

WOONG WEREWOLVES: GIRLS' GENIUS, FEMININE, AND INITIATION IN ANGELA CARTER'S AND MÄRTA TIKKANEN'S VERSIONS OF "LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD"

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Abstract: Girls' initiation contributes to cultural representations in Western folk fairy tales. This study examines girls' initiation in three contemporary versions of "Little Red Riding Hood", Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice" (1979), and Märta Tikkanen's *Rödluvan* (Little Red Riding Hood, 1986), in relation to "The Story of Grandmother", popularized by Paul Delarue (1956). Combining fairy-tale research with Kristevan theories on subjectivity, the feminine, and the genius, it examines how initiation assigns to the girl in Delarue's tale a social identity and role as a woman and how the contemporary tales negotiate this through the heroines' wooing of werewolves. The findings, presented in both written and visual forms, show the reach of the heroines' feminine psychosexual maturity, here called the girl genius, in Carter's and Tikkanen's versions, representing an alternative to traditional assumptions of girls' psychosexuality within normative heterosexuality.

Keywords: abjection, Angela Carter, the Kristevan feminine, the girl genius, girls' initiation, menstruation, Märta Tikkanen, the Kristevan subject, Little Red Riding Hood

INTRODUCTION

Girls' initiation, their admission into adulthood, plays an important part in Western folk fairy tales. Francisco Vaz da Silva (2008b: 487; see also Conrad 2008: 1041) argues that all oral folk narratives, or wonder tales, address

initiation simply because they have assimilated traditional representations and structures of initiation. This is seen in the oral folk tale “The Story of Grandmother”, where, according to Yvonne Verdier (1997: 117), a menstruating girl is sent to her grandmother to undergo initiation. The tale that circulated in female culture (Verdier 1997: 118) dates to the 1000s (Tehrani 2013: 5) but was not transcribed until 1886 by Achille Millien in France, after which it became the front version of Paul Delarue’s (1956) collection of twenty oral versions of “The Story of Grandmother”. Delarue’s “The Story of Grandmother” is better known today as “Little Red Riding Hood” (LRRH), ATU 333, by Charles Perrault (1697), and “Little Red Cap” by the Brothers Grimm (1812), who acquired the tale from women tellers. Although Perrault and the Brothers Grimm shift the focus from initiation to caution about rape (Zipes 1993 [1983]: 8, 33–37), elements of initiation persist in their versions. This is seen in Mary Douglas’s (1995: 6) assertion that stories like LRRH are “verbal rites”, handling women’s matters of the past, and in Judy Grahn’s (1993: 141) descriptions of the girl in the Brothers Grimm’s LRRH as an “archetypal menstruant” and the story as a menstrual narrative, outlining initiation. Other examples of tales with an oral and initiatory past are “Sleeping Beauty” and “Beauty and the Beast”. Perrault’s “Sleeping Beauty” (1697) and the Brothers Grimm’s version “Little Briar Rose” (1812) centralize an adolescent princess’s deathlike sleep, caused by a splinter from an old woman’s spindle, interpretable as a shift of menstruation and fertility from old to young (Vaz da Silva 2007: 243–244). The protagonist in Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve’s “Beauty and the Beast” (1740) is likewise a girl, and the tale that revolves around her romantic relationship with an animal bridegroom might be the oldest of these fairy stories since it returns to Lucius Apuleius’s “Cupid and Psyche”, transferred to writing in the 200s AD (Swain 2008: 106–108). Yet, the oldest story that stems from oral lore and that is known to describe initiation (Wolkenstein & Kramer 2004: 23–25) is the Sumerian poem “The Descent of Inanna” (2000 BC), where in Grahn’s (1993: 211–212) view, goddess Inanna visits the netherworld to do menstrual initiation rites.

Adolescent girls’ initiation, like that of adolescent boys’, has had a central meaning in human societies, although today these are nearly individualized in the Western world. Girls’ adolescence is a transition between child and adult, innocence and maturity, where girls’ identities, psyches, and bodies are particularly open, malleable, impressionable, and, therefore, suitable for initiation (Markstrom 2008: xi, 46–53). During adolescence, hormones impel massive biological, cognitive, and emotional changes, which, according to Carol A. Markstrom (*ibid.*: x), are only comparable to those of infants. Along with sexual maturity, Julia Kristeva (1990: 8) asserts that adolescence involves an

openness towards the border of the maternal, an individual's psychic space relatable to the mother and formed in infancy. This causes the adolescent's psychic transformation that traverses borders between differences in identity related to gender and sexuality, in reality and imagination. The function of girls' initiation has traditionally been to structure, through rites, cultural attitudes, values, customs, and beliefs related to perceptions and practices of women and menstruation on girls to shape desired physical traits, character, and personality (Markstrom 2008: 2–3). By assigning a socially fit identity and role to the initiate, defining girls' place in society as women, rites bridged the gap between child and adult and provided comfort and assurance in relation to the unknown (Perianes & Ndaferankhande 2005: 423; Markstrom 2008: 2). Nevertheless, owing to changes in education, employment, dependence patterns, and mobility in life transitions in Western societies, while diminishing the importance of age, adolescents' or young adults' individual agency has been centralized, highlighting individual choices, opportunities, and representations in contemporary initiation (Furlong 2009: 1–2). This shift to individuality was predicted by Arnold Van Gennep (2004 [1909]: 189), who claims that rites can be individual: "Sometimes the individual stands alone and apart from all groups". According to Inge Seiffge-Krenke and Shmuel Shulman (2011: 158–160, 166), a key component of adolescents' individual transition and social development today is the romantic relationship, describing an interest in romance, sexual, and emotional gratification with the other (or same) gender that highlights the adolescent's seeking of "a new love object" to replace that of parents (Kristeva 1990: 9). The ability to form and maintain relationships, particularly romantic ones, referred to as "object relationships" by Kristeva (2004a: 420), is central to contemporary initiation (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman 2011: 165–166) because relationships with others change individuals' entire life courses (Heinz 2009: 7).

