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LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD IN THE DIALOGIC TENSION OF  
WOLF POLITICS IN THE U.S. WEST

by

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ABSTRACT

The reintroduction of wolves opened a new chapter in the story of wolves in the U.S. West. But what the conservation community considers moral progress, welcoming the once violently eradicated wolves as an important part of a healthy ecosystem, those opposing wolf restoration consider their return a decivilizing, regressive move back to a by-gone era. In the contentious discourse over wolf politics, the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood is used as a common metaphor; its prevalence and persistence in this discourse indicates that more than an innocuous children's bedtime story is in question.

To examine the potential cultural and political currency the fairy tale brings into this discourse, I rely on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic nature of an utterance. An utterance is never a neutral expression, but an active participant in an ongoing social dialogue; Little Red Riding Hood brings into this discourse a distinct voice of a fairy tale that imbues new meaning and relevance in the tenacious dialogue between the pro-wolf and the anti-wolf sentiment. Looking at the contextual and relational interaction of the utterance brings visibility to how Little Red Riding Hood provides a vehicle to disseminate, manipulate, and proliferate competing cultural and political messages about much larger issues than the presence of the biological wolves in the U.S. West.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The eradication of gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) from the U.S. West was but one part of a massive onslaught on wildlife—either as desirable game species or despised agricultural pest—as European settlers moved westward. But no other animal was a target of such belligerent effort to be hunted down as the wolves. By the 1930s—owing to the systematic effort by the federal government and private bounty hunters—wolves were all but gone from the lower 48 states. Only a small enclave of wolves in northeastern Minnesota and on Isle Royal in Michigan survived the eradication. Even in areas set aside to preserve wilderness and protect natural resources, the predators were not tolerated; the last wolf in the Yellowstone National Park was killed by the mid-1920s (Robinson 2005; Jones 2010).

As part of a larger sociocultural shift toward a heightened concern for the health of the environment and a new understanding of the important role predators play in the ecosystem, wolves were listed under the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1976 (Kleese 2011). In 1995 and 1996, to enhance the wolf recovery effort, sixty-six wolves were captured in Canada and reintroduced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the Yellowstone National Park and, under the tribal oversight of Nez Perce, in Central Idaho. In 1998, the USFWS reintroduced the southernmost subspecies, the Mexican gray wolves (*Canis lupus baileyi*), in Arizona and New Mexico. With only five

remaining wild wolves captured in Mexico, others found in captive facilities—the foundation for the bi-national Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan—the Mexican wolf was saved from the brink of extinction. For their part, the reintroduced wolves adapted successfully, and populations expanded as wolves dispersed in search of mates and territory.

But the return of the wolves to the physical landscape after their 70-year absence has proved to be a highly controversial issue; their status as a federally protected species or a state-managed trophy game species has been a subject to constant litigation, and used as a political pawn. Over time, the polarization between the anti- and pro-wolf sentiment over the reintroduction and recovery has only deepened, stirring anxieties about larger economic, social, political, and cultural issues about power and value (Nie 2003). Relentless public media coverage of the wolf reintroduction has greatly escalated the controversy, favoring stories that inflame polarized views, either agitating a visceral fear of a gluttonous predator or highlighting the reverence for a noble animal (Fritts et al. 2003).

Since the wolf reintroduction, a legion of scientific studies has increased our understanding of wolf-human relations. But the contest over the wolf reintroduction has never been a straightforward debate about the biological wolf. It is the particularly symbolic value of the wolf in Western cultural narratives that guarantees it visibility and staying power; simultaneously this symbolic resonance often outstrips the wolves' physical presence (Phillips 2015), and greatly challenges the management of wolves (Rutherford and Clark 2014). This mythic image of the wolf is everywhere: in religious parables, folklore, children's stories, literature, and media. The stories of the wolf offer a

mythology imbued with archetypal powers that tap into profound fears about human place in nature; fears that blur the boundaries between an animal world and a human world (Robisch 2009; Lopez 1978). These imaginative associations and the deep emotions wolves stir in humans, make them “magnets of meaning” (Van Horn 2012, 206). The folk images and stories of the wolf are indelibly ingrained in the cultural and ideological conflicts and discourses over the wolf, and simultaneously the storied wolf has become intertwined with contentious issues about social change, urban-rural divide, states’ rights, property rights, predator-prey relations, and social construction of nature (Bell 2015).

The return of the gray wolves to the physical and cultural landscape in the U.S. West has brought the classical fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* into the scope of the wolf controversy as human past and present relationship with wolves is being negotiated anew. It is widely considered that this fairy tale is negatively influencing people’s perceptions about wolves, which in turn impacts successful wolf management and recovery (Boitani 1995). *Little Red Riding Hood* also frequently appears in public media discourse over conflicting views about wolves, adding new meaning and relevance to the appropriation of the fairy tale.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, those who oppose and those who advocate for the wolf reintroduction and recovery both use the same language of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper “*Little Red Riding Hood*” is used in two ways: as a literary text by the Brothers Grimm and as an utterance in the debate over the wolf. When referring to the former, the name is italicized.



Little Red Riding Hood appears in this discourse as a persistent, yet subtle, reference that relies on the narrative elements of the classical Brothers Grimm fairy tale version deeply ingrained in Western cultural imagination, so familiar that only a mention of the fairy tale will suffice to recall the famed encounter between the wolf and the girl. It is the ubiquitous and taken-for-granted presence of Little Red Riding Hood that caught my attention. But what is it that keeps a fairy tale so potent in the anti-wolf and pro-wolf dialogue? Rather than merely an innocuous referent for outdated stories about wolves or a media attempt to enliven the story of the wolf controversy, I argue that the classical fairy tale brings cultural and political currency into the conflict over the wolf reintroduction, highlighting uncompromising views about the presence of wolves. To capture the meaning Little Red Riding Hood lends to the contentious anti- and pro-wolf dialogue, I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism to analyze the contextual and relationally situated dynamic that grants Little Red Riding Hood staying power in this discourse. The fairy tale brings to this discourse a narrative purposed for Western civilizing efforts, that parallels the story of the biological wolf in Western culture. In turn the fairy tale provides a powerful template and vehicle in messaging about ongoing deep-seated anxieties about larger overarching issues such as nature and culture, human and nonhuman animal, and coexistence and dominance. I propose that Little Red Riding Hood provides a valuable lens into the Western cultural production of deep-seated human-animal entanglements ever-present in wolf politics.

## Chapter 2

### Little Red Riding Hood as Utterance

Little Red Riding Hood may offer a colorful referent to draw public attention to the story of the wolf reintroduction, but the traction the fairy tale gets and its pervasive presence in wolf politics signifies that something else is going on. What often appears as a mere allusion to the fairy tale conveys a powerful message in swaying people's attitudes about wolves. To tease out the potential meaning Little Red Riding Hood relays in this discourse, I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin.

According to Bakhtin, "Language is not a neutral medium" that merely expresses the speaker's own intentions; rather, "it is populated—overpopulated—with intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 294). That is, Little Red Riding Hood, an expression in a living context of exchange, is an utterance that arrives into the discourse already loaded with its own historical and cultural content, and, in turn, becomes layered with new meaning and relevance as it is re-formed and re-contextualized by subsequent speakers and audiences (Gillespie and Cornish 2009). As Bakhtin points out:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to

become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it—it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (Bakhtin 1981, 276-7)

Not an abstract notion out of context but an active participant in social dialogue, Little Red Riding Hood acquires its meaning from the relational interaction between the speakers, audiences, historical, social, and cultural context, as well as the fairy tale voice of the utterance that bears its own significance as a particular socio-historical narrative into the dialogue.

In utilizing dialogism to illuminate the meaning of an utterance, Gillespie and Cornish (2014) rely on a “dialogical” interpretation of meaning for “the meaning of the utterance is inextricably part of situated dialogue.” Thus the meaning of an utterance or a word is not its dictionary definition; the meaning is not found “within” an utterance but in the “relation” between the utterance and its larger context (436). Gillespie and Cornish lay out certain premises for the dialogical interpretation of the meaning. It requires a social context, where at least partially shared history and culture provides people a common ground to negotiate assumptions, aims, and interests. Meaning is also temporal as an utterance is built on preceding components; a speaker borrows a word or an expression that has a prior history, and, in turn, adds new meaning influencing its future use. In addition, an utterance is addressive and always directed to somebody. The intention of a speaker is to have a certain effect; thus the speaker speaks from the standpoint of the audience and what is relevant and meaningful to the people whose attention the speaker seeks.

In this inquiry Gillespie and Cornish propose looking at such questions as what is the context?, what is the speaker doing?, who is being addressed?, who is doing the talking (the voice of the utterance)?, and what future is constituted? As Dialogism considers the meaning in an utterance always contextual, social, and unfinished, these questions will assist in orienting my inquiry into the meaning Little Red Riding Hood lends to the contemporary pro- and anti-wolf discourse. Bakhtin offers an excellent approach to capture Little Red Riding Hood as an utterance that emerges and gains potency as a discursive referent in wolf politics at a certain social and political moment in history. But it is in the cacophony of colluding claims over Little Red Riding Hood that the fairy tale accrues new meaning and relevance as a vehicle to further particular socio-ideological ideals.

It is significant that the dialogue over wolf reintroduction and recovery relies on a fairy tale as a common language. Thus the discourse takes on a “specific flavor of a given genre” that imbues the utterance with a “specific point of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre” (Bakhtin 1981, 289). The familiarity of the immensely popular fairy tale makes it an excellent vehicle for messaging as it provides “a normative structure of patterned expectations,” providing each participant with predictable things to say (Gillespie and Cornish 2014, 443). The seemingly timeless and ahistorical voice of the fairy tale brings into the dialogue the intentions of Brothers Grimm, which subsequent speakers appropriate in the debate over the wolf, and who consequently add new meaning to the utterance. It is also important to consider that the word “wolf” is similarly a living utterance that takes meaning and shape in an ongoing tension-filled interaction between the word and its environment, as “a word

forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way” (Bakhtin 1981, 279). This “wolf” is entangled with powerful imaginative associations that are then enfolded into the fairy tale reference of the Big Bad Wolf.

Thus, as I explore the cultural and political meaning Little Red Riding Hood lends to the story of the wolf reintroduction—that sets the stage for the recall of the fairy tale—it is, respectively, important to consider what relevance the fairy tale, as a product of a certain socio-historical context, brings into the discourse. After laying out the broader context, I proceed to look at how the utterance gained popularity and what the participants are doing with the utterance as it circulates in public media in statements by conservation biologists, ranchers, environmentalists, hunters, First Nations, and journalists in the discourse about wolf reintroduction and restoration. Finally, I will look at the relevance of the fairy tale as a voice in this dialogue.

## Chapter 3

### Storied Wolves: Wolf Reintroduction—From an Old to a New Story of the Wolf

Wolves are viewed as an important barometer to measure human relationship with nature (Kellert 1996). They are considered a keystone species not only biologically but also politically (Nie 2003). The eradication and reintroduction of wolves in the U.S. West, and their changing status from a threatening predator to a threatened species is representative of the conflicting narratives humans have over their relationship with the natural world. In U.S. history, the presence of wolves has defined the boundary between the “civilized”—the domesticated animals and landscapes—and the “wild”—wilderness and its nonhuman and “uncivilized” human inhabitants. Whereas the presence of fewer wolves had been considered economic progress and killing them seen as morally justified, with a sociocultural shift in environmental values and a new understanding of the important role predators play in the health of the ecosystem, more wolves—and the concomitant human ability to coexist with them—became to signify “moral progress” (Van Horn 2012). Just as the eradication of wolves was part of the colonial civilizing effort, the rescue of the wolf from extinction and the rewilding of the U.S. indicated a revision of what “progress” means in the Anthropocene. The reintroduction of wolves and reversing the species’ extinction are often viewed as redemption for past atrocities; it is seen as an effort to redeem humanity by restoring the once violently eradicated wolves back into the landscape (Coleman 2004). As Research Scientist William Lynn points out,

this effort is about moral values and a concern of the well-being of human *and* nonhuman others.

