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Absent Mother and the Wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*

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Abstract Focusing on *Little Red Riding Hood* my article examines the cultural and biopolitical links between the absent mother and her evil doppelgänger/counterpart, the wolf. As a figure that was demonised from the middle ages on and referred to undesirables abandoned by the community, specifically in the Germanic context, the wolf is caught between fruition and perdition, between nurturing and devouring, reflecting the dual archetype of the mother, the good one and the bad one. Drawing on the *homo sacer* as the individual cursed and expelled by the community (Agamben), the essay discusses what the initiation rite in the folktale has to do with the early medieval expulsion of culprits known in Germanic Northern Europe as the *vargr* as both 'wolf' and 'outlaw'. What are the structural and metaphorical links between the three women and the wolf, and can we detect the mother's untold story in this constellation?

Keywords Absent mother · Wolf · *Homo sacer* · Witch · Initiation · Rape

El lobo es incogniscible (Cormac Mc Carthy, *The Crossing*).

Mothers and stepmothers are a much debated topic in scholarship on fairy tales. However, less attention has been paid to the absent mother, most likely for the reason that she is absent. Focusing on the Grimm tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* this article argues that Red Cap's mother, who is no longer mentioned after her warning to the girl not to stray from the trail, remains present in the other characters, the wolf, Red Cap, and the grandmother. The wolf is a catalyst in this tale that brings the three women together, with Red Cap's mother looming behind the presence of

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the predator and the two women representing the two generations that surround her. I want to add to the countless readings of this tale one that suggests that the appearance of the wolf is tied to the mother's absence. In this tale the wolf is inextricably linked to the fates of these three women and their intergenerational conflict. As the traditional *Friedlos* (the man without peace) he becomes a projection of their fears and desires, but, as I see it here, uncannily also of the mother's absence and thus her continued presence in her unwritten story of potential predation and displacement.

A common pattern in folktales is that the real, loving mother dies only to be replaced by an evil stepmother. For the Cinderella tale (Grimm tale 21), for example, the focus of research tends to be on the stepmother rather than, as Elisabeth Panttaja has argued, on the good mother, who dies at the beginning of the tale but whose spirit is then present throughout. Panttaja points out that "unlike the narratives favoured by psychoanalysis, which are about maternal absence and disempowerment, [Cinderella] tells a story about a strong mother/daughter relationship" (Panttaja 1993, 90). By mentioning the psychoanalytic narratives she is referring primarily to Maria Tatar's insistence (1987) on the significance of the stepmother (Panttaja 1993, 87) as well as Bruno Bettelheim's shift of attention to the figure of the father and the oedipal conflict in tales like *Little Red Riding Hood* (Grimm tale 026) and *Cinderella*. Basing his analysis on Freudian models Bettelheim famously argued that once the mother figures in *Little Red Riding Hood* are out of the way, "the road seems open" for the girl to act on her unconscious desire and "be seduced by her father (the wolf)" (Bettelheim 1977, 175), and that while the mother is absent "the father is present but in hidden form… in two opposite forms: as the wolf, which is an externalization of the dangers of overwhelming oedipal feelings, and as the hunter in his protective and rescuing function" (Bettelheim 1977, 178).

Recent scholarship has taken Bettelheim to task, especially with regard to the mother/daughter plot in folktales. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber, for example, have argued that his insistence on the child's need for an absent real mother is rather simplistic. Echoing the work of Herman and Lewis (1980), Fisher and Silber (2000) scriticize Bettelheim's argument the stepmother's destructive nature helps the heroine to progress, a theory that tends to overlook that that nature could be the result of hidden sources of frustration and anger of women. "Instead of implicating the fairy-tale stepmother for her terrifying acts of aggression toward the girl under her care," Fisher and Silber point out that Herman's and Lewis's analysis "draws our curiosity to the untold story of this disruptive female character, whose rebellion against the 'feminine plot' of passivity and submission is repeatedly cast as the source of conflict in the tales" (Fisher and Silber 2000, 123).