Romantic and sexual relationships in the young heroines' transition into adulthood are highlighted in British writer Angela Carter's and Swedo-Finnish writer Märta Tikkanen's contemporary narratives of LRRH. While Carter's short stories "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice", published in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), have been widely studied and the former even filmed in 1984, Tikkanen's novel *Rödluvan* (Little Red Riding Hood, 1986), translated into Finnish as *Punahilkka* (1986), has received less attention. According to Sinikka Tuohimaa's (1994: 169–176) study, Tikkanen's semi-autobiographical novel is violent and erotic, describing Märta's transformation from girl to woman and her romantic relationship with Henrik, her second husband, whom Märta names the Wolf, while she calls herself Little Red Riding Hood. Carter's tales are similarly classified as heterosexual erotica for women, focusing on the protagonists' romance with werewolves. Whereas Cristina Bacchilega (1997:

59) argues in her study that Carter intertextually returns to both written and spoken LRRH traditions to deconstruct normative sexual and gendered behaviour by re-evaluating girls' menstruation and initiation, Andrea Gutenberg reads Carter's tales as fables of sexual initiation, redeeming both the werewolf and the girl through abjection, an individual's inner abilities to transform, or contrastingly fortify, subjective identity (Kristeva 1982: 13–15). Merja Makinen (1992: 4–14) emphasizes that Carter constructs, with her protagonists, a female psychosexuality that is rooted in violence, perversion, "animalness", and drives, what Kimberley J. Lau (2008: 77) calls "an alternative erotics".

Expanding on previous research, this study addresses representations of initiation in Delarue's, Carter's, and Tikkanen's tales by colligating theories of female initiation in folk fairy tales by Verdier (1997) and Vaz da Silva (e.g., 2008a; 2008b; 2008c) with the Kristevan *subject* and *feminine* (e.g., Kristeva 1982; 2019). I am interested in how initiation in Delarue's "The Story of Grandmother" assigns a woman's traditional role and position to the protagonist and how the heroines in Carter's and Tikkanen's tales negotiate tradition through a transition that awakens, along with menarche and romantic interests, the heroines' libido that resembles the characteristics of feminine psychosexuality, as theorized by Kristeva, moving within normative heterosexuality, *the girl genius*, my adaptation of the Kristevan genius to foreground girls. The Kristevan *subject* emerges from an infant's relationship with and love for its mother, marking out psychic, or maternal, space through the drives of the body, but is not considered complete until the young child abjects the mother, by separating from her to become a subject proper within the symbolic (hence symbolic identity) through language, culture, and morals, taking up (or not) the father as a new love object (Oliver 1993: 3–5, 22–23, 32; Kristeva 2014: 69–72). A subject's *feminine*, emerging from maternal space and in a symbiosis with the masculine, forms an individual's psychosexuality (Kristeva 2019: 3–4). Through her writing on Hanna Arendt, Melaine Klein, and Colette Willy, who distinguished themselves within their respective fields, Kristeva (2004a: 419–427) discovered three characteristics of the *feminine* connecting these women geniuses: 1) a view of temporality as new beginnings or rebirth; 2) a self that connects to others; and 3) a unity of living and thinking, offering meaning to life (Kristeva 2004b: 222–227; Schippers 2011: 119–121).

The combination of initiation and Kristevan theories lends itself to a comparison of initiation and abjection. In an interview with Charles Penwarden (1995: 23), Kristeva likens the subconscious workings of initiation, or the rite of passage, with that of abjection. According to Kristeva, abjection is known to confront individuals' feminine and transform identity through a return to maternal space, for example, during adolescence (Kristeva 1982: 58; 1990: 8).

She continues that this is viewable in societies' coding themselves through rites and rituals "to accompany as far as possible the speaking subject on that journey" (1982: 58). Comparably, initiation in folk fairy tales follows Van Gennep's (2004 [1909]: 18, 90–106; see also Vaz da Silva 2008b: 487) division of passage into three stages, where *seclusion* removes initiates from childhood and places them at the entrance of *transition*, experienced in terms of transformation through death and rebirth, after which initiates are incorporated into adulthood in the *inclusion* phase. Following along from this, Delarue's tale highlights three representations of female initiation – needles and pins, cannibalism, and skin-shifting (Verdier 1997: 102; Vaz da Silva (2008c: 1026) – that relate to the werewolf. These are featured in Carter's and Tikkanen's tales, too, in terms of awakening the heroines' libido in ways that reach feminine psychosexuality and disclose the genius. This will be shown in written and visual representations in the conclusion, where the written exegesis and the creative work have been synthesized, and they both represent the same findings, the latter perhaps offering a challenge to readers by presenting a social taboo, menstruation, concerning female bodies.

"THE STORY OF GRANDMOTHER"

In "The Story of Grandmother", female initiation defines the protagonist's place as woman. Following her mother's instruction, the protagonist journeys into seclusion, marking a crossing into the maternal, with food and crosses paths with a werewolf. With the words "You are going to carry a hot loaf* and a bottle of milk to your grandmother", the mother in "The Story of Grandmother" sends her daughter away (Delarue 1956: 230), like in real-life initiations, where often in the company of initiators, initiates sought privacy from family and community (Frazer 1998 [1890]: 686–689; Grahn 1993: 24–35). Between the family home and the grandmother's house, the protagonist in Delarue's tale encounters a crossroad, figuratively representing a critical juncture that shows her crossing into the underworld, metaphorically marking the maternal. Considering initiation rites, Louise Carus Mahdi (1998 [1996]: xxiii) indicates that crossroads are initiates' crossing into the underworld of dead ancestors, spirits, and deities, functioning as sites of sacrifice, transformation, and the advents of initiators. At the crossroads, a werewolf in "The Story of Grandmother" greets the protagonist, asking her where she is going. Food marks the crossing in Delarue's (1956: 230) tale when the girl imparts that she is "taking a hot loaf and a bottle of milk to [her] grandmother". Food was shared among generations in French folk tradition, and children distributed the food, cooked by their

