil, who promulgated reaching truth through the annihilation of the self. It seems likely, then, that the devouring of the heroine, an act Zipes sees as most profoundly about rape, works instead to illustrate the abjection at the heart of LRRH. The wolf, by extension, embodies deception, as well as the forces of the abject which the liar summons.

Zipes sees the wolf as allied with male heterosexual desire, but argues the wolf stands for “natural forces” (rather than male subjects), which implicate the heroine in what Zipes sees as her rape (81). However, Zipes also states that the wolf embodies “social nonconformity” (81). Although Bettelheim’s reading of “Rotkäppchen” interprets it as narrative of an adolescent girl’s psychological processes, he also states the wolf is “not just the male seducer, he also represents the asocial, animalistic tendencies within ourselves” (175). It seems to me, these “animalistic” tendencies within the wolf, his “nonconformity”, are not coded as male sexual desire, but pertain to the werewolf’s ambiguity in general, which is most apparent in the wolf’s ambiguous gender. Maria Tartar notes that violence in the Grimms’ stories works to underscore a stark moral universe: “rather than toning down scenes of violence for children’s stories, recorders and collectors often added moral lessons that, in their eyes, gave them license to emphasize or even exaggerate descriptions of punishment and death” (Off with Their Heads 11). Yet, as Fromm perceived, in “Rotkäppchen” it is not the heroine who is the subject of violent punishment, but the wolf.

The exaggerated punishment in “Rotkäppchen” is not directed at male sexual desire, as Fromm asserts, but queerness. For Marjorie Garber, the lupine resonates with the strain of maintaining the gender binary; the wolf, which she specifically links with LRRH, is
“like some Lacanian signifier gone mad...inscrib(ing) itself all over the text of transvestism” (375). The bzou is edited into a wolf in literary versions of LRRH, thus removing the blurring of the animal/human divide the bzou embodies. Yet, despite being no longer called a bzou, the wolf retains certain humanoid traits: illustrations of LRRH continue to show him upright, dressed in human clothes, even as “debonair gentleman”, as Zipes himself notes (370). The wolf’s ability to engage in human speech distinguishes him from an animal and is also the feature that allows him to pose a threat to the girl, as he always begins by engaging her in conversation. This continued dissonance with binary oppositions, including those of normative gender and sexuality, indicates that the forces the wolf represents may not be contained within the heteromatrix. The disruptive presence of LRRH’s wolf that Garber maps in literary texts is, I suggest, an irrepressible continuation of the destabilizing force of the bzou from oral culture. In addition, the fluidity in the dialogue might be read as small but crucial moments where the tale’s omniscient narrator melts into cross-gendered narrative voices, including that of the heroine. For example, “Rotkäppchen” moves straight from an external depiction of the grandmother—“her cap pulled down over her face so that it gave her a strange appearance”—to the girl’s voice—“Oh Grandmother, what you have!”—to that of the wolf: “the better to hear you with” (136). The direct speech is read aloud by the parent, instating a slipperiness of identity. According to Rina Kim’s introduction to Cross-Gendered Literary Voices (2012) the voice is a psychoanalytical object that “plays an important part in the subject formation in relation to the gendered Other” (6). Although this passage of direct speech is not long, the tale is concise, and the speech happens at the peak of dramatic tension and danger. The inclusion of back-and-forth dialogue remains consistent across variants of the LRRH pattern and is one of the hallmarks of this tale.

Sigmund Freud, himself the father of psychoanalysis, suggested in “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1914) that LRRH contained the child’s “infantile fear of the father”, who may have “threatened in fun, to ‘gobble him up’” (32). Similarly, in her introduction to her translation of Perrault’s work, Angela Carter recalls “when the wolf jumps on Little Red Riding Hood and gobbles her up, my grandmother used to pretend to eat me, which made me squeak and gibber with excited pleasure” (240)—although, as Carter points out, her Grandmother could not have known of Perrault’s notes in the margins of “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge”, which suggest just such an action. With Attwood, I suggest that this fear (and the corresponding masochistic “excited pleasure” at being...
devoured) belongs to little boys as much as to little girls. Freud considers this tale as it emerged in the dream had, in youth, by a client called “The Wolf-Man”. At around the age of three and a quarter (20), Wolf-Man had been seduced by his sister, two years older than he, after which he had the “passive sexual aim of being touched on the genitals” (24) and turned his attentions to his nurse, masturbating in front of her; whereupon she told him he would get a “wound” (24). Freud states that around this time the boy was concerned with the idea of castration but also regarded the notion with incredulity. In an interesting turn of phrase, Freud writes that “sexual problems” arose for this boy “out of the fairy tales with which he became familiar at this time” (25), stating that the boy was confused about whether the wolf “was a female creature, then, or could men have babies in their bodies as well?” (25). Before this question was “settled”, according to Freud, the boy had no fear of wolves (25).

The boy later became unruly which, according to Freud, had the aim of “forc(ing) punishments and beatings out of his father, and in that way to obtain from him the masochistic sexual satisfaction he desired” (28). Subsequently, after a dream he had around the time of his fourth birthday (28), the boy became markedly anxious and terrified of animals, especially pictures of wolves with which his sister would “torture” him (16). The boy’s dream contained elements of both LRRH and “The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats” which has, as Freud states, “much in common” with LRRH (31). Freud explains this dream’s content as the repressed primal scene. According to Freud, a conflict ensues between the boy’s masochistic desire for his wolf-father and the desire to disidentify with the “castrated” (tail-less) wolf, his mother (47). I suggest, moreover, the boy’s gender anxiety did, in a way, come “out of the fairy tales”, in response to the imagery of LRRH connoting the primal abjection and recalling his pre-Symbolic existence.

ii. **SHAME**

Maintaining my focus on the male audience and writers of LRRH stories, I would like to consider the colour red as a marker of shame, incorporating theories about shame as essential to ego formation. As Ruth Leys states, “until the early 1960s, shame was rarely differentiated from guilt, appearing instead as a minor variant of the latter” (123); however, since then, shame as an affect has received attention in its own right. The primary feature differentiating guilt from shame is the presence of the other, and it is the otherness of the
wolf that sparks the action of this tale. In the second part of the book, Zipes adds to his contention that the heroine of LRRH is presented as “guilty for her own rape” (357) the idea that “it is possible to interpret Little Red Riding hood’s desire for the wolf as desire for the other” (361), searching in the wolf’s eyes for “a mirror reflection of who she might be” (361). Connected, these two notions point us towards the affect shame, which, as Jacqueline Rose describes, is distinct from guilt in that it “arises when someone knows, or fears, they have been seen”(1). Sartre is in accordance: “(t)his self of which I am ashamed does not already exist prior to the encounter with the Other; rather, it is conferred upon me by the Other’s gaze” (286). Lacanian tradition holds that this imagined gaze arises at the mirror stage, at which the infant misrecognises itself as a stable entity, and first sees itself as separate from the m(Other). The subject immediately tries to adopt a conception of his or herself through this imagined gaze, which is associated with the superego. This moment at the formation of individual subjectivity is one I shall return to later in this chapter.

The heroine’s gaze on the wolf is an integral part of the LRRH pattern and proves troublesome for those who would assert that the passivity of the heroine entails simply positioning her as an object. In the epilogue of Trials and Tribulations, Zipes upholds the claims about literary LRRHs he advanced in part one, but surveys illustrations of the tale from the 19th century to the present to continue his argument. He admits that the gaze of the heroine in illustrations reveals a “curious ambivalence about male phantasies which needs more explanation” (357). He is forced to take a brief and unprecedented foray into Lacanian theory to provide this explanation, and ends up concluding that, as a projection of male desire, the heroine “gazes but does not really gaze” (379). According to Zipes, “(t)he gaze of the wolf is a phallic mode of interpreting the world, and is an attempt to gain what is lacking through imposition and force. Thus, the positioning of the wolf involves a movement toward convincing the girl that he is what she wants, and her role is basically one intended to mirror his desire” (379). Yet, as Zipes states, the phallic mode, usually associated with the male subject position, does not require the desiring gaze of its object even to mirror its desire. The dialogue that is a recognisable part of the LRRH pattern, “what big…you have!”, explicitly illustrates the girl’s gaze on the wolf, yet does not fit easily into Zipes’s assertion that the pattern as a whole positions the girl as an object.

Feona Attwood argues that the girl’s gaze is actually the female subject’s apprehension of her own, monstrous, female body, as constructed through patriarchal discourse. Unfortunately, this becomes complicated by Attwood’s adherence to Zipes’s
notion that the LRRH pattern plays out male fear of female sexuality. To justify Attwood’s hypothesis that “Rotkäppchen” is a “sadistic phantasy of women’s blame, punishment and annihilation” (103) the wolf is therefore male at least sometimes, including when he is objectifying the girl or when he is “cross-dressed” (101); yet when he eats the girl he represents femaleness for Attwood. While Attwood agrees with Marjorie Garber about the importance of transvestism in the LRRH, she contradicts Garber’s notion that it allows “a space of possibility” in this case, because the wolf ultimately summons the phantasy of the castrating female by eating the heroine. However, it is difficult to see how the story can have two characters swapping gender roles completely (the heroine now presumably standing for the castrated man) while also successfully locating the monstrous in the female body, and then equating this body with the female subject. The relationship between the gendered body and the subject is not consistent in this interpretation.

I suggest, then, that the heroine’s gaze could communicate the moment of first feeling shame, a sudden dis-identification that is “both particularly contagious and peculiarly individuating” (36) according to Eve Sedgwick in Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity (2003). Sedgwick claims that shame is related to what one is, rather than one’s actions (37). She concurs with Silvan Tomkins that shame occurs when “one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or... one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar” (qtd in Sedgwick 35). A sense of sudden unfamiliarity permeates the girl’s recognition of the wolf, as the back-and-forth dialogue consists of her describing each thing she realizes is strange. Sedgwick writes that “shame interrupts identification but in doing so shame, too, makes identity” (36). She describes blushing and looking down, and averting the gaze, as various “blazons of shame” which function both as “semaphores of trouble and at the same time, of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge” (36). Blushing, a “lesser” semaphore of shame (35), is suggested throughout the tale by the girl's identifying red hat, as Carloni notes, though he links this to sexual excitement rather than shame (178). Darwin’s observations about shame are similar: “under a keen sense of shame, there is a strong desire for concealment”, especially in bodily posture: “we turn away the whole body, most especially the face, which we endeavour in some manner to hide” (319). Later, the heroine will sometimes be pictured with a small red cloak (e.g. Zipes 354–353), an item linked even through its name to concealment, also, she always has a head covering which works to partially hide the face. The girl doesn’t see what
is there for most of the tale, until a “sudden” strangeness, followed by a complete annihilation of the self.

I propose shame as an explanation for both the colour and item of clothing, elements of the tale that Perrault introduced and the Grimms kept in. If the LRRH pattern reenacts the separation between self and m/Other, the red hat or hood, connoting shame, could parallel the way this affect works to form subjectivity. Shaming may certainly be a means to socialise people by marking out one aberrant individual, and this is the way Zipes perceives the colour red working in retellings of LRRH. In the context of Zipes’s wider argument, the clothing denotes the child a nonconformist, signalling that the girl behaves with impropriety (83), but this presents difficulties for Zipes’s claim that the heroine also manages to represent generalised femaleness. This colour is clearly important, but since red cannot be said to denote femaleness (unlike, say, pink in contemporary Western culture, or the blue of the Virgin Mary prior to that), for Zipes its prominence is “not clear” apart from being “generally associated with sin, sensuality, and the devil” (26). He offers the proposal that the hood implies the heroine is spoiled and pleasure-seeking, but admits in an endnote, “it is difficult to determine exactly why Perrault used the colour red” (88), especially when his argument tries to locate the purported sinfulness of the girl in her gender. Red could be linked with the adolescent female body due to the onset of menarche, as Erich Fromm suggests (211); but in Zipes’s view, Perrault was writing for the children and adults of the upper classes, to civilise and titillate respectively. It seems unlikely menstrual connotations would serve either purpose; in fact, Cristina Bacchilega significantly builds on Zipes’s account to show how Perrault wrote the female body out of the tale (57). The red hood of the heroine is also sidelined in Dundes’s account of LRRH, which aims to link “Rotkäppchen” to folklore from East Asia as well as France; but if we consider the versions of Grimm and Perrault as well as modern rewritings, some form of red hood is a consistent identifying feature of the tale. While the details of LRRH’s folkloric existence remain hazy, the prominence of the red hood in retellings of LRRH across film, theatre, art and literary texts is hard to dismiss.

