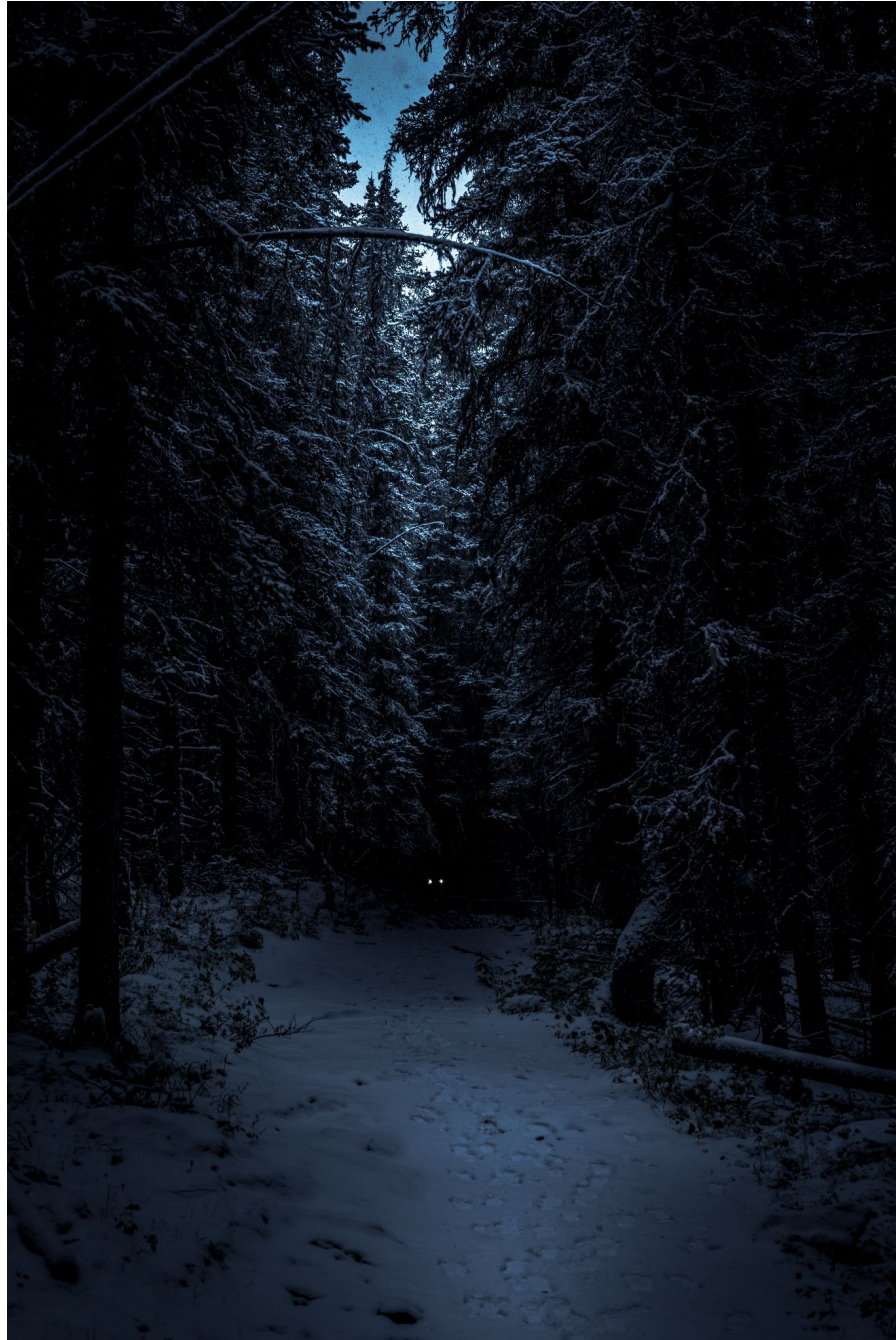


Wolf-Women: Femininity And Abjection in *Ginger Snaps*



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INTRODUCTION

There are many examples within the medium of film that represent the werewolf as a man in a number of ways; as a tragic hero in the case of Lon Chaney's iconic performance in *Wolfman* (1934) and its sequels, a growing boy in the case of *Teen Wolf* (1981), a physically-fit, teenage love interest in the *Twilight* Saga and a monstrous villain most recently in *Werewolves Within* (2021). Representations of female werewolves are comparatively few and far between. Most often, female werewolves are either left out because the established werewolf lore in films makes female werewolves rare (such as in the *Twilight Saga* and the film adaptation of *Blood and Chocolate* and the television shows *Bitten* and *The Originals*). One example that differentiates itself from this tradition is *The Company of Wolves* (1984); a film that critiques the male gaze and embraces the subjectivity of its female characters, who become wolves. *The Company of Wolves* and *The Bloody Chamber*, the book it was based on, have been written about extensively (Gracey, Lappas, Schanoes, Wu). One of the most well-known cult films with a female werewolf at its centre is *Ginger Snaps* (2000), which is why I will take this film as my main case study in my BA thesis.

