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## Releasing the Creative Self in Transcultural Neo-Tales.

### Baba Yaga in Jane Yolen’s “Finding Baba Yaga” and

### Lana Hechtman Ayers’ “Red Riding Hood’s Real Life”

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#### Abstract

This article deals with two American (US) ‘novels in poems,’ both of which draw on Russian and East Slavic fairy tale motifs. In them, the witch Baba Yaga is reinterpreted, on the one hand, as an initiator into female self-liberation and self-realisation and, on the other, as a catalyst for the release of creativity. Through Baba Yaga, the protagonists discover and develop an autonomous self that derives its strength from the aesthetic act, whereby art resp. poetry and autonomy are shown to coincide. Meanwhile, femininity stands for the human soul, freed from the structural constraints imposed by the masculine principle of logos. The figure of Baba Yaga is thus chosen simultaneously and very likely independently by both authors as an archetype for the soul’s discovery of its own autonomy in aesthetic (self-)creation, while the genre of the ‘novel in poems’ itself reflects this motif of formal self-constitution.

**Keywords:** verse novel, novel in poems, Baba Yaga, creative self

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## **Releasing the Creative Self in Transcultural Neo-Tales.**

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While it remains rather marginal in other literatures, in the anglophone world, especially in the United States and Britain, the hybrid genre of the verse novel is enjoying a strong upswing. In the context of this renaissance, a special genre has emerged: the novel composed of individual poems (cf. Stahl, forthcoming). Each constituent poem may vary with regard to length and composition of the stanzas as well as in the ratio of narrative sequences to genuinely lyric, dramatic, or poetic passages. 'Narrative' here refers to a dominant treatment of the object (characters and their world, plot), 'lyric' to the performative constitution of the content by the speech act, 'dramatic' to the performance of communication, and 'poetic' to the medium of language, underscored by the use of poetic and linguistic devices and the short form of the poem. Although the 'novel in poems' is normally attributed to the verse novel, it is unique in form; it also differs from arrangements of poems in cycles or books, combining the basic features of both the novel and poetry in a certain balance.

The advantage of this specialised genre lies in the fact that the plot has to be (re-)constructed from short scenes or reflections upon them and, in many cases, from the multiple perspectives of persons to whose subjectivity the poems are assigned. There is no coherent narration in the usual sense. The reader must synthesise the plot, character development, and motivation from the poems and from paratexts —such as chapter titles, epigraphs and, in some cases, ancillary poems, pre- or postfaces, and appendixes —like a puzzle or mosaic. This fragmentary and episodic arrangement is the exception in other language literatures, where

it is only gradually regaining some contemporary acknowledgment. In Russia and Germany, for instance, where the novel in verse has deep ‘high art’ roots and is still less than widespread, the ‘novel in poems’ today is practically absent, whereas it is climbing the anglophone best-seller lists and enjoying notable success, among other things even in the ‘low art’ young adult market.

Within the young adult (YA) niche, there is another general synthetic tendency: the hybridisation of fairy tale motifs—often of foreign cultural provenance—with a ‘realistically’ narrated present-day world. These motifs and their functions are transformed and reinterpreted to build up a contemporary mythology that individualises archaic collective myth and at the same time engenders a supra-individual meaning. The fairy tale material is revived in transcultural hybridizations, changing the spectrum of its meanings, as established by respective traditions.

This article deals with two American (US) ‘novels in poems,’ both of which draw on Russian and East Slavic fairy tale motifs. In them, the witch Baba Yaga is reinterpreted, on the one hand, as an initiator into female self-liberation and self-realisation and, on the other, as a catalyst for the release of poetic or artistic creativity. Through Baba Yaga, the protagonists discover and develop an individuality that derives its strength from the creative act, whereby art and autonomy are shown to coincide. Meanwhile, femininity stands for the human soul, freed from the structural constraints imposed by the masculine principle of logos. The figure of Baba Yaga is thus chosen simultaneously and very likely independently by both authors as an archetype for the soul’s discovery of its own autonomy in aesthetic (self-)creation, while the genre of the ‘novel in poems’ itself reflects this motif of self-constitution.

