

WOLF IS A WOLF TO MAN:

How the perception of wolves has evolved from classic fairy tales to modern day
graphic novels

Bachelor's Thesis

Eetu Elo-Rauta

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Language and Communication Studies

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Susien kuvaukset perinteisissä tarinoissa ovat olleet toistuvasti hyvin negatiivisia, susi on ollut pääasiassa ilkiö. Tämä on vaikuttanut susien kohteluun oikeassa elämässä, kun niiden tarinallinen rooli on sulautunut ihmisten mielikuviin itse eläimestä, minkä takia susia on mm. metsästetty Euroopassa eksessiivisesti. Tämä tutkimus tutkii mikä susien rooli nykyaikaisissa tarinoissa on ja kuinka paljon se vastaa tai eroaa perinteisemmästä suden kuvauksesta, antaen näin kuvan siitä, miten susia tullaan mahdollisesti tulevaisuudessa kohtelemaan.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus vertaa susihahmoja kahdesta Grimmin sadusta, <i>Red Riding Hood</i> sekä <i>Wolf and the Seven Little Kids</i>, suosittun <i>Fables</i> sarjakuvasarjan vastaavaan susihahmoon. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin visuaalista retoriikkaa sekä multimodaalista diskurssin tutkimusta sarjakuvien kuviin ja tekstiin pohjaavan tarinankerronnan avaamiseksi.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa löytyi sekä eroavaisuuksia että yhtäläisyyksiä hahmojen välillä, mutta pääasiassa moderni kuvaus sudesta oli erilainen kuin aiemmissa tarinoissa. Susi toimi tarinassa sankarina/antisankarina vastustajan sijaan, lisäksi suden pahoja puolia oli inhimillistetty ja pehmennetty ja tämä osoitti joitain inhimillisiä puolia, joita perinteisten tarinoiden susilla ei ollut.</p> <p>Moderni versio sudesta oli moniulotteisempi ja inhimillisempi kuin tarinoiden susi, eikä tällä ollut samanlaista roolia selkeänä vihollisena tarinassa. Vaikka otoskoko oli pieni, löydöt vaikuttavat osoittavan susien roolin tarinoissa muuttuneen mustavalkoisesta ilkiöstä moniulotteisemmaksi ja neutraalimmaksi hahmoksi, tulevaisuudessa susien voidaan olettaa pääsevän irti ”ison pahan suden” stigmasta ihmisten tullessa siitä tietoisemmiksi.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Stories have been a part of human history for as long as we have existed. They range from cautionary tales and warnings of danger to teachings of morality and definitions of good and evil. They have been shaped by the cultures they arise in, and the characters and their alignments have reflected the values of the people who created them. However, the contrary has also been true. The stories have shaped the way people who experienced them view the world. A case in point are animals, for example: Owls have been presented as a wise animal and that is how people generally view them, like foxes often carry the connotation of cunning and sheep of meekness. This study focuses on the recurring character of the wolf, and how the Christian cultures of Europe have viewed it through fairy tales, comparing it to how it is presented in a modern-day graphic novel.

In European/Western folklore, wolves have generally been placed in the role of the antagonist. There was a time when the wolf was a more neutral figure, like in depictions of the founding of Rome, but in medieval times there came a shift to the traditional figure that is now more commonly known (Jesse, 2000: 5). That is, wolves are presented as the devouring beast, a constant threat at the edges of civilization that will lead people astray and eat them any chance they get. In most European languages, they are associated with ruin and hunger much more often than anything positive (Hunt, 2008: 320-321). Thus, the characteristics most often associated with the wolf are greedy and cruel, and this picture of the animal has led to real world ramifications on how they are treated. Wolves have been hated and hunted probably more than any other animal due to this (Busch, 2018). If stories have the power to influence how people perceive and treat wolves, it is important to be aware of how wolves are being presented in the stories of today. Though many studies have been made researching wolves in their traditional role, their modern depictions have not been researched nearly as much, if at all.

This study attempts to do that by focusing on the modernized version of the Big Bad Wolf character, prevalent in many European fairy tales, presented in the graphic novel *Fables* by Bill Willingham. Graphic novels are a modern form of storytelling that is rising in popularity. They provide a medium that employs both picture and texts in telling their stories, and often deal with mature themes in their storytelling (Tabachnik, 2017: 26). This study will focus on the first volume of the series and attempt to compare the wolf character of the graphic novel to the wolf characters seen in two fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm, *Little Red-Cap*, which is a version of the more well-known Little Red Riding Hood, and *Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*, where the wolf is the primary antagonist. Comparing the

characteristics of these characters should give indication both on how the wolf is perceived in the modern day, and how it could be perceived and treated in the future.

The subject will be studied using both visual literacy, to analyze the visual elements of the graphic novel, and multimodal discourse analysis, to analyze how the text and image interact with each other to create the story and meanings within it.

The contents of the study will be as follows: First, the history of wolves in Western history will be presented, followed by an introduction to what graphic novels are and their relation to the more commonly known comics and finishing with introduction to the *Fables* graphic novel used as a main source. Then, the aim of the study is presented along with the research questions, followed by the data used and methods of analysis. The analysis portion will first go through the fairy tales used and then move on to discuss the *Fables* character in relation to them. The study will be finished with a conclusion on what was learned and how the study could be followed up on.

