

Article

“I Am the Wolf: Queering ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ and ‘Snow White and Rose Red’ in the Television Show *Once Upon a Time*”

Brittany Warman

Department of English, The Ohio State University, 421 Denney Hall, 164 Annie & John Glenn Ave. Columbus, OH 43210, USA; warman.17@osu.com

Academic Editor: Claudia Schwabe

Received: 2 March 2016; Accepted: 6 June 2016; Published: 8 June 2016

Abstract: In season one, episode 15 of the television show *Once Upon a Time*, viewers are given a glimpse into the history of Ruby/Red, the series’ version of Red Riding Hood. The episode reveals that, contrary to most oral and written versions of the ATU 333 tale, Red herself is the wolf: a werewolf who must wear an enchanted red cloak in order to keep from turning into a monster. The episode also features the beginnings of the close friendship between Red and Snow White. The sisterly bond that quickly forms between the two women, combined with the striking images of their respective red and white cloaks, easily calls to mind a less familiar fairy tale not explicitly referenced in the series: “Snow White and Rose Red” (ATU 426). Taking queer readings of this text as starting points, I argue that this allusion complicates the bond between the two women, opening up space for a compelling reading of Red’s werewolf nature as a coded depiction of her then latent but later confirmed bisexuality.

Keywords: fairy tale; queer; television; werewolf; “Little Red Riding Hood”; “Snow White and Rose Red”; *Once Upon a Time*

1. Introduction

The first season of the television show *Once Upon a Time* (henceforth *OUAT*), currently in its fifth season on ABC, centers on the adventures of fairy tale characters transported via curse to our own, mundane world.¹ There they are given alternate memories that force them to forget who they really are. Key characters such as Snow White, Prince Charming, Rumpelstiltskin, Little Red Riding Hood, and Cinderella are trapped in a land without happy endings, frozen in time and doomed to suffer a vague discontent associated with being separated from their true identities. The first season of the series weaves its story largely through flashbacks to the fairy-tale land that was, letting us see new imaginings of the “true” versions of these well-known tales.²

In season one, episode 15, viewers are shown scenes from the past life of Ruby/Red (Meghan Ory), the series’ version of Red Riding Hood. The episode reveals that, contrary to most oral and written versions of the ATU 333 tale³, Red herself is the wolf: a werewolf who must wear an enchanted

¹ Claudia Schwabe describes this set up as a “rapprochement of the dichotomy between the familiar, visible, nonmagical, ordinary, and rational (the everyday) and the unfamiliar, invisible, magical, extraordinary, and nonrational (the magical)”, arguing that the show “synthesize[s] quotidian reality with supernatural/magical reality, forming a new reality with magical influences” ([1], p. 295).

² This structure is very similar to another television show, *Lost* (2004–2010), for which *OUAT* series creators Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis worked as writers and producers. *OUAT* frequently features “Easter eggs” evoking *Lost* that are meant to serve as insider winks for fans of both series [2].

³ While Red transforming into a wolf herself is not frequently seen in either oral or written versions of the traditional fairy tale, there are several other films and television programs that do make use of this idea. See the work of Pauline Greenhill

red cloak in order to keep from turning into a monster [5].⁴ The episode also features the beginnings of the close friendship between Red and Snow White (Ginnifer Goodwin). The sisterly bond that quickly forms between the two women, combined with the striking images of their respective red and white cloaks, easily calls to mind a less familiar fairy tale not explicitly referenced in the series: “Snow White and Rose Red” (ATU 426). Taking queer readings of this text as starting points (see, for example, [6]), I argue that this allusion complicates the bond between the two women, opening up space for a compelling reading of Red’s werewolf nature as a coded depiction of her then latent but later confirmed bisexuality⁵.

In this article, my use of the word “queer” to describe a possible reading of both a character and a television adaptation as a whole relates both to the established use of the term, that which “implicate[s] lives and theories relating to sexes and sexualities beyond the mainstream and deviating from the norm”, and the broader definition that is becoming more and more prevalent in scholarship, that which addresses “concerns about marginalization, oddity, and not fitting into society generally” and “embraces more than sex/gender/sexuality to deal with the problematics of those who for various reasons find themselves outside conventional practices” ([8], p. 4). A queer reading, as I understand it here, “unpick[s] binaries and reread[s the] gaps, silences, and in-between spaces” of a text ([9], p. 5)—it is not, to call on Alexander Doty’s work, an alternative reading to a presumptively normative heterosexual analysis, but rather an equally valid reading that is not “any less there, or any less real, than straight readings” ([10], pp. 1–2). Depictions of queerness on mainstream television nonetheless remain controversial subjects in Western society. While significant positive “[s]hifts in public attitudes toward lesbian and gay stories [...] became apparent in the 1990s, especially on television” ([11], p. 2), programs that feature queer romance are still met with significant resistance, both from anti-queer viewers and from those who identify as queer themselves. Recurring criticism from within the queer community includes objections to tokenism, stereotypical depictions that “limit what it means to be lesbian, gay, or queer” ([11], p. 4), and portrayals seen as showing queer people to be ultimately “innocuous and inoffensive” to hegemonic interests. ([12], p. 4).⁶

