

Little Red Riding Hood Revisited: Continuations of the Tale in Modern Greek Children's Literature

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Abstract

During the last two decades there have been a remarkable number of revisions of Little Red Riding Hood in Greece. In this study I decided to focus on two of them -Little Green Riding Hood by Ioulita Iliopoulou (2008) and The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the clockwork wolf by Christos Boulotis (2007)- that continue elements of the source tale. Discussed are the points of convergence and divergence between the continuations and the source text and the meanings created in the process of the intertextual play between the texts. I look specifically at how these continuations use the trope of the journey into the forest so as to both make it resonant to modern-day perceptions of gender identity and redefine his cautioning message.

Keywords: continuations, gender, intertextuality, retellings.

Little Red Riding Hood, the hypertext par excellence (Beckett, 2002: xvi) due to its amazing ability to adapt to new socio-cultural environments, has endured a remarkable number of retellings throughout the last two decades in Greece. The Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers' versions of the fairy tale have formed the basis for these retellings.ⁱ Therefore, Greek retellings can be read as revisions of them.ⁱⁱ To quote S. Beckett, "In contemporary culture, *Little Red Riding Hood* has become almost as protean as the heroine herself" (Beckett, 2008: 6), reflecting a strong authorial desire to 're-read' the pre-text in order to address contemporary issues: sexuality, violence, animal rights, seniors, physical fitness, environmental and gender issues (Beckett, 2008: 4-6). This is the case also with Greek revisions; they actually comment on and challenge issues such as gender roles, self-definition, personal freedom, environmental awareness, childhood, mother-daughter relationships.

A discussion of all contemporary Greek revisions of *Little Red Riding Hood* would demand extended analysis that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, I have chosen to narrow my analysis to examining only two of them: *Little Green Riding Hood (Prassini Soufítsa)* by Ioulita Iliopoulou (2008) and *The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the clockwork wolf (Oi Dodeka Kokkinoskoufítses kai o Kourdistos Lykos)* by Christos Boulotis (2007). Their common element is that both of them answer the question "What happened next?" in the life of the fairy tale's heroine. *Little Green Riding Hood* portrays a mature version of the famous heroine. *Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the clockwork wolf* centers around the classical heroine's daughters. These two continuations of the source tale are chosen for this article in order to examine the ways in which the authors use the trope of the female journey to the woods so as to both make it resonant to modern-day perceptions of gender identity and redefine his cautioning message. In *Little Green Riding Hood* by Ioulita Iliopoulou (2008) the story revolves around young Rosa's task to protect the forest close to her house from the threat of destruction arising from Claw & Son Universal, a construction company that is building a luxury housing project.

Rosa is Little Red Riding Hood's mature version.ⁱⁱⁱ She has a job, she lives in the remodeled house of her grandmother, who is no longer alive, and is still afraid of wolves, although the big bad wolf has been killed by the hunters. The dangerous forest through which Little Red Riding Hood has to walk in order to go into her grandmother's cottage is substituted in Iliopoulou's story by a forest at high risk for human exploitation. Rosa is determined to protect the forest and attempts to accomplish her task by taking action. She protests to officialdom, but realizes soon that she can't overcome an unresponsive bureaucracy. Her only helpers are the children of the area and her animal friends, among them the wolf. Apparently, this revision is one of reversals.

In *Little Green Riding Hood* the wolf, although hungry, is portrayed as a harmless and friendly creature deserving Rosa's friendship; what is more, he doesn't play the role of the villain but the victimized role. In Perrault's version, Little Red Riding Hood is eaten by the big bad wolf. In Iliopoulou's revision, in contrast, the story ends with the poor wolf's death in the human-caused fire which burned part of the forest. Through this shift in plot denouement, the large multinational firm, i.e. men eager for money, can be considered to assume the role of the villain now and, in consequence, a completely different moral, compared to Perrault's version, is articulated at the end: there are, nowadays, humans that constitute a greater danger than wolves.