In cosmopolitan language, we might say that the moral fabric of the cosmopolis was torn by habitat degradation and species extinction, and the recovery of wolves, whether through reintroduction or recolonization, is a necessary step towards reweaving the moral order of nature and culture.

(Lynn 2002, 312)

The recovery of wolves from extinction in the U.S. West is a moral test that continues with the restoration of wolves back to their former habitat. Wolves are no longer considered a useless pest or a villain but a victim as well as a hero, an “ecological celebrity,” symbolizing the diminishing wilderness (Jones 2010, 338). For the environmental movement the wolf became a high profile rallying point and a flagship species in the implementation of the ESA (Van Horn 2012).

For those who oppose the wolf reintroduction, bringing the animal back to the landscape denotes regression: “Reviving the presence of animals that were intentionally trapped, poisoned, and shot out of existence, constitutes a regressive plunge that decivilizes the land and threatens to disrupt human’s position as nature’s rightful manager” (Van Horn 2008, 84). This rhetoric reverts to considering the wolf as the enemy of civilization. As the executive director of the Montana Shooting Sports Association, Gary Marbut points out, “One might reasonably view Man’s entire development and creation of civilization as a process of fortifying against wolves” (Marbut 2003). Thus the wolf both threatens and produces civilization. Simultaneously, the wolf is seen as an agent of

change; their restoration back into the landscape threatens old cultural narratives that support human dominion over nature (Van Horn 2012).

As the reintroduction and restoration of wolves back to parts of their native habitat signaled “the emergence of a new story about *Canis lupus*” (Jones 2011, 203), it opened up competing and conflicting narratives over human place in the natural order. The notion of biodiversity has brought a new line of inquiry into human coexistence with predatory wildlife, challenging the traditional uncompromising methods of eradicating what doesn’t fit into the human dominated landscape. On the other hand, a narration based on an argument about biosecurity concerns draws not only from the primordial fear of ferocious wild animals perceived as a threat to human physical safety, but also from broader concerns about ontological well-being. In this rhetoric, wolves are not only regarded a threat to humans, their property, and a competitor over game species, but are also seen as a threat to the very culture and tradition of a pastoral lifestyle (Buller 2008).

This conflict between the two narratives about wolves is often referred to as “wolf wars” or a “war on the West” (Nie 2003, 210). In 2010, when the U.S. Congress delisted the gray wolves, with the exception of the Mexican wolves, and turned wolf management to the states, *National Geographic Magazine* ran a cover story, depicting the drama of the reunion of wolves and man.

Packs are making a comeback. That’s a thrill for wildlife lovers. But wolves are still wolves, killing cattle and elk. Many Westerners are angry. And so, the age-old fight over land and food has begun anew. (Chadwick 2010, 34)



More than a controversy over wolves killing ranchers' cows or depleting hunters' elk herds, the relationship between wolves and humans is part of a much larger "culture war." Brett Haverstick, education and outreach director for Friends of the Clearwater in Northern Idaho, explains that many people still think the U.S. West is an "endless frontier" and consider that individuals shouldn't be held back by any restrictions put on them.

Wolves were eliminated 100 years ago and that was part of being a good westerner, the conquest of nature. Now wolves are caught in a struggle between the Old West and the New West. Those wolf carcasses you see in social media photos you would think it's Osama bin Laden hanging from the rafters and that the hunters are proudly serving their country, posing with their assault rifles. This is about going into the forest and removing evils from American society. (Gibson 2013)

Ralph Maughan, professor emeritus of Political Science at Idaho State University, the founder of the Wildlife News, and a longtime commentator on wolf politics, observes that although it is true that from the beginning the wolf reintroduction was met with strong opposition from ranchers, the proponents and opponents of the reintroduction were willing to make a reasonable effort to have a conversation how to coexist with wolves. It was not until a decade later that a radical anti-wolf sentiment, a "militant anti-wolf narrative" began to develop and proliferate. Maughan links this demonizing of wolves to a wider phenomenon of political tactics of fear mongering and anti-government attitudes in which the wolf serves as a symbol of the federal government intervention and takeover. He considers the issue to be about cultural politics and urban-rural divide, not

about wolves (Maughan 2013, 2016). Sociologist Matthew Wilson notes in his study of the conflict between environmentalist and wise-use movements in the U.S. West that the wolf is not longer the traditional predator of “the western cultural myth” but, rather, “a political symbol that broadens the agenda of a much larger antienvironmental [sic] campaign, mobilizing activists to repeal federal land use restrictions throughout the American West” (Wilson 1998, 457). Initiated by some prominent Western politicians, this rhetoric is predicated on the assumption that a demise of rural economy will follow the wolf reintroduction. Others “citing data from the Grimm Brothers,” echoed a familiar sounding warning, “the wolves will kill a little girl before the first year is over” (Maughan 2013; Williams 2013). Anti-wolf propaganda cloaked in fairy tales has been accused of having infiltrated the establishment as “fairy tales are influencing legislation, regulations, public opinion and threatening the recovery of wolves and their vital contribution to our ecosystems” (McCormick 2015).

Proponents and opponents of wolf recovery alike, draw on the same symbolic language about wolves, whether as threat or salvation, in order to convey a set of values, belief systems, and worldviews about wolves charged with multi-layered meaning and translated into contentious public policy debates (Meadow et al. 2005). As proponents of wolf recovery strive to clear the negative stigma of the wolf lore, opponents draw on the same folk tradition that depicts wolves as a menacing threat to human well-being. This tradition that relies on the Brothers Grimm story of *Little Red Riding Hood* offers an image of the Big Bad Wolf as an existential threat. Although wolves have always been clothed, “dressed up to suit human needs, moralities, and fantasies” as they have been “enfolded in human culture” (Marvin 2010, 59), the *Little Red Riding Hood* image of the

wolf is particularly powerful as it is a stand-in for a predatory human, a transgressor, foreign intruder, trespasser, a criminal, who is immoral, cunning, and evil. To understand the meaning the fairy brings into this dialogue and the power it lends to the wolf image, it is important to take a look at the socio-historical context that gave rise to the fairy tale as a container and vehicle of a simple but powerful message.

## Chapter 4

### Little Red Riding Hood—A Socio-Historical Narrative

Fairy tales, with their embedded warnings and lessons about life, are powerful tools to mold children's and, consequently, adults' perceptions about the world around them (Mitts-Smith 2010). *Little Red Riding Hood* is one of the most widely read stories, and one that children are exposed to at an early age. And rather than outgrowing this children's bedtime story, it becomes internalized (Orenstein 2002). Of the countless retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*, it is the classical literary versions by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm that hold "a revered if not sacred place in modern Western culture," their reception comparable to the bible (Haase 1993, 383). In its seeming timelessness, *Little Red Riding Hood* continues to uphold a narration that furthers a thinking specific to certain social-historical circumstances and as such has become deeply ingrained in Western culture as part of Western collective consciousness (Teverson 2013).

Some have suggested that the popularity, universality, and longevity of *Little Red Riding Hood* should be attributed to the emotional power of a threat of predation, considering the fairy tale primarily a warning tale about predatory animals and only secondarily about human strangers (Sugiyama 2004). But Jack Zipes, a folklorist and the foremost Little Red Riding Hood scholar, contends that it is critical to understand the

fairy tale against the changing socio-historical context of the narrative both as a tool and a product of Western patriarchal civilizing processes (Zipes 1993).

Zipes locates the significant turning point in the historical development of the story at the intersection of the original oral folk tale and its literary, industrialized version at the service of Western civilizing processes. The earliest version of the oral tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* has been traced back to the Middle Ages, and is considered to have served as a women's initiation story that celebrates the young woman's resourcefulness. In this story, the female is not a helpless victim; rather than falling prey to a werewolf or a wolf, she cleverly finds a way out of her predicament. In this oral tale, the girl is not afraid of the woods or the wolves (Zipes 1993). In 1697, French aristocrat Charles Perrault turned the oral tale into a moralizing and sexually violent literary story to warn young women of the French court about unsavory suitors. The girl is turned into a gullible and helpless female who contributes to her own demise as she is devoured by a sexual predator, disguised as a wolf. Perrault appropriates the motifs of the folktale "imbuing them with different ideological content and stylizing the elements of the plot" (Zipes 1993, 26). He transforms the story to suit patriarchal, bourgeois society's demand for the virtuous behavior of young females. Thus Little Red Riding Hood's story becomes an instrument of control for a particular sex and social class (Zipes 1993). Importantly, Perrault changes the oral tale's antagonist into a "simple" wolf. Although the era of witch hunts and werewolf trials had subsided by the time Perrault penned his version, these earlier associations likely remained, identifying the wolf with a werewolf, the devil, insatiable lust, chaos, and the witch (Zipes 1989).

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed an increasing interest, particularly among middle and upper classes, in the child as a malleable and educable subject, and children's literature was seen "a tool devoted to informing young people's religious and moral growth" (Marshall 2004, 261). The Brothers Grimm 1812 version of *Little Red Riding Hood* became to fulfill this goal to teach patriarchal bourgeois ideals of industriousness, domesticity, and specific gender roles. In this version of the story the girl was made younger and more naïve, and the tale's message became conforming in its scope. In contrast to Perrault's version, the Brothers Grimm tale also modified the overtly sexual content to suit younger readers, yet retaining sexualized messaging, now embedded in suggestive illustrations (Zipes 1983). In the tale, the girl didn't listen to her mother's orders to stay on the straight and narrow path, but foolishly allowed the cunning wolf to trick and tempt her to idly stray off into the forest to pick flowers. The Brothers Grimm added a "happy ending" and a paternalistic intervention to the story; rather than punished by death, the girl is redeemed by a huntsman who kills the wolf and eliminates the evil that tempted the girl.

As Zipes points out, *Little Red Riding Hood* is a "tale of double violence;" not only did Perrault and Brothers Grimm take the oral tale told by women and appropriate it to tell the story from a male perspective, but they also made the girl provoke her own violation (Zipes 1993, 8). The fairy tale's transition conveyed a message in the instrumentalization of a particular subject. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the girl is subjected to discipline that produces "practiced bodies," or "docile bodies" that "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" adhering to such values as domesticity, industriousness, and productivity (Foucault 1979, 136-8). This disciplinary, docility-utility effort is one of

surveillance and regulation practiced at homes and in schools. The narration in *Little Red Riding Hood* supports the increasing state sanctioned disciplining of societies since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a Western social practice in which “modern ‘subject’ arises out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint” (Foucault 1979, 29). Foucault identifies different “modes of objectification” that transform humans into subjects: the status of science in categorizing and taxonomizing life, the subject internalizing their expected role, and “dividing practices” that objectify the subject according a binary system into such categories as criminals and “good guys” (Foucault 1982). But whereas the tale offers the girl an opportunity to redeem herself by complying with certain values, the wolf has no such option available as it is suspended in the role of the antagonist and the villain instrumental for the fairy tale to do its work. Traditionally, Western legal system has relied on the wolf as a referent for a human outlaw, whom the state is under no obligation to protect, thus incorporating the wolf “always within and yet always outside the social order” (Phillips 2015, 5). In the classical fairy tale, the wolf represents the evil that can never redeem itself, yet is necessary for the fairy tale’s moral lesson and disciplinary purposes. Furthermore, the wolf appears even as if being “sent” to teach the girl a lesson (Zipes 1993).