## **1 Baba Yaga - old and new, again and again**

Baba Yaga is perhaps the most famous figure in all of East Slavic folklore, traditionally appearing in fairy tales about magic (cf. Jones 2004/2010). Her roots go back to Slavic mythology, where she has her archetype in the goddess of death, who guards the threshold to the af-

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terlife (Johns, 2010, pp. 27; 16).<sup>1</sup> The latter is reflected in her hut, which stands in the forest on chicken legs and is able to move, hinting at an ancient Slavic burial rite. Her fence, made of human bones and skulls, and her cannibalism (she eats children and young men) emphasise her deadly power. Although she is imagined as an old and ugly hag, she also possesses sexually suggestive attributes that connote transformation and new beginnings: e.g., she travels using a mortar and pestle, which, as is well known, crushes seeds.<sup>2</sup> She is also a sorceress who possesses the ability to change her outward form or enchant objects. As a threshold figure (Johns, 2010, p. 3), her function is to initiate the hero, to whom she gives advice or an important magic item or with whom he must do battle in order to proceed.

In present-day music and literature, but also in comics and film, Baba Yaga's territory has expanded beyond her East Slavic homeland along with a revival of the witch motif more generally. The latter, which has been in use by feminist movements since the 1960s, became a rallying figure for the self-determined free woman in juxtaposition to the 'traditional,' system-compliant functionalisation of the witch as a dread spectre (Calla, 2018). In more recent years, the witch has again been used as a figure for positive self-identification —for instance, in the 2017 founding of Witch Bloc Paname (Paris), which attracted international media attention.

In 2015, Russian-American writer Taisia Kitaiskaia began a reinterpretation of the witch motif in the US, transforming it into the prototype for female writing: "To write, then, is to make magic. And so it follows that to be a female writer is, in fact, to be a kind of Witch"<sup>3</sup> Kitaiskaia also specifically picked up the motif of Baba Yaga and, through her widely viewed internet project *Ask Baba Yaga* (founded in 2015 and published in book form in 2017), incorporated it into American women's literature as a symbol of the ambivalence of female creativity. For Kitaiskaia,

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1 There is a wide range of interpretations of Baba Yaga's origins. For this reason, "the word 'witch' does not describe Baba Yaga in all her complexity and richness." (Johns, 2010, p. 2).

2 Baba Yaga is "the death of human beings and nature", but also "associated with the fertility of earth, marriage, and birth" (Johns, 2010, p. 19).

3 Cf. the foreword by Grossman (2017, p. 5).

what is significant about the witch, especially Baba Yaga, is that she stands for the transformative, dynamic power of creativity, which both destroys and gives life; she is understood as a “female archetype that has power in its own terms” and as “a change agent” (Grossman, 2017, p. 5). In this article, we will analyse two such examples of the Baba Yaga motif in its contemporary deployment.

## 2 Jane Yolen: Baba Yaga, the “inner witch”

Jane Yolen, an American writer with Russian-Jewish roots, studied Russian as a minor subject in college (Scholastic, 2019).<sup>4</sup> In many of her works, she not only uses magic motifs but also European fairy tales, in which the Russian tradition plays a central role. She published an illustrated children’s book, *The Flying Witch*, based on Baba Yaga, in 2003; but Baba Yaga also figures in her adult-oriented poems and other works. Of these, the most significant is *Finding Baba Yaga*. Yolen herself defined it as “a short novel in verse,” but the book is presented in the specialised form of a ‘novel in poems.’ Individual poems included in the book have been published separately since 2015. In interviews, Yolen talks about the ambivalent fascination she developed with Baba Yaga since childhood. Her appreciation of Baba Yaga oscillates between nightmare and admiration, because the motif combines destruction with vitality. Baba Yaga is, for her, “the strongest and greatest witch in the world,” with whom she identifies as a writer: “*So from the time I was about eight years old, I wanted to be Baba Yaga, gnashing my iron teeth*” (BookTrib, 2018). The “anarchic” life force of the witch and her mental autonomy (“she always says what she thinks” [BookTrib, 2018]), which Yolen emphasises, are presented in this book as the source of poetic creativity. Baba Yaga is raised to the archetype of female writing. Yolen also refers to Taisia Kitaiskaia’s interpretation of the witch in her internet project *Ask Baba Yaga* (Kitaiskaia, 2017) and identifies Baba Yaga directly with Kitaiskaia (Yolen, 2018, pp. 12, 120).

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4 Additional information is available at BookTrib (2018).