2. “Little Red Riding Hood” (ATU 333)

As any close reading of any fairy-tale adaptation must, I will begin with a brief look at the primary source material. While all fairy tales exist in a myriad of forms and variations, my focus here will be on the Grimm version of “Little Red Riding Hood”, called “Little Red Cap”, and, later, the Grimm version of “Snow White and Rose Red”. My reasoning for this is, simply, that they are by far the most popular to adapt and, I would argue, the chief source texts for fairy tales beyond Disney for *OUAT* in particular.⁷

and Steven Kohm, particularly “Criminal Beasts and Swan Girls: The *Red Riding Trilogy* and Little Red Riding Hood on Television” in *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television* [3] and “Hoodwinked! and *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*: Animated “Little Red Riding Hood” Films and the Rashōmon Effect” in the journal *Marvels & Tales*, for several key examples [4].

⁴ All quotations and descriptions are from season one, episode 15 unless otherwise noted.

⁵ I use the term “coded”/“coding” as a way of marking “covert expressions of disturbing or subversive ideas” ([7], p. vii)—and queerness is, at least to corporations like Disney, still quite subversive. My use of this term is indebted to the introduction to *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture* by Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser entitled “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Cultures” [7]. Though Radner and Lanser’s particular essay focuses on women exclusively, the strategies of coding discussed may be used by anyone facing oppression “to refuse, subvert, or transform conventional expectations” ([7], p. 23). In calling lycanthropy a code for queerness, I am suggesting the use of the coding strategy they identify as “indirection” ([7], pp. 16–19).

⁶ There has been considerable and extensive scholarship examining queerness on television—examples include [12–15].

⁷ As ABC is owned by the Disney Corporation, the majority of the fairy tale stories adapted on *OUAT* at least begin with the version of the tale presented in a major Disney film. Neither ATU 333 nor ATU 426 have been adapted into full length Disney motion pictures, though the corporation has produced shorts based on ATU 333. *OUAT* does, however, incorporate fairy tales beyond those that have been made into major animated Disney films—aside from the two discussed in this article, *OUAT* also adapts, for example, the stories of “Rumpelstiltskin” (ATU 500) and “Hansel and Gretel” (ATU 327a). All of the non-Disney fairy-tale adaptations seem to have markers suggesting retellings that began with the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as their starting point.

The Grimm's fairy tale "Little Red Cap", (henceforth "Little Red Riding Hood" when speaking generally, as that is its most common name) (ATU 333) is a familiar one to most of Western civilization. It is popular to tell and retell in various ways. Its fame has made it frequently one of the first tales thought of when asked for an example of a fairy tale. The Grimm version of the story is relatively simple—a young girl who always wears a red cap is given a piece of cake and a bottle of wine to bring to her beloved grandmother, who is ill. To get to her, she must travel through a forest, where she encounters a wolf. The wolf is cunning, and schemes a way to be able to eat both the grandmother and the little girl—he tells her to slow down and pick some of the flowers that grow just off the path, and despite her mother's warning not to stray, she does so. He then rushes to the grandmother's home and eats her, puts on her clothes, and pretends to be her when Little Red Cap arrives at the house. After the famous "what big ears [*etc.*] you have" exchange, the wolf eats the girl as well. Luckily, a huntsman happens to overhear the wolf's snoring, finds him in the house, kills him, and opens up his belly, revealing a still alive Little Red Cap and grandmother. The story ends by saying that Little Red Cap learns from the experience and, when another wolf tries the same thing, she and her grandmother are able to foil him on their own [16].

Interpretations of this story have been wide-ranging, from psychoanalytic [17], to socio-historical/cultural and feminist [18], to the most common conception that the story is simply a metaphor for the dangers young girls face from predatory men. Jack Zipes argues that the tale's status as "the most popular and certainly the most provocative fairy tale in the Western world" stems from the fact that it "raises issues about gender identity, sexuality, violence, and the civilizing process in a unique and succinct symbolic form that children and adults can understand on different levels" ([18], p. 343). As Rita Ghesquiere acknowledges, that dual appeal to both young and old has also "managed to inspire creators of various kinds who have transposed the story not only for a young but also for a grown-up audience" ([19], p. 87).

"Little Red Riding Hood" is, in many ways, ripe for contemporary adaptation. Particularly popular are feminist retellings in which the titular character emerges triumphant, often killing the wolf herself. Jennifer Orme locates a queer retelling in David Kaplan's film version of the tale as well [20] and, though *OUAT* is not the first adaptation of the story to make Red herself a werewolf, it is perhaps the most popular and wide-reaching one to do so.⁸ Several reviewers of the fifteenth episode of season one admitted to being shocked by the twist, indicating that the idea was new to many of those watching (see, for example, [22,23]). Phillip A. Bernhardt-House acknowledges, however, that "[t]reatments of female sexuality and sexual initiation in relation to wolves have often focused on the tale" ([24], p. 169) and, further, that tales of female werewolves frequently seem to serve as representations of "the uncontrollable and dangerous nature of the female" ([24], p. 168).