2. BACKGROUND

The aim of the background section is to introduce literary concepts relevant to the topic and present the theoretical background and previous research relevant to the study. In the following sections, I discuss how the wolf has traditionally been perceived in history, how it has been utilized in literature, and define the traditional wolf motif used in fairy tales. I will also introduce the modern equivalent used in the graphic novels series *Fables*. Lastly, due to their multimodal nature and hinging reputation as a second-class form of literature, I will touch on graphic novels as a form of media.

2.1. Wolves in Western history and literature

It should be noted that perceptions of the animal differ drastically in different cultures, and that the object of this study deals mostly with the Western approach. Therefore, though other interpretations will be touched upon, the focus of this study will be on Western fairy tales and literature.

Wolves have been living side by side with humans for a very long time. Our common companions, the well-loved *canis lupus familiaris*, dogs, are suggested to have been domesticated by humans from wolves in Europe around 16,000 years ago, though the exact dates are debatable (Busch, 2018: 3). Wild wolves, however, have held a separate place in our cultures. The earliest depictions of wolves portrayed them in a variety of ways, such as the nurturing she-wolf who suckled the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus. However, as soon as humans began to farm lands and raise animals

(Busch, 2018: 111), the more sinister form of the wolf as a dangerous predator began to dominate Western literature. Jesse (2000: 30) points out, that when farmers started keeping livestock for the first time, wolves became a real threat to their economic interests. Via citing Lopez (1978: 139), she further claims that being an adversary for the farmers in such regard does not sufficiently explain the extent of literature with negative depictions of wolves.

In his book, Lopez (1978) presents an argument for the role of the medieval church in this shift in depictions. As the church called the people their flock of sheep, so too was the link drawn between the devil being a wolf circling and threatening the flock (Lopez, 1978: 207). Jesse (2000: 31) argues that the wolf was chosen as it was “the beast most hated by man”, expanding on the fear people already had for wolves. Though tales of werewolves existed before that and with no particular connection to religion, for example the Greek myth of King Lycaon and Norse shapeshifters, the church began to claim werewolves were people who made a pact with the devil (Busch, 2018: 115), further deepening the connection between wolves and the devil. Jesse (2000: 32) claims this was an example of “man’s hate of his own bestial instincts”, a line of thought called “Therophobia”. *Homo homini lupus est* is a latin proverb that embodies this. It translates to “A man is a wolf to man”. It claims that men behave towards each other in an inhuman, beastly way, in accordance with the claimed nature of the wolf. Yet, by its very definition, it denotes human behaviour, that has merely been outsourced to the concept of the wolf.

Language used concerning wolves has certain regularity. In European languages, it generally carries negative connotations. “Wolf” has been used to denote negative characteristics and phenomena. This can be seen from the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of “wolf”, which vary from “a person or being having the character of a wolf; one of a cruel, ferocious or rapacious disposition” to “as a type of a destructive or devouring agency, esp. hunger or famine” (Hunt, 2008: 320). Jesse (2000: 14) presents such usage of wolf in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, “Thy desires are wolvis, bloody, starved and ravenous”, as well as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, with mentions of a she-wolf who is “laden with the craving of her greed” (Canto I, line 50) and later “a cursed wolf of Hell” (Canto VII, line 8). Several European languages share common phrases with negative connotations revolving around wolves, such as “wolf in sheep’s clothing”, as a deceiver, and “throw someone to the wolves”, as a placeholder for danger and trouble (Hunt, 2008: 320). Busch (2018: 112) also quotes such phrases as “keep the wolf from the door” and cites Shakespeare naming hunger “the universal wolf”. There are some examples of positive or neutral use of the word “wolf”, such as the French term for endearment *mon petit loupe* (Hunt, 2008: 320), but generally, usage of the term leans heavily on negative connotations.

Linnell and Alleau (2016) claim that discussions regarding wolves have been heavily influenced by people's perceptions of the animal. "Historically, Western attitudes towards wolves have been negative and have contained elements of hatred and fear, with rumours, legends and myths providing the knowledge basis for public opinion" (Linnell and Alleau, 2016: 359). They claim that most public discussions regarding wolves tend to become polarized and that objectivity on the subject seem hard to attain. Wolf attacks, for example, are a documented fact, but recent studies have made attempts to claim that the attacks have mostly been made by rabid wolves, or as extreme, and thus abnormal behaviour of individual wolves or packs instead of a general behavioural pattern. Instead of creating an objective point of view, this has largely divided the public discussion on the topic to two extremes, for and against wolves (Linnell and Alleau, 2016: 366). Their study seems to support the argument that depictions in literature and art can influence how people perceive the real world, and lead to unfair treatment of wolves.

The wolf motif used to have more variety in fables and fairy tales. There are stories of Greek King Lycaon being cursed to lycanthropy, meaning involuntary transformation into a wolf, the Teutonic hero Siegfried having wolf as a foster mother and an Irish legend of a king raised by wolves (Busch, 2018: 110). The antagonistic nature of the wolf was present, but it coexisted with other depictions that treated it with respect or presented it as a nurturing figure, as with Siegfried and Romulus and Remus. In classic fables and fairy tales, the wolf has more defined characteristics.

