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## Peripheries of Girlhood; Erin Bow's *Plain Kate*

If there was no “wrong place,” there would be no transgression.

Tim Cresswell *In Place/Out of Place* (39)

**ABSTRACT:** The focus of this analysis is a representation of girlhood in Erin Bow's 2010 novel *Plain Kate*. The novel has been categorized as “Young Adult Literature” which has come to indicate subversive and a transformative potential in that it often evokes traditional narrative models only to de- and re- construct them. The eponymous Plain Kate, therefore, is a prototypical Other: an ugly, orphaned and homeless girl who has to flee her hometown under the accusations of being a witch. She is a transitional character and a boundary-crosser; as such she does not belong anywhere. Importantly, the story makes it clear that what transforms Kate into an outsider is, among other things, her gender, which is why the protagonist's evolution from a child into an adult is shown through metaphors of the fluid female body. This paper aims to discuss the topography of girlhood on the example of Bow's novel, focusing specifically on the questions of marginality, otherness, liminality, and transgression, inscribed in the category of Young Adult Literature.

**KEY WORDS:** Young Adult Literature, girlhood, liminality, transgression, Erin Bow's novel

In recent years, a renaissance (or perhaps merely a *naissance*) of the category “girl” could be noticed within Western academia. In Deanne Williams's words, “girl” has become a “hot topic in contemporary sociology, psychology, and cultural studies” (2014: 3). This resulted in the rapid evolution of the field of Critical Girlhood Studies – which the following paper can be inscribed within – and the launching of an interdisciplinary journal, *Girlhood Studies*, in 2008. Regardless of its current popularity, however, “girl” remains a “troubled category that evokes a complex and paradoxical range of associations, from innocence to sexuality, and from passivity to resistance...” (WILLIAMS, 2014: 3). The problem with “girl,” therefore, is that she is not a “static figure” but a more transient character “whose representation engages with competing discourses of femininity” (MARSHAL, 2004: 259). Even the very word “girl” contains a “charged history

of unstable gender identity as well as seamy associations with sex and service” (WILLIAMS, 2014: 5).<sup>1</sup>

Ephemeral as it is, “girl” is not around for long: it is prescribed that she “should grow up” (DRISCOLL, 2002: 2) as she is “always definitely prior to the Woman [she] is used to explain” (6). Girlhood, then, is not a state but a phase; an identity which has to be negotiated rather than taken up, and constructed “against that which [it is] not, thus always invoking the ‘other’” (AAPOLA et al. qtd. in BROWN, 2011: 109). In Elizabeth Marshall’s phrasing, therefore, “the figure of the girl arises as a site of political struggle through which shifting [...] discourses about gender and sexuality circulate” (2004: 268). “Girl” is by definition homeless, unattached, and peripheral: “In running from one uninhabitable place or condition to another, she mediates among identifications that resist aggregation into a unified whole. She occupies, instead, many discontinuous locations” (CHANG, 1997: 173).

The focus of this analysis is a specific representation of such a “homeless” girl, one named Plain Kate, the protagonist of Erin Bow’s 2010 book, categorized as “young adult literature.” This category, in fact, is as problematic as the one of “girl,” and for similar reasons: “A majority tend to view literature for adolescents in the same way that they view adolescence: a period of uncertainty when kids are no-longer-kids-but-not-quite-adults” (ALMARIO, 2009: 1). Consequently, it has often been deemed secondary to “adult” literature. However, if only for the phenomenal popularity of series such as *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, or *Twilight*, young adult lit can no longer be defined as such, especially that its subjects are rarely limited to “kid stuff.”<sup>2</sup> In her attempt to define literature for teenagers, Ani Rosa Almario suggests that transgressiveness inscribed within adolescence translates itself into the subversiveness of literary works devoted to it: “What is inherent in [these works] is how [the themes of sex, violence, and domestic problems] cross gender and race” (2009: 2). There is, Almario suggests, a subversive and a transformative potential within young adult literature, which may evoke traditional narrative models only to de- and re- construct them.

