Article

Bloody Transformations: Reinventing the Werewolf Through Explorations of Gender and Power in the *Ginger Snaps* Trilogy

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Abstract: The wolf has stalked human society for centuries, becoming a figure of fear and reverence. It is unsurprising that such a figure would infiltrate culture via folklore, myth, and legend, most notably in the form of the werewolf. A review of historical references reveals that the figure of the 'she-wolf' also shadows human culture, providing an outlet for fears around women's power, desire, and sexuality. As storytelling has shifted from oral traditions to cinematic portrayals, the she-wolf has been left to the sidelines. This paper seeks to explore how the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy (2000–2004) reset this imbalance, providing three distinct narratives centered on the female werewolf, intertwining the stories of the Fitzgerald sisters and their lycanthropic transformation. This trilogy served to reinvent the stereotype of the werewolf, using traditional lycanthropic tropes to explore issues of feminine monstrosity, the painful transitory period of adolescence, and enduring social anxieties under patriarchal societies. This paper argues that the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy is an integral set of texts for understanding how the werewolf motif has transitioned into contemporary society and how it continues to act as a release point for wider social anxieties.

Keywords: werewolf; *Ginger Snaps*; abjection; feminist theory; folklore; horror cinema

> "Women are more desirous of becoming werewolves than men, in fact, they are far more cruel and daring, and much more to be dreaded, than male werewolves". (O'Donnell 1996)

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1. Introduction

The figure of *canis lupus* has shadowed human society for centuries, inspiring both cultish devotion and fear. As a result, we find cultural practices and beliefs that reveal a desire to destroy the wolf whilst also mimicking its power (Priest 2017, p. 1). It is little wonder then that an animal that has inspired such strong emotion, and has had such cultural resonance, would work its way into folklore and storytelling. In stalks the werewolf, a folkloric figure that remains inextricably bound to civilization (Priest 2017, ibid.). The werewolf has captivated cultures temporally and globally, with folklore and storytelling embedded across various time points and geographical locations. Some of the earliest examples of werewolf lore can be found in Ancient Greece and Rome, such as the story told by Roman author Petronius, which tells of a soldier attempting a journey into the countryside. Knowing he should not travel alone, he asks an acquaintance to accompany him. However, whilst on the journey, the acquaintance takes off his clothes, transforms into a wolf, and runs into the forest. Terrified, the soldier makes his way to his paramour's home, who informs him that a wolf has carried off their sheep but not without being wounded. Upon his return to his quarters, he finds his acquaintance gravely wounded in the same location as the wolf (Felton 2021, p. 39).

Despite cultural variation, there are some shared and, thus, stereotypical lycanthropic tropes highlighted in this story. We find a person witnessing a man transforming into a wolf, referring to the familiar trope of extreme, often painful, physical transformation. Transmutation is often linked to the cycles of the moon, a factor explored later in this paper. Depending on the wider narrative, this transformation can be the result of a curse, or an

intentional magical transformation. A common theme is transformation following a bite or scratch from a werewolf. When in lupine form, the werewolf hunts voraciously, as seen in Petronius' story in which the werewolf carries off a herd of sheep. When injured in lycanthropic form, the injury remains in human form. These tropes are easily recognizable as indicative of werewolf lore and have endured across history from oral traditions to contemporary media.

One important factor to note is that we cannot separate our monsters from the context in which we speak of them. Even in the retelling of ancient myths, like the tale mentioned above, we still interpret these tales through a contemporary lens, applying our temporal sensibilities to these narratives. Moreover, these stories are always a product of the culture that produces them, from Ancient Greek myths to the Hollywood horrors we know today. This means that, to understand the werewolf, we must engage not only with underlying ideology but also with specific details of context. To decontextualize werewolf folklore is to defang it, and we must be cautious as contemporary researchers that we do not lose sight of the wider context of the stories we explore. We must also explore the elements that underpin these contexts. One intrinsic element is gender. This is particularly applicable to historical werewolf lore but also remains significant in contemporary narratives. The masculine gendering of the werewolf is influenced by its manifestation of strength, violence, and aggressive sexuality, factors that are traditionally associated with testosterone-fueled masculinity (Hódosy 2017). But what of female werewolves, often referred to as 'she-wolves'? Given that werewolf comes from the Old English *werwulf* ("man-wolf"), a woman who transforms is, by default, the Other compared to the male werewolf, highlighting how the female werewolf serves as a figure of contradiction. The woman who transforms transgresses stereotypes of the tender, fragile feminine to behave in the beastly fashion attributed to the masculine werewolf.

Before exploring the transgressive figure of the she-wolf, the ongoing interest in the werewolf bears exploration. Why does the notion of shapeshifting into a bloodthirsty, violent beast appeal to us? Often, lycanthropy acts as a vehicle for expressing cultural anxieties around our animalistic nature, tensions around the entrapment of the human spirit in material embodiment, fear of nature, and the danger thought to be inherent in our inability to repress natural corporeal instincts (Hódosy 2017). In sum, we fear that our animal side will overtake us and we will be unable to adequately discipline the body, and this may result in threat to the social order. Thus, these stories of lycanthropic transformation act as a pressure valve, releasing these anxieties. As society has evolved, our storytelling has changed shape, our social rules have shifted, and yet our interest persists. Interestingly, it has been suggested that we can interpret lycanthropic transformation as a metaphor for becoming a woman (Hódosy 2017). How does this fit with notions around the undisciplined body and threat to social order? What relevance does the werewolf have in contemporary culture? This paper will explore these ideas, alongside key theoretical frameworks including Kristeva's abjection theory (Kristeva 1982) and Cohen's classic monster theory (Cohen 1996), to argue that the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy (2000–2004) has reinvented the figure of the werewolf through its use of feminism, abjection, and the monstrous feminine body. As a result of the exploration of these themes and the application of werewolf tropes to the lives of the adolescent Fitzgerald sisters in the trilogy, the classic figure of the werewolf is reimagined, resulting in a new paradigm through which to utilize lycanthropic monstrosity as a metaphor for adolescence and feminine rage.