3. Blending the Fairy Tale to Queer It

In the fifteenth episode of season one of *OUAT*, entitled "Red-Handed", the audience is given a look into the past life of Ruby, a young woman with rebellious tendencies who works at her grandmother's diner in Storybrooke. She is, of course, an updated interpretation of Little Red Riding Hood. The show depicts a relatively familiar version of the character as she has been modernized in recent years—tough and unconventional, but also kind, vulnerable, slightly naive, and uncertain of her place in the world.⁹ Ruby fights with her grandmother, called Granny (Beverly Elliott), frequently, often because she feels trapped in the small town (as she indeed is.) In this particular episode, when the scenes shift to contemporary Storybrooke, they quarrel over the necessity of the tedious paperwork

⁸ The other major contender is the 1984 film *The Company of Wolves* based on Angela Carter's short stories [21].

⁹ Zipes would argue that Red has always been "individualistic and perhaps nonconformist", even having "certain potential qualities which could convert her into a witch or heretic" ([25], p. 122). He further states that Red "becomes at one with the wolf" when she is eaten, an act that realizes "her 'natural' potential to become a witch" ([25], p. 124). Though *OUAT* does not follow this reading exactly, Red's werewolf nature certainly qualifies her as both supernatural and "one" with the wolf.

associated with the diner and Ruby's increasing desire to see the world. The Storybrooke parts of the episode further feature Ruby quitting her job, attempting to leave the town but being stopped, getting a new job as an assistant at the sheriff's office with the show's main character Emma (Jennifer Morrison), helping Emma solve what they believe is a murder, and ultimately reconciling with Granny and coming back to work for her [5].

What I would like to focus on here, however, are the flashback scenes that take place in the Enchanted Forest many years before the scenes set in Storybrooke. There, Ruby is a lighthearted girl nicknamed Red who has a crush on a boy named Peter (Jesse Hutch).¹⁰ She lives with her grandmother, who is quite strict and makes Red always wear a particular red cloak during what their village calls "Wolf's Time", the time each month that an enormous, ferocious wolf terrorizes the area. Red wants to go with the people who want to hunt the wolf, but her grandmother will not allow it, instead making her help secure their cottage. She also reminds Red to wear her cloak always, as red is supposed to repel wolves, but it seems as though Red has a history of not remembering to do this.

The next morning, Red finds a hiding Snow White in their chicken coop and agrees to help her, despite Snow admitting that she is a known fugitive. After the slaughter of the men who went to hunt the wolf is discovered, Red confesses to Snow that she wants to be with Peter, but knows that she can't while the wolf is free because Granny will never let her. She and Snow go to search for the wolf on their own and discover via footprints that the wolf can transform into a human. When they see that the prints lead to Red's window, they assume that Peter must be the wolf, as he was the only person Red can think of that had been there. That night, Red sneaks out to tie up Peter so that he won't hurt anyone, vowing to stay with him despite her revelation about him, while Snow pretends to be Red by wearing her cloak and lying on her bed at home. When Granny discovers that Red is gone, without her cloak, she panics and rushes from the cottage with Snow close behind. When they get to the tree where Red had tied up Peter, however, it is too late—Peter is not the wolf, Red is, and she has devoured him in her wolf form. Snow and Granny throw the cloak over Red, which transforms her back into a human and thus reveals its magical properties and why Granny wanted Red to wear it all the time. Red is confused and horrified by what she has done but the group hears a hunting party coming and Granny forces her to escape with Snow into the woods.

What is perhaps most interesting about these Enchanted Forest scenes, aside from the twist reveal of Red herself being the wolf, is the fact that they clearly connect to another fairy tale completely separate from "Little Red Riding Hood"—"Snow White and Rose Red" (ATU 426).¹¹ Though a less familiar fairy tale, "Snow White and Rose Red" is still recognizable to many and is, for those who know it, a far more interesting and subversive tale than many of those that have gained considerably greater popularity.¹² This intertextual blurring of two fairy tales allows the texts to "mingle with one another, anticipating, evoking, interrupting, and supporting one another in unpredictable ways" ([26], p. 79).

To summarize, the Grimm version of "Snow White and Rose Red" is the story of a poor widow who has two daughters that resemble the rose bushes outside their home ([27], p. 475). The two sisters are very close but also very different—as Andrew J. Friedenthal notes, "Rose Red is [...] figured from the story's very outset, in comparison with her sister, as wilder and less domestic" ([6], p. 163)—she "prefer[s] to run around in the meadows and fields, look for flowers, and catch butterflies", while Snow White likes to "sta[y] at home with her mother [and] hel[p] her with housework, or read to

¹⁰ This, of course, additionally alludes to the 1936 Russian musical composition and story of "Peter and the Wolf" by Sergei Prokofiev.

¹¹ The "Snow White" in "Snow White and Rose Red" is not traditionally the same "Snow White" of the other fairy tale with that title. The majority of the story of the Snow White depicted on *Ouat* is modeled after the other story (and, of course, the Disney version of that), but the show seems to have chosen to conflate the two characters into one in its particular fairy-tale universe.