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Yolen's book consists of thirteen parts: nine chapters of poems attributable to the protagonist (an adolescent girl), a prologue and epilogue of unmarked attribution but pointing to the author herself, and two other paratexts: a foreword and a didactic "Reading Group Guide" explicitly in the voice of an external author. The poems describe, in a diary-like form, the girl's escape from her parents' house to the hut of Baba Yaga. The aim of the girl's quest is to find herself, which coincides with her becoming a poet. She writes about her "path": "I am becoming a poet. / I am thinking in metaphors. / I am walking through a poem." (Yolen, 2018, p. 52) At the end of the novel, the girl is the heiress to Baba Yaga, whose mission is to tell the 'truth by lying,' i.e., to be a poet: "I've learned to write poetry, telling the truth / through metaphor, simile, straight-forward lies." (Yolen, 2018, p. 127). Finding words and creating worlds from them is the magic of the witch. Accordingly, the novel is self-consciously logocentric—"Things always come back / to the word" (Yolen, 2018, p. 40)—and uses a self-reflexive poetic language instead of prose speech.

The girl's journey involves the repeated crossing of borders (leaving her house, the city, crossing natural boundaries like a river) and is presented with allusions to alchemical symbolism (washing-up as purification, defeat of fire). It leads her from *Putrefactio* to *Conjunctio* and culminates in the "finding of Baba Yaga" as the "inner witch." The old and the young woman form an "odd, the oddest" *Conjunctio*, in which the girl has arrived at her real "home": "We are like an old couple now, an odd couple, / the oddest. Are we sisters? Cousins? / Mother and child? It doesn't matter, / for I crossed tundra, taiga, major highways, / nineteen stones and a meadow / to find this home" (Yolen, 2018, p. 127).

This *Conjunctio* involves, on the one hand, the girl's native talent as a poet (her genius) and, on the other hand, the necessity of an education (Baba Yaga as mentor): "Witches are made, not only born. / [...] We pass on our genius / as well as our genes" (Yolen, 2018, p. 131). The creation of poetry is thus presented as a process of endless learning and new trials. It is about acquiring the ability to ask questions, to listen, and to perceive the—referring to Baudelaire—correspondences of the

language of the ‘forest’ (i.e., the unconscious): “This is a place of correspondence [...] I need to learn how to frame a question. / I need to learn how to listen” (Yolen, 2018, p. 48). Furthermore, to be a poet demands that one be ready to face new and troubling experiences and to accept injuries (Baba Yaga herself is injured by Kostchai the Deathless and weeps a flood of tears for the loss of her daughter).

To be a poet-witch also presents a third way beyond the antinomies of a patriarchally structured world. At first glance, the novel draws upon the pattern of Apollonian-Dionysian opposition: the paternal “logos” —the word as order, norms, and rules but also sterility— is opposed to the “bogus” —impure speech— as well as the ‘dirty’ but fertile counter-world of witchcraft and of art: “Good words, *logos* he [father] calls it, / God’s words in the beginning. [...] But bad words, he calls *bogus*, / confusing anger with sin. [...] Swearing can be held too tight in the heart, / Speaking it aloud, an artefact, an art” (Yolen, 2018, p. 21).

This contrast is reflected in the novel’s language itself, which plays with Russian-language infusions and allusions. Russian is explicitly introduced as the language of cursing (swear words), which Baba Yaga praises: “*Try these*, she says. / *Mudak, suka, dik*” (meaning: “asshole,” “bitch,” and the third word, which is a bilingual pun—both English “dick” and Russian “wild”) (Yolen, 2018, p. 102). The poetic composition proves Baba Yaga sublimely right and turns the speech of the father on its head. His pejorative “bogus” contains the Russian word for “God” (“*bog*”), which also appears explicitly on the next page in English: “the Goodest Word, the God-est Word”. Here, again, a Russian word is sublimely present: “est” – “is”, resulting in “the God-is Word” or “God is the Word,” in a reversal of the beginning of the Gospel of John (“The Word was God,” John 1:1). Cursing is a denial of the given order and thus contributes to the release of the creative self, which finds its strength in resistance.<sup>5</sup> In the end, the girl acquires her own language and truth: “great magic” means “telling my own truth” (Yolen, 2018, p. 118). Subordination to the transcendent truth of God is thus suspended,

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the Baba Yaga is connected with Slavic words meaning “anger”, “rage” or “strength, force”, but also with “disease, illness” and some other words (see in detail: Johns 2004/2010, p. 10).

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as much as the patriarchal ratio.

Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that, in the ‘novel in poems,’ the binary oppositions on which the world of the father is based are themselves transcended; for the world of Baba Yaga is its antithesis only from the perspective of that world. In itself, however, it exceeds such duality as a structural principle of rational order, formally constituting itself as a third. This can be seen on multiple levels: the nine chapters thematically form 3x3 units, mirrored around the fifth chapter; they are supplemented by three paratexts and the didactic instructions for analysis, which breaks up the closed 4x3 composition (13 is the number of the witch). Figures are introduced in shifting constellations of three, which conflict and thus constantly alternate (father-mother-child; Vasilisa-prince-protagonist; Baba Yaga-protagonist-Vasilisa). The ‘third’ principle is the disturbance of the binary order, which ‘shifts’ it and thus opens it to change.

This shifting as a transgression of established orders is the essential principle of Baba Yaga, as her attributes in the story also illustrate: her hut rotates constantly and is depicted as the “head” and seat of poetic creation; her mortar and pestle serve as a flying vehicle and stand for the fact that, in movement, the grains of reality are crushed and thus made suitable for poetic transformation; her destructive force is represented by her iron teeth, with which she devours little boys, the heirs to the patriarchal order, while her “pen” —in the role of a female phallus— passes on the creative power of transformation to the protagonist: “but the memory of creation is here / in my fingers, as they hold fast / to the feather weight / of Baba Yaga’s pen” (Yolen, 2018, p. 119).

These fairy tale motifs are used in the novel as images for the processes of consciousness. Thus, the hut of Baba Yaga is also explicitly called “Nowhere” (“A Long Walk to Nowhere,” [Yolen, 2018, p. 38]), which one only reaches if one shifts one’s consciousness “around the corner”: “Just turn a corner of your mind, / and it’s there” (Yolen, 2018, p. 38). In a metaphorical way, it is said that the ordinary hierarchical order must be reversed in order to expose the non-place of pure becoming, of

creativity, in the moment of shifting, of transition. The quality of this third world of Baba Yaga or creativity is “ever after” to be in transition and lives in the expectation of constant disturbance, displacement, and transformation. Thus, the two women expect a third, Vasilisa, the lost ideal, to return to their lives, wounding them again and again: “*Will she come back?* I whisper. / *Bad pennies always do*, she tells me. / Then, finger against her nose, adds: / *She’ll break your heart all over again.* // [...] *Not when you want her, but when you don’t*” (Yolen, 2018, p. 123).

Accordingly, Baba Yaga is not simply a counter-image of the father’s world of ordered consciousness, but rather a place of constant transformation. Tradition, as that which has already become, is deconstructed, analysed, reassembled, and thereby made her own. For this reason, the young protagonist learns in the last poem of the last chapter to analyse literature from different cultures, especially Russian and American, and from both ‘low’ and ‘high’ literature. As a “witch-poet,” she is an eternal learner.

The ‘novel in poems’ itself implements this principle: seemingly ‘found’ materials are removed from context, compositionally reorganised, and transformed into a new story. And it is precisely this task that the book presents to the reader, who is asked in the “Coda” to “tell this story” in turn: the book concludes with a guide to analysis as a first step towards appropriation in the form of continued writing. The two framework poems, “You Think You Know This Story,” focus on the free appropriation of inherited material in literature and life and invite the reader to do the same: “You want to tell this story, / perhaps now you will” (Yolen, 2018, p. 131). Individualisation happens for Yolen through creative appropriation: “Until it’s my own” (Yolen, 2018, p. 131).

In her ‘novel in poems,’ Yolen uses the Baba Yaga material to tell a new fairy tale that identifies creative force with the image of the witch. This creativity releases the self, which has to transcend norms and rules in order to fashion its own and, in turn, overcome them as well. Only then does it realise its essential principle, which Yolen regards as life force and, thus, as constant becoming and passing away, as a capacity for

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transition. She simultaneously understands this creativity as an inner human form of the divine. The protagonist imagines poetry in analogy to the Holy Communion: “*Come to the altar of the book, / open your heart, take in the story / It’s a transubstantiation, / as great as any you believe in.*” (Yolen, 2018, p. 118). In the release of creativity, which is at the same time individuation, Yolen realises the actual power of God in man. The “memory of creation” in the poet is the memory of God’s creation (Yolen, 2018, p. 119). This power, however, is at the same time the other side of God—‘*deus inversus*,’ magical witchcraft—because by shifting what has already become, it is always a process of the simultaneous undoing and transformation of the divine order. The witch is the eternal transformation of life, activated and used by the creative self, and her nature is ambivalent, divine and not divine at the same time: “Baba Yaga represents the ageless life force” (Yolen, 2018, p. 11).