Kristeva's theory of abjection refers to a sense of disgust or revulsion that results from a threat to boundaries, particularly the boundaries between the stable, ordered Self and the dangerous, often disgusting Other. It is a relative concept that changes depending on differing systems of thought and sociocultural formation (Creed 2022, p. 2). Whilst it may appear that abjection is an unwelcome state, one that is externally imposed, the author argues that it can be a powerful tool for transformation. Creed has also argued this point, identifying Kristeva's conception of abjection as a space from which one can experience revolt and rebirth (Creed 2017, p. 4). This ties into the tenet of Kristeva's theory that

abjection is central to the formation of selfhood (Kristeva 1982, p. 2). Intimate revolt is thus a questioning of one's own being, from which rebirth is possible. Key to conceptualizing abjection is an understanding that it arises out of a threat to the established order through underscoring how fragile this order is. It is found in the liminal space where meaning collapses, and so resists classification. This is where the horror lies, in the threat abjection poses to the status quo and in its unruly consequences, and so abjection has been readily applied to the horror genre, in which the boundaries of the body, and accepted social order, are frequently broken by internal and external forces. This threat to order is readily apparent in the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy, in which the abject adolescent body flexes against the boundaries of acceptable development and the Fitzgerald sisters push against the confines of middle-class suburbia.

Cohen's seven theses provide a framework for exploring both our conceptualization of monsters and the fears they represent. This theory seeks to understand culture through the monsters it creates, something that is particularly relevant to the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy and its subversion and reinvention of the werewolf as a classic monster seen in folklore and storytelling through the ages. In brief, these theses are that the monster is (i) a cultural body that (ii) always escapes and is (iii) the harbinger of category crisis, that (iv) dwells at the gates of difference and (v) polices the borders of the possible. Cohen also contends that (vi) fear of the monster is really a kind of desire, and (vii) the monster stands at the threshold of becoming (Cohen 1996). Each of these theses are explored, in tandem with abjection, in relation to key overarching themes of the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy.

2. Womanly Werewolves: The Rise of the She-Wolf

Before exploring this trilogy, a brief exploration of the legacy of the she-wolf will be provided. As noted, werewolf narratives have evolved from oral storytelling through the Gothic literature of the 19th century and onto the silver screen in 20th- and 21st-century invocations. Due to the propensity of cinematic portrayals to focus on men as werewolves (Hódosy 2017), contemporary understanding may assume that historical beliefs also had a phallocentric focus. However, an exploration of historical references reveals that this is not the case. When exploring these historical references, it is important to state that "a cultural approach to body and gender has to be genuinely cultural and not secretly materialistic, while at the same time, recognizing that for early modern people biological differences—such as those between male and female, and between human and animal—formed an integral part of their mental outlook (De Blécourt 2009, p. 192)". As a result, the concept of female werewolves is not alien in historical accounts. Whilst werewolves were not as widely persecuted during European witch trials, there are records of people being charged with lycanthropy, as well as detailed, if fragmented, accounts of associated sexual violence, murder, and cannibalism (De Blécourt 2009, p. 193). Indeed, it appears that werewolves and witches were often interlinked during this period (Davidson and Canino 1990, p. 47). This historical relevance demonstrates that, whilst the she-wolf may be seen as Other, in relation to the male werewolf, the feminine figure of lycanthropy was a cause of some anxiety in historical societies in her own right. Given the enduring legacy of the werewolf in contemporary storytelling, we can infer that it continues to hold cultural resonance. As a result, it is argued here that the figure of the she-wolf, and all her associated cultural anxieties, remains an important figure for exploration. This paper specifically explores the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy as a case study, as it is the most comprehensive example of the she-wolf on screen and so is a useful example of how the tropes of the werewolf have endured into a contemporary narrative, one that draws on the social anxieties of its time (the early 2000s). That the she wolf is still a relevant vessel for these contemporary fears suggests that, although we may have experienced significant cultural shifts since the witch and werewolf trials of centuries past, we still turn to the claws and teeth that haunt the darkness, revealed under the light of the full moon, to express our social anxieties.

3. The *Ginger Snaps* Trilogy

As discussed, the werewolf is a culturally ingrained figure, and so it is possible to view art that focuses on the werewolf as essentially adaptation, with creators clinging to "variations of the known" (Miller 2005, p. 281). Whilst female werewolves have not received as much cinematic attention as their male counterparts, there are some notable examples within the wealth of cinematic representations of male lycanthropy. One such outlier in this cache of traditionalism is the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy. Beginning with *Ginger Snaps* (2000), a film that has received much critical and academic attention, the trilogy is completed with *Ginger Snaps 2: Unleashed* (2004) and *Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning* (2004). This trilogy represents one of the most comprehensive cinematic examples of the female werewolf, and so this paper will explore how the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy reinvents the classical tropes of the werewolf, specifically in relation to the use of the werewolf transformation as metaphor for adolescent transformation and the tying of the werewolf figure to feminism through its use of young women as central characters.