The Grimms also include a coda to “Rotkäppchen”, often overlooked, which sees the heroine meet another wolf. This time, she ignores his overtures and goes straight to her Grandmother’s house, where the two lure the wolf down the chimney and into a vat of scalding sausage water. Zipes claims the girl’s rescue in “Rotkäppchen” underscores the notion that “only men can serve as protectors” (77). Zipes explains the coda as further
reinforcing the girl’s need for a saviour (32), but if Grandmother really is a saviour (although it seems important that the two work together) she is still a woman. Through reading both as part of a misogynistic trajectory, Zipes blurs the distinction between “Rotkäppchen” and “Le Petit”. The heroine’s gaze on the wolf has been undertheorised in “Rotkäppchen”, although it points towards shame: “shame is an emotion that is rooted through the eyes and that the logic of shame is a scene of exposure. (This is true even if the scene is only an imagined one, and the observer is not an external spectator but an internalised other)” (Leys 126 emphasis original). This is nowhere more apparent than in the coda, where the situation is replayed; but the heroine does not engage with the wolf, except to note the “mean look in his eyes” (138). As both Sedgwick and Darwin attest, the subject’s own gaze is removed or downcast as a response to the gaze of the Other; and the congruence between the behaviour of the heroine and the subject suddenly exposed is particularly noticeable here. Having separated from the m/Other, the subject becomes newly aware of, and leery of, the gaze of the Other, just as the heroine learns to avert her gaze and behave like one feeling shame. She hurries past the wolf instead of treating him as someone familiar, and then kills him. Her desire to commune with the m/Other is similarly destroyed.

The importance of theatricality in this tale only strengthens the centrality of shame to LRRH. The tale features costume, role-playing, back-and-forth dialogue and direct speech. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the acting out of this story by the parent reading is common. For Sedgwick, “shame, it might finally be said, transformed shame is performance. I mean theatrical performance” (38 emphasis original). The exposure necessary in public performance of any kind, whether by an actor, performance artist, or activist, impels a “flooding of the subject by the shame of refused return, or the successful pulsation of the mirroring regard through a narcissistic circuit rendered elliptical (which is to say: necessarily distorted) by the hyperbole of its original cast” (38). Sedgwick also gives an interesting insight into the vanity that Zipes perceives in many depictions of the heroine of LRRH, inferring the implication that vanity is inherent to girls and women (43). During her assessment of Henry James’s prefaces to his own works, Sedgwick writes, “(t)he narcissism/shame circuit between the writing self and its ‘inner child’ intersects with that other hyperbolic and dangerous narcissistic circuit, figured as theatrical performance, that extends outward between the presented and expressive face and its audience” (44). The narcissism/shame circuits that Sedgwick suggests are activated by Henry James’s staged
conversations with his younger self might similarly be triggered through the LRRH pattern, as the subject writes a theatrically infused narrative of the moment of self-misrecognition, at the individual’s self-formation.

iii. DENIAL

The argument of *Trials and Tribulations* stretches credibility in asserting that the “real hero of the tale (is) the hunter-gamekeeper” who, according to Zipes, represents “male governance” (81). The tale is consistently named for the heroine, and the hunter-gamekeeper remains excluded from those contemporary retellings influenced by Perrault: for example, Beni Montresor’s 1991 version. Furthermore, the introduction to this same version by renowned opera singer Luciano Pavarotti makes it clear that the heroine is the locus for identification in this tale, even for boys. Pavarotti recalls: “I identified with Little Red Riding Hood, I had the same fears as she, I didn’t want to die. I dreaded her death—or what we think death is. I waited anxiously for the hunter to come” ("Introduction" n. pag.). In *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1973) Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis describe identification as a “psychological process in which a subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified” (205). Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether little boys might also make a connection between their own masculinity and that of the wolf/hunter, the child listener of both sexes is evidently often transformed into LRRH’s heroine, and “gobbled up”. Pavarotti plainly admits his cross-gendered identification, while simultaneously distancing himself from it by placing it firmly in the past. He writes, “this beautiful, violent tale (…) has enchanted children the world over for three centuries” (my emphasis), before finally collapsing this distinction: “me and my marvellous grandfather included” (“Introduction” n. pag.). The child/adult division introduced and then dissolved by Pavarotti is both a clue and a red herring, as it echoes the male/female division that is culturally inscribed, a distinction LRRH seems at first glance to affirm. Pavarotti’s unsuccessful relegation of both passivity and gender fluidity to a past self here echoes a broader cultural gesture, an attempt to contain vulnerability within the figure of the little girl, and a denial of the permeability of borders such as male/female, life/death, and
self/other. However, these borders may come undone through the act of (re)writing, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

In *Flesh of my Flesh* (2009) Kaja Silverman explores how the notion of creativity as curative might play out through constructions of gender. For Silverman, writing resembles the “talking cure”, psychoanalysis, and therefore, like psychoanalysis, often attempts to touch the Real, which lies beyond discourse (104). The book begins by accounting for the notion of the creative artist as a solitary male—a trope increasingly popular through the twentieth century—as an attempt to disavow the artist’s kinship with the gendered Other. Following Lou-Andreas Salome’s understanding of creativity (specifically, that of the poet Rilke) as a movement towards a self-cure, Silverman argues that it is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (rather than the other well-known contenders, Oedipus et al) which underwrites the Western heterosexual relation, with Eurydice (who she sees occulted in heroines such Jenson’s *Gradiva*, for example) as the “ideal physician” (104). Focusing on the often neglected coda to the myth, where Eurydice and Orpheus are reunited, Silverman call attention to the likeness between the figure of Eurydice, with her “healing, tough love”, and the ideal of the psychoanalytic process: reunion with her unleashes what is repressed. Facing lack, which has been relegated to the place of femininity, “demonstrates the curative effects of explanation (...) and reawakens passion” (104). Eurydice also provides an object for the love she reawakens, and is able to return it. So how could Silverman’s argument about the Orphic myth underlying the Western heterosexual relation bear on the LRRH pattern?

I suggest that the heroine of LRRH stands in for part of male subjectivity, delegated “feminine”, much as Eurydice does in Silverman’s understanding. Also, following Silverman’s conception of Eurydice, creatively accessing the Real through this figure may represent a move towards that which is repressed. Perrault’s fairy tales ended with a rhyming moral. He concludes his version of LRRH by explicitly linking the female child audience to the heroine, and implicitly linking society gentlemen with the wolf. His narrator says that “(o)ne sees here that young children, especially young girls...should never listen to anyone who happens by”, and adds, “the docile (wolves) are those who are most dangerous” (93). As Jennifer Schacker has suggested in “Unruly Tales: Ideology, Anxiety, and the Regulation of Genre” (2007), it is in these morals that “the narrator’s voice is at its most wry, worldly, and even cynical as he reflects on courtship, desire, power, and matrimony, in ways that often run counter to the implied meanings of the narratives
themselves” (“Unruly Tales” 387). Perrault’s moral attempts in multiple ways to distance the heroine from adult males, through both the voice of the narrator that emerges in this moral and its message, and may be seen as an attempt to gender the universal experience of abjection. Yet the term “especially young girls” still contains a note of ambiguity (rather than the word “exclusively”) and the addressing of “girls” happens almost as an afterthought. This moral can itself thus be read as an afterthought, at the reluctant return to the quotidian, including paternal law, which must come at the end of the tale.

Perrault insists upon the heroine’s embodiment as young girl. She is aligned with all young girls who are “pretty, well brought-up, and gentle” (93). The significance of the young girl figure can be seen to influence the tale’s development in its literary rewritings, since the heroine is almost always a girl; yet the tale remains popular with children of any gender, as noted by Glauco Carloni (177). LRRH’s heroine is defined by her size, also: she is little, petit, chen. While there are good arguments for understanding her as an adolescent (discussed in the previous chapter), from Perrault’s tale onwards what Dundes calls “the insistence upon Red Riding Hood’s being called ‘little’” (226) permeates diverse versions of the tale, emphasising the heroine’s vulnerability. In “Deconstructing Femininity: Understanding “Passivity” and the Daughter Position” (2004), Jessica Benjamin explains that the young girl may provide the illusion of stability for male subjectivity. She writes, “(t)he daughter position, in which the girl functions as container, helps shore up a masculine self threatened by oedipal loss, exclusion, or overstimulation”(146). For Benjamin, femininity is “not a preexisting thing that is repudiated by the male psyche; rather it is constructed by it” (145). The daughter position is one elaboration of this constructed femininity; Benjamin argues that this figure is constructed in response to the father imago. She names it the “daughter position” because the father is the catalyst, but the subject is the Oedipal boy, the brother in this imaginary family. According to Benjamin, the Oedipal boy’s necessary separation from the mother entails gendered splits in the subject’s objects, including the self. Overstimulated by the seduction of the mother, the boy cannot turn to her for containment as he did when he was an infant, since he has begun to disidentify from her due to social pressure. So the mother imago is split, with her “accommodating aspect…attributed to the girl, and her active, organizing aspect…refigured as male, fatherly” (49). Using gender polarity to manage this tension, the boy constructs the father, separating him from his mother, as an aggressive force. At the same time he identifies with him, rather than the mother. Bettelheim reads the wolf
unequivocally in terms of the girl’s father, but I suggest that the retroactive nature of Perrault’s conflation of adult males and wolves echoes the Oedipal boy’s sudden and insecure identification with his father.

The male subject may experience primal abjection as the mother’s abandonment, a formative experience that chapter one discovered repeated in “Mère grand”. Similarly, Benjamin describes the Oedipal boy forced to separate from the mother/son couple as experiencing a sense of being “passively overwhelmed, and abandoned” (49). Other scholars have noted the difference between the behaviour of the heroine in male-authored LRRH texts and the heroine of “Mère grand”. Zipes see the heroines of “Le Petit” and “Rotkäppchen” as “helpless” (26, 33), while Orenstein calls them “passive female protagonists” (86), but both scholars interpret them in the same way: as implying that girls in general are naturally weak. I suggest this passivity actually reflects the male subject’s own fear of passivity, and the theme of the mother’s abandonment continues to find its expression in the bad mother, experienced as an overwhelming destabilizing force, as I have interpreted the wolf. According to Benjamin, the part of himself that the Oedipal boy associates with the passivity he feels during separation, and remembers from infancy, is repudiated and then projected onto a little sister figure. Thus the male subject uses the construct of gender to convince himself that it is the little girl who is vulnerable; he is infinite. Perrault’s rewriting can also be seen as enacting this disavowal. The fear of vulnerability is enacted by the little girl in the red hood, and then literally swallowed up.

In “Rotkäppchen”, it is the heroine’s passivity that makes her vulnerable. According to Shuli Barzilai in Lacan and the Matter of Origins (1999), the mother’s order prevents the girl from seeing the wolf: “her mother said: go to your Grandmother’s house” (emphasis original, qtd in Barzilai 207). Barzilai concurs with the LRRH reading of Rivka Eiferman, who suggests LRRH’s heroine is so invested in the paternal order and the “symbolic regime of which her mother was a premier exponent” (207) that she cannot register the divergent reality literally in front of her. Thus the peril that befalls LRRH’s heroine stems from her attempt to adapt herself to the imagined gaze of the Other, which “distorts the subject’s actual perception” (208). Likewise, “Little Red Riding Hood’s gaze is policed by language and law” (208). In her obedience to the paternal order, the heroine of LRRH stands in for the male subject in a position of passivity; but through the danger which befalls her due to her obedience to this order, its limitations are highlighted and its arbitrary nature revealed.
iv. REPUTATION

In the concluding chapter of her landmark book *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1992), Garber notes that “in discussing transvestism in literature and culture we seems to have run into Red Riding Hood and the wolf at every turn” (375). Garber draws parallels between the tale’s appearance in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, and its invocation in Freud’s Wolf-Man Case, wherein both the wolf and the “woman as cross-dresser” are “repeatedly, even obsessively evoked” (377). The appearance of LRRH in *Nightwood* occurs when one character, Nora, discovers another character, the Doctor, cross-dressed. “It flashed into Nora’s head: God, children know something they can’t tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!” (71). Garber astutely revisits Freud’s reading of LRRH as primal scene, and asks, “of what, precisely is this a primal scene?” when LRRH appears in *Nightwood*. She suggests that what the witness encounters is “not a revelation but a recognition” (385) of the contingency of gender. Sarah Haydn understands this moment specifically in relation to Judith Butler’s well-known notion of drag performance as revealing the inherently artificial, performative nature of gender roles. Because *Nightwood* is, as Haydn states, “preoccupied with identity, and specifically gender as a performance”, the “images of imposture, artifice, and falsehood” that “overflow” (79) in the novel are thus related to the precariousness of hegemonic gender roles. Garber’s chosen epithets, “mad” and “obsessive”, evoke the particular urgency with which this tale recurs in culture; an urgent push towards a stable identity, which is also testament to the masochistic pleasure available in a “borderline that becomes permeable” (16). For Garber, transvestism is “a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture” (17) and that this space of possibility is “not the exception but rather the ground of culture” (16). I further suggest that the correlation between images of deception and the performativity of gender is not mapped onto LRRH by *Nightwood* but is, in fact, essential to the LRRH pattern. In my view, it is because this tale resonates on these levels with the baroque *Nightwood* that it works to such effect in this novel.

So why do so many other authors repeat the LRRH pattern? I suggest the theatricality, gender ambiguity and unity with the m/Other in the Perrault and the Grimm’s tales retain the “space of possibility” opened up in the oral material. If Perrault did revise a tale from oral culture, this “space of possibility” could explain his attraction to it. The
pleasure impelled by returning to this space could also explain why other, usually male, authors consistently revisit the tale over the following centuries. Feona Attwood detects “male masochism” in Rotkäppchen, through elements that are also present in “Le Petit” (103). She sees the heroine being devoured, and the wolf being penetrated as the acting out of as male masochistic phantasies (103). While I am not convinced the wolf represents the male subject, I propose that male masochism may be instead found in the act of rewriting the tale.

