

Introduction

Kaja Franck and Janine Hatter

‘Werewolves are not a subject for the *academe*’

Glen Duncan, *The Last Werewolf* (2011), p.140

In May 2016, the residents of Hull, Yorkshire, were harassed by an ‘8ft tall creature lurking in an abandoned industrial area’ whose ‘upper body is more wolf than man – similar to the beast in the American Werewolf films’ (Branagan 2016). The local consensus decided this monster was a werewolf and the article describes, in suitably sensational language, that the ‘city [Hull] is trembling in terror as the full moon approaches’ (Branagan 2016). By using the label ‘werewolf’ to account for these sightings, newspaper coverage identified the werewolf as ubiquitous in the popular imagination. Moreover, this is a monster who has been shaped by popular culture as both the reference to the ‘American Werewolf films’ and the full moon, an aspect of lycanthropy that was cemented in *The Wolf Man* (1941), show. In the twenty-first century, lycanthropy sells