

Werewolves in Psyche and Cinema: Man-Beast Transformation and Paradox

Elizabeth A. Lawrence

The phenomenon of human beings undergoing transformations into other species has been a prevalent notion since the dawn of consciousness. It occurs readily when boundaries between humans and animals are perceived as indistinct or when the presence of those boundaries is being tested or established. Such changes may be voluntary—brought about in an effort to obtain certain desirable characteristics possessed by an animal—or they may be involuntary—inflicted wantonly by an outside force upon an innocent person or intentionally upon a guilty individual as a punishment. Over the course of history, this so-called “shape-changing” has involved many animals, with the wolf being one of the most frequent and persistent. From the Anglo-Saxon *wer*, meaning man and *wulf* meaning wolf comes the term werewolf, defined as a man temporarily or permanently transformed into a wolf (Spence 426). Lycanthropy is the magical ability to assume the form and characteristics of a wolf, and is also used to denote a mental disorder in which a person believes himself to be a wolf.

Our contemporary technological world is imbued with positivism that leaves little room for human-animal forms like werewolves to prowl the night. For industrialized society, belief in the actuality of werewolves has all but vanished; yet the creatures still exist in the human psyche, lying in wait to disturb our dreams. They remain “alive and well in the twentieth century,” according to recent psychiatric case studies (Keck 113; Kulick 134). They survive in popular culture through fantasy fiction, Gothic horror novels, tabloids, and even in a 1978 song about werewolves in London. No single classic gave rise to the werewolf image in the way that Mary Shelley’s work established Frankenstein and Bram Stoker’s novel created Dracula. Rather the contemporary human-wolf has been inspired largely by cinematic representations. The werewolf is the subject of films which have recurred quite regularly over the last six decades and in which the idea of becoming a

werewolf is a real possibility, depicted with creativity and enthusiasm, encoding many symbolic meanings.

The 1994 Hollywood hit, *Wolf*, described as “the thinking man’s werewolf movie” (Janusonis D5), stars Jack Nicholson, whose “normal feral intensity and lupine features” including “demonically” arched eyebrows are said to fit him for the role (“Wolf” 13; James 13). He plays Will Randall, book editor of a New York publishing house who, when the story begins, is a polite, intelligent individual described as the “last civilized man.” He is known as “a good man,” but as someone remarks, “the worst things happen to the best people.” His character changes after being bitten by a wolf while traveling in the wilds of Vermont. Not only does this event occur during a full moon, but also on the very night the moon was closer to the earth than it had been in 100 years. The first sign that anything unusual had happened to him is the reaction of extreme fear that he inspires in a horse. Later, birds fly in panic out of the trees when he approaches. Soon, dense hair grows around the bite wound on his hand. Then he develops an extraordinarily keen sense of smell, allowing him to detect the odor of another man on his wife’s clothes, betraying her infidelity. He no longer needs glasses, hears conversations through closed doors, and can move each ear separately. Hair grows on his face. He twitches his nose and sniffs the air. His habits change to sleeping by day and being active at night. He makes love to his wife after a long abstinence, first pulling off her bathrobe belt with his teeth. She responds by calling him “You animal!” He feels 20 years younger and suddenly has courage to decide to start his own company. He beats up three thugs who attempt to rob him and leaps over a wall when policemen chase him out of a zoo where he has gone to feed. He gives up his former vegetarian lifestyle and craves meat—the bloodier the better.

Randall’s conversion is complete when at the next full moon he jumps out of a window, growls revealing fangs instead of teeth, chases a deer through the

woods and brings it down. His face is transformed to that of a wolf as he bites the animal's throat, and consumes its flesh. His face and hands are covered with blood. He develops paws with talons and runs on all fours. His eyes glow green. At one point he urinates to mark his territory, and later manages to urinate on the shoes of a fellow-worker who schemed to get his job. Ultimately, he attacks humans, and after his first experience, spits out the fingers of a child. He kills his wife. His arch-enemy and his lover are turned into werewolves after he bites them.

Randall describes his rejuvenation: "I feel as if the wolf passed something along to me, a scrap of its spirit in my blood." A Hindu expert on animal possession tells him that his wolf spirit is a "gift"; not everyone who is bitten has the talent for such transformation. "There must be something wild within, an analogue of the wolf." Through his lupine identity, Randall can experience "power without guilt and love without doubt." This contemporary depiction of the legend has been called "the male version of the heroines in *Women Who Run with the Wolves*," with Randall's "analogue of the wolf" resembling the "Wild Woman Soul" (James 13). *Wolf* is an allegory depicting the viciousness of modern life as represented in the corporate business world. And, following the werewolf tradition, the film reinforces the concept of social and sexual restraint, with loss of control having disastrous consequences. Because wolves are sexual symbols, it has also been suggested that "wolves infecting other people and turning them into other werewolves could be seen as symbolizing the spread of AIDS" (Weinraub 1,22).

