

Woman in Red and the Object in Unni Lindell's Crime Thriller *Rødhette*

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Unni Lindell's thriller Rødhette (2008) är en subversion av den traditionella folksagan "Rödluvan". Romanen präglas av en kvinnlig mördare som jagar män och baserar sig dels på en medeltida, muntlig sagotradition av kvinnliga berättare, dels på nyare versioner förmedlade av manliga författare. Medan färgen röd i den muntliga traditionen markerar kvinnlig initiation, indikerad med menarche, betecknar rött förkastad kvinnlig agens och patriarkalisk underkastelse i den nedtecknade traditionen. Den undermedvetna narrativen om färgen röd både upprepas och kritiserar i romanen. Kvinnliga mördare är ofta kritiker av patriarkatet och marginaliserade till objektets begränsade plats i samhället i samhällsengagerad kriminallitteratur. Denna artikel undersöker en kvinnlig mördare, objekt och färgen röd i Lindells Rødhette. Kvinnlig initiation är i hennes narrativ konstruerad på den maskulina hjälte-myten och objekt, vilka aktiverar en cykel av kvinnligt våld. Analysen bygger på kvinnlig initiation och socialt objekt samt diskuterar kvinnlig identitet i relation till könsöverskridning, kropp och sexualitet. Genom våldssamma överskridningar av objekt och initiation i hjältecykeln skiftar protagonisten från ett oskuldsfullt barn till ett traumatiserat offer och en mördarjägare, för att slutligen bli mamma. Endast genom att övervinna objektet, kan huvudfiguren fullgöra initiationen, hjälte- och mördarcykeln samt nå jämlikhet och rättvisa.

Keywords: the object, crime fiction, hero narrative, intertextuality, Little Red Riding Hood

1 Introduction

"Little Red Riding Hood" is one of the most well-known stories in the Western canon of folk tales. We are all familiar with the girl in a red hood, sent by her mother to take a basket filled with treats to her ailing grandmother who lived in a hut beyond the dark forest, through which the girl had to find her way without straying from the safety of the path leading to the warmth of the grandmother's hearth. We also remember her encounter with a sinister figure that in the end proved to be a devious wolf, and her escape from death through the heroic intervention of the hunter who killed the beast and thereby saved both the grandmother and the girl. This version in which the male celebrates over the female is but one modulation of the story of the girl with the red marker. In the earlier, medieval versions of the narrative, circulated through women's storytelling, the centrality of the female and the girl's initiation to womanhood were highlighted. Moreover, several contemporary rewritings, of which Angela Carter's wolf stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (2006) are perhaps the most widely read and researched ones by academics, also join and become formative of this continuum in which the girl of the male tradition who bears the metaphorical female stigma of the color red turns this stigma into a symbol of female subjectivity, of strength, agency and heroism.

Following in the footsteps of Carter and others, Norwegian crime writer Unni Lindell features the medieval motif in a contemporary guise in her crime thriller *Rødhet* (2008; hereafter *R* in references). This psychological thriller is a story of violation of integrity, trauma, murder and, paradoxically, healing through the abject act of murder. With strong emphasis on femininity through its central characters, it is also a narrative of gender and the susceptibility of power in societies based on patriarchal ideologies. The narrative revolves around a dysfunctional family of three generations of women: a demented and delusional grandmother confined to her bed in an old people's home, her alcoholic daughter and absent mother incapable of taking care of her own three daughters, all grown up at the time of the 'now' of the novel. Of these daughters the eldest is the murderer, who several years after her encounter with the "wolf", DI Holger Eliassen, begins to kill men in an act of repression of the trauma caused by the initial meeting with the violator. Eliassen, the representative of the detective agency, and Judith Marner, the murderer, are both caught in a cycle of pursuit of each other without recognition until the final encounter.