Much of the work of the fairy tale takes place in the “extralegal invisible systems of discipline” as a disciplinary measure for rearing children (Roberts 2001, 504 fn 32). But as legal scholar Katherine Roberts points out about this “fairy-tale discipline:”

In short, the fairy tale’s exclusively legal theme of crime and corporal punishment, its legal structure, and its self-avowed function as an educative tool for children, casts it definitively within the category of a disciplinary script, even

without Foucauldian insight, and gives it a different role to play. This role is nothing less than the raising of obedient subjects. (Roberts 2001, 505)

This disciplinary or coercive function of the fairy tale Robert compares to case law in the Western legal system. The prevalence and access to fairy tale narration, its canonicity, the audience—impressionable young readers—and status as an archetypal story embedded in the Western collective consciousness, has special powers of persuasion about legal behavior, more so than recorded law itself. The fairy tale relies “on forging a shared understanding, a common meaning between itself and the readers that will lead to a reader’s commitment to the tale” (Roberts 2001, 501). And importantly, the rule of law, although based on the legal tradition of *corpus juris*, that implements the justice, “is always the manifestation of a system of shared meaning, which can only be expressed through a culture of stories” (Roberts 2001, 501). In other words, “law must have meaning before law can have power,” making law and narrative inseparably connected (Roberts 2001, 502). Fairy tale “persuades us to accept violence as ‘punishments’ that are just and legitimate, and reject other violence as unjust ‘crimes’” (Roberts 2001, 503-4). The fairy tale genre rules demand that good characters are duly rewarded and evil ones justly punished as “the fairy tale seeks to raise (and shape) us as obedient social and legal subjects” (Roberts 2001, 499). In this system of social control, the wolf, who devours Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother, is bad and his act is one of crime; but the hunter, who kills the wolf, is good for his act is considered a righteous deed representing due justice (Roberts 2001, 504).

It is not only social control the fairy tale exercises. Another legal scholar, David Gurnham takes a critical look at spatial control in the classical fairy tale. In comparing



the medieval, women's folk tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* with the canonized classical version by Brothers Grimm, Gurnham points out that the traditionally held justice affiliated with moral landscapes between the "good" inside (home, family, safety, order, and civilization) and "evil" outside (forest, foreign, danger, disorder, and wilderness) is a product of the patriarchal turn in the story's historical development. In the fairy tale, "the choice of punishment is a retrospective balance and a restoration of the natural moral order" (Gurnham 2005, 595). The Grimms tales are educative moral narratives of bourgeois family values, in which "justice is served by ensuring that characters that can be educated to accept and value the ideal of productive family life are eventually rewarded. Those that cannot be educated must be eliminated" (Gurnham 2005, 594). The fairy tale heroes are considered to belong to the inside/home, and the villains, like the cunning wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*, both physically and morally peripheral, to the outside/forest. In law, force is considered necessary to protect the integrity of the system from the trespassers; similarly, in fairy tale violence is justified to protect the home from the outside threat. Yet, as Gurnham points out, the medieval folk tale figures—less polished and subjectively edited than the ones in the Grimm's version—are imbued with ambiguity, and relay a message that "danger and violence is not conceptually separate to places (and concepts) that we thought were safe" (Gurnham 2005, 585), and thus, "the wolfish traits of one's own family members are disguised in the narrative by creating the character of the wolf and locating him outside in the forest" (Gurnham 2005, 601). Thus the medieval story's reference to the forest and the wolf presents a safe metaphorical distance to a danger that already might reside inside the home and too close to openly to be discussed.

As Roberts points out, “Perrault and Brothers Grimm instituted a system of consistently rewarding the good and punishing the bad, and retributive justice...that serves to legitimate the violent portrayals of the fairy tale” (Roberts 2001, 499-500). Importantly, the fairy tale also provides a platform to contest this paradigm.

The notion that the fairy tale has a more practical role to play in societal indoctrination than most other forms of literature is underscored by the fact that fairy tales, like the law, have been seen as a worthy sites for social reform and contestation. Realizing that fairy tales, like law, can reflect and change society, a multitude of revisionist scholars have become alarmed at the supposedly objective “good” and “bad” of the fairy tale world and the supposedly legitimate justice therein. One major focus of the revisionist effort has been to overthrow the entrenched patriarchal order of the fairy tale, which male collectors like Perrault and the Grimms worked so hard to affirm. (Roberts 2001, 529)

The classical fairy tales by Perrault and the Grimms have provided not only a platform to scrutinize the role of the culpable and helpless female in the patriarchal storyline, but also the role of the wolf as its perpetual villain. With new cultural narratives, new retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* have emerged, which attempt to change the classical image and role of the fairy tale wolf, presenting the tale from the wolf’s perspective or highlighting the friendship between the girl and the wolf. As Sandra Beckett points out in *Revisioning Red Riding Hood around the World: An Anthology of International Retellings* (2014), the fairy tale that had provoked much “bad press” for the wolf, became a “vehicle for

promoting animal rights and, in particular, for rehabilitating the endangered *Canis lupus* after an alarming 1970s census reported for their dwindling numbers” (9).

Yet, although there have been numerous attempts to alter the classical story line and resurrect the female, and the wolf, from under the classical tale’s patriarchal projection and subjection, the old imagery is persistent. This “Little Red Riding Hood syndrome,” which Zipes refers to as a persistent image of a disempowered female trapped in the Western imagination (Zipes 1993, 66), has been extended to refer to the similarly trapped image of the wolf. In this context “Little Red Riding Hood syndrome” has come to refer to the feelings and expectations people have toward the behavior of the wolf, which to a large extent are determined by irrational emotions and cultural prejudices (Drenthen 2014). As Debra Mitts-Smith points out in *Picturing the Wolf in Children’s Literature* (2010), “routine stories” like *Little Red Riding Hood* not only “keep the retelling fresh and wolf dynamic” but they also keep human irrational fears alive (17). The effect of the repetition of certain wolf images and their content, not only in storybooks but also in mainstream media, “does more than render the scenes familiar and recognizable; it also imbues the image with authority, and by extension, truth” (17).

Despite of the new narratives that have emerged with the reintroduction of gray wolves and shifted people’s views about the biological animal and its important place in the ecosystem, “somewhere under the rational surface hides a wolf in our subconscious that is sometimes apprehended as real” (Masius and Sprenger 2015, 1) This evil fairy tale wolf, of which the Little Red Riding Hood wolf is the most famous, “has remained a very stable character in popular culture and perseveres through today” (Masius and Sprenger 2015, 13). This fairy tale wolf gets special purchase as it is deeply enfolded in the human

world and imbued with human qualities. To better understand the power the fairy tale wolf lends to the contemporary wolf controversy, it is important to consider how the wolf, as a socially, culturally, and politically constructed subject, powerfully merges with the character of the children's bedtime story.

## Chapter 5

### The Figure of Wolf

Wolf, perhaps more than any other animal, enfolded and clothed in human culture, is “a multifaceted construct of contemporary Western culture” (Pluskowski 2006, 199). As the wolf is dressed up to suit human needs and fantasies, it is also used to reflect and refract human anxieties; wolves challenge fundamental human constructed dualities of civilization-wilderness, culture-nature, and human-animal (Buller 2008). It is important to understand wolves a part of what Donna Haraway calls “world-making entanglements,” where “figures are not representations of didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another;” they are “where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality” (Haraway 2008, 4). When we speak about the “wolf,” it is this “constant traffic in matter and meaning” that needs to be taken into consideration (Collard 2012, 519). It is the biological animal, its scientific representation, and its symbolic presence that show up in the human discursive space.

#### Trespasser, Intruder, and Criminal

The image of the wolf is arrested at the civilization-wilderness divide. Since the Middle Ages, wilderness, an environment at the fringes of human political and economic

control, has been associated with wolves. Both a place of potential danger and refuge, it provided an abode not only for wild beasts, both natural and supernatural, but also a hiding place for human fugitives. But despite of the popular associations between Dark Ages and menacing wolves emerging from the forest, it is not a concept inherited from the medieval understanding of wolves and wilderness, but, rather, a modern creation by fairy tale imaginary (Pluskowski 2006).

Tracing the changes of human relationship with the wolf in the Middle Ages, archaeologist Aleks Pluskowski considers the important turning point when a zoocentric worldview gave way to an increasingly anthropocentric worldview that considered the wolf a competitor (Pluskowski 2006). As a competitor, the wolves were regarded a hindrance to the advancement of civilization and a nemesis to pastoral economy, culture, and idyll. Considered merely a pest requiring control, wolves seemed to offer nothing in return to man; their meat was considered inedible and their hide difficult to tan. The hunt for the wolf throughout the centuries has been for one reason only, to get rid of a perceived threat. With the eradication of the wolves from most of Europe, this threat of the wolf remained in folktales and “in human imagination as a fear of being consumed” (Salisbury 1994, 54). But wolves have been drawn into “a much more complex social and cultural system of crime, vengeance and punishment” (Marvin 2012, 89). It was not enough to punish the wolf as a trespasser and transgressor in human propertied space; it was as if the wolf deserved to be punished, most cruelly tortured, not only for its actions but also, and precisely, for being a wolf (Coleman 2004).

It is the wolf crossing boundaries and borders that presents a problem for humans. As Aaron Phillips points out, “the gray wolf’s story in the American West is about

territory and crossing borders” (Phillips 2015, 2). Wolves as trespassers and transgressors takes different forms. Biological wolves are highly mobile species; problems arise with humans when the iconic wilderness symbol refuses to be contained in the areas assigned for it. Wolves are an economic asset for ecotourism; as long as they stay within the boundaries of such designated areas as the Yellowstone National Park, they are considered valuable and “essential,” but when they wander outside that area, they become “nonessential” and a target of another economy, a prized trophy for the recreational sport hunter (Kleese 2002). As transgressors wolves are considered a threat to human dominance, security, and propertied places and animals (Van Horn 2012). In the fairy tale, the wolf emerging from the dark forest is intruding upon the tranquility of the domestic realm. The cunning wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* and in biblical imagery, repeated through centuries, naturalized the wolf as “a particular dangerous enemy to humankind, to be feared precisely because it uses guile to slip into the human world” (Marvin 2012, 40). In *Little Red Riding Hood*, it is the wolf as a hybrid of man and wolf that makes the wolf figure especially powerful.

The heated media discussion over wolves among some ranchers and hunters perpetuates and legitimizes certain ideological assumptions of the wolf as an intruder (Bell 2015). One often repeated concern by those opposing the reintroduction is that wolves do not stay in the wilderness, contrary to what “wolf experts” assure about their behavior. This reflects a sentiment of being betrayed by the federal government and its biologists. Another prevalent allegation is that the wolves reintroduced in the Northern Rockies are an “invasive species,” imported from Canada, that are bigger and more aggressive than the ones that once roamed in the U.S. Similarly, Mexican wolves,

reintroduced in the Southwest, are claimed not having been native to the U.S. but, rather, as indicated by their name, belong to Mexico. Parallels are also drawn between the trespassing, “non-native” and “invasive” wolves and criminalized human border-crossers, similarly considered violating national borders and the body of home. The “non-belonging,” outsider status justifies violence against the intruder; “a foreign body is characterized as a threatening force—a worker or a wolf—whose incursions into colonial territory are militated against by regimes of territorial power” (Phillips 2015, 11). Thus the “wolf war” in the U.S. West is intertwined with nationalistic tendencies.