¹² Friedenthal argues that the relative obscurity of the tale "may reflect centuries-old cultural taboos against both lesbianism and free expression of female sexuality" ([6], p. 163). It is also worth noting, as Friedenthal does later in his chapter, that the cultural taboo of incest is also in play in this story ([6], p. 166).

her" ([27], pp. 475–76). The colors associated with each also emphasize this difference—"Snow White, associated with the color of cleanliness and innocence, of inexperience and childhood, is, literally, pure in essence. Rose Red, in contrast, is named for the color of blood and passion" ([6], p. 165). Regardless of these differences, however, the two sisters love each other dearly and often explore the forest together.

One day, during a cold winter, a bear asks for shelter in their home. Though they are all afraid at first, they soon come to love the bear. The two sisters care for him and like to play with him by the fire. When the bear leaves the cottage in the summer, Snow White is particularly sad. Later, when the girls are in the forest, they come upon a dwarf twice with his beard stuck in various places and once almost being carried away by an eagle. Each time the sisters free him but he shows no gratitude. Eventually it is revealed that this is the dwarf who had cursed their friend the bear, who is really a prince transformed. Of course, the tale ends with the dwarf defeated and the return of the prince to his rightful human form. Snow White then, as is expected, marries him and Rose Red, in what seems almost like an afterthought, marries his brother [27].

When arguing for the queer reading of "Snow White and Rose Red", it is prudent to note that the tale was not originally included in the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*—indeed it did not make an appearance in the collected text until the abridged second edition in 1833, then subsequently appeared in the third edition of the full text in 1837. Part of the reason for this is that the tale is Wilhelm Grimm's retelling of a German literary fairy tale by Caroline Stahl and not an oral tale—there is even evidence to suggest that the Grimms took pains to retell the story in a way that would encourage readers to identify it as an oral folktale ([28], pp. 148–50). One can speculate, as Cristina Bacchilega and Heinz Rölleke do, that the tale appealed to the Grimm brothers because "the sisters' devotion to one another plays a key role in the tale and mirrors that of the two Grimms" themselves ([26], p. 85). This perhaps helps explain its inclusion, despite the fact that the lack of any clear evidence of an oral history for the tale should theoretically have excluded it from the Grimms' collection.

Though at first the two traditional tales drawn from for this episode of *OUAT* seem quite different, they do feature a few interesting similarities. For example, "Snow White and Rose Red", like "Little Red Riding Hood", centers its story on several women seemingly on their own. In *OUAT*, Granny, Red, and Snow function as a team of women against the men of the village who wish to kill the wolf, thus mirroring that female-centered focus. "One could argue that the Grimm tales [...] largely reference a female-centered world, where relationships between women—whether or not they are sexualized and/or eroticized—become the primary area of concern" ([8], p. 9), but these two tales in particular seem to be among those that do so most prominently. Both stories also feature the intrusion of a male figure into a previously female exclusive space (first the wolf and then the huntsman in "Little Red Cap" and the bear prince in "Snow White and Rose Red") and the idea of transformation—in "Little Red Cap", the wolf does not literally transform but does don the appearance of an old woman (a cross-dressing act that is perhaps queer in and of itself¹³) and, in "Snow White and Rose Red", the bear is of course a transformed prince. The *OUAT* episode uses this concept of transformation in their choice to make Red herself the wolf—she is a human girl who transforms into an animal, a werewolf. The idea of the deep forest is also crucial to both stories, though in quite different ways. In "Little Red Cap", the forest symbolizes an unfamiliar, potentially frightening world outside that which had been previously experienced. The "Snow White and Rose Red" story, in contrast, depicts the woods as the comforting, well-known space of the two sisters. In making the forest the domain of the wolf, *OUAT* associates it with danger a la "Little Red Riding Hood" tales. In making *Red* the wolf, however, *OUAT* also brings in elements of the familiar space where one truly belongs that is captured in "Snow White and Rose Red".

¹³ For an in-depth discussion of this idea, see the concluding chapter of Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* [29].

In the context of the “Red-Handed” *OUAT* episode, however, the inclusion of such clear “Snow White and Rose Red” allusions in a “Little Red Riding Hood” retelling most significantly suggests a queer reading of that retelling in line with the “subtle themes of lesbianism and female sexual empowerment in ATU 426” ([6], p. 161). As Friedenthal notes, “[t]hrough the Grimms’ “Snow White and Rose Red” may lack overt expression of incestuous lesbianism, the entire tale centers on a series of queer images and symbols”—he singles out, for example, the roses (particularly their thorns), the “fecundity and fertility” of the forest surrounding the sisters’ home, and the repetitions of the color red throughout the tale ([6], pp. 166–67). Though “Red-Handed” does not feature roses, the forest, as previously noted, and the color red both play key roles in the narrative. Aside from the obvious fact that Red’s cloak is a bright red brocade, the episode strongly relies on images of blood as a way of cementing the terror of the wolf. For example, when Red and Snow go out to a well to get water for the cottage, the bucket brings up only a dark red substance. Red puzzles over it while Snow notices that behind them are the bloody corpses of the entire hunting party who went out after the wolf the night before. Their blood had seeped through the ground and into the water of the well. This focus on blood hints at an idea that is later confirmed by Granny—Red only began transforming into a wolf once a month when she turned thirteen, connecting the transformation strongly with ideas of sexuality, puberty, and the beginning of menstruation.¹⁴

