

TRACING DESIRE:
FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

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I identified with Little Red . . . I admitted to myself that
I have felt hunted just like Little Red was by the wolf.

—Laura Evans, “Little Red Riding Hood Bites Back”

When we think of Little Red Riding Hood, we think of an innocent little girl skipping through the forest as she gathers flowers on her way to grandmother’s house. She is always followed by the Big Bad Wolf as he desires to make her his next meal. We tend to consider this a cautionary tale for children; few of us would examine it for sexual overtones, let alone think about Little Red Riding Hood as a temptress with sexual desires. But in many versions of this tale, Little Red is a feminine, empowered, and heroic character. Our precious Little Red Riding Hood has had a long journey through folklore and literature. She begins in oral traditions not with an iconic red riding hood, but as a plainly clothed little girl ready to take on the dangers of the forest. In all versions, regardless of her attire, Little Red sets out from her home and encounters the wolf. This encounter leads her to a rite of passage, a transformation from an innocent little girl to a woman. The tale warns young girls of the danger that lies out in the world, represented as the wolf. The wolf becomes a symbol of the lust of men and the danger he presents to young women. He threatens their virginity by tempting women to embrace their sexual desires. However, in retellings of the tale, this encounter is one of heroism rather than victimhood, the outcome determined more by Red’s agency than the wolf’s threat. From the earliest oral tradition to modern retelling, Little Red explores the roles for women in relation to her independence and sexual awakening.

In this essay, I map several transformations of this tale and how it responds to and enforces different expectations for women. One of those expectations is the response to female sexual desires; these desires are presented differently in each tale. I will analyze the girl’s sexual desires and the influence of those desires on her choices in three versions of the stories: “The

Grandmother,” translated by Achille Millien, “Little Red Riding Hood” by Charles Perrault, and “The Company of Wolves” by Angela Carter. Little Red Riding Hood’s character changes over time as the challenges presented to women and the roles accepted by women also change. I argue that representations of female sexual desires are prevalent in each of these tales, especially in those written by women. Female authorship is an important consideration. As Karen Rowe argues, the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” is an example of “women as storytellers,” and they have “woven or spun their yarns, speaking at one level to a total culture,” integrating a seemingly minor domestic tale into cultures across the globe (301). The evolving cultures that foster these stories are reflected in female sexual desires and expressions in each tale. It is important that we understand the significance of Little Red’s dynamic character because we continue to repeat versions of this tale—in books, films, and bedtime stories—to our children. Even today, fairytales “play an extremely crucial role in furthering the critical consciousness of the young,” and as we pass along tales we pass along its fears and warnings (Zipes 210). We should be critically aware of how we continue to reinforce the acceptance of traditional gender roles instead of encouraging a challenge to patriarchal and sexist traditions.

Many feminist readings of Little Red Riding Hood stories analyze the sexual nature of the wolf and discount the girl’s sexuality. In her book *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale*, Catherine Orenstein analyzes the cultural and sexual connotations of several versions of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Orenstein claims Little Red Riding Hood is interesting because she is a complex human character concerned with issues of coming of age, family, self, and interrelationship (7-8). In terms of sex and gender relations, Little Red Riding Hood’s fight with the wolf reflects many of the same challenges that plague women today. Little Red appeals to women because she is a beautiful and innocent girl. They also recognize the gender and power dynamics involved in the Big Bad Wolf’s manipulation of her. I agree with Orenstein that the character of Little Red Riding Hood reflects the fears of many women. Women can see themselves in her place because they, like Laura Evans, feel “hunted just like Little Red was by the wolf” (131). This “hunted” feeling comes from centuries of cautionary tales that become engrained in our lives and minds from a young age. Cautionary tales such as Little Red Riding Hood remind readers that the world around us is unsafe. There are wolves in each of our lives, waiting for us to step out in the forest to take advantage of us. Little Red’s ability to escape the wolf with her clear, level-headed thinking becomes an example to women, giving them hope to triumph over their own wolves, symbols of everyday problems. Orenstein suggests that Little Red’s appeal is more than surface level; her choices lie in the subconscious of society, and our stories can aid us in making