Before I move on to explain the theme of this thesis, let me briefly introduce John Fawcett's film *Ginger Snaps* (2000). The film tells the story of Ginger and Brigitte Fitzgerald, two teenage sisters who are living in the Canadian suburbs, where dogs are being found mauled to death. The sisters make a suicide pact to die before they turn sixteen in an effort to not become 'average'. They are faced with their mother's enthusiasm about Ginger's first menstruation being near. That night, they find themselves at a playground where they discover another dismembered dog at the moment Ginger starts to bleed. She is attacked by a creature who bites her and soon after, starts to show symptoms of werewolfism; she grows hair from her wound, becomes

aggressive, grows a tail and claws. Brigitte anxiously looks for a cure and hides Ginger's secret. When she finds a cure, it is already too late to hold back the transformation and Brigitte must either cure or kill her werewolf sister, resulting in Ginger's death.

The film ties werewolfism to female puberty. The werewolf is portrayed as incompatible with femininity. My interpretation of this is that the societal idea of femininity does not include aggression, strength or sexuality. The symptoms of werewolfism are similar to puberty and bring about unwanted hair growth, mood changes, sexual urges, etc. that young girls — and later, women — try to hide, because they are not socially permitted to show them. However, these are natural changes to the body that become permanent, they are suppressed and become abject. This will be elaborated on in my analysis. Historically, the treatment of women and werewolves have been linked to one another as well (Arnds 47-68). As one of the most popular representations of female werewolfism, it is rather unsurprising that the 'curse' of werewolfism is tied to the female reproductive system. I would like to bring special attention to the experience of the menarche (the first menstruation) and early puberty in recent films. This is related to shame and disgust for one's own bodily functions and can be explained as the experience of abjection. This has prompted me to analyse this film using the following research question:

How does John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* construct the meaning of the menarche?

In order to answer this question, I have formulated the following subquestions: "How does John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000) represent the transition from childhood into womanhood?" and "How does the transformation into a werewolf affect the meaning of the menarche in John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps* (2000)?".

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I will first put the film in the context of werewolfism. In order to sketch an accurate picture of the most important aspects of the history of werewolf fiction and its themes, I will be referring to Peter Arnds's work on the connection between wolves and witches in German literature. He illustrates how the transformation into a werewolf is used in literature to represent a break with the civilised world as a sort of rite of passage and a psychological journey from a masculine conception of society to the feminised space of the woods. Peter Arnds explains how the belief in and persecution of werewolves and witches have been linked to one another since the late Middle Ages, when Pope Innocent VIII issued the Great Werewolf and Witch Hunt (48). Werewolfism was equated with the unclean and versions of the shapeshifting creature would either exile themselves or be exiled from society, either temporarily or permanently. Arnds even states that "during his time of lupization, man is dead to the community . . . he may be able to return once his moral impurity is considered to have been washed clean" (50). This unclean element is often representative of the encounter with sin that is meant to be overcome. Arnds explains that psychoanalytically, the transformation represents a rite of passage in which the person grapples with their shadow side, their subconscious, in order to become a more complete person who has learned to integrate their shadow (50). Women would not be able to take part in the same initiation rites that the werewolf represents and thus, women deciding to spend any period of time living in the woods were considered witches. When a girl first experiences an awakening of her sexuality, she is in between the space of innocence and sinfulness and the forest often serves as a testing ground for this rite of passage (56-9). In this perspective, women and witches cannot be separated from one another, because the persecution of witches was a persecution of mostly women.

From an explanation of werewolfism in relation to gender, I will continue my analysis of *Ginger Snaps* as a critical interpretation of femininity in horror films. The context in which the film takes place also informs my analysis. The context of *Ginger Snaps* is one of Canadian suburban banality in horror films. This is elaborated on by Victoria Madden who analyses a similar case of the suburban gothic and its tropes within the horror film *Carrie*, a film that centres around the character's experiences coming into womanhood in a suburban context. Particularly interesting is Madden's analysis of how suburbia excludes and expels differences (10-3). I will attempt to link this process of exclusion with the Fitzgerald sisters' outlook on suburban life in *Ginger Snaps*.

