

Fig. 1 Gustave Doré's engraving, 'She Was Astonished To See How Her Grandmother Looked' (1862), an illustration of Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon Rouge'.



# Little Red Riding Hood: A Discourse of Disciplinary Punishment

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**H**istorically, the scholarship and social discourse attached to the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale have held the protagonist accountable for her own violation and murder.<sup>1</sup> In part, this is due to the moral framing of her story and how her behaviour has been interpreted. Through this process and various retellings, the character and her crimson cloak have become iconic symbols of agentic female sexuality. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum argue that retold stories, 'especially folk and fairy tale ... initiate children into aspects of social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions'.<sup>2</sup> These traditional narratives, constructed from interlocking ideological frameworks, reveal the 'existential concerns of a society' through 'concrete images and symbolic forms ... offering a cultural inheritance subject to social conditioning and modification through the interaction of various retellings'.<sup>3</sup> In recent times, a more sympathetic portrayal of Little Red Riding Hood as a victim of the wolf has emerged in western society.<sup>4</sup> These shifts reflect a changing perception towards violence against women.

Little Red Riding Hood made her literary debut in 1695 in a collection of fairy tales written by Charles Perrault. This manuscript was given (and dedicated) to Louis XIV's 19-year-old unmarried niece, Élisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans.<sup>5</sup> Perrault's story depicts a maiden's implicit rape and murder by a sexual predator. Superficially, it is a cautionary tale which advocates female celibacy before marriage. A closer inspection highlights the use of disciplinary punishment to silence the voices of the girl and her grandmother. The mother is mostly silent too. After uttering two sentences in the opening paragraph, she is absent from the story. Traditional retellings based on Perrault's work encode violence against women, social etiquette, gender roles and responsibilities, and hegemonic adult/child, male/female power structures. These practices and the structuring of silent femininity suggests these themes had social value in the cultures which generated the narratives.

Louis XIV's reign was a hedonistic era, overshadowed by public displays of disciplinary punishment. Michel Foucault's research on the 17th-century French penal system is a useful tool for examining the ideological frameworks constructed in Perrault's narrative, and other versions of Little Red Riding Hood; the most notable being the Grimms' 'Little Red Cap' (1812)<sup>6</sup> and Paul Delarue's 'The Story of Grandmother' (1951).<sup>7</sup> All three narratives contain similar themes of female sexuality and punishment, which have attracted the attention of academics.

Foucault theorises that forms of disciplinary punishment, such as public torture and execution, encouraged witnesses to conform to the law. Foucault argues that 'power produces knowledge',<sup>8</sup> and that power-knowledge discourse is formed by governing bodies and people with knowledge of the law and medicine.<sup>9</sup> These narratives identify and inhibit unacceptable social behaviour and are reinforced through hegemonic institutions such as parliament, schools, churches and penal systems. People are socialised to accept these discourses as the norm and use them as moral guides.

Seventeenth-century French fairy tales were originally written to entertain adults: Louis XIV's courtiers, members of the Académie française,<sup>10</sup> and those who attended the Parisian fairy tale salons. The latter were hosted at the homes of female fairy tale writers, the *conteuses*, who gave voice to their political views through their stories.<sup>11</sup> Their texts featured agentic and powerful female protagonists: characters who expressed concerns over arranged marriages and a woman's lack of autonomy within the gender hierarchy. Over time and through various retellings, this subversive mode of discourse evolved to transmit hegemonic ideologies and indoctrinate children.

Scholarly impressions of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tales are varied. Academics such as Bruno Bettelheim,<sup>12</sup> Paul Delarue,<sup>13</sup> Yvonne Verdier,<sup>14</sup> Alan Dundes,<sup>15</sup> Jack Zipes,<sup>16</sup> Catherine Orenstein<sup>17</sup> and Marina Warner,<sup>18</sup> among others, have researched the literary and folkloric history of the tale. Collectively, this body of work has substantially added to contemporary understanding of how the narrative has evolved over the centuries, through different cultures and various adaptations. The themes of seduction, implied rape and female sexuality as constructed in Perrault's narrative (and in later retellings by the Grimms and Delarue) have also drawn much academic attention. Bettelheim questions the character's innocence leading up to the implied rape and argues that she is complicit in her own demise. Orenstein disagrees with Bettelheim's psychoanalytical approach, yet even she concedes that while Perrault's 17th-century 'stranger-danger' moral survives, 'in popular culture sweet Little Red Riding Hood has grown up and become an ode to Lust'.<sup>19</sup>

These observations illuminate how social discourse can shape a literary character's identity. The question then arises: is the evolving pop culture discourse in turn influenced by academic scholarship? Zipes has been described as one of the most prolific critics of literary fairy tales,<sup>20</sup> while Bettelheim's work has been described as 'the best-known psychoanalytic interpretation of the Little Red Riding Hood narrative'.<sup>21</sup> David Fisher, Bettelheim's biographer, states he:

operated as a public intellectual whose writings and pronouncements were eagerly awaited, widely disseminated, and published in distinguished large circulation magazines and journals . . . his ideas and opinions had a huge impact on a large reading audience . . .<sup>22</sup>

By creating a dialogue with a fairy tale which promotes female chastity, Bettelheim's text encouraged readers to adhere to conservative gender behaviour. His work is a good example of how a person in a position of 'power' can produce knowledge through discourse. Some of Bettelheim's theories are now disputed but his analyses contribute towards fairy tale interpretations within academic circles and pop culture discourse.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, his body of work continues to have a voice in the dialogue related to this fairy-tale heroine.