In fables, which were meant to teach lessons and often featured anthropomorphized animals, the wolves are often depicted as oppressive, cruel and greedy (Jesse, 2008: 17). Sometimes cunning, often dim-witted and often ultimately fails their pursuits due to laziness, greed or stupidity. They are often described with monikers of "starved" or "farmished" (Jesse 2008: 14) in line with the aforementioned shakespearean personification of hunger.

In fairy tales, the image of the wolf is similar but made more sinister than the simpler fables. Rather than a predator stalking other animals, the wolf is given a role directly antagonizing humans (Jesse 2008: 24). Wolves are more civilized, employing deception and trickery, they are more representative of a variety of evils to be wary of, instead of only possessing negative traits as often in fables (Jesse 2008: 24-25). The wolf serves as an ill-meaning villain and works as a cautionary device, reminding people not to talk to strangers lest they have the nature of the wolf, as it has been established. The fairy tale wolf still possesses the vices recurring in fables, with the acts of eating, killing, or general selfishness being their driving force.

In conclusion, the wolf has been a hated figure in Western cultures for a long time. To such extent, that Busch (2018: 109) claims: “probably no other animal in history has suffered the amount of misplaced animosity as has the wolf”. Elements of this can be seen in the characteristics of the classical wolf figure of several fables. This attitude, passed down by language and literature for decades, has had real-world effects such as “[t]he attempt to exterminate the wolf in the USA by the descendants of European immigrants” (Hunt, 2008: 321). Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how much of this traditional wolf motif still holds true in a modern interpretation, and how much has changed.

2.2. “*Fables*”, modern take on old tales

In this section I aim to shortly introduce the *Fables* graphic novels and why they are a good fit for the study’s aims. *Fables* is a graphic novel series written by Bill Willingham and published by DC Comics’ Vertigo between the years 2002-2015. In it, classic fairy tales are brought to a modern setting: with established fairy tale characters participating in new stories. This is not a unique concept. Amanda and Wein (1998: 3) present in their study three other series from DC Comics (*Swamp Thing*, *Sandman* and *Hellblazer*) that similarly depend heavily on traditional folk beliefs and: “by examining the use of traditional and contemporary folklore in these serials, it is possible to see not only the extent and manner to which folklore is utilized, but also how widespread certain folk vocabulary and beliefs are in the contemporary period”. As such, *Fables*, by its theme and medium, is a perfect fit for comparing perceptions between classic fairy tales and new ones. Though old fairy tales are often directed towards children, *Fables* contains mature themes such as violence, sex, explicit language, and emotional trauma, and is suggested for mature readers by the publisher.

Fables frequently employs intertextuality, as it almost exclusively uses characters found in old tales of various kinds. Examples of these could be Snow White, of Grimm and Disney fame, and Little Boy Blue, who appears in a titular nursery rhyme. The characters exhibit traits commonly known from their fairy tale counterparts, but with a new twist. The Beast from the story “Beauty and the Beast” shifts from human to monster in relation to how angry his wife is at him, and the reformed Big Bad Wolf has a discussion with one of the Three Pigs, whose houses he blew down in their shared story, with the pig claiming the Wolf owes him a place to stay and some cigarettes for the previously mentioned event (Willingham, 2012).

This study will be focusing specifically on the character of Bigby Wolf, which is the name of the *Fables* version of the Big Bad Wolf prevalent in many classic folk tales, though he is referred to as both on occasion. He will be used to examine the modern motif of a wolf in comparison to the

classical, fairy tale one, as the character is the embodiment of the old wolf motif in a modern setting, told through a modern form of media.

2.3. The Graphic novel as media and why they are/are not comic books

In this section I will define key characteristics of graphic novels and when, or whether, the term can or cannot be used interchangeably with comic books. The key characteristics can be summarized as follows: “an emerging new literature of our times in which word, picture, and typography interact meaningfully and which is in tune with the complexity of modern life with its babble of signs and symbols and stimuli” (Campbell, 2007: 13). Comics and graphic novels share the visual medium of delivery, combining text and picture to tell their stories. Their differences become clearer when the genres are further defined.

There has been extensive discussion in the field of comic book studies on the differences between the two. Tabachnick (2017: 26) claims that graphic novels and comics have a great deal of differences, pointing out the content and production value of graphic novels, claiming them “an extended comic book freed of all restrictions on form and content and capable of tackling all of the issues that writing and art for adults have always dealt with”. On the other hand, Labio (2011: 125) argues against using the term “graphic novel”, claiming that it denotes the importance of picture over text in the medium and that the definition narrows down the whole field of comic studies, and “only compounds problems associated with the existing terminology”. Frey and Noys’ (2010: 255) argument disputes this, claiming that comics are not considered legitimate objects of cultural analysis and that the term “graphic novel” has been partly used to rescue comics from their critical neglect. Campbell (2007: 13) claims, that the term “graphic novel” is used in four mutually exclusive ways: First, as a synonym to comic books. Second, as a classification of format, meaning comics in soft- or hardcovers in contrast to the traditionally stapled comics. Third, as a narrative difference equivalent in form and dimension to a traditional novel. Finally, as a work outranging comics in the scope of its ambition.

To summarize, the two terms seem to have been separated in an effort to highlight the ability of the text-and-picture medium to tell stories beyond the confinements of the early comics, with deeper and more mature narratives ranging from fiction to autobiography. The differentiation between the two often focuses on publishing, narrative form and themes, attempting to elevate graphic novels above traditional comics as a form of literature. In a sense, they argue that graphic novels are comics that can, and should, be taken seriously. Some consider this unnecessary, as can be seen from Labio’s argument, but nevertheless the distinction exists.