A more innocent film with some of the same motifs, *Teen Wolf* (1985), stars Michael J. Fox as Scott, a frail but handsome schoolboy who is failing both at basketball and at winning the class beauty for his girlfriend. He is bored with working at his dad's hardware store and is "sick of being average." The first sign of his transformation comes when the sounds from a "silent" dog whistle being blown hurt his ears. His ears soon become pointed, his teeth change to fangs, his face and hands become hairy and his nails grow long. Like other werewolves before him, he howls at the full moon. When he participates in a party kissing game, his partner hits him and emerges from the closet with her dress ripped down the back as though by claws. The boy's changing into a wolf is a genetic trait inherited from his father, who explains that, "being what we are is not all bad. There are some advantages. We have great power, and with power goes responsibility. You can do things other people can't do."

Scott has a problem in that he sometimes turns into a wolf when he does not want it to happen. But at first he uses his new strength to great advantage. He becomes an extremely skillful basketball player, making his team victorious and winning popularity with the cheerleaders. He is able to seduce the glamorous girl who once spurned him. And he is suddenly assertive toward the school principal who formerly intimidated him. The whole town goes "wolf crazy" in its adulation for his new achievements, making him a hero and wearing tee-shirts marked "wolf buddy" in his honor. But ultimately his role as wolf fails to bring happiness. He realizes that he loves the quiet girl who has always been his friend, and asks her to the prom. She will only accept, however, if he goes as Scott, not as the wolf. She says she has missed the real Scott. He decides then to be himself, even though the championship game is coming up and he will be letting the team down. In spite of his friends' pleas and his teammates' chant of "wolf, wolf, wolf," he tells the coach "no wolf. I want to play and be myself." The team wins anyway, and Scott is a hero. The experience of being a wolf gave him residual power to excel by instilling confidence.

A more sinister 1980 film, *An American Werewolf in London*, also involves a teen-age boy, David, who travels to northern England accompanied by his friend Jack. The movie opens with the song, "Blue Moon," but soon becomes more ominous as the pair of hikers tries to take refuge from a stormy night at a pub called "The Slaughtered Lamb"—a portent of events to come. The boys notice a five-pointed star on the wall of the pub, a "pentangle" which is associated with witchcraft. The hostile occupants do not allow the boys to stay, driving them away into the dark with the warning, "beware of the moon, avoid the moors, and stick to the roads." But the moon rises, howls are heard, and before they have traveled far a wolf attacks, killing Jack and rendering David unconscious. He wakes up in the hospital with nail scratches on his chest and a bloody mouth after dreaming of killing and eating a deer. Jack appears as a ghost and tells David that the attack by a werewolf made him a lycanthrope. He will remain in limbo, he says, until the last werewolf is destroyed.

Conforming to the familiar pattern, David makes love to his nurse, who has fallen for him. He is shown urinating. A frightened cat spits at him. On the next full moon, he tears off his clothes, revealing a hairy body; he develops fangs and paws with long nails. He feels invigorated and his body seems very strong. He howls while "Blue Moon" plays, and heads for the zoo, where he climbs into the cage with wolves, who

accept him, then jumps out and runs through the park. The next morning, six people are found murdered and mutilated. David considers suicide and wonders whether he needs a silver bullet. After a harrowing chase in which he is pursued like a mad dog through Picadilly Circus, the werewolf is shot and changes back into the boy, David, as soon as he is dead.

The Howling, a 1981 film, also features the full moon, yellow, shining eyes, howling, and the idea that werewolves can be killed only with fire or silver bullets. It begins with comments that humankind has lost something valuable in evolution; man is still part savage and we should not deny the animal in us. The plot involves Marcia, a TV reporter who had been kidnapped by a maniac and rescued and who goes on a country retreat with her husband in order to regain her composure. But instead, she encounters werewolves, among them her abductor and her trusted psychiatrist. A graphic scene that is the delight of film makers shows a human transformation into wolf in minute detail. When the heroine is attacked by a werewolf, she fights back with a hatchet and manages to cut off one of the beast's front paws. Upon returning home, she finds her husband with a bandage covering his missing hand.

Eventually, she is caught by a pack of werewolves, who tell her that they once raised cattle for prey but they now feed on people. They explain, "You can't tame what's meant to be wild....From the day we're born, there is a struggle between what is peaceful and what is violent." Finally, the police surround the pack and shut the wolves into an enclosure that is set on fire. But one werewolf gets away and succeeds in biting Marcia. She cries out, "We have to warn people, we have to make them believe." Her inevitable transformation into a werewolf is televised as proof of the reality of the phenomenon. The most striking symbolic element of this movie is an avowedly evil woman in a restaurant ordering a rare hamburger. The final scene consists of a closeup of a raw, red hamburger on a grill, with a spatula patting the meat causing the blood to drip down into the fire. The meat is turned over for cooking on the other side and again pressed, emitting bloody juice, and is served up rare.

Although the noble character of wolves is occasionally portrayed in the films just described, that aspect receives more emphasis in a fascinating movie entitled *Wolfen*, also dated 1981. The plot stresses the likeness between American Indians and wolves: they evolved together and both are superb hunters that do not overpopulate the earth. Unlike most werewolves, who live in remote surroundings, the ones in this story

live in New York City. The reason for this becomes clear when a native elder explains to a white man that the creatures he has seen are not wolves, but "wolfen." "For twenty thousand years—ten times your Christian era—the great hunting nations lived together in balance with nature," he points out. "Then came the slaughter" of wolves as well as Indians and buffalo by the white man. "The smartest went underground into the new wilderness." The great hunters became scavengers of garbage in urban areas. "They might be gods. They can see two looks away and they can hear a cloud pass overhead. In their world there are no lies, and no crime. In their eyes, you are the savage. You got technology but lost your senses." They are "other nations, their world is older, more complete, finished. They kill to survive, to protect their families. Man does less." Because of human arrogance, he warns, there will be "life that will prey on us as we prey upon the earth." He tells the white man "You don't have the eyes of the hunter, you have the eyes of the dead."