The sociocultural context of this film trilogy is important to consider, particularly the first installment *Ginger Snaps* (2000). Whilst the two subsequent films have been framed as cynical money-making ventures, *Ginger Snaps* (2000) represented a fresh take on the werewolf genre. The sensibilities of this film reflect wider third-wave feminist discourse, that, in tandem with a rise in 'indie' filmmaking, resulted in films that centered on empowerment, individuality, and reclamation of sexuality. This marked a shift away from the sexless 'final girl' of the 1980s and poorly developed, minimal characterization for female characters (Janisse 2022, p. 76) towards films that positioned women, whether protagonist or antagonist, as more fully rounded characters.

The *Ginger Snaps* trilogy is one example that centers women as protagonists, focusing on the relationship between the socially outcast Fitzgerald sisters, Ginger and Brigitte. In *Ginger Snaps* (2000), we see Ginger and Brigitte killing time until they can get out of their painfully middle-class Bailey Downs suburb. Both young women inhabit the liminal space between childhood and adulthood; neither have started their period and both are failing to fulfill the expectations of their parents and peers. Whilst out roaming the night-time streets, Ginger is attacked by an unknown beast at the same time as her period begins. The sisters cover up this attack but begin to notice strange changes to Ginger's body and personality, culminating in her eventual transformation into a werewolf. At the end of the film, Brigitte is forced to kill her beloved sister, but not before she has sealed their relationship with a blood pact, thus infecting herself with lycanthropy.

In *Ginger Snaps 2: Unleashed* (2004), we find Brigitte residing in a secure unit. She is engaging in an ongoing analysis of her transformation, following her self-infection with Ginger's blood. She takes monkshood to stave off these changes and cuts her flesh to test how quickly she heals. These behaviors are readily interpreted by the staff at the facility as evidence of drug use and self harm, and so Brigitte is forced to remain and partake in therapy sessions whilst fending off lecherous advances from staff. Haunted by Ginger, she is drawn into the orbit of Ghost, a young girl who is not what she seems. As Brigitte continues to transform, she uncovers that Ghost is responsible for her own mother's immolation, and that Ghost has been tracking her transformation, deciding to use Brigitte to target her enemies. The film ends with Brigitte's final transformation, trapped in a basement as Ghost waits for her mother to return home.

In *Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning* (2004), Ginger and Brigitte are lost in the Canadian wilderness when they come across the Fort Bailey colony. Whilst at the colony, the sisters uncover that the residents are under siege from a pack of werewolves. Ginger is subsequently attacked by a small boy inside the colony, and Brigitte is surreptitiously investigated by the colony doctor, who suspects lycanthropy. Ginger begins to show signs of infection and is framed for a murder, whilst Brigitte narrowly avoids being raped by one of the soldiers. Later, when the pair are given shelter by local Cree residents, Brigitte has a prophetic vision of herself murdering Ginger. This prophecy is disrupted by Ginger and the pair return to the fort. Brigitte is captured and threatened with being burnt at the

stake, before Ginger opens the colony gates, allowing the werewolf pack to enter and kill the residents. In the chaos, Ginger and Brigette leave the fort for the wilderness, but not before Brigitte, in an echo of the first film, presses her cut palm to Ginger's, sealing their lycanthropic fate.

Certain themes are explored across all three films, namely female monstrosity, subversive sexuality, the unruly female body, and marginalization. Whilst these themes are not uncommon in horror cinema that focuses on women as central characters, it is in their application alongside the werewolf genre that we find their subversive qualities. The use of the werewolf as a means of exploring the experience of the menstruating woman ties it firmly into the realm of the female, subverting traditional representations of the lycanthropic male. The *Ginger Snaps* trilogy remains one of relatively few examples of films that feature she-wolves. Prior to this film trilogy, one of the only notable examples comes from *The Howling* series (1981–1995). Thus, by the nature of its focus on she-wolves, this trilogy is by its very nature subversive within the wider canon of werewolf cinema. Each of these themes will be explored below, outlining how the trilogy uses the metaphor of lycanthropic transformation to subvert the traditional narrative of the werewolf.

4. The Monstrous Feminine and Subversive Sexuality

One of the central ways in which *Ginger Snaps* reinvents the werewolf is in its depiction of sexuality. Whilst the werewolf has always been a figure that inspires thoughts of carnal lust and aggressive sexuality, *Ginger Snaps* takes this motif and links it explicitly not only to lycanthropic monstrosity but also to the experience of adolescence. In *Ginger Snaps* (2000), the tandem events of Ginger's menses and a werewolf attack make it impossible to distinguish whether the attack was triggered by her menstrual blood (Hódosy 2017). This link between menstruation, sexual desire, and monstrosity is irrevocably entangled throughout the remainder of the film, encouraging the audience to question the interplay between these facets. This can be related to Cohen's thesis that the monster's body is a cultural body (Cohen 1996, p. 4), embodying wider social fears about menstruation and adolescent sexual desire. Tying Ginger's onset of menstruation to the werewolf attack also highlights that her body has become a site of both fascination and fear, demonstrating Cohen's thesis that fear of the monster is really desire. Later, this fear is tied to her sexual awakening which occurs in tandem with her transformation into a werewolf. The fear and disgust that surrounds menstruation in the film is an embodiment of abjection, as Kristeva describes, with menstrual blood seen as a pollutant. This is due to its border-breaching, a fluid that resides inside the body making its way outside. There is clear misogyny in this when we consider that other fluids, ones that are not inherently female, such as sperm and tears, are also internal fluids that exist outside the body but yet have no "polluting value" (Kristeva 1982, p. 71). Kristeva also argues that abjection and its associated revolt are "eminently productive of culture" (Kristeva 1982, p. 45) thus, Ginger's menstruation is not abject because it is unclean but rather because of what it represents, a disturbance to system and order and that which occurs in "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Creed 2022, p. 4). Despite menstruation's vital role in the reproductive cycle, it remains a taboo subject for many societies globally, resulting in period poverty, stigma, and gender-based violence. In some cultures, women are still ostracized during menstruation, highlighting that it continues to belong to the realm of the abject. As in Cohen's thesis, Ginger is on the threshold of becoming both a woman and a werewolf. Her menstruation is particularly taboo because it is delayed, and thus Ginger and Brigitte have remained on this threshold longer than society permits, occupying an increasingly socially uncomfortable liminality in which their bodies refuse to obey.