quick decisions that will save our lives. Likewise, Cynthia Jones recognizes the subconscious of society bleeding through in fairy tales and argues that the tale sets the girl on a rite of passage to discover her womanhood and animus, her inner connection with the collective unconscious (139). Jones says meeting the wolf allows the girl to engage the collective unconscious inside her and go out into the world, continuing her human journey after her own rite of passage. Jones argues that both good and the bad exist within Little Red Riding Hood and that only through the rite of passage is she able to unlock and understand herself.

In contrast, this essay focuses on Little Red Riding Hood's sexual desire. Each of the tales I am analyzing relates to a rite of passage, and each presents the girl in a unique light. One of the earliest versions was "The Grandmother," originally passed down verbally from mother to daughter. The tale's first transcription was in French during the sixteenth century and translated into English by Achille Millien around 1870—but the story seems to retain its earlier oral folkloric and feminine essence. "The Grandmother" allows the girl to choose her path, and her choice reflects the notion of female sexual desire. This tale told by women allows the girl to recognize her desires but does so in a covert, implicit way. She is not able to be explicit with her desires, so they become cloaked in traditional gender roles. Still, the girl chooses a path that will lead her to loss of virginity and mature sexuality. Perrault's seventeenth-century tale deviates from "The Grandmother," as its patriarchal revision imagines Little Red as a subservient and weak character. Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" conditioned women not to speak to the wolves that threatened them, but rather to obey male authority and to stay inside where it is safe. Finally, in a postmodern, radical feminist retelling, Angela Carter wrote "The Company of Wolves" in 1979 in English. This retelling allows the girl to embrace her sexuality directly and encourages women to do the same. Carter comes back to the sexual desires of "The Grandmother" in a more direct way. She openly creates a character who becomes sexually powerful rather than victimized, as in Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood." By looking at all these tales, I will analyze the sexual implications and how they relate to the girl choosing her desires.

"The Grandmother"

"The Grandmother" accepts women's traditional roles yet, even as its origins far predate the modern period, hints at feminist independence. As in most Little Red tales, this one follows a rite of passage narrative in which girl becomes woman. Catherine Orenstein describes this narrative as "the same pattern that characterizes human rituals marking life transitions: birth, death, and especially

puberty or initiation rites”; in this case, the rite fulfills the traditional roles for women by forcing them to choose to accept traditional gender roles (Orenstein 78). In “The Grandmother,” the girl chooses a path that will lead her to this transformation to womanhood—the loss of her virginity and the preparation of marriage. However, as we shall see, the story also undermines patriarchal authority in allowing women some degree of freedom in sexuality and marriage roles.

In characterizing Little Red stories, Cynthia Jones uses Arnold Van Gennep’s three stages of the rite of passage: the preliminal, the liminal, and the postliminal (135). The preliminal stage occurs at the outset of the story when the girl is at home with her mother. The liminal stage is the journey to grandmother’s house, where the girl will face her transition to adulthood. The postliminal stage occurs when the woman rejoins society, typically with an initiation scene (135). In the preliminal phase, the girl exists within a world of specific gender roles and hierarchical authority. The mother instructs her daughter to take food to her grandmother and the girl sets forth, carrying “a hot loaf and a bottle of milk” into the forest (Millien 13).