*The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim's Freudian analysis of popular fairy tales, was published in America in 1976. His study of the Little Red Riding Hood narratives endorsed conservative, patriarchal views on female sexuality during the western sexual revolution. Bettelheim introduces Little Red Riding Hood to his audience as a 'charming, "innocent" young girl swallowed by a Wolf'.<sup>24</sup> His use of inverted commas for the word 'innocent' positions readers to question the morality of the character before he even begins his discussion. He then uses Lang's English translation (1889)<sup>25</sup> to deconstruct Perrault's story after the heroine arrives at Grandmother's house.<sup>26</sup>

In Lang's translation, the meeting between wolf and child unfolds in the following manner:

Little Red Riding-Hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened.  
The Wolf, seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bed-clothes:

“Put the custard and the little pot of butter upon the stool, and come and lie down with me.”

Little Red Riding-Hood undressed herself and went into bed, where, being greatly amazed to see how her grandmother looked in her night-clothes, she said to her ...<sup>27</sup>

Little Red Riding Hood, unable to perceive the threat presented by the wolf, trustingly obeys her pseudo-grandmother. And Lang, who was writing for children, specifically notes that Grandmother was wearing 'her night-clothes'.

Bettelheim altered Lang's text to support his theory that Perrault's character was a 'fallen woman'. He omits the description of the wolf concealing his identity. He writes:

In Perrault's story the wolf does not dress up as Grandmother, but simply lies down in her bed. When Little Red Riding Hood arrived, the wolf asked her to join him in bed. Little Red Riding Hood undressed and got into bed, at which moment, astonished at how Grandmother looked naked ...<sup>28</sup>

Bettelheim's version positions readers to think that when the child entered the house, she immediately saw the animal undisguised, and willingly joined him in bed. His textual modification also supports his theory that the heroine was sexually promiscuous. He argues:

when the wolf tells her that his strong arms are for embracing her better nothing is left to the imagination. Since in response to such direct and obvious seduction Little Red Riding Hood makes no move to escape or fight back, either she is stupid or wants to be seduced ... Little Red Riding Hood is changed from a naive, attractive young girl ... into nothing but a fallen woman.<sup>29</sup>

Bettelheim also identifies the Grimms' heroine, Rotkappchen, as a pubescent girl with a 'pleasure-seeking id' whose premature, 'budding' sexuality is a danger to herself and others.<sup>30</sup> Bettelheim argues that Rotkappchen battles her unacknowledged Oedipal desire to seduce her father, symbolically represented by both the wolf and huntsman,<sup>31</sup> and arranges 'things so that the wolf can do away with the mother figure', i.e. Grandmother: her aging rival for the wolf's attention.<sup>32</sup> This occurs when Rotkappchen willingly gives the wolf directions to Grandmother's house.<sup>33</sup> The removal of this authority figure frees the child to act on her subconscious desire to seduce and be seduced.<sup>34</sup> This enables her to explore her sexuality with the father/wolf/hunter figure.

Bettelheim maintains that the grandmother contributed to the child's unruly behaviour because she spoils her granddaughter and 'abdicates her own attractiveness to males and transfers it to the daughter by giving her a too attractive red cloak'.<sup>35</sup> His use of the words 'too attractive' in relation to the red cloak suggests Grandmother dressed her female child in a sexually provocative outfit, one which encourages negative male attention. The character's name is linked to the colour red, 'which she openly wears, a colour that signifies 'violent, sexual emotions'.<sup>36</sup> Through his analysis, Rotkappchen flouts her sexuality and readers are positioned to view the character, and agentic female sexuality, as inherently sensual and sinful.

During her analysis of the red hood/cape in Perrault's text, Orenstein creates a similar interpretation. She writes: 'Perrault cloaked his heroine in red, the colour of harlots, scandal and blood, symbolizing her sin and foreshadowing her fate'.<sup>37</sup> She argues that Perrault's moral pre-text warns of the 'dangers of female promiscuity'.<sup>38</sup> Zipes also observes that in 17th-century France, the colour red was associated with 'sin, sensuality and the devil'.<sup>39</sup> He argues that the red hood, a gift from her indulgent grandmother, was a warning to the implied female reader that the heroine could be 'spoiled in another way by a wolf/man'.<sup>40</sup> Through Zipes' lens, the 'spoiled' child was accustomed to being at the centre of attention. When she stopped to talk to the wolf, she created her own downfall.

The red hood/cap is missing in Delarue's narrative. However, in the Grimms' and Perrault's versions, this article of clothing is so important both the narrative and character are identified by it. Perrault's text was written in an age and culture when aristocratic families secured important social alliances through arranged marriages.<sup>41</sup> Orenstein notes that a 1629 ordinance declared that paternal consent was legally required for all French marriages, regardless of the offspring's age. Failure to comply was punishable by death.<sup>42</sup>

The bride's virginity ensured that any child born after the union was a legitimate heir to their combined fortunes.<sup>43</sup> To help ensure their purity until they came of age, aristocratic daughters were usually cloistered within a convent from as young as four years of age until they were married.<sup>44</sup> During her discussion on 17th-century regional French bridal attire, Gibson records that on their wedding day, the 'peasant bride of Touraine favoured colour and sparkle with her scarlet robe and head-dress embroidered with imitation jewellery'.<sup>45</sup> It was likely Perrault was familiar with this custom as his mother came from Touraine.<sup>46</sup> From this socio-historical perspective, the red hood does not align the character with sin, sensuality and the devil. Rather, it references 17th-century French marriage customs and highlights the implicit theme of marriage interwoven within the tale. When the heroine disrobes and enters the bed at the wolf/grandmother's command, she was unknowingly rejecting the respectability of the marriage bed. The finality of her 'death' symbolically represents her future exile from respectable/'polite' social circles. It also reinforces the *moralité* of the story and reveals a societal concern for young girls to comply with hegemonic cultural discourse relating to arranged marriages.