The theoretical framework I will be using is that of gender studies and particularly, feminist film theory, as well as semiotics. However, the theories most pertinent to my analysis are the psychoanalytic theories of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva explores abjection as created from the most repressed forces in the deepest depths of the psyche. She explains that abjection is born when boundaries are rejected; the borders between the human and the animalistic as well as the borders of the body, which are the most important aspects at play in Ginger's transformation. I will use this concept to explain how the relationship between the Fitzgerald sisters and their femininity is an abject one that alienates them from their own bodies. This is part of the process of coming into womanhood in a patriarchal society. To *become* a woman, in the sense of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, is not to grow up with gender characteristics, but to be taught the conventions of womanhood and to be "Othered" as a woman would by the society in which one lives (330-343). I will use de Beauvoir's writing to explain how this reflects itself in the oncoming womanhood of the Fitzgerald sisters. Furthermore, I will be referring to Barbara Creed's feminist analysis of horror films. Her

psychoanalytic explanation of how horror films feature women as monstrous as a reflection of the fears of woman's ability to castrate men is in line with my view on Ginger's transformation in *Ginger Snaps*. I will use Anneke Smelik's chapter on feminist film studies to explain how feminist film scholars conceptualised psychoanalytic theory in film and relate that to *Ginger Snaps*.

METHODOLOGY

For the film analysis, the book *Film Art* by David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith will be the background with which different visual and audio elements of the film are combined to create the effect of abjection in the viewer and how that influences the meaning of the menarche within the film. I will attend to the details of narrative, mise-en-scène, cinematography and the sound and music of *Ginger Snaps*.

Then, I will use a semiotic analysis to delve deeper into the meaning of the film. Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* will be used to deconstruct the myths which the "text" of the film may convey. This is useful in pinpointing the meaning that the film imbued into its narrative.

Finally, I will bring the results of my visual and semiotic analysis within the context of gender theory. Multiple feminist scholars will be used to bring forth that analysis, including Smelik's feminist film analysis, Butler and de Beauvoir's theories on gender performance. And the theories of abjection of Kristeva and Creed.

In the first chapter, I will discuss the themes of suburban banality, the obsession with death, menstruation and the status of womanhood within the film's logic using visual analysis. In relation to the analysis of the suburban context, I will do a close reading of the space within the film. This visual element will be interpreted in connection to Madden's writings as well as the narrative elements of the film that give meaning to the suburbs. In order to uncover the meanings

that are played with in the film, the semiotic approach will be used. By analysing certain signs, I hope to reveal myths behind the themes of suburban banality, death and womanhood.

Furthermore, the point-of-view of two main characters, Ginger and Brigitte, will be used as a reference point to understand what the messages around femininity that they experience are. This will also be related to feminist scholarship on gender.

In the second chapter, I will bring the results of the visual and semiotic analyses to feminist concepts of abjection in relation to gender. Here too, film analysis will be used to look at scenes that pertain to the abject and the monstrous-feminine that Ginger's character is embodying in *Ginger Snaps*. Then, I will focus on Brigitte's role in the film as the medium through which the viewer experiences this abjection.

The third chapter is the conclusion in which I will bring the results of the analysis and the theoretical concepts together and formulate an answer to my research question. Furthermore, I will add my final thoughts on the topics of the menarche, femininity and abjection in *Ginger Snaps*.

CHAPTER 1: HORROR IN THE CANADIAN SUBURBS AND A SISTERS' PACT

In this chapter, I will answer the question “How does John Fawcett’s *Ginger Snaps* (2000) represent the transition from childhood into womanhood?” by doing a close-reading of the physical and social (suburban, middle class) space that contextualises the story, as well as how this context affects the sisters’ perceptions about their gender.

The suburban context in which the Fitzgerald sisters find themselves plays a large part in their story. *Ginger Snaps* shows visually an uncanny sameness: the camera shows the town of Bailey Downs from an extreme long shot (Bordwell et al. 189). This framing brings attention to the fact that the architecture of the houses in the suburb are identical. It is not clear where the suburb ends either, as the rooftops are numerous. The mise-en-scene of the first scene features the similarity between the houses, kids, minivans and empty lawns with white fences (Figures 1 and 2). The film initially shows the suburb as comforting in its homogeneity and predictability. The first scene of the film thus visually establishes that the suburban landscape in which they find themselves is *meant* to be safe. However, the camera focuses on a dog that is found dismembered in a backyard while the neighbouring children play on without questioning what dangerous creature may have killed the animal.