Flashback films of wolves being mercilessly gunned down from helicopters drive home the history of human cruelty perpetrated upon the species. Yet the people violently killed by the wolfen are restricted to those who directly threaten their survival, individuals involved in urban renewal projects that destroy the old buildings where the creatures live in order to build luxury condos. The wolfen must protect their hunting ground. Mutilation and cannibalism represent their retribution against the humans who wrong them. Otherwise, they thoughtfully prey only upon victims who will not be missed—the sick, the old, and drug addicts. Abandoned people have become their new sources of meat.

In this film, scenes of shape-shifting take place, like other werewolf transformations, under a full moon. Belief holds that the soul can transfer the body into a different form. The shape-shifter goes to the water's edge, takes off his clothes, and with his hand makes paw prints on the shore. He goes down on all fours and laps water containing the moon's reflection and blows water out of his mouth, illustrating the ancient notion of water as a facilitator of transformation. He dashes about in a frenzy and then runs into the water and howls. His teeth grow huge. The moon turns red.

The 1941 definitive cinematic version, *The Wolf Man*, became the "key generating text for the modern figure of the werewolf" (Douglas 244). Set in Wales, this film contrasts in many ways with the recent *Wolf*, demonstrating the evolution of the werewolf image over the past five decades. The titles indicate the

emphasis on the human side of the man-beast in the earlier film, with more focus on the animal in the later. In *The Wolf Man*, Lon Chaney, Jr. plays the doomed hero, Larry Talbot, a huge, hulking figure, who is at home with tools, not philosophy. He has no special "gift" like the editor in *Wolf*, and does not resemble a wolf at all, except in the slang sense of chasing a pretty girl and telling her "What big eyes you have, Grandma!" From the very beginning, the script makes clear that

Even a man who is pure in heart,
And says his prayers by night
May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
And the autumn moon is bright.

Larry's innocence cannot save him from his fate when the pentagram, the sign of the werewolf, appears on his hand as a warning he is the next victim of the creature's bite. A simple man, he is a passive victim who cannot be blamed for the hideous murders he commits as a savage wolf, representing the evil side of man. The gypsy woman chants over Larry's body, "The way you walked was thorny through no fault of your own, but as the rain enters the soil, the river enters the sea, so tears run to a predestined end." Her blessing ensures death will release the werewolf from further suffering.

In the recent Jack Nicholson film, despite bloody killings, there is the message, however ambivalent, that wolves can be wholesome, even noble. A new theme enters the old legend: the werewolf can be good or bad according to the character of the transformed human. In *The Wolf Man*, the "everyday world is benign, well-ordered," and Christian, whereas in the 1994 version, "everyday life is a wolf-pack, with rivals contending for power, sex and dominance" and with definite pagan elements (Rutherford 55).

The werewolves' vulnerability to silver, mentioned in subsequent films, is a prominent theme in *The Wolf Man*, in which a silver cane, rather than a silver bullet, is used to kill the creatures. Other patterns set in 1941 for future films are the influence of the moon, the vividly detailed transformation of man to wolf, terrified dogs that bark furiously in recognition of the human form of the werewolf, a frightened horse that rears and whinnies when such a person appears, and a charm provided by a soothsayer to protect the werewolf, who gives it to his sweetheart to protect her from himself. Eerie scenes in a misty forest, wolfbane flowers that wilt when the werewolf is about to strike, a bite wound that heals overnight

and then turns into a pentagram, and gypsies with a werewolf among them who return every autumn are noteworthy elements.

The important contribution of this film is articulation of the tension between the physical aspects of the werewolf as an actual entity and the idea that the phenomenon is a mental illness. For Larry, the pragmatist who understands only what can be touched, his transformation is real. For his father, a brooding theorist, the werewolf is more complex. He explains that the werewolf legend, like all legends, has some truth; it is an "ancient explanation of the dual personality in all of us." For him, lycanthropy is a variety of schizophrenia, expressing "the good and evil in every man's soul. In this case, evil takes the shape of an animal." For some people, he says, "life is simple, black and white, with no shades of gray." For others, good and bad are complex and not so easily distinguished. Although he does not believe in the physical form of the werewolf, he feels that "anything can happen to a man in his own mind." He thinks his son has conjured up an evil thing and wants to help him "get out of this mental quagmire." The doctor who is consulted agrees that "a man lost in the mazes of his mind may imagine he is anything." He argues that lycanthropy is "mind over matter," mental suggestion, a kind of self-hypnotism like the stigmata. Larry, he says, is a sick man with a psychic maladjustment who could be cured if he cooperated. But therapy does not intervene. The savage wolf who, while attacking his next victim, is killed by strokes with the silver-tipped cane, turns into the dead body of Larry.