The intertextual dialogue between *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Little Green Riding Hood*, which helps the reader to appreciate the full meaning of deconstructing the opposition good = human = culture vs bad = wolf = nature, stresses issues about man's abuse of nature and the protection of endangered animals as well. To put it differently, awareness of the environment's delicate balance serves as a powerful focal point around which the nature/ culture opposition clears a way of problematizing the categories of 'animal' and of 'human'; nevertheless, imbuing the classical fairy tale with modern-day ecological sensibilities is not the most noteworthy aspect of this revision. My contention is that one of the most interesting things about Iliopoulou's revision is that is a way in which alternatives to gender stereotyped roles are envisioned. To be more specific, the fact of a heroine who is and at the same time is not exactly the well-known Little Red Riding Hood, offers the author an interesting way to articulate his own 'message' about gender in a context revolving around the juxtaposition of the cruel and materialistic nature of the real world with the fairy tale world of people who feel out-of-place. In doing so Iliopoulou brings together elements of fantasy and realism as well; what is more, she is most interested in imagining new twists for her main character.

The beginning of the story is significant in the way that it establishes Rosa as a liminal character whose status lies between childhood and womanhood. Rosa, who works in a toyshop, the Doll's House, selling dolls, is portrayed as a delicate, fairy-like, young woman: she befriends with animals and birds and talks with dolls. In such a context, the self-referential question that Rosa addresses to herself: "What happens when a doll falls off her shelf [...]. What happens when it leaves its fairy tale?" (*Little Green Riding Hood*, 9), functions as a pointed hint, an *amorces* in Genette's terms, of what will happen next in the heroine's story. In fact, *Little Green Riding Hood* describes the quest of a young woman who, though unwilling to cope with the harsh nature of the reality around her, has to depart from her own quasi fairy tale world in order to protect the forest and, through this quest, to find her own self and her role in the world. In so doing, it is not only subverts the pre-text by portraying Rosa as a young woman with agency, but it invests the classical heroine with a layer of psychological complexity. Rosa embodies the innocence of a child, but is able to go through a trial of growing up when she has to face a reality which reveals its materialistic ugliness and roughness; most importantly, she affirms the necessity of taking action.

What is more, in her story Iliopoulou privileges the heroine's perspective and, by doing so, recounts Rosa's psychological development, to the point at which she finds her path to personal growth. Given her traumatic experience as a child, the heroine has an aversion to the color red and she is growing fearful of wolves and the forest. During her quest, she learns to deal with her fears, she develops self-sufficiency and independence. As a consequence, at the end of the story the reader will find a heroine who finally transcends the limiting boundaries of her fairy tale past and appears as an emerging female self.

Nevertheless, while seeking a path to independent womanhood, she does not find fulfilment to companionship; loneliness is the price she has to pay inasmuch as the forester, an admirer of her, does not dare to live with a woman defiant towards conventional adult maturity. In this way, *Little Green Riding Hood* seems to enact a postfeminist retelling of the pre-text, i.e. a retelling that is fraught with ambiguities in its representation of femininity; a femininity which while foregrounding female empowerment, at the same time displays a melancholic stance towards the implications that such a perspective engenders.

This particular way of portraying Rosa as a young woman trying to balance between the adult and the child, between reality and fairy tale, between self-sufficiency and loneliness acknowledges the complex, multiple ways identity is constructed and experienced. In this respect, it is no surprise that Iliopoulou's version ends by displaying the heroine's nostalgic desire to revert to a traditional role. In the concluding section of *Little Green Riding Hood*, the narration sees into the future of Rosa's story and depicts the heroine as an old woman who decides to reconnect with her past, even if it is in the role of the teller keeping the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* alive in children's memory.

Rosa, although reluctant to deal with the burden of her fame as a fairy tale heroine, she will not reject finally the role of the tale teller inscribing herself in “the lineage of women as tale-tellers” (Rowe, 1999: 297).^{iv}

If Iliopoulou’s subtle inscription of *Little Red Riding Hood* references reveals her understanding of the ways in which fairy tales contribute to notions of subjective identity, Christos Boulotis refashions the *Little Red Riding Hood*’s plot with the intention both to interrogate gender ideology and issues surrounding childhood, and explore the boundaries of real. The links between *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the clockwork wolf* by Christos Boulotis (2007) rest primarily on plot development; that is, Bouloti’s revision follows, in general, the same pattern as the pre-text: departure – reconnaissance – delivery – trickery – complicity – villainy – mediation – beginning counteraction – struggle – victory. However, the story is set in a rather contemporary urban setting and the characters are modified into the contemporary life. Little Red Riding Hood, who is now married with children, is no longer the central figure; the story centers on her twelve daughters who “are naughty, disobedient, wilful, inventive, and mischievous” (*The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the clockwork wolf*, 6).