mothers, to their grandparents (Verdier 1997: 114). Verdier (*ibid.*: 111–114) interprets the werewolf, known for its ability to skin-shift, in Delarue’s tale as a representation of the girl’s grandmother, initiating her into womanhood. In many parts of the world, girls’ initiation was overseen by senior women. Wiser in years, they managed women’s secrets and life, transferred to girls in initiation rites (La Fontaine 1977: 424, 434). If rites, including initiation, demonstrate the border between an individual’s maternal and symbolic (Kristeva 1982: 73), the crossroad is comparable to crossing the borders of an individual’s symbolic identity into the maternal, which not only transforms but also threatens subjectivity; as Kristeva (*ibid.*: 64) argues, “Phobia alone, crossroad of neurosis and psychosis, and of course conditions verging on psychosis, testify to the appeal of such a risk.” Standing at the crossroad, the werewolf in Delarue’s tale controls the representations of female initiation, transforming the girl subject: needles and pins, cannibalism, and skin-shifting.

The fork in the road in the woods diverges into the roads of needles and pins, the first werewolf representation used in female initiation and a stand-in for menstruation, which highlights women’s place (Delarue 1956: 230). The werewolf in Delarue’s tale asks which way the protagonist will take to her grandmother’s house, “the Needles Road or the Pins Road” (*ibid.*). Crossroads in folk fairy tales are symbols of magic rites, faith, and luck, and involve a choice of road, where an animal may influence which road to take (Garry 2005: 334, 338–340), like the werewolf in Delarue’s tale. The girl chooses the Needles Road in Delarue’s version, while in many of the other versions, she decides on the Pins Road. In a version from Forez, France, she defends her choice by stating, “I like the road of pins with which you can dress up” (Verdier 1997: 105). According to Verdier (*ibid.*: 101–106), needles and pins carry specific meaning in the context of sewing. Sewing was an important skill for girls, to whom the tale was told by women during the 1800s in areas of France and Italy, where it was a custom for peasant girls during a winter to live with an old seamstress. In addition to needlework, she educated them in socially fitting adult behavior and responsibilities, formalizing their place as women for the benefit of family and community. Here, pins carried a symbolic meaning, representing maidens through menarche and virginity, whereas needles resembled adult women’s sexuality and blood (*ibid.*: 106–107). Women’s bleeding and fertility in folk fairy tale are often described in terms of figurative language, for example, the spindle in “Sleeping Beauty” (Vaz da Silva 2007: 243–244), a red apple in “Snow White” (Girardot 1977: 292), and a red hood in LRRH (Verdier 1997: 103–104). Women’s regular bleedings also figuratively connect with the werewolf’s transformations under the full moon (Gutenberg 2007: 151–152). In Verdier’s view, through pins and needles, the girl is instructed in women’s roles, work, and sexuality,

defining her place as woman in French peasant society. Traditional values, old customs, and morals governed peasant life, dividing culture into young and old, women and men (Poster 1984: 222, 225). While Verdier (1997: 117) sees some power, freedom, and even rivalry between women within female culture, even more so among both genders in urban areas and the noble, it must be noted that rural peasant women were not free because, outside women's culture, adult men ruled over them and their children (Poster 1984: 225).

It is also noteworthy that in the context of initiation, the Pins Road in "The Story of Grandmother" calls attention to a cutting of girls' genitals, resulting from menstrual taboo, a prohibition or social exclusion (see Freud 1989 [1913]: 15–41; see also Kristeva 1982: 62–63). The Latin word for a pin, fibula, has motivated infibulation, a type of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), closing the vagina (Andro & Lesclingand 2016: 219). Fibula also has a second meaning of brooch (OED 2023), drawing attention to an old Egyptian custom of pinning brooches, fibulae, to female slaves' labia (Burrage 2015: 81). Romans correspondingly infibulated theirs; and chastity belts, forming mechanical infibulations, were popular among the noble in Medieval Europe (Andro & Lesclingand 2016: 220). A Greek papyrus of 163 AD claims the FGM to have been important in girls' initiation rites in Memphis, Egypt (Burrage 2015: 81). The FGM closely relates to taboo (ibid.: 12). Menstrual taboo, where it is practiced, typically starts around menarche and continues throughout women's menstruating life (Laws 1990: 23–24; Grahn 1993: 24–28). The menstrual taboo parts menstruants from others because female blood is considered a defiled substance (Kristeva 1982: 62–63; Freud 1989 [1913]: 15–41), seen in, for example, Leviticus 15:19–33 of the Old Testament and Torah. The Roman author Pliny the Elder (1855: 304–305) warned against the menstrual taboo in *The Natural History by Pliny*, 77 AD, arguing that proximity to female blood makes iron rust, ivory dull, and wine go bad; it makes mirrors fog, bees die, and dogs go mad; additionally, it causes fruits to fall prematurely, plants to wither, and crops to barren. According to Kristeva (1982: 73), defilement in a context of taboo points to the first boundaries of an individual's "clean and proper self", amounting to the maternal because mothers traditionally washed infants' bodies to keep their skin clean, which has provoked a view of women's bleeding, fertility and the feminine as unclean (Penwarden 1995: 23). Kristeva (1982: 15–17, 48) lists taboo as a form of abjection that operates in individuals' subconscious, upholding morals in the unconscious part of the mind, where it "prohibits, separates, prevents contact" (ibid.: 59). Defilement in taboo must be cleansed through rites (ibid.: 17, 70, 83). Such cleansing is separation rites (ibid.: 77), including the FGM, alluded to in the Pins Road of Delarue's tale, although a curbing of

female sexuality and generative powers is perhaps viewed as more important (ibid.: 70, 77; Burrage 2015: 12).