Tales of human-wolf transformations date to the remote past and occur in many cultures. The earliest known description of such a change is found in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dating from the early second millennium BC, in which the goddess Ishtar turns a shepherd into a wolf who is then devoured by his own dogs. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* describes Jupiter's punishment of Arcadian king Lycaon for giving him a banquet of human flesh: Instantly Lycaon howled, "his clothes changed into bristling hairs, his arms to legs, and he became a wolf." His "savage nature showed in his rabid jaws, and he now directed against the flocks his innate lust for killing" and his mania for shedding blood. "Though he was a wolf, he retained some traces of his original shape" and "presented the same picture of ferocity" (35). Virgil's *Eighth Eclogue* mentions a werewolf as a magician who voluntarily undergoes transformation through use of herbs.

Although these epics gave brief sketches of the phenomenon, the first substantial literary description of a werewolf that became the progenitor of all later versions is included in a Roman work, *Trimalchio's Banquet*, written by Petronius in the first century AD. The tale is narrated by a former slave, Niceros, who was going to visit his mistress and asked a soldier to accompany him. The two men set out under a full moon and after a time stopped to rest among some tombstones that lined the road. During that sojourn, the soldier began stripping off his clothes, putting them down by the roadside. Then he urinated in a circle around his clothes and suddenly turned into a wolf who began to howl and ran away into the woods. His clothes turned into stone. When Niceros reached his mistress's house, she informed him that a wolf had just been there and had butchered many of her herd. The wolf had escaped, but a slave had managed to stab the animal in the neck with a spear. On returning to his master's house at dawn, Niceros notices that the clothes have been removed from the roadside, leaving a pool of blood in their place. Back at home, he finds the soldier lying in bed with a doctor treating his wounded neck. Niceros realized then that the man was a werewolf—using the Latin word *versipellem*, meaning literally 'turn skin' (Otten 231-233; Douglas 39,41-42).

With this story the major elements that recur in werewolf traditions over the ages, including the Hollywood versions, were established. The transition from man to wolf must take place under the full moon. On a practical level, the moonlight enabled Niceros to see an event that had transpired at night and thus make his story believable to his listeners. But the moon also has deep associations with lycanthropy. Symbolically, the moon is associated with the hunt in almost all cultures. This may relate to the fact that for hunter-gathers the collection of plant food was a daily chore whereas hunting was a periodic activity that may have been stimulated by the phase of the moon acting as a signal to begin the chase. This sign would be reinforced by the howling of the wolves—the predators that hunters most closely imitated. In prehistoric times the lunar cycle was a recognizable unit of time, a natural clock. In many traditions there is an association between the moon and a female deity concerned with hunting. The classic example of this association is the Graeco-Roman figure of Artemis, or Diana, called "the mistress of animals," who is known for changing a man into a stag when he saw her bathing (Douglas 38-40). The moon, of course, as the archetypal symbol of change, has a logical connection with the profound alteration inherent in the man-to-

wild beast transformation.

Petronius' story also established the feature that a person must remove his clothes in order to become a werewolf, discarding the things that make him human before changing into an animal. Also initiated was the tradition that some form of magic is used to bring about the transformation, as in the case of the soldier urinating in a circle around his clothes. The urination theme became part of many versions of the werewolf, and relates to the lupine habit of territory marking. In order for the werewolf to become human again, he must return to the same spot where he left his clothes to retrieve them. The conversion of the clothes into stone would prevent anyone from taking or moving them while the owner was in wolf form. Another important motif that persists to the present day is the sympathetic wound—an injury inflicted on the werewolf that will still appear after he returns to human form. In Petronius' tale, as in others to follow, this wound is proof that the phenomenon of changing into a werewolf actually happened and confirms the shared identity of man and wolf. In cinematic versions of the werewolf, as just described, many of these motifs have been retained and others have been added. Water has been an important element in effecting human-to-wolf transformation, and its power could be imparted by drinking from a wolf's pawprint, rolling in the dewy grass, bathing in a fountain or spring, or plunging into and swimming across a body of water. Charms or secret ointments rubbed on the body were also used to cause the transition, and wolf pelts or magic belts or girdles provided by a supernatural being and donned by a human could bring about the change to beast.

In order to understand the werewolf and the emotions it evokes, one must take a close look at the extraordinary history of human relationships with the wolf and the crusade of annihilation. The species was long ago extirpated in the British Isles and Scandinavia and wolf populations were decimated in its former range throughout the world (Lopez 13-14). As one wolf researcher points out, the destruction of that animal represents "the first time in the history of the planet [that] one species made a deliberate organized attempt to exterminate a fellow species." Ingrained hatred of the wolf was brought with the colonists to the New World. The American war against the species was "one of the most successful programs ever carried out by the federal government." The original wolf population in what is now the lower forty-eight states before the arrival of European settlers is estimated to have been two million. "By the 1950s, except for isolated populations of a few

hundred wolves in the Upper Midwest, the gray wolf had been exterminated in those areas" (McIntyre 69,77).