The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods, being informed about their mother’s adventure, willingly look for their own adventure in order to revive the famous story.^v To be more explicit, Little Red Riding Hood kept on having children in the hope of producing a boy, but gave up after six set of female twins. The twelve sisters want to revive their mother’s adventure in their own conditions, playing it safe. Thus, they decided to get a clockwork wolf from a Chinese travelling salesman; a wolf, extremely smart, but harmless as he is mechanized. What they do not take into account is that there is a real, bad wolf, the nephew of the fairy tale’s wolf, who wants to take revenge for what happened in the past and for his uncle’s death. As a consequence, crossing the forest –which is drawn by the girls, since there are no forests in their city– to meet their clockwork wolf becomes a real trial for the heroines instead of being a safe procedure. Misled not by the wolf’s cunning, but by their own erroneous conception of things, they are to give in willingly to the wolf; it is worth noting that during their first encounter with the wolf the Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods feel no fear, but rather curiosity, even impatience. Nevertheless, the wolf doesn’t take long to reveal who he really is and he ties them up. The girls are crying for help and the clockwork wolf comes to the rescue. The two wolves join in direct combat, to use the proppian terminology; in a combat that takes the form of a knowledge contest, the outcome of which will define the twelve girls’ destiny. The winner in such a contest cannot be other but the very smart clockwork wolf and, finally, the Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods are rescued.

Boulotis’ handling of the story challenges social codes inscribed in both traditional and feminist versions of the fairy tale. Although he shows an awareness of gender issues reflected in the feminist revisions of the tale and of changes in the depiction of little girl character echoing historical and socio-cultural changes in the construction of childhood, in representing both the agential capabilities and the vulnerability of modern-days Little Red Riding Hoods, the author redefines the cautioning character of the tale so as to make it meaningful to the present. Two things need here to be emphasized. To start with, Boulotis’ revision seems, at first, challenging both stereotypical gender ideology and the position of children as passive, dependent, and naïve. To be more precise, it presents through the Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods, a young girl’s image as opposed to the heroine’s traditional image. The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods are depicted as being aware of the dangers that a venture in the woods contains; hence, they are neither naïve nor ‘innocent’. What is more, they are not passive.

They decide their venture into the forest by themselves; both the forest and the clockwork wolf are the outcome of their own inventiveness and determination. By doing so, the author gives his heroines a degree of agency denied to the classical heroine in both the Perrault and Grimm Brothers’ versions; nevertheless, the way the story evolves shows that the heroines have neither the knowledge nor power to fight against the (real) wolf. In fact, unlike other contemporary retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* which portray a heroine who doesn’t need help from others, in this one Little Red Riding Hoods became the victimized little girl must be rescued by the hero.^{vi}

The plot involves the arrival of the clockwork wolf who, just like the hunter in the traditional tale, functions as the sisters’ saviour and becomes actually the hero character. To this may also be added that at the end of the story the clockwork wolf refuses to become an exhibit in the museum and prefers to stay free in order to “protect giddy little girls from pitfalls” (*The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods*, 30). One could say that Boulotis with these insertions of male-like power,^{vii} first in the rescue and then in the protection of little girls, parodies one of the tropes present in feminist retellings of fairy tales, i.e. girls with agentic capabilities. However, there is another dimension to this.

The twelve sisters enjoy more freedom than the traditional heroine due to their mother's fixation to the "fabulous adventure of her childhood" (*The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods*, 8). Little Red Riding Hood, caught in her past fame, feels happy when she realizes her daughters' thirst for the revival of her adventure with the wolf.

This circumstance while it renders functions such as "interdiction addressed to the heroines" and "violation of the interdiction" unnecessary as a framework for the plot development, questions indulging mothering –that is mothers who permit their children to deal with real-world realities and dangers before they are prepared to do so. In such a context, and given the absence of the twelve sisters' father and the lack of guidance resulting from it, both the role of the clockwork wolf as a saviour and his final decision could be seen as a longing for father-like protection and, consequently, as a way of illustrating a patriarchal nostalgia. In this respect, Boulotis' version shares a degree of commonality with the pre-text, especially with the version by the Grimm brothers. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, writing about fairy tales in their book *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, state that "For the Grimms, children need only know how much they don't know so that they can see the wisdom of accepting the wise advice of their parents..." (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003: 308). I could say that for Boulotis, children need know how much they don't know so that they can see that need a mother not only as a model to imitate, but as a wise advice giver as well.