However, another reading can be drawn from the text and the significance of the red hood/cloak in 17th-century France. In this reading, Perrault's, the Grimms' and Delarue's heroine is an innocent victim/ prey. In part, her death occurs due to the structuring of social etiquette and the promotion of childhood obedience to adult authority figures. In Perrault's text, the wolf is portrayed as an 'old neighbour' wolf /man.<sup>47</sup> The word 'neighbour' and the character's friendly response implies he and the heroine are known to each other (at least in passing). This explains why she stopped to talk to him – she is not encouraging his sexual advances; she is merely being polite.

The power structures created by the text privileges the adult male in the adult/child, male/female relationship. The protagonist (and, through her experiences, the reader) learns that she is powerless in her social encounter with the adult, male wolf-man. When Little Red Riding Hood immediately obeys the wolf/grandmother's command to undress and enter the bed, her behaviour demonstrates that childhood obedience was an important social construct in Perrault's time. And when the narrator informs the reader that 'the poor child . . . did not know that it is dangerous to stop and listen to the wolf',<sup>48</sup> this indicates that children were viewed as naive and ignorant in 17th-century constructions of childhood. This wording also portrays her as an innocent victim of the wolf and implicitly condemns the mother for being negligent in her parental duty. Hence the 'stranger danger' warning commonly extracted from this narrative.

In the *moralité*, the omniscient narrator warns the implied reader that if a young girl stops to listen to the wolf, 'it is not so strange the wolf shall eat them'. This implicit criticism is the only time the text positions readers to think that the victim might be at fault for encouraging the wolf. However, the sentence must be read in context with the rest of the paragraph. The final lines of the *moralité* state: 'But alas for those *who do not know* that of all the wolves the docile ones are . . . most dangerous' (my italics).<sup>49</sup> This last sentence again exonerates the victim of all responsibility and reinforces the impression that she was ignorant of societal dangers.

Social etiquette is more strongly structured in the Grimms' retelling when the mother actively coaches her daughter how to behave on the way to grandmother's house. When the wolf (portrayed as a talking animal) greets the child, 'Good Day, Little Red Cap', she politely responds with: 'Thank you kindly, wolf.'<sup>50</sup> The wolf has addressed her by name so it is unsurprising that the child stops and replies. In this version, the wolf is a stranger. His knowledge of the character's identity implies he has been stalking her.

A foreshadowing of her fate as a victim of rape, and the loss of her virginity, is created when he proceeds to ask her 'What are you carrying under your apron?'<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that in both the Perrault and Grimms narratives, the child disobeys the mother and listens to the wolf when *he tells her* which path she should take. Unlike Delarue's text, she is not given a choice in these pre-texts. This indicates that patriarchal voice held more authority than feminine voice in the cultures that generated the text (i.e. 17th-century France and 19th-century Germany).

Collectively, the arguments of Bettelheim, Zipes and Orenstein identify Little Red Riding Hood as being sexually promiscuous. However, through close narrative analysis, Perrault and the Grimms' Little Red Riding Hood character emerges as a well-loved (not spoiled) little girl. She is adored by her family and all who 'laid eyes upon her'.<sup>52</sup> At her mother's bidding she leaves the matriarchal domain and enters the external political sphere: the forest, inhabited by patriarchal representatives, i.e. the woodsmen and wolf. This cherished child, who has never been treated harshly, has the confidence to speak freely to the wolf/man and ask a series of incessant questions from the 'loving' adult authority figure, represented by the wolf/grandmother during their infamous dialogue. However, after leaving the sheltered, feminine world of her home, the patriarchal representative teaches her that it is politically incorrect for her to question the patriarchy or *any other* authority figure.

Through a Foucauldian lens, readers are positioned to view Little Red Riding Hood's questioning of the wolf as 'bad' behaviour because the act of speaking has negative repercussions: both Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are *permanently* silenced, cast out of hegemonic society by their violent demise. The matriarchal voice is further stifled through the structuring of the mostly absent (and therefore silent) mother. This narrative motif is significant given that motherhood was an important social construct in Perrault's time.<sup>53</sup>

Foucault argues that punishment of the prisoner's mind and body is 'a complex social function ... a political tactic ... It is always the body that is at issue ... its forces, their utility and their docility, their distributions and their submissions.'<sup>54</sup> Annette Iggulden draws a link between silent femininity and political gender power-discourse when she writes:

Historically, the speech and silence of women appears intricately intertwined with and shaped by attitudes borne from various visual and verbal discourses about their bodies ... the naturalisation of silence and passivity as feminine virtues had left women profoundly vulnerable to the exercise of male power and control.<sup>55</sup>

Foucault's and Iggulden's theories can be applied effectively not only to 'Little Red Riding Hood', but other traditional western fairy tales such as 'Snow White', 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty'. In these stories, the silence of women is a recurring theme closely associated with punishment and/or death of the female body. Perrault's Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are rewarded for their silence and obedience with romantic love, advantageous marriages, wealth, and acceptance into the highest echelon of their society. Their marital reward promotes female passivity and silence as desirable feminine qualities which have been normalised and further endorsed through the reprinting and retelling of these familiar stories.<sup>56</sup> However Little Red Riding Hood, who is arguably one of the more vocal female protagonists, breaks the 'happily ever after' fairy-tale mould.