The work of Kaja Silverman again offers some illumination here. Her essay “Masochism and Subjectivity” (1980) builds on Laura Mulvey’s theory that the male child denies that which he relegated on entering the discursive world, i.e. the possibility of being both genders, of being infinite and of never dying. He does this “by either establishing the woman’s guilt, so that her ‘castration’ seems a just punishment; or by transforming her through over-valuation (fetishism) into a compensatory object” (qtd in Silverman 2). Silverman returns to the Freudian fort/da game, which is central to Freud’s theories about pleasure and mastery, to interrogate Freud’s (and Mulvey’s) assumption that pleasure requires mastery, for male subjects. Silverman argues that it is precisely an inability to master that inspires compulsive repetition. She relates Lacan’s reading of this fort/da episode as an allegory about language, that “language is predicated on, and reconciles us to, the fact of absence or lack” (1). She then links the fort/da game to Lacan’s “mirror stage”; that is, when the subject recognizes himself as autonomous and seems to see himself from the place of the Other for the first time. This ideal image is at the core of how the subject defines himself as an autonomous being, and his inevitable distance from this ideal image results in what Silverman calls “the pleasure of passivity; of subject-ion” (3). Silverman challenges Mulvey’s suggestion that, for the male subject, it is the horror of the mother’s assumed castration that must be either attributed to guilt or sickness, or provoke verneinung (denial through fetishisation into a compensatory object). In fact, for Silverman, the crisis is provoked by the male subject’s “identification with her” (6 emphasis original). This distinction is crucial to my reading of the LRRH pattern.

In this chapter, I have made the case that the liminality and shame in the texts suggest literary versions of LRRH resonate with the subject’s experience of the world prior to and during the moment of seeing himself from the place of the Other. As Silverman explains, the subject may experience the pleasure of passivity in realizing the contingency of his selfhood, and I argue it is this pleasure that drives the return to the LRRH pattern.
However, this pleasure is not openly displayed, but disavowed through dis-identification with femaleness, echoing the formation of the gendered male self. Freud theorised that the self as object is formed through identification with and against other objects, but unconscious identifications are only revealed through defences against these, which are symptoms (Laplanche and Pontalis 206). The attempt to attribute passivity to the heroine of LRRH is a symptom echoing the cultural attribution of masochism to the female and sadism to the male subject, in a bid to “wide(n) the moral distance between male and female subject” (6), since Western phallocentric culture “attempts at every point to blur the distinction between the (male) subject and the Symbolic” as Kaja Silverman attests (Masochism 8). Indeed, “the writing of the history of the male subject, which…has reached its culmination in Freud, is really a writing out of the history of the female subject. It constitutes an elaborate verneinung, an elaborate denial of passivity and masochism” (8). So if the pleasure of passivity is felt by the male subject who is drawn to rewrite the LRRH pattern, this passivity is simultaneously denied within the text produced, ascribed to the heroine, and girls in general.

Accordingly, I suggest that the difference in gender between the—probably female (Orenstein 61)—storytellers of oral LRRH material and the male authors of its most prominent literary versions result in two distinct ways of articulating the formation of subjectivity. In my reading, while the oral material is clearly distinct from literary incarnations, the two most notable literary versions of the LRRH pattern are more alike than they first appear. Perhaps the reason they have become conflated into a generalized conception of LRRH is that the distance between the “tragic” ending of “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” and the rebirth in “Rotkäppchen” is not as vast as may be first thought. As Cristina Bacchilega observes, these disparate endings have been “significant to the interpretation of the tale as a whole” (54) in LRRH scholarship. However, Bacchilega points to the existence of unhappy endings in the tales collected by Paul Delarue and argues, with Soriano, that this ending may already have existed in oral culture (Bacchilega 55). Clarifying the chronology of these distinct endings seems less significant than accounting for the recurrence of each of them; indeed, as Bacchilega states, “the popularity of both endings in a literary and folkloristic context attests to their value and vitality” (55). In terms, the little boy recognises himself as a separate person, and thus is reborn, while his passive infant self, the little girl who was in danger of being swallowed up by m/Other, has died. The heroine of “Rotkäppchen” vows, “Never again in your life will you stray by
yourself into the woods when your mother has forbidden it” (137), a statement seemingly congruent with what Zipes sees as a consistent narratorial attempt to locate the genesis of the wolf’s violence in the girl’s gender (11). However, it is also possible to understand it as the heroine refusing her former attitude of passivity, stating that she will not let this bad thing happen again. Thus, the declaration could signal that the protagonist assumes responsibility in every sense, denying passivity, growing up.

While Feona Attwood states that the gender ambiguity in “Rotkäppchen” is “bloodily resolved” (101) when the girl is gobbled up, the far more overt resolution is when the girl is safe and the wolf is dead, especially because when the wolf swallows the girl in “Rotkäppchen” he is cross-dressed, as Attwood notes elsewhere. Attwood observes that both wolf and heroine of “Rotkäppchen” “become victim and persecutor in horrifying acts of destruction” (99), yet the role exchange is not actually peppered throughout the text but occurs in a decisive reversal at the end. The girl's passivity is cast off as the heroine is reborn, paralleling the birth of the self that occurs as the male subject imputes what he remembers as his former passivity to his sister. In the Sondheim musical Into the Woods, when the heroine is cut from the wolf’s stomach, she sings a song entitled, “I Know Things Now” 

8 See Into The Woods (videorecording).

9 The few times when the girl is a persecutor still rely on the existence of traditional versions for the surprise. Two examples are by James Thurber (see Zipes 229) and Roald Dahl (see Orenstein 157–158).
CHAPTER THREE

Playing Her Part:

A Female Poet Rewrites That Story

I have ink but no pen, still
I dream that I can piss in God’s eye.
I dream I’m a boy with a zipper.
It’s so practical, la de dah.
The trouble with being a woman, Skeezix,
is being a little girl in the first place.
Not all the books of the world will change that.
I have swallowed an orange, being woman.
You have swallowed a ruler, being man.
Yet waiting to die we are the same thing.

(Anne Sexton, “Hurry Up Please It’s Time” The Complete Poems 384)

Marjorie Garber’s Vested Interests (1997) places transvestism at the heart of Western culture, and invites scholars to look at, rather than through, this act. For Garber, transvestism instigates a crisis of gender by confusing the signifier and the signified; but at the same time, it reifies the function of the signifier (that of particular clothes to signify particular genders). Thus, she reasons, transvestism instates metaphor’s ability to create meaning. Cross-dressing represents the deferral and repression of the truth regarding gender and sexuality, that these are constructed. In approaching yet concealing the unsayable, transvestism both explodes and instates individual subjectivity (390). For Garber, Little Red Riding Hood epitomises this social phenomenon; in fact, she declares the tale “the primal scene of narrativized cross-dressing” (389), thus part of the larger narrative of the primal scene (the Freudian term for witnessing, even in fantasy, coitus between one’s parents, and the realization of one’s own conception, and contingency, projected in hindsight onto this scene). Garber’s elucidation has been crucial to my
thinking about LRRH rewritings, as I posited that, despite the veneer of adhering to patriarchal ideology, the gendered subject/object division in these tales is exaggerated rather than naturalized; and further reasoned that the act of rewriting this story might be symptomatic for men, expressing an occulted longing for what lies beyond the patriarchal order. But what could it mean when a female subject takes up the narrative? This question propels the final chapter of my thesis.

A comprehensive survey of female-authored versions of LRRH would constitute an independent project, so this chapter focuses on a single iteration of these: Anne Sexton’s “Red Riding Hood”, from her collection of fairy tale poems Trans formations (1971). I use material from Sexton’s life, for which I am indebted to Diane Middlebrook’s Anne Sexton: A Biography (1991); but Sexton’s poem will be primarily placed in the context of literary LRRH retellings: the tradition of rewriting and revision explored in chapter two.

Lee Burns’s article “Red Riding Hood” (1972) approaches Sexton’s poem from the context of the tale’s retelling. I, too, take this less common route into understanding the poem; moreover, I remain conscious of place of gender in the tale’s authorship. The preponderance (although not total domination, as I will show) of male-authored LRRH tales leads me to wonder about Sexton’s identity as a woman writer, and how this identity might find articulation within the poem. Elisabeth Bronfen’s essay “Performing Hysteria: Anne Sexton’s ‘Business’ of Writing Suicide” (1998) connects Sexton’s personas and the way they intersect with her poetry to Butler’s notion of gender as performative rather than biologically ingrained.

I elaborate upon this association and explore how the theatricality of Sexton resonates with theatricality in the LRRH pattern. I was intrigued by the ways Sexton’s dramatic flair and use of personas might foreshadow the camp inhabitation of femininity currently at large in poetics, represented in Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg’s compendium Gurlesque (2010). Glenum writes that these contemporary women poets and artists “perform their femininity in a campy or overtly mocking way” (11), and I use this idea to determine how Sexton’s poetic engagement with social constructions of gender compares with these current female writers. Sexton’s wolf is a “kind of transvestite”, and her version of LRRH provides an example of the uses to which the story as a “primal scene of cross-dressing” may be put. Sexton interweaves personal narrative and contemporaneous detail with the Grimm’s tale in “Red Riding Hood”, I suggest, as a means to interrogate and destabilise identity.

10 See Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity (1990)
Many critics see *Transformations* as a turning point in Sexton’s work (Wagner-Martin 8). Rose Lucas’s “A Witch’s Appetite: Anne Sexton’s *Transformations*” (1993) describes this shift as transmuting the “so-called ‘confessional concerns’ of Sexton’s other poetry into a struggle with “the tension, inherent within patriarchy, which is involved in locating a speaking position as a woman and as a poet” (73). My analysis builds on Lucas’s work by looking at “Red Riding Hood” in particular through this lens, and suggesting that this struggle often forms the crux of the female personas Sexton assumed, specifically those of storyteller-witch, and little girl. I return to Julia Kristeva’s theory of the maternal abject, the focus of chapter one, and to Jessica Benjamin’s notion of the daughter position, elaborated in chapter two, to understand how these personas use existing patriarchal notions of gender to make gender strange, and how that might affect Sexton’s account of LRRH. However, while Lucas concludes that Sexton finally does not “effect the transformation of the categories of witch and maiden” (84–85), I maintain that through a combination of confessional style and use of personas, the element of theatricality serves to reveal these categories as constructed, and thus undermines their ability to convincingly present as anything other than patriarchy’s phantoms.

There are innumerable variants of LRRH and this thesis does not purport to cover them all, but returning to the critical theories of fiction and gender employed in chapter one reveals the ways in which Sexton’s poem echoes “Mère grand”, the text discussed in the first chapter. Furthermore, apprehending it from the context of rewriting demonstrates what it shares with the LRRH stories of Perrault and Grimm. Cristina Bacchilega has already drawn strong parallels between last century’s LRRHs by women, and the oral tradition of LRRH (70). However, through the context of literary versions of LRRH, I hope to find wider resonances that indicate that the magnetism of the LRRH pattern could be due to the self-shattering possibilities it holds, that which Kristeva describes as the “the braided horror and fascination that bespeaks the incompleteness of the speaking being” (*Powers* 209). Just as “Mère grand” mimics the process of the primal abjection at infancy, Sexton’s “Red Riding Hood” follows the borders of the individual as they are erased, and then redrawn; yet this poem is an adaptation of the Grimm’s “Rotkäppchen” (*Vonnegut ix*). This reading is intended to encourage hidden commonalities in my sample texts to come to the fore, making the endurance of the LRRH pattern apparent through this poem’s affinity with the process of individuation.
LRRH’s prevalence in female-authored work is a recent trend, but marked enough to merit being taken into account when discussing LRRH as a whole. Women writers have a long tradition of engaging with fairy tales in various ways, as Donald Haase details in his 2004 overview *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (vi–viii). As Haase puts it, “the fairy tale as a primary site for asserting and subverting ideologies of gender is evident throughout the genre’s history” (vii), and LRRH is no exception. Zipes’s own compendium of LRRHs includes various anonymous stories where the gender of the author is unknown. Also, while it is true that authors of literary LRRHs up until the mid-twentieth century have most frequently been male, as Zipes emphasises, it is also true that the second wave of feminism saw a sharp increase in the critical discourse around fairy tales and gender, and a corresponding echo in contemporaneous literature. Haase dates this interest back to 1970, when “scholarly research explicitly devoted to feminist issues in fairy-tale studies began in earnest” (vii), an event he ascribes to the feminist movement’s wider interrogation of gender. Alison Lurie thought that fairy tales, possibly a relic of lost matriarchal cultures, “suggest a society in which women are as competent and active as men” (42), while Helen Cixous countered that through modelling patriarchal gender roles, fairy tales indoctrinate girls into passivity (65–66). For Zipes, while second-wave feminism contributed to subverting the LRRH pattern, but because earlier texts tend to resemble either Perrault’s or the Grimms’ versions of LRRH, to maintain his argument about the misogyny in these versions it is necessary for Zipes to insist that “women writers of the nineteenth century” (48) who rewrote LRRH also displayed misogyny, thus dismissing their choice of this tale as “contribut(ing) to their own oppression and circumscription” (48). Feona Attwood’s article “Who’s Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood” (1999) focuses on “Little Red Cap” (“Rotkäppchen”) but from this makes claims about “the classic Little Red Riding Hood” (104): a problematic jump. Attwood’s conclusion—that LRRH is not “in any way ‘by’, ‘for’ and ‘about’ female authors and audiences” (104)—likewise overlooks these nineteenth century authors of LRRHs, as well as the later female authors, and the impact of second-wave feminism’s critical discourse around fairy tales. Claiming LRRH has nothing to do with women writers and readers also fails to recognise the extent to which women in a patriarchal society necessarily engage with male fears and phantasies, such as those Attwood’s own article perceives within Rotkäppchen.