Ironically, at least "since the advent of death certificates, there have been no verifiable records of unprovoked attack on humans by [healthy] wolves in the North American continent" (Thiel 35). Yet countless injuries and deaths attributable to wolves have been recorded from the Old World. A partial explanation may be that these attacks were related to rabies epidemics. There is also the plausible theory that some of the aggressive encounters involved wolf-dog hybrids, which are much less wary of humans than wolves. In particular, the eighteenth century attacks in southern France by the so-called "Beast of Gévaudan" can likely be traced to a wolf-dog cross (Trotti 126). Another factor is that wolves can tell when a person is armed. Modern wolves have had many generations' experience with firearms, and thus are much more cautious than their ancestors (Russell and Russell 158). Numerous causes underlie the hatred that motivated brutal wolf-exterminating campaigns throughout the animal's range. Culturally ingrained superstitions imbued the animal with mysterious frightfulness. Anti-wolf sentiment was inspired by the desire to protect vulnerable livestock and also to preserve the species preyed upon by the wolf, such as deer and elk, for human sport-hunting purposes. But ignorance of the actual ecological role of the wolf, and its value, also accounts for much of the tragedy. Overall, the issue at stake has always been a lack of knowledge about humankind's relationship to the universe, the age-old dilemma relating to determining "man's place in nature."

It is likely that Ice-Age hunters throughout Europe enjoyed fairly peaceful competitive coexistence with wolves, as they both pursued big game in the same areas. Judging from recent hunter-gatherer cultures, early European hunters probably viewed wolves in the same way as many tribes of Native Americans, as "brothers in the hunt." With habitat and game abundant, social predators, both wolf and human, could afford to be tolerant of one another. Hunters, unlike husbandrymen and stock-tenders, would undoubtedly admire the wolves' courage and hunting skill. Early humans probably learned to function like a wolf pack in hunting methods and social organization. People and wolves lived in similar societies and shared characteristics in common, including pair-bonding, extended family clans, group cooperation to achieve goals, communal care and training of young by both sexes, group ceremonies, leadership hierarchies, and the sense of

kinship that caused individuals to share food with others. In social customs and subsistence lifestyle, wolves are considered the prime model for understanding early humans (McIntyre 18). Paradoxically, the concept that humankind is more like the wolf than any other animal may explain some of the antipathy toward the animal. By mirroring our own predatory nature, the wolf evokes hatred for that aspect of humanity that represents our less domesticated selves.

W. M. S. Russell and Clare Russell, two scholars who would be expected to know better, wrote on the social biology of werewolves in 1978, giving a diatribe against wolves that more properly belongs in the Dark Ages: "To propose conserving [wolves] in the wild" is "analogous to suggesting the conservation of desert locusts or malarial mosquitoes....It can only be explained by something like totemic survivals." Referring to Australian totemism, they present the misleading argument that "so long as totems were valuable food species, the totemic system was ecologically sound." But when it spread to embrace objects of "no actual service to the natives," this was no longer true. "The conservation of a pest species is, therefore, intelligible in totemic terms, though obviously not in terms of rational ecology" (178-179). What an unfortunate discussion to be published during this time of ecological crisis, when modern science has demonstrated the vital role predators, particularly wolves, play in the integrity of the natural environment and even in the health of the entire planet!

The Russells argue against the validity of what they call the "sentimental attitude" to wolves, citing the adverse opinions of stock-tenders who must deal with predators in real life, such as the reindeer-herding Lapps. In that society, the Boy Scout movement was resisted by the children, who "objected strongly to being called Wolf-cubs" (179). The authors trace the origin of the Boy Scout wolf cubs to Akela, the wolf in Kipling's *Jungle Book*, and argue that through that figure "generations of urban children have been familiarized with the wolf totem." They assert that this may help to explain the appearance in recent years of movements to conserve wild wolf populations, and even reintroduce them into regions where they have been exterminated," a practice that is deplorable because of wolves' "depredations on livestock" and their being "dangerous carriers of rabies" (178). To advocate a cultural materialist view which excludes psychological and cultural motivations denies the preeminent influence of human symbolic capacities.

Admittedly, the utilitarian concerns associated with the rise of stock-tending have been strong factors in evoking hatred for the wolf. In that regard it is relevant that a human-wolf phenomenon exists among the Navajo, a tribe that is deeply involved with sheep-raising. However, the anthropologist who studied Navajo human-wolves, which are a type of witch, did not find that they have any direct relationship to the killing of sheep, but did note that they may steal sheep, motivated by "the jealousy and envy which accrues to the owner of much jewelry and many sheep" (Morgan 11, 40).

Navajo shape-shifters or human-wolves represent belief in fluidity between the human and animal worlds. Human wolves possess great speed and the ability to cover a lot of territory without effort and then to disappear, demonstrating their supernatural power. As recently as 1992, a Navajo driving a truck at 75 miles an hour reported that the figure of a man ran alongside him and then veered off, changing into a wolf just before disappearing into the bush (Burbank 1994: 1, 5, 6). A Navajo human-wolf can be distinguished from a real wolf because his tail hangs straight down, in contrast to an actual wolf, who puts his tail out behind him as he runs. The morning after shooting a wolf, a Navajo may follow its tracks for miles, only to discover a man bleeding from a suspicious wound. Or, if a suspected werewolf is shot, the next morning a Navajo miles away may fall from his horse, wounded in exactly the same place where the werewolf had been shot. Human-wolves, also called skin walkers, are believed to climb to the top of a family's hogan and look through the smoke hole. Occupants see a pair of pointed ears and a wolfish face with glowing eyes. The wolf then drops some powder made from the skin of a dead person, called corpse poison, into the fire below, which flares and causes the people to breathe the deadly fumes. Or the wolf may sprinkle the poison on the victim's nose or mouth or blow it at him, causing bad luck, illness or death (Burbank 1994,7,8;Burbank 1990,49;Morgan 18).