This order sends her through the woods and into the “liminal stage,” or the “space through which the little girl completes her transitional voyage” (Jones 135). Here, the girl makes her decision to take the path towards the loss of her virginity. On the way to her grandmother’s house, the girl comes to a place where two paths cross, and she meets a werewolf, or “bzou.” He asks her where she is going, and she tells him. The wolf gives the girl a choice of paths: “‘Which path are you taking,’ said the bzou, ‘the one of the needles or the one of the pins?’ ‘The one of the needles,’ said the little girl” (Millien 13). The symbolic language of needles and pins, carried through from the original folkloric source, was familiar to French peasant women (Douglas 4). Mary Douglas explains that pins were understood to be “easy to use but only mak[ing] a temporary fastening, a symbol of a virgin” (4). Needles, on the other hand, “are employed with skill and perseverance, they make permanent ties.” Furthermore, “putting a thread through the eye of a needle has a simple sexual connotation.” Therefore, says Douglas, “the needle is an adult woman” (4). Had the girl chosen the path of the pins, a path for an innocent child, she would not have experienced the rite of passage. By choosing “the one of the needles” (Millien 13), she chooses womanhood and announces her sexual desires. By allowing the girl to choose her path, the tale suggests the girl’s agency. So, the girl and the wolf take separate paths—the girl the path of needles and the wolf the path of pins. She chooses a path of sexual awakening and even seems to embrace her desires: “the little girl entertained

herself by gathering needles” (Millien 13). Her lingering on the path and “gathering needles” symbolize her gaining of sexual experience.

The story continues along a plotline that seems familiar, but which contains surprising details relevant to the symbolic rite of passage. The wolf arrives first at the grandmother’s house. He kills her and then “[puts] some of her flesh in the pantry and a bottle of her blood on the shelf” (Millien 13). When the girl arrives, the wolf, pretending to be the grandmother, invites her inside. He tells her to eat the meat and drink the wine on the shelf, then demands she take off her clothes and get into bed with him. The girl does as she is told. Orenstein explains that the girl’s actions symbolize her final transition into womanhood: “the heroine’s bottle of wine [the grandmother’s blood] symbolized her virginity” (Orenstein 70). The girl participates, by drinking her grandmother’s blood, in a kind of initiation rite (Orenstein 70). To symbolically gain the wisdom of her elders and to continue the tradition of the rite of passage, the girl literally eats her grandmother. She must take in the old regime of the matriarchy and continue to apply it to her life.

Now the new woman embraces her sexual nature. Since she chose to accept the traditional role as a wife, she must dispose of the innocence of her childhood, which she accomplishes by throwing her clothes into the fire in a striptease fashion:

‘Get undressed my child,’ said the bzou, ‘and come to bed with me.’

‘Where should I put my apron?’

‘Throw it into the fire. You won’t need it anymore.’

And for all her clothes – her bodice, her dress, her petticoat, and her shoes and stockings she asked where she should put them and the wolf replied, ‘Throw them into the fire, my child. You won’t need them anymore’ (Millien 13).

She does as the wolf says and climbs into bed with him, despite the loss of her innocence and her virginity.

But rather than simply a transition to womanhood, something unexpected occurs. The woman’s sexual act isolates her from the traditional roles and further encourages her independence. She has nothing more to lose from going outside these roles, so she challenges tradition by lying with the wolf. Stripping for the wolf is a sexual act of her design. She challenges tradition by acting on her sexual desires before marriage. Once all her clothes burn, she climbs into bed with the wolf, commenting on his appearance, “Oh, grandmother, how hairy you are!” (Millien 14). She does not flee when she sees the wolf’s hair, body,

and fang-filled mouth, deciding to leave only after he says, “the better to eat you with” (Millien 14). In staying with the wolf, despite his appearances, the girl is willing to give up her virginity to fulfill her desires.

In the postliminal stage of the rite of passage, the girl returns a changed woman. After the girl realizes that the person she is lying next to is a dangerous wolf, she tries to escape, claiming the need to urinate and saying: “I have to do it outside” (Millien 14). The wolf sees through this escape and tells her to “do it in the bed,” but she insists that she must go outside, so the wolf ties a thread to her ankle and allows her to leave. Once she is outside, she “tied the end of the thread to a plum tree in the yard” and escapes (Millien 13-14). This thread symbolizes the bond of marriage: by tying a woman to a man, they become one in bond. She breaks that bond by tying the thread to a plum tree. Although she has already accepted the role of women in marriage by drinking the grandmother’s blood, she finds her escape and challenges the role. The girl escapes the wolf, not as an innocent girl but rather as an experienced woman.