<sup>1</sup> In Deanne Williams’s words, “[m]ost scholars follow F. C. Robinson’s argument that the word ‘girl’ comes from the Old English *ge-gyrela*, a term for garment, or dress, which also gives us the word ‘kirtle’ or ‘smock.’ This metonymic term invokes the practice of breeching: boys and girls alike wore *gyrela*, which kept them undifferentiated until little boys were breeched. But it also highlights the status of clothing, and of costume, as constitutive attributes of the performance of girlhood” (4). It was, however, “not until the sixteenth century that the word ‘girl’ settled into Samuel Johnson’s definition: ‘female child, or a young woman’” (4–5). One of the meanings of the word “girl” is, however, “a female servant or employee” ([www.thefreedictionary.com/girl](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/girl)).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Louise Halse Anderson’s *Speak* and *Wintergirls*, which explore the subjects of rape and anorexia respectively, Terry Spencer Hesser’s *Kissing Doornobs* (a story of a teenage girl with obsessive-compulsive disorder), and Philip Pullman’s classic trilogy *His Dark Materials*, which features two teenagers engaged in a romantic – and very much erotic – relationship.

For instance, the widely celebrated literary series I mentioned above – *Harry Potter*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* – are all present-day versions of a traditional “hero story.” “Though infinitely varied in detail the [...] story is always the same” (HOURIHAN, 1997: 9): a hero “leaves the civilized order of home to venture into the wilderness in pursuit of his goal” (9), overcomes any difficulties, achieves the goal, and returns home (9–10). Traditionally, such a hero had to be “white, male, British, American or European” (9), with Harry Potter as its modern representative. In classic hero narratives “heroism is gendered” (68), and it is always a boy who sets out on a difficult journey towards manhood, whereas “girls remain shadowy presences on the periphery of the action” (158). In *Hunger Games* and *Twilight*, as well as in Philip Pullman’s transgressive trilogy *His Dark Materials*, however, girls are central characters. While Stephanie Meyer’s saga is a verbose romantic narrative whose central character – evocatively named Bella Swan – recreates the most customary version of femininity, Suzanne Collins’s Katniss Everdeen and Pullman’s Lyra subvert the patriarchal logic of the hero story in being active, strong, courageous, gutsy and noble. They both undergo “a testing and toughening process, a version of ritual initiation” (68), which used to be reserved for boys only. In both cases, they achieve maturity which is not only emotional or mental, but also bodily and sexual. In the case of Lyra specifically, who is only twelve years old when the story ends, sexual initiation is the prerequisite to the story’s victorious closure. Importantly, it is Lyra who initiates the sexual contact, replaying the role of Biblical Eve to the betterment of humankind, and to the downfall of the “center” represented by the church and its institutions. Revered by some and reviled by others, Pullman’s trilogy construes the girl’s body as actively defiant and *revolt*-ing. As Erin Bow’s *Plain Kate* embarks on a similarly strenuous journey out of “home” (which may also represent the safety of the traditional categories of femininity), and into the wilderness, I aim to look for a correspondingly transgressive potential of the novel in the images of the transforming female body.

Bow’s novel is a historical fantasy inspired by Russian folktales and set in an imaginary borderland modelled on the Polish/Lithuanian frontier of the 16th century.<sup>3</sup> The eponymous character, Plain Kate, as the very name suggests, breaks away from classic depictions of girlhood in that she is homely: “plain as a stick, and thin as a stick, and flat as a stick. She [has] one eye the color of river mud and one eye the color of the river. Her nose [is] too long and her brows [are] too strong” (*PK* 2). Not unlike other fictional girls,<sup>4</sup> however, Plain Kate’s fate, like her name, is determined by her looks. In Seth Lerer’s words, “[g]irls always seem to be put up on stages. How they look and sound is, in a way, far more important than how boys do” (2008: 229). Plain Kate’s ugliness, consequently,

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<sup>3</sup> Available: <http://www.yabookshelf.com/2010/09/interview-with-erin-bow-author-of-plain-kate/>. Accessed: 05.01.2014.

relegates the girl to the margins of the culture depicted by Bow as markedly “oppressive to females, sexually charged, and dangerous” (BROWN, 2011: 111).