The story is constructed on the circular structure of the traditional hero narrative consisting of a number of seminal stages of crossing thresholds and negotiating borders (see Campbell 1988). The patriarchal hero narrative essentially assumes a male protagonist and reserves the role of the passive object for women characters (see Morris 1993: 16–34). In Lindell's novel, and any contemporary crime novel featuring a female murderer, the tables are turned in that the straightforward male agency of the conventional hero narrative is rendered ambiguous through the confusing connection between woman and violence and the fact that the traditional male position is occupied by a woman. This ambiguity is present in the ways in which the *male hero narrative* is in this novel converted into a narrative of *female initiation* and *abject*. The color red, absent in the medieval female tradition but central in the later written versions, also runs through Lindell's novel as the activator of the cycle of female violence, an ambiguous marker of femininity and a motif incorporating critique towards patriarchal ideology.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the color red as a female motif in *Rødhet*, through intertextuality and the *abject*. In the novel, the color red returns in different patterns with shifting meanings and potentials. Red is a color which carries various personal, cultural and intertextual connotations. The intertextual references to the color in the novel interrupt the narrative flow and displace both the personal and historical narrative time by invoking memories of past times and hurts. The color red demonstrates a female essence which comprises values of female agency versus victimization (Intertexts of red and the tradition of "Little Red Riding Hood" are outlined in chapter 2.). In addition, in Lindell's novel red incorporates novel references to female violence and resurrection, which eventually completes the initiation cycle (chapter 3.). *Female initiation* features as the focal point for the emergence of the ambiguous force of red. The color emerges as a sign or symbol of what is abjected in the novel. The *abject* can be described as a

black hole which repeatedly ruptures the identity of the protagonist, an indication of death and thus of dispersal and destruction in the middle of life. Because the abject marks transformative and traumatic life events such as the crossing from childhood to independence, it also frames female initiation. Female initiation and the hero cycle with its different formative stages (see Campbell 1988 and van Gennepe 2004) represent points of abjection in the Marner narrative.

Julia Kristeva (1982; see also 1990) examines the abject from the perspectives of social and maternal abjection, which can be further developed in the context of trauma. The mother, whom the infant traumatically abjects in order to enter into language and subjecthood, institutes the maternal abject which continues to influence future flows of abjection which rupture the identity of the subject. Since the psychological pattern of maternal abjection resurfaces in adolescence, it plays a vital part in female initiation into adulthood. This means that the abject can be highly regenerative; the maternal, or semi-otic, center is a center not only for destruction and bodily drives but also for creativity, thought, nurture and regeneration. It constitutes the core of maternal empowerment. At the same time, the abjected maternal reference also explains the marginalization of the feminine in the masculine symbolic order. In Kristevan aesthetics, woman is a personification of the suppressed social abject in society, a reading which expresses fear of and mutilates the female body. As such the abject encounter is a trauma, which threatens to consume the subject from the inside. It is an injury of the mind told through the double narration of life and death (see Caruth 1996: 3, 60–64). In Lindell's novel, the traumas of being abused and neglected by the mother together with the encounter with the "evil man" in the forest are infested with the abject: the mother composes the repressed maternal, and Judith's violence is triggered by her position as social abject contained in her femininity and accentuated by the red marker; yet, the initiation offers an escape.

In what follows, we discuss the intertexts of the tradition of "Little Red Riding Hood" and the color red. Then we identify first, the abject threatening the protagonist with disintegration and second, explore how the girl defeats the abject in the hero cycle thus gaining agency over her body and sexuality. By embracing violence, as a new reading of red, Judith Marner defeats her childhood traumas of attempted rape, abuse and neglect.

2 Intertextuality, Tradition and the Color Red

The novel *Rødhette* draws on two distinct traditions of the folktale "Little Red Riding Hood". First, it builds on the fairly unknown oral tale "The Story of Grandmother" (Delarue 1989) circulated by female storytellers in Medieval Europe and second, on two written versions, Charles Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" (1697) and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Rotkäppchen" (1812). In Lindell's *Rødhette*, the two folktale traditions, the feminine and the masculine, together with their social intertexts pour into the

narrative and continue to represent both the victim versus dominator archetype and suggest a return to female initiation and agency, which also fractures the subconscious narrative of the red marker.