In “The Grandmother,” we see that Little Red chooses her own path as she navigates an inevitable transition in her life. The rite of passage allows the girl to choose her own path, and she chooses a path that fulfills her sexual desires as well as carrying her into womanhood. She chooses to act on her desires rather than conform to safe or traditional expectations. Her choice of paths reflects her sexual desires, and she only accepts traditional roles to satisfy these desires, escaping shortly after those desires are fulfilled. Chase and Teasley argue that because she chooses to isolate herself in picking her path, she gains “an unnatural independence [that] can be seen to have resulted in prostitution and witchcraft” (769). Although she breaks tradition by losing her virginity before marriage, she is no prostitute. She simply challenges traditional roles by sleeping with the wolf and then escaping. The independence of the girl in “The Grandmother” challenges traditional roles by allowing the girl to free herself from the wolf and from the role women play in marriage.

Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood”

While Little Red in “The Grandmother” chooses a path that meets her desires, Little Red in Charles Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” instead has her path chosen for her. Charles Perrault was the first one to transcribe and publish the fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” in 1697, and the first to name the character. In Perrault’s tale, the girl’s description is that of “the prettiest creature who was ever seen,” and she receives a name when her grandmother makes her a red cape

that causes the people of the village to brand her Little Red Riding Hood. Perrault's tale omits Little Red Riding Hood's sexual rite of passage, which we saw in the older, though more recently transcribed, Millien version. It is unclear whether Perrault discards sexual wordplay and symbolism of the folktale out of ignorance or censorship, but I believe Perrault's goal in writing "Little Red Riding Hood" was to condition women to be subservient and dutiful wives, and in effect, that is what his version seems to accomplish.

Perrault's version has a simplified storyline most familiar to us from books of fairytales. After being asked by her mother to take food to her grandmother, the girl meets a wolf in the woods who asks her where she is going and proposes a race:

'Does she live far off?' said the wolf.

'Oh I say,' answered Little Red Riding Hood; 'it is beyond that mill you see there, at the first house in the village.'

'Well' said the wolf, 'and I'll go see her too. I'll go this way and you go that and we shall see who will be there first.'

The wolf rushes off, but the girl "took the roundabout way, entertaining herself by . . . gathering bouquets of little flowers." The image of her picking up flowers and enjoying the scenery along the path brings her child-like innocence to light. She is blissfully unaware of the urgency of the wolf's competition, and like many children, easily distracted. The wolf reaches the grandmother's house first and pretends to be Little Red Riding Hood to gain entry into the house. The grandmother invites him in, and he immediately eats her whole. When Little Red Riding Hood finally arrives, he pretends to be the grandmother, lying in her bed and feigning her voice. Once in her grandmother's house, she is "first afraid, but believing her grandmother had a cold," she relaxes and continues to converse with the wolf disguised as her grandmother. Little Red Riding Hood does not follow her intuition; rather, she believes everything she is told and trusts blindly. He then asks Little Red Riding Hood to take off her clothes and get into bed with him.

In omitting the titillating striptease of "The Grandmother," Perrault simply states, "Little Red Riding Hood took off her clothes and got into bed," thus emphasizing only the wolf's desires. Little Red Riding Hood takes off her clothes not to tease the desirous wolf but because her "grandmother" asked her to. Perrault creates a patriarchal ideal of girlhood, suppressing any suggestion of women's rights, independent thought, or sexual self-awareness. Little Red Riding Hood passively taking off her clothes makes her seem the perfect dutiful wife. Ironically, the control the wolf has over Little Red Riding Hood reflects the

traditional role and Perrault's belief that women should avoid dangerous situations by obeying men.