Lastly, and most importantly, the “Snow White and Rose Red” story is characterized by the closeness of the two sisters. *OUAT* mimics that closeness admirably in the short time it has for Red and Snow to get to know each other in the “Red-Handed” episode—an almost instant understanding forms between the two women, and intimate conversations and co-planned schemes soon follow. Indeed it is Snow who inspires Red to defy her grandmother and gives her the means with which to do so—Red could not have left the house during Wolf’s Time if it were not for Snow agreeing to wear the cloak and pretending to be her. This co-transgression cements the strong tie connecting them. It is this same “intense intimacy [that] lends the [traditional] tale an air of homoeroticism” ([6], p. 171). Indeed, in the Grimm tale, this closeness “often finds physical expression: they “loved each other so much that they always held hands whenever they were out”; they swear never to leave each other as long as they live and they sometimes “would lie down next to each other on the moss and sleep until morning came” ([6], p. 166, quoting [27]). What’s more, though the sisters do both marry princes in the tale, their respective marriages do not result in their separation. As Bacchilega argues, there is “no need [in the tale] for married life to replace sisterly bonds” and the sisters are not “dependent on males” ([26], pp. 86–87).¹⁵ This small but unexpectedly powerful move is a direct challenge to a hegemonic, heteronormative, and patriarchal understanding of marriage and thus perhaps the queerest thing about the traditional story. While *OUAT* does not suggest any (non-incestuous) romantic relationship between their Snow and Red characters—Snow White is quite clearly heterosexual throughout the series—the intertextual presence of the “Snow White and Rose Red” tale allows for such a reading to shimmer on the edges of viewer consciousness even as Red’s awakening to her bisexuality shimmers on the edges of her own.¹⁶

4. Reading the Werewolf as a Code for Queerness

Combining the evocative lesbian imagery of “Snow White and Rose Red” with the story about how Red discovers her true nature reveals a new way of conceptualizing the concept of the werewolf

¹⁴ Even the term used by Red’s village for when the wolf prowls, “Wolf’s Time”, suggests “Moon Time”, a phrase often used for the period when a woman is menstruating.

¹⁵ Doty makes a similar argument in his bisexual analysis of the 1953 film *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* ([10], pp. 131–53).

¹⁶ The depiction of Snow and Red in *OUAT* might also put viewers in mind of what is perhaps the most popular adaptation of “Snow White and Rose Red”, the one featured in Bill Willingham’s *Fables* series [30]. Willingham’s story draws strongly on the differences between the two girls and even, as Friedenthal notes, hints at incestuous lesbianism between them ([6], pp. 175–76, 178, n. 7). Bacchilega adds that other adaptations also “underscore Snow White and Rose Red’s intimate bond”, such as Francesca Lia Block’s short story “Rose” (2000) ([31]; [26], p. 90).

in the *OUAT* world. As Bernhardt-House notes, there has been “[s]ome discussion of vampirism in relation to queerness” but “little or no discussion of lycanthropy”, with, of course, the exception of his own chapter on the subject ([24], p. 164). As he aptly points out, however, the werewolf’s position as a “‘hybrid’ figure of sorts—part human and part wolf—and its hybridity and transgression of species boundaries in a unified figure is, at very least, unusual, thus the figure of the werewolf might be seen as a natural signifier for queerness in its myriad forms” ([24], p. 159). Harry M. Benshoff adds the fact that “the figure of the monster throughout the history of the English-language horror film can in some way be understood as a metaphoric construct standing in for the figure of the homosexual” generally ([32], p. 4). Following this logic, Red’s story can be understood as an “activist adaptation”, to use Bacchilega’s term ([26], p. 80). “Activist adaptations” are those that “take a questioning stance towards their pre-texts, and/or take an activist stance toward the fairy tale’s hegemonic uses in popular culture, and/or instigate readers/viewers/listeners to engage with the genre as well as with the world with a transformed sense of possibility” ([26], p. 80). In making Little Red Riding Hood into a werewolf, and then coding that werewolf as queer in various ways, *OUAT* participates in an adaptation that questions traditional “Little Red Riding Hood” stories, particularly their emphasis on Red as a victim in need of rescue by a man, and encourages viewers to see new things in an old story.