In addition to needles and pins, the second and third representations of female initiation, cannibalism, and skin-shifting, specific to the werewolf of folk fairy tales (Vaz da Silva 2008b: 1026), display abjection in the oral LRRH tradition. Because werewolves were well-known for cannibalism already in medieval lore (Zipes 1993 [1983]: 18–20), as Verdier notes (1997: 104), the werewolf in “The Story of Grandmother” only follows its instincts when it kills and eats the girl’s grandmother while placing some of “her flesh in the pantry and a bottle of her blood on the shelf” (Delarue 1956: 230). Another oral LRRH version from Tyrol, Italy, takes particular relish in the werewolf’s gruesomeness: “he had hung the intestines of his victim on the door in place of the latchcord, and he had placed the blood, the teeth and the jaws in the buffet” (Verdier 1997: 108). The grandmother’s eating is present in Perrault’s and the Brothers Grimm’s versions, too, although the man-wolf is a man or a wolf, seemingly lacking capacities to transform between these. Because the werewolf cannot maintain its own stable borders of identity and also threatens its victim’s, in Gutenberg’s view (2007: 149–153), it resembles an abject, described by Kristeva (1982: 75) as a border “between the human and the non-human”. The werewolf also rivals the maternal through an individual’s imagination and introjection of a maternal construction that it must expulse to establish borders between its own inside and outside, between itself and the mother, in order to become a speaking subject (Gutenberg 2007: 153). This calls attention to Sigmund Freud’s (1918) study of the “wolf man” who suffered from animal phobia, a fear of being devoured by animals. According to Kristeva (1982: 38–42; see also Oliver 2009: 286–287), the phobic object, sometimes a wolf, stands in for the mother that the child has assimilated through the mouth but is not yet introjected or displaced.

The protagonist in Delarue’s tale transforms into a cannibal, the second werewolf representation in female initiation after she has entered her grandmother’s house with food. Verdier (1997: 117) likens the granddaughter’s sojourn with an “initiatory visit”, turning the grandmother’s house into a menstrual hut, used for initiation rites in a large part of the world (see Buckley & Gottlieb 1988: 12–13). The heroine in Delarue’s tale accesses the “world of the dead” (Verdier 1997: 16), like Inanna, who entered the netherworld, the world after death, to meet her sister for initiation (Wolkenstein & Kramer 2004: 23, 33). In Delarue’s tale, the werewolf requests that the heroine eats the meat from the cupboard and drinks the wine. While the heroine appears monstrous (Verdier 1997: 104), Vaz da Silva (2008a: 157) argues that in folk fairy tales, “women in different generations often ingest one another”, making cannibalism a representation of female initiation. For example, the stepmother in the tale “Snow White”

demands a hunter to bring the princess's liver for supper (Vaz da Silva 2008a: 157). Cannibalism describes the initiate's "passage and transubstantiation, death and renovation" (Vaz da Silva 2008a: 157), reflecting intergenerational survival relatable to power, identity, and presence among blood-kin (Warner 1998: 63). Through the young generation's assimilation of the old, cannibalism has been incorporated into fairy tale magic, ensuring female fertility, rejuvenation, and rebirth (Bacchilega 1997: 56; Vaz da Silva 2008a: 157). Cannibalism is also about assimilating information (La Fontaine 1977: 425; Freud 1989 [1913]: 102). Ancient Egyptians and Tunisians ate their kings and queens before they were to die naturally, and in Paleolithic and Neolithic traditions, deceased relatives' brains were eaten, while their skulls were adorned, cared for, and provided for with food offerings and sought for advice (Skinner 1961: 71–86). The meal in Delarue's tale is more complex in the other oral versions, illustrating the girl's learning from women's cooking (Verdier 1997: 109, 115). In a Touraine version from France, the girl makes blood pudding of her grandmother, while in two versions from Tourangelle and the Alps, France, she cooks and eats her grandmother's breasts and nipples while a voice calls out, "You are eating my *titine* [nipples or breasts], my daughter" (Verdier 1997: 108).

Delarue's tale draws on the third werewolf representation in female initiation, skin-shifting. Werewolves in old lore are "skin-shifters", transforming between animal and human skins (Vaz da Silva 2008c: 1026). Kristeva (1982: 53) comments on skin in relation to experiencing abjection: "It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's own and clean self". Werewolves' shedding of skin represents transformation, death, and rebirth (Vaz da Silva 2008a: 279; 2008c: 1026), invoking "cyclical notions of time and being" and of menstruation (Vaz da Silva 2003: 349–350). Kristeva (1982: 15) argues that abjection similarly transforms individuals since "[a]bjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego)", resembling a second birth that recalls the genius's characteristic of new beginnings and rebirth. The girl's change of skin, or identity, in Delarue's tale is visible in the werewolf's prompting her to strip her clothes and share the bed. The peasants of rural France often shared the same bed, making children understand the secrets of sexual life early because they were aware of their own parents', families', or animals' sexual acts (Poster 1984: 230). Nicolas Edme-Restif (Poster 1984: 231) describes a not so innocent game, called Wolf, played in the historical Burgundy region, from where stem several versions of the oral LRRH tale. A wolf, always a boy, was blindfolded and placed in the middle. The other children threw their clothes on the wolf, who identified the owner based on their scent. If the wolf identified a girl, he ate her, which often involved sexual indecency or roughness, especially among older children. Van Gennep (2004 [1909]: 81) explains

that unclothing in initiation sheds initiates' identities, preparing for rebirth. Similar to the children that played *Wolf*, the girl in "The Story of Grandmother" removes her clothes and throws them, not on the wolf, but in the fire, like goddess Inanna, who was gradually shorn off her clothes and jewelry, then, hung on a peg for days from her own skin, as a celebration or maybe cleansing of women's fertility and bleeding (Wolkenstein & Kramer 2004: 33); resembling real-life menstrual rites were girls hung in hammocks for the duration of menarche (Frazer 1998 [1890]: 690–4). While Vaz da Silva (2008c: 1026) argues that the "wolfish girl" in Delarue's tale "ends up figuratively reborn", making her sexual debut and implying female empowerment between generations, Verdier (1997: 118) maintains that women's domestication of initiation, as seen in Delarue's tale, underscores "the traditional power and autonomy of women over their destiny". However, it cannot be overlooked that girls submitted to traditional values and roles of heterosexuality, where women assumed a submissive and passive role. Since pain was believed to ensure submission, the intercourse of real-life initiations, where it was practiced, could be violent, too (Delaney & Lupton & Toth 1988 [1976]: 32). Coitus sometimes coincided with marriage but equally often not (Van Gennep 2004 [1909]: 70). More often, an old woman perforated girls' hymen (Delaney & Lupton & Toth 1988 [1976]: 32; Van Gennep 2004 [1909]: 72), drawing attention to the werewolf-grandmother in Delarue's tale.