As such, I argue that for the purposes of this study, “graphic novel” can be considered a subclass of comics, as they share common history and the medium of storytelling, with the differences mainly focused on their content. *Fables* defines itself as a graphic novel and shall be referred to as such in this study. Furthermore, I will be using works based on comic studies further down in the study due to their shared history and several forms of analysis being interchangeable between the two, especially regarding their visual elements.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

This section aims to explain the topic of the research, how it is going to be studied and what the reasons behind those choices are. First, I will present the aim of the study along with its research questions. Second, I will present the data as well as the reasoning behind them. Finally, I will explain the methodology used in analyzing the data.

3.1. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to examine how much of the traditional wolf motif still holds true in a modern interpretation, and how much has changed. As was explained above, the wolf has been treated unfairly through literary representation, and that has translated to the unreasonably negative treatment and perceptions of the animal itself. This has largely been due to the effect of stories and loaded narratives, which still hold power to this day. Yet, little research has been done on the current depictions of wolves in literature. Thus, this study aims to examine a popular modern depiction of the wolf motif to see whether the statement regarding their literary representation still holds true, giving information on the direction whether or how the wolf’s literary interpretation is changing and thus hinting towards how wolves could be perceived and treated in the future.

This is to be achieved through the following research questions:

- 1. How does the character of Bigby Wolf compare to the wolf character in *Red Riding Hood* and *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*?**
- 2. How is the character of Bigby Wolf depicted, visually and textually, in the graphic novel *Fables*?**

It should be clarified that, as mentioned in the background section, the character of Bigby Wolf is the *Fables* equivalent of the Big Bad Wolf character appearing in the classic stories mentioned above and thus acts as a fair point of comparison.

3.2. Data

As mentioned above, the study aims to compare a modern wolf character to the traditional one and thus, the data will consist of one modern piece of literature, where the wolf is a major character, and two traditional fairy tales, to provide points of comparison. The data used will consist of volume 1 of the *Fables* graphic novel series, titled *Fables: Legends in Exile*, and two fairy tales from the Grimm Brothers, *Little Red-Cap*, also known as the Red Riding Hood, and *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids* (Taylor et al., 2009). I will give short summaries on both for clarity.

Little Red-Cap tells of the titular character going to visit her grandmother. Red-Cap talks to a wolf, who tricks her to stay and pick flowers while it runs to eat her grandmother and pose as her to wait for Red-Cap, proceeding to deceive and eat her too. A passing woodsman can hear the wolf snoring and comes rescue the two devoured people by cutting open the wolf. They then fill the wolf's belly with rocks, which causes it to die when it finally wakes. A second wolf tries to do the same, but failing to deceive Red-Cap. After stalking on her grandmother's roof for a while, the wolf dies by getting lured into old sausage-water where it drowns.

The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids is a story about a she-sheep and her 7 children. The Mother goes shopping and warns the children not to open the door to the wolf. Whilst the mother is shopping, the wolf comes and claims to be their mother to get in. The children notice its voice and black paws and refuse, after which the wolf goes to buy chalk and threaten the townsfolk to disguise itself better, which allows it to deceive the children and get in. It proceeds to eat all but the youngest, who managed to hide better than the rest. When the mother comes back home and finds her surviving child, they find the wolf snoring outside and cut him open, freeing the other children. They fill the wolf's belly with stones, and when it wakes up it tries to go take a drink from a well but falls in it due to the stones, drowning and dying.

The traditional stories were chosen as they come from the prominent and well-known Grimm Brothers and will probably carry some level of familiarity with most readers of this study. Especially the popularity of the *Little Red Cap* implies it is a good example of the wolf character of those times, as it could be considered one of the more memorable ones. *The Wolf and the Seven Kids*, though a less known tale, serves another take on the wolf character to offer more insight to point of contention. From them, a fairly accurate depiction of the wolf motif from that time period should be able to be constructed.

Fables was chosen as the subject of analysis for a couple of reasons. First, I have read the series through previously and am familiar with the character and the series in general, and because it is a modern take on the issue discussed, on a new medium of literature. Bringing the stories to a modern era both through the way they are told and through its themes and narrative, it serves as a good parallel to the traditional fairy tales, especially since they all employ the same character of the Big Bad Wolf. Considering the scope of this study is fairly limited, only the first volume of the *Fables* series will be used. *Fables: Legends in Exile* is comprised of both the comic paneled section, where the main story is told, and a short text at the end of the novel, telling the story of how the wolf came to be a citizen of Fabletown, the area where the story is located. For the sake of brevity and the scope of this study, only the comic section will be analyzed.