Although Bow uses the elements of fantasy which add to the fairy-tale character of the narrative, the novel is surprisingly realistic in its depiction of gruesome events brought about by people’s prejudice, stupidity, and outright cruelty. The fact that Plain Kate is surrounded by folk who do magic does not mean much, as the girl is incapable of using it to her advantage. As her father reveals, “there is magic in the world [...] but it is a thing that is in the blood, and it is not in [Plain Kate’s]” (*PK* 2). In the same vein, even though she is an extraordinarily talented carver, she cannot use her talent to protect herself or improve her position (a masterpiece she is working on for a long time ends up, rather disappointingly, burned to ashes in a marketplace). On the contrary, “a person who [can] wield the knife [is],” in the eyes of the simple folk, “halfway to a witch” (*PK* 2). Yet, as long as she remains a daughter to her father (her mother died birthing her), the girl is safely “anchored by the social role the father represents” (PICCHIETTI, 2002: 37). Her standing is inextricably linked to the one of her father’s, a renowned carver, and her future is planned: she is to be Piotr’s apprentice, and become “a full master by the time [she is] twenty” (*PK* 4). In other words, as long as Plain Kate is a daughter, she is perceived as somewhat valuable to the society, for “daughter,” in Catherine Driscoll’s words, is both “a kind of money,” and a concept “relative to patriarchy” (2002: 109).<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously, however, “the daughter appears [so] weak and coopted into a patriarchal system of gendered roles and relationships” (PICCHIETTI, 2002: 34), that in order to “gain an independent identity” (PICCHIETTI, 2002: 36), she has to renounce the security inscribed within the category of “daughter.” Fittingly for the development of the narrative, Piotr passes away when the girl reaches puberty. Plain Kate, therefore, enters adolescence with a new identity of an orphan. With this transformation, her life changes dramatically, as does her position in her community. As an orphan – and a plain and witch-like one at that – she has “nowhere to go” (*PK* 9). Therefore, she moves into her father’s box cabinet – a part of the man’s stall in the marketplace of their little town of Samilae – occupying the big bottom drawer which to her feels like a coffin. The death of the daughter marks “the beginning of her new life” (*PK* 13).

As a “halfway” character – not only halfway to a witch but also halfway to a woman/wife/mother – Plain Kate/the Orphan epitomizes Otherness<sup>5</sup> and thus

<sup>4</sup> Driscoll sees a daughter as “an evaluation of property and wealth and an extension of reproductive and familiar labor into the world” (109). “Analogies between daughters and commodities,” she says, “are widely promulgated, and commodities are often aligned with girls (and their desirability)” (109).

<sup>5</sup> My understanding of Otherness goes back to the phenomenological definition of the term as the state of being both, different and alien to the Self, and the way in which it has been used in Gender Studies and Feminist Theory which designate Woman as “the Other” to the Man.

has to be exiled from the center. It is, then, a continual movement (across, toward, and against) which conditions Plain Kate's story, in line with Driscoll's assertion that "feminine adolescence is performed in transitional roles" (2002: 57). Three geographical places mark the beginning, the middle, and the end of Plain Kate's journey, namely, her hometown, Samilae, the town of Toila, and the city of Lov. Although the names of these places suggest that there is a positive progression to the girl's quest – from "malaise" which is the anagram of Samilae, through "exertion" of Toil-a, to "love" – all three places, in fact, provide the setting for increasingly horrifying events. The stage the girl is put on is, in each case, a marketplace, this "epitome of local identity" (STALLYBRASS, 1986: 27). This is the heart of a town where the number of sellers and buyers, the quality of the produce, and the decisions concerning what to buy and from whom, all reflect the character, values and hierarchies of the community. As the marketplace is the representation of the center, it is difficult for Plain Kate to hide within it. She is the visible invisible: on the one hand, people avoid her, disregard her, are afraid of her, as they see "witchcraft in her skill, witch marks in her mismatched eyes, her bad luck, her long shadow" (*PK* 20) – on the other, she is a conspicuous target of their contempt and fear. It is the *Scara rok*, the bad time, and someone has to be blamed. It is then in the marketplace of Samilae that someone smashes her father's stall with an axe, almost killing the girl, a crime that the town's watchmen ignore to investigate.

Any geographical place, including a marketplace, is a "subject of particular discourses of power, which express themselves as discourses of normality" (CRESSWELL, 1996: 60). Homely and homeless, Plain Kate *is in a wrong place*, and poses a threat to the "normality" of the center. The marketplace, however, quite paradoxically, is not only the "center of the polis" and of local identity, but also a "hybrid place": a representation of "the unsettling of this identity by the trade and traffic of goods from elsewhere" and of "a comingling of categories usually kept separate and opposed" (STALLYBRASS, 1986: 27). "Thus, in the marketplace, "inside" and "outside" (and hence identity itself) are persistently mystified. It is a place where limit, centre and boundary are confirmed and yet also put in jeopardy" (STALLYBRASS, 1986: 28). The marketplace then, perhaps more than any other place, welcomes strangers, at least temporarily. It is a liminal space which the Other pass through but never indwell.