One such untold story of a discontented mother may fill one of the hidden subplots of *Little Red Riding Hood.* Although she appears only at the beginning of the tale in a few cautionary gestures and comments, one wonders how absent she really is. One may ask also whether she is the real mother or the stepmother, and what the cause of her anger is, for she strikes us as emotionally rather absent, lacking in love for her daughter. The tale assures us that Red Cap is loved by everyone, most of all, however, by her grandmother ("die hatte jedermann lieb, der

sie nur ansah, am allerliebsten aber ihre Groβmutter," Grimm 2007, 156). It seems strange that the grandmother loves the girl more than her mother, which makes us question whether the mother, if she is the biological one, wanted the girl in the first place, what happened to her, and where the actual father is, not just his symbolic doubles, the wolf and the hunter. How much love is there for the child coming from a mother who cautions her not to leave the path as she would otherwise break the wine bottle if she tripped ("sonst fällst du und zerbrichst das Glas und die Groβmutter hat nichts" Grimm 2007, 157). There is not a word about the wolf or the mother's fear that her daughter may come to harm in any way. There is, however, a good deal of scolding coming from the mother: "Und wenn du in ihre Stube kommst, … guck nicht erst in allen Ecken herum (when you enter her house don't start snooping around in all the nooks and crannies). "Ich will schon alles gutmachen" (Grimm 2007, 157, I will do my best), Red Cap reassures her, shaking her mother's hand (not hugging or kissing her) just before her departure.

This pattern is different from what happens in the other famous wolf tale, *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* (Grimm tale 05). Here the mother absents herself physically but not emotionally. From the very first sentence this tale stresses the fact that Mother Goat loves her seven little kids, "hatte sie lieb, wie eine Mutter ihre Kinder liebhat" (loved her the way a mother loves her kids, Grimm 2007, 51). I would argue that the wolf can be a projection of maternal fear and desire, as he appears the moment the mother has absented herself. He embodies genuine anguish for Mother Goat but feelings of a different nature for Red Cap's mother, possible jealousy, possibly unpleasant memories of the past. The tale does not give this away. In the middle of the forest Little Red Cap is being accosted by the wolf, superficially an incarnation of the mother's warning, but at a deeper level also of her curious absence of love.

In *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* the mother enters the forest, wolf terrain, while the wolf enters the domestic space. The moment she absents herself he appears at the doorstep pretending to be the kids' mother. In both tales, for the purpose of camouflage and devouring the children the wolf adopts motherly features, transcending gender boundaries. In becoming cross dressers, as it were, these wolves exploit the mother's absence and reinforce their links with the maternal principle. As devouring male the wolf deceitfully poses as nurturing mother. Such cautionary folktales clearly draw on the wolf's ambivalent mythological and biological nature of nurturer and devourer. In its adaptation of Matthew 7:15, the false prophets as wolves in sheep's clothing, *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* shows us the wolf posing as the nurturing mother goat to gain access to the house in which he devours all but one of the seven little kid goats their mother has briefly left behind. She warns her children that they can recognize him by his low voice and black paws. Unlike Red Cap, the kids try hard to heed her warning. When he arrives, it takes him three attempts on the threshold[1] of the house to find out that he needs to

[1] Tricksters are traditionally found on thresholds in many cultures, in liminal spaces between two terrains, the domestic and the uncivilized in this case. The wolf and the witch (the *hagazussa*, woman on the hedge between the domestic and the wild space) belong together under this archetype of the trickster.

soften his voice with chalk and whiten his paws with dough in order to trick the kids into believing he is their mother.

The Wolf and the Mother

Not all wolves in myth and literature are drawn this negatively. Its nurturing side is largely a matter of myth, as in the *lupa romana* of the Roman foundation myth, but also in other texts for children around the world. In Kipling's *Jungle Books* (1894), for example, Mowgli is taken in by Raksha (the Defender) and her pack, a motif that is intimately connected to the author's own traumatic experience of losing his parents, especially his mother. He was only six years old when they left for India abandoning him and his two-year-old sister to the care of complete strangers in England. Kipling's mother-wolf, a product resulting from conflating the Roman she-wolf with typically Indian lore of feral children raised by wolves, undoubtedly presented Kipling with a way of coping with his childhood trauma.