William Morgan argues that the psychological and cultural meanings of Navajo werewolves lie in the fear of the "ravenous cannibalism" they represent and their association with tribal belief in "night wandering" that allows a person to be in two places at the same time (11). Also prominent is the idea that a human-wolf will dig up and eat bodies or take the jewelry that has been buried with the deceased for use in the afterlife. Navajo have "an excessive fear of the dead," shunning contact with a corpse, for the spirit is still in the physical body and must be avoided. The

main defining characteristic of a Navajo witch is "trifling with the dead or the possessions of the dead." While in wolf-skin, witches break powerful taboos by engaging in necrophilia, sexual excess, incest, bestiality, and cannibalism. Thus they negate world order and bring chaos, destroying the tenets of social propriety not only by obliterating the demarcation between humans and animals but also by transgressing the boundary between life and death (Morgan 11, 25-26; Burbank 1994, 6; Burbank 1990, 49, 51).

The most vivid archetypes of fearful werewolves, however, are those of the Old World, still remembered with dread by each generation who shudders anew at the retelling of their history. During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, when belief in werewolves was most prevalent, countless hundreds of people accused of undergoing transformation to wolves were punished, usually by death, often with confessions obtained through torture. Many were burned alive. Details of these cases were carefully recorded. One of the most notorious was the German, Stubbe Peeter, who, over a twenty-five year period allegedly committed many crimes including rape, incest, murder, eating the raw flesh of people as well as animals, and adultery. He confessed to having made a pact with the devil, who had given him a girdle to transform him into a wolf. Above the instrument of torture used in his 1589 execution in Cologne was hung the likeness of a wolf "to show unto all men the shape wherein he executed those cruelties" (Otten 9,53,76).

Another self-confessed werewolf, Jean Grenier, tried in France in 1603, revealed that he had become a werewolf by applying a salve and wearing a wolf skin provided by "The Man of the Forest," an affiliate of the devil. The young lycanthrope admitted he had clawed and bitten several girls and had killed and eaten babies and children. The court, unusual for its time, took into account his mental derangement and low intelligence that made him "incapable of rational thought," and sentenced him to life in a monastery for moral and religious instruction. There a visitor noted that he had nails like claws and ran on all fours, eating rotten meat. He died at age twenty, considered to be "scarcely human" (Otten 9, 51; Lope 244).

During the height of the werewolf craze, a person who was antisocial or marginal, living apart from others, might be accused of being a werewolf. Anyone who was conceived at the full moon, born feet first or with a caul, had a hairy body, scabbed legs, or lupine features, or whose eyebrows met in the middle might be suspect. Lack of visible fur was not a protection as

one accused werewolf found when he told his tormentors his hair was on the inside and they gashed his arms and legs to verify his claim (Summers 160-161). Werewolves never had the long, bushy tails of ordinary wolves, and were distinguished from them by being tailless or having truncated tails. Werewolves might also have smaller heads or appear different in color. Many theories involving disease as the cause of belief in werewolves have been advanced. Foremost among these proposed etiologies is porphyria, a rare blood disorder whose symptoms include excessive hair growth on face, hands, arms, and legs, reddish teeth, and claw-shaped fingernails and toenails, as well as facial scarring and disfigurement from lesions resulting from a toxic reaction to sunlight that might make the sufferer prefer to travel at night ("Porphyrias" 7). Other diseases implicated are rabies and ergot poisoning, which could account for the victims' irrational actions; hypertrichosis giving a bestial appearance; malnutrition stimulating an appetite for flesh; demonic possession; melancholia, autism, schizophrenia, and various psychoses; or the ingestion of pharmacological hallucinogens leading to delusions of lupine identity. Though provocative, probably none of these factors played a substantial role in the werewolf phenomenon.

Far more significant is the cultural context in which fear and implacable hatred of predators became nearly universal at a certain stage of human history. Many indigenous predator species take human-beast form in various areas of the world, such as were-jaguars in South America, were-bears in northern Europe and Asia, were-leopards in Africa, were-tigers in China, and were-foxes in Japan. But the concept of werewolves is by far the most widespread and deeply-entrenched image of violence and aggression, occurring throughout the whole range of the wolf's former habitat: from the northern tundra of Europe and Asia down to the shores of the Mediterranean, east to India and China, and to western North America (Douglas 21).