As mentioned earlier, in the late 17th century, aristocratic women hosted literary salons in their homes. Their conversation included debates concerning arranged marriages and protests against laws inhibiting women from owning property. Anti-feminist propaganda was generated in response to this type of feminist discourse and circulated freely in French society.<sup>57</sup> Warner writes that salon hostesses also held large gatherings in their bedchambers while lounging in bed. Favoured guests were allowed access to the '*ruelle*' which Warner defines as:

the alley – which was the space between her bed and the wall. Ruelles became the word for such salons ... those who attended were called *alcôvist*es, privy to the *alcôve*. This arrangement of social space, both public and private at the same time, was presided over by women ...<sup>58</sup>

A reference to this feminine seat of power, and feminist discourse, is constructed in Perrault's text when the narrator informs the reader that the wolf follows 'young ladies right into their homes, right into their alcoves'.<sup>59</sup> In Perrault's and the Grimms' text, the grandmother is lying in bed when the wolf arrives. He tricks her into allowing him access



to her home and kills her as she lies in bed, thus appropriating her matriarchal domain, her feminine seat of power (represented by the bed), her identity and her voice. By masquerading as grandmother he then uses all these authoritative feminine attributes to manipulate the girl-child in order to permanently silence her.

In the Grimms' retelling, both the wolf and the hunter appropriate feminine roles traditionally associated with feminine autonomy and power (i.e. motherhood and midwifery, respectively). This occurs when the wolf swallows the grandmother and child and a passing hunter rescues them by slicing open the wolf's abdomen and performing a laparotomy/pseudo-caesarean section. Zipes utilises Foucault's theories to argue that the Grimms' heroine demonstrates her repentance (for sexual transgressions) with a symbolic act of disciplinary punishment. He writes:

**The Grimms were responsible for making Little Red Riding Hood definitively into a disobedient, helpless little girl ... She is much more fully to blame for her rape by the wolf because she has a nonconformist streak which must be eradicated ... a policeman appears out of nowhere to save Little Red Riding Hood, and, when she is granted the opportunity to punish the wolf by filling his stomach with rocks, she is actually punishing herself ...**<sup>60</sup>

In Zipes' scenario, the act of swallowing the child is a sexual act because when she is devoured she becomes a part of the wolf.<sup>61</sup> The hunter/policeman's disciplinary punishment teaches the child to 'internalize ... the restraining norms of sexuality.'<sup>62</sup> Granny, too, gains wisdom from her experience and both females combine forces to defeat a second wolf later in the narrative. This structuring demonstrates that both females were reborn at the hands of the male 'midwife' as patriarchal constructs of 'good' femininity. Within a Foucauldian framework, the act of retrieving stones as a symbolic form of disciplinary punishment is a reasonable assumption. However, a close reading of the text reveals the hegemonic gender power hierarchy: the female characters are powerless against the brute strength and authority of the male characters. Furthermore, the consumption of Little Red Riding Hood makes her a victim; she is not sexually complicit in her demise.

Zipes also examines Perrault's tale as a discourse of rape and violence against women, written by a male author.<sup>63</sup> Zipes writes: 'Perrault's historical contribution to the image of Little Red Riding Hood ... must be viewed in light of French social history and Perrault's own personal prejudices.'<sup>64</sup> In this manner, the story emerges as 'projection of male phantasy in a literary discourse ... aimed at curbing the natural inclinations of children.'<sup>65</sup> Zipes argues that the structuring of the child's discipline and punishment in Perrault's tale and various adaptations reveals social concerns and the regulation of sex roles and sexuality.<sup>66</sup> From Zipes' perspective,

Perrault 'contaminated'<sup>67</sup> a 17th-century oral tale (as recorded by Delarue in 1951),<sup>68</sup> and in doing so, he converted an innocent, plucky folklore heroine into an objectified sexual being.

Zipes observes that Little Red Riding Hood's reputation as a *femme fatale* has evolved from the themes of seduction, violence and rape woven into Perrault's literary classic.<sup>69</sup> His own interest in Little Red Riding Hood was piqued by exposure to pop culture images and social advertisements featuring her persona. He writes:

**What attracted me to Little Red Riding Hood in the first place  
was 'her' commodified appearance as a sex object, and how  
I was socialized to gaze at her gazing at me ...**<sup>70</sup>

Zipes later examined the narratives in light of the rape culture discourse prevalent in western society. His discussion was written in the 1990s following a spree of sexual crimes committed against women by a serial rapist.<sup>71</sup> Zipes highlights societal concerns regarding female safety and gendered violence and observes that the hegemonic Western rape narrative blames female victims for their violation. This dialogue has seeped into popular discourse (books, films, cartoons etc.). Zipes cites Perrault's story as an example and argues that while the story presents a useful 'stranger danger' warning for girls, it also 'reinforces the notion that "women want to be raped"'.<sup>72</sup>

Foucault identifies sexuality as a 'dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring'.<sup>73</sup> Bettelheim's interpretation of the Doré print illustrates this theory ('She Was Astonished To See How Her Grandmother Looked', 1862, Fig. 1). The print depicts the infamous bed scene Bettelheim uses to construct his 'Fallen Woman' narrative. Bettelheim notes:

**She makes no move to leave. She seems ... attracted and repelled  
at the same time ... The combination of feelings her face and body  
suggest can best be described as fascination ... the same fascination  
which sex, and everything surrounding it, exercises over the  
child's mind ...**<sup>74</sup>