In Bow's novel, these are outsiders who change Plain Kate's destiny. The most significant of them is Linay, a male witch and an albino Roamer (modelled on Polish Roma people) whose "hair [is] white-gray like bleached wood," and who has "eyes white-silver like tin, [and] skin [...] white as if he were a day dead" (*PK* 17). Linay is a "halfway" character, too, for he (half-)lost his twin sister, Lenore, accused of witchcraft and burned at a stake. The two had always been together; "it was like they had one heart between them" (*PK* 92). After Lenore's untimely death, Linay performs a forbidden ritual, offering his

blood and his shadow to summon his sister back from the “shadowless country” (PK 94). The fact that during the ceremony he speaks Lenore’s name renders Linay “dead” to his people, as they “[speak] death to him” so that “his name [is] closed” (PK 96). Neither dead nor alive, Linay is out of his head. Consumed with the love for his sister, which is markedly romantic, he plans his revenge on Lenore’s murderers and is bound to relive his sister’s final ordeal. With magic in his blood, Linay has godlike, creative powers: what he says comes into being, and if he lied, he would die.

In the marketplace of Samilae, Linay sells “things in the shadows” (PK 20), trading in “witchcraft that people [crave] to protect them” (PK 20). As such, he is competition for Plain Kate who (barely) makes her living carving *objarkas* – wooden talismans protecting one against bad luck. More importantly, it is with Linay that Plain Kate makes her Faustian pact: the man takes her shadow in return for a talking cat, “oilcloth, a sleep roll, and a pack” (PK 41), things necessary – perhaps with the exception of the cat – to survive on the road which she is forced to take, now that she does not have a place to live. What originally attracts Linay to Plain Kate is her underprivileged position – the fact that she has no family and no home, which, together with her plainness and her uncanny talent, turns her into the town’s most noticeable Other. As such, Plain Kate is unprotected by the laws of the town, and is in the process of disappearing even before she meets the man, which is emphasized by her diminishing, starving body. In consequence, as much as they are both outsiders, the relationship between the two characters is hierarchical, with Linay being a representation of a male oppressor, and with Plain Kate being a passive victim.

Importantly, it is through the man’s actions that Plain Kate becomes truly homeless – as he turns the inhabitants of Samilae against her – and it is through his actions that the integrity of the girl’s body is forcibly violated. Namely, in order to dispossess Plain Kate of her shadow, Linay performs a ritual in the course of which he cuts her wrist with a dagger and burns her free-flowing blood to “set loose the spell” (PK 46). When she grows scared and wants to back off, the man casts another spell which renders the girl immobile:

Plain Kate thought she was dying and then when she died she would remain as a statue, held in place by the stiffness of the air. Linay reached out a hand for her. She was sure she would die if he touched her but she could only watch his hand coming.

And he touched her. (PK 46)

This disquieting incident can be interpreted as a rape scene, especially that Plain Kate naively ponders the value of what has been taken from her (“though it was supposed to be her shadow, she felt as if it might have been her soul” (48)), and that from then on she experiences her body as open and leaking. With

Linay's cut, Plain Kate's body becomes gendered feminine, as stressed by the girl's first menstruation, which follows shortly afterwards. Its passivity, which seems to be femininity's main requirement, is accented by the revelation that the difference between the living and the dead is that the latter are shadowless. With her own shadow disappearing – slowly leaking away – Plain Kate, like Linay, is no longer fully alive. Before she reunites with the man to win her integrity back, she tries to find her place among the Roamers, wanderers who “[live] on the edges of things” and, just like her, “[tend] to be thin” (*PK* 26).