In the two German folktales, however, the wolf is purely destructive. He is the very antithesis of Mother Goat, but, I would argue, partly a reflection of Red Cap's mother's emotional and physical absence. Red Cap is aware of her mother's emotional absence. It makes both women's bond with the predator all the stronger. The secret of this absence of love may be contained in the red cap of the teenager, indicative, as critical readings and fictional rewritings of the tale have shown (Verdier 1997; Bettelheim 1977; Carter 2006, for example), of her blossoming sexuality, and thus possibly pointing to the mother's jealousy. We are familiar with this pattern in other folktales, such as Snow White, for example, where the stepmother is jealous of her stepdaughter's youth and beauty, reflecting the queen's fear of advancing old age and turning her into a cannibal (she asks the hunter to bring back Snow White's lungs and liver). Although *Little Red Riding Hood* is a cautionary tale, the mother's lack of restraint in sending her daughter into the fangs of the wolf—her child neglect as it were—could be the result of envy aligning this tale with others such as *Snow White*.

Yvonne Verdier's outstanding work on the links between the Grimm version of *Little Red Riding Hood* and the earlier oral traditions in Asia and France casts further light on the mother's anguish as the possible cause of her absence of love. Verdier points out that the intergenerational conflict in the tale demonstrates that Red Cap's mother is struggling with the fact that her daughter is of an age in which she will soon replace her as child bearer: "what the tale tells us is the necessity of the female biological transformation by which the young eliminate the old in their own lifetime. Mothers will be replaced by their daughters and the circle will be closed with the arrival of their children's children. Moral: grandmothers will be eaten" (Verdier 1997, 110). We can see how close the identity is between the three women in this interpretation, especially between the mother and the grandmother. The rivalry, Verdier continues, in particular between the mother and the daughter even "goes as far as physical elimination (Verdier 1997, 117).

The wolf thus becomes a catalyst for the mother's fear of being displaced by the daughter. A close look at the way food is handled in this tale would support this

reading. If we argue that the cake and the wine may symbolize new life (a bun in the oven, the blood of Jesus), then the act of the mother handing them over to Red Cap signals the passage from one life giver on the wane to the next provider of life as the new child bearer. The food does not reach its target because the girl's attempt to replenish the grandmother with it fails due to her aberration, and Granny does not get a chance to consume it anymore, as the wolf swallows her up well before Red Cap arrives. We need to keep in mind, however, that this displacement of the mother by the daughter is not solely linked to the act of procreation but, if we follow Freudian readings of the father/daughter plot, also to oedipal desire.

No doubt, the wolf stands for more than this intergenerational conflict. Some scholars have argued that the tale could in the end just be a warning against animal attacks (Sugiyama 2004, 111), while many concur that he may symbolize a male aggressor, a rapist even (Orenstein 2003; Fromm 1951). His close bond with the mother may imply that he signifies a male aggressor in her own life. After all, where is the father, and does the mother not live with Granny because the latter may be the absent father's mother who is not welcome in her daughter-in-law's house? The tale does not give this away. What it does reveal is the wolf's function for the loss of peace within a family that seems to consist only of women. This view of the wolf as a destroyer of peace is in accordance with his negative perception in Germanic culture, where his nurturing side almost exclusively serves the purpose of trickery in order to satiate himself. The voraciousness of the wolf has been his chief quality in Germanic culture from the very beginnings of its literature, the medieval bestiaries where he is pitted against the fox and stands for monkish hypocrisy. In Heinrich der Glîchezâre's late twelfth-century verse epic *Reinhart Fuchs*, for example, about the strange brotherhood and enmity between Reinhart the fox and Isengrin the wolf, the fox consistently dupes the strong and voracious but ultimately stupid wolf.