3.3. Methods of Analysis

As a graphic novel, *Fables* employs various forms of expression, and will thus be subject to different forms of analysis than a typical novel would. The use of pictures means that *visual rhetorics* (Foss, 2005) was a necessary aspect to analyzing the data. However, as Labio (2011: 124) points out, the picture does not take precedence over the text in graphic novels and thus, *multimodal discourse analysis* (Gee and Handford, 2008: 35-47) was used to analyze the relationship between the text and picture in forming coherence. The colours used, the size of the panels and other visual cues were analyzed in addition to the text. For example, a large panel in the middle of the page took precedence over smaller panels leading towards it in importance and impact, which was then analyzed for its textual and visual content, whilst keeping track how the smaller panels were leading into it through the same elements. The speech bubbles were analyzed as text, while looking for contextual clues from the picture to determine the tone of voice used, for example. The characteristics I was looking for were the ones present in classic tales, both fables and fairy tales. Such as greed, gluttony, cruelty, violence, trickery and animalistic traits. I was focusing on how other characters perceive and react to Bigby Wolf and how he is portrayed in his actions, dialogue and visual presentation.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the first portion of this section, I will analyze the data in two ways: First, I will approach the research questions through themes found in the fairy tales and how they are or are not present throughout the text. Secondly, I will take a particular page or panel and do a more comprehensive analysis on all of its elements. The first portion will answer the correlating research question, whereas the second portion gives a better look towards the second research question.

Based on the following, the correlation between *Fables* and *Little Red-Cap* and *Seven Little Kids* will be examined through the characters' appearance, role, actions, defining characteristics, and the stance of other characters towards them.

4.1. Themes found in *Little Red -Cap* and *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*

The Wolf character was presented in both stories with some recurring themes and some specific to each story. They coincide with previous research on the subject, and I will present the specific themes found in the stories here.

The wolf character in *Little Red-Cap* was introduced as “a wolf”, with a second wolf making an appearance further in the story after the first one was killed. Red-Cap also did not immediately shun the first wolf. This depiction of the wolf presented it with guile and evil intention, but also with some politeness and charm, all while it was thinking of eating Red-Cap. The wolves are shown as subtle and deceitful, luring children to bad ways if they are not careful of strangers. There is also a certain wariness towards civilization, as Red-Cap mentions thinking that the second wolf would have eaten her were they not on a public road.

In *Seven Little Kids*, the wolf was referred to as “The Wolf” and seems like a well-known figure in the story. The mother warns her children specifically of the wolf and that it will come and eat them if the children let it in. The wolf presented in this story is more brutish than in *Red-Cap* with the wolf threatening to devour the miller to get his way, and them obeying out of fear for the wolf, followed by a remark by the writer “Truly, this is the way of mankind” (Taylor et al., 2009: 262). The wolf also recites poetry at the moment of its demise, lamenting the feeling in its “poor bones” and rumbling stones in its stomach.

Though the depictions of wolves differ a bit in each story, the similarities outnumber the differences. In both stories, wolves are the antagonists. Both swallow their prey whole, which enables their rescue. Their physique is mentioned, although with slight differences, one focusing on their voice and paws,

the other on their ears, eyes, mouth and hands. Both fell asleep after they had eaten. Two wolves died by drowning, one via heavy rocks in their stomach which also befell one of the drowned wolves. All of them tried to deceive their prey and ate or attempted to eat them. Their hunger and satiating it is mentioned several times and seems like their driving force. Finally, the deaths of all the wolves were celebrated and joyous occasions.

These stories show the wolf as a villain character with little to no redeeming qualities, succumbing in the end to their own greed and laziness. They are referred to as “wicked” and “old sinner” in *Red-Cap*, and similarly, “wretch”, “monster”, and “grey-beard” in *Seven Little Kids*. It is also worth mentioning that the wolves are referred to as “he/him”, they are considered male figures.

4.2. The Themes of the Wolf in *Fables*

4.2.1. Throughout the Story

The themes that can be found in *Fables* can be separated into three categories: 1) Correlating with the fairy tales, 2) Contradicting with the fairy tales and 3) New themes. The first two are in clear relation, and after them I will present the possible themes outside of them.

The first correlation can be found in that the character is a male, as was the case in the fairy tales as well. Most of the time Bigby is seen as a human instead of a wolf, during which he does not seem to exhibit the hairiness, large or black hands, large mouth, eyes or ears. There is a specific moment in the novel where Bigby assumes a wolfish form, which I will delve into separately and in more depth (see 4.2.2.).

For most of the novel, Bigby is depicted as a relatively normal looking human. Though there is no straight correlation to the fairy tale wolf, some hints are dropped to his wolfish nature. He is depicted as a hairy man with a stubble and relatively unkept hair. The few times he is seen in his home (Willingham, 2012: 35, 77) he wears little clothing. His professional attire consists of a loosely fitting brown suit and a collar shirt with a tie, which he lets hang loosely, and long trench coat which mostly covers his form. When attending a dance (Willingham, 2012: 96), he has combed his hair and put on a suit, but still has a stubble and cannot tie his bowtie, which is left hanging loose. These could be indications that the character is not comfortable in clothing or grooming himself. Lastly, the most obvious hints towards his wolfish nature, on one occasion, is that his shadow (Willingham, 2012: 26) is depicted as a wolf. The art in the beginning of the story also depicts Bigby climbing out of a giant wolf with a zipper (Willingham, 2012: 9) and besides a red-eyed wolf (Willingham, 2012: 10). These

are pictures outside of the story though, so they are likely meant solely as context for the reader, to help them associate the human character with the wolf within him.

His role in the story is one of the major points of contradiction: Bigby is the protagonist of the story. Even though the story revolves around finding a murderer, nobody accuses him of the deed. Instead, he is called to solve it, as he is revealed to be the sheriff. The role he plays in the story is directly contradictory to that of the fairy tales. Though he is probably more of an antihero than a traditional hero, he is still far from a villain.