### **3 Lana Hechtman Ayers: Between Baba Yaga and Wolf**

In Lana Hechtman Ayers’ *Red Riding Hood’s Real Life*, which can also be characterised as a ‘novel in poems,’ Baba Yaga is combined with German fairy tale motifs. Its protagonist is an adult woman in her early thirties named Eve Red Riding Hood. Her self-discovery as an independent artist is not only initiated by Baba Yaga, who sometimes overlaps with the grandmother of the German fairy tale but also by the Wolf. Here, Baba Yaga is, first of all, a traditional symbol for the emancipation of women, who, like the protagonist at the beginning of the novel, are only instrumentalised as a function of family and society: “We inherited the broom [...]. To sweep, sweep, sweep [...] We were told to sweep and be grateful. [...] But could we dance in the rain / splatter paint on a canvas, / without being called selfish witch or insane?” (Ayers, 2017, p. 133). The woman who refuses these roles exposes herself to “hellfire” and breaks with the order of society: “my polite apology to society / for being female was over. / I’d become author of some new / inscrutable ever after. Hellfire was to come our way [...].” (Ayers, 2017, p. 120). Baba Yaga asks the protagonist to become self-determined and to find her own way: “Take my advice [...] Teach your chicken-legged / house to

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dance. / A man will just keep you down” (Ayers, 2017, p. 27); “Live your story, missy, / your own – not mine” (Ayers, 2017, p. 28).

The protagonist carries the seed of her individual creativity hidden under “seven veils,” which she sheds, like Oscar Wilde’s Salome (in that novel, too, self and creativity are two sides of the same coin). Self-knowledge coincides with the release of her talent as an artist: “self-knowledge [...] was a seed already alive / in me that begun to sprout / the day I ventured out / to the art museum” (Ayers, 2017, p. 158), where she first encounters the Wolf. However, the germination of the seed needs stimulation. This is what the Wolf gives her, who, as a lover, releases her from marriage and introduces her to art as her mentor and master. At first, he is the embodiment of what the protagonist is yet to become: “Being a creative spirit, / the Wolf excels at one thing // especially – individuality” (Ayers, 2017, p. 96). The Wolf gives her the consciousness of her creative self for the first time: “Oh, that Wolf, / I wouldn’t take a moment of us back. / You made me conscious of the fact that I / contain multitudes, more fathoms than the sea” (Ayers, 2017, p. 162).

However, the protagonist finally moves beyond the Wolf: he needs her as his “Muse” (Ayers, 2017, p. 181), but she detaches from him in order to find herself. The protagonist discovers more and different depths within herself than the Wolf possesses, and she separates from him in order not to become dependent on a man again: “Should I have been more clear / with the Wolf about my fear of losing // not only him, but my newfound sense of self? [...] I must trust my intuition more, not second guess” (Ayers, 2017, p. 162). She subsequently finds the Wolf inside herself—“her artist animus” (Ayers, 2017, p. 163) in the sense of C. G. Jung: “When I staggered upon a wolf animus / inside me, I embraced my wildness, / went deeper into my own dark side. // I can be sweeper no more, weeper no more, [...]” (Ayers, 2017, p. 134).

After her separation from the Wolf, she meets a human-sized wolf in the depths of the forest, the image of her unconscious, who then transforms into Baba Yaga. The wolf is only one of Baba Yaga’s manifestations, because, as Red recognises: “Wolf is more anima / than he is masculine

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male” (Ayers, 2017, p. 165). However, the real essence of Baba Yaga is not her appearance as a witch but her next transformation into a pile of bones in the moonlight. This is where the central initiation takes place. The protagonist collects some of these bones; only this symbol of being reduced to death gives her new life: she suddenly feels “energized” (Ayers, 2017, p. 156). With these bones, she follows the way home intuitively—i.e., to her actual self (Ayers, 2017, p. 157). The bones symbolise for her the essence of herself (“These bones are truth, / are essence”; “Harrow every bone, and by this / know myself to the marrow” [Ayers, 2017, pp. 163, 164]).