Lycanthropic sexuality is a generally prevalent thread within werewolf narratives, with the figure of the werewolf acting as a figure of transgressive sexual desire. But this transgression becomes even more potent when dealing with a she-wolf, who not only represents the dangers of lycanthropic desires but also the wild, feral feminine desires that women are taught to suppress. Even with contemporary 'porn' culture (Hódosy 2017), in

which women's very existence is grotesquely sexualized, Ginger's hypersexuality is still punished, even though she is ostensibly living up to the male gaze. This reveals the grisly truth, that female desire will always be a source of disgust, because it links back to agency and to understanding of female pleasure. Ginger knows what she wants, and how to get it. This, along with her tail, makes her an object of disgust. That the tail could be read as a phallocentric symbol is obvious, and when coupled with her masculine approach to sex, she is accused of appropriating the male role in her sexual dalliances. It is here that we find the tension in this reimagining of the werewolf. Whilst Ginger is engaging in actions that liberate her from the constraints of middle-class, suburban femininity, she finds that the limits of this liberation align with her level of monstrosity. She is breaking the rules of heteronormative sexual congress, rules that require women to avoid excess, to demonstrate sexual discipline and to control, and contain, desire (Hódosy 2017). As explored below, she is also breaking the rules of the submissive, orderly female body through her physical transformation. This returns us to Cohen's thesis that the fear of the monster is actually a subverted desire. Monsters frighten and corrupt, but they also attract (Cohen 1996, p. 17) and can "evoke potent escapist fantasies" (Cohen 1996, ibid.). Simultaneous attraction and repulsion are evident in both the males surrounding Ginger and in the viewer as we witness her transformation. Indeed, Cohen argues, it is this tension between desire and disgust that allows the monster to culturally endure. Through its refusal to be confined to a binary, it titillates as it terrifies, much like Ginger herself, who invokes fear in tandem with sexual desire. This is the space where the abject sits, and we see in Ginger's dance along the binary of human and lycanthrope, sexually disinterested and then voracious, a body responding to its borders, and, in Ginger's case, tearing through them.

This tryptic also allows us to explore the representation of the monstrous feminine. As Creed notes, Ginger's transformation into a *femme animale* continues a legacy that began in ancient civilizations (Creed 2017, p. 180). Just as the gorgons turned men to stone when they gazed upon, and fetishized, the female body (Creed 2017, ibid.), Ginger punishes those who seek to both fetishize and use her body for their own gain. She transmits lycanthropy to a teenage boy she has sex with, an element of the film which both reimagines the possible transmission of lycanthropy and highlights the contemporary perils of unprotected sex. As Ginger becomes more monstrous, she also becomes more sexually confident and assertive. We see in her interactions with her teenage male peers that she is sexually aggressive to the point of violence, subverting the traditional representation of passive, submissive female sexuality. At one point, one of her partners queries "who's the guy here?", identifying that Ginger is occupying a more traditionally masculine role in their sexual interaction.

Ginger Snaps demonstrates that sexual freedom is only an illusion (Hódosy 2017). Wild sexuality is something to be performed for the pleasure of the male gaze. Performative sexuality titillates the patriarchy as long as it is fueled by desire for the male who is the object of their desire. When this performance becomes reality, when desire is innately driven by the wildness within rather than without, it becomes a source of both fear and disgust. But sexuality in the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy is complex. Prior to Ginger's menarche and subsequent werewolf attack, she is indifferent to sex. The mating ritual of her peers is a source of disgust and is one of the ways in which she and Brigitte demarcate themselves. This disgust also highlights how the Fitzgerald sisters are failing at performing adolescent sexuality. They do not have crushes, flirt, or play into the pubescent fantasies of their peers. Post transformation, Ginger becomes sexually assertive and voracious, much to Brigitte's chagrin. But as we see over the remainder of the film, sex does not satiate the hunger that consumes Ginger. As we learn, the ache Ginger feels is not for sex, but to "tear everything to fucking pieces". This statement reveals another essential theme in the film, female agency and disruption of the status quo. It also confirms Ginger's willing crossing of the liminal space between monster and sister, as she starts to push back against Brigitte's attempts to stave off her transformation. She begins to embrace the monster within, who is pushing against the borders of both her physical flesh and her will to remain human. This calls to mind Cohen's thesis on category crisis, as she refuses to conform to categorization, as

human or animal, dwelling in the abject in-between as she slowly transforms. Her eventual willingness to succumb to her transformation reveals a desire to embody that which is powerful enough to disrupt this status quo, to "rip everything to fucking pieces".