Furthermore, one can look at the actions Bigby initiates, or does not, during the novel. To begin with, Bigby does not eat any of the other characters. He does not die either, neither by drowning or eating rocks. On the contrary, he seems like a frequent swimmer (Willingham, 2012: 99). When Bigby is asked whether the owner of the pool knows Bigby is using it, he answers with “If he **does**, he’s never complained”, alluding to the fact that this is not the first time he has been swimming there. He does, however, threaten people with violence. Sometimes indirectly, when advising Jack, the main character from the story of the magic beanstalk and reporter of the crime, to carry Snow White away or knock her senseless if she disturbs him while investigating (Willingham, 2012: 29), and sometimes directly, “**drop the knife and back away from the boy—Or I’ll rip your fucking throat out**” (Willingham, 2012: 70-71), even instigating it once, with seemingly arbitrarily arresting Jack and putting him in a handlock when he attempts to fight the arrest (Willingham, 2012: 32). He does seem to enjoy the violence, as he can be seen smiling when restraining Jack. However, he does not actually damage or kill any of the other characters.

His use of deception is likewise limited. He omits telling details of the case to the other characters (Willingham, 2012: 110) but justifies it as not wanting to jeopardize the case. One of his aggressive outbursts during an interview is also speculated to have been deception, when Snow White makes a report about their investigation and claims that Bigby’s violent accusations might have been calculated to get one of the subjects to reveal information (Willingham, 2012: 61). Still, this is not outright lying from Bigby, but more manipulation, though the reason for it seems to have been less malicious and more methodical. Thus, the lying nature of the wolf seems to be contradictory in the fairy tales and *Fables*, though some amount of manipulative guile and subtlety seems to be visible in Bigby as well. The one occasion he does lie, claiming that asking Snow White to dance “could be” to catch the killer (Willingham, 2012: 76), and later admits that he was too shy to do it outright (Willingham, 2012: 125), his intent seems far from nefarious and instead, a humanizing factor. All in all, considering his role as a protagonist, it seems natural that the more common acts of evil doing do not carry over from the fairy tales to the graphic novel. Instead, he performs two deeds that could be

considered heroic during the novel: First, he rushes in to save Jack from being murdered (Willingham, 2012: 70) and second, solves the murder of Rose Red (Willingham, 2012: 102).

Another major point of contestation is how the other characters view Bigby. In fairy tales the wolf is generally seen as an evil figure by the other characters, with the naïve Red-Cap being the exception, and that is presented as only being due to lacking experience. The wolf is called a sinner, wicked and wretched. Bigby is not referred to by these, but by many other names in the novel, surpassing in amount those of the wolves in both fairy tales combined. However, they carry different connotations depending on the context. Snow White refers to Bigby by several names: Bigby, Mister Wolf, Wolf, The Sheriff, and “a frustrating son of a bitch”. Their relationship seems professional and at times friendly, with Snow White calling him mostly by his first name, Bigby, but referring to him in a more formal manner when the situation calls for it, with even daring to yell profanities at him. She is not afraid of Bigby, nor does she treat him in any way as a monster. A similar approach can be seen from Flycatcher and Boy Blue, who work as Bigby’s underlings in the novel and seem to venerate him to some degree, referring to him respectfully as Mister Wolf, or familiarly as Bigby or Super Sleuth (Willingham, 2012: 57), and also calling out Bigby’s “cool moves” in the dance (Willingham, 2012: 97). Likewise, some characters who make only an appearance refer to Bigby as Mister Wolf or “Gaffer Wolf”, like the Black Forest Witch. Within a little variation, the references are mostly respectful.

King Cole, the major, represents a midpoint, where he refers to Bigby respectfully as “Mister Wolf”, but mentions to Snow White how Bigby used to be “A beast of the most unruly sort. Killer.” (Willingham, 2012: 60), inquiring whether that might still be the case. Thus, he seems wary of Bigby’s past and wolfish nature, further backed by the fact that he has not dared to prohibit Bigby from swimming in his pool, if he is aware of it (Willingham, 2012: 99). Another midway point comes from Jack, who calls Bigby by a plethora of names ranging from casual Bigby, to spiteful “power-mad fuckshit” to Bwana, meaning boss. Nevertheless, he does not seem to be afraid of Bigby and does not treat him as a monster. Another character like Jack is the unnamed Pig, a member of the three piggies whose house the Big Bad Wolf blew down. He refers to Bigby by name or as “Biggs”, even calling him “a monster through and through” mockingly when Bigby offers him bacon for breakfast, implying a high level of familiarity. He even crashes on Bigby’s couch and smokes his cigarettes, not showing the slightest hint of fear, but instead calling his stay as Bigby paying his debt to him for destroying his house.

The only character who seems to openly dislike Bigby is Bluebeard, who also refers to him as “Wolf”, but seems to be using more in the literal way instead of as his last name, like all the other characters

do. He refers to him as Snow White's "Pet Wolf" on one occasion, and openly calls Bigby a monster in sheep's clothing when he threatens him in his werewolf form, claiming to have killed many of his kind and having rid his land of such vermin ages ago (Willingham, 2012: 72).