Originally, Plain Kate feels some affinity with the Roamers – as a visible minority, they too understand what it means to be an outcast. Even though they do business with the town folk, they are “a people with their own language and their own ways” (*PK* 26). These ways, Plain Kate suspects, have to be opposite to the strict laws of Samilae. After all, many a Roamer have died under the accusations of witchcraft. Indeed, it is Mother Daj, the clan's supposed matriarch, who lets Plain Kate into her wagon and – temporarily – grants her a place among her people. The woman calls her *mira* – family – and Plain Kate begins to feel included in the group, especially that she strikes a friendship with a girl named Drina, and makes a deal with Rye Baro, the leader of the clan: her duty is to earn a place in the group by her skill (*PK* 81). Gradually, however, the protagonist begins to notice that the Roamer ways are not unlike the town ways, particularly when it comes to the division of space – even if this is a space you traverse rather than possess – into men's and women's zones. Mother Daj's wagon is, in fact, the last in the caravan, which seems to represent her standing in the clan: “Big decisions,” she tells Plain Kate, are “a matter for the men” (*PK* 73). Rigid rules regulate the relations between men and women: “Don't pass between a man and a fire. Don't walk between two men who are facing each other. Ask permission to speak. If you walk near a man, gather up your skirt so that it does not brush him” (*PK* 78), and, most importantly, “you can't go among the men bleeding” (*PK* 76).

This, in fact, is the one rule that Plain Kate cannot follow. Opened by Linay, her body becomes a leaking vessel, over which the girl has no control. She feels “like a sack with a hole in it. Spilling” (*PK* 92). Her shadow is “like a river flowing away from [her]” (*PK* 97), her heels are “blistered deep and seeping blood” (*PK* 76), she menstruates, and finally, she wounds her arm with her carving knife and “[seeps] blood the way the bog [seeps] water” (*PK* 150). Among the Roamers, woman's blood is not only viewed as dangerously powerful, but also as threateningly excremental and polluting; menstruation in particular, as “a figure for the abhorrent,” “speaks the body as abject” (DRISCOLL, 2002: 92).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It is Julia Kristeva who, in her *Powers of Horror*, famously argues that “menstrual blood stands for danger issuing from within the identity (social and sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex

It is not menstrual blood, however, that dooms Plain Kate, but the fact that, without her knowledge and participation, water contaminated with the blood from her injured arm is used to make tea which is then drunk by a Roamer man named Wen. As he subsequently goes down with a “sleeping death” – or falls into a mysterious coma – Plain Kate is locked in an iron cage “that [...] once held a dancing bear” (*PK* 158), and accused of witchcraft. By that time, her shadow is gone completely, which is used by the Roamers as a proof against her. Another reason for the Roamers’ dread is that Drina was almost torn to pieces by a crazed mob of Toila, and it is believed that it was Plain Kate who brought it on her. What follows is a sickening scene of the talking cat, Taggle, being mercilessly tortured, and Plain Kate being almost burnt to death in the bear cage. If puberty, as Driscoll asserts, is “a powerful regulatory discourse” (2002: 101), Plain Kate certainly learns her lesson. In the last possible moment, she manages to free herself from the cage, and, her body on fire like Lenore’s, reaches the river which “[takes] her in” (*PK* 173). Eventually, however, it is Linay – her original oppressor – who saves her life.

As the story makes very clear, and as I indicated earlier, Linay is not a mere villain, but a transgressor who undermines the concepts of morality and justice as well as questions borderlines between the self and the other, the normal and the abnormal, the past and the present, the inside and the outside. Although his decision to turn the people of Salimae against Plain Kate and then take advantage of the girl is morally wrong, it is dictated by his desire to avenge his twin sister, which is a noble motive. The woman, revealed to be Drina’s beloved mother, after her tragic death turned into Rusalka, “vampire, siren, doomed to wander and never find her rest” (*PK* 176), whom Linay summons to the world of the living. Lenore, therefore, is the embodiment of the traditional dichotomy between angelic and monstrous femininity. In order to call Lenore to the city of Lov so that she could bring death upon its inhabitants, Linay plans to use Plain Kate’s shadow, and before that can happen, he feeds his sister first with his, and then Plain Kate’s blood. Lenore, the monstrous mother figure, is the one who brings the sleeping death upon people, one who resides in milk-white fog, one who sucks “more than blood. Bones. [Plain Kate’s] own name” (*PK* 199). Plain Kate’s body then becomes a bowl that Rusalka drinks from (*PK* 209).