#### Sexuality, Gender, and Predatory Power

As Robisch points out in *Wolf and the Wolf Myth in American Literature* (2009), *Little Red Riding Hood* relies on the usual fairy tale effects of reversal allowing young readers immediately and directly to relate with the fairy tale characters.

[B]ut “Little Red Riding Hood” also employs the powerful combination of filial loyalty and sexual temptation, depicted through the doppelgänger, the figure of disguise and transformational twinning. Unlike “the Wolf and the Seven Kids” or “The Three Little Pigs,” in which the wolf is instantly recognized as a predatory figure of danger, “Red Riding Hood” gains much of its energy from the wolf’s duplicity and humanization, even to its predatory hunger being metaphorically sexual. (Robisch 2009, 264)

The fairy tale wolf, who seeks to make the acquaintance of the girl, is not only endowed with the power to kill, the natural propensity of a predator, but sexual power which, when



associated with sin, makes the wolf both dangerous and evil (Stekert 1986). The sexually violent undertone of the story lends the wolf a particular role in the dominant vs. submissive, assailant vs. victim, and male vs. female dichotomy.

As Maneesha Deckha points out, there is an intimate connection between race, gender, and species. Species is like other hierarchical markers of difference; each resembles the others both in structure and effect. Species like other socially constructed identity markers draw from biological difference, taxonomies, and categorization (Deckha 2006). The construction of these identity markers is also closely connected to the discourses of civilization. Deckha point out that hierarchical thinking with animals and animality is not only utilized in racialization of certain people, but animals are also portrayed as racialized and gendered objects (Deckha 2008).

In “A Race of Wolves” (2015), Carla Freccero looks at this intertwined cultural production of species, sex, gender, and race in the figure of the wolf that haunts Western history and literature in complex and contradictory ways. Freccero suggests, that the portrayal of the devouring, gluttonous wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* is further complicated by the interspecies sexual encounter.

In “Little Red Riding Hood” there is a specificity to the gender of the child—she is female—which adds a dimension of genetic and reproductive competition to the fantasy of wolf/human competition—the transpecies miscegenation so sought after in other contexts (male human hybridized with male wolf), when posited as between male wolf and female human is a threat. (Freccero 2015, 115)

Comparably, Barry Lopez suggests that the sexual violence in *Little Red Riding Hood* could be metaphorically extended to the peculiar rural, socially accepted violence inflicted on wolves. The rancher, who loses his cows or sheep to wolves, could be likened to Little Red Riding Hood's paternal protector, as the wolf is seen "devouring" and "molesting" the animals that belong to the rancher's domestic space. And further, "the sort of outrage and the promise of violence stockmen manifested when they found a wolf-killed sheep is uncommonly like that manifested by men on hearing that a neighbor's child has been raped by an itinerant laborer" (Lopez 2004, 266).

The devouring wolf is also linked to complex dynamics of a predator-prey binary where "predatory remains problematically bound to other persistent and hierarchical binaries. Culture preys on nature; men prey on women" (Collard 2012, 532). In the patriarchal civilizing narrative of the fairy tale, culture and man subordinate nature and woman. As a hunter, man positions himself among other top predators. But in the hierarchical dynamic, the predatory behavior of the wolf is constructed as competitive; whereas zoological predation is a "fluid process of exchange," predation seen as competitive becomes a "static possession of dominance" (Collard 2012, 533). Rather than hunting for survival, the behavior of wolves is anthropomorphized and denaturalized as unethical and disturbing; wolves are portrayed as "serial killers" or "sadistic," who hunt "for sport" (Bell 2015, 299). Whereas the human hunter considers himself an integral part of a healthy ecosystem, the predatory behavior of the wolf is often depicted as criminal and destructive. This point is particularly relevant as politically influential sport hunting organizations rely on a tradition that views the human hunter in charge of managing wildlife. The human hunter is also portrayed as a paternalistic protector, exemplifying a

masculine family provider role (Anahita and Mix 2006). Like the monster slayer of traditional Western hero mythology (Simon 2013), in the Brothers Grimm *Little Red Riding Hood* “the male hunter or game keeper, who polices the woods” (Zipes 1983, 81), comes to the rescue of the girl and, by extension, lends himself also the rescuer of (other) prey species who are in danger of being devoured by the wolf whose appetite has no limits. The sexual undertone of the tale, eating as a sexual act, associated with the biological wolves and their alleged insatiable hunger, leads to other related accusations about their “immoral” behavior that lends them more killable (Bell 2015). Their ravenous and lustful appetite dictates that they cannot be rehabilitated or controlled, thus placing the Big Bad Wolf outside of civilization (Ratelle 2012).

Phillips suggests that the wolf could be considered in Western political tradition the “keystone other,” a “pathological hybridity,” that is suspended into a space of neither-nor. He further points out that the “conflicting discursive characterizations of wolves, long present in folklore, appear to extend into political discourse regimes” that cast wolves as not belonging to their native habitat (Phillips 2015, 14). It is this discursive characterization of wolves that draws from and adds to the fairy tale tradition of Little Red Riding Hood actively used as an expression to convey meaning in the environmental conflict over wolf reintroduction.

## Chapter 6

### Little Red Riding Hood in the Discourse of Contemporary Wolf Politics

#### Little Red Riding Hood Syndrome

The fear of the folklore wolf played an important role in driving wolf eradication by early Euro-American settler (Coleman 2004). These folktales and the European fairy tale tradition that portrayed wolves as a threat to human safety and well-being, have been recognized as a body of knowledge that pervasively continues to affect people's views about wolves, hindering successful recovery of wolves in the U.S. West. Internationally renowned conservation biologist and wolf expert Luigi Boitani emphasizes the importance of public perception about the wolf in the successful wolf population recovery. He points out that Little Red Riding Hood provides "a perfect example of a culture detaching itself from the biological reality of an animal in order to construct an image for its own use," which then reflect adversely on the image of the biological animal (Boitani 1995, 8). When asked, "where did wolves get such a bad reputation?" Boitani unambiguously exclaims, "From Little Red Riding Hood!" He explains that it is the fairy tale's symbolic value that is "automatically transferred from generation to generation," people hardly even realize it, when wolves are talked about, "it all comes out," as the fairy tale embodies the only knowledge people often have about wolves (Spinney 2005).

Many state and federal wolf management programs officially recognize the profound effect fairy tales have on a negative views about wolves and point out that “European fairy tales, werewolf mythology, and religious beliefs, along with the view that wolves were incompatible with human civilization together resulted in the persecution of wolves” and their near-extermination in the contiguous United States (Michigan Department of Natural Resources 2008, 19). *Little Red Riding Hood* also serves as an educational tool. The USFWS Mexican Wolf Recovery Program’s web page for children explains that wolves were not only killed for economic reasons but also because of stories and fables like *Little Red Riding Hood* that portrayed the wolf either a ferocious killer or a cunning trickster (The USFWS, The Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Program). The Arizona Game and Fish Department offers an interactive educational package, “Little Red Takes Many Paths,” to engage young students to consider wolves in the context of evolving cultural values and morals.

To pave the way for the return of the wolves to the U.S. West, considerable effort was invested to demystify wolves and gain public acceptance for them. The comeback of wolves and their high-profile reintroduction in the Yellowstone National Park required considerable renegotiation over an issue that was not only about “stockman’s property rights and biologists’ notion of ecological balance” but about “evolving attitudes toward one of the most evocative animals” (Peterson 1985).

National public media offered a platform for this conversation to create a more favorable and sympathetic image for the wolf, and *Little Red Riding Hood* among other fairy tales provided the public media an often-utilized reference point to highlight the “bad press” on wolves. In 1974, soon after the ESA was signed into effect, a staff writer

for the *Christian Science Monitor* notes in an article “Big, Bad Wolf Is Not So Bad, After All: Final Fight for Survival?” the “incalculable harm” bedtime stories like *Little Red Riding Hood* have done to wolves, promoting the wolf “as the most maligned animal” (Lawrence 1974). In 1987, the *New York Times* reports, that opinion polls show that the public no longer considers the wolf “the evil creature depicted in such tales as the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’” (Shabecoff 1987). And in the mid-1990s, when wolves were being reintroduced in the Yellowstone National Park, responding to concerns about possible danger wolves pose on humans, the *New York Times* assures that “scientists have lately peeled away layers of myth and misunderstanding, and the resulting revolution in attitudes has opened the way for the wolf’s return to some former homelands.” The article asserts that, more than any other animal, the wolf has had a powerful hold on human imagination, highlighting the triumph of science over myths:

From werewolves to the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Western culture had demonized the species. But by studying wolves in both nature and captivity and by investigating reports of their past behavior, scientists have dashed most of the myths. (Stevens 1995)

Yet, old perceptions and attitudes prevail and, according to many conservation biologists, the persistent wolf image from children’s bedtime stories continues to plague wolf management. As one USFWS biologist expressed his frustration over the image of the fairy wolf that hinders the wolf reintroduction:

The wolf is all caught up in the mythology of the animal. Bears kill people, but everybody loves bears; they want to come into the woods and hug bears

because they've been hugging them since they were in the cradle. But when it comes to wolves, who don't hurt anybody, they can't stand it—it's Little Red Riding Hood and the big, bad wolf all over again. (Peterson 1985).

Similarly, Carter Niemeyer, the wolf biologist who played a key role in the capture, relocation, and on-the-ground management of wolves in the Yellowstone National Park and elsewhere in the Northern Rockies region, is perplexed why wolves inspire such animosity. In a statement for *ABC News Nightline*, Niemeyer suggests, lacking a better explanation for the hostility wolves ignite in some people, that it must be “the lore, the mystique of fairy tales” as people get fixated in the images of “werewolves, little red riding hood, three little pigs” (Bury and Brown 2008). Another biologist addressing Oregon hunters, considers that not until the perception of the fairy tale wolf and the “Red Riding Hood syndrome” subside, the fairy tale images continue to teach people that wolves are a “menace and threat to humans” and wolves will be misrepresented and social acceptance of the animal will be difficult (Landers 2010).

Biologist Jim Lukens points out in an Idaho Fish and Game press release, that wolves have generated more emotional reaction than any other species, and advocates science and rational thinking over emotional reactions.

Both folklore and human nature play into fearful emotions through legends such as werewolves, stories like Little Red Riding Hood, and our tendency is to hate what we fear or do not understand. On the flip side, native cultures in North America and elsewhere credit wolves with almost mythical power. In reality, neither representation is true. Wolves are

predatory animals, just like any other. In 1995, wolves were reintroduced in Idaho and have been intensively observed ever since. During that time we have learned a great deal about these animals, enough to be able to clear up some misunderstandings. (Lukens 2006)

The quote points out the dichotomy between a “good” wolf and a “bad” wolf often used by public media, in which Little Red Riding Hood (and other myths) are juxtaposed with an image of a wolf imbued with iconic significance (Peterson 1985; Royster 2005). In a 1987 *New York Times* coverage anticipating the return of the wolves in the Yellowstone National Park, wolf research biologist David Mech confirms that the “savage wolf,” considered a threat to humans, is nothing but a myth. Yet, he simultaneously cautions about another myth gaining popularity, namely, the wolf as “an amicable creature that befriends human beings and lives largely on mice and other small animals,” referring to the hugely popular book by Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf* (1963) and its 1983 movie adaptation (Shabecoff 1987). One critic scathingly questioned the factual content of the book, noting, “Not since Little Red Riding Hood has a story been written that will influence the attitude of so many toward these animals” (Jones 2011, 218). According to another article, some ranchers and hunters blame the movie’s Hollywood fame, influencing a new popularity in wolves, one that makes the wolves “more cuddly than the Little Red Riding Hood’s stalker” (Egan 1992).