All in all, there is no such widespread dislike visible in *Fables* as is in the fairy tales, only a few characters seem afraid or weary of Bigby due to his past, i.e., Bluebeard and King Cole, but only Bluebeard openly accuses him of being a monster and seems to think of him as a beast. Instead, Snow White calls Bigby "the poster child of the reform" claiming he has had a spotless record since the general amnesty of all the fables (Willingham, 2012: 60). Even though he does not seem a hugely popular character, people do not seem to be afraid of him nor think of him as a bad guy. This is, of course, contradictory to the fairy tales' approach.

The final point of contestation are the characteristics of the wolf. Bigby does exhibit some wolfish characteristics. He calls himself a "genetic luddite, incapable of operating anything more complex than my toaster" (Willingham, 2012: 66). His appearance is unrefined and, as mentioned above, he cannot tie his bowtie, nor can he dance well. These characteristics could be interpreted as vague nods towards his bestial nature. It is mentioned several times that he has heightened senses, when he claims that he smells that the blood on the crime scene belongs to Rose Red and how "you can't fool this nose" (Willingham, 2012: 37). He does seem to enjoy restraining Jack, as mentioned above, and shows no remorse for having blown apart the house of the Pig (Willingham, 2012: 35). While interrogating the suspects he acts provocative and mocking, with violent outbursts and a menacing glare (Willingham, 2012: 61). All of these moments do point towards the brutish, violent image of the wolf in the fairy tales.

However, he does show another side to himself, mostly while interacting with Snow White. He shows her empathy, consoling her and taking her on a candy run (Willingham, 2012: 49) after an emotional interrogation. Also, even though he talks about kicking the Pig out and not caring about his past deeds, it seems the Pig has crashed at Bigby's place before and he does offer the Pig breakfast. A few other noteworthy characteristics include an act of charity (Willingham, 2012: 25) where he asks a taxi driver to "keep the change". This is a minor occasion, but contrary to the claimed greedy nature of wolves. He also mentions he does not eat sweets (Willingham, 2012: 49), which could contradict being a glutton, though it could also mean he only eats meat, which would underline his bestiality. He also does reference being a literal son of a bitch (Willingham, 2012: 67). Bigby also seems to disregard some conventional rules, as he is seen smoking in places where it is not allowed (Willingham, 2012: 22, 25) and taking Jack in custody with an admittedly made-up excuse. He also claims to work best when working alone (Willingham, 2012: 37), like a lone wolf. Though many of

these characteristics point towards being a wolf, some of them lack the connotation of an evil wolf of fairy tales, instead being merely animalistic traits. His personality is, for the majority of the novel, hard to define, as he is calm to the point of coldness and even his outbursts seem to be explainable as calculated. However, there are a few moments when his true personality seems to come up from under his cold exterior. One of them is in the final pages of the novel, where he admits to tricking Snow White into being his dance partner, and thus revealing his infatuation towards her (Willingham, 2012: 125). It is one of the rare moments we see Bigby vulnerable. The other two will be analyzed in more detail in the following section.

4.2.2 A Deep Dive on Specific Spreads

This section shows Bigby at the ends of a spectrum. The first is him in his werewolf form, being as close to the monster of the tales as he gets. The second is him being the most human and vulnerable in the novel, when he is coping with the news he received alone in his home.

Werewolf Transformation, Willingham, 2012: 70-72

This spread shows for the first time the wolfish form of Bigby Wolf, which he takes in a moment of violence. First thing to note is that this is not the form of a wolf, but that of a werewolf. He walks on two legs and his features are of a wolfish humanoid instead of the animal, but considering the wolves of the fairy tales similarly exhibit the ability to speak and open doors, they could be considered similar in form. In addition to growing fur, several noticeable changes appear: Bigby grows in size, his eyes turn pupilless and yellow and he grows fangs and claws. His voice also seems to change as is indicated by the appearance of the speech bubbles and the change in font.

The transformation carries many signatures of the traditional wolf: There is emphasis on violence and power, as is evident from the change in size and his manner of speaking, as well as the prominent fangs and claws. The eye colour yellow is unnatural to humans but present in wolves, and the lack of pupils makes Bigby seem inhuman. The fairy tales both refer to the wolves' hands, being described as black and large, and the claws do seem prominent in the transformation.

The placement of the reveal also builds this up as a meaningful moment. The first page gives a glimpse on the hair, claws and the yellow eyes of the transformation. Then his claws become visible as shadows on the wall, and we see a look of horror on Jack's face as he looks at Mr. Wolf, though that could also be attributed to being threatened with a knife by Bluebeard. The second page is dedicated in its entirety to the visage of the wolf and the dialogue of Bluebeard, where Mr. Wolf is portrayed as looming over Bluebeard and Jack with extended claws reaching forward.

The reaction of Bluebeard is very relevant. He references “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” and talks about “reverting to the old ways” and how “nature cannot be denied”. This seems to imply a few things. One, Bluebeard has suspected this transformation to be Bigby’s natural and true state. Two, this is the first indication of the monstrous appearance of Bigby that Bluebeard has seen, and three, Bigby has exhibited violent behaviour in the past. Technically, considering the intertextuality of the comic, this is a straight reference to the traditional wolf and the way he acted in the fairy tales.