In the oral narrative, the color red marks female initiation, communicated through menarche and the shapeshifting werewolf impersonating as the grandmother after having killed her. Surprisingly for the contemporary reader of the folktale, the red hood and the male wolf are not part of the plot. Instead, red figures in the story in a different way: Female sagacity and strength are shared between generations in the sacrificial cannibalistic meal at the cottage, where the adolescent girl, invited by the lycanthrope, drinks the blood and feasts on the procreative parts of her grandmother's cadaver (Verdier 1997: 104–110).

What is demonstrated in the initiation is a regression to the maternal abject before the youth confirms her adult and sexual identity. In Kristevan (1990: 8–10) theory of abjection, also the adolescent rejects the maternal by crying and spitting out the (m)other with horror and yields to the new adult identity of the subject. The werewolf assumes the role of the maternal abject and the prime mover of the initiation. In the sacrifice and the following sexual intercourse when the girl joins the wolf in the bed, the maternal werewolf and the neophyte mingle for a moment, only to separate again. Thus, the girl literally incorporates maternal power from the intercourse and the bloody sacrifice of the older generation. Since *Rødhette* is in a dialogue with both the male and female tradition, Judith is initiated by the male wolf while she retrieves the lost agency from her mother.

In mediaeval times, the color red was commonly associated with features of martyrdom, royal blood and great bravery (Butler Greenfield 2005: 19). These are indicated in the oral creativity through the blood sacrifice, menstruation and also empowerment. Throughout the story, the pubescent is brave and exercises control over the lycanthrope. When interrogated by the werewolf about which road to take to the cottage – the one of needles or pins – she is in charge of the decision making. When the female child recognizes the werewolf in drag in grandmother's bed, she assigns her own destiny by playing tricks on the beast and decamps. To summarize, the color red promotes female initiation and authority written in menstrual blood and valor through the sacrifice of the maternal.

In the Perrault and the Grimm versions, the color red takes on new morals. The male authorship comprises a male wolf and cloaks the girl in a red hood, which already in the 17th century carried contradictory values of social prestige versus immorality (Zipes 1993 26). Medieval and Renaissance Europe were strictly color coded by law and customs. Bright colors such as red were entitled to the affluent only who could afford such grandeur. Brilliant red garments were favored by nobility as a social marker in order to mark off lower classes. Contrariwise, red was also associated with the devil, witchcraft

and the prostitute (see Zipes 1993: 77) For the Church the color red epitomized woman in equally ambiguous terms: Red is the color of Virgin Mary as well as the sinful Whore of Babylon, the Scarlet Woman drunken on “the blood of saints [and] martyrs” (The Holy Bible 2011: 600). These associations are visible in the male tradition of the story, which has been interpreted as narratives of rape by scholars at large (see Bettelheim (1979); see also Dundes (1989); Zipes (1993). Dressed in the sinful color red, the youth attracts the wolf’s gaze among the trees in the forest and indirectly causes the violation by behaving irresponsibly because if she had obeyed her mother and not strayed from the path, she would have come clean. Instead the girl is sexually consumed by the starving male wolf and unjustly punished with death. What was the girl’s business sauntering all alone in the wood in the first place?

In the masculine story tradition, female values are circumscribed by patriarchal law and violence. The Perrault and the Grimm versions reflect large social changes in Europe starting in the 17th century, promoting women’s inferior legal status and the changing view of the body. The conditions of the human body and sexuality migrate from frank and open into Renaissance purgatorial ideals of control and individuality. Through the new discourse sexuality deteriorated into a suppressed matter (Foucault 1998: 3–10). Since especially “female nature” was considered dangerous and chaotic in its sensuality, women had to be protected from their wild nature (Zipes 1993: 71–75). By reappropriating old folktales and customs and introducing new ethics, Church and the state approved man to dominate over woman and children, who confront social abjection. Simultaneously, as sexual behavior and customs waned towards puritan restrictions in the 19th century, the fame of the color red declined. The color was no longer associated with social prestige; instead it waxed into a vulgar institution of promiscuous behavior and shame.