In this juxtaposing a good and a bad image of the wolf, First Nations have been drawn into this discourse, and their views appropriated as an alternative to the prejudiced views toward wolves European settlers brought with them to the New World. On WildEarth Guardian’s online information page, “Humans versus Wolves,” First Nations



and their coexistence with the natural world is compared with “a Little Red Riding Hood style intolerance for wolves that Europeans practiced from the earliest days of the conquest of the Western Hemisphere” (WildEarth Guardians n.d.).

Similarly in an interview with Josiah Black Eagle Pinkham, a tribal member of the Nez Perce, Defenders of Wildlife commentator notes that “no allusions to European fairy tales, no references drawn from Little Red Riding Hood or the Brothers Grimm” were made. Instead Pinkham points out, “We have our own stories about wolves, coyotes and other animals that speak to our attitudes of coexistence,” stories which, he explains, “go back to a time long, long before Europeans ever realized this continent was a place on the map of the world” (Wilkinson 2014). Joe Rose, an elder of the Bad River Ojibwa band, uses Little Red Riding Hood as a segue to illustrate the different outlook the Great Lakes tribes have regarding the 2011 state sanctioned sport hunting of wolves. He remarks in a *New York Times* interview, “We don’t have stories like Little Red Riding Hood, or the Three Little Pigs, or the werewolves of Transylvania,” and points out that *Maiingan*, the wolf, is considered a sacred being and a brother to the Ojibwa, not a settlers’ fairy tale import (Gorman 2012). Rose’s comment, with an undertone of sarcasm, speaks to the fear-based stories and views settlers brought with them from Europe that helped to eradicate not only the wolf, but hunted down Native peoples in a similar effort.

To succeed in the effort to bring wolves back to the landscape, it was crucial to gain the support of the general public, measured in opinion polls and manifested in political voting power. Recalling a familiar fairy tale provided a tool to highlight the concern that was most pressing in people’s minds, the possible danger wolves pose on

human life. Little Red Riding Hood operates as an antidote in this messaging; juxtaposing fictitious fairy tales and sound science offered an opportunity to highlight scientific proven facts about wolf behavior over unsubstantiated fears.

Although it is the context of the reintroduction of wolves that provides Little Red Riding Hood new meaning and visibility as a story about a misinterpreted wolf, it is in the tension between the conflicting views about wolves, that the utterance draws on additional relevance. As Bakhtin points out, an utterance doesn't exist in isolation but, rather, lives a socially charged life; not only does the utterance draw meaning from its prior history, building on the narrative elements of the classical fairy tale, but it importantly provides a sounding board for the speakers, who attempt to persuade their audiences, to negotiate issues and interests informed by a particular socio-ideological understandings how the world should work. Thus the fairy tale marshals certain ideals; the fairy tale gets populated with intentions reflecting conflicting claims about the moral of the story, as expressed in the utterances claiming either that Little Red Riding Hood "lied" or Little Red Riding Hood "is right" that collide, creating a discourse that reflects two different dialogic imaginations.

### Little Red Riding Hood Lied

Recognizing the significance of the negative wolf stereotype conveyed in fairy tale myths, environmental organizations harnessed Little Red Riding Hood as part of their campaign to combat the anti-wolf sentiment that attempted to derail the wolf reintroduction. The focus was to separate facts from fiction and to fight prejudices and

preoccupations not based on science. Rather than consider wolves to be a threat to humans “as Little Red Riding Hood tells us,” the amounting scientific information about wolf behavior proves otherwise. In a 1996 press release proposing the designation of a National Wolf Awareness Week, the then-president and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife, Roger Schlickeisen points out that “the overwhelming success of wolf restoration in the Yellowstone ecosystem...has captured the imagination of America and sparked a fire to make restitution to these magnificent predators long persecuted by our own species.”

Schlickeisen continues:

America is entering a new era of enlightenment about predators. Today’s schoolchildren realize that Little Red Riding Hood lied about wolves and that wolves play an important role in the web of life. Moreover, the wolf has become a popular symbol of wilderness, attracting perhaps more attention in the past few years than any other native species of American wildlife. (Moody and Fascione 1996)

Not only did the slogan “Little Red Riding Hood Lied” become an immensely popular Defenders of Wildlife bumper sticker in promoting the restoration of wolves in the U.S. West and an identity marker for those supporting this effort, but also its message was prevalently used as a shorthand to denote a turning point in people’s attitudes toward wolves. The messaging reiterated that people “no longer believe in Little Red Riding Hood—the United States made a mistake in eliminating wolves, now we want them back” (Lazaroff 1997). This message drew attention to the misconceptions about how wolves behave; contrary to what the fairy tale tells us, the wolves “do not eat grandmothers or children or pose any significant threat to any human” (“And when they

kill livestock, Defenders compensates for the loss at full marked value”) (Thompson 1999). At the same time this messaging alerted about the ubiquitous “Little Red Riding Hood syndrome” that “still triumphs over common sense” (Lazaroff 1999), and points out that, “some people still believe myths that have haunted wolves for centuries like Little Red Riding Hood and other fairy tales. However these myths are based on fiction rather than fact” (Lazaroff 2000).

In the more recent years, Defenders of Wildlife messaging took another angle; rather than accusing Little Red Riding Hood of lying, the emphasis shifted to scrutinizing the origins of the classical fairy tale. During the 2012 National Wolf Awareness Week campaign, wolf supporters were urged to share on their Facebook page an image of a cartoon-wolf holding a sign, “Don’t blame me. I’m just a metaphor.” Next to the image a text with the headline, “Give the ‘Big Bad Wolf’ a Break,” explains:

Little Red Riding Hood was meant to make children wary of strangers, not wolves. Fairy tales and misunderstood mythologies have given wolves an image problem that persists to this day, despite the scientific facts that counter it. (Motsinger 2012)

The blog post also informed the readership that the original printed version of *Little Red Riding Hood* by Perrault was intended as a cautionary tale to warn young women of French aristocracy about predatory men, not about “irrational fears of local wildlife.” As the post points out, the annual Wolf Awareness Week was part of an effort to debunk these old myths and to help tell a new story about wolves, a story of the keystone species invaluable to biodiversity and a healthy environment (Motsinger 2012).

In addition to Little Red Riding Hood appearing as a reference to irrational fears about wolves, it is utilized to accentuate political issues involving federal wolf delisting, state management of wolves, and trophy hunting of wolves.

In a 2010 debate whether wolves should be allowed to expand to Utah, *High Country News* ran an article, “It’s Time to Put Aside the Fairy Tales; How Big and Bad are Wolves, Really?” The author, a communications specialist for Defenders of Wildlife, blames a Utah state senator for his anti-wolf agenda that is based on the “same tired Little Red Riding Hood fallacies about wolves in order to generate fear and harness economic anxieties as a motivator to support his extremist agenda.” The author affirms that the truth about wolves “is based on biological realities, not children’s story books,” and points out the importance of wolves in bringing revenue to local communities as a tourism attraction, in keeping ungulate populations healthy and sustainable, and points out how wolves represent for many “the legacy of the Wild West.” The article concludes with an exclamation, “It’s high time we stopped living out Little Red Riding Hood, and just let wolves be wolves” (McCallum 2010a). Separately addressing Defenders’ membership, the author refers to her effort as an attempt to “dispel some more rampant myths” and urges her audience to “tackle the Little Red Riding Hood mentality, that frequently (and unfortunately) is part of any dialog regarding wolves, with facts” (McCallum 2010b).

The 2011 Congressional delisting of wolves, driven by a last-minute rider added to the budget bill, abruptly shifted the status of wolves from the protection under the USFWS to state-managed wildlife, which immediately led to a hunting season on wolves. Brenda Person, a nature writer and a contributor to *National Geographic Magazine*,

responds to the delisting in a commentary, “Little Red Rider and the Big Bad Wolf Hunt,” by reversing the roles of the good hunter and the evil wolf of the fairy tale. She refers to the wolf hunt as “grim as the Grimm’s fairy tale” in which the “wolf must die” and “the heroic hunter” comes to the rescue of the little girl and the grandmother. The hunter, rather than on a rescue mission, is “bent on earning the trophy of the wolf’s skin.” Criticizing trophy hunters and ranchers having biased and corrupted industry interests, Peterson wonders:

Isn’t it time for we the people to update Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond? Who now is rescuing the grandmother and the little girl and keeping the village safe for future generations? It’s not the hunters. It may well be the wild wolves. (Peterson 2011)

Instead of the hunter, the traditional hero of the fairy tale, it is the wolf that is needed to save humanity and help preserve the wilderness for future generations. In this process humans assume the role of the villain, the part previously reserved for wolves.

Just as there are many contemporary literary retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* geared toward demythologizing the wolf by presenting an amicable encounter between the wolf and the girl, media messaging has captured the opportunity to renegotiate teamwork between the wolf and the girl. After all, the characters seem to have a common plight, both trapped in a certain fairy tale plot. Instead of Little Red lying, it appears that the girl herself has been lied to.

Little Red Riding Hood is turned into such political ally in a 2015 *Santa Fe Reporter* article, “Another Santa Fe Fable; What Big Teeth You Have!” addressing the public outcry over the much publicized New Mexico Game and Fish Commission’s adverse interference in the Mexican wolf recovery effort. The satire converts Little Red Riding Hood’s story into a tale of cooperation between the girl and the wolf. Until then, the girl had relied on second hand stories about wolves.

Like most children, the only thing Little knew for sure was that wolves were her mortal enemy. Raised on a steady diet of propaganda like “The Three Little Pigs,” Peter and the Wolf,” and “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” she believed wolves ate children all day long.

As the wolf informs the girl, wolf attacks on humans are extremely rare. The surprised girl inquires, if not to eat her, what does the wolf then want? The wolf simply would like to share some of the food from her basket to welcome the new wolves soon to be released into the wild by the USFWS. The wolf expressed his confidence in the commissioners as “intelligent, well-informed people” capable of making the right decision about allowing USFWS to move forward in their effort to recover the Mexican wolf population in the wild. But the embarrassed girl informs the wolf, that not only are the commissioners siding with ranchers and hunters, but they also aren’t the most intelligent decision makers, and they certainly don’t care about New Mexico’s wildlife. To offer her support to the cause of the Mexican wolves, “Little promised she surely would attend the commission’s meeting, to see if by some miracle they might, just once, listen to the people” (Basler 2015).

Indeed, Little Red Riding Hood made an appearance at the commission meeting. Two wolf advocates (and notably, big game hunters), with their infant in tow, arrived dressed up as Red Riding Hood and the wolf and captured media attention with their colorful appearance (Daniels 2015). In addition, Bold Visions Conservation, an Albuquerque-based non-profit environmental organization, prior to the meeting distributed stickers picturing a Little Red with a bouquet of flowers joyfully riding on the back of a wolf with a message, “Science, Not Fairy Tales; Disband the NM State Game Commission.”