Whilst Ginger is often framed as the sexually voracious Fitzgerald sister, in *Ginger Snaps 2: Unleashed* (2004) we witness Brigitte's sexuality begin to bloom. However, where Ginger reveals a lust for both sex and violence, Brigitte's sexual development is marked by repression, fear, and revulsion. Whilst never explicitly articulated, it is possible to frame Brigitte's refusal, in the final scenes of *Ginger Snaps*, to join Ginger in this next phase of her journey and her subsequent attempts to stave off transformation as a rejection of socially and culturally ingrained mores that present a tie between menstruation and sexual availability, thus positioning the menstruating woman as the sexually mature woman, something Brigitte appears determined to deter. In *Ginger Snaps 2* (2004), her ambiguous feelings towards sex, in this context heteronormative sex, are evident when she rejects the advances of a predatory member of staff in the rehab center, behavior that can be inferred as an attempt to push back against both her lycanthropic transformation and her transition from teenage girl to adult woman. As in the first film, Brigitte is desperate to stave off her biological development. In the second film, we see how she is forced into sexualized interactions during her stay in the rehab facility, against her will, further highlighting wider social issues around sexual coercion and violence. The rehabilitation center reinforces the notion of the importance of engagement in sex, with inmates encouraged to engage in communal autoeroticism (Hódosy 2017). In a dreamlike sequence, which may be a fantasy of Brigitte's, the residents of the facility collectively masturbate. This scene recalls Ginger's statement in the first film that "it feels so… good, Brigitte. It's like touching yourself. You know every move… right on the fucking dot. And after, you see fucking fireworks. Supernovas. I'm a goddamn force of nature. I feel like I could do just about anything", tying together both exploratory sexuality via masturbation and lycanthropic transformation. This intermingling of therapeutic treatment and sexuality reinforces what Hódosy refers to as "striptease culture" (Hódosy 2017). This involves seeing sex as a motivating factor, and a reward for those who are appropriately behaved self-disciplined subjects. However, the enforced nature of this sexualized cure thus turns it into another form of control and domination, as Taylor, the male nurse, uses drugs to coerce sexual favors from residents. This transforms this 'cure' into abuse, reinforcing the critique of postfeminism (Hódosy 2017) by identifying how sexual exploitation is present even in apparently therapeutic settings.

Sexuality in tandem with the excess body hair intrinsic to the female werewolf help reveal the "masculine in the feminine" (Priest 2017, p. 17) as the sexuality that may initially seem to be the height of seductiveness morphs into more masculine-coded displays of sexual self-confidence. It has been suggested that this "non-normative feminine sexuality" not only appropriates the ideals of the masculine but has the potential to also incorporate the corporeality of the male (Priest 2017, ibid.). However, this does require acceptance of gender norms, particularly around sexuality. The female body has long been associated with an ability to devour; we only need look at the myth of vagina dentata for confirmation of this. Indeed, folklore was often used to repeat these myths, with one example coming from Estonia (Metsvahi 2017, p. 37) in which the vagina is presented as the apex of beauty but also a devourer of the penis, making it comparable to the bloody jaws of the wolf. Alongside this transgressive sexuality, the "libidinous, irresistible she wolf" (Cininas 2010, p. 9) represents a threat to bodily order, displaying excessive hirsutism that violates social mores around acceptable women's bodies.

5. Hair Where Hair Was Not There Before: The Werewolf Body

The werewolf is one of the most extreme examples of body horror when considering classic monsters. It is interesting to consider the nature of this transformation; it could be framed as an inversion, in which the hair, teeth, and claws are hiding *beneath* the smooth (relatively) hairless skin of the human form and so the human subject essentially inverts to

reveal the beast. Or it could be an external change, hair growing *from* the smooth human skin, claws erupting from nail beds, teeth bursting through gums, changing the external facade of the human subject from the outside. Whether the werewolf hides under the skin or changes it in another way, the transformation sequence is pivotal in any werewolf text. One of the most significant of these changes is the excess body hair, which covers the body. This hair is a useful narrative device, helping demarcate the transition from human to animal, but is particularly interesting when explored within the context of the she-wolf.

Hirsutism has often been linked to lycanthropy, with particularly hairy human bodies being likened to animals. Indeed, Ambras syndrome, also known as hypertrichosis, is often called 'werewolf' syndrome. Excessively hirsute individuals have always invoked anxieties around what it is to be human, and at what point we transgress from the realm of human into animal (Cininas 2017, p. 80). This is particularly true for hairy women, who trigger these anxieties around violation of bodily integrity (Cininas 2017, p. 85). These anxieties are not unexpected given the focus on the hairless girlish body as a clean, sexually attractive ideal. The framing of hairy women has various complexities. For example, during the fifteenth century, we find representations of saints, Mary Magdalene in particular, who's naked bodies are covered with tight, modest curls (Cininas 2017, p. 78). This modesty is in direct opposition to the female werewolf's transgressive, and aggressive, furry pelt. It is interesting how, in this context, Mary Magdalene's fur is designed to repel men and thus preserve her virtue. It also serves to reinforce ideas of innocence and lack of vanity, framing Mary Magdalene as living innocently among nature, freed from the "vices of civilisation" (Cininas 2017, ibid.). This is in direct contrast to the framing of lycanthropic witches demonized via iconography during the witch (and werewolf) trials of Europe during this time period.