Sexual initiation was a sign of the completion of skin-transformation, the transitional phase, incorporating the initiate into society as an adult; she could now leave the menstrual hut. As a ruse to exit her grandmother's house, the protagonist in "The Story of Grandmother" asks the werewolf if she can go outside to defecate. Her mention of feces and the werewolf's wish to swaddle her, by doing it in the bed, refer to mothers' duties. Based on Edme-Restif's recalling (Poster 1984: 233–234), little girls were swaddled in their excrements more often than boys, as Mark Poster notes (*ibid.*), to ensure "helplessness and dependence" on others in French peasant communities, where individual autonomy was considered threatening. Yet, the girl in Delarue's tale maintains the boundaries of her clean and proper self by going outside to reveal herself and escapes. Unlike Perrault's and the Brothers Grimm's versions, where Little Red Riding Hood is swallowed by the wolf, albeit also saved by a hunter in the latter, the protagonist in "The Story of Grandmother" returns home as a woman.

MÄRTA TIKKANEN'S *RÖDLUVAN*, ANGELA CARTER'S "THE COMPANY OF WOLVES" AND "WOLF-ALICE"

While, like in Delarue's "The Story of Grandmother", Carter's and Tikkanen's tales centralize girls' passage into adulthood, menstruation, and fertility, their heroines' transitions recreate women's traditional place and roles through romance, which results in sex and a reach of feminine psychosexual maturity, displaying the genius's three characteristics. Food, crossroads, and werewolves acquire new meanings in Carter's and Tikkanen's tales, when the heroines take control of their own initiation, indicating a transition to romantic interests. Separation here conforms to breaches in parental attachments, allowing a development of romantic involvements (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman 2011: 167–168). Kristeva (1990: 8–9) explains that youths' psychic reorganization coalesces with an opening towards the maternal, metaphorically described through the crossroad of Delarue's tale, questioning their own identifications and seeking of romantic object relationships with others. Similar to the mother in "The Story of Grandmother", the mother in "The Company of Wolves" prepares a food basket for her daughter to carry. However, as opposed to the former tale, the "strong-minded" daughter in the latter decides to visit her grandmother despite the dangers of wolves (Carter 2006: 133). She increases personal authority and individuation from her parents through decisiveness, according to Walter R. Heinz (2009: 3), a characteristic of contemporary transitions. The knife slipped into the food basket also demonstrates strength and bravery. The heroine's crossroad in "The Company of Wolves" is the woods, where a male werewolf in the form of a chivalrous, handsome hunter approaches her. Dressed in green hunting clothes and a hat, the werewolf resembles the Green Wolf of French lore, symbolizing fertility in spring rites (Monaghan 2011: 180). Terri Windling (2002: 4–5) links the green wolf with Jack in the Green of British lore, known as a trickster figure in green with a good eye for girls, appearing on May Day and symbolizing rebirth and regrowth. The crossing in Carter's tale turns into a "rustic seduction" (Carter 2006: 135), when the werewolf tries to double-cross the protagonist with a magic compass, showing the quickest way to her grandmother. Despite his little tricks, she finds him "dashing" (*ibid.*: 134) and promises to kiss him if he arrives at her grandmother's house first.

Similarly, the protagonists in *Rödluvan* and "Wolf-Alice" meet their romantic partners. *Rödluvan* in Tikkanen's tale carries raspberry juice and bread in a basket when crossing a path with a wolf in the woods, whereas Märta, working as a reporter in the parallel story, comes across Henrik, the Wolf. Märta describes the Wolf as soft, naked, vulnerable, and scared underneath his wild, reckless, and aggressive fur. Despite her innocence, *Rödluvan*, with whom Märta

identifies, is contrastingly viewed as “grym, glupsk och listen” (ferocious, wolfish, and lascivious),¹ leading the wolf into the depth of the woods (Tikkanen 1986: 165–166). Her whole life course transforms when she divorces and remarries, which indicates the decision-making and timing of contemporary transitions, transcending age, which carried significance in traditional initiation (see Heinz 2009: 3). Märta outlines a shift of romantic attachment from her father and first husband to Wolf, her true companion. Like Carter in “The Company of Wolves”, Tikkanen, through Märta’s outlining of male object relationships, indicates the heroine’s separation from, or abjection of, the mother, girls’ primary love object in early childhood, for the father as a new romantic relationship, resulting here in her heteronormativity and taking up a position of autonomous, speaking subject (see Oliver 1993: 55). Unlike the other protagonists who wander into the woods, in “Wolf-Alice” the wild is the protagonist’s natural habitat as she is abandoned by her human mother. Wolf-Alice grew up among wolves. Her home is the lair, and her food is milk from wolves until hunters cross the lair and kill her wolf mother. The killing represents Wolf-Alice’s crossroad, showing parting from her wolf mother. Wolf-Alice cannot speak and is, therefore, not a speaking subject, as Kelly Oliver (1993: 23) notes, one “becomes, through language, a subject proper”. However, parted from her mothers, it may be argued that she is in transition to become a subject. The hunters bring Wolf-Alice to a convent, from which, because of her animalness, she is sent to work for the Duke, a werewolf. Like the heroine in Carter’s “Wolf-Alice”, who was snatched by hunters, animal brides in fairy tales are often victims of abduction, reflecting on men’s fantasies of rape and domination and women’s desire for autonomy (see Warner 1995: 310; see also Silver 2008: 41).

Tikkanen’s and Carter’s tales return to the first representation of female initiation, needles and pins, found in “The Story of Grandmother”, and change it into a celebration of menstruation. Tikkanen’s *Rödluvan* alludes to needles and pins, seen in “knappnålar och synålar och bröst och blod” (pins and needles and breasts and blood) (Tikkanen 1986: 227), where pins, needles, and blood stand for menstruation, whereas the addition of breasts indicates female fertility and sexuality. Carter plays with similar word combinations in her tales, for example, in “The Company of Wolves”, the heroine’s “breasts have just begun to swell ... she has just started her woman’s bleeding” (Carter 2006: 133). Furthermore, Carter and Tikkanen represent needles and pins through sewing. The grandmother in “The Company of Wolves” resembles an old seamstress, invoking initiation through her needle craft, “the grandmother who’d knitted her red shawl” and “the patchwork quilt she made before she was married” (ibid.: 133–135). However, rather than a continuation of women’s traditional place, as suggested in Delarue’s tale through the werewolf-grandmother (Verdier 1997:

110), her passing in Carter's tale indicates a break with traditional ways of doing initiation and needlework because the werewolf is here a male lover. The heroine in "Wolf-Alice" comparably breaks with the past by tearing up finely sewn garments, belonging to the Duke's dead mother, into rags to halt menstruation (Carter 2006: 144). Like the other protagonists, Märta in *Rödluvan* renegotiates women's place, assigned through sewing. Wearing her father's old suits, refashioned into girls' garments, her father's masculinity is transferred to Märta, employing a feminization of masculinity (Tikkanen 1986: 130).

In relation to menstruation, Carter and Tikkanen construct the heroines' feminine psychosexuality to expand into the genius's characteristic of time as new beginnings and rebirth. Kristeva uses menstruation and motherhood to describe how the view of time as new beginnings and rebirth works with the feminine: "Whether or not it is founded on the experience of menstrual cycles or of maternity, this temporality which breaks with linear time ... seems to resonate with female psycho-sexuality" (Kristeva 2004b: 226). The protagonists in Carter's tales have arrived at similar understandings of time as cyclical using menstruation and sexuality. The heroine in "Wolf-Alice" "learned to expect these bleedings" and "discovered the very action of time by means of this returning cycle" (Carter 2006: 144), as well as combining blood and sexual fantasies that foregrounds the werewolf's relation to the moon and menstruation: "she woke to feel the trickle between her thighs and it seemed to her that a wolf who, perhaps, was fond of her, as wolves were, and who lived, perhaps, in the moon? Must have nibbled her cunt while she was sleeping, had subjected her to a series of affectionate nips" (Carter 2006: 144).

Like Wolf-Alice, the heroine in "The Company of Wolves" has gained an understanding of "the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month" while imagining sexual pleasure through her "magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane" (Carter 2006: 133). In *Rödluvan*, Märta's perception of time as new beginnings and rebirth rises from her feminine that emphasizes maternity, positively enhancing female generative powers: "ungens doft och mjölkens, kvinnolukten, den går aldrig ur, den leder bakåt inåt neråt, djupt mot skogstjärnar och fuktig sammetmossa, fjärrantider, ursprungsåder sinnlighet, orgasmextas" (the kid's scent and the milk's, women's scent, which never disappears; it reverts backwards inwards downwards, towards a woodland pond and damp velvet feather moss, bygone times, mother vein, sensuality, the ecstasy of orgasming) (Tikkanen 1986: 273). Tikkanen's construction of giving birth as new beginnings comes close to Colette Willy's, one of Kristeva's geniuses, perception of herself as "hatching" (Kristeva 2004a: 210) or Hanna Arendt's, another of Kristeva's geniuses, view of natality, seeing each child as "a new beginning" because "each begins, in a sense, a new world" and has the capacity to begin again (ibid.: 423).

Carter's and Tikkanen's tales explore fears of the werewolf in folklore, highlighting sexuality and power and revealing the heroines' attachment to the werewolf as similar to the relationship between the girl and the beast in the tale "Beauty and the Beast". While Warner (1995: 308–309) maintains that many of Carter's fairy tales expand on the theme of "Beauty and the Beast", also making it prominent in "Wolf-Alice" and "The Company of Wolves", Vaz da Silva (2008a: 163) suggests that werewolves in Carter's tales represent dangerous male sexuality and female power. Of all nightly and woodsy creatures in folklore, the wolf is described as the worst in "The Company of Wolves". Through the werewolf theme, Carter (2006: 129) constructs homology between eating and sex: "once he's had a taste of flesh then nothing will do". The werewolf's erect penis when jumping on the grandmother to eat her in her home makes his sexual intentions explicit while also alluding to the eating of the grandmothers in Delarue's, Perrault's, and the Brothers Grimm's tales. Eating and cannibalism have been linked to coitus in literature since the turn of the 1500s (Partridge 1996 [1947]: 40–108), and werewolf lore was increasingly coupled with sexual perversion in the 1900s (Gutenberg 2007: 154). Comparable to the werewolf in "The Company of Wolves", the werewolf-Duke in "Wolf-Alice" is portrayed as a "corps-eater" and a "body snatcher", whose "eyes see only appetite" (Carter 2006: 142). The werewolf-Duke resembles the Beast in the tale "Beauty and the Beast", where Beauty, who has come to live with the "ugly male animal," performs tasks for him to retrieve his love (Vaz da Silva 2008a: 41). The heroine in "Wolf-Alice", likewise, assists the werewolf-Duke, knowing "no better than to do his chores for him", cleaning scraps of his victims every night from his bedroom (Carter 2006: 143). Like the Beast attracts his Beauty in "Beauty and the Beast" (Warner 1995: 308), the heroines in Carter's tales attach to the werewolves, despite their repulsiveness, reminding one of the abject, described as "a repulsive gift" that fascinates its victims while threatening the integrity of their identities (Kristeva 1982: 9). Animal grooms in fairy tales, like the werewolves in Carter's tales, represent the transformative powers of love (see Silver 2008: 41). Previously seen in the heroine's liking of the werewolf in "The Company of Wolves", Wolf-Alice's attachment to the werewolf-Duke indicates an increased object relation, significant in the context of both adolescents and the genius (Kristeva 2004b: 222–224; 2007: 715–717). While adolescents often submit to "amorous passion" and idealization of their love objects (Kristeva 2007: 717), the genius's ego cannot separate from its relationships (Kristeva 2004a: 420). Like the other werewolves here, the wolf in *Rödluvan* engulfs the grandmother (Tikkanen 1986: 226), while Henrik, the Wolf, turns to alcohol, affairs, and violence (ibid.: 177–274) because he is afraid of love, "han kan inte älska" (he cannot love) (ibid.: 167). Like Carter invokes the "Beauty and the

Beast” theme in her tales, Märta in *Rödluan* hopes her love, indicating her romantic investment and increased object relationship, will change the Wolf’s heart but nearly breaks her own (ibid.: 167, 271).

Tikkanen highlights cannibalism, the second representation of female initiation, in *Rödluan* through the abjection of the heroine’s mother, thus reversing the beast motif also seen in “Wolf-Alice”. Of Tikkanen’s and Carter’s tales, Märta in *Rödluan* remains most true to the cannibalistic representation of female initiation, earlier seen in Delarue’s tale: “Vargen bjuder henne på en måltid som hon sent ska glömma dricker mormors blod och äter mormorns bröst” (The wolf invites her to a meal which she won’t forget drinking granny’s blood and eating granny’s breasts) (Tikkanen 1986: 226). The first experience of cannibalism for humans is the infant’s incorporation of the mother’s breast (Skinner 1961: 71). Melanie Klein, also called a genius by Kristeva, discovered the infant’s first notion of a self in relation to a partial object, the mother’s breast, which occurs before her abjection (Kristeva 2004b: 223). Warner (1998: 146) likens the child cannibal in folk fairy tales, reversing the motif of the beast, with children’s uncontrollable id, instinctual and animalistic desires, through “inner compulsions, especially greed and the ferocious survival instinct”. According to Kristeva (1982: 39), for small children, cannibalism is a fantasy, dealing with the fears of losing the mother after having abjected her, as she writes, “I incorporate a portion of my mother’s body, her breast, and thus I hold on to her”. Equally fantastic to the infant, as its wish to devour the mother, is the fear of being devoured by her (ibid.: 4), which describes a feeling of maternal excess (Oliver 1993: 77). In another context, Warner (1998: 57) similarly describes cannibal parents in folk and fairy tales as excess. Märta in *Rödluan* captures the essence of maternal excess through an ambivalence of devouring when stating that “äter inte Rödluan upp sin mormor äter mormor henne” (if Little Red Riding Hood doesn’t eat her granny, granny will eat her) (Tikkanen 1986: 226). These fantasies that doubtless are aggressive and sexual, too, coincide with the child’s incorporation of language, culture, and morals (Kristeva 1982: 13, 41–44): The child replaces maternal loss with signs, gestures, and words (ibid.: 41). As Kristeva (ibid.: 79) writes, “I give up cannibalism because abjection (of the mother) leads me towards respect for the body of the other”, the mother having turned into an other after abjection, helping the child separate from her and become autonomous (Oliver 1993: 61). Raised by beastly wolves that similarly understand neither human language nor culture, the protagonist in “Wolf-Alice”, as Makinen (1992: 11) argues, is raised “outside of the social training of the symbolic” but nevertheless learns enough about this to become a subject proper, visible in her partaking in a congregation at the local church: “She lent them the assistance of her own, educated voice” (Carter 2006: 148).

The theme of “Beauty and the Beast” combines with cannibalism and skin-shifting, the second and third representations of female initiation, in “The Company of Wolves”, unleashing the heroine’s inner sexual being. Reminiscent of “The Story of Grandmother”, the heroine in “The Company of Wolves” removes her clothes and throws them on the fire, indicating her skin-shifting. However, when the werewolf wants to eat her, too, knowledgeable that “the worst wolves are hairy on the inside”, she bows to fate and meets his desire, realizing that she is “nobody’s meat” (Carter 2006: 137) and changing the “passive terror” endured by the Brothers Grimm’s Little Red Riding Hood in the wolf’s belly (Makinen 1992: 5). Merja Makinen (1992: 10) points to Carter’s use of “skin and flesh as signifying pleasure” in *The Sadeian Woman*, which through the protagonist’s sexual passion in “The Company of Wolves” transforms “meat’ into ‘flesh’” (ibid.: 11) and the werewolf into a “tender wolf” (Carter 2006: 138). The tale ends with romance through Carter’s envisioning of a bizarre fairy tale wedding: “she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as he would do in a savage marriage ceremony” (ibid.: 139). While Makinen notes Carter’s fascination with “beast marriage’ stories” (ibid.: 9), Warner (1995: 307) argues that by exploiting the beast motif, Carter’s heroines discover their own “force of nature” through the werewolves, only reflecting what already resides within; as Makinen (1992: 9) emphasizes, Carter’s tales show that women can be sexually active and even perverse. The beast represents a sensuality that has traditionally been viewed as devouring but which, if embraced, is empowering because it provides “a new awareness of both self and other” (ibid.: 10), also viewable in Carter’s “Wolf-Alice”.