Still today, the subconscious narrative of the red discolors attitudes towards the female gender. In the tradition of the tale, the girl is a slut who deserves to be raped (Zipes 1993: 8–11). This fixture of red generates shame and hurts the female reader. According to Elisabeth Freeman (2010: 61–63, 68–70), “temporal drag” is the repetition of gendered stories from the past through intertextual codes such as clothes and hairstyles displayed on the contemporary body. In Lindell’s novel, this negative association is rendered volatile. On the one hand it serves as the starting point for the narrative: when the protagonist’s grandmother Berit Marnier in *Rødhet* stitches the home-sewn red dress on the little girl’s body, she subconsciously reproduces the story of the stigmatized red, related to memories, hurts and failures of past generations of women. The negativity is further emphasized in the soiling of the red dress, as exemplified in the quote on the next page, and later, in Judith’s hands and feet which are covered in blood when she returns from the woods. As the child walks beside the sunny and summery headland in her little red dress on her way to the secret tree in the woods, which she shares with her sisters, she seems to communicate to the reader: “I tell the contemporary story of my

own gender by telling a prior story of gender – her gender” (Freeman 2010: 70). On the other hand, the intertextual relationship pointing towards negativity is also emphasized in Lindell’s description of the meeting between the girl and the wolf, which draws on the style of the earlier written versions in producing the seminal scene of the novel, the first encounter between the child and the “wolf”:

The little girl walked beside the headland. [...] Her red dress was mottled with soil and cream. On her feet she had tiny canvas shoes. She was on her way to the tree [in the wood]. He lifted his head and looked at the child. While he stood there with sweat running down his forehead, he got an evil thought. [...] The little girl had still not seen him. She sang and had knelt down beside a cluster of daisies. The jogger felt that something was taking over him, something dark and dangerous. Little girls should not walk alone in the woods. His pulse didn’t slow down while he rested, instead it rose (*R* 9–10, our translation).

However, the novel also strongly promotes a narrative of femininity based on the maternal abject, as a source of regeneration pointing towards agency and freedom through a symbolic sacrifice of the mother. In this process, the color red plays a central role.

3 The Color Red and the Making of Judith Marner

The color red runs through Judith’s story from the first encounter with the “wolf” to the murder of Holger Eliassen. It appears in different guises: in the red dress she is wearing when she meets the “wolf” for the first and last time, her bleeding hands and knees, or other red signs to signify her agency, worn by her when she kills her victims, such as a knitted red cap, red coat or red lipstick. Red is an oppressive and omnipresent reminder of the abject through its connection with girlhood and femininity as well as death. In Kristevan theory, women and children are marginalized; girls are subject to double social abjection – first as females and then as children. In Judith Marner’s case, her vulnerability as a female child and woman, the traumatic encounter with the “wolf”, and the color red are intertwined in abjection which she overcomes in the hero cycle.

3.1 The Girl in Red

When Judith walks beside the headland, red is a positive color, but it changes character after the sexual assault by the jogger, to whom the girl later refers to as the “wolf”. The attempted rape is the call to adventure which initiates the girl into the hero cycle. When she emerges from the woods with bloody hands and knees, red has transgressed into a symbol of danger, of fear and agency.

Although Judith first declines the call, she begins to exhibit deviant agentic behavior. The assault, which is a sad repetition of the narrative of rape in the patriarchal story tradition, is disrupted by Judith who bravely defends herself against the perpetrator. Her courageous behavior consequently fractures the stereotype of the female victim. Yet, when she arrives at Grandmother Berit’s house bruised and bloodstained and in a torn

dress, she does not receive sympathy but is corrected for behaving immorally. Good girls are gentle, well-behaved and helpful; they do not get into fights, soil their clothes or run away. Pressure to conform to the gender hierarchy comes from inside the family as well as the educational system and the community ultimately guarded by police detective Holger Eliassen. Throughout her childhood, Judith comports well in school, helps her grandmother and sisters and eventually in adulthood succeeds as a photographer. Simultaneously, her identity is threatened by fragmentation.