German literature, however, also reflects the medieval equation of the wolf with the outlaw, the *Friedlos*, man who due to a crime he has committed is expelled and has consequently lost his peace.[2] In German history the metaphor of the wolf is closely linked to this concept of losing peace, the state of nature as a state of war where *homo hominem lupus est*. He who broke the peace lost his. The criminal's so-called *Wolfsfreiheit* (freedom of the wolf; see Erler 1940, 303) meant that he was free from the community, but because of the ensuing absence of care he was also free to die. He was *vogelfrei* or *wolfsfrei*, literally as free as birds or wolves in the double sense of being set free from the human social contract and, once dead, free to be devoured by birds or wolves. As an animal with human qualities the folktale wolf is an allegorical figure for this historical *Friedlos*, abandoned in the forest. The wolf holds the potential for human sin that devours its victims and threatens to cast them into permanent exile. Following this rationale, various characters' encounters with wolves in these folk tales function as warnings against sin and the impurity associated with sinfulness. In the nineteenth-century folktales the early barbaric practice of expulsion and persecution may dwindle into an initiation rite for

[2] Giorgio Agamben has identified the Germanic *vargr* as a variant of the Roman *homo sacer*. Cf. G. Agamben 1995, 104–111.

children, a cautionary gesture to them, but the equation of actual wolves (*vargr* meant wolf and outlaw in Old Norse) with men preying on the community remains.

This notion of the *Friedlos*'s moral impurity survives in *Little Red Riding Hood.* In *The Company of Wolves*, one of her brilliant rewritings of the tale, Angela Carter has described him as an "infernal vermin" (Carter 2006, 135), a creature set aside into exile and attempting to set others aside who become unclean through him. This intimate union between women and wolves is already contained in the imagery of devouring in the Grimm tale, but Carter intensifies it in her story about the love Red Cap develops for her wolf so full of lice. As the werewolf is about to devour her, she rips off his shirt and throws it into the fire, thus condemning "him to wolfishness for the rest of his life," while "seven years is a werewolf's natural span" (Carter 2006, 132). In the end, the wolf's lust to eat her subsides and with it the aura of fear, because she loves him and searches his body for lice. By wanting to eat his lice and through her loss of virginity with him the girl too becomes 'unclean' from a typically patriarchal perception. Carter takes this theme of woman's purported uncleanness to maximum heights, as her Red Cap commits the kind of disgrace the Inquisition saw in the union between women and the devil (Baschwitz 1963, 93). However, she also elaborates on the possibility that the red cap of the Grimm tale may indicate the girl's first menstrual cycle. Her girl, whose "breasts have just begun to swell," wears a red shawl, the colour of blood on snow, and "she has just started her woman's bleeding" (Carter 2006, 133).

This conflation of the notion of exile and uncleanness so tenderly revised by Carter seems to have been suggested to her by the Grimm version where initiation coincides with the girl's temporary exile in the traditional space of the *homo sacer/ Friedlos*. By sending her there and to Granny, who is well beyond menstruation, Red Cap's mother renders her daughter *friedlos* and *wolfsfrei*, literally free to be taken by the wolf, with whom she shares her loss of innocence through spilling blood. Her temporary exile in the forest and encounter with a creature traditionally associated with the Devil add, although never explicitly mentioned, the dimension of the witch to this tale. All three women, I would argue, display not only a strong bond with the wolf, but through him also with the concept of the witch as a woman that pre-Enlightenment societies perceived as having absented herself from the domestic environment.

Wolf and Witch

In the Germanic tradition the word for witch, *Hexe*, is derived from Old High German *hagazussa*, the woman associated with the hedge or forest. It is in this phenomenon of her becoming a forest dweller that the word *Hexe*/hag has its origin. By penetrating the hedge, that boundary between the domestic and the uncivilized terrain, she enters the space of *homo sacer*, men perceived as wolves, and is henceforth associated with him and his crimes. For women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries having left the communal space and living in the forest was highly suspicious, and would have easily marked them as witches thought of as being in pacts with the devil and riding wolves (Grimm 1844, 593). Wolves and

witches became synonymous with the devil, blending together in this process of demonization as early as the Great Werewolf and Witch Hunt initiated by Pope Innocent VIII in the *Papal Bull Summis Desiderantes Affectibus* in December 1484 and by the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches 1486; cf. Zipes 1983, 69). Isolation may very well have been the beginning of terror (cf. Arendt 1973, 474), and women living outside of the community experienced this terror over centuries.