Here Bettelheim argues that because the child *chose* to stay in bed with the wolf, her sexual agency and attraction to the wolf are to blame for her implicit rape and murder. This transforms the child victim into an empowered sexualised female. It also exemplifies Foucault's theory of how 'discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power', but also a 'starting point for an opposing strategy'.<sup>75</sup>

Orenstein implicitly endorses Bettelheim's theory when she notes that Doré's print captures the couple in:

an intimate cliché ... it's as if we're peering through the keyhole into an old Parisian boudoir ... The bed fills the picture frame ... The girl's loosened hair tumbles over her shoulders; she clutches the sheets to her breast.<sup>76</sup>

Her evocative language portrays the heroine as an alluring female, a willing participant in her seduction and implicit rape. She writes that what 'Doré captured, and Bettelheim later enhanced', is the story's 'buried meaning as a sexual parable.'<sup>77</sup> Orenstein examines the story against the backdrop of Louis XIV's debauched court. She notes that the reference to the wolf in Perrault's text was significant from a socio-historical viewpoint. The term 'she'd seen the wolf' indicated a loss of virginity.<sup>78</sup> Orenstein explains that 'any courtier who read this tale' would have understood the meaning as it was part of the common slang.<sup>79</sup> This implies the term predated Perrault's text.

In his paper 'A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations' (1983-4), Zipes makes similar observations during his analysis of Doré's print:

Doré also suggests that it is primarily she who is asking for it. And, what is it? The erotic display ... confirms what we suppose to be true about both women and men: women want men to rape them ... men are ... weak beasts ... tempted by alluring female creatures.<sup>80</sup>

Zipes argues that the scene captures the couple engaged in prohibited extramarital behaviour. He writes:

the longing if not seductive look of Little Red Riding Hood as she peers into the eyes of the wolf, and her faint smile ... the proximity of wolf and girl who appear to be touching and to be totally absorbed in an intimate *tête à tête* ... Doré stresses the desire of the girl and wolf for one another. But, by revealing the full face of the girl and her apparent seductive glance, Doré also suggests it is primarily she who is asking for it. And, what is it? In this case it is an immense wolf or phallus ...<sup>81</sup>

Through this interpretation, Little Red Riding Hood is again transformed into a seductive female who actively encourages the wolf's advances. Zipes notes that Perrault's heroine is 'too stupid'<sup>82</sup> to outwit the wolf or discern the type of danger he represents. Here, Zipes

is comparing Perrault's character with Delarue's, who outwits the wolf and escapes. Zipes argues that Perrault's heroine is 'spoiled, negligent and naïve.'<sup>83</sup> Her red chaperon transforms her into 'a type of bourgeois girl tainted with sin, since red, like the scarlet letter A, recalls the devil and heresy.'<sup>84</sup> Zipes' discussion on the western rape narrative draws attention to how it can emerge in social discourse. He also creates awareness of how cultural norms are formed through society's repeated exposure to narrative threads.

In scholarship attached to her story, Little Red Riding Hood has been called stupid, a fallen woman, a femme fatale, and other derogatory terms. Some argue that she is complicit in her own rape and demise, and responsible for her grandmother's death.<sup>85</sup> This reinforces negative stereotypes of femininity in relation to her character. She has been linked to the western rape culture through academic and pop culture discourse. As such, we need to consider the effect academic power discourse may have upon the victim-blaming rape narrative and how this, in turn, can disempower women who have been sexually assaulted.

In light of this, I would like to offer an alternative deconstruction of Doré's illustration. Here is a child in a defensive rather than seductive pose. Her right arm and shoulder are protectively raised. The downward tilt of her head emphasises her guarded response to the wolf. Furthermore, the corner of her lips are compressed and she is frowning. Admittedly, she does not look afraid while conversing with the wolf; however, the widened eyes indicate wariness. The wolf is invading her personal space and overshadowing her as he leans in towards her and gazes directly at her body. The downward tilt of his eyebrows and his unsmiling mouth appear unfriendly and threatening. In response, the child's torso is tilted backwards, away from the wolf. She holds the sheet up protectively between them so that it completely covers the right side of her body (including her arm), which is closest to the wolf, and she rests the material against the lower part of her face. Her left hand crosses over her chest in a defensive manner and anchors the sheet in position. Even her knees (beneath the blanket) are turned away from the wolf, as though she will leap out of the bed at any moment. Collectively, these observations paint her as the wolf's victim, rather than a willing participant.

Foucault argues that '[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.'<sup>86</sup> In recent years, there has been a slight shift in how women who have experienced gendered violence are perceived. Little Red Riding Hood's social image has changed too. For those familiar with her story, her iconic red cloak can be linked to social injustice and accountability. An example of this is the red headgear worn by Steve McCurry's 'Afghan Girl' (1984) and Jack Lack's street art portrayal of the same image entitled 'Steve McCurry's Girl' (Fig. 2).

McCurry's portrait of Sharbat Gula appeared on the 1985 cover of *National Geographic*. An accompanying caption proclaimed the child's 'haunted eyes tell of an Afghan refugee's fears.'<sup>87</sup> Gula's constricted pupils and dishevelled dark hair amplify her wary expression and her features are framed by a red burka. This unique combination and the subject's age creates an inadvertent intertextual reference to Little Red Riding Hood. This implicitly links the literary character

Fig. 2 Jack Lack's street art illustration 'Steve McCurry's Girl' was inspired by Steve McCurry's 'Afghan Girl'.