In *OUAT*, Red’s werewolf side is at first seen as a shameful, monstrous secret that must be kept at all costs. Her grandmother, tellingly, keeps it from her, believing her to be safer if she does not know the truth about herself. “Red-Handed” shows the consequences of that choice—as the wolf, Red unknowingly kills numerous townspeople and even her potential heterosexual love interest, Peter. This framing of the werewolf as a dangerous creature who terrorizes normative society and destroys the possibility of heterosexual love is in keeping with heterosexual fears regarding queer sexualities—particularly the idea that homosexuality is “a threat to the community and other components of culture—[that] homosexuals supposedly represent the destruction of the procreative nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and [...] ‘family values’” ([32], p. 1). As Benshoff argues, “[i]n short, for many people in our shared English-language culture, homosexuality is a monstrous condition” ([32], p. 1) and one that must be suppressed. The connection between lycanthropy and homosexual desire in *OUAT* is further strengthened by the fact that Red does not find out she is the wolf until the appearance of Snow White, with whom she has an almost immediately close relationship (as discussed above.) When Red does discover the truth about herself, she and Snow must even flee together into the woods to avoid persecution by the nearing hunting party from the town. Though Snow is decidedly heterosexual, her appearance at this crucial moment in Red’s life, combined with the instant bond between the two women that mirrors a tale with strong homosexual possibility, seems to clearly hint at the eventual confirmation of Red’s bisexuality in season five [33]. It is not a far stretch of the imagination to presume that Red’s first real feelings of same-sex attraction were for the girl who is, after all, the “fairest in the land” [34].

In a later episode of the series, “Child of the Moon” [35], the story of what happens to Red and Snow after they leave Red’s hometown is revealed. On the run, the two girls happen upon a group of men who are after Snow White, and Red’s cloak is ripped as they escape. Worried that the magic of the cloak will no longer work, Snow and Red agree to separate for the night, as it is a full moon. The next morning, Red meets a fellow werewolf about her age, Quinn (Ben Hollingsworth), who takes her back to the werewolf lair he shares with several others like himself. There she meets the leader of the group, Anita (Annabeth Gish), another werewolf who turns out to be her biological mother. Anita informs Red that Granny kidnapped her, telling her that “[Granny] didn’t want you to find out the truth about who you really are. She believed the wolf is something to be ashamed of. I see things differently. Humans want us to believe we are the monsters. The moment you believe them... that’s when you become one” (35). Anita believes that once a werewolf accepts the wolf as a part of him or herself, he or she can then control it and revel in it—in short, that the wolf to her represents both “natural urges and social nonconformity” ([18], p. 81).

However, as Red soon sees, that reveling comes with the price of abandoning one's humanity and the rest of society entirely. The group of werewolves her mother leads believes that humans are evil and that living among them necessitates the suppression of their superior wolf characteristics. They have thus completely removed themselves from the rest of the world and no longer seek any sort of acceptance or human connection. This ultimately false narrative of having to choose between living with deep shame and hiding *vs.* embracing one's true self but, in doing so, also choosing a profound separation from the rest of the world can easily extend the lycanthropy/homosexuality metaphor. These are not, however, the only choices possible for Red, who ultimately chooses to embrace both her human and her wolf side—she decides to stay with Snow, stating that “[m]y mother wanted me to choose between being a wolf and being a human. Granny did, too. You are the only person who ever thought it was okay for me to be both” (35). Again, viewers are seemingly given a clue to Red's bisexuality—Red believes, with the support of her closest friend, that she can embrace being *both* a human girl and a wolf¹⁷. While this reading does once again problematically conflate humanity with heterosexuality and the monstrous wolf with homosexuality, thus potentially furthering the stereotypical fears about queerness that Benshoff argues are always already present in mainstream media [32], the show seems to seek a more nuanced adaptation of this same idea. Red embraces her dual nature in a way that can be seen as a more progressive and positive depiction of these concepts. Snow's complete acceptance and unquestioning support of her friend is perhaps a further reflection of a changing Western society.¹⁸

5. Conclusions

Queer understandings of *OUAT* have existed almost since the series' pilot aired in 2011. Indeed, as Rebecca Hay and Christa Baxter note, many fans have long hoped for the inclusion of a homosexual relationship on the show—the “Swan-Queen” advocates, those pushing for a romantic relationship between Emma, the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming (Josh Dallas), and Regina (Lana Parilla), the evil queen, have been particularly vocal since the beginning ([36], p. 329). The possibility of an actual homosexual relationship on *OUAT* was first truly put forward, however, with the introduction of Mulan (Jamie Chung) from Disney's *Mulan* (1998 [37], based on a traditional Chinese ballad) and Aurora (Sarah Bolger) from the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty” [38]. Fans zeroed in on a perceived sexual tension between the two women and heavily advocated for a relationship to form between them in earnest on the show. Though *OUAT* ultimately followed through with the marriage of Aurora to Prince Philip (Julian Morris) as the traditional fairy tale dictates, the show strongly hinted—particularly in episode three of season three, “Quite a Common Fairy”, when Mulan appeared to be ready to confess her feelings for Aurora [39]—that Mulan was heartbroken by the realization that Aurora is in love with Philip, not her. Seemingly largely in response to the outpouring of support for that relationship, Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis confirmed soon after that season five would feature a romantic same-sex relationship [40].