Given the associated extreme physical transformation, the body and its borders are central to the werewolf trope. This relates to Cohen's thesis that the monster polices the border of the possible. The example used by Cohen to illustrate this thesis is the myth of Lycaon (Cohen 1996, p. 12), the first werewolf, who is transformed into a wolf after serving human flesh to the gods, highlighting that the wolf has always served as the Other for society to pin its monstrosity to. Thus, Cohen argues, the monster polices the border of the possible via valuing some behaviors and devaluing, or even making dangerous, others. When exploring the presentation of the female werewolf, we find that both non-normative female bodies and issues of corporeality arise (Priest 2017, p. 10). In order to avoid detection, the werewolf body must be consistently monitored and disciplined. In *Ginger Snaps* (2000), this monitoring is doubly significant because it also requires adherence to contemporary consumer culture and heteronormative standards of femininity (Hódosy 2017). This highlights how the borders of the possible have shifted in tandem with social developments. Now, the danger does not lurk in the woods, policed by a witch or big bad wolf, but lies in the unchecked female body that does not regulate its borders sufficiently to adhere to these beauty standards. This is evidenced in Ginger's ongoing battle with her changing body, as she shaves thick, animal hair and tapes her tail to her thigh. The threat of the hairy female body is not limited to discussions about lady lycanthropes; however, the figure of the female werewolf does take this fear to its extreme. The fear around hirsute women is manifold, but one suggestion for this fear and disgust can be seen to center on the fact that female body hair also reveals the 'feminine within the masculine', and this is impermissible under patriarchy, making the hairy female body a threat in its refusal to conform to the absolute 'Other' in opposition to the male body. The pubescent body, particularly the pubescent woman's body, is central to the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy. In *Ginger Snaps* (2000), we see this horror arise in tandem with the onset of menstruation which, symbolically, culturally and in folklore, is a significant time for change and transition. In *Ginger Snaps: Unleashed* (2004), the horror of the changing body is much more explicitly physical and external as Brigitte's body begins to break down under her attempts to stave off transformation. Western society has a long, and complicated, relationship with body hair and fur. This complexity increases when fur is not an external adornment but is grown

organically, especially on the female body (Cininas 2017, p. 77). As one declaration from the 1600s suggests, “woman is by nature smooth and delicate; and if she have many hairs she is a monster” (Cininas 2017, ibid.). Unfortunately, this willful misunderstanding of the nature of women’s bodies, and the hair that naturally occurs upon it, persists despite multiple waves of feminism.

When considering abjection, as defined by Kristeva (Kristeva 1982, p. 10), we see how there is little that could be more abject than the pubescent werewolf female body. As a “versipellous monster” (Creed 2017, p. 188), the werewolf is a shape, or more accurately, a skin shifter, that engages in regular metamorphosis from human to wolf and back again in a process that can be understood as a lycanthropic rebirth. In visual media, especially in horror cinema, this transformation is a pivotal sequence and highlights not only the character’s transformation but also the “thinness of the human skin” (Creed 2017, ibid.). As Kristeva points out, the skin is a fragile container that prevents the inside from breaching its boundary and revealing itself outside the body. Abjection is often the process by which that which is inside becomes visible outside. This is particularly relevant in *Ginger Snaps* (2000), in which Ginger is a teenager who is both menstruating and becoming a werewolf. As Creed suggests, the female werewolf is more unstable than the male and this is linked to this notion of transformation, in tandem with the ‘normal’ transformations women’s bodies experience, including menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, and so on. This highlights an enduring belief that, as a result of these bodily shifts, women are more attuned to nature and to the animal world. It is not accidental that menstruation occurs for Ginger in tandem with lycanthropic transformation. In this way, *Ginger Snaps* (2000) reinvents the werewolf trope by linking it explicitly to the female body. This link is emphasized throughout the film, as Ginger and Brigitte verbalize their desire to avoid “the curse” and are left horrified by a biology film that presents menstruation as a repulsive and unwanted thing. The attack of the Beast of Bailey Downs alongside this frames Ginger’s menarche as a gateway to the darker side of nature. The werewolf as femme animal is “ hermaphroditic, a parthenogenetic fantasy” (Creed 2017, p. 191) and, like the werewolf, Ginger is in a state of flux, blurring the boundaries of human/animal and adult/child. This ties into Cohen’s thesis that the monster dwells at the gates of difference, as Ginger blurs these boundaries, reflecting society’s discomfort when confronted by a woman who does not conform to submissive norms. If we return to the wider sociocultural context in which *Ginger Snaps* was created, we can see how Ginger’s evolution from willing outsider to monstrous feminine werewolf reflects the erosion of the gender norms of previous decades. The reinvention of the werewolf and *Ginger Snaps*’s subversion of tropes of the genre stem from this erosion, as the films explore the abject nature of female sexuality, and reproduction, from an original perspective that disrupts patriarchal myths about women (Creed 2022, p. 10).

The concept of the female werewolf, particularly in the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy, provides an outlet for women to derive power and delight from their abjection. However, Creed has argued that embracing this abjection, which allows woman access to nature, her own embodiment, and the unconscious (elements that are often lauded in she wolf narratives), serves to exclude the woman from the world in which she seeks to define herself. This leads to death of the subject, resulting in the human inside the werewolf being forced into a descent into the abject. This event is evident in all three of the *Ginger Snaps* texts, as Ginger and Brigitte, both separately and together, give into their lycanthropic form. Given that this film trilogy has remained popular in the almost quarter-century since its release, it appears that this descent is not unwelcome for viewers. This may be in part because it allows the viewer to vicariously satiate both curiosity around and desire for an embrace of pre-social and animalistic states, leaving the werewolf, and by extension the viewer, in the place where ‘I’ no longer exists, where instead carnality, bloodlust, and violence reside. This embrace of the abject can be liberating, and it can thrill an audience to enjoy the perverse desire of the werewolf from a distance, but Creed advises caution, as both viewer and werewolf subject can become lost within this liminal abject space, a fate we see befall the Fitzgerald sisters.