Even the versions of LRRH dating from the era of second wave feminism may not always take a particularly iconoclastic stance towards the LRRH stories of Perrault and
Grimm. Angela Carter’s “wolf stories” (“The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”) in The Bloody Chamber (1979) preclude the rape that Zipes sees as central to “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” (at the wolf’s threat, the heroine of “The Company of Wolves” “burst[s] out laughing; she knew she was nobody’s meat” [118]). Yet Carter had also translated a volume of Perrault’s stories (The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault 1977), indicating she held his work in high esteem. In 1985, an interviewer described The Bloody Chamber as “taking a patriarchal form like the fairy tale and rewriting it”, a statement Carter rejected. Actually, she corrected, she was “taking the latent content of these traditional stories and using that” (qtd in Bacchilega 69). This includes attributes of the LRRH pattern that live “in the margins of the text and in performance” which, as Cristina Bacchilega observes, bring the LRRH pattern back to the “girl’s actual feasting on her Grandmother’s flesh in oral tradition” (70). Excluding rape from her wolf-stories makes it doubtful Carter perceived it to be at the core of Perrault’s tale. Rather, I suggest she saw what “Le Petit” shared with other stories: the “latent content”. Furthermore, during and since that time, this tale has been chosen by women to reflect their first-person experience: for example, in the autobiographical novel Rödluran (1986) by Marta Tikkanen. Female poets such as Olga Broumas in Beginning with O (1977) and Carol Ann Duffy in The World’s Wife (1999) mobilise seemingly biographical detail to place themselves in the role of LRRH’s protagonist. Sexton’s mode of poetic writing similarly encourages a personal identification with her protagonist. Although, the narrator of “Red Riding Hood” is not necessarily Sexton, we might easily assume that it is she through Sexton’s presence as a literary figure, her confessional style, and the fact that she so often read her poetry aloud. Again, in these cases, the allusion to LRRH does not so much invert the Grimm and Perrault versions of LRRH as perhaps bring out occulted aspects of the pattern, often to illustrate something about gender and sexuality.

Zipes sees Sexton’s “Red Riding Hood” as an expression of what is, for him, the overarching concern of Transformations: “how women are used as sex objects and how their lives become little more than commodities or hollow existences when they follow the social paths designed for them” (64). Carol Leventon claims that Transformations depicts the male characters with empathy but Sexton “does not extend this potentially healing acceptance to or suggest a similar nurturing relationship to the young women of the tales at the same time that she celebrates her own power to comprehend and articulate. One effect of this is to perpetuate the mutually exclusive female roles—active, vocal, ‘witch’ who
breaks free/manipulated, passive girl who stays trapped—that make the tales of her source so problematic for so many female readers” (146). Leventon calls this a “devastating vision of women’s roles” (136) but I would like to link this contrast between the girl and witch roles to the “enormous gulf between” the voices of Sexton’s letters and the poems, described by Margaret Atwood in her review of a collection of letters as Sexton’s “habit of splitting herself in two” (15). This duality coheres with the way Kristeva regards women’s writing as oscillating between positions of identification with the phallic order, and denying its power through avoiding it. Lucas’s “A Witch’s Appetite” also identifies this split in Transformations, as Sexton adheres to and moves beyond (through the figure of a witch) the constraints of patriarchal values and discourse. I am in accordance with this, but rather than interpreting this oscillation as evidence of a psychical struggle, I would like to reframe it by emphasising Sexton’s detachment from both positions. Marian Seldes, an actor, described Sexton’s thespian streak: “(t)here was a great deal of what people think of as an actress about Anne. She was a dramatic-looking person; her behaviour was interesting; her laugh, people would say if she was an actress, was a theatrical laugh. Oh yes, her reactions were spontaneous and full, not guarded. She fit in with actors instantly” (qtd in Middlebrook 320). I see the overt theatricality of Sexton’s self-fashioning, as well as the movement between personas, as constantly questioning the possibility of a stable identity. In opposition to Leventon, I posit that Sexton’s “passive girl” is not a representation of other women who lack the power to “comprehend and articulate”, but is highlighted as a role, just as the storyteller-witch is a role.

Sexton frequently opened her readings with her poem “Her Kind”, saying, “I’m going to read you a poem that tells you what kind of poet I am, what kind of woman I am, so if you don’t like it you can leave” (xix). Critics and audiences were invited to read her poems autobiographically, and their responses accord with this. Poet Elizabeth Bishop demurred, “I feel I know too much about her” (qtd in Middlebrook 125), and the language of other critics focuses on Sexton’s perceived lack of discretion. Even the relatively sympathetic Rosemary Johnson talks of Sexton “staining the linen of the culture”, not far from the expression “airing dirty laundry” (92). Rose Lucas wrote in 2009 that Sexton’s poems “offer profound insights into the dialectical exchange between life-affirming speech and melancholic silence, between the drives for pleasure and those for death, which haunt the lives and experiences of all readers” (Gifts of Love, Gifts of Poison 57). Indeed, Sexton’s relentless focus on taboo topics may act to highlight their universality. As Alicia Ostriker
writes, Sexton is the “easiest poet to condescend to”, her personal style enabling detractors to dismiss her work as the outpourings of a “primitive” or a “crazy suicidal lady” (11). Ostriker demonstrates how criticism that centres on Sexton’s personality, labelling her a narcissist or castigating her for a “lack of reticence”, bears witness to her statement that, in writing as in life, “to expose a personal fragility is to invite attack” (11). Crucially, however, Ostriker stresses that this critical disdain actually stems from “a fear of being stung into imaginative sympathy”, a fear provoked in response to three qualities in Sexton’s oeuvre, her frank and constant mention of the female anatomy; her untethered emotion, making a demand to be loved; and “her quality of unresignedness” (11). This last manifests as “feverish attempts to ‘gnaw at the barrier’ dividing us from each other and from the ‘weird abundance’ of our creative capacities” (11). This quality made Sexton a particularly apposite author to rewrite the LRRH pattern because, as I have argued, this pattern also works to erode the barriers dividing us from ourselves, and each other. It is possible Sexton used this, and the construct of the little girl, as a means to an end. In Sexton’s later poetry, Alice Ostriker compares her with Emily Dickinson in that she “modeled her God on the image of a father”, whom she seems to have “needed” to write; and she identifies Sexton’s attitude to God as that of a “coy little girl” (16). Jessica Benjamin’s understanding of “The Daughter Position” again illuminates the way this seemingly innocuous, or even cloying, “coy little girl” role might embody the vulnerability and passivity disavowed by the masculine subject. Provoking unease, the little girl role exaggerates the gendered power distribution maintained but disguised by Western culture, while simultaneously reminding the male subject of an identification which subjectivity and culture do their best to deny. The “child-woman’s ferocious need for cosmic love” (Ostriker 14) is unrelenting, and will not be placated, refusing to let us be consoled.

Adrienne Rich’s statement that “(h)er head was often patriarchal, but in her blood and her bones, Anne Sexton knew” (122) depicts a split between mind and body. Rose Lucas similarly notices a “Cartesian duality” in Sexton’s work, but alongside another act “that conflates narcissistic regard with violent masochism and self-loathing” (“A Witch’s Appetite” 73). Sexton was conscious of the place of mental illness and suicidal tendencies in her public persona; even while she was alive, she was unflinching in discussing these taboo topics, she was ahead of her time in her subject matter, as Adrienne Rich pointed out in 1979 (121). Diana Hume George also sees Sexton’s self-destructiveness as a nexus of social notions about projected onto specific people. According to George, “we ask (poets)
to speak the unspeakable for us, and when they do, we are capable of effecting a violently
negative transference” (xiii). She characterises Sexton as something of a sacrificial lamb
(albeit perhaps self-appointed) driven, as Oedipus was commanded, to know herself: “to
seek enlightenment concerning her, concerning our, fate” (7). Sexton related her quest for
truth unflinchingly through her work, in George’s account; however, I continue to see the
poet figure as a role for Sexton, and the quest for truth as a demand of this the role, rather
than a goal that trumps all Sexton’s other roleplaying. To read Sexton’s work simply as
autobiographical is to reduce the multi-faceted violence in her poetry to the self-destructive
tendency she demonstrated through suiciding, doing a disservice to her legacy, which is her
work. While it is necessary to resist glamorising her death, it is nevertheless possible to
acknowledge that Sexton invokes and toys with the image of the suicidal woman poet in
her work, without reading this as proof of her subscribing wholeheartedly to this image as a
model of creativity. I would like to view the act of regarding the female body Rose Lucas
describes in light of George’s ideas. I suggest that “Red Riding Hood” could similarly
involve Sexton embodying pre-existing social notions, which is the conflation of the sexual
objectification of body coded female, with the abject as represented by the maternal body.
The poet narrator herself is a liar, one of the deceivers, as she informs us, seemingly frank:
“And I. I too.”11 So, “Red Riding Hood” locates this abject within the female narrator’s
self, which is thus linked to her female body. Since, as Kristeva observes, female bodies are
socially conflated with their sometime maternal function (Oliver 161), women writers need
not cross gender as a means to approach abjection, but may turn inwards. As Rich’s phrase
obliquely suggests, the female body can be liberatory in Sexton’s work through its use of
the abject.

To dwell a little further on Rich’s image, when Sexton’s “mind was gone”, as the
expression has it, that would also be escaping her patriarchal head. The “weirdness” of the
witch is related to her mental illness as well as her female body: two aspects of Sexton’s self
that were socially constructed as abject. Middlebrook links Sexton’s depictions of insanity
to her female body, and Paula M. Salvio calls attention to how much this framing shares
with Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of the body as a situation (15). For example, in the first
poem of Transformations, “The Golden Key”, the narrator’s ability to speak is melded
together with her uncontained body, and also her strangeness: “The speaker in this case /
is a middle-aged witch, me —/tangled on my two great arms” (1). Yet, although these two

11 All references to “Red Riding Hood” are taken from Sexton’s Transformations (73–79).
elements are constantly invoked, they are not conflated with identity; just as the wolf is doomed by his nature to die, a point I will discuss in more detail later, the strange female-bodied self must be abjected in order for the narrator to maintain the voice of authority.

The role of the witch, in turn, embodies many elements of the abject maternal. Diana Hume George notes in *Oedipus Anne*, “the introduction to Transformations allows us to picture children gathering around the witch” (112). Sexton speaks to “her own generation…adults she knows are still internally young” (112), and thus the “middle aged witch” narrating Transformations positions herself as a Mother Goose figure to them, and the other readers. She names them and asks: “Do you remember when you were read to as a child?” (1). As Rose Lucas explains in “Double Hooks: American Women Poets Write the Maternal” (2000), inhabiting the figure of the witch is itself disruptive, since to speak from the place of the maternal subject disrupts patriarchy’s dominant narrative—that of the oedipal boy entering the Law of the Father—and in itself raises “broader questions about gender” (15). Alicia Ostriker notes, “(f)ar more than Plath, Sexton challenges our residual certainties that the life of the body should be private and not public, and that women especially should be seen and not heard, except among each other, talking about their messy anatomies. We believe, I think, that civilization will fall if it is otherwise” (11). I suggest that the female body in Transformations brings its vestiges of the maternal that summon the memory of the chora, the pre-lingual semiotic state which precedes the self. Ostriker comes close to agreeing with my point when she writes that Transformations recalls “the helpless ur-self whose whole world is touch and taste, who fantasizes omnipotence, who dreads annihilation in a thousand ways” (13). So while confronting us with the maternal abject, Sexton reminds us of its constant, repressed presence in ourselves.

Transformations achieves this through allowing the quotidian to floods into the fairy tales; in *Anne Sexton and Middle Generation Poetry* (2004), Philip McGowan calls this hybrid “the fantastic and the mundane, the possible and the improbable, the poetic and the pragmatic”(74). This unstable register allows Sexton’s marginal witch narrator to enter into the midst of normalcy. Rose Lucas observes that “Red Riding Hood” places the witch in amongst us, in the “suburban matron” who can fly, a witch who is “not always readily distinguishable from the ordinary woman” (77). The confessional nature of Sexton’s oeuvre similarly not only complicates notions of an author as an omniscient, objective voice, but may also use the idea of female suicidal poet to illustrate the lure of the abject, without naturalizing the gender dichotomy underlying this idea. In his introduction to
Transformations, Kurt Vonnegut Jr writes that what makes him “grateful in (his) bones for poets” is the “deep favour” Sexton does for him: “she domesticates my terror, examines and describes it, teaches it some tricks which will amuse me, then lets it gallop wild in my forest once more. She does this for herself too, I assume” (vii). This slightly patronising image actually reveals strong affinities with George’s idea of poets’ “ritual function” (xiii).