There was reason to suspect that this relationship would be between Mulan and Red. At the end of the ninth episode of season five, “The Bear King” which aired in November of 2015 soon before the series took a break for a few months, Red and Mulan were seen deciding to team up together to search for other werewolves [41]. Given the potential queerness of both characters, it seemed

¹⁷ And, indeed, it is important to note that Ruby does show further sexual interest in men in Storybrooke in the first several seasons of the show. It is not until her same-sex relationship in season five that her sexuality is confirmed.

¹⁸ One should also note that this reading is “working within conventional binaries” that “understand [bisexuality] as a movement between, or a combination of, heterosexuality and homosexuality and the straight and lesbian or gay identities that are usually attached to these desires and practices”—other understandings of bisexuality include those who “find their bisexuality works itself out as a desire for both the same sex and the opposite sex in tandem with a social or political identification with either gayness, lesbianism, or straightness” and those who “see it as having desires for both the same sex and the opposite sex within bisexual identities that don't reference straight or lesbian or gay ones, but may reference less binarily defined queer or non-straight identities” ([10], p. 131).

a good guess that they would be the promised queer romantic relationship on *OUAT*. However, the show chose instead to have Red fall in love with Dorothy Gale (Teri Reeves) from *The Wizard of Oz*, a union that was confirmed by a magical “true love’s kiss” in the April 2016 episode “Ruby Slippers” [33].¹⁹ This confirmation of Ruby/Red’s bisexuality adds a level of complexity to *OUAT*’s adaptation of the fairy tale form and distances the show significantly from Disney’s usual notoriously heteronormative politics. The queer reading of Red’s lycanthropy—a tantalizing possibility from her very first focal episode—seems to suggest that, perhaps, the show has always strived to present a far more unconventional and progressive reimagining of the Disney fairy-tale world than many first imagined it could or would.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

OUAT Refers to the television show *Once Upon a Time*

References

1. Schwabe, Claudia. “Getting Real with Fairy Tales: Magical Realism in *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*.” In *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*. Edited by Pauline Greenhill and Jill Terry Rudy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014, pp. 294–315.
2. Lambe, Stacy. “Why *Lost* Fans Should Watch *Once Upon a Time*.” *VH1*. Available online: <http://www.vh1.com/news/88358/once-upon-a-time-lost-similarities/> (accessed on 26 February 2016).
3. Greenhill, Pauline, and Steven Kohm. “Criminal Beasts and Swan Girls: The *Red Riding Trilogy* and Little Red Riding Hood on Television.” In *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*. Edited by Pauline Greenhill and Jill Terry Rudy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014, pp. 189–209.
4. Greenhill, Pauline, and Steven Kohm. “Hoodwinked! and *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*: Animated ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ Films and the Rashōmon Effect.” *Marvels and Tales* 27 (2013): 89–108. [CrossRef]
5. “Red-Handed I, 15.” *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Ron Underwood. Written by Jane Espenson. Disney, ABC Television Group, 11 March 2012.
6. Friedenthal, Andrew J. “The Lost Sister: Lesbian Eroticism and Female Empowerment in ‘Snow White and Rose Red.’” In *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*. Edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012, pp. 161–78.
7. Radner, Joan N., and Susan S. Lanser. “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Cultures.” In *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture*. Edited by Joan N. Radner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. 1–29.
8. Turner, Kay, and Pauline Greenhill. “Once Upon a Queer Time.” In *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*. Edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012, pp. 1–24.
9. Giffney, Noreen, and Myra J. Hird. “Introduction: Queering the Non/Human.” In *Queering the Non/Human*. Edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 1–16.
10. Doty, Alexander. *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
11. Demory, Pamela, and Christopher Pullen. “Introduction.” In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays*. Edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 1–9.

¹⁹ Melanie E. S. Kohnen argues that mainstream media tends to form a “limited and limiting conceptualization of a queer visibility structured around white gay and lesbian characters in committed relationships [that] has become the embodiment of progressive, LGBT media representations” ([15], p. i). In choosing to develop the show’s first same-sex romance between two white characters (as opposed to a white character and an Asian character, a union that seemed almost inevitable), *OUAT* seems to be perpetuating—consciously or not—this significant issue, a fact that problematically underscores the progressive move of featuring a same-sex romance in the first place. The relationship was met by other criticism from the queer community as well, including the fact that Dorothy and Red are not main characters (and thus only appear infrequently on the show) and that their “true love” was developed seemingly half-heartedly over the span of only one episode, lending it an air of tokenism—see [42–44] for more on these issues. Other fans were predictably not happy with the show depicting a queer relationship at all, as is evident from the string of angry comments on the show’s Facebook page following the airing of the episode in question [45]. All of this said, the overall reaction to the relationship from fans seems to be largely positive.