Although the story of the wolves and their important role as top predators in restoring the ecosystem health in the Yellowstone National Park has gained much public support, Louisa Willcox, a senior wildlife advocate for Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), points out that “the myth of Little Red Riding Hood just won’t die” (Knickerbocker 2008). This statement alludes to the persistence of “Little Red Riding Hood mentality,” “Little Red Riding Hood style intolerance,” and the “Little Red Riding Hood syndrome;” yet, it is the frequent recall of the fairy tale that keeps it dynamic and potent for those with opposing views to respond.

#### Little Red Riding Hood Was Right!

A notable figure in wolf politics, Valerius Geist, a professor emeritus of Environmental Science at the University of Calgary, a big game hunter, and an outspoken wolf opponent influential both in North American and in Europe, considers the issue reversed; it is not the myth of the Little Riding Hood, but a “myth of the harmless wolf”



that should be of concern. In an essay published on the Boone and Crockett Club's website, Geist asserts:

This myth is apparently upheld in the science community and has given rise to a popular counter-claim; namely, that all information pertaining to dangerous wolves is an outgrowth of the misleading fairy tale about Little Red Riding Hood. Further, this fairy tale is claimed to reflect ancient, primordial, and irrational fears of wolves and gross misinformation about their behavior. (Geist 2008)

Geist warns about the “extremely powerful” advocacy behind the “harmless wolf myth,” that invests in politics rather than in science and biology. This myth is “repeated so often that it transformed long ago into a politically correct ‘truth.’” Moreover, he considers that “the better educated people are, the more likely they are to believe and fall victim to this myth” (Geist 2008). Geist maintains that North American biologists, due to language and cultural barriers, have not been able to properly investigate foreign historical materials and have thus missed pertinent information. Drawing on his own reading of a historical account from “the very heartland of the brothers Grimm fairy tales” (Geist 2012), he finds a parallel between that source material and *Little Red Riding Hood* fairy tale, and arrives at the conclusion that the fairy tale is “not based on myths, ignorance, or a misunderstanding of wolves. Rather, it is based on very real and terrible experiences with wolves throughout the centuries” (Geist 2008). Geist appears to direct his argument specifically at the environmentalist campaign zealously attempting to separate the biological wolf from its infamous fairy tale counterpart:

The politically correct version is currently the image of the “harmless” wolf that does not attack people. Matters to the contrary are labelled [sic] derogatorily as the “Little Red Riding Hood Lies” all historical evidence to the contrary! (Geist 2007, 10)

Geist considers that when wolf populations are allowed to expand freely under the ESA protections, where the prey base is diminished and livestock is not abundant, “wolves focus on humans—then as now—with frightening consequences” (Geist 2008). First, wolves would advance human habitation as nocturnal garbage dump raiders; later, as they get bolder, they would arrive at daytime to snack on small-bodied pets; and eventually, wolves would turn their attention to humans. And much like the Little Red Riding Hood’s stalker, who attempts to make the girl’s acquaintance, this wolf strives to make the unfamiliar familiar; in “wilderness that is virtually free of humans, both bears and wolves frequently explore lone humans by observing such from hiding, by following human tracks, as well as sitting close to cabins and apparently listening to the human occupant” (Geist et al. 2015). Geist observes further:

Bears and wolves distinguish between the actions and sounds made by confident, armed humans and not-so-confident unarmed hikers. Armed individuals walk boldly and carelessly, and do not normally show fright responses when encountering bears or wolves. These sensitive animals, which are easily frightened, can differentiate the difference in human behavior. (Geist et al. 2015)

Although Geist's views about wolves could easily be dismissed as extremist, he most certainly is not an insignificant figure in wolf politics. His background as a scholar of environmental science grants him authority and his role as a prevalent commentator on wolves grants his viewpoints visibility. Notably, Geist has been instrumental in the articulation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC), a concept that has been adopted by many state wildlife agencies and sport hunting organizations as their guiding philosophy in wildlife management (Organ et al. 2012). Based on the wildlife management philosophy of prominent past hunter-conservationists, the model considers recreational sports hunting central to wildlife conservation. Geist's viewpoint is invested in the role of the hunter as the keeper of order. Like the fairy tale's hunter-gamekeeper who "policing the woods," the sport hunter is relied upon to keep the predator population in check; he protects the game species as well as humans who otherwise would fall prey to the gluttonous wolf. By claiming that the fairy tale builds on historical factuality, Geist not only challenges the authority of wolf biologists but also discredits their integrity as scientists.

Sharing Geist's views about the "myth of the harmless wolf," James Swan, a senior columnist for ESPN Outdoors, paints a picture of wolves as cunning and clever predators who have an uncontrollable appetite, "constantly testing their boundaries as they look for their next meal." Swan assures his readership that when a healthy wolf attacks a human, it is "almost always predatory and/or for pleasure," for "wolves enjoy killing." Swan also considers *Little Red Riding Hood* a required reading for parents to prepare their children for a possible real-life encounter with a wolf, because "someday, it might just save their lives" (Swan 2010).

In a response to Swan's article, NRDC's Northern Rockies representative Matt Skoglund expressed his outrage in a letter addressed to ESPN, and its majority share holder Walt Disney Company, scolding the popular sports channel for publishing Swan's biased and misleading article. As for the mention of the fairy tale saving children's lives from wolf predation, Skoglund merely shrugs it off as "insanity" (Skoglund 2010). In an earlier commentary, concerned about the 2009 delisting of wolves, Skoglund himself refers to Little Red Riding Hood as "the myth of the nefarious wolf" that fuels much of the anti-wolf rhetoric in the West; it threatens real wolves, drives for their delisting, and jeopardizes their recovery in the wild (Skoglund 2009).

Different anti-wolf campaigns have enlisted Little Red Riding Hood to counter the environmentalists' accusations about Little Red Riding Hood lying about wolves. To fuel an early discussion about the national delisting of wolves, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Safari Club International, and Wisconsin Bear Hunter's Association in a joint campaign released an advertisement entitled "Little Red Riding Hood Was Right." In the 30-second ad, anticipated to run on the television network for a year, the camera, focused on a playground at the edge of a forest, zooms on a swing-set where children are playing. The camera then begins to move, as if from a canine vantage point, slowly approaching the unsuspecting children. The ad ends with an ominous message, "the danger may be closer than you think" (Gregory 2007; Myers 2007).

A similar messaging about the gluttonous wolf with its eyes on the innocents was recently on display on a billboard in Spokane, Washington. The billboard with the caption, "The Wolf... Who's Next on Their Menu?," shows an image of the eyes of a diabolical beast lurking over its alleged victims: a young child on a swing smiling at the

camera, a golden retriever, cow calf, a fawn, a doe, and a bull elk. A spokesperson for Washington Residents Against Wolves (WARAW), the organization behind the billboard, reasoned that they do not “despise the wolf for being a wolf,” but considers the “jobs” for predators already filled in Washington State. Thus, by “adding a wolf to the mix, we are forcing predators to compete for a limited prey base and we know they will move on to domestic animals and possibly children as new sources of food” (Landers 2015).

The billboard’s alleged prey base for the wolf, that appears to be selected to highlight a symbolic significance, alludes to the threatened tranquility of domestic space (a child on a swing and a pet dog), the family unit of a vulnerable prey animal (a doe and a fawn), and the sport hunter’s trophy (a Royal 6-point bull elk) thus arousing a certain affect in the viewer. The organization also prides itself of having enlisted Little Red Riding Hood as an ally. On their Facebook page, a photo of a girl dressed in a red cape, pointing a revolver past the viewer, presumably at the Big Bad Wolf, is accompanied by a recruitment message that reads, “Looks like Little Red decided to join WARAW and fight back on the wolf issue. Have you?” (This particular Facebook page is no longer available). One commentator considers the “anti-wolf fanatic’s quest of fairy tale ideologies” behind the WARAW billboard detrimental to the species recovery. The commentator further points out that fairy tales are being used as propaganda to instill fear in people, and “sadly some people seem susceptible to this scaremongering and genuinely believe that the big bad wolf is going to enter their homes with fangs bared to gobble them up for dinner” (McCormick 2015).

This theme, claiming Little Red Riding Hood as an armed ally to protect the home front from a criminal trespasser, was appropriated in the 2016 adaptation of the fairy tale published on the National Rifle Association's (NRA) online Family page. Here Little Red Riding Hood is equipped with a gun and know-how about gun safety as she fends off the wolf that emerges from the dark and dangerous forest. The author, a young woman, who identifies herself as "a writer and a patriot," decided to rewrite her version of the tale, "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)," to offer the readers and their children a less violent and disturbing fairy tale experience than the classical Brothers Grimm version. In this tale, the obedient girl not only knows not to talk to a stranger/wolf, but also is not compelled to stray from the path to grandmother's house, for she always did what she was told to do. The wolf could not fool the grandmother either; the hunters, patrolling the woods, had already informed her about a possible wolf encounter, and she, as well, knew how to use a gun. The wolf ultimately meets his fate with both "capable ladies" pointing a rifle at him; he is tied up, and sent off with a hunter, who arrives at the scene in case his help is needed. Indeed it was a bad day for the wolf, "Oh, how he hated when families learned how to protect themselves." And the story ends with the family coda of "safely ever after." What happens to the wolf, who is hauled away by the hunter, is "a story for another day" (Hamilton 2016).

In this story the wolf could easily be replaced with any criminal trespasser threatening the domestic space; the fending off the intruder has an explicitly nationalistic fervor. Although the story received wide media attention, the dialog diverted to a discussion about gun-rights rather than alerting environmentalists to challenge yet another sinister version of the Big Bad Wolf myth. What happens to the wolf is left for the

readers' discretion. But considering NRA's vehement anti-wolf lobbying, it is clear the story does not allude to a happy ending for the wolf.

Similar concerns to protect the home front from wolves, perceived as a monstrous threat, have been extended to the discourse about threat and security on the state government level. Since the wolf reintroduction, Idaho has drawn considerable public media attention to its overtly hostile stance toward wolves that are considered "agents of oppressive federal government regulations" (Phillips 2015; Yuskavitch 2015). In 2011, Idaho House of Representatives approved legislation on a "wolf emergency plan" that proclaimed Idaho's wolves a disaster emergency and allowed the governor to declare an open season on wolves. Ron Gillett, a hunting outfitter and the founder of the Idaho Anti-Wolf Coalition, contends that the only way to control these "Canadian" wolves is to get rid of them. Defenders of Wildlife representative Suzanne Stone points out that this wolf emergency is without merit; after all people get injured and killed by domestic dogs and cows, not by wolves. Stone contends that this opposition to wolves is based on misinformation that starts with childhood fairy tales; this legislation "sends a bad message around the world that Idaho can't be trusted and people put more faith in Little Red Riding Hood than science" (Idaho Reporter 2011). An editorial, "Beware: Legislative 'Scientists' at Work," in the *Idaho Statesman* mockingly dubbed a Republican representative, who was vocal in her support of the legislation, the "resident Statehouse Little Red Riding Hood" (Western Wolves 2011). In turn, the *New American*, a John Birch Society affiliate, felt compelled to react to this ridicule and trivializing the emergency plan that, they contend, is meant to protect Idaho businesses and citizens. The article cross-references Valerius Geist and draws on his warning of the dangerous

“popular urban myth” that considers the wolf a “cuddly benign canine.” To lay claim how wolves have become dangerously habituated to humans and losing their fear of man, the article showcases stories titled “Pack Threatens Women,” “Hunting the Hunters,” and “Stalking Children” (Jasper 2011).