Judith represses the memory of the perpetrator: As the straying subject suppresses the maternal to keep the abject at bay, the trauma victim dismisses the original event in self-defense to camouflage the inflicted wound (Kristeva 1982: 8; Caruth 1996: 5–6). This leads to the constant reappearance of the traumatic event and activates the murder cycle. The trauma or the abject never leaves the contaminated alone but returns to haunt its victim in repetitive anxiety attacks and nightmares. The external violence inflicted on Judith's young body eventually results in the abjection of her mirror image through the creation of an abjected double, the Fourth Sister, onto whom she projects the murdering agency. This Fourth Sister appears in a diary which Judith receives at the pubertal age of eleven, around the onset of menarche, and she commits her first murder at fourteen. Thus, menarche, as a reference to female initiation in the oral tradition, functions as a mentor for the girl on her hero quest, through which the Fourth Sister materializes.

Her first victim is her maternal uncle Olaf Marner who abuses the sisters sexually as minors:

Uncle Olaf comes by when mother Berit goes to her sewing circle. He pretends to be the babysitter. And it's a secret, so we can't tell mother Berit. [...] When Judith was in the kitchen to brew coffee, he always sat down in the rocking chair with Lisbeth on his lap and read her fairytales from the Grimm book, while rocking the chair back and forth. And then it was Judith's turn. [...] We don't want to rock in the rocking chair with Uncle Olaf. But he says that we for sure have to. And then he laughs. And then we laugh too. (R 88, 112, our translation)

Uncle Olaf capitalizes his dominant position and exercises control over the girls by repeatedly violating their bodies and budding sexuality. In matters of child abuse, Jeanette Sundhall (2012: 29, 173) explains that because minors carry reduced legal rights in matters of nominee and voting entitlement, the child victim lacks agency and is contingent on adult norms and authority to prosper. The Marner girls remain, accordingly, deprived of a voice to speak up against the molestation until the day when Judith has "had enough" and chokes the pedophile to death with a red pillow in grandmother Berit's bed (R 276). Later she confesses the murder in her Night Diary.

I am scared. Uncle Olaf is dead and it is my fault. I am fourteen years and four months old. It is of course terrible for Mother Berit because he was her son. But she doesn't know how he was. I am happy he is dead. [...] Perhaps evil men don't go to heaven. Perhaps evil girls don't go to heaven either. It's not so bad. I don't wish to go to heaven. I'd rather be here. (R 114, our translation)

When Judith crosses the threshold into the murder cycle through the murder of Uncle Olaf, red shifts from a color of victimization to embody ideas of female agency. Femininity is from now on associated with violence and the abject, generated out of Judith's fears of the "wolf" and the rocking chair.

3.2 The Return of the Maternal

As in every true hero narrative, the hero faces an ordeal, which has to be resolved before the journey back can begin. For Judith, this challenge surfaces in the return of the maternal. When Judith reconciles with her mother, her narrative of vulnerability and fear transforms into a quest for agentive subjectivity with one goal, that of recreating herself through the final, destructive encounter with the "wolf", Holger Eliassen. The reunion provides a reference to the maternal abject of female initiation and empowers Judith to amend the maternal wound, which spans over three generations of women.

Lilly is the alcoholic mother who, due to physical and emotional neglect, loses custody over her daughters who move in with their Grandmother Berit. While Berit provides physical and educational care, love is banned in the family home, and she fails to fulfill the girls' emotional needs as well as protect them from male violence. Judith's earliest memories are of dressing herself first and then helping her little sister. She used to drag a chair to the window and stand there for hours pressing her lonely face against the glass, in vain, waiting for someone to come, while Lilly slept her hangovers off. The maternal deprivation leaves permanent traumatic marks on all the girls: Carol "cried out after Lilly so hard that it ached deep down in her belly. [...] For Lisbeth, the thoughts came at night. Light and shadow played out in front of her like a thin blanket" (*R* 101–102). Judith describes the loss of her mother as "suddenly losing her breath, as she fell down from high above and dreadfully waited to hit the ground" (*R* 101–102).