Vonnegut describes their prior meeting at a literary party, an event which happens to be shadowed in “Red Riding Hood” with a depiction of the cocktail party where the poet is “seemingly quite collected”, although the reader knows the truth. Like the notion of the solitary male artist discussed in the previous chapter, the figure of the suicidal female poet is equally a product of gendered social mores influencing modes of artistic expression and authorial self-conception. Sexton’s work, however, mobilizes this trope in useful ways. Sexton’s drive towards (seeming) self-exposure provoked shame in others, that affect which is instrumental in forming the subject; as Sedgwick reminds us, “shame interrupts identification but in doing so… makes identity” (36). Longing for death in Sexton’s work may be also understood as a movement towards the abject, towards union with the m/Other, partially enacted through a public persona bent on self-destruction.

In “Red Riding Hood”, as in many of Sexton’s poems, the motif of internal anguish and suicidal thoughts appears. Yet while anguish is described as a solitary event, it binds people together. “Red Riding Hood” begins with a list of deceivers and their deceptions, a place that initially seems tangential to the tale. In fact, this unlikely sideways approach allows Sexton to edge neatly into the “strange deception” at the heart of the poem. The other attendees of the cocktail party, a social event, are unaware that inside the narrator’s head she is “undergoing open-heart surgery”; the confession of pain privileges the reader and provides not just empathy but intimacy with her. This revelation, with mention of the presumably stuffy cocktail party, contains a hint of an alternate scenario where she has had too many cocktails and so have we, and we are backed into a corner or are the last two left on the smoking deck, blurring out secrets with an abandon we will regret tomorrow. The comedian, in contrast, keeps his inner life closed to the reader, but with the slash of wrists and blood leaking out, his humanity is rendered overt. Suffering and death humanises and unites the readers with the disparate cast of characters, just as a return to physical safety and mental tranquillity distances them from us. We get no insight into the thoughts of the hunter, or the girl and grandmother as they emerge unharmed at the end, except to say what they are not thinking. Through the lack of positive statements of their thoughts, they
are less identifiable than the dead wolf, whose dreaming head we last entered (when he was “wolfless”). As Sexton’s contemporary Lee Burns noted in 1972, she “makes the wolf strangely vulnerable…Sexton suggests that his ‘crime’ did not approach theirs” (35). The ultimate scene in the poem has the huntsman, grandmother and heroine sitting down by the wolf’s corpse, where they “had a meal of wine and cake”. The cosy little funeral meal recalls “Let them eat cake”: a saying which entered the English vernacular due to a probably apocryphal story about Marie Antoinette: when informed her subjects were starving for want of bread, the unfortunate monarch allegedly responded thus. Whatever its veracity, the anecdote is intended to demonstrate either lack of empathy or comprehension in Marie Antoinette, and there seems a similar blinkered callousness in the little party next to the corpse.

The bullying collusion of the three and their obliviousness to the dead body beside them provides a stark counterpoint to the loneliness of the suffering parties earlier in the poem. This loneliness is clear with regards to the narrator who must hide her feelings at a party, the comic who muffles his despair, and “an old Jenny” who gets robbed of her savings by two other women; but in the case of the suburban matron with a lover, her pain is less obvious. She seems to be named as a “deceiver”, most obviously in her marriage, but her husband is not present in the moment the poet captures. His reaction, if he finds out, is rather secondary, as are any feelings of guilt on her part. Instead, the woman’s solitude is highlighted by the fact that she has to keep her excitement to herself and pretend to be calm, deceiving the general public. These characters, whether deceivers or deceived, have in common a failure to “naturally” fit to their environment, just as the wolf will be bloodily ousted from the world of the humans to which, cross-dressed, he seemed for a time to belong. “Red Riding Hood” can be read as a paean to not belonging, to the way loneliness sharpens the edges of the self. Yet as individual subjectivity is brightly outlined, a shadow appears; the memory emerges of the semiotic unity with m/Other, a pull towards abjection.

The obliviousness of the diners is also shadowed in the deliberate forgetting that concludes the poem. The last stage of abjection is the return of the subject. Unity is once again dissolved as the abject is relegated to the m/Other. Abjecting the m/Other, as mentioned in chapter one, can be perceived her betrayal or abandonment. Likewise, after the wolf is stone-stuffed and disposed of, “Red Riding Hood” concludes with the figures of the grandmother and girl forgetting what has passed: “those two remembering/ nothing
naked and brutal”. Kaja Silverman argues for amnesia as a coping mechanism, which enables us to retreat from the truth; faced with the teeming multiplicity of the universe, the only way to appear to exercise mastery is to exercise what the writer Paul Valéry called “our grand capacity for deliberately forgetting” (qtd in Silverman, *Flesh* 135). The line break installs a touch of ambiguity within their forgetfulness, however; the two *are* remembering, until “nothing naked and brutal” blanks this out. With these adjectives dressing the “nothing”, we are alerted to the presence of something beyond representation, beyond thought. We witness the effort to efface the primal abjection, but not the complete vanishing of it, since it can be repressed but not removed.

As McGowan points out, Sexton locates the nexus of fraud and related destruction in language, particularly through the comedian, the only male (human) deceiver, who falls at the centre of the list (82). The poem’s opening proclamation is calm, resigned: “many are the deceivers”. The narrator is seemingly unmoved as she coolly relates the various deceptions of the gallery. But she shares her suffering with us; she encourages us to doubt the veracity of her composure. While she asks, “Where is the moral?” when an old Jenny is robbed, she is silent by the time LRRH occurs. Her self-possession in the face of the character’s suffering may be seen as an extension of this deceitful behaviour; her role as author of the poem, like her role as middle-class housewife at a cocktail party, requires a certain amount of deceit. The readers bear witness to the effort of the narrator to inhabit the role of author, but her struggle is actually part of the performance of this role. This narrator is congruent with Sexton’s public persona: a troubled woman, a suburban housewife, who writes as a means of therapy. Through the confessional style, direct address, and the nature and frequency of Sexton’s readings, we are encouraged to read the poems through relating them to such a figure.

Just as, for Butler, drag reveals the performatve nature of gender, the poet persona that Sexton called “Storyteller” (Middlebrook and George xiii) reveals a private life without upholding it as an internal essence, thus undoing the notion of a stable identity. Sexton enjoyed great success on the reading circuit (Middlebrook 319, 390), even allowing her to demand a higher fee than was usual (152). At the same time, the act of public self-revelation also throws into question the self’s authenticity, the nebulous quality on which the value of a “confession” is predicated. Allowing Sexton a degree of intentionality in her public persona makes it possible to discern how she might use “Red Riding Hood” to make evident the problematic stereotypes and paradoxes interwoven into the notion of the
woman writer. Sexton’s female roles recall Joan Riviere’s influential essay, “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929), in which Riviere observes herself and her female peers flaunting an excess of femininity “both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (213). These women, described as intellectuals, were anxious about inhabiting the subject position usually allocated to men. While Sexton may not have been an intellectual per se (Middlebrook describes her teaching style as “not for the well-read in literature” [340]), as a writer she was pronouncing authority. Thus she was in possession of what Riviere calls “masculinity”, inhabiting the subject position. This masquerade matches the deceits—punished and unpunished—that the poem details. Sexton’s self-presentation could even be said to entail “feminist camp” avant la lettre, resembling the contemporary poetry and art presented in the anthology Gurlesque (2010). Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg define Gurlesque as “a feminine, feminist incorporating of the grotesque and cruel with the spangled and dreamy” (2). Anne Sexton is among those named as forerunners to Gurlesque (21). Glenum claims, however, that one main point of difference from second wave feminists is Gurlesque’s lack of attachment to a stable identity, whereas “to engage in persona is to assume there is a face beneath the mask” (13). Yet, as she then ruminates in a footnote, “it has never been clear to me that the poets we deem ‘confessional’ actually conceive of their poetic practice as confession rather than the creation of a transitory, ephemeral self on the page” (13). Glenum’s reservation here hits on a crucial, often overlooked, nuance of Sexton’s work. In the vision of Sexton’s style offered by Elisabeth Bronfen, “her poetry was always meant to be seen in quotation marks” (139). Jacqueline Rose similarly finds Sexton’s niche to be “the personal as the ultimate persona” (23). She points out that even in the debate around the use of Sexton’s therapy tapes in Middlebrooks’s biography, “we assume that in her sessions—as recorded—Sexton was always telling the truth” (23). These tapes are accorded “the status of a unique form of truth-telling” when their very existence is “testimony to the disjunctive and contradictory ways in which a self can remember” (23 emphasis original). A similar assumption is extended to the narrator. As Philip McGowan notes: “Whether ‘spy’ or ‘crook’…a writer is for Sexton involved within a dishonest subversive practice that counterfeits, that posits the replica as the original, the false for the real” (47). Within the context of Sexton’s work, then, I suggest the primary function of her confessional style is to draw attention to the deceitfulness inherent in the myth of the objective (male) writer, by contrasting it with an abject, uncontained, over-sharing female voice. But this too is a
persona: “I suspect that I have no self so I produce a different one for different people”, declared Sexton (qtd in Middlebrook 62). I stress the possibility of the storyteller-witch persona as just one of these selves.

Sexton’s gendered identity is integral to her work; in her appraisal of Sexton, “The Woman of Private (but Published) Hungers” (1988), Rosemary Johnson discerns that her “perceptions and her sensibility are female, stem from her womanhood” (92). Yet Johnson goes on to dismiss the poet’s expressions of “lack of gender, androgyny, hermaphroditism, and the like” as “toy(ing), for effect one feels” (92), a circular argument that disregards the myriad other ways that Sexton overtly engaged with gender. However, for me, these other attitudes to gender do not nullify the “womanhood” Sexton expresses, but enrich and enhance it. Although Sexton was a “knockout”, in Adrienne Rich’s words (qtd in Middlebrook 111) and thus arguably would have met contemporary standards of female worth, she allied herself with witches, such as the central character of “Her Kind”. Additionally, her disinclination to adhere to dominant standards of good taste meant that she destabilised the markers of gender even as she seemed to reproduce them. Elisabeth Bronfen links this specifically to Butler’s notion of performative gender, writing that Sexton’s “public self-representations perform the terms of the production of woman as text, as image, but by virtue of the performance also exceed the constraint” (131). The distance between this persona and her gender is openly exhibited: identifying herself through “Her Kind” as “not a woman, quite” (qtd in Middlebrook 114) exposed a remove between Sexton’s gender presentation and her identity. For Bronfen, Sexton’s combination of performance and poetry manages to “cannily have staged a psychoanalytic and deconstructive truth, namely the fact that the most interior part of the psyche has, as Jacques Lacan argues, a quality of exteriority, of being Other, like a foreign body, a parasite, a state for which he coined the term ‘extimacy’” (129). The narrator of “Red Riding Hood” describes watching her heart run around in a maze, as if she is detached from it, just as she acts detached from the other betrayals she lists, committed by “the deceivers”. The narrator’s heart, traditionally positioned at the core of one’s being, becomes more and more distant, actually enacting that quality of being Other described by Bronfen. At first it is human, “poor fellow”, then a blind insect (an eyeless beetle) and finally, a dead blind insect. The narrator literally looks down on it, and describes it from above; this beetle-heart is also set at odds with Sexton’s voice, and consequently her role as author and narrator. It is her heart—both as a metonym for her subjectivity and emotions, and as organ vital to
her gendered body—that is the source of what is abject in her.

Sexton’s role as the omniscient narrator is at odds with the partisan nature of her self-hood, and her gender. This conflict emerges, jumbling and intersecting LRRH as it unfolds. Sexton demonstrates a lack of emotional containment as a narrator, although she tells us this is the sort of deception she manages well socially, at cocktail parties. However, there she would be required to fulfil the social role of bourgeois wife, in keeping with her gender and class. Each time she becomes more emotionally involved (“Where is the moral?”) the narrator must remove herself again to tell the story. In “Red Riding Hood”, feelings and subjectivity are surplus to her role as narrator, and her demonstration of this could be read as both a criticism of authorial pretentions to impartiality, and a questioning of the effect of this goal. As Diana Hume George puts it: “The overvaluation between ‘the man who suffers and the mind which creates’ makes inevitable the undervaluation of the feminine voice in our critical tradition” (92). “I can be deeply personal but I’m not being personal about myself” said Sexton (qtd in Salvio 4); a statement which, as Joanna Gill discusses in “‘My Sweeney, Mr. Eliot’: Anne Sexton and the ‘Impersonal theory of Poetry’” (2003), refers to and contradicts T.S. Eliot’s standard of the impersonal in poetry. The position of narrator is also in conflict with the other role she has been more adequately prepared for, that of wife and mother. “Where’s the aspirin?” she interjects, for example, as the child sets off with her basket. Because the ostensibly neutral voice of author is in fact a male voice, the feminine is made a point of difference, and this is actually shown as Sexton oscillates between the two. The confessional poet persona Sexton inhabits, this persona’s attempt to inhabit in turn the ideal (male) author role in the poem, and the resultant fissures this produces provide a further illustration of the disjuncture between individuals and their environments presented in various way in this poem.