The U.S. Congress has also been accused of allowing Little Red Riding Hood to influence their decisions over wolves. When Congressional budget cuts placed the integrity of the ESA under attack in 2016, the CEO of Humane Society of the United States called the effort by the special interest groups to influence Congress to strip protection for the wolves, one that draws on “Little Red Riding Hood and other big fat lies about wolves” rather than one that listens to science and facts (Pacelle 2016). Further elaborating on this theme, environmental legal organization EarthJustice responded with a satirical contemplation of the different ways anti-conservation Congressional members are attempting to gut the ESA. One way is to “form an anti-wolf pack.” On their blog post, EarthJustice points out that as the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf reintroduction came to be considered one of the greatest achievements of the ESA, the wolf simultaneously became the biggest target for the opponents of the conservation law, setting a precedent for future congressional action to strip ESA, and turning the act into a “political bargaining chip.” To accentuate this statement, a cartoon depicted a wolf standing next to a bed asking, “Grandmother, what big anti-wolf myths you have.” To which a member of Congress, slyly peeking from behind the sheets, answered, “The better to delist you, my dear” (Caldwell 2015).



## Little Red Riding Hood in Social Dialogue

Little Red Riding Hood serves as a shorthand to highlight the persistent and unfounded fears about wolves, often referred to as the Little Red Riding Hood syndrome, used by biologists and environmentalists. Little Red Riding Hood also accrues new meaning in the context of the tenacious dialogue, fueled by relentless media coverage, between the anti- and pro-wolf sentiment over competing claims, either denouncing the fairy tale (“Little Red Riding Hood lied”) or embracing it (“Little Red Riding Hood is right”).

Importantly, an utterance is always aimed at somebody in anticipation of a particular effect; thus the utterance reflects the future response the speaker is seeking from the audience. By asking what the utterance assumes about its audience, reveals further meaning behind a particular utterance (Gillespie and Cornish 2014). As wolf proponents evoke a fairy tale and contrast it with science, they appeal to an audience that considers itself educated and environmentally conscious, and that chooses to trust science rather than believe in fairy tales. Simultaneously the utterance suggest that those who are convinced wolves pose a danger to human, contrary to what scientists claim about the nature of the species, implicitly validate children’s bedtime stories.

As Bakhtin points out, an utterance itself is a productive element in social dialogue. Although the speaker is responsible activating the utterance—Little Red Riding Hood as a stand-in for a deep-seated fear of the wolf—and steering the conversation the direction the speaker intends it to go, the utterance released in its new context has its own dynamic in repositioning participants in the dialogue (Gillespie and Cornish 2014). The

messaging conveyed in the expression “Little Red Riding Hood lied” or “Little Red Riding Hood mentality” and its other variants, construed as derogatory, downplaying people’s fears as Valerius Geist proclaims, fuels its alternative, “Little Red Riding Hood was right,” in turn, to discredit those who believe wolves are not dangerous to humans. In this dynamic tension, reference to Little Red Riding Hood wolf is perpetuated as an offensive tactic that refers to the unreasonable wolf hatred expressed by some Western politicians, hunters, and ranchers ridiculing this opposition portraying wolves as mythical, monstrous killers.

This reversal also positions those opposing the reintroduced wolves, accused of believing in fairy tales, as victims, not unlike Little Red Riding Hood. Not necessarily victims of a vicious and devouring wolf, but victims of restrictions imposed on them by the federal government as the overseer of environmental regulations. The division between “rural poor” and “urban elite,” an underlying sociocultural issue in wolf politics, further enflames this view (Maughan 2016; van Horn 2008; Wilson 1997). The urban environmentally conscious majority was instrumental in advocating for the wolf as the true “legacy of the Wild West.” On the other hand, the Western ranchers consider themselves and their livestock as victims to wolves and federal government oversight; the restoration of wolves in the wild is seen overriding the well-being of the people (Watters et al. 2014; Skogen 2015). As the wolf has become for rural people a catalyst through which they attempt to advance their particular social and ideological beliefs and demands (Watters et al. 2014; Van Horn 2008), Little Red Riding Hood appears to offer an opportune metaphor to symbolize these claims; not only is the fairy tale’s wolf a gluttonous predator that threatens their livestock, but the fairy tale’s wolf figure offers

also an image of a wolf-man merger, the “predatory” federal government responsible for the reintroduction of the wolves.

#### Endangered Wolf vs. Endangered Custom and Culture

In *A Wolf in the Garden* (1996), political science scholars Brick and Cawley evoke a conversation between land rights proponents and environmentalists and deploy Little Red Riding Hood as a metaphor to reflect on the contemporary power struggle over the land in the U.S. West. They utilize the encounter between the wolf and the girl at the interface of wilderness and civilization to demonstrate the transition from an “old” to a “new” worldview and a shift in the political power structure.

For the “old view” Brick and Cawley evoke the classical fairy tale image of the wolf appearing from the “dark forest to embody cunning evil and powerful cowardice,” that had no place in the civilizing efforts of the Euro-American colonial westward expansion. And by the mid-20th century, “there were no wolves remaining to greet Little Red Riding Hood as she strayed from her straight and narrow path.” That is, not until “elaborate federal reintroduction schemes pushed by wolf advocates and the environmental movement” had a “new wolf” emerge from the wild. These wolves, unlike the one from the Brothers Grimm, would not devour Little Red Riding Hood but lovingly greet her. This reintroduced wolf of the “new environmental paradigm,” was a benevolent “creature that should not be feared, but loved” (1). And as an icon of wilderness, the wolf became a tool to recover a “paradise lost” (2).

Brick and Cawley consider that “the various images of the wolf (the various clothes put on it) represent differing worldviews, and the status of the wolf signifies the effort to assert one worldview over another” (2). But as they see it, the struggle is not over natural resources, wolves or wilderness, but about who controls the U.S. government. Brick and Cawley use the wolf as leverage in negotiating collaboration between the seemingly incompatible agendas of the environmental and the land rights movement. Their argument is that in the federal government both parties have a common foe; after all, the very same federal agency that had exterminated the wolves from the American West, is now in charge of restoring them back to the wild. But Brick and Cawley also offer a caution that ominously alludes to the relevance of the fairy tale wolf in political campaigning that equates the government with the wolf, “mucking about in what should be their private garden” (4).

In some vague (yet clearly articulated) sense, some people fear government in much the same way they used to fear wolf. Although wolves rarely if ever attack humans, the belief that they might turn their gaze on us fuels our fears of the mythological wolf. Mistrust of government bears much the same imprint. (4)

Brick and Cowley allude to the interchangeability of wolves and the federal government, how the fear and mistrust felt toward the government, indeed, might recall the mythological wolf of Little Red Riding Hood. Others using the same metaphorical language, point out that rural residents distrust the government to the point the government becomes “predatory,” a “conniving, mythological wolf of the *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Peter and the Wolf* stories, and the wolves that the government

reintroduced are constructed as bureaucrat's vehicles to limit resident's self-determination by controlling their lifestyles and their livelihoods" (Scarce 1998, 39). The federal government oversight is seen as an act of being devoured by the wolf, as an article in *Range Magazine* expressed it, "when Little Red Riding Hood said to the wolf, 'My, what big teeth you have!' she could have been talking about the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Endangered Species Act." Dependent on grazing rights for his cattle on public land, one rancher considered that ranchers "could well be endangered species themselves" (Bump 2004). According to this view, the wolves are not only considered a cause for economic loss, but are also poised to eat the ranching culture alive, at least symbolically.

These competing worldviews and "ideological constructions have a powerful impact on whether or not wolves are viewed as natural and legitimate part of the landscape" (Bell 2015, 285). In the Southwest, where the Mexican gray wolf was reintroduced from a captive breeding program, the reintroduction and recovery of wolves in the wild has proven particularly contested (Van Horn 2008). Wise-use infused with property rights ideologies and the county supremacy movement seeking to take control over federally protected public lands, has found a stronghold in Catron County, New Mexico and in a pronounced opposition to Mexican wolf reintroduction. Although this rural resistance movement is often portrayed as a grassroots movement, it relies on the support from large corporations and industries that strongly oppose environmental regulations (Miller 1992, 1998). Simultaneously these organizations have harnessed the rural anti-wolf attitudes to further their own interests in political mobilization (Skogen and Krange 2003).

In the 2013 documentary, “Wolves in Government Clothing,” screened during an anti-wolf rally at the 2013 USFWS Mexican gray wolf public hearing, the reintroduced wolf is considered an imposter for the federal government. The central premise of the film, sponsored by Koch Brothers-funded Americans for Prosperity (AFP), is to draw a parallel between “two apex predators,” the wolf and the federal government empowered by the ESA, threatening the lives and livelihoods of the rural residents. Both wolves and the federal government are considered particularly dangerous, as they “have no predators of their own, have little respect for boundaries, they prey on the weak, they often work together in packs and use deceptive tactics, and have no regard for those who suffer from their actions.” David Spady, the film’s producer and narrator, as well as the California state director of Americans for Prosperity, considers wolves “not compatible with civilization.” Coming from a premise that “nature is indifferent; mankind is not,” Spady believes, “True conservation cannot come at the expense of mankind. When civilization is forced to regress to accommodate a bygone ecology the results are simply...unsustainable.”

Although the film itself makes no direct references to the fairy tale wolf, certain familiar elements are present in the narration; it anthropomorphizes the wolf as an immoral and cunning predator imbued with human intention, and the film invests considerable attention to portraying the wolf as a threat to the domestic space, and a predator that stalks children. The film’s portrayal of “kid cages,” wolf-proof structures erected in and around the town of Reserve in Catron County, allegedly to protect children from wolf attacks, received nationwide attention and National Geographic coverage. In the film, a single mother of four laments that her six-year-residency in Reserve has been

“pure hell,” as she is concerned for the safety of her children who “have to wait for their school bus in a cage because we are afraid the wolves will take one.” Her teenage daughter explains “the wolf is just standing there right across the field, just starring at the bus.” Another young mother recounts an incident when a wolf arrived at the front steps of her home, and “pressed its nose on the window, and stayed there for fifteen minutes.” The film ends with Spady’s ominous words: “These predators will control us, unless we control them” as the camera zooms on the sweet and innocent face of a young girl, followed by an eerie nightly scene with full moon accompanied by a wolf howl. The familiarity of the rhetoric and the imagery of the “kid cages” didn’t go unnoticed by environmental journalist Jason Mark, who, after interviewing several local residents, interprets this Catron Country phenomenon “a modern day replay of *Little Red Riding Hood*” (Mark 2015).

This gluttonous wolf was already a given prior to the 1998 reintroduction of the Mexican wolves. In an opinion piece, “Politics over Biology (It certainly isn’t biology),” posted on the anti-wolf website Wolf Crossing, dedicated to fighting against Mexican wolf reintroduction in New Mexico, the director of the Las Cruces based non-profit Southwest Environmental Center, was accused of attacking ranchers for their “same old ‘pseudo-science, half-truths and myths about wolves’.” Enraged by the director’s claim that ranchers were misled by the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale, the administrator of the website exclaims that “every People on Earth” know that “wolves are predators, and like to EAT cattle and elk... and deer, dogs, and anything else tasty that happens to come across their path when they are really hungry, including men, women, and children. Especially little children.”

The reversal of roles about who is a threat and who is threatened is a recurrent theme and Little Red Riding Hood offers an opportune template for rural communities from which to draw potent messages and imagery. Ten years after the Mexican gray wolves were reintroduced in the Southwest, Albuquerque's free weekly newsletter *Alibi*, featured an article, "Return of the Big, Bad Wolf," covering the deep-seated controversy over the Mexican wolf. The article colorfully opens with an adaptation of the fairy tale to the New Mexican landscape.