Thousands of years ago the wolf was celebrated as a protector; thus a spiritual leader who acquired its powers to become a wolf-man was regarded with awe. But as human societies became sedentary and adopted the agricultural way of life, attitudes toward wolves, and hence werewolves, changed. They became identified with hostile forces, outcasts who lived in the woods and preyed upon humans, and were perceived as dangerous misfits or deviates with savage qualities that made them uncivilized and untamable. Originally, primitive societies had

generally viewed the werewolf positively because it represented integration of the cultural and wild elements of humans. "To learn to howl with the wolves" meant "opening oneself up to the essence of nature," a process through which it was possible to achieve self-awareness. To live in a social order, a person must have spent time in the wilderness, for only by going outside the self could one's inner nature be made clear. By the Middle Ages, however, the werewolf had lost its benign ritual meaning and was considered destructive, bloodthirsty, and cunning. In the late Middle Ages, it became associated with the devil. At the end of the fifteenth century, the official Catholic position switched from considering belief in werewolves nonsensical and sinful to full belief in their existence as accomplices of Satan who, according to the 1484 Papal Bull, must be annihilated. This change was "connected to the holy dictum to believe in witches. Along with cats, werewolves were allegedly the favorite cohorts of witches, and in many werewolf trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was no real distinction made between werewolf and witch." The greatest fear in both Catholic and Protestant minds was chaos, which was associated with sensuality and an uncontrollable nature, and that fear was projected upon human wolves (Zipes 68-69, 71).

Preeminently, the werewolf phenomenon articulates humankind's overwhelming penchant for symbolizing with animal images, making sense of life with metaphors from nature. The wolf is an extraordinarily rich vehicle of expression, carrying a complex web of embedded codes, some of which stand in paradoxical relationship to the actual animal but most of which are rooted in emphasis on its predation and meat-eating. The wolf bears projected guilt for the human predatory past and a present replete not only with consumption of animal flesh but with all manner of exploitation of and barbarity toward our own species and others. In Christian symbolism, Jesus is the lamb of God and the Good Shepherd for whom the wolf is enemy. Thus, Satan acquired lupine imagery. Christ warns his followers to "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Evil wolves became embedded in literary masterpieces. Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* includes the Devil's wolves that strangle the sheep of Jesus Christ. Dante's *Inferno* depicts the wolf as a symbol of greed and fraud, for those who are condemned to hell for the sins of the wolf are seducers, hypocrites, thieves, and liars. Rude eating is described as "wolfing" one's food, and hunger is the

“wolf at the door.” A “discordant note on the violin is still called a wolf.” An aggressive sexual signal is a “wolf whistle,” and immoral acts are epitomized by the use of the French idiom “she’s seen the wolf” meaning “she’s lost her virginity” as well as by calling prostitutes “wolves” because they are viewed as “consuming the souls” of men (Lopez 219, 221, 239). Not only human evil, but even that emanating from nature itself is foisted upon the wolf. Lupus is the word for a dread disease that may eat away the flesh.

The uprooting of graves for devouring corpses gave wolves an association with death and their attraction to body-strewn battlefields linked them to war and desolation. Human savagery is couched in lupine terms. The fifteenth century French nobleman known as Bluebeard, who tortured, killed, and ate hundreds of children and bathed in their blood was categorized as a werewolf by folklorist Sabine Baring-Gould (181-237), even though no man-beast transformation was reported. A Nazi terrorist organization called “Operation Werewolf” carried out a regime of murders in 1920 and in World War II one of Hitler’s headquarters was named Werewolf (Douglas 26; Russell and Russell 165). Robert Eisler, following his imprisonment at Buchenwald and Dachau, argued for an evolutionist derivation of human violence, titling his study of sadism and masochism *Man Into Wolf* (1951). American World War II propaganda was interwoven with opposition to Aldo Leopold’s wolf preservation program. An advocate of the bounty for wolf killers wrote, “The wolf is the Nazi of the forest. He takes the deer and some small fry.... Can Professor Leopold justify their existence because deer meant for human consumption should be fed to the Nazi because we must have that protection for the trees? Can he justify the Jap or Nazi because he eats a rabbit or a grouse which are meant for human food, or the songbird on its nest, which are meant by the Lord for our pleasure?” A poster promoting the sale of US Savings Bonds depicts a snarling wolf, and states “There’s one 100-proof way to guard your door against this fellow’s visit. There’s wolf poison in every US Savings Bond you buy” (Thiel 107-108).

A werewolf, according to one account, had “eyes glaring like marsh-fires” (Baring-Gould 3). A recent Broadway musical production of *Beauty and the Beast* featured snarling wolves with crimson eyes lit up like burning coals. But where many observers described a hideous red or orange glow in the werewolf’s eyes, Aldo Leopold saw in the last wolf he had shot “a fierce green fire dying in her eyes.” The experience made him think “like a mountain” with an ecological

perspective that changed his role from wolf-killer to wolf-preserver (Flader 1). Since that day in 1944, attitudes about wolves have been gradually shifting to becoming more sympathetic, though with many fluctuations. Now, fifty years later, the principal cellist in a California symphony orchestra quit her job in protest against performing Prokofiev’s 1936 work, *Peter and the Wolf*. She urged the public to boycott the performance of the work that teaches children “to hate and fear wolves and to applaud a hunter who kills a wolf” (Wolf Pact D1). Presently, wolves are being reintroduced to various regions of the United States where stockmen, hunters, and those who fear the wild can be out-voted. School children may visit wolf education centers and are encouraged to adopt a wolf through donations of money.