Figure 1: Suburban buildings of Bailey Downs



Figure 2: Children playing hockey in the streets of Bailey Downs

This is exactly what irritates the sisters who are rebelling against the idea of being 'average'. They hardly respond to the screeching of their neighbour, because the presumed safety of the suburbs removes the idea of a threat. The sisters are bored, to put it simply. They make a pact to commit suicide when they turn sixteen, calling it "epic". Captivated by death, they enjoy making 'death photography', like the photographs of Ginger's body posed in scenes of (her) accidental death, all involving the suburban setting. This horror imagery is encapsulated perfectly in the first photoshoot; Ginger is shown covered in blood, impaled through her stomach by a white picket fence (Figure 3). This image shows the appropriation of the white picket fence as a semiotic sign, bearing many connotations. Barthes explains that texts do not just bear meaning on their own: it is through a process of interpretation and knowledge of cultural codes that a person finds meaning or myth in a text (107-8). In this image the signifier is the white picket fence, because it is an icon of suburban living that connotes the ideal comforts of a 'conventional' family home. Along with other elements of the home, such as the lawnmower and the garage, it falls into the "utopian ideal of perfect community" that finds its execution in the creation of the suburban home (qtd in Madden 10). The sisters transform that sign into a dangerous one by adding a dead girl into the image, creating a new connotation that links the utopian with the horrifying. The myth of the idealised society that the fence represents is thus destroyed (Barthes 111-5, 118). Madden explains that the backdrop of the suburbs is often used in horror films as an environment that is *seemingly* safe, but in reality, is hiding a horrific truth. Madden points to the suburbs as maintaining a sense of sameness and expelling difference; the almost utopian myth of their safety and unity is cracked through the practices of homogenisation and persecution of 'otherness' (7-10). Ginger and Brigitte despise that sameness and have found a way to rebel against it through the imagery of death and decay. As can be expected in the

climate of the suburbs, this is also what leads others to respond negatively to them in social situations, at times even erupting into physical altercations.



Figure 3: Ginger impaled by a white picket fence in a photoshoot made by the two sisters.

What is noteworthy in the suburban context is that there are dead pets on screen even before the sisters are shown. They are not the source of horror in the film (yet). It suggests that there is already an undetected evil lurking in the landscape. The places where the dead dogs are found are the high school gym field, the backyard and the playground; all places that are inhabited by children and meant for play. The connotations of these spaces are that they are innocent, safe, trusted spaces for children to be children. The myth of safety that these signs represent is transformed from comforting to cruel and in the context of childhood and growing up, the uncanny feeling they induce is one not just of monsters and the fantastic, but one of real-life experience of the harshness of growing up.

“BEING FEMALE”, FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE FITZGERALD SISTERS

A danger within is also found in the definition the Fitzgerald sisters give to being female. *Ginger Snaps* makes it very clear that the two girls suffer from the male gaze. The male gaze is a theory,

first described by Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1974) as a patriarchal gaze that objectifies the female ‘Other’, pacifying her. The way this is at work in the film is by showing the boys in frame gazing at the bodies of the girls on the field. Then we are shown a shot of the girls’ bodies while hearing their comments about those bodies (Bordwell et al. 222-5, 241-4). Brigitte has a particular disdain for the attentions of boys. She wears baggy clothes that cover up her body, even during physical education classes, and when a few boys on the bleachers start commenting on the bodies of the girls on the field (“Bounce, babies! Bounce! Keep running! . . . you want it, baby!”), she shudders in horror. The words used by the boys denote not only that the girls’ bodies give them pleasure, but also that the girls are presumed to enjoy that, regardless of their actions. Ginger throws her middle finger up at them in protest, which is met with even more cheer, as if that is an invitation for more harassment. The sexual harassment is a daily activity that Brigitte experiences as related to her being female and having body parts such as breasts. In her words “high school is just a mindless, little breeder’s machine. A total hormonal toilet”. The film shows that for Brigitte, becoming a woman is synonymous with becoming a mother and being harassed by men who see her body as a site of pleasure. This is evidenced by the words “breeder’s machine”. The signified “machine” denotes repetition of an automated nature. The connotation of this process is that it may never end and that there is no choice to do anything else (Barthes 111-5, 118).

Ginger is rather preoccupied with the other girls’ complacency in this sexist process of objectification. She plays a game with her sister in which they ridicule popular girl, Trina Sinclair, for upholding Western standards of beauty, commenting on the practice of weight-watching and wearing tight-fitting clothes, cruelly joking about her death from taking “nothing but diet pills and laxatives” and commenting that she “likes her shorts stuck up her ass crack”.

The focus on maintaining her physical attractiveness is seen as an effort to gain the attention of boys, which is not a positive, but a thing to be ridiculed. However, the objectification from the boys is a shared experience between all girls on the field; Ginger and Brigitte simply view that attention differently from Trina, who in their eyes, has internalised the male gaze and polices her own body in an effort to satisfy it. This is something that causes the Fitzgerald sisters to isolate themselves and develop a co-dependent relationship, as they believe themselves to be the only ones who share that viewpoint. The two hardly interact with other women throughout the film, unless it is to criticise or threaten them. By having its main characters express these sentiments, the film has created a narrative space in which the construction of femininity in service of the pleasure of men is criticised. The mise-en-scene, editing and sound also reveal how the male gaze hurts these vulnerable young women.