6. Social Class and Monstrous Marginalization

One of the key ways in which *Ginger Snaps* (2000) subverts traditional notions of the werewolf is in its exploration of marginalization and social class within a middle-class suburban context. Within this context, it is possible to view their transformation into werewolves as a manifestation of their marginalization, reflecting how their outsider status is tied to outside fears of their monstrosity. As discussed above, the sisters are made monstrous first by their refusal to conform to the norms of their peers, and then through their transformation. Indeed, the sisters are marginalized via their outsider status, gender, and social class, allowing us to see the films as a commentary on the punishment faced by those who do not conform to middle-class American values. In the second film, we see how this refusal to engage is medicalized, manifesting in removal from the society Brigitte refuses to conform to. What emerges in the first two films of the trilogy is thus a narrative about the horrors of growing up in the banality of white, middle-class suburbia (Molloy 2007). The werewolf is a transgressive figure and the female werewolf is doubly so. In the Fitzgerald sisters, we see two transgressive human subjects who are already confronting the limitations of their environment and disrupting the status quo. We see this play out in *Ginger Snaps* (2000) as Brigitte and Ginger refuse to conform to their mother's, and their wider communities', ideas of what middle-class suburban teenage girls should want.

The evil of these banal horrors is further explored in *Ginger Snaps 2* (2004), as we find Brigitte forced into a rehabilitation clinic, medicated and monitored to ensure her behavior, and body, does not violate established borders. Using self harm and addiction as a metaphor, the second film explores how the sanctions of the social workers, "representatives of normative social control" (Hódosy 2017), are used to punish Brigitte's unruly body. Alongside the other residents, we see how Brigitte's refusal to conform to society's expectations has resulted in her forced removal from society. Within the walls of this clinic, we also witness how this marginalization is weaponized against those subjected to this 'othering' as others seek to manipulate the situation for their own gain. For Tyler, this gain comes from coercing, and forcing, young women into sexual favors. For Ghost, this gain comes from manipulating Brigitte and Alice into harming her enemies, resulting in the final imprisonment of Brigitte as she transforms into a werewolf. As noted above, sexuality within this institutional context is one of the few behaviors that are not policed, but rather encouraged. This is interesting given that the goal appears to be 'educating' residents to be submissive, and obedient, members of society. This reinforces that "sexual liberation" is necessary as part of societal obedience, particularly for the young women in the rehab center, to comply with patriarchy's desires for sexually available, and yet compliant, women, further reinforcing that "liberating emancipation is illusory" (Hódosy 2017).

Marginalization and patriarchal control are also prevalent in the third installment of the trilogy, *Ginger Snaps Back* (2004), in which the Fitzgerald sisters find themselves in a 19th-century outpost in the Canadian wilderness. Facing patriarchal control, threats of sexual violence, attempted immolation (a choice that clearly invokes the legacy of the witch trials), and isolation, this film contextualizes the history that embeds in the contemporary settings of the first two films. In the choices made by Ginger and Brigitte across all three films, the viewer is required to confront the truth, that however they try to resist or push back against the rules society imposes, they are punished. Ginger embraces this in *Ginger Snaps* (2000), refusing to return to "being nobody", of accepting the role of "slut. . .bitch. . .tease, or the virgin girl next door", instead embracing her orgasmic bloodlust (Cininas 2010, p. 8). Brigitte resists, continuing to self-medicate with monkshood in an attempt to stave off the embrace of her animal side. She also conforms to the expected role of maternal protector with Ghost, realizing too late that she is being manipulated. This leads to the return of the status quo, with both monsters being killed at the end. These deaths are literal, in the case of Ginger, and implied in Brigitte's case. In the third film, both death and survival are possible as the sisters leave the confines of their restrictive social context in order to embrace their lycanthropic freedoms. This ending is ambiguous; on the one hand, it can be interpreted

as a liberating embrace of the animal within. However, it can also be interpreted as a negative ending. As both young women enter the wilderness, the viewer is reminded that monstrosity will never be embraced by society, and the only freedom the sisters can find is in isolation from human civilization. The monsters may not die at the end of the third film, but they are cast out, literally, into the cold. This ambiguity reinforces an uncomfortable truth about the trilogy, that whilst it presents a feminist take on the werewolf genre, the ending of each installment still conforms to the monster movie trope of the monster dying, either literally or in a social death that confirms their abject Other outsider status, at the end of the film. That is not to say that these films do not offer a powerful reimagining of the werewolf, or that they do not add to a growing body of films that centers women's voices, but the trilogy remains constrained by the wider sociocultural context in which it was created. As discussed, the monster signifies the abject, and danger is born out of this violation of cultural categories, so destruction of the monster is needed to curtail its threat to the social order (Pinedo 1997, p. 22). It is interesting to see how later films (see *Teeth* (2007) for a relevant example) confronted viewers with the survival of the monster, further demonstrating the shift in attitude that the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy started to explore.