The Hänsel-and-Gretel tale in particular offers us a sinister reminder of the persecution of witches from the late sixteenth century onwards, women burnt on the stake because they posed a threat to the patriarchal world order. The witch, who also lives far removed from the community, is a monument to the persecution of these old and poor women engaging with the natural resources. Like the German folktale wolf she is described as nefarious, although both creatures contain the duality of nurturing and devouring. Her nurturing side survives in the detail that she feeds the children, but like the wolf she uses her position as nurturer to trap her victims, so that the nurturing function is used for the sake of devouring. Could the same hold true for Red Cap's absent mother, namely that her cautionary message at the beginning disguises her destructive intentions? We remember that mothers and witches are often identical in folktales. After all, Hansel's and Gretel's evil stepmother, who like Red Cap's mother sends her children into the forest, is the witch's *Doppelgängerin* (the double), and disappears from the scene as soon as the witch burns to death.

Although a witch is not explicitly mentioned in *Little Red Riding Hood*, her position is implicit with all three women. "[G]randmothers are always wicked", Cixous maintains (Cixous and Kuhn 1981, 43).[3] Being devoured by the wolf implies that she becomes part of him, that she becomes wolf, their physical union revealing the symmetry between woman living outside the community condemned as a witch and the human wolf as *Friedlos*, likewise expelled from the human community. The hagazussa/*Hexe* as woman associated with the hedge is alluded to above all in Grandmother, living in the forest and by the *Nusshecken* (hazelnut hedges, Grimm 2007, 157). Grandmother is absent in the sense of living outside the domestic environment, "weiter im Wald" (Grimm 2007, 157), further into the forest, into wolf space. The Hansel and Gretel witch also lives in the deepest part of the forest, "da gerieten [die Kinder] immer tiefer in den Wald" (Grimm 2007, 104).

The wolf forms the link between the mother and the grandmother. Although the mother is absent in a physical sense, she is always present in her symbolic relationship with the other two women; and the wolf becomes a reflection of these women. On the one hand he stands in for the mother's emotional and physical absence, on the other hand, this lone wolf shares the grandmother's isolation from the communal bond in the forest. He embodies the possibility that both women are part of the devouring mother archetype, one as a loveless mother, the other one as woman possessed by the wolf, a witch. The absent mother is thus present in the grandmother, a fact supported by many earlier, especially French, versions of the

[3] Cf. Baschwitz 1963, 139ff, "Der Krieg gegen die alten Frauen." As Baschwitz has argued in his seminal book on the witches and witch trials, the war against the devil was primarily a war against old women, against women driven by desire for murder ("von Mordlust getriebene alte Weiber").

tale from the oral tradition in which mother and grandmother are often interchangeable (cf. Verdier 1997, 109: "Fricon, fricassee, le sang de ta grantasse/mérasse). By devouring Granny and posing in her clothes (in drag) the androgynous wolf perverts Granny's love for Red Cap, any nurturing instinct that it may contain, into a cannibalistic love. He/she loves her so much that s/he could devour her the way the Hansel and Gretel witch as the double of the evil stepmother wants to devour the children.

For the maternal figure in the *Wolf and the Seven Kids* this tension between the domestic terrain and the forest is quite different, as Mother Goat must absent herself from the domestic scene and enter the forest in order to provide for her children. Her nurturing, loving quality reigns supreme, her *Waldgang* (walk in/to the forest, to use a term from Ernst Jünger), reflecting a sinister reality of many women who have to raise children—seven in this case—on their own. Being forced to provide for them without a father such mothers have no choice but to absent themselves from their kids, consequently leaving them in peril. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, on the other hand, the mother never leaves the domestic space. She does not absent herself in that sense. Instead she sends Red Cap on a food mission (mother bakes while the girl transports), which makes her leave behind the space traditionally associated with *Friede* and *Umfriedung* (the enclosure of a dwelling place),—a peace that appears to be troubled in view of the mother's untold tale. That absence of peace in the mother's life and her house is partly indicated through the grandmother's (as the mother's Other, Cixous and Kuhn 1981, 43) dwelling in the state of nature where the wolf/*Friedlos* can just walk into her house, out of the forest.