Little Red Riding Hood's blind trust leaves her vulnerable, and when she sees she is in danger as the wolf says, "all the better to eat you up with," she lacks preparation to find a quick escape, and the wolf "ate her all up." Through the death of Little Red Riding Hood, the wolf fully dominates her, and Perrault asserts his desire to silence women. This control further exemplifies his concluding moral. He asserts that young women should not talk to strangers to protect their virginity. Perrault says that wolves come in "various kinds," including those who are "charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets." Each of the various wolves presents a danger to the purity of young women, and Perrault wants to caution young women to stay inside and not talk to strangers.

Critics are still uncertain whether Perrault drew from the many folkloric traditions of France and Italy (Malarte-Feldman 103) or whether he based his text on a particular version (Shavit 323). Regardless, he creates something unique and new. He is refashioning a tale, told by women, to fit his ideas of womanhood from a male perspective. Zohar Shavit claims that if Perrault does borrow from multiple versions, he still strays from the "formulas of the folk tale" by adding a "tragic ending" and a moral (Shavit 324). The concluding moral makes this tale unique to Perrault and reflects his ideas as a man of French society. Robert Darton remarks that Perrault "communicate[s] traits, values, attitudes, and a way of constructing the world that was peculiarly French" (quoted in Haase 357). Perrault certainly wants young women to become like Little Red because he and his cohorts in the Court of Versailles did not think women should challenge traditional roles. Perrault's version seems exceptionally patriarchal in reaction against contemporary salons of France, which according to Orenstein, "fostered feminism before the existence of that term" (32). While Perrault was enforcing traditional roles through literature, the salons were fighting "for legal reforms to give women the right to marry, or to remain single, and to refuse to have children" (Orenstein 32).

In short, Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" aims its morals to the acceptance of traditional roles, omitting reference to female sexual desires because of the patriarchal vision he seeks to reinforce. Perrault's version shies away from the blatant sexual connotations and trades them for blind obedience to the wolf—the patriarchy. His version separates itself from the clear narrative rite of passage evident in "The Grandmother." The last step, the "reincorporation to society" (Jones 135), cannot occur because the "wicked wolf fell upon Little Red Riding Hood and ate her all up" before she learns from this experience. Perrault

does not account for her complete development because he rejects female sexual desire embedded in the older versions of the tale. But the suppression of female desire would not remain uncontested forever.

Carter's "The Company of Wolves"

Angela Carter's postmodern short story "The Company of Wolves" (1979) creates a sexually awakened Little Red not unlike the protagonist of "The Grandmother." However, Carter's retelling allows Little Red to embrace her sexual desires directly, thus encouraging women to embrace their individuality and sexual identity. Carter's story begins with an initial account that sets the cultural context. She establishes the wolf as fierce and cruel; he is "carnivore incarnate [who is] cunning as he is ferocious; once he's had a taste of flesh nothing else will do" (110). The wolves in the tale have a history of wreaking havoc on villages, and the people of the village live in fear of these wolves.

Carter then embarks upon the tale of a young girl on the cusp of womanhood wearing a red shawl. She walks alone in the dark forest on her way to take food to her reclusive old grandmother. She knows the forest is a dangerous place but thinks she is invincible as she practices taking the knife from her basket. The young girl has just begun her first period, and "her breasts have just begun to swell" (113). She meets a wolf in the guise of a man, and he charms her into friendship. The two of them walk down the path together for a while, talking and laughing. The wolf, who knows the forest well, challenges the girl to a game. He believes he can arrive at the grandmother's house first with the aid of his compass. The girl takes up the challenge and asks the wolf what he wants if he wins—a kiss. The wolf debarks quickly, but the girl dawdles—she actually yearns to kiss the man/wolf. The wolf arrives at the grandmother's house and devours her. Then he waits for the girl, and when she arrives, the wolf blocks the door so she cannot get out. She sees that she is in trouble and begins to seduce him, taking off her clothes and throwing each piece into the fire. The tale ends with the wolf lying in her arms (110-118).