As I explained in the introduction, werewolfism is often related to women's puberty and specifically to menstruation. Let me discuss a few scenes in the film, to uncover the meaning the Fitzgerald sisters attribute to the first menstruation. When menstruation is first mentioned in the film by their mother, the sisters recoil at the mere mention of the menarche and combat the topic by suggesting gruesome alternatives: "maybe it's scoliosis" and when their mother asserts that it's "not normal" that both sisters are late bloomers, Ginger lashes out in anger. Later, when Ginger first gets her menarche, she exclaims to her sister: "God, kill yourself to be different. Your whole body screws you. But if I start simping about tampon dispensers, moaning about PMS, shoot me. Okay?". This outburst establishes the sister's uncomfortable feelings, if not hatred, for the menarche. Ginger relates her own bleeding to her body failing her and affecting her behaviour to become "moany". The reaction to the menarche is linked to the perception of womanhood as something they would rather avoid than experience. This shows that the sisters

relate the menarche to a physical and emotional transformation that will turn them into women who centre their lives around men and are trapped by their female body.

This invites feminist scrutiny. I will put the sisters' experience within the context of feminist theory. De Beauvoir was one of the first philosophers to bring a new understanding of what it means to become a woman; meaning on the one hand, oppression at the hands of men and on the other, learning to abide by the cultural norms around womanhood that will be policed by both men and other women in the system of patriarchy. She famously wrote that one is not born so much as a woman, but rather becomes one (330). 'Becoming' a woman happens not only through the biological process of puberty, but the cultural aspect of it determines how one is treated within a society. The sisters' revolt against femininity is one in which they refuse to perform femininity according to the norms of their culture. Judith Butler described gender as a "stylized repetition of acts" that is not fixed, but consistently performed (Butler 519). Gender, according to Butler, is not inscribed onto the biological body, but is a culturally constructed idea that is maintained through social pressure and a consistent, convincing performance. A binary system of gender is not supported by this theory as the performance of gender is consistently in flux (520-32). In my analysis, The Fitzgerald sisters recognise this performance on the one hand, by separating themselves from their peers' performance of femininity, but maintain the deterministic view that the biological process of the menarche and puberty will cause them to behave in the same way. In my interpretation, they feel, in a way, a victim of their biology. They are highly aware of the cultural expectations that they will need to perform their gender 'properly' once they get their menstruation. The sad consequence of their experience of becoming a woman, is that they can only escape through death.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analysed the narrative the sisters have created around what it means to be feminine in the suburban context they grew up in in an attempt to answer the question of how *Ginger Snaps* represents the transition from childhood into womanhood. There are two aspects of *Ginger Snaps* that influence the Fitzgeralds' behaviour; the space of the suburbs and the cultural constructions of gender that come with it. The emphasis on normative behaviour and the expulsion of difference is one that leads to the expression of femininity in a limited capacity within that normativity by other girls who live within that system. Through the analysis of several scenes, this chapter has shown that Ginger and Brigitte are trying to escape the cultural trappings of womanhood found in the patriarchal society they live in through the medium of death and decay. This leads to them avoiding becoming women in a physical sense, by killing themselves before they turn sixteen. Considering the implications of gender at work within the context of the suburbs, transgressive gender expression of any kind will not be tolerated and therefore, the young girls who grew up in it do not see their way out of that system of patriarchy. The social pressure of the suburban context to assimilate into sameness or be subjected to more physical and emotional harm has led Ginger and Brigitte to that conclusion.

In order to answer the next subquestion of my research, I will focus in the next chapter on the aspect of werewolfism in *Ginger Snaps* and how the transformation into a werewolf affects the meaning of the menarche within the film.

CHAPTER 2: THE MONSTROUS-FEMININE: WOMAN AS WEREWOLF

To understand the aspect of horror in *Ginger Snaps*, the psychoanalytic concept of abjection must be explained, because it is the abject that pervades the genre of horror. In her psychoanalytic reading, Julia Kristeva explains that abjection is a rejection of an ‘other’, something that transgresses boundaries and does not abide by the laws of the civilised world. The unclean is emphasised here and a large part of abjection is the rejection of the unclean and the preservation of what is clean. The abject “is not an object”, it exists in a liminal space and is fraught with ambiguity (1). It is borne from the repression of the primal within ourselves. Human beings recognise a part of themselves in the abject and reject it so that it will no longer be a part of us (3-5). The abject is a borderline case, usually something that is abjected from the living body, like bodily fluids such as (menstrual) blood, spit, vomit, hair, etc. Anything that does not belong inside of us and anything that is not a part of us is considered abject. The abject signifies the in-between: between life and death, between human and animal, between the self and the other.