Outside literary references continue to increase the tension around authorship and identity humming throughout this poem. Beatrix Potter’s “Peter Rabbit” is mentioned when the narrator questions the wisdom of taking cakes and wine to Grandmother. Potter was an esteemed children’s author, but this genre was not generally considered serious literature. However, the latent content of this tale of course invites speculation, and critics often tend to read the author through the text, just as Sexton, who unlike Potter was

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12 “Beatrix Potter was creating an order through which she could constitute meaning both for herself and for the imperilled child of her best friend”, claim Judith P. Robertson, Eugenia Gritziotis & Tony Campbell, for example (179).
knowledgeable about psychoanalysis, encouraged the idea of insights into the “self” of her narrator persona through her poems. Another reference has the narrator’s heart as a “Kafka beetle”. Franz Kafka, whose short story “The Metamorphosis” famously sees him turn into a beetle, is notable for his use of surrealism, and Walter Benjamin, Patrick Bridgewater and Tim Beasley-Murray have all caught the resonances of fairy tales in his work (Beasley-Murray 202). Both Peter Rabbit and the protagonist of “The Metamorphosis” are not human, yet we are on their side as they meet danger in their human antagonists (in Mr McGregor and Samson Gregor’s family respectively). This subtly foreshadows how Sexton will question our loyalty to the humans in LRRH.

The narrator is eventually almost successful in reconciling the contradictions in the notion “poetess”, through a sort of vanishing. Just as the individual self-formation of the LRRH pattern’s heroine necessitates a loss, a rejection of the abject in the form of the wolf, “Red Riding Hood” sees Sexton-as-narrator confide her “true feelings” about cocktail parties, lament her inability to escape her past, then disappear as the LRRH story takes precedence. The past “haunts” the “new house” of her present in the form of her mother, and in finally ridding herself of her subjectivity the interjecting female voice disappears from the poem, just as the haunting m/Other is abjected, or at least is able to be “forgotten”. By constructing the familiar characters of LRRH, inhabiting the role of the author might also be a way to escape herself; however, it fails, as the partisan quality of the narrator’s account remains, even when she is no longer “haunting” the “new house” of the story by interrupting it. And while the individual’s desire for the abject and for unity with the m/Other is also “forgotten” by the end of the poem, it also remains in the unconscious.

Indeed, although it is in the mode of confessional poetry, “Red Riding Hood” erodes the idea of a stable identity even as it reveals it; the poem is riven through with the shifting borders of the abject. The passage “I too. / Quite collected at cocktail parties, / meanwhile in my head / I’m undergoing open-heart surgery /…the heart, that eyeless beetle” demonstrates the corporeality of the narrator refusing to resolve into coherence. The anatomical picture it maps is unsettling; her heart within her head, her chest cut open, while she goes on to describe her heart as paradoxically both beating a drum and running around in a panic. In “Red Riding Hood” there are sudden fluctuations in size and proximity as well as weight, giving the impression of uncontainable bodies, of borderlines dissolving. The body of the wolf is rent into fragments: “what big ears you have, / ears,
eyes, hands and then the teeth”. Similarly, the human/animal divide is freely transgressed: the narrator’s heart is a beetle, the girl’s hood is “red as chicken blood”, the girl herself compared to Peter Rabbit. Even the barrier between life and death is notably permeable: the “faint death beat” of the narrator’s heart implies her veins and arteries pulse death through her body rather than life. In fact, the corpse, the ultimate abject entity for Kristeva (*Powers* 4), appears three times: the comedian, the narrator’s heart and, finally, the wolf. “Red Riding Hood” is rife with examples of the abject, and, like “Mère grand”, pulled between the competing wish for and fear of union with the m/Other.

As the familiar LRRH pattern emerges, its persistence corresponds to the failed repression of the primal abjection. This poem is haunted, like the A-frame house the narrator buys in an attempt to free herself of ghosts. This purchase was one of the “deceptions”; she is bound to fail as the repressed returns, so the deceived is herself. The spectre of a dead mother foreshadows the running together of death and the return to the womb which signals the state of abjection, and which is made present through the body of the wolf. The ocean seeping through brings with something that Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) called an “oceanic feeling”, a pre-egoic sense of union with everything; while the inescapability of this ocean heralds the imminent return to this. When the heroine is swallowed towards the end of the poem, she will find herself re-immersed in this state of oceanic feeling, in the belly of the wolf. It is prefigured much earlier, however, after one of the narrator’s abrupt shifts to direct address: “Where is the moral? / Not all knives are for stabbing the exposed belly. / Rock climbs on rock and it only makes a seashore”. Rock on rock is echoed later in the poem by the stones knocking against each other in the wolf’s belly; an “exposed belly” that has recently met with a knife, “a carnal knife” that connotes flesh (*carne*) as well as sexuality, dragging the heroine back to shore from the oceanic depths. The wolf is also shunted back from this state and returned to his own body.

Just as the mother haunts the narrator and will not let her escape her childhood, this seashore also repeats, through the ocean outside the house in Cape Cod. There, the kitchen has “the smell of a journey”, the journey with which LRRH always begins, and it always ends with the girl’s return home. The reader is also, in a sense, waiting for the LRRH story to begin, because of the poem’s title and its context in a book of fairy tales, which promotes a feeling of endless repetition or haunting. The lineation of the poem on the page also adds to the fatalistic effect this imagery produces. “Red Riding Hood” is composed of short lines, while its frequent use of repetition pulls the eye down the page.
(e.g. the lines 6–8 begin letting/letting/getting). At the words “make a new life” the narrator begins to tell the story of the tale proper, as if this is her attempt to start again, as if this time there might be a different ending. Once the poem moves to the story of LRRH, the narrator commences with the act of deceit—“a strange deception;/a wolf dressed in frills/a kind of transvestite”—before checking herself, and starting at “the beginning”. This (obviously deliberate) stumble draws attention still further to the repetitiousness of this tale, and accords the narrator’s account with the sense of inevitability chiming throughout the poem.

The wolf’s consumption of the heroine entails a counting down which resembles the counting down of pregnancy, but also of separateness melting away (only to be reinscribed at “birth”). The phrase begins with three distinct beings: “He appeared to be in his ninth month/and Red Riding Hood and her grandmother”. In the wolf’s belly, the latter are “two Jonahs”, identical and placed as if in utero, as if on a reverse journey from twins to zygote. They are then described as “One pigeon. One partridge”. This could be one of each, but the repeated “one” also gives an impression they are merging into a single being, which morphs from pigeon to partridge. The human/animal division is undone here, but so is the individuality of the two swallowed. Kristeva writes that the abject “only has one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1, emphasis original). Here we see all opposition give way as the I and abject unite.

Finally, the wolf, who inhabits the between-world while he is “dreaming in his cap and gown”, becomes “wolfless”. He dreams while in the garb of a human, reflecting an untenable desire for unity with the Other. That small neologism, “wolfless”, on its own line, is extremely powerful, indicating a complete annihilation of self for the wolf as well as the heroine. This moment is not explicit in the Grimm tale Sexton worked from, but arose from its latent content. Sexton was particularly attuned to the Grimm versions of the tales; she said the ones she rewrote “had to evoke something in me or I couldn’t do it” (No Evil Star 145). The dissolution of the wolf illustrates a complete union between two once distinct beings. In this state, in Kristeva’s words, “(i)t is no longer I who expel, ‘I’ is expelled” (3–4). This “wolfless” state of primordial unity, therefore, is communicable only through what it is not. When this state is disrupted, its affinities with sex, death and birth, all borderline states, become apparent. The hunter’s knife is “carnal”, and he also performs “a kind of caesarian section”; these two acts position the wolf as female, despite his masculine pronouns. The intervention of the hunter foregrounds the wolf’s gender
ambiguity and makes it the source of his demise. The carnal knife’s function is to open the belly, which condemns the wolf to die, since the humans will fill it with stones, as in “Rotkäppchen”. The rescue of the girl and Grandmother is the most obvious birth, but the wolf is also reborn at this point. He is no longer wolfless but back in his role of wolf, the Other. He is re-embodied so that he may be abjected in this form from the right and proper. The wolf’s destruction is required as abjection reinscribes the borders of the self.

The wolf contains this ending within him, much as tragic heroes of ancient Greek theatre possessed their hamartia (fatal flaw) from the play’s beginning. From the first image of the suburban matron, holding herself down with her list, weight and lightness are woven through the poem; and the wolf is as “heavy as a cemetery”, “killed by his own weight”. The workings of gravity, a natural law, lend this brutal death an inevitable quality, and it resonates with our own repressed knowledge of the certainty of our own death. The weightiness of the wolf’s death is underscored by this event being entirely predictable for the majority of readers, since most would be familiar with “Rotkäppchen”, or a truncated version. Despite our witnessing the means of death, the wolf’s demise is presented as a consequence of his nature rather than outside forces. The narrator sums him up as “a deceitful fellow” and after his death adds, “(m)any a deception ends on such a note”. According to the narrator’s logic, it was the kind of fellow the wolf was that dictated his end. However, the narrator’s ostensible moral position is complicated by the poem. The wolf’s deception is carried out in a manner that links him to the heroine; as Lee Burns observes, “(h)e is child-like in his disguise and in his eagerness” (35). Moreover, the OED Online states that the name Jenny is “sometimes applied derisively to a man who concerns himself with purely feminine matters”. The old woman Jenny who is robbed earlier in the poem is clearly a victim who deserves our sympathy; the wolf, who concerns himself with human and feminine matters is too, if less obviously so. Since our narrator is represented as subject to human limitations, these resonances gain all the more strength for not being explicitly discussed. The parallels between the child, the poor old woman, and the wolf are not stated by the narrator, but rather lined up and left to seep gradually into the poem’s silences.

In Transformations, Sexton only rewrote those Grimm stories which “evoked something” in her (No Evil Star 145). What moved her about “Rotkäppchen” may have been in sympathy with her theatricality and use of the abject. Sexton inhabits social constructions as roles—the passivity of the small girl, the insanity of the suicidal poet, and
the abject body of the mother—but always with the fluidity and excess that highlights their constructed nature. Through writing, she plays out the contradiction between masculine authority and these feminine roles, revealing the gendering of each position. Enacting this in “Red Riding Hood”, she is attuned to the the submerged narrative of a subject's encounter with finitude, which I have argued forms the crux of the LRRH pattern, and uses her personas to intensify the theatricality and gender ambiguity also inherent in the pattern. This is just one example of the LRRH pattern as it manifests in the work of a female author, wherein, as I have demonstrated, the motive is neither to subvert the LRRH of the Grimms, nor to reinscribe patriarchal gender norms, but to use this pattern to explore the limits of individual subjectivity, to approach the repressed knowledge of our own finitude. Other writers may reveal the contingency of identity in other ways through using the LRRH pattern, whether through confounding the hetero-gender matrix of patriarchy (e.g. Olga Broumas, Terayama Shuji), or continuing to reproduce a very similar story to the one told by Perrault and Grimm. But just as there are common elements which make these tales part of the LRRH pattern, both male and female tellers of the tale move towards the dissolution of the self; although each teller takes their own route, they arrive at the same place.
CHAPTER FOUR

i. FOREWORD TO POEMS

“…what is most distressing about Sexton, I think, is her quality of unresignedness… feverish attempts to ‘gnaw at the barrier’ dividing us from each other and from the ‘weird abundance’ of our creative capacities”

(Alicia Ostriker “That Story” 11)

“Once I speak, I express the universal and when I remain silent, no one can understand me”

(Soren Kierkegaard Fear and Trembling 85)

“A test of what is real is that it is hard and rough. Joys are found in it, not pleasure. What is pleasant belongs to dreams”

(Simone Weil Gravity and Grace 102)

If I were to locate myself in the production of this thesis, it is perhaps unsurprising that I would choose the part of Little Red Riding Hood. While writing and researching, I aimed to ally myself with the strand of criticism wherein the critic reveals his or her own presence, a challenge issued by Jane Tompkins’s “Me and my Shadow” (1989), for example. I therefore let things get personal, as I knew they must; as I know they do anyway. Having decided on such an approach, I took it to heart, something I am prone to do. When I was a child at the school sports fair, the Te Horo Primary School headmaster—a man who never lost an opportunity to impart a life lesson, who seemed to me endlessly wise, a cross between Santa and God, with his white hair and striped rugby socks—invoked tortoises and hares, and reminded us that nowhere was this test of character more crucial than in the egg and spoon race. I was suitably impressed by his words. As my mother enjoys recounting, after the race began, I inched forward, step by tiny step, oblivious to the crowd of restless siblings and bored parents; and eventually, to the other kids who had all finished and wanted ice blocks. Eventually the headmaster had to come over and inform me personally that the race was over so that everyone could go
home. I was untroubled by this, though, certain my dedication to being “slow and steady” had won me the only gold worth having that day. Writing this thesis, then, and attempting to make an “original contribution to knowledge”, I determined to do the best I could by personally engaging wherever possible; but again, there was a slightly monomaniacal aspect to the way I moved towards what I perceived to be the true goal—in this case, knowledge.