In trauma theory, Caruth (1996: 75–90), both literally and metaphorically, connects the verb "to fall" with the subject's attempt to free herself from the original reference. Falling is the gravitational experience of the death drive through the temporary scattering of the human body. To fall is to fleetingly yield to the abject. Caruth turns to Paul De Mann's discussion of the puppet dancer's graceful movements directed by the puppeteer, as a metaphor to explain the reactivation of the primal scene in posttraumatic stress disorder. The analogy also outlines the gravitational laws behind falling and rising. In movement therapy, this rebound to the earth is observable in the exploration of the human body's underlying energetic relation to gravity on a somatic level (Hartley 1995: 66–86). In addition, it is a central paradigm of both initiation and the grotesque as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984: 19–22), in which what is high has to be brought down to earth in order to regenerate. In initiation, to fall implies a temporal death, which prepares the neophyte for the inception (Haase 2008: 487). Judith's experiences of

falling into, as she calls them, abject “black holes of unconsciousness” (R 207) are reactivations of the maternal trauma.

As an adult, Judith confronts her mother in Oslo, which enables reparation of the maternal trauma. The ambivalent meeting at Hansen's Bakery in Oslo, where mother and daughter share a ritual meal, becomes an encounter with the maternal abject. Although it is a moment of forgiveness because Berit has sent Judith to ask Lilly for remission for the adversities committed by Olaf, emotions of sharp pain overwhelm Judith when she sees her mother again: “I could kill [...] that damn candy witch” (R 211). The abject momentarily sucks her into its black hole when the trauma resurfaces and she walks in the woods with the “wolf” again. However, she maintains control, confronts the abject and works through the trauma. Healing is granted when Judith courageously asks: “Did you really know how much we missed you [and] why didn't you take care of us?” (R 212), to which the mother responds that she was never good enough for Mother Berit and too weak to fight an unjust system alone. Time stands still, as the words caress Judith's heart. In essence, the mother-daughter bond is resumed, which provides Judith with the first one of the necessary gifts in order to heal and complete the cycle.

4 Cycle of Female Violence

Next time you encounter a little girl with a [red] toy gun in her hand. Look closely and pay attention to what she does when a man walks by. See how she triumphantly shoots him in the back. (R 122)

In the hero cycle, the color red metamorphoses from victimization into a trope of danger associated with femininity. When Judith enters the hero cycle, the color of female submission transforms into the color of agency. The abject which until now has signified marginalization and immanence is, from this point on, endowed with agency when Judith, in her red garb, transfigures into a warrior. The constantly returning memory of her childhood's red toy pistol – an attribute of male power ironically in the color of femininity – merges with and is materialized in the red pillow with which she commits her first murder, that of Uncle Olaf, and the color continues to foreshadow the killings in her war against chauvinistic men.

Judith kills in self-defense in fear of fragmentation of identity. She is provoked by threatening male chauvinist behavior which makes her cross the abject line. For example, she is triggered by sexual insults manifesting male objectification of women such as “I think you need a fuck” or “you clearly haven't been shagged for a long time. [...] You are alone and worthless and full of repressed prurience” (R 61, 196). The statements are humiliating and attack her body, and she literally sees red. Grandmother Berit also provokes her when Judith asks: “Do you never cry, Mother Berit”, replies that “[i]t doesn't help, [w]hat helps is to get angry, [l]ike this, my girl”, while furiously waving a scoop in the air (R 27). Her victims are pedophiles, domestic abusers or sex customers

who mistreat women and children or men who hamstring her escape and thereby question her integrity.