Between Initiation and Rape

In earlier oral versions of the tale the wolf is not the only wolf to grandmother, but Red Cap too is *homo hominem lupus*. As Dundes has shown, in most Asian and French versions from the oral tradition the wolf having killed Grandma puts her blood in a container and some of her flesh on a plate for the girl (Dundes 1991, 77). This implied cannibalism runs through all three generations, and the wolf as devourer is a metaphor for it: the mother cannibalizes Red Cap through her destructive instincts, the wolf as grandmother/grandmother as wolf cannibalizes Red Cap by loving her so much that s/he eats her, and Red Cap cannibalizes the mother and the grandmother in the sense that both are past child-bearing age and thus being displaced by the girl's fertility.

In most of the earlier versions from the oral tradition, both in Asia and in France, the girl is never devoured by the wolf, only Grandmother is (Verdier 1997, 104). In the Grimm version, however, she is being eaten right after her grandmother. This incorporation of Red Cap by the beast seems to indicate that the girl herself is in danger of becoming a witch/wolf. In many of these folktales it is especially a young woman's awakening sexuality that marks her liminal status between innocence and sinfulness, and heterotopias such as the forest are typical testing grounds for her individuation. *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hänsel and Gretel*, but also *Frau Holle* all demonstrate that the descent into the underworld (indicated either as a walk into the

forest or as a plunge down the well) is closely linked to the passage from childhood to maturity, but by the same token these tales are also sinister reflections of the age of the witch hunt.

In the patriarchal, Christian world represented in the Grimm tales, Red Cap stands on the threshold between *hold* (the innocence of her as a child) and *unhold* (her awakening sexuality as a potentially sinful side of her, *Unholde* being another word for witch in the early modern age). Her encounter with the wolf is her lycanthropic moment, in which the animal brings out her 'indulgence in sensuality and her disobedience' (Zipes 1983, 34) to bourgeois expectations of young women. She is being tested for her potential of throwing all communal expectations to the wind, leaving the domestic scene, and becoming a witch. Red Cap's encounter with the wolf, however, also corresponds to that phase in the formation of an individual that serves many cultures as a rite of passage and has left its imprint especially on folktales and trickster myths. In view of a young woman growing up, most scholars agree that Little Red Cap needs to distance herself from her home and spend time in the metaphorical woods of the world. Here she is bound to encounter one of the main threats faced by women, rape. As is typical, however, of the patriarchal folktales in the early nineteenth century, Red Cap's walk through the woods and her encounter with the wolf contains the warning against a potentially immoral side of herself. Her eventual physical union with the beast that devours her contrasts sharply with her nurturing goodwill signaled by her task of carrying a basket of food to her grandmother, and, from the vantage point of a patriarchal Christian value system, accentuates the peril of her becoming morally corrupted.

Depending on what we make of Red Cap's age, her walk through the forest vacillates between child neglect and an initiation ritual. If we take her as an adolescent, then the girl's awakening sexuality is the cause of her being tested to see whether she will stay on the right track in life or succumb to the sensual temptations of the forest—the sexual urges of her own body, which in line with the bourgeois moral code of the nineteenth century needs to be disciplined. Bettelheim famously interpreted this moment of temptation in the context of Freud's pleasure principle for which Little Red Cap relinquishes the reality principle and that "[d]eviating from the straight path in defiance of mother and superego was temporarily necessary for the young girl to gain a higher state of personality organization" (Bettelheim 1977, 181), with her absent father representing both oedipal desire and the resolution of the conflict through his double, the hunter (Bettelheim 1977, 175–178). The father/hunter and the wolf, too, can be seen as symbiotic, reminding us of Jacques Derrida's equation of the sovereign with the beast in *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain* (*The Beast & the Sovereign* 2008), his lecture series about the wolf in culture held at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS). After killing the wolf the hunter then skins him—"der Jäger zog dem Wolf den Pelz ab und ging damit heim" (Grimm 2007, 159). He is the wolf man conjoining in himself the sovereign and the *homo sacer*, the powerful patriarch torn between maintaining law and order (that is, killing desire) and breaking it (giving into desire). As the one who breaks it he becomes the very wolf/Friedlos that he kills, a process expressed in his holding on to the wolf skin.