My extra-curricular approach meant that during the times I was not writing or reading about the tale, I saturated my senses with anything LRRH related (and there is a lot), hoping to imbibe the tale in a less conscious way. This chapter constitutes the part of the thesis that was born from a poetic engagement with the LRRH pattern. It opts out of attempting to position myself as the impartial scholar, and lets my academic voice fall silent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the introduction to Gurlesque provides a “genealogy” of influences on Gurlesque poetry (21). Like the claims Glenum and Greenberg make for Gurlesque poetry, my work attempts to situate itself in a lineage of women’s writing, and write back to it. The significance of silence in the history of women’s writing is expounded by works such as Adrienne Rich’s Lies, Secrets, and Silence (1979) and Tillie Olsen’s Silences (1978). But the important distinction here is that my silence is voluntary: not a lapse, but a meaningful pause. In this case, the momentary silencing of my critical voice is counterpointed by my turn to poetry, a language, in Kristeva’s conception, that holds vestiges of the pre-lingual, the rhythmic babble of the semiotic. With its emphasis on sound and rhythm, the motility of poetry can surpass the constraints of symbolic, according to Kristeva. Writing these poems was thus an attempt understand the LRRH pattern more fully by engaging with the ideas in my thesis in a less conscious way. In writing creatively, I was bringing my own unconscious unequivocally into my study of the LRRH pattern, but I was unsure if it would give me the outcome I wanted. So, again, I find myself returning to what is called passivity, and its parameters and possibilities as a stance. This failure to know about Little Red Riding Hood was more circuitous but could also yield something richer, unexpected. Accordingly, I decided on Sexton’s “Red Riding Hood” as a primary text in this study partly because I was interested in her engagement with psychoanalytic theory (Middlebrook 53–54), and how it might play out through poetry.

The other means I used to ensure my commitment to knowledge was to encourage transference to Anne Sexton, capitalising on my predilection for cathecting to charismatic, self-destructive women (the sorry details of which fall outside the scope of this thesis). I
undertook this naively, largely out of a desire to motivate myself as I prepared to study her work closely, read and write about her, and spend a good deal of my own life thinking about her. Sexton proved an all-too-suitable subject for my obsession, with her intensely personal poetry and the glut of material (photos, letters, therapy tapes) available to the prurient reader. I wanted to see what would happen if I attempted to consciously employ a usually counterproductive facility to take everything personally in order to produce something. Maybe I am not capable of Sexton’s extremities, but I wanted to push my natural tendencies - to idealise, to obsess, to be led - beyond the point of safety and reason. I also wanted to respond to my (barely acknowledged because so unwelcome and unflattering) concern that I would do better if I chose a more esoteric or obtuse poet; I feared her self-described “populist touch” would reveal me as an unexceptional thinker, all feeling, not knowledgeable enough, not rigorous enough. These doubts fitted Alicia Ostriker’s aforementioned “snee from fear” notion pretty well (11), that my slight queasiness about Anne Sexton resulted from an attempt to disown my affinity with her. Sexton herself felt shame for the poets she liked, Sara Teasdale and Edna St Vincent Millay, women who were not well regarded by contemporaneous critics. Tillie Olsen described herself and Sexton bonding over this: “We never needed to be guarded or dissemble. Our love of Sara Teasdale or Edna St. Vincent Millay didn’t shame us, with each other” (Middlebrook 197). This incident seemed to me to reveal in Sexton an anxiety about aligning herself with prevailing good taste, despite what comes across in her work as a disregard for these standards. Another way I felt we were similar is that both of us were motivated by strong transference in writing our poetry. Sexton wrote for her doctors, and I wrote for Sexton, as she became increasingly real to me.

Originally I had searched for commonalities between us, to find a way in, to care, but soon I no longer had to seek them. It began to seem like Sexton was writing to me. As I absorbed Sexton’s diary and letters, flicked through photos, compared accounts of her life, and read her poems, I felt myself being drawn further in, transfixed. Most of all, it was reading the poems, and feeling that I knew her as I read them. For Sexton, poetry was primarily a means of communication, especially between poets (Middlebrook 253). I also would like to think of it as such, an elliptical means of expression that circumscribes the problem of discourse which sabotages the most sincere effort to speak precisely and directly—as the Kierkegaard quotation at this foreword’s opening tries to describe. The coincidences were multiplying. A comprehensive list would be irrelevant here, but to
illustrate the irrational extent of them, one example I recall is that Sexton and I have a mole in the same place, which she describes in “The Fortress” matching her daughter’s, and comprising “a spot of danger where a bewitched worm ate its way through our soul” (The Complete Poems 66). At last, an explanation for my irredeemable weirdness—and someone to share it (a molemate!). In that ridiculous moment, the thing that makes me an outsider was reduced to something concrete and nameable, and of course, was also my redemption; as in childhood daydreams where one is discovered to be really of noble blood, and whisked away from a cruel and uncomprehending family, one detail cemented my place in the Sexton family tree. Although this inclusion would have been less than idyllic in reality, something was born from this imagined connection, something that, to me, continues to be unrecognizable.

The whole experience curiously resembled a crush in my reading (and/or misreading) signs—whether one is seeking non-verbal cues and the like, or sense of destiny or fate. I think it was a refusal to accept that the idea of a stable being who may come to be known through biography is a comforting illusion. Sexton called psychoanalysis “the big cheat”, for stirring up unconscious desires it would never fulfil. I was cheated too. I encouraged this transference in an attempt to meet and surpass the requirements of critical approaches that value embodiment. I didn’t realize that in so doing I was suspending disbelief about the notion of personal revelations having the ability to more accurately convey a stable truth. So what I felt towards Sexton grew out of a feeling that I was getting to know her, of communication, communion. But all we ever know of other people is what they do, what they tell us. It’s not just that people can’t always be trusted but that they can’t ever be known. The problem—as Sexton knew—is in language. Even when we speak what we feel to be the truth, and when we trust that others are doing the same, there is still so much room for miscommunication. There remains a part of each of us that is incommunicable. My most important real-life romantic relationships have all suffered from language barriers. Or perhaps I should say: my longest-lived relationships have had some sort of language barrier available to pin the blame on when the inevitable miscommunications surface. But in a relationship where there is nothing beyond language, there is little room for miscommunication. Anne Sexton became my most faithful correspondent.

In her essay, Jane Tompkins depicts herself in her office with the autumn trees rustling outside. Here I am, on a deep blue summer night, in my own office in a building at
the University of Melbourne. Most people have gone home but I can hear cleaners working on other floors. I have finished up for the day, and call my partner on Skype. The connection is bad: the picture pixelated, the sound fuzzy. We spend most of the call saying “what? please repeat”, “repita, por favor”, often at the same time. After about half an hour of this, we give up. I shut the laptop. Sexton is still where I left her, further over on the desk, on the back cover of “Words for Dr Y”. She smirks at me, beautiful, limned precisely in grayscale. Not being able to express yourself well only exaggerates and makes overt how discourse unites and divides us, that barrier disguised as a bridge. Sexton, poet and weirdo, gnawing away at the limits. I was drawn to this image of her (summed up in Ostriker’s quotation) and reached towards it, through reading and writing poetry. But the impossibility of understand and being understood remains. Even the attempt to reveal myself as critic in this thesis is problematic—difficult do in a way that feels honest, to balance the position of impulsiveness and naivety which permits exploration and playfulness with intellectual rigour, and the necessary scepticism to see a situation as it is, to not mistake a fantasy or a disguise for the fur and spit of reality.

In her 1927 biography of Rainer Maria Rilke, Lou-Andreas Salome declared her love for him thus: “you were for me the first real truth”, a phrase recalling his statement to her, “you alone are real to me” (24). Furthermore, as Iris Murdoch states, literature may do this too: “Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality” (51). Sexton herself is unknowable, like every other person I have wanted to know, and just as capable of intentional and unintentional miscommunication and deceit. The image may have been two-dimensional, but reaching for it, I found something real. Meanwhile, I initially attempted writing the poems with the themes of abjection, the girl figure, and gender performativity in mind, and traces of these concerns are evident to me; but it seemed my unconscious had its own trajectory. The poems would start out plodding along, obediently enough—and then go rolling off to one side, quick as mercury. Later, I would have to excise this first bit, cut off the string of shrivelled words that hung ugly and necessary as an umbilical cord. I had to throw out some poems that remained bad whatever I did, but the ones I liked, and included in the chapter, had organically grown into something else, something other than the poems I intended to write. To write the poems, I had to resist mastery. To get them to move on their own, I had to relinquish conscious understanding and with it the sense of control that allows.
It seems to me a similar kind of loss, and a similar kind of discovery: having to accept that I can’t really know Sexton, or anyone, just as I gave up writing the poems I had planned for and expected. I knew that despite my abundance of effort and passion, there is ultimately no objective truth about the LRRH pattern, or anything, just as people are not stable selves able to be reached by absorbing every written and spoken scrap of poetry they produce; but still I found it hard to shake the feeling I was getting closer. In the end, I had to relinquish any pretence of control, but my perceptions continue to be cloaked in fantasy. In this way, writing this thesis, and writing these poems, felt like a kind of initiation; I was necessarily brought up hard against the limits of my knowledge and control. This is apposite to the idea I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, namely that man or woman, adult or child, engaging with the story of Little Red Riding Hood draws us in until the breath of the wolf tickles the face. I followed.
Eventually the hunter

that is to say, a young man from the village who had been out hunting

burst into the house.
slit open its belly
with a kitchen knife,
a little disappointed it was such an easy fight.
He was not that surprised when a girl came out
Nor that it happened to be that girl from that night.

She did not say thanks for saving me, even bashfully.
Maybe nerves. Some kind of clear jelly on her. Yet still pretty, he observed. Hardly the time for that, he allowed, but still. Pretty. Natural he would notice.

It didn’t move. It didn’t stir even when the boy filled its belly with stones.
It might have whimpered as if in a bad dream.

Although who knows if they dream.

Now he thought about it, the hunter wasn’t sure what had called him there.
Then

there was probably some sort of moon
I lay on the leaves and tried not to peep
at the shapes she made taking off clothes

then she was next to me skin to fur
I realised I had nothing to take off
then she said let’s go to sleep
so I shut my eyes and waited

too warm

I needed to cough
I tried to fake a sleep cough

listening to her breathing
and my heartbeat
and did she notice that I angled my face
so that the air she breathed out
had to pass through my nose and mouth too

then her fingers on the side of my neck

I opened one eye and right there she was
looking back at me
small dark hairs above
her lips close
then a sudden plum split with juice biting back
Home coming

Enormous shoes by the door
Side by side by polish and brush

She got used to different hands
The lines of his neck and jaw

Smooth over bumps beneath
Furniture muffled under white sheets

Black stubble pushing through his skin
A woodsmoke ghost still rising from him

Fades familiar nice and easy
She moves slower these days

She can reach over and touch him anytime
Which is nice
Wake up (i)

“Love for love’s sake is childhood. Lovers are children. Children do not have children.”
Marina Tsvetaeva, Letter to the Amazon (121)

The bed sized square of empty of her
Of the space around it
The same colour now
Digesting
A sea horse wolf dries out in ridges
Petulant snout
Tail spiralling in
It is quite pretty
Red wet mouth
Red wet face
Soggy poppy
Guilt suits it
Keen

Staggering back and forth howling high

pitched wordless stones clunk back and forth

blood leaks through the stitches of its stomach wound

red spotting along the river bed

After the bubbles disperse

Just a shape

Gleaming dark fur

He waved it goodbye

the boy not much more

than a kid already retelling it

to his friends in his head

and not looking at the girl

who had been watching

pressed against the glass like a dried flower
Perspective on poppies

Some drama queens well known
Go floating off if no one looks.
Nose in the ozone. Little bitch. bint. bit
I was born, malformed, with a phoney accent. I was born dead.
My poor motherland. Even gods find it hard to love
The spittlebug sliming atop a bile green
Little bud that will not bloom
Beneath the bitter fingered hand of some weird old witch
no hairs on her cavernous head and sugared formaldehyde on her breath.
You need to be more grounded they said,
so I tried to settle in. Ha ha
you should have heard it; a cave collapsing
an empty mouth gawps onto a gravel clattered throat
thuds on the soft pulp of rotting lungs.
Then the plangent sound of the thin road stretching out like a harp string.
My needs were too loud to listen I decided I choked down my sweet toad of a tongue and
And elsewhere the first step to someone else.
Feels good. Feel good. Fresh air on face etcetera.
But don’t look down they say. Don’t look back.
You do fall
Dizzy and heart
Sick the sight
Pieces of your own
Wind skirmished
Or snapped by beaks
BACK IN ON HIGH My toes crisping curl in. My chest pastry puffed tight.
Something I forgot comes back To land on my stomach. Hot filling splat
Going on and on again I cry my eyes out Leaving only two round golf holes
I am going up, I go up, I am gone.
Wake up (ii)

frame frame frame frame frame frame frame

at the table, reading: a young girl likened to

a green split stem her sweet pea self she hasn’t met

pressing somewhere under the ink shadows over the page

among the backward shapes the letters make on the other side
**Dog boy**

the world is ugly, said the dog,

she nodded

she had no need of beauty

the girl pushed her hood back

and her face glowed like a terrible sun

black dog, white dog, yellow dog,

curled up, dried out, a leaf from last autumn,

dog boy sleeps, in, the, gutter,

quick, step over him,

a little cat jeered at her.

but she was the bird girl, singing as she went

a child, newly dead

born trailing gossamer thread

a nipper, a nib, a nut..,
Quickening

he was dead as soon as he saw her

what is it about girls wearing red that lost look the hood naturally

soft looking curls spilling out underneath her flesh too baby soft her faint sweet smell of sour milk

maybe he knew he should have known

what is more a red little tongue and a sharp little row of gleaming enamel

her eyes purposeful kitty green

he tasted iron in his spit

his fur grew sweat damp prickled the back of his neck he felt himself turn to stone
PRESENTS

ONCE we were drinking and she leaned in over the candle
I saw her decide and then change her mind
and again the shadows move among the leaves
gold black green her eyes steady on me I want to be with you
a finger presses exactly on the seam between tenderness and disgust

TONIGHT she is with him he gives her 12 roses all the same and they begin
she confesses her fondness for me he understands
then cultural reference both get and laughing mention of
their shared past and he gives her a bear skin
eyes hooked on each other as two figures lean in
another embrace. “I’ve missed you too.”
and I piss on his shoes on the way out
The sky is clotted and I am only
overtaking biting shaking.