Critics have discussed Carter's short story in the context of feminism, gender roles, and patriarchal power. Jim Shepard, for example, said Angela Carter's work "signaled a recommitment to the power of those primal feelings [of] terror, or desire, feelings that attended upon revelations about the fundamental and unapologetic intimacy of innocence and guilt" (70). But not all critics agree that Carter is reconnecting old tales with modern ideas in a positive way. Kimberly Lau argues that Carter's tale is "moral pornography, an alternative

pornography that must first engage a more traditional hegemonic gazing” (85). She contends that Carter maintains a patriarchal desiring gaze which requires the wolf to be “sexed male” and Little Red a “sexually desirable young girl” (85). The story thus reinforces rather than revises its sexist/patriarchal tradition. Lau is not entirely wrong; Carter does describe the characters in a very traditional light, but there is more depth to the tale than Lau contemplates.

Part of this complexity is Carter’s revision of the symbolic rite of passage. As Cynthia Jones argues, Little Red’s journey through the woods is a symbolic rite of passage from “preliminal” to “liminal,” and “postliminal” phases (135). In her preliminal phase at the beginning, her mother hands her food for her grandmother, then sends her into “the liminal stage,” represented as the forest (Jones 135). Carter emphasizes this rite of passage as she describes the girl: “her breast just begun to swell, and she just started her woman’s bleeding” (113). As she enters the forest with her red shawl, “the color of her menses,” her basket of food, and her knife, the young girl prepares herself for what promises to be more than a geographical journey, but a passage into womanhood (Carter 117). This beginning of womanhood marks her ability to choose to accept traditional gender roles and ultimately embrace mature female sexual desires. While she does not purposely choose a path associated with sexual experience like the girl in “The Grandmother,” she does make a conscious decision to be more sexually adventurous. She joins the wolf in a competition for a kiss. She chooses to accept this rite of passage, “want[ing] to dawdle on her way, to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager” (Carter 115). The third step, the postliminal stage, or return to civil society, is not shown in “The Company of Wolves.” The story ends with a choice to make; she can either stay with the wolf forever in the traditional role as his wife or rejoin her society as a newly changed woman. Either way, she will complete the final step in the rite of passage and reincorporate into a social order.

But what happens in the liminal stage requires study. In the key sexual scene, the rite of passage challenges the girl’s virginity and forces her to break the seal of her childhood. She was “a closed system” (114), but her sexual desire and her lust for the wolf lead her to womanhood and save her life. The girl’s sexual desires are evident when she enters into competition with the wolf and are emphasized when, arriving at her grandmother’s house, she disappointedly assumes the man has not preceded her. The kiss she anticipated sparks her sexual desires. It is not until she strips off her clothes and seduces him further that “she freely gave the kiss she owed him” (118). But her seduction is complicated by her realization, upon seeing her grandmother’s hair in the fire, that her life is in danger. If on one level, the encounter is an affirmation of Little Red’s sexuality,

on another level it is a story of her moral danger. However, her sexual awakening now empowers her to overcome the peril. When the wolf threatens her life, she uses her body to regain control and begins to strip off her clothes piece by piece:

What shall I do with my shawl?

Throw it on the fire, dear one. You won't need it again.

She bundled up her shawl and threw it on the blaze, which instantly consumed it. Then she drew up her blouse over her head; her small breasts gleamed as if the snow had invaded the room.

What shall I do with my blouse?

Into the fire with it, too, my pet.

The thin muslin went flaring up the chimney like a magic bird and now off came her skirt, her woolen stockings, her shoes, and onto the fire they went, too, and were gone for good. (Carter 117-118)

It is in this act of stripping that she gains confidence in her ability to control the wolf and save her life, and she ceases to be afraid of the wolf. When he threatens to eat her, she laughs in his face and overpowers him through disrobing: “she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire” (118). By throwing his clothes into the fire, she is paradoxically both asserting her control over him and making herself equal to him. Both of their clothes burn, and they face each other in the intimacy of nakedness.