The traumas which trigger the killings are mechanisms of Judith's life drive. When Judith transmogrifies into the Fourth Sister, it is not the original reference of the mother she recalls but the trauma of the "wolf". The quest for the "wolf" has substituted the primal scene of the mother. Caruth (1996: 59) explains that traumas are not experienced as they occur but reappear as distorted flashbacks removed from the original reference. When Judith traverses into the killer, the attempted rape scene is reactivated before her eyes, and she encounters herself as the running, wounded and scared little girl in her torn, red dress. Everything around her signals danger when she brutally and forcefully executes misogynistic men: One is beaten to death with an iron pipe, another is pushed out of a window and two stabbed to death with scalpels and knives. However, the violent acts do not simply reverse inflicted male violence, as Johan Lingard (2016: 114) argues. Since the life instinct is the motivation behind posttraumatic stress disorder and not death, the killings are testimonies of Judith's will to survive (see Caruth 1996: 65). Corollary, in the context of gendered violence, Judith's murder spree demonstrates an alternative route of female violence as resistance of death coded in red blood.

Judith dreams of a new life dawning in a red sun. After the murders, she feels omnipotent, blissful and safe, and for a short while, these sensations ease the pain and fear by filling the aching wounds of her body. But then emptiness and coldness creep upon her again: "Many nights I have laid awake staring into the ceiling, feeling how my body longed, but it wasn't this it longed for" (*R* 149). Instead of emptiness, Judith craves for authentic emotions and gender equity. "She thinks about love, a word which is never used in this family. It is love which makes her feel lonely. The love for the sisters, feelings she is unable to show and tell" (*R* 36). Nevertheless, she encounters her equal on a trip to Iceland in a widowed man Laurus, who treats her with respect and with whom she feels warm and safe. A red sunrise over Iceland prefigures the rebirth. In ancient times, red additionally symbolized the sun (Butler Greenfield 2005: 20). Moreover, Judith develops maternal feelings for Laurus' motherless daughter Mira in her red backpack. According to Kristeva (1981: 29), motherhood enables women to reunite with the maternal link. In essence, red transfigures from a female cycle of violence spurred by the life drive to include new qualities of rebirth indicated through the rising sun, love and motherhood.

Before the resurrection can take place Judith has to hunt down the lurking "wolf" from her childhood. By chance, she recognizes a scar formed as a half-moon on detective Eliassen's knee when she visits her home town. She finally remembers her childhood perpetrator and carefully prepares the last murder. In a new red dress, Judith poisons the "wolf" with a plant from Grandmother Berit's garden, on his seventieth birthday party. As the now successful cycle of female violence is completed, Judith escapes

punishment and moves to Iceland, which suggests the protagonist's emancipation from the violence incorporated in institutional patriarchal masculinity. Ultimately, Judith has healed her wounds by successfully defeating the abject trauma and completed her hero quest, and as she concludes, she can finally become young after having been old for too long (R 278).

5 Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed Judith Marner's transformation from a child victim to an avenger through a regendering of the traditional male hero cycle and her completion of this cycle in motherhood. In the process, she claims agency over her body and sexuality and is emancipated from institutional male violence. We have offered a reading of the color red and the abject and brought them together with subconscious intertexts of "Little Red Riding Hood" present in *Rødhet*. We show how the narrative of red points towards female agency, initiation and the maternal abject and how it participates in negotiating the victim and dominator relation. Red underlies trauma and haunts the protagonist to enter a murder cycle through which the abject in the trauma of attempted rape, abuse and neglect transfigures from stigma into dangerous femininity. In the cycle, male supremacy is questioned and won over: The victim-murderer is exculpated while the male perpetrators turn into the new abjects. The color red transforms into a new representative of the feminine through the display of violence and rebirth.

Lindell's novel thus joins the continuum of stories celebrating femininity and the color red which do not turn the color into an unambiguous sign of valor, strength and heroism but instead draw on its shady ambiguity and its potential for regeneration in surprising ways. The volatility of the narrative of red also marginalizes the ethical questions of good and evil as well as culpability and punishment with which popular crime fiction is essentially concerned. When judging within the framework of social ethics, it is evident that both Eliasson and Marner are guilty of heinous crime and deserve to be punished. Within this framework, it can also be claimed that the novel discusses the ways in which patriarchal institutions and masculinist values generate violence in society. This, however, is not what has been the aim of this paper. Since the abject pertains in the semiotic, it stands outside symbolic ethical considerations: It is not the abject as such but the social reactions to abjection which raise ethical concerns.

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