From now on, she carries both Wolf and Baba Yaga within her, and, at the same time, she has overcome them, because she sets herself free as her own female deity. With the “seven veils,” she puts down images that have determined her. Merging symbols of ambiguous goddesses from different mythologies, she becomes her own deity: “seven powerful feminine identities / midwifing into one - / this one - / this new Red / I am becoming” (Ayers, 2017, p. 159). Her goddess realises itself in “wolf-woman configurations” (Ayers, 2017, p. 164) (the Wolf is hidden in each of her paintings). She has found in the deep forest her own individual archetype as a “timber-wolf-woman spirit” (“where forest / deepens with Limber pine and timber-wolf-woman spirit” [Ayers, 2017, p. 167]).

After she has become “whole” in herself, she can meet the Wolf again after many years, aged and with grey hair, in order to become his partner on an equal footing. Baba Yaga has fulfilled her function as an initiator into self-knowledge, and, now, as a lonely old woman, she becomes the counter-image of love between the two artists: “Only Baba Yaga, unpartnered, remains unchanged, / alone in the woods in her chicken-legged home, / scheming ways to trick the lovelorn / into doing her terrible bidding” (Ayers, 2017, p. 211).

#### 4 Baba Yaga as initiator of a free and creative self

Both ‘novels in poems’ can be characterised as transcultural neo-tales that hybridise motifs of foreign cultural provenance. What they have in common is that Baba Yaga—in accordance with Slavic folkloric tradition—assumes the function of an initiation figure. In both cases, she stands for a deeper, transrational dimension hidden from the ordinary consciousness of the protagonists, which is at the same time the origin of their creative power and their self-determination. Accordingly, their self-discovery coincides with their development of creativity as a poet resp. painter. While the emancipatory meaning of Baba Yaga is prefigured by its use in feminist contexts in the 20th century and is also internationally widespread, the relation Baba Yaga draws between the self and artistic creativity constitutes a specific re-evaluation of the motif in recent years in the United States.

However, the two authors treat this new function of Baba Yaga differently. In Yolen’s novel, “finding Baba Yaga”—i.e., finding the self—is a permanent union with Baba Yaga as the ‘inner witch,’ which means individuation and creativity as an endless process of transition. This goal is characterised as exclusively feminine, whereas the masculine is only needed as a catalyst for its power: men stand for the patriarchal order to be abandoned or broken, boys are witch food, and powerful princes are disturbing interlopers. Ayers, on the other hand, uses Baba Yaga not as a destination, but as a stage on the path of individuation that must be overcome. She formulates this shifting goal as an inner and outer balance of female and male elements, which she calls love. Even though love is defined as an uninterrupted work of self-reflexive creation,<sup>6</sup> at the end of her novel, the development of the characters is nevertheless completed, as she explicitly points out: fairy tales end when things “get vexing”.<sup>7</sup> Yolen’s protagonist never arrives at such a conclusion; rather, she has learned to learn—becoming an autonomous and creative person, a poet, with ongoing readiness for further develop-

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6 The moral of the story is: “Listen – this is the truth: ... Love is daily labor. ... Love’s labor pays / in love / that stays - / love.” (Ayers, 2017, p. 213).

7 “Fairy tales aren’t fair. // They end when things / are just about / to get vexing –” (Ayers, 2017, p. 211).

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ment. Her self is and remains genuinely transitory.

The choice of the specific form of a ‘novel in poems’ has a fundamental meaning for both authors. Yolen’s book eludes the dichotomy of prose novel and poem and thus corresponds to the idea of an ongoing transition as a third form beyond binary orders, which is adequate to the self as a pure force of creativity. All of the poems—with the exception of the frame texts—originate from the pen of the protagonist herself and reflect her aesthetic evolution as a poet. Ayers, on the other hand, uses the form of a ‘novel in poems’ to provide insights into her characters from multiple perspectives; sometimes Red Riding Hood speaks, sometimes the Wolf, sometimes other figures, or sometimes a narrator, to which the epigraphs, the titles of the poems, and their arrangement refer. This polyphonic form corresponds to the protagonist’s developmental goal in the novel, which consists in the ability to live in a balance between multiple selves on the basis of their self-determination, avoiding superiority or subordination.

Yolen and Ayers demonstrate the ‘novel in poems’ to be a productive form, which is able to narrate a plot in an elaborated as well as suspenseful way and open up psychological insights through the expressive value and semiotic surplus of poetic language.

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