12. Keller, James R. *Queer (Un)Friendly Film and Television*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2002.
13. Demory, Pamela, and Christopher Pullen, eds. *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
14. Beirne, Rebecca. *Televising Queer Women: A Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
15. Kohnen, Melanie E. S. *Queer Representation, Visibility, and Race in American Film and Television: Screening the Closet*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
16. Zipes, Jack, trans. "Little Red Cap." In *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 3rd ed. Edited by Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam Books, 2002, pp. 93–96.
17. Dundes, Alan. "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalytically." In *Little Red Riding Hood: A Case Book*. Edited by Alan Dundes. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 192–236.
18. Zipes, Jack, ed. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
19. Ghesquiere, Rita. "Little Red Riding Hood Where Are You Going? " In *Toplore: Stories and Songs*. Edited by Paul Catteuv, Marc Jacobs, Sigrid Rieuwerts, Eddy Tielemans and Katrien Van Effelterre. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006, pp. 84–99.
20. Orme, Jennifer. "A Wolf's Queer Invitation: David Kaplan's *Little Red Riding Hood* and Queer Possibility." *Marvels and Tales* 29 (2015): 87–109. [CrossRef]
21. *The Company of Wolves*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Performed by Sarah Patterson, Angela Lansbury, Stephen Rea and David Warner. ITC, Cannon, 1984.
22. Phillips, Tracy. "Once Upon a Time's Meghan Ory on Her 'Big Bad' Twist." *Xfinity*. Available online: <http://my.xfinity.com/blogs/tv/2012/03/18/once-upon-a-times-meghan-ory-on-her-big-bad-twist/> (accessed on 26 February 2016).
23. Ratcliffe, Amy. "Once Upon a Time: 'Red-Handed' Review." *IGN*. Available online: <http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/03/12/once-upon-a-time-red-handed-review> (accessed on 26 February 2016).
24. Bernhardt-House, Phillip A. "The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves." In *Queering the Non/Human*. Edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 159–83.
25. Zipes, Jack. "'Little Red Riding Hood' as Male Creation and Projection." In *Little Red Riding Hood: A Case Book*. Edited by Alan Dundes. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 121–27.
26. Bacchilega, Cristina. "Fairy-tale Adaptations and Economies of Desire." In *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*. Edited by Maria Tatar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 79–96.
27. Zipes, Jack, trans. "Snow White and Rose Red." In *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 3rd ed. Edited by Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam Books, 2002, pp. 475–80.
28. Hameršak, Marijana. "A Never Ending Story? Permutations of 'Snow White and Rose Red' Narrative and Its Research across Time and Space." *Narodna Umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 48 (2011): 147–60.
29. Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
30. Willingham, Bill. *Fables*. Comic series. New York: DC Comics, 2002–2015.
31. Block, Francesca Lia. "Rose." In *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.
32. Benschoff, Harry M. *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
33. "Ruby Slippers V, 18." *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Eriq La Salle. Written by Bill Wolkoff and Andrew Chambliss. Disney, ABC Television Group, 17 April 2016.
34. Zipes, Jack, trans. "Snow White." In *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 3rd ed. Edited by Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam Books, 2002, pp. 181–88.
35. "Child of the Moon II, 7." *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Anthony Hemingway. Written by Ian B. Goldberg and Andrew Chambliss. Disney, ABC Television Group, 11 November 2012.
36. Hay, Rebecca, and Christa Baxter. "Happily Never After: The Commodification and Critique of Fairy Tale in ABC's *Once Upon a Time*." In *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*. Edited by Pauline Greenhill and Jill Terry Rudy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014, pp. 316–35.
37. *Mulan*. Directed by Tony Bancroft, and Barry Cook. Performed by Ming-Na Wen, Eddie Murphy and B. D. Wong. Walt Disney Pictures, 1998.
38. "Broken II, 1." *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Ralph Hemecker. Written by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz. Disney, ABC Television Group, 30 September 2012.

39. "Quite a Common Fairy III, 3." *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Alex Zakrzewski. Written by Jane Espenson. Disney, ABC Television Group, 13 October 2013.
40. Gelman, Vlada. "Once Upon a Time EPs: Same-Sex Romance in the Works for Season 5." *TVLine*. Available online: <http://tvline.com/2015/09/18/once-upon-a-time-lgbt-lesbian-storyline-season-5/> (accessed on 13 February 2016).
41. "The Bear King V, IX." *Once Upon a Time*. Directed by Geoffrey Hildrew. Written by Andrew Chambliss. Disney, ABC Television Group, 15 November 2015.
42. Stauf, Samantha. "The Problem with the Red and Dorothy Love Story on *Once Upon a Time*." *SheKnows*. Available online: <http://www.sheknows.com/entertainment/articles/1120653/the-problem-with-the-red-and-dorothy-love-story> (accessed on 3 June 2016).
43. Still, Jennifer. "Why Ruby & Dorothy's Relationship on *Once Upon a Time* Missed the Mark." *Bustle*. Available online: <http://www.bustle.com/articles/155329-why-ruby-dorothys-relationship-on-once-upon-a-time-missed-the-mark> (accessed on 3 June 2016).
44. Carbone, Gina. "Once Upon a Time Fans Have Strong Feelings About That LGBT Storyline." *MovieFone*. Available online: <http://www.moviefone.com/2016/04/18/once-upon-a-time-fans-strong-feelings-lgbt-storyline/> (accessed on 3 June 2016).
45. Facebook. "Once Upon a Time." Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/OnceABC/> (accessed on 3 June 2016).



© 2016 by the author; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).