As Red Cap is being devoured in the Grimm version, this implies an act that according to the Christian value system inscribed into the tale shows her, however briefly, physically possessed by the tempter. As wolves were closely associated with witches in the early modern age, there is a close symbolic union not only between the wolf and the grandmother but also between him and the guilt-endangered girl he devours.[4] Little Red Cap can only be cleansed from her impending transformation into a young woman possessed by the wolf—from becoming a witch in other words—by being cut out of his belly. The tale echoes centuries of anxieties about the dangers of women young and old—Granny has to be excised as well—of becoming witches. After being liberated, the belly of the wolf is filled with stones. In *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* it is the loving, nurturing mother who performs this act, while in *Little Red Riding Hood* it is the girl who gets the big stones ("holte geschwind groβe Steine" Grimm 2007, 159) and is then being assisted by the hunter in filling the wolf's stomach, the cause of his "falling to death" only moments later ("dass er gleich niedersank und sich totfiel" Grimm 2007, 159).

This image of the cut-open belly may be one indicator of the trauma that has caused the emotional absence of Red Cap's mother. It is an image that these folktales share with the figure of Holle, associated with the Wild Hunt myth, Odin/Wotan and his wolves, and known also by various other names: Hulda (the *Holde*) in central Germany, Perchta in South Germany, Frau Herke, Gode, Freke, or Frigga in North Germany (Timm 2010, 9). Unlike the purely evil witch of *Hansel and Gretel*, Holle is part of the Great Mother archetype that joins in herself the forces of fruition and perdition, of life and death. In folk belief she typically appears during Twelve Nights between Christmas and Epiphany, a period in which she would punish lazy weavers by cutting open their bellies and putting stones inside as a symbol of their lack of productivity. Her ability to punish the lazy and control weaving activities found its way into the Grimm tale of 'Frau Holle' (024) about two girls visiting her underworld at the bottom of a well. Here they are tested for their domestic qualities, Holle rewarding the diligent *Goldmarie* by showering her with gold coins but punishing the lazy *Pechmarie* (Pitch Mary) by covering her in pitch.

The image of cutting open the wolf's belly and replacing life inside it by rocks that the two wolf tales share with a myth about a woman who either nurtures or devours humans may signify a few things. The swollen belly indicates Red Cap's rebirth as a more mature young woman stabilizing her place in the natural generational order of reproduction. Although the rebirth of the goats and Red Cap may be on the side of nurturing, as it implies a lesson learned, replacing the children with rocks also marks the wolf as a "gottlos[er]" (Grimm 2007, 54) destroyer of life, negating his traditional side as nurturer. Cutting open the belly, however, may also imply woman's desire for self-harm. It may express her refusal to become pregnant by a rapist, which makes me wonder if this is not the case in *Little Red Riding Hood*, where unlike in *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* it is not the mother but the patriarch, the hunter, who instead of just shooting the wolf "nahm eine Schere und fing an, dem schlafenden Wolf den Bauch aufzuschneiden" (Grimm 2007, 159).

[4] Jung (2015, 102) too mentions the witch as a nefarious mother archetype together with the devouring animal: "nefast die Hexe, der Drache (jedes verschlingende und umschlingende Tier ...)".

This act of violation then prepares the way for that ultimate image of infertility, the rocks inside the belly that he and Red Cap put in and that may point to the fact that the absent mother would have preferred infertility to her pregnancy.

If the hunter is another version of the absent and aggressive father, as Bettelheim has argued, then his cutting open the belly could be read as a reference to his violation of the mother, Red Cap being the unwanted result of that rape. According to the logic of the double identity of the father as wolf/hunter the killing of the wolf by the hunter and Red Cap would then mean that all sexual desire, whether oedipal (between father and daughter) or otherwise (the father's possible rape of the mother) is being stifled. If Red Cap is indeed the result of rape, then this would explain the mother's emotional absence, her lack of displaying strong feelings of love to Red Cap at the beginning of the tale. Being aware of this, Red Cap's help in getting the heavy rocks could then be indicative of her wanting to undo her mother's pregnancy with her. Whichever interpretation we may give this final image of the tale, the absent mother never quite leaves the scene but remains present to the end.

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