In *The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the Clockwork Wolf* the heroines are not finally punished for their journey into the forest. Rather, their venture is represented as a pathway through which they progress towards self-definition. According to Bacchilega, in the versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* written by Perrault and the Grimm Brothers, males determine feminine limits: "Whether she survives her journey into the outer world or not, the girl is *inside* when the tale ends –inside the wolf's belly for Perrault, or her grandmother's home for the Grimms. [...] When the wolf punishes the girl's curiosity, and when the hunter saves her and the grandmother, males determine feminine limits" (Bacchilega, 1997: 58-59). Keeping this in mind, it seems that in Boulotis' revision the situation has changed, but still not completely. Boulotis challenges the traditional ending of fairy tales giving her heroines several options other than the traditional "happily ever after" marriage:

Six of them remain unmarried and devoted themselves entirely to painting that is they painted for the rest of their life their adventure with the bad and the clockwork wolf, as they thought that nothing more interesting would happen to them. [...] The other four, who they had missed her absent father very much, went to a faraway country to meet him. Two of them studied cooking; the other two studied the piano. They got married and, each of them, gave birth to two boys named after them Little Red Riding Hoods. The two youngest girls went to China, where they learnt the art of making clockwork toys in the workshop of a renowned toy manufacturer of Shanghai. They made only clockwork Little Red Riding Hoods that looked real and they became famous as well. No one knows if they got married or if they had children (*The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods*, 30).

Most importantly, the narrative ends with Little Red Riding Hood, who is depicted growing old alone, expressing the desire to journey into the forest once in a while to meet with the wolf, not the authentic one but the clockwork. But how can we explain the fact that modern-day versions of Little Red Riding Hood still want to venture in the woods, but in so doing they prefer 'wolves' who may look fierce, but they are gentle, protective, and, above all, mechanized? This is the other point I want to give attention.

Bruno Bettelheim describes the figure of the hunter in the *Little Red Riding Hood* as one who "dominates, controls, and subdues wild, ferocious beasts" and who represents "the subjugation of the animal, asocial, violent tendencies in man" (Bettelheim, 1975: 205). Viewed with these explanations in mind, a wolf, though mechanized in this particular case, is the one who, as a substitute of the hunter in the role of the saviour, dominates the beast, i.e. a real wild wolf. Insofar as one accepts the character of the wolf, as a 'double', the seemingly identical but oppositional characters of the wolf and the clockwork wolf bring to the fore the notion of duality in man (wild/animal nature = darker unconscious self vs cultural nature = man's social personality), and in so doing address issues of unconscious impulses that had to be controlled.

Further to this, in making the clockwork wolf not only indistinguishable from the real wild wolf, but most desirable as well, the author interrogates the notion of the 'real' and the position of the individual in relation to this notion. A point of clarification is called for here. In taking the literary trope of the double as signifying a kind of return of the repressed,^{viii} one thing that demands recognizing is that in such a move the narrative suggests that now-days Little Riding Hoods although never ceasing to express a desire to explore the dark geography of the forest, are reluctant to give in to experiences of a 'devouring' aspect.

The real wolf appears as the excess that the subjectivity of Little Riding Hoods is unable to deal with; hence, their desire to domesticate the wolf, to turn his otherness into something familiar –or to be attracted to his culturally appropriated and reassuring version.

If looked under this perspective, to the extent that the clockwork wolf performs more suitable than the real wolf, the distinction between the real and the copy becomes irrelevant; the copy can be treated as another type of reality, or rather modern-day Little Red Riding Hoods have come to unconsciously accept it as real. To this may also be added the twelve daughters of Little Red Riding Hood who while subsuming at first the recurrence of the same and being dependent upon the ‘original’ they imitate, signify at last a world where repetition is difference; that is, a world characterized by the coexistence of the undifferentiated and the different, the old and the new, by the desire to have the old experience repeated and the thrill of its realization in a different way. Doubling the wolf as well as multiplying the number of Little Red Riding Hoods, enabled Boulotis to discuss the blurring of the lines between the real and the artificial induced by our “culture of the copy”,^{ix} the constructed nature of reality, and the iterability of the journey through the forest which address an iterative female experience.