LATER TONIGHT, she opens the door
I hand over a bouquet of rabbits
small marble eyed pile on the shelf next to the bear skin
are you mad she says and I say nothing
my tongue is stupider than ever and my throat choked with growls
but she can see I have a yes face on
my mouth refusing to stay up
important that I poke some dry skin off my paw with a twig
her hugging herself quiet until I am sorry
I realise my face still has rabbit blood
go to wipe it away but she sucks the patches and
my love it is okay

AFTERWARDS THOUGH she sleeps while I remain
watching them from the bushes and twitching awake with shame
Sometimes girls

Pomegranate and sea breeze

Glow on the mantelpiece

Meanwhile she seems to be softening

In her belly something lies heavy

Impervious to scented candles

Her flesh spongy some fluid leaking out or in could be

She takes care of herself at least she takes lots of baths

Scrubs hard, rubs glugs of oil into her skin

Wraps herself in a white towel then another nap

Her husband says when she sleeps she looks like a child

Sometimes girls go all hysterical

Her husband says to his friend

They get worked up over

She went in singing
Her face a bright mask.

Nothing too much
Romantic mush in the media
Her hair bedecked with garlands

Sweet violets, roses and rue knotted in

But their courtship and marriage
Real smooth
No drama

The hair of gold
The leaves of green

Relatively bloodless he grins
Where is she now
His friend asks
Sleeping again I guess

The roots
Trailing river mud

Its not healthy
To think too much about shit
Her husband explains
Like the two of them

His wife and him
And soon you will be three
His friend reminds him
Elbow chuckle blush
They finish their drinks
Both men
Stand up and walk away
The couch displays in pleather
Twin monumental imprints

Pull down
The red shutters
Twist close
Where are you now then
Knowing

I will know you

By your gait

The way you tap your feet

The little sound you make

When lifting heavy things

By the exact stacking

of vertebrae

in your back

By the joints that will

one day give you pain

By your movements

By the movements of your eyes

What they pass by

where they linger

By the frequency of your blink

By your smile of course, but more thoroughly
your grimace when you try not to cry

By the sound of your sneeze

And especially the whorling tips of your fingers

and the cracked or supple soles of your feet

your skin encrypts maps marking the places you’ve been

dead girl dead poet dream girl

I will know you so exactly

You won’t even need to see me
**Hide and seek**

From the other path, he was watching.

I uncorked the bottle of raspberry wine. Took a swig.

First it only darkened my mouth, as I could see

When my reflection stuck out

My garnet stained tongue at me.

From the other path, he was watching.

I took a swig.

From the other path, he was.

I took a swig.

From the other path, he.

It got better

The further down I went.

From the other path, he was watching.

I took a swig.

Took a swig.

I did not look at him as he crossed over and stood beside me.
The bottle was empty.

I don’t care for cakes.

I put one finger in the pottle of butter.

He was watching.

When I held out

my buttered finger to him.

A glimmer of drool

joined his mouth to the ground.

He was ready.

He licked

my finger clean.

Slobber of purple grey.

I did not look away.
The song of young budkin

The baby came out
As if from a womful of bleach
A yawning maw of burning need
Skin and eyes without colour
A fine full set of teeth
When she grew
Hair it was
Perilously thin
A dandelion
Gone to seed
Nightdressed

Grandmother is smaller just like a little girl
Thought the little girl just like me
Under twisting wool blankets hand knit
Outside the birds long ago hushed
Since that twilight time when they all squalled from one tree
Now only electrical hum sliced by the tick of the clock
How is a person supposed to sleep
How does grandmother sleep
Peep over under the night and see
Bare faced
and her falsies in a jar
and the white of her breath defrosting
the moon dreaming of caves
crammed with gold teeth
her mouth sucking at the soft dark
Heroine

Even if you were born in the midst of a forest

in a heavily lined continent or a forest of words

so you could not even explain where you were

without clichés worn thin and had to endure

twerp birds rattling off the same song daily

and you had never seen fingers that fold the page corner

over and never heard the distant rustle of the sea

you might know to follow

from the tides of your own eyes blinking

from your hands folding in on each other

making red and white marks and

from the lunar pull of your own blood

or the smell of a leaf crushed

like the figure clamps a blank seed

too tight in her hand

Once Upon a Time
and the clockwork birds rattle

but this echo is a testament

she is like you and you watch her progress

hushed and careful as when you

first learnt to read first you were

whispering then you were

trying not to move your lips then you learnt

to keep your body silent and still

as the plum tree inside the stone
Bird girl

The dawn-cracked voice of one who’d woven into the night.

Keep it down. Don’t show off.

She nodded. The hood swallowed most of her face.

This child could be anyone. The first lie, the hood.

Burning deathless red. Tiny, smooth-cheeked she stood,

while Mother loaded her up. Small kid toting big cargo

as if on her first day of school. Ridiculous.

Don’t let anyone look, said the mother,

knowing the child would.
Home again

river mud won’t come off
if you touch it
packs of wild dogs wandering snarled
    but she stood silent as folded linen

a big black dog appeared
eyes huge as wet plates
burning lava to scarlet red
and a terrible red wet mouth
just as she’d heard
his breath hot decay
    but she did not wince
    patted the shaggy neck
    scratched under his chin
ashen gunking under her nails

    as he carried her across the river
    she kept her fingers twisted tight into his fur

he seemed to know where to go
so she followed him to a house
she knows but not like this

her mother’s mother’s house.

Grandmother in bed in her usual clothes eyes wide open
like Grandmother but not like this
it tried to shake her but she held on
when it disappeared she clung to the place where it had been
not very smart but it worked

so the dog showed her what to do
for three days and three nights
the two sat still beside Grandmother and howled
to the chestnut smooth moon

then the dog gobbled the flesh from the bones

You have to give up everything said the dog
showing its ‘terrible red wet mouth’
& gobbled her up too
Blood ties

The mother went to the house
sometimes. This time
there were only bones.
chalky bones of Grandmother
and smaller ones.

The mother cried and cried, of course.
An inordinate amount of tears
As if jagged cries could pierce clouds.
Or as if bones float in salt. Like the pool of clear
liquid started silting milky, and the bones to rise and soften into whispers.

The obedient mother went into the next room
and returned, a knife between her teeth.
Just a little cut, just above the line of her pubic hair

The mother wiped the blood into one
Needling warm hand
Lifting the bones out of goo with the other
Needling warm hand
As if sprinkling the blood on the tear-bloated bones turns them tender green.
As if a little sprout may might be seen.

Something must be done now. She buried them.
As if a tree could spring up overnight.
Then fruit. One purple plum, one smaller red one.
Dig beneath.

Now here is the girl, sleepy, arms outstretched, smelling of earth and violets.
And here is Grandmother, walking with a slight limp.
Daylight savings

At last, a day of spring light.
It turns gold around 5 or 6 o clock as it goes.
The squarish shadows as it goes upwards in a chunk.

The buildings are so solid here.
I cross the lawn and through glass doors down spiralling fans of stairs into the library basement seeking out his poems. Their warmth. I pause on the picture of Auckland.

The clocktower flanked by tips of trees. The sky blank blue behind.

His name in the contents. Open to page 243.

No sound. I used to have him reading aloud. ‘Starfish Streets’. I used to walk along, matching the march of my untutored feet to the beat of his voice on my mp3. He told of an old town full of ghosts. His voice froze at that moment. Pause. Play. At a touch melting into Brunswick, soundwaves lap, soothe, pull me back. A vivid private track on repeat. I followed word for word.

2am, hands clacking the tips from that dodgy pizza place.

Another just for now.

Sweet hurt heart shapes
spotted in thought clouds
leading back to Aotearoa.
Auckland. The clocktower
The scrumpy tree near.
Stop.
Hot librarian. Definitely flirts. This could be my chance
to fuck in the staff-only room.
and if we fast forward to the last scene.
Dot dot dot. Debt debt debt.
Outside it is dark, but not as cold as I’d thought walking back across the evening grass.
CONCLUSION
Endings/Beginnings: Home again

Folklore articulates social sanctions at the very same time that it permits, through wishful thinking, escape from those very same social sanctions.

(Dundes *Little Red* 214)

In this thesis I undertook to open up new ways of understanding the LRRH pattern. I sought to do this through analysing diverse texts—a transcription from oral culture, two of the most influential versions of the written tale, and a twentieth century poetic revision—as well as producing a series of poems. My purpose was to remain alert to the gender politics in the production of this tale, while also discovering what may be gained by reframing the discourse as a whole around LRRH to encompass the diversity of its incarnations. I also intended this approach to enrich conceptions of LRRH that do not attempt to account for the tale's ubiquity. To that end, I incorporated the social and historical context of these texts into a psychoanalytic reading, attempting to fill the gap created by existing psychoanalytical work on LRRH that often overlooks the authorship of the tales. I apprehended each of the texts, in different ways, as presenting a staged encounter with the limits of subjectivity. The similarities I found indicated that it is possible for a conception of the LRRH pattern to include a wider range of texts, acknowledging that this is a tale that has thrived in parody, pantomime, and pornography, as well as the nursery, for much of its existence.

Yet the aim of this thesis is to expand ways of thinking about LRRH, not to shut down existing ones. While I maintain the validity of my reading, this reading discusses each individual text in its capacity as part of a pattern; on the other hand, taken on its own, each text retains its own myriad functions and resonances. Jack Zipes sets a gracious precedent for inclusivity by conceding that while LRRH is not, in his view, directly relevant to the relationship between France and Germany, Hans-Wolf Jager’s analogy can still be valid (36). Jager’s “Is Little Red Riding Hood Wearing a Liberty Cap?” (1974) interprets the tale as an allegory about anti-French feeling in French-occupied Germany, something that has very little to do with the gender politics Zipes sees at play in LRRH stories. Similarly, the roles of sexual object and subject Zipes apprehends in the LRRH pattern could certainly
perpetuate the gender dichotomy of Western culture, even while, as I suggest, their rewriting enacts the individual’s moment of perceiving this construct as unstable—and traces of this moment remain in the texts. Forms of LRRH could also serve other functions, such as “a warning against the danger of being killed by real wolves” (Beckett 19), without impeding the unconscious content that I believe they contain as part of the LRRH pattern. I would like to allow that, just as my sample texts were limited; my psychoanalytic reading of the LRRH pattern does not purport to be conclusive. Perry Nodelman’s “The Hidden Meaning and the Inner Tale: Deconstruction and the Interpretation of Fairy Tales” (1990) calls attention to the unusual feature of Alan Dundes’s psychoanalytic reading of King Lear which Dundes includes in *Cinderella: a Casebook* (1982). Dundes concludes the footnotes, and the essay, with the caveat that “the folkloristic and psychoanalytical perspectives utilised in this essay do not pretend to explicate all facets of the play” (244). As Nodelman sums it up, “after energetically arguing for the validity of his own interpretation, (Dundes) insists that it is merely another version, in effect his own retelling of the story of King Lear” (144). Nodelman’s deconstructionist framing argues that a given reading of a fairy tale does not unlock any ultimate truth but, as he approvingly notes Dundes admitting, a given reading might say as much about the interpreter as about the text: “the core of meaning he finds on the inside of the play is still acknowledged to be on the outside—he does not confuse his inner Lear with the inner Lear” (144, emphasis original). In this thesis I have also attempted to acknowledge my presence as a critic, especially through the poems, and therefore I follow Dundes’s example in concluding by acknowledging the limits of my scholarship.

Nevertheless, I have also attempted to go some way towards discovering what the LRRH pattern and its persistence could mean in this century, through a careful analysis of some of the texts credited with defining this pattern, an assessment of a later text demonstrating the pattern’s manifestation in the work of one particularly complex writer, and my own creative experimentation with rewriting the tale. This thesis’s investigation of rewritings in the LRRH pattern was informed by the idea that the pleasure generated through repetition does not spring from mastery, but from confrontation with one’s own finitude. I drew attention to the liminality, transvestism, and theatricality in the texts, and focused on the way these aspects cohere with theories about the formation of subjectivity.

13 Sugiyama (2004), who also understands LRRH as pragmatic, provides a thoughtful example of this school of interpretation.
The centrality of the figure of the girl to LRRH means that to explain how unconscious material emerges in this figure may in turn illuminate how the gender binary continues to inform and organise our subjectivity. As it echoes and re-energises the process of individuation, the LRRH pattern beguiles us to transcend this construct and thus continues to prove an enduring source of fascination, terror, and delight.
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