Artwork and photograph of artwork: Jack Lack. Instagram: @jack\_lack\_

Original photo/source material: Steve McCurry. Instagram: @stevemccurryofficial



(a victim of patriarchal power) to the subjugated female refugees of a patriarchal political war.

In Lack's interpretation of McCurry's work, the girl's blurred, fragmented image and solemn features highlight the original subject's difficult experiences as an Afghan refugee. Lack also transformed the rusty colour of the original burka to a deep crimson. The draped material resembles a hooded cloak which further heightens her resemblance to Little Red Riding Hood.

The red clothing worn by Lack's and McCurry's girls connects female victims of social injustice to the Little Red Riding Hood character. Yet her story has always been linked to gendered violence against women and this continues in pop culture narratives. An example of this is Eddie White's cartoon (2018, Fig. 3), which circulated on Australian Facebook pages (including the Australian Fairy Tale Society's) after the 2018 rape and murder of Eurydice Dixon.<sup>88</sup> This Melbournian woman was stalked in a park after dark by a sexual predator. It was the fourth similar (but unrelated) incident to occur in Melbourne within a 12-month period. Eurydice's name was never attached to the image in the Facebook posts, but the timing of the posts and the nature of the crimes committed against her created an unspoken connection between this innocent young



Fig. 3 Eddie White's Little Red Riding Hood illustration (2018) circulated on Australian Facebook pages following the rape and murder of Eurydice Dixon.

victim and the illustration of Little Red Riding Hood. White's image demands social accountability and change in relation to sex crimes against women. It also challenges preconceived notions of Little Red Riding Hood being held responsible for her violation and murder.

Delarue's wolf first encounters the heroine at the crossroads while she is journeying to Grandmother's house and he asks her to choose between the path of pins or needles. French ethnographer Yvonne Verdier interprets the tale through her knowledge of 19th-century French peasant culture whereby girls at the age of 15 undertook apprenticeships as seamstresses. Verdier argues that from within this ethnographic context the child must decide whether to stay an adolescent (represented by the pins), or move forwards into womanhood (represented by the needles).<sup>89</sup> Zipes and Verdier argue that Delarue's text presents a hopeful tale of female maturation.<sup>90</sup> This is because Delarue's protagonist uniquely outwits the wolf and makes her escape.<sup>91</sup> When comparing Perrault's pre-text to Delarue's version, Zipes writes that Perrault 'transformed a hopeful oral tale ... into a tragic one of violence in which the girl is blamed for her own violation', whereas Delarue 'celebrates the self-reliance of a young peasant girl'.<sup>92</sup>

However, Delarue's discourse explicitly structures the heroine as a sexual tease and 'salope' (slut).<sup>93</sup> Delarue writes: 'After she had eaten, there was a little cat which said: "Phooney! ... A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny."' <sup>94</sup> Unlike Perrault's asexual character (who undresses in a matter-of-fact manner before entering the bed), Delarue's heroine enacts an elaborate striptease for the wolf as he lounges in Granny's bed:

**"Where should I put my apron?"**

**"Throw it into the fire, my child, you won't be needing it anymore."**

**And each time she asked where she should put all her other clothes, the bodice, the dress, the petticoat, and the long stockings, the wolf responded ...**<sup>95</sup>

A Foucauldian analysis reveals a deeper, underlying thread of disciplinary punishment and torture. The wolf's role as executioner is foreshadowed when he meets the heroine 'à la croisée' (at the crossroads).<sup>96</sup> In his study of the 17th-century French penal system, Foucault explains that the corpses of condemned prisoners were exhibited 'at one of the near-by crossroads'. These corpses served as a deterrent against crime for all those who passed by.<sup>97</sup> The public executioner (like the wolf) lived outside the parameters of hegemonic society and wore a mask as part of his persona. In traditional Little Red Riding

Hood narratives (including Delarue's), the wolf as executioner *masks* his identity when he dons Granny's clothes. Foucault refers to the practice of desecrating the body of the prisoner after death as another form of punishment and argues that the punishment of the prisoner took the 'form of humiliation and pain'.<sup>98</sup> This is demonstrated in Delarue's text when the wolf/executioner butchers granny's body into sections and drains the blood into a vessel before storing these items in the pantry. After Little Red Riding Hood arrives at the cottage, the wolf tortures his next victim when he tells her to 'eat the meat that's in the pantry and drink a bottle of wine that is on the shelf'.<sup>99</sup> After watching her cannibalise her grandmother, the wolf orders her to undress in front of him and join him in bed. In Delarue's text, the omniscient narrator and reading audience are privileged with knowledge of the wolf-grandmother's true identity. Like witnesses at a public execution, they observe the grandmother's and child's torture and granny's execution. The wolf's patriarchal control over the child is consistently demonstrated through his manipulation of the child and her obedience to his demands. This highlights the adult/child, male/female power hierarchy constructed within the text. Delarue's heroine, like her predecessors before her, is a victim of the predatory wolf.

However, unlike the maiden in Perrault's and the Grimms' version, Delarue's heroine outwits the wolf and saves herself, thereby inverting the power structure of the existing binaries. Delarue's text structures this power inversion through the child's feminine speech. This occurs when the child interrogates the wolf about his appearance as follows: "Oh, Granny, how hairy you are!"<sup>100</sup> As the dialogue progresses, readers become aware that the child has a growing awareness of Granny's true identity. She utilises the wolf's own deception (his pretence of being a doting grandmother and genteel woman) to manipulate the wolf into allowing her to go outside and relieve herself. He reluctantly agrees and ties a rope around her leg before allowing her to go outside. However, once she has left the house, she re-ties the rope to a tree and successfully escapes, thereby inverting the adult/child, powerful/powerless, knowledgeable/ignorant binaries the text has created between the male/female characters. A female folk hero is born.