The one quality of the spread that contradicts the traditional wolf, is that the threats Bigby makes are to stop Bluebeard from killing Jack instead of jumping straight into violence. It is also an interesting thing to note that the cigarette, nearly always present in his human form, drops from his mouth when he transforms. The cigarette could be seen as a mark of indulgence, something he consumes to keep his wolfish side in check. Further evidence of this is that when exercising his senses and in some interrogations, the cigarettes are not present even in his human form. This could mean that when he leans to his traditionally wolfish side, he puts the cigarettes out.

This part of the novel shows Bigby as the Wolf, he is menacing and dangerous, and most of all, inhuman in the eyes of his opponents. However, it is worth noticing that he did not act on his threats, and previous pages have shown him capable of acting enraged as a bluff. It could be argued that Bigby is playing to Bluebeard’s image of him being a monster, manipulating him through fear to diffuse the situation without violence.

Dire News, Willingham, 2012: 76-77

The way Bigby is depicted in the final panel seems to convey an emotion not often prescribed to the traditional wolf: Sadness, exhaustion, or grief. The character has just come out of the shower and has gotten a phone call of relevance to the case. He maintains his tough demeanor for the duration of the phone call, with sarcastic remarks and giving stern instructions, but is shown to sit down and cover his face the moment the phone call ends. Though the dialogue during the call acts with callousness, sarcasm and a professional attitude, the way the character is shown to act when there is no one to see contradicts it. We see a humane side of Bigby, which is not often shown when the character is in the presence of others.

The character is naked save for the towel, as nakedness can be used to convey vulnerability. Thus, one could argue that this panel distances the Bigby character from the fairy tale wolf and moves him towards a more human side. It even suggests that the character’s hard exterior is, to some extent, an act, as it drops for a moment when he is shown to be vulnerable and alone.

Giving relevance to this panel is the placement and size of it. It takes up half a page and consists of nothing but setting down the phone and the character sitting, with his head in his hands. It seems to imply that this image conveys something important and warrants attention, as in relation, the panels of the phone call take much less space and are focused on the dialogue. The colours used are shades of blue and purple and seem to bring a sense of melancholy to the scene. A dark evening sky is also visible from the window, putting further emphasis on his loneliness.

The character starts smoking immediately when exiting the shower, and there is a picture of an elderly woman on the wall in the final panel. Though no special significance is cast on it, it is worth remarking that, being a wolf, Bigby does not have a human grandmother, thus it can be seen as an easter egg reference to the grandmother from "*Little Red-Cap*".

In conclusion, the character of Bigby Wolf exhibits some traits also found in the fairy tales, though the polarized idea of the Big Bad Wolf does not seem to fit him. He shows redeeming qualities in the form of infatuation, empathy and rare moments of vulnerability. He does resort to threats of violence and manipulates people on occasion, but does seem to have good intentions behind it, not showing many signs of the greedy, lazy wolf seen in the fairy tales. Though both iterations seem cunning and capable of deceit, their goals, and thus their character, differ.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to find out comparisons between the Grimm's fairy tales and *Fables'* Bigby Wolf by viewing the correlations and contradictions in the stories and examining how he is presented in the graphic novel. There was correlation between the three depictions, but significant differences could also be found. Bigby and the traditional wolf both shared the capacity and penchant for manipulation, threats of violence to get what they want and even the rare appliance of it. Though Bigby was mostly seen in his human form, the wolfish form he transformed into shared key visuals brought up in the fairy tales; the focus on his hands and claws, large eyes and the changing of his voice as is shown by the speech bubbles changed appearance. Even when in his human form, Bigby does appear to have heightened sense of smell, like that of a wolf.

However, the centerpoints of his character seem to lead in a different direction. His role in the story has changed, from the antagonist of fairy tales to the protagonist, though an anti-hero, who, through unorthodox methods, solves the crime of murder. As was mentioned before, he is mostly seen in human form and the acts of aggression and coercion seem to be a ruse, a way of manipulation for him to get the information he needs to solve the case. However, he mostly refrains from violence and does not carry out many of his threats. He even shows a humane side, showing affection and compassion to Snow White, and seeming to be in good terms with his old victim, the pig. Though some people still doubt him, he shows himself to be reformed from the fairy tale wolf, both to the other characters and to the reader as well. A parallel between the reformation of the character and the archetype is easy to draw, as the book itself references the fairy tales as being Bigby's past. Based on this, one could conclude that wolves are seen as less one-dimensional monsters and villains, and more flexible characters capable of being either the hero or the villain. To summarize, the character of Bigby Wolf exhibits some traits also found in the fairy tales, though the polarized idea of the Big Bad Wolf does not seem to fit him. He shows redeeming qualities in the form of infatuation, empathy and rare moments of vulnerability. He does resort to threats of violence and manipulation, but although both iterations seem cunning and capable of deceit, their goals, and thus their character, differ.

One should keep in mind that the scope of this study is rather limited. It is only one part of a series, and only a series among hundreds, though it is an impactful one, as games and TV-series have been based on the same concept. Still, the impact a singular series has is hard to gauge and compared to the scarcity of stories in the time of fairy tales, it probably cannot be considered as influential and well spread today as those stories were in their time, or even the present. Thus, the subject could be studied further by either broadening the scope of study and studying the series in its entirety, or by

studying other modern stories with a strong wolf motif in them. The fairy tales used are also rather modern versions of the stories and though the plot stays relatively similar to earlier depictions, it is hard to say what or how much has changed between newer and older versions of the stories. More accurate results would be obtainable by researching earlier versions of the stories, or even the original German versions of them.

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