The legend of the big, bad wolf is alive in the Southwest. In the remote wilderness of the Gila and Apache national forests, the wolf is still making mischief, raiding calving sheds and chicken coops, and lurking in wait for tasty, tender-limbed little girls. But in this version of the classic tale, it's not Little Red Riding Hood that's in peril. It's the wolf. (Trainor 2007)

The opening serves a segue to highlight how ranchers experience federal oversight that, they claim, places the animal before the concerns of the people. One rancher relays her emotional attachment to her cows and calves, and the difficulty she has adjusting to the presence of the kind of "creature" the wolf is; another anticipates a "prospective attack by a wolf on a human." Gila Livestock Growers Association president, and long time anti-wolf spokesperson, Laura Schneberger recounts an incident when her then 14-year-old daughter on horseback encountered two wolves. The daughter was not harmed but the mother anticipates that "somebody's going to be hurt soon." And, as one rancher points out, "you can replace a steer but you cannot replace a child" (Trainor 2007).



As groups advocating wolf reintroduction and recovery efforts have campaigned to shed light on the wolf as an unduly prosecuted villain and strived to highlight the important role wolves play in ecosystem health, many ranchers have responded to these efforts by considering themselves as an endangered species. Reflecting this sentiment, the Wolf Crossing updated its website to “Endangered Working Cattleman” ([www.Endangeredworkingcattleman.org](http://www.Endangeredworkingcattleman.org)). The previous profile picture of a bloody wolf paw print was changed to an idyllic ranching scene with the caption, “The Endangered Working Cattleman: Working to save the west’s ranchers, cattlemen and custom and culture.” In this role reversal, it is the rancher and by extension the “culture of the West” that has become endangered, reflecting the anxieties rural communities experience about social change and uncertain future.

Such messaging was displayed during the 2017 New Mexico legislative session as a group of ranchers gathered to counter-protest a rally organized by wolf advocates demanding the governor to advise the New Mexico Game and Fish Department director to authorize releases of Mexican wolves into the wild. The two opposing groups exhibited their signs either for “more wolves” or “no wolves” to be released into the wild. Two next generation ranchers gave their support to the governor’s refusal to allow new wolf releases; a young boy carried a sign that read, “Ranchers are the Endangered Species” and a girl displayed one with, “Red Riding Hood Was Right, so is the governor! No more wolves!” The girl and her mother, hailed from Lincoln County, New Mexico, were urged to attend the rally by the NM Cattle Growers Association and the NM Farm and Livestock Bureau, industries that have vehemently opposed wolf reintroduction and recovery throughout the years. Although no wolves have been reintroduced in Lincoln

County, the mother felt compelled to attend the rally in anticipation of possible future encounters with wolves. She also called for better compensation plans if ranchers are expected to “feed the wolves.” Another rancher expressed her concern, not about wolves as such, but about a “hidden agenda” behind the wolf reintroduction, i.e. an attempt to drive ranchers off of public lands (Stallings 2017; Matlock 2017). Such claims led Ralph Maughan to express his frustration over Western wolf politics and the media coverage that largely ignores wildlife biologists’ findings, but claims to provide a balanced view of the situation by giving a platform to ranchers.

Ranchers are somehow regarded as experts on wolves even when most had never even seen one. Their qualification seemed to be that they would retell a bit of the hundreds of years of negative folklore. Few seemed to even be embarrassed when they used phrases like “Red Riding Hood was right” and other fairy tales as evidence that wolves were near demonic. (Maughan 2014)

Yet, rather than evoking a predator that should be feared or that wrecks havoc on rural economy, “Little Red Riding Hood was right” conveys a message validating real, existential fears of a different nature. In *Eating Wolf* (2014), philosopher Thomas Thorp proposes that the “public gleeful celebration of enmity” or “hyperbolic wolf loathing” in the U.S. West is not an extension of a fear of the wolf European settlers brought with them to the New World (78). Thorp argues that the myth vs. science debate and the “paradoxical relation between the degree of threat represented by the wolf and the degree of loathing directed toward the wolf” (183) needs to be understood as a specific version of a fear of predation. Rather than a wolf threatening a human, this anxiety refers to an

awareness and fear of an extirpation of a Western way of life. Thus, “[t]he hatred of wolves is in fact an abject loathing, an indication of the inexpressible realization that the extractive industries of the West cannot survive, cannot be sustained, but are in fact consuming the very resources upon which they rely” (196). Here the mythical wolf that is evoked becomes a way to repress and project a haunting fear of an uncertain future. The expression “Little Red Riding Hood Was Right” then serves to validate a way of life that is under an existential threat.

## Chapter 7

### Fairy Tale as a Voice in the Wolf Controversy

Little Red Riding Hood offers an opportune platform to negotiate conflicting values about ideological and social priorities. As Zipes points out, telling effective stories is a powerful way to influence social practices. And fairy tales offer culturally relevant ways to communicate alternative social practices.

Fairy tales are informed by human disposition to action—to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world. Therefore the focus of fairy tales, whether oral, written, or cinematic, has always been on finding magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people and animals that will enable protagonists to transform themselves along with their environment, making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment. (Zipes 2012, 2)

Fairy tales provide a template narrative for a linear progression from conflict to order and a quest to return to a state of “naïve morality,” that “tells us what we lack and how the world has to be organized differently so that we receive what we need” (Zipes 2012, 14). Little Red Riding Hood provides an enactment of a Western cultural narrative for an agreed upon moral order in which justice is served, good prevails over evil, and order is

restored. The fairy tale's naïve morality is instrumental in how Little Red Riding Hood works in the conflict between the pro-wolf and the anti-wolf factions to proliferate meaning behind their ideological and social priorities.

For the proponents of wolf reintroduction, the presence of wolves in the U.S. West is seen as a reversal of the legacy of wolf eradication; it offers an opportunity for humanity's moral progress, and celebrates biodiversity and coexistence based on environmental awareness. In this context the fairy tale provides a powerful platform from where this moral progress is negotiated and old beliefs replaced with a new understanding about wolves. Little Red Riding Hood facilitates an opportunity to reverse the role of the wolf as a threat to a misunderstood and unduly demonized species. Juxtaposing sound science with fairy tale fiction, biologists and environmentalists appropriate Little Red Riding Hood as a metaphor for outdated attitudes of a bygone era, both as a story that is considered part of a body of myths that influenced earlier wolf eradication by settlers, and as a story that is deeply rooted in Western cultural imagination and that continues to proliferate a fear of the wolf.

Just as Little Red Riding Hood has been operationalized as an effective antidote for old fears, the story's ubiquitous presence in the rhetoric of the wolf proponents has provoked a response from wolf opponents, who rely on the recall of the very same fairy tale wolf. But the wolf that is being evoked by the anti-wolf rhetoric is not merely the scary stranger of the bedtime story but imbued with extraordinary qualities and human intentions. This wolf is appropriated for various roles, from criminal trespasser, to threat to domestic space and private property, and an agent for the federal government. In other words, this wolf works as a metaphor that draws from people's anxieties over much

larger issues about social change, scarcity of natural resources, and economic insecurity. The classical fairy tale is also appropriated to uphold a patriarchal vision, validating the armed male hunter, a paternal overseer and protector of morality, home, and the nation. In fact, in a modern twist of the story celebrating gun culture the armed hunter appears as a mentor for Little Red Riding Hood, now, herself, a gun owner and seeking justice.

But as historian Jon Coleman points out, in the discourse that attempts to challenge the negative images about wolves, a rigid dichotomy of good and evil is retained as the roles of the victim and the villain are simply reversed, thus restoring a mythology rather than dismantling it (Coleman 2004). In this narration the wolf remains in the confines of social and spatial control exercised in the fairy tale. The fairy tale provides the participants with a common language to approach the conflict over the wolf in which the narration relies on a simple guidelines for justice, what is good and right, and what is bad and wrong; the wolf is placed in dark woods or iconic wilderness, either as a dangerous transgressor who has no limits to its appetite, or a champion and a gatekeeper of wilderness, who protects the wild places from the destruction of man.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

The reintroduction of wolves opened a new chapter in the story of wolves in the U.S. West. But what the conservation community considers to be moral progress welcoming wolves back for the health of a living landscape, those opposing the wolf reintroduction and recovery consider the wolf's reintroduction to its original habitats a decivilizing, regressive move back to a by-gone era. Wolves are caught in-between two incompatible, competing views and mythologies. Wolf proponents and opponents engage in a political discourse, either for the "good" wolf or against the "bad" wolf, that highlights a "single optic vision" that creates a zero-sum dynamic that leads to a "posture of mutual disavowal" (Kim 2015, 19), where the demand for "more wolves" or "no wolves" leaves no middle ground.

In the contentious discourse over wolf politics, the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood is used a common metaphor; its prevalence and persistence in this discourse indicates that more than an innocuous children's bedtime story is in question. Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic nature of an utterance makes clear that the current discourse about the fairy tale wolf is far from a neutral expression; it is, rather, an active participant in an ongoing social dialogue. But what appears to express two conflicting perspectives about the danger biological wolves pose to humans, "Little Red Riding Hood lied" and "Little Red Riding Hood is right," instead, speak of two differed dialogic imaginations. Little

Red Riding Hood brings into the discourse a distinct voice of the fairy tale that offers a cultural template to think with as well as a vehicle to disseminate, manipulate, and proliferate competing cultural and political messages. In the dialogic tension between the participants advocating their particular claims over Little Red Riding Hood, the utterance accrues new meaning as it collides in the social dialogue between the anti-wolf and pro-wolf sentiment. “Little Red Riding Hood lied” advances the politically progressive urban sentiment that advocates “rational” science and downplays “foolish” fairy tales, whereas “Little Red Riding Hood was right” reinforces the politically conservative rural sentiment and the “war on the West” rhetoric, as many see themselves victims of the wolf that is a stand-in for the federal government oversight. Both lay claim to the same fairy tale, but populate the utterance with their respective dialogic imaginations.

Although this political struggle takes place in human discursive space, the fairy tale has direct influence on the biological wolf. The fairy tale image of the cunning and gluttonous wolf seeking the company of a human child forever haunts the biological animal. The anticipated threat of a human-eating wolf combined with allusions to Little Red Riding Hood evokes the visceral scenario of the wolf-human encounter. This sets a propagandist precedent in which a child appears as a political pawn. In this scenario, the armed human, not unlike Little Red Riding Hood’s paternalistic hero, is valorized as the necessary protector in safeguarding domestic space against a predatory intrusion.

Little Red Riding Hood needs to be recognized as a site for intervention by scrutinizing the very paradigm that supports particular Western thinking, as feminists and scholars in cultural studies have done, and how it relates to other forms of hierarchical and binary thinking. The fairy tale wolf is caught in a discourse that validates its role as a



disciplinary agent—as a threat or a salvation—in service of a discourse that upholds a binary of human-animal, nature-culture, and civilization-wilderness. Scholarly work on the socio-historical developments of Little Red Riding Hood offers a critical view to the (taken-for-granted) classical fairy tale as a product of and tool for the patriarchal civilizing narrative that has profoundly influenced Western thinking about social and spatial order, as well as of a sense of justice about what is right/good and what is wrong/bad. For example, considering the story's application in the contemporary anti-wolf messaging that relies on the patriarchal twist of the story, scrutinizing the origins of the tale while placing the story in its historical context, may provide an intervention not only in the heroic-male-centered view of the storyline, but also an opportunity to scrutinize human exceptionalism and ways in which the Other is enfolded in this narration.

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