It is, however, not only Lenore’s blood-sucking tendencies which represent the disruption of bodily borders, as the woman herself is body-less and fragmentary. She “[flickers] like layers of ice, and [appears] in little pieces: a long hand, a tumble of hair, one egg-blank eye. Then suddenly she [has] a face. It [is] nar-

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in the face of sexual difference” (qtd. in CRESSWELL, 1996: 108). Consequently, as Tim Cresswell asserts, “knowledge of a woman’s menstruation becomes... something specially reserved for the heterosexual relationship: it must be kept carefully hidden from all other men including one’s father and sons. Thus the experience of menstruation is reconstructed in such a way as to emphasize an image of women’s lives as constructed by men’s gaze” (109).



row and sad and incredibly beautiful" (*PK* 198). Like a stereotypical representation of a female vampire, Lenore is not so much threatening as she is alluring. When Plain Kate sees her for the first time, she [falls] to her knees as if she [saw] an angel" (*PK* 198), and then, enraptured by Lenore's mischievous sadness (*PK* 199), she "[falls] in love with her" (*PK* 199).

Contrary, then, to what the narrator suggests ("there [is] nothing to love in the walls of Lov" (*PK* 277), as the place "[has] a stone heart" (*PK* 274)), it is love which sets the subsequent tragic incidents in motion. They are triggered, first and foremost, by Linay's obsessive love for Lenore, and by Taggle's love for Plain Kate. In order to bring Rusalka back to life, then, Linay sacrifices his life at the stake, and in order to save the people of Lov, Taggle, the talking cat, commits suicide by impaling himself on Plain Kate's knife. Linay's last words are, in fact, "Lenore [...] I love..." (*PK* 292), whereas Taggle, right before his final jump, addresses Plain Kate as "Katerina, Star of my heart" (*PK* 289). It is also love which motivates Lenore to forfeit her newly regained life and simultaneously to resurrect the cat, the single felicitous event in the story.

All the characters can be interpreted as transgressive, as they transform, break the rules, and operate from the margins. Linay, Taggle, and Lenore make impossible decisions, and remain true to their choices. Plain Kate, on the other hand, although deeply moved by these happenings, remains nothing but their close witness whose victory – marked by her survival and the reclaiming of her shadow – is not really her own doing: she is rewarded not for her self-reliance or courage, but rather for her passive endurance. The girl is lucky to have survived in the same way in which she happened to be unlucky throughout her journey. She begins yet another new life with a new name of Katerina, which indicates the end of Plain Kate/the adolescent. In a clear reference to traditional fairytales, the summary of her adult life, which closes the story, is very concise: she and Taggle keep on living, "not always without trouble, but happily, and well, and for a long time thereafter" (*PK* 311).

In the introductory part of this article, I suggested that various, often contradictory and competing discourses shape "girl stories." On the one hand, then, Erin Bow's novel reveals the patriarchal structure of the normative world in order to criticize this structure through images of death and social injustice, and to symbolically undermine it through images of Otherness, fluidity and motion. "Marginal, grotesque, extraordinary elements and events [...] are interesting when we examine the role they play in defining the 'normal,' the classical, the dominant" (CRESSWELL, 1996: 149). Such examination necessarily unveils the merging of such categories as "normal," "abnormal," "self," and "other," as well as their superficial nature. On the other hand, the text reflects a number of traditional narrative patterns, the first of which being that it features an underprivileged, orphaned hero who sets out on a life-changing journey. Since the hero is a girl, like Snow White, or Little Red Riding Hood, and unlike Suzanne

Collins' Katniss and Philip Pullman's Lyra, she plays a passive rather than an active role in the narrative.

In its focus on the body and bodily changes, as well as naturalistic descriptions of physical suffering, the text fails to offer an alternative to the apparent horrors of feminine adolescence. The sadistically drawn-out, graphic descriptions of torture, and the melodramatic theatricality of the final events, overshadow any positive elements. For example, although Taggle, the talking cat, is introduced to the story to provide comic relief, his slapstick remarks hardly counterbalance the atrocities the characters go through, and they are cut short by his Christ-like death. In a similar vein, the narrator does not ponder the future of Plain Kate and Drina's friendship, but suggests the girls will go their separate ways. Adolescence then is a transformative rite of passage for Plain Kate, but her peripheral wanderings leave the center unaffected. The palpable proof of her final "success" is that Linay leaves her money with which she can now pay her apprentice fee. As Katerina, she can reenter the social order which relegated Plain Kate to the margins.

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