This textual structuring illustrates Foucault's theory on temporary power inversion. Foucault explains that on the scaffold, condemned prisoners were allowed to say anything they wanted. In this manner, 'rules were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes'.<sup>101</sup> Foucault argues that it is possible for subjugated individuals to temporarily invert the power structure through their knowledge and understanding of power processes, and their struggles to navigate these power hierarchies.<sup>102</sup> Delarue's text positions readers to view the heroine as adaptable and courageous. She is no longer a victim of the predatory wolf. Yet there is no denying that her freedom came after she was subjected to acts of disciplinary punishment.

Little Red Riding Hood's evolving narrative is encoded with cultural gender values and power structures. Historically, these themes have been used to construct and



reinforce victim blaming narratives in relation to this character. However, a socio-historical, Foucauldian reading of the original text revealed that the wolf is responsible for his own sexual crimes. He manipulated, deceived and silenced his female victims. A similar interpretation of the wolf's role is also possible for the Grimms' and Delarue's narratives. These readings challenge hegemonic academic and pop culture discourse related to this fairy-tale heroine.

In today's society, victims of sex crimes are still being silenced by shame, fear of repercussions and even murder. In relation to this, Foucault's theories on how power-discourse is formed and how it can be used to create social norms and inhibit unsavoury behaviour prove useful. Foucauldian theory, along with Zipes' analysis of western rape culture, illustrate how literary characters, while fictional, can still play a role in creating and reinforcing gender norms. This discussion questions the relationship between pop-culture discourse and scholarship and how each informs the other.

An examination of the varied academic approaches used to analyse Little Red Riding Hood's narratives indicates its relevance across many fields of scholarship, including pop culture discourse. It's clear that the story remains open to interpretation, but the terms used to describe literary victims of sexual abuse, particularly children, in those interpretations may have wider cultural implications. Perhaps, over time, with a more empathetic approach to the scholarship, academic power-discourse can play a role in altering the hegemonic western rape-culture narrative. This can change how real-life victims perceive themselves and encourage them to use their voice to obtain justice. It can also transform how we, as a society, see them. We need to create a compassionate, nurturing community where victims are encouraged to share their story.



**Claudia R. Barnett**

## Notes

1. Bruno Bettelheim argues that Little Red Riding Hood is 'stupid or she wants to be seduced' because she does not try to escape or fight the wolf's advances after she enters the bed (Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses Of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 169). Furthermore, Jack Zipes describes Perrault's heroine as 'the helpless girl, who subconsciously contributed to her own rape' (Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1993), 27). Zipes offers a similar assessment of the Grimms' Little Red Cap when he explains that the character was punished for her 'disobedience and indulgence in sensual pleasures ... the wolf is sent to teach her and the audience a lesson. Her degradation and punishment set an example.' (Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 33.) And, during her analyses of the fairy tale, Maria Tatar examines a 'verse melodrama' written by F.V.N. Bailey in 1862 (in Zipes, *Trials & Tribulations*, 158). Tartar explains the text 'made Little Red Riding Hood responsible for her own death and for her grandmother's demise' (Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1999), 6).
2. John Stephens and Robin McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 4.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Susan Brownmiller identifies the Little Red Riding Hood story as a 'parable of rape' (Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, 4th edn (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2013), 343-4). Brownmiller examines the narrative as part of her discussion on patriarchal myths used to justify rape crimes. Brownmiller argues that both the child and her grandmother 'are equally defenseless before the male wolf's strength and cunning' (*Ibid.*). Eddie White's illustration, 'Little Red Riding Hood' (Fig. 3), also challenges hegemonic victim-blaming narratives and reminds his audience that society as a whole has a responsibility to keep potential victims safe from sexual predators. White's illustration is examined further in this paper.
5. Charles Perrault, *Contes De Mère l'Oyé* (France, 1695).
6. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Little Red Cap (1812)', trans. Jack Zipes in Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, ed. Jack Zipes, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1993), 135-9.
7. Paul Delarue, 'Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault et la tradition populaire', *Bulletin folklorique d'Ile-de-France*, vol. 13 (1951): 221-8.
8. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27.
9. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11 and 102.
10. Christina A. Jones, *Mother Goose Refigured: A Critical Translation of Charles Perrault's Fairy Tales* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 53.
11. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon A Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.
12. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses Of Enchantment: The Meaning And Importance Of Fairy Tales*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
13. Delarue, *Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault*.
14. Yvonne Verdier, 'Little Red Riding Hood in Oral Tradition', *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 11, no. 1/2 (1997): 101-23.
15. Alan Dundes, 'Introduction', in *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes (USA: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), ix-xi.
16. Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, ed. Jack Zipes, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1993).
17. Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Unlocked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
18. Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, 2nd edn (London: Vintage, 1995).

19. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 6.
20. Jan Ziolkowski, 'A Fairy Tale from before Fairy Tales: Egbert of Liege's "De puella a lupellis seruata" and the Medieval Background of "Little Red Riding Hood"', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* (1992), vol. 67, no. 3/Jul.: 551.
21. Dundes, 'Introduction', *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, 217.
22. David J. Fisher, *Bettelheim: Living and Dying* (Rodopi, 2008), 1.
23. Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, 220; Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 213; Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 193; Peter Arnds, 'Absent Mother and the Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood', *Neophilologus* (2017), vol. 101: 175-85; Marcia K Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': female acculturation through the fairy tale", in Jack Zipes (ed.), *Don't Bet On The Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (Gower Publishing, 1986), 187.
24. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 166.
25. Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (1989), Sacred Texts, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/lfb/bl/> (accessed 16 July 2017).
26. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 167-8.
27. Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*.
28. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 167.
29. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 167-8.
30. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 173.
31. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 175.
32. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 172.
33. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 173.
34. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 175.
35. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 173.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 36.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 26.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Wendy Gibson, *Women In Seventeenth-Century France* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 58.
42. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 36.
43. Gibson, *Women In Seventeenth-Century France*, 63.
44. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 36.
45. Gibson, *Women In Seventeenth-Century France*, 63.
46. Zipes notes that Perrault's mother grew up in Touraine and would have heard of the 1598 werewolf trial which took place there. Thus, Perrault would have been familiar with oral werewolf stories. (Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 20.)
47. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 91.
48. Perrault translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 91.
49. Perrault translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 93.
50. Grimms translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 135.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Grimms translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 135-9.
53. In her study on childbirth in fairytales in early modern France, Holly Tucker argues that 'a woman's identity centered on her ability to marry and to procreate' (*Pregnant Fictions: Childbirth And The Fairy Tale In Early Modern France* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 1). Furthermore, it was not uncommon for aristocratic mothers to be the chief educators of their underage children (Gibson, *Women In Seventeenth-Century France*, 142). Pregnancy and infertility were recurrent themes in many 17th-century fairy tales (Tucker, *Pregnant Fictions*, 8). This reflected the importance of motherhood and procreation in relation to

- continuing the family line.
54. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25.
  55. Annette Iggulden, 'Silent Speech' in E. Barret and B. Bolt (eds), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, 4th edn (London and New York: I.B Tauris & Co., 2010), 65-6.
  56. Lieberman, 'Some Day My Prince Will Come', 194.
  57. Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 29.
  58. Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 50.
  59. Perrault translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 93.
  60. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 80.
  61. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 77.
  62. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 80.
  63. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 8.
  64. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 27.
  65. *Ibid.*
  66. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 27 and 55.
  67. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 25.
  68. Delarue first published 'The Story of Grandmother' in the journal *Bulletin Folklorique d'Ille-de-France* in 1951 (Delarue, 'Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault', 221). Among his research (which included 35 oral versions of the Little Red Riding Hood narratives) was his transcription of an 1885 manuscript he discovered in Nievre, France. Zipes and other academics (such as Orenstein) argue that Delarue's transcription is a truer version of the 17th-century oral tale than Perrault's 1695 narrative (Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 4; Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 75). This is due to the unique story motifs which are absent in Perrault's literary version, i.e. the 'paths of pins and needles, the blood of granny, the defecation in bed and the escape of the girl' (Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 4 and 25). Similar oral versions were also recorded by Charles Joisten in the south of France during the 1950s (Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 6). However, Zipes' repeated use of the phrase 'original oral tale' in reference to Delarue's 20th-century text is problematic as it is impossible to confirm which oral versions circulated in 17th-century France. Ruth Bottigheimer (*Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 54) and Jan Ziolkowski ('A Fairy Tale from before Fairy Tales', *Speculum*, 551) argue that Perrault's 1695 literary fairy tale is the existing pre-text and an original story created from an amalgamation of medieval texts and ancient fables. This notion is supported by Dundes ('Introduction', *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, 3) and several other scholars cited in Carole Hanks and D.T. Hanks, 'Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood": Victim of the Revisers', *Children's Literature*, vol. 7 (1978): 68-77, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy-f.deakin.edu.au/article/245962> (i.e. Maria Leach, *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1949); Geoffrey Breton, *Perrault's Fairy Tales* (Penguin, 1957); Jaques Barchilon and Henry Pettit, *The Authentic Mother Goose Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1960); Stith Thompson, *One Hundred Favorite Folktales* (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968); and Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974)).
  69. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, xi & 7-8.
  70. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 8.
  71. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 13.
  72. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 11.
  73. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 103.
  74. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 176.
  75. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 109.
  76. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 22.
  77. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 23.
  78. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 26.

79. *Ibid.*
80. Jack Zipes, 'A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 7/8 (1983-4), 93.
81. Zipes, 'A Second Gaze', 91 and 92.
82. Zipes, 'A Second Gaze', 80.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. Bettelheim, *Uses Of Enchantment*, 169; Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 27 and 33; F.W.N. Bailey in Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 158.
86. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 101.
87. Nina Strochli, 'Famed "Afghan Girl" Finally Gets a Home', *National Geographic*, 13 December 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/pages/article/afghan-girl-home-afghanistan> (accessed 8 April 2021).
88. Karen Percy and staff, 'Eurydice Dixon's killer Jaymes Todd jailed for life for her rape and murder', ABC News, 2 September 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-02/eurydice-dixon-killer-jaymes-todd-sentenced/11469328> (accessed 17 March 2021).
89. Verdier, 'Little Red Riding Hood in Oral Tradition', 106.
90. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 24.
91. Delarue, 'Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault', 232.
92. Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 7 and 25.
93. Delarue, 'Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault', 221.
94. Delarue translated by Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 22.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Delarue, 'Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault', 221.
97. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 44.
98. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 35-6.
99. Paul Delarue, *The Borzoi Book of French Folk Tales*, trans. Austin E. Fife (USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 231.
100. Delarue, *The Borzoi Book Of French Folk Tales*, 231.
101. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 61.
102. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.