To put this into the context of the film, I will use the example of the dog corpses in *Ginger Snaps*. Ginger and Brigitte find a dead dog on the floor at a playground on a full moon. Kristeva explains that the corpse is the most abject other that can possibly be found, because of a few reasons. The corpse is at the border of life; meaning those who witness the corpse's ‘cesspool’ are reminded of what the body is constantly fighting against: death. The boundary of life is then a reminder of the inevitable onset of death that is to come, that we resist every day as living beings. The ‘I’ — meaning, the concept of the self that a person is enacting at each moment in time, as well as the body of that person — is constantly expelling things in order to live, but in the case of the corpse it “is ‘I’ who is expelled” (3-4). There is a moment in this

scene in which the borders between Ginger's body and the corpse (that is both animal and dead) is made. Brigitte takes the corpse's leg and says that it is still warm, then drops it to the floor. She says to Ginger that some of its blood splattered onto her. Ginger reveals her calf which has blood dripping down it. Brigitte says "what?", to which Ginger responds with "Bee, I just got the curse". Then the scene cuts to her holding up two fingers with blood on them. This is a moment of double meaning through discontinuous editing (Bordwell et al. 225-6). It is not clear whether the blood on Ginger's fingers is her own menstrual blood or that of the dog. Visually, this equates Ginger's menstruation to the decaying corpse beneath her.

It is after Ginger is bitten by a werewolf (whose identity remains unknown) that we start to see manifestations of the monstrous-feminine that Barbara Creed has written about. When the female body is present in horror films, Creed explains, it is either as a helpless victim or as a manifestation of the "monstrous-feminine". The psychoanalytic perspective that the female body in film elicits an anxiety response in men stemming from the unconscious fear of castration, has previously been linked to the idea that a woman is perceived to be castrated. Anneke Smelik writes about this in relation to the male gaze in film. She points out that the male gaze is a fetishistic attempt to soothe this anxiety (ch. 14). Creed explains in her introduction (referring to the work of Susan Lurie and Stephen Neale) that women are *constructed to be* castrated on screen in an effort to deal with the male anxieties surrounding the possibility of being castrated. She describes this idea of the castrated woman as a phantasy that is meant to lessen the real fear of a woman's ability to castrate him. However, Creed — in agreement with Lurie's conception of the psychoanalytic perspective — asserts that a woman is not perceived as castrated, but as *not* castrated, complete. Because of this, she has the ability to *castrate* men. The castrating woman is the monstrous-feminine. This theory is a further exploration of Kristeva's notion of the

abject. Creed explains how the abjection that women in horror films evoke, is intimately connected to their gender and sexuality (1-7).

Creed explains that abjection is related to the mother, because the mother is the one who holds authority, teaching her children what is clean and unclean about their bodies. This is also where the fear of castration originates. The father, on the other hand, is the one who asserts the symbolic order; the rules of proper conduct within society. Horror films are a sort of ritualistic descent into the abject in order to purify it and regain the boundaries between human and non-human. To Creed, horror presents the maternal body as a site of abjection, but offers a “representation of and reconciliation with the maternal body”. Signifying a relationship to nature, the mother’s body is conventionally less clean (8-15).

To relate this to the film: it is Ginger’s transformation into a werewolf that signifies the descent into abjection from which the boundaries between human and nature needs to be regained. Ginger’s behaviour after being bitten by the werewolf gradually becomes more aggressive and sexual. Creed describes how female vampires are abject, due to their aggressive sexuality. She explains that female vampires do not respect the rules of proper sexual conduct in this way (61). Similarly, werewolf Ginger does not obey those rules in her sexual encounter. She aggressively kisses a boy in a car who is trying to calm her down. When she does not listen, he asserts the law of sexual conduct by asking her “who’s the guy here?”. This points to her sexual appetite as being untamable and unacceptable for a woman, who is meant to be submissive to the man she is having sex with. Her response is rage. The viewer is shown a long shot of the two in the car through the window as she pushes him down beneath her. A shot of her ripping his shirt open is shown in a close-up (Bordwell et al. 189). She comes down on him as he screams in horror. This is a moment that highlights the monstrous-feminine. Psychoanalytically, the fear

that she evokes in the boy in this moment is a fear of her potential to castrate. Her monstrosity in this moment stems from her aggressive, castrating, sexuality and her transgression of the symbolic boundaries around her gender.