Writing beyond the Little Red Riding hood’s ending,^x allows Iliopoulou and Boulotis to appropriate the trope of female journey toward experience as a way both to acknowledge its power to address issues surrounding women’s identity and question its meaning in our postfeminist era. Both assert that surviving her journey into the forest is not the end for Little Red Riding Hood and present plots that involve the heroines’ desire to revive the adventure as a way to suggest that journey toward finding oneself is an evolving process and never fully complete. In Little Green Riding Hood the author explores the process of becoming, rather than being, an adult woman and the trope of the journey into the forest functions as a process through which past issues are resolved and new anxieties came up. The Twelve Little Red Riding Hoods and the Clockwork Wolf portraying little girls and women’s desire to stray from the path once again suggest that acting as a Little Red Riding Hood has been a rite of passage for every new generation of adolescent females while simultaneously remind us that there is no such thing as a ‘true’ repetition. In any case, both of them offer a Little Red Riding Hood resonant to modern-day diverse and sometimes conflicting notions of gender role identity. Being both questioning and affirmative of both traditional patriarchal and feminist gender politics, they eschew binary oppositions and in so doing they portray women and young girls as complex figures that are both autonomous agents, free to make individual choices, and damsels in danger require ‘rescuing’, both independent and vulnerable, all at once.

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ⁱ Parallels to *Little Red Riding Hood* have been identified in several ancient myths. Nevertheless, the basic elements of the tale were developed in an oral tradition during the late Middle Ages, largely in France and northern Italy. They gave rise to a group of tales intended for children and they were so widespread that they influenced C.Perrault's version of 1697 (Zipes, 1993: 18). Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published their version in 1812.

ⁱⁱ I prefer the term 'revision' as it is used by Zipes who states that retellings of the fairy tales fall into two categories: duplicates and revisions. Duplicates of classical fairy tales "reproduce a set pattern of ideas and images that reinforce a traditional way of seeing, believing, and behaving", while revisions seek to "alter the reader's view of traditional patterns, images, and codes". (Zipes, 1994: 8-10).

ⁱⁱⁱ According to Beckett, in contemporary retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* the heroine rarely retains the general designation and anonymity of the traditional tale, but is generally individualized and given a Christian name (Beckett, 2008: 87).

^{iv} Many scholars have acknowledged the women's role in telling stories. In the chapter "To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale" from *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion and Paradigm*, Karen E. Rowe explores the history of voicelessness of women and notices that, historically, there has been an intimate connection between weaving and telling stories; that is, women's " 'audible' art is associated with their cultural function as silent spinners or weavers, and they employ the folk or fairy tale as a speaking (whether oral or literary) representation of the silent matter of their lives, which is culture itself" (Rowe, 1999: 300). For a thorough review of the literature concerning the female fairy-tale tradition, see Haase's "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (2004).

^v Boulotis' text shares similarities with Philippe Dumas and Boris Moissard's *Le Petit Chaperon Bleu Marine* (1977), in which a decided and self-confident young girl is jealous of her grandmother, the famous "ex Little Red Riding Hood", and so she sets the wolf free in order to make the old story revive and become as famous as her grandmother.

^{vi} *Little Red Riding Hood* has been the subject of a large number of feminist revisions that attempt to reconsider the gender roles embedded in the classic fairy tale and its ambiguous sexual morality in order to provide non-sexist representations of gender. The new Little Red Riding Hood in the contemporary versions of the fairy tale is provocative, disobedient or undisciplined; she is sometimes cunning and heartless, but, by all means, is assertive and is able to make her own decisions. What is more, challenging the perception of women as powerless and victimized, some authors portray a heroine capable of escaping from the wolf all by herself; others portray the heroine as the victimizer. To sum up, by quoting Cristina Bacchilega from *Postmodern fairy tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, in contemporary retellings of the *Little Red Riding Hood* tale, "straying from the path is necessary" (Bacchilega, 1997: 68).

^{vii} The big bad wolf has been seen as "an archetypal symbol of the predatory male" (Beckett, 2008: 22); it is in these terms that the 'insertions of male-like power' might be understood.

^{viii} Freud views the double as a very important source of the uncanny and states that "the quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect" (Sigmund Freud, 1949: 389). The double is, subsequently, "something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, 1949: 370), but that became unfamiliar due to its repression.

^{ix} I borrow this expression from Hillel Schwartz who writes that we are a "Culture of the Copy", obsessed with images of identical or Siamese twins, *Doppelgängers*, photographs, copies of all sorts, clones, industrial mass production practices, and other future possibilities (Schwartz, 1996: 47).

^x I make an allusion to Rachel Blau DuPlessis' *Writing beyond the Ending*. According to the author *writing beyond the ending* is a metaphor for narratives that represent new possibilities or women.