But the evil werewolf still prowls. Two 1990 British sex criminals were called the “werewolf rapist” and the “Wolfman.” Yet strangely the recent multiple murders and cannibalism of Jeffrey Dahmer which resemble deeds recounted at the old European werewolf trials did not elicit those titles (Douglas 262-63). A currently popular song tells about the “Werewolf of London” with “a Chinese menu in his hand.... Going to get himself a big dish of beef chow mein.” The lyrics warn “If you hear him howling around your kitchen door/Better not let him in. Little old lady got mutilated late last night.... He’s the hair-handed gent who ran amuk in Kent.... Better stay away from him/He’ll rip your lungs out.... I saw a werewolf drinking a piña colada at Trader Vic’s/His hair was perfect/Werewolves of London draw blood” (Zevon). The human/wolf form continues to represent our species’ carnivorous nature and our staggering propensity for violence. Likely, werewolves will continue to be important in the future, representing as they do the paradox of our projection into animals of traits unacceptable in humans and the assignment of human behavior patterns to animals. Both processes are deeply entrenched in human cognition and are becoming more, not less, prevalent in modern times. As the wild domain becomes ever more engulfed by the tame and we are concerned with measuring one against the other, the man-beast figure that combines them both holds renewed fascination. Werewolves embody the conflict between instinctual urges and rational behavior—a source of ongoing controversy regarding the question of establishing valid distinctions between people and animals. The werewolf concept represents the need to deal with animality, wildness, and otherness—urgent issues in modern life—and bridges the man-beast gulf, challenging the ingrained Cartesian dualism that

divides humankind from animals in Western society. The sense of identification we feel with wolves horrifies us, but at the same time captivates us as we acquire deeper appreciation for the wild realm and our place within it.

Works Cited

- An American Werewolf in London*. Polygram Pictures, 1980.
- Baring-Gould, Sabine. *The Book of Were-Wolves*. New York: Causeway Books, 1973.
- Burbank, James C. *Vanishing Lobo: The Mexican Wolf and the Southwest*. Boulder: Johnson Books, 1990.
- Burbank, James C. "Yenaldloosh: The Shape-Shifter Beliefs of the Navajos." *The Indian Trader* 25.6 (June 1994): 1,5-8,10.
- Douglas, Adam. *The Beast Within*. London: Chapman's, 1992.
- Eisler, Robert. *Man Into Wolf: An Anthropological Interpretation of Sadism, Masochism and Lycanthropy*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1951.
- Flader, Susan L. *Thinking Like A Mountain*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1974.
- The Howling*. Avco Embassy Pictures Corporation, 1981.
- James, Caryn. "The Werewolf Within Dances with Abandon." *New York Times* 19 June 1994: 13,18.
- Janusonis, Michael. "A Ponderous Wolf Could Use More Howling." *Providence Journal-Bulletin* 17 June 1994: D5.
- Keck, Paul E., et al. "Lycanthropy: Alive and Well in the Twentieth Century." *Psychological Medicine* 18 (1988): 113-120.
- Kulick, Aaron R., Harrison G. Pope, Jr., and Paul E. Keck, Jr. "Lycanthropy and Self-Identification." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 178.2 (1990): 134-37.
- Lopez, Barry Holstun. *Of Wolves and Men*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978.
- McIntyre, Rick. *A Society of Wolves: National Parks and the Battle Over the Wolf*. Stillwater, Minnesota: Voyageur Press, 1993.
- Matthew: 7:15.
- Morgan, William. "Human Wolves Among the Navajo." Yale University Publications in Anthropology no. 11, 1936.
- Otten, Charlotte F., ed. *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. New York: Penguin, 1955.
- "Porphyrias." *Mayo Clinic Health Letter* 7.10 (1986): 7.
- Russell, W. M. S. and Claire Russell. "The Social Biology of Werewolves." *Animals in Folklore*. Ed. J. R. Porter and W. M. S. Russell. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978.
- Rutherford, Brett. "Wolf and Other Wolves—An Appreciation." *Haunts* 28 Summer/Fall 1994: 55-56.
- Spence, Lewis. *The Encyclopedia of the Occult*. London: Bracken Books, 1988.
- Summers, Montague. *The Werewolf*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1934.
- Teen Wolf*, Wolfkill Productions, 1985.
- Thiel, Richard P. *The Timber Wolf in Wisconsin: The Death and Life of A Majestic Predator*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993.
- Trotti, Hugh. *Beasts and Battles: Fact in Legend and History?* New York: Rivercross, 1989.
- Weinraub, Bernard. "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book Editor?" *New York Times* 12 June 1994: Section 2: 1,22-23.
- Wolf*. Columbia Pictures, 1994.
- "Wolf." *People* 41.24 (27 June 1994): 13.
- The Wolf Man*. Universal City Studio, 1941.
- "Wolf Pact." *USA Today* 6 October 1994: D:1.
- Wolfen*. Orion Pictures, 1981.
- Zevon, Warren. "Werewolves of London." *A Quiet Normal Life*. Audiotape. New York: Elektra/Asylum Records 1986.
- Zipes, Jack, ed. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, VMD, PhD, a veterinarian as well as a cultural anthropologist, is Professor of Environmental Studies at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, where she teaches and carries out research in the field of human-animal relationships.