This reading of Angela Carter's short story invites further comparison with the earlier versions, as Kimberly Lau indicated. And in fact, Carter's tale does owe much to earlier versions—indeed, how could it otherwise act as a revision? But Carter's revision is still radical in its feminism, in part because it is more explicit and direct than its predecessors. As in “The Grandmother,” Carter's tale has an independent girl throwing her clothes into the fire in a striptease fashion, signaling apparent acceptance of traditional marriage roles or, alternatively, an affirmation of feminine desire and sexuality. “The Grandmother” and “The Company of Wolves” are woman-authored, recalling Virginia Woolf's assertion about women's writing: “it is sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel” (584). These women's tales capture the feeling behind womanhood, yet this is not to say that Carter's story is nothing like Perrault's patriarchal account. In comparing Carter and Perrault, one should note the lack of a father, and a similar mother figure ready and willing to send her daughter out into the forest. The narrator in Carter's tale almost echoes

Perrault's moral when Carter writes, "Her father might forbid her, if he were home" (114). But Little Red goes out into the forest prepared for adventure, and in most respects, Carter's tale is vastly different from Perrault's. For Carter, the girl is aware of her surroundings and prepared to do anything it takes to save her life, including using her sexual power to control the situation and save her life.

Yet the question remains: in using sex for survival, does the girl in Carter's story ultimately accept traditional (submissive) gender roles? Or is she empowered, using her sexuality to gain control over the wolf to save her life and therefore, challenge the traditional roles maintained by patriarchy? The girl gives the wolf a striptease and casts her clothes into the fire. But she only takes off her clothes after she saw her grandmother's hair in the fire, and "she knew she was in danger of death" (Carter 117). She begins to think of a way to escape and is left with one option, seduce him or die. She settles on seducing him rather than consenting to a sexually violent death. Veronica Schanoes remarks that the girl's "sexuality makes her vulnerable, her red cloak and dangerous game leave[s] her open to pain," but her sexuality ultimately saves her life (38). Yet, the narrator describes this sex scene as "a savage marriage ceremony," an acceptance of marriage roles (Carter 118). Yes, the girl enters into a "marriage" with the wolf, but she does so under duress. I do not think that it is as simple as choosing one or another. Forced to choose between a life defined by traditional gender roles or death, she chose to live. That does not mean she wanted to accept the traditional role but merely that she wanted to live rather than die a horrific death like her grandmother. Rather than being sexually victimized, she uses her sexuality against the wolf to save herself. She is not submissive to the wolf; she takes control over him: "she knew she was nobody's meat . . . she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire" (118). If Little Red's sexual desire leads her into a situation that she quickly realizes as dangerous, her sexuality also empowers her. Her domination is an expression of her sexual power over the wolf. The girl takes her life into her own hands and seemingly accepts the submissive role. But she is in fact weaponizing that role to undermine patriarchy's power. She is choosing to use her own sexuality to master the wolf's sexual desires, ultimately saving herself.

Conclusion

The tales of "Little Red Riding Hood" enable women to be independent and fearless in the face of the wolf. It gives women an example of a strong-willed woman, who embraces all her desires despite the negative connotations. But this tale's fears embeds in our very instincts. As we continue to read these tales to our

children, we pass on our deepest personal fears. In each version, the wolf forces Little Red to accept traditional roles or die by his hands, but she refuses to choose and creates a path, meeting her desires. In reading the same tales to our children, we are forcing them to relive the same traditions instead of following Little Red's example and creating a new path, becoming independent instead of blindly accepting traditional roles. Angela Carter's version changes this. She sets the path for women to choose their desires by creating an openly sexually promiscuous character. Carter's promotion of female sexual desires allows women and future generations to question traditional gender roles. She creates a character that has a choice to challenge these roles to become an example to others. Little Red's journey is not finished. There are more tales to create to reflect the ideas of different times and cultures. I believe that future tales will step away from tradition and free Little Red of the social norms that plagues her past. Little Red will become a character who openly embraces her thoughts and desires.

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