7. Fanged Feminism: Embracing the Monster Within

Finally, the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy subverts the traditional stereotype of the werewolf by directly tying this experience to a feminist critique of the experience of Western adolescence. One of the ways this is explored is through a focus on the strength of the relationship between Ginger and Brigitte, rather than the more common representation of the lone male werewolf. In the first film, this bond endures throughout Ginger's transformation, despite Brigitte's fear. In the second film, Brigitte is haunted by Ginger, who encourages her transformation and embrace of her animal side. In the third film, this bond is cemented as both sisters choose to embrace their feral feminine and live as lycanthropes in the wilderness. This is a film trilogy that explores these relationships, and other feminist themes including the power of sisterhood and the challenges faced by young women living in contemporary patriarchal societies, under which they are supposed to be sexually liberated, autonomous women whilst still being punished for seeking sexual freedom and autonomy. Ginger's transformation is a visual metaphor for the rage this double standard evokes. This rage, and its expression, can be tied to Creed's interpretation of the experience of Kristeva's abjection as an intimate revolt, a questioning of one's own being. This links to the concept of abjection, and horror, as a means of disturbing, and often destroying, existing identity resulting in the collapse of boundaries and thus the possibility of revolt and rebirth (Creed 2022, p. 4). This process occurs during the 'dark night of abjection' Ginger and Brigitte face across the trilogy, in which they are first externally Othered and made monstrous, before seeing the strength that can be found in abjection as it "points to the fragility of the patriarchal symbolic order (Creed 2022, ibid.).

In the third installment, *Ginger Snaps Back* (2004), we see how these standards and restrictions have persisted throughout history, with the Fitzgerald sisters facing punishment for not conforming to the expected roles within the colony. This offers a critique on the ways in which the same fears and anxieties about women's power, agency, and sexuality have persisted across time, resulting in various forms of social control. As stated at the start of this paper, we can never remove our monsters from their context, and it must be acknowledged that this is a fictional interpretation of this historical period. But we do see in the treatment of the sisters, most notably in the attempted burning of Brigitte, the echoes of documented historical events that sought to terrorize, demonize, and control women. As Oliver notes, "every society is founded on the abject- constructing boundaries and jettisoning the antisocial- every society may have its own abject. In all cases, the abject threatens the unity/identity of both society and the subject. It calls into question the boundaries under which they are constructed" (Oliver 1993, p. 56). This continuation of the abject is highlighted across the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy, as the Fitzgerald sisters are framed by their social context as the abject Other at various points in history.

However, whilst this paper has argued that the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy reinvents the classical image of the werewolf as a monster, it is apparent that the male werewolf has erroneously been presented as the pack leader in these representations. As previous researchers have suggested, the confluence between moon cycles and menstruation can be traced to the beginnings of civilization (Cininas 2010, p. 5), thus predating the concerns of the wolf man. As a result, given the link between lycanthropy and lunar cycles, perhaps the wolf man should be framed as the Other, with the she-wolf being the default setting. The fact that this is not the case, and indeed, that part of the monstrosity of the male werewolf is found in his (often unwilling) embrace of the "feminine within the masculine", only provides further evidence for the inherent femininity of the werewolf, a figure that continues to threaten patriarchy through violence, lust, and the untamable body. The *Ginger Snaps* trilogy, now over twenty years old, presents a potent exploration this threat, although it remains limited by the constraints outlined above, and restrains itself using the ties of social interest, namely returning us to the status quo. However, the influence of this trilogy is felt in later films that have defied these social interests, allowing the women at the center of the narratives to transgress, and survive, social boundaries. Whilst *Ginger Snaps* may not be directly referenced in these films, its influence is seen in later works that combine horror, coming of age narratives, and feminist themes, including *Teeth* (2007) and *Raw* (2016).

8. Conclusions

The werewolf has dug its claws into human folklore, and society, for centuries. Given its longevity, there are a number of tropes that we have come to expect to see in werewolf narratives. Whilst it may initially seem that the werewolf is a male figure, we can see that female werewolves have been part of these lycanthropic narratives throughout history. However, as our storytelling moved into the 20th century, visual representations of women as werewolves became sparse. The *Ginger Snaps* trilogy reinvented the werewolf myth with its focus on female adolescence, sexuality, and identity. Blending body horror, psychological horror, and feminism, the series provides a unique take on the werewolf genre, moving beyond traditional lore into a novel interpretation of a culturally ingrained archetype. The result is an intimate, socially conscious text that explores the monstrous feminine and the reality of teenage girlhood. The strength of this trilogy lies in its use of the werewolf as metaphor for both the horrors of puberty and the societal limits placed on women's sexual subjectivity (Miller 2005, p. 281). As Miller argues, these films demystify both menstruation and werewolf mythology through the creation of composite ideas of lycanthropy and menstruation (Miller 2005, ibid.), offering a feminist critique of how society fears and thus pathologizes feminine power. Rather than offering a straightforward take on the werewolf myth, the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy challenges these narratives, presenting instead a subversive exploration of gender, power, and autonomy. Ginger's death in *Ginger Snaps* (2000) and Brigitte's enforced transformation and imprisonment in *Ginger Snaps 2* (2004) conform to traditional narratives and remind us both that the monster must die at the end to return us to the status quo and that women will be punished for failing to live up to social conventions surrounding femininity and sexual agency. This penalization following the empathic portrayal of the sisters reminds us that there are no easy transformations, and that transformation must be accompanied by pain. This subverts our relationship to the werewolf, allowing us to see the power of embracing our monstrosity whilst reminding us of the inevitability of society's judgment if we do. As Miller has stated, in the Fitzgerald sisters, we see "an awakening of tremendously powerful notions of self, sexuality, and female power. . .that refuse to be sublimated or redefined to fit the conventional expectations for female behavior" (Miller 2005, p. 8), using the werewolf motif in a true reimagining of what it means to be made monstrous, and how we step into our power when we refuse to be ashamed of the animal inside.

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