Ginger descends deeply into the abject when she starts to kill the teachers in her high school and equates the murders to the pleasure of masturbation. She follows up that statement with an even more taboo subject. The incest taboo is invoked when she whispers in her sister's Brigitte's ear "you know, we're almost not even related anymore" and slams her to the ground. The two are shown in canted framing, from a frog perspective as Ginger grabs her sister by the ankle and crawls on top of her, saying the words: "You love it. Should come for the ride. A little scratch. Swap some juice. We'll be our own pack, like before". Because Ginger has already sexually transmitted the 'disease' of werewolfism through intercourse and the scene is filmed in canted framing, this moment is loaded with sexual meaning as well as abject symbolism. The red lighting, the ominous music and the angle of the camera all strengthen the meaning of the words and movement of the bodies of the two sisters (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Ginger sexually propositioning her sister on the floor of the high school

MY SISTER'S KEEPER

I would argue that *Ginger Snaps* is written from the position of Brigitte and not Ginger nor a joined perspective of the two sisters. It is Brigitte who is situated as the hero of the story. She is the one who attempts to contain her sister's abject body and purify it by stopping her sister's transformation. Within the overall narrative, it is Brigitte who chronicles Ginger's 'development': her display of the monstrous-feminine and her descent into the abject. This is noticeable through the visual elements of the film. In a montage, shots are shown from Brigitte's point-of-view. Her hand is shown marking the day of the next full moon in her calendar, as well as holding a book on the stages of the menstrual cycle. The camera pans down to show that both books are being held at the same time and are being cross-referenced. The next take is one of Brigitte holding a book and then a close-up of the monsters in the chapter she is reading. A howl is heard, followed by a take of Brigitte watching a movie scene in which a werewolf attacks a wailing woman. Her look of disgust and widening eyes during the film and later, while holding a hairy razor indicate her experience of abjection towards her sister's bodily transformation. The body hair on the razor is abject, because it is another example of the "unclean" Kristeva refers to (3-4). The appearance of hair on the female body is kept to a minimum; the body is only considered clean if it has been 'clean shaven'. The appearance of hair, even on the razor instead of the body, is a reminder that hair grows where it is not permitted to grow if a woman is to be clean.

The sisters' difference is further marked by their costumes. After Ginger's debut as a new, sexy version of herself strutting down the hallways of the high school to electronic music, the music plays on and a take of Brigitte's body walking meekly across the schoolyard is shown.

The music draws a parallel between the two takes. Brigitte's physicality, in contrast to her sister's, is turned inward as if to hide her female body from the outside world (Figures 5 and 6). Throughout the film, it is Brigitte who conveys the looming threat of her sister's transformation, while Ginger slowly embraces it. Ginger ignores the bulk of her werewolf 'symptoms', while Brigitte actively seeks to identify and police them. She learns from a boy named Sam, who knows the secret, that piercing silver into Ginger's body may keep her werewolfism at bay and convinces her sister to let her pierce her belly button. What results from this is another castrating scene in which Brigitte pierces a ring of silver through her sister's belly button while Ginger screams in pain. Ginger's monstrous femininity is to be contained by this piercing, so that it cannot cause harm to anyone. This is a symbolic way to soothe the fear that she evokes. The urge to control Ginger's transformation grows until Brigitte locks her into their bathroom to create a cure to inject into her sister.



Figure 5: Ginger's new look



Figure 6: Brigitte's (lack of) physicality in contrast to Ginger's

In the end, Brigitte arguably succeeds in re-establishing the boundaries between the human and non-human, and between the clean and abject body, by killing her sister after Ginger has fully transformed into a werewolf. However, the film succeeds in destabilising these boundaries by infecting Brigitte with werewolfism in the final scenes and reuniting the sisters visually. Brigitte is physically still a human being, but werewolf Ginger recognises that she is infected by testing her bloodlust, motioning towards the blood of Sam, who has been maimed by Ginger. In order to survive, Brigitte must drink the blood of her friend Sam with a fully transformed Ginger. Brigitte vomits, expelling the abject bodily fluid from her body and Ginger attacks her in response. Brigitte stabs her and as her sister's werewolf form lays dying, breathing heavily on the floor, Brigitte moves in to lay her head on its chest and listen to her breathing. This is shot with a wide angle, zooming out slowly in a long take, leaving the ending ambiguous in a possible return of the abject (Bordwell et al. 210-5) (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Brigitte and Ginger's werewolf form embrace.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explained how Ginger embodies the monstrous-feminine in *Ginger Snaps* and how Brigitte suppresses Ginger's abject body. My analysis shows that it is not just Ginger's transformation into a werewolf that looms over Brigitte throughout the film, but also the idea of womanhood that comes with it and especially, the knowledge that she will one day go through the same process when she will start menstruating. The cure to werewolfism is at the same time a cure for the monstrous-feminine. Brigitte's feelings of abjection towards her sister and need to expel the element of abjection out of her sister is a way to expel the monstrous femininity she is afraid to exhibit herself. Ginger is monstrous, because she transgresses the symbolic order by being aggressive and sexual. The gendered aspect of this transgression cannot be neglected, as the symbolic laws to which women are bound in contemporary, Western society prevent them from exploring these forms of expression, lest they become abject (Creed 38). The feeling of

abjection towards the female body that this film represents will be discussed further in the final chapter, the conclusion.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION: WHAT IS TRULY MONSTROUS?

In this chapter, I will be answering the research question of this thesis. To repeat the research question: “How does John Fawcett’s *Ginger Snaps* construct the meaning of the menarche?”.