Similarly, skin-shifting and cannibalism of female initiation wed in “Wolf-Alice”, displaying sexual maturity that reaches feminine psychosexual maturity seen in the genius’s unity of living and thinking. Carter (2006: 146) constructs skin-shifting, in Wolf-Alice’s own words, through “the new skin that had been born ... of her bleeding”. Carter (ibid.) also combines skin-shifting and cannibalism in Wolf-Alice’s examination of her own skin and breasts, which for hours, she would lick and taste with her long tongue, indicating both pleasure and eating. Towards the end of the tale, by putting on a dead woman’s bridal dress, which refers to marriage, Wolf-Alice reverses the representation of skin-shifting, her transformation. She sets out from the castle in the bridal dress and finds the injured Duke, shot with a silver bullet, in the graveyard. The villagers have decided to finish him because he abducted the bride, the owner of Wolf-Alice’s dress. However, Wolf-Alice brings him to his bedchamber in the castle. With her long tongue, she licks “without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead” (Carter 2006: 148). As Makinen (1992: 11) observes, Wolf-Alice confronts her own desire “in all its unruly ‘animalness’”. While Lau (2008: 91) finds Wolf-Alice’s response

“both tender and erotic”, like the protagonist’s picking of lice in “The Company of Wolves”, in Makinen’s (1992: 11) view, she brings the werewolf-Duke “into the world of the rational, where he too can be symbolized” (ibid.); however, in such a way that “flesh” makes “thought”, that thought yields to instinctual drives (Kristeva 2004b: 225). Such is the genius’s characteristic of the unity of living and thinking, also emphasized in Carter’s characterization of Wolf-Alice: “how did she think, how did she feel ... with her furred thoughts” (Carter 2006: 144). Like Carter, Colette Willy (2004) explores her furry thoughts through the minds and feelings of a dog and a cat in her short story collection *Barks and Purrs*. According to Kristeva (2004a: 85), pushing beyond “the limits of the sensory” with humor and simplicity, Colette tames her own animality through “extreme perceptions and desires as if they were those of a beast”. Carter (2006: 149) constructs a similar kind of gentle animalness, displayed in the heroine’s “soft, moist, gentle tongue” in “Wolf-Alice”, which is very different from the protagonists’ more violent animalness in “The Company of Wolves” and *Rödluvan*.

Tikkanen’s *Rödluvan* similarly represents skin-shifting, through love and sex, which extends into feminine psychosexual maturity. Märta’s shift of skin in *Rödluvan* is shown through death and orgasming, indicating her transformation: “strip-tease och eldsflammer och lilla döden, stora döden” (striptease and flames and little death, giant death) (Tikkanen 1986: 209). Märta, as *Rödluvan*, describes her libido as “riktigt skönt pervers och ful och härligt våldsamt snedvriden och hotfullt farlig” (really charmingly perverted and ugly and delightfully crooked and terrifyingly dangerous) (ibid.: 225). The heroine in “The Company of Wolves”, correspondingly, seduces the werewolf, by kissing and violently ripping off his clothes, informed that without his human clothes, he is condemned to wolfishness. Lau (2008: 86) argues that the protagonist “opts for the bestial”, revealing her own animalness and sexual agency. Nevertheless, unlike the sex in “The Company of Wolves” that, according to Makinen (1992: 9), is grounded in equality and recognition of “the reciprocal claims of the other”, the Wolf in *Rödluvan* cannot control Märta in the sexual act because, as he laments, her pleasure is internal and “han blir utanför” (he is left outside) (Tikkanen 1986: 223, 273). Märta thinks that he is afraid to give in to her love (ibid.: 167), and it is not until he is dying that they reconcile in love (ibid.: 290). Yet, like the protagonists in “Wolf-Alice” and “The Company of Wolves”, Märta’s psychosexuality has a soft side, too, resembling maternity through her love and care for the Wolf and her own children, making the maternal part of the erotic because if the mother lacks the libido of the lover, a drive-oriented satisfaction, her eroticism, Kristeva (2014: 75) argues, would run “defensive or operational”, impeding thinking. Maternal eroticism orients itself towards other beings (ibid.: 71), emphasizing the genius’s inseparableness from others.

CONCLUSION



Figure 1. Girl Geniuses I–III (2020). Carola Maria Wide ©.

Addressing three representations of female initiation in folk fairy tales – needles and pins, cannibalism, and skin-shifting – in Delarue’s, Carter’s, and Tikkanen’s tales, this study has shown how traditional female initiation in Delarue’s tale allocates a social identity of the woman to the girl, by her taking up women’s responsibilities, roles, and positions, and how the heroines in Carter’s and Tikkanen’s tales, while returning to traditional representations of female initiation and womanhood, transform them through romance and sex in ways that resemble contemporary transitions. The study has additionally compared the heroines’ initiation with abjection: while initiation is not abjection, initiation rites function like abjection, through the return of a subject to the maternal, transforming and reconstructing the subject’s identity. With the photographic series *Girl Geniuses I–III* (2020) in Figure 1, picturing the author’s blood, I hope to demonstrate that abjection can be a regenerative force and that menstruation, like in Carter’s and Tikkanen’s tales, can be both beautiful and empowering for girls. Along with an awakening of the heroines’ menstruation, love, and sexuality, using the werewolf as an adaptation of the beast, Carter and Tikkanen represent a reach of the heroines’ feminine psychosexual maturity, the Kristevan feminine. The Kristevan feminine concludes here in the girl genius, which transforms and moves the heroines’ identity as subjects beyond the ordinary and can, therefore, be considered as an active and agentive force for girls: a self that holds a capacity for viewing time as new beginnings and rebirth, that orients itself towards romantic others without losing itself, and, finally, that amalgamates living and thinking, instinctual drive and intellect to achieve wholeness. Such is the genius of Carter’s and Tikkanen’s girl protagonists. In

order to write of the feminine, one is sometimes bound to first experience it (Kristeva 2000: 120), which also suggests a certain genius of Carter and Tikkanen, which could be worth examining in the future.

NOTE

¹ All translations are my own.

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