The analyses I made in chapters 1 and 2 will be discussed in order to arrive at an answer to this research question.

In the first chapter, I answered the subquestion “How does John Fawcett’s *Ginger Snaps* (2000) represent the transition from childhood into womanhood?” by analysing the suburban context of the film. First, I explained that the suburban context of the film is one of sameness that does not permit non-normative forms of femininity. Then, I deconstructed how the Fitzgerald sisters use the space of the suburbs in their photoshoots to express their negative sentiments towards the normative character of the suburbs. I analysed how the sisters respond to the objectification of girls by the teenage boys at their high school, as well as the complacency of other girls in that objectification by internalising the male gaze. I analysed how the two main characters of *Ginger Snaps* perceive themselves to be trapped in their female bodies, due to the fact that their physical features determine their social interactions with others. Lastly, I made a connection between the suburban context and the gender politics of *Ginger Snaps*, concluding that the representation of the transition into womanhood in the film is a constraining one that operates within the system of patriarchy that its characters struggle to escape from.

In the second chapter, I answered the subquestion “How does the transformation into a werewolf affect the meaning of the menarche in John Fawcett’s *Ginger Snaps* (2000)?”. Firstly, I explained that Ginger’s body in the film is an example of the abject female body, as the editing and mise-en-scene of the film approximate her to the abject. I use the example of a scene in which her menstrual blood is indistinguishable from the blood of a dog corpse through editing.

Then, I identified that Ginger's transformation into a werewolf is a representation of Creed's monstrous-feminine, because it is inherently tied to her sexuality and the ways she transgresses the boundaries of permissible womanly behaviour during her transition into a werewolf. Lastly, I argue that *Ginger Snaps* frames Ginger's transformation as abject and monstrous through the eyes of Brigitte and that Brigitte is the one who is attempting to re-establish the boundaries between woman and animal in her search to 'cure' her sister's werewolfism. I concluded the chapter with the answer to my subquestion: menstruation is made abject in *Ginger Snaps* through the werewolf transformation. The menarche is equated to a transformation with great destructive potential (werewolfism) in *Ginger Snaps*. Ginger is constructed as a monstrous woman in the film, through her abject behaviour and castrating potential.

MORE REFLECTIONS

I will use these insights from my analysis to further interpret the construction of the meaning of the menarche in *Ginger Snaps*.

When I first watched *Ginger Snaps*, it sparked recognition within me. While watching, I was reminded of my own menarche and the feelings that it brought up in me. Though I had grown up with a mother who was willing to answer all my questions and had learned about puberty in school, I was still mortified at the changes my body was going through at the time. I remember trying to hide any signs of change or growth with a desperate intensity from everyone I knew, including myself. When it was pointed out to me that I had bled through my clothes or let it show that I had sexual urges, I anchored myself in denial. Menstruation and the hormonal changes that come with it — in fact, all natural functions of the female body — are still taboos in today's world. This is something that many feminist activists, scholars and artists combat in their work. I would not say that *Ginger Snaps* actively combats this idea or that the film is an

inherently feminist film. However, horror films do explore and exploit existing anxieties within society. As I explained in the second chapter, horror films can be conceived as a dive into the abject in order to attempt to reconcile with it.

The latter is arguably not the case in *Ginger Snaps*. *Ginger Snaps* does represent one of its main characters as monstrous and the menarche as a terrifying experience. Moreover, the film moves back towards the established order by reinstating the boundaries between human and animal, clean and unclean, because Ginger is killed at the end of the film. However, *Ginger Snaps* also brings attention to societal issues with the menarche and womanhood and critiques them. Ginger and Brigitte's hatred of the male gaze and the expectations of femininity put upon them are clear examples of this. The sexual politics between men and women that are at play when Ginger has her first sexual encounter cause outrage within her as well. Lastly, the ending of the film remains ambiguous as to what will happen to Brigitte, creating the possibility that it will all happen again. At the same time, Brigitte is mourning her sister on screen. Her efforts to cure Ginger have been in vain and now, she is facing her own menarche alone. She will get her menstruation eventually and by infecting her with werewolfism, the film implies that it has already started. The re-stabilisation of the societal order that horror films usually employ is therefore left out. In my interpretation, this can be related to the real world; girls get their periods and they experience abjection towards their own bodies that continues every month as long as the body is not properly reconciled with. In this way, the film does have the potential to start a dialogue about the menarche. In conclusion, while I cannot say that *Ginger Snaps* reflects the experiences of women in Western society, because that is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would say that *Ginger Snaps* constructs a nuanced and sophisticated view of the menarche as

inherently tied to the societal idea of what womanhood is. In this case, that is a patriarchal one, concerned with the policing and mutilating of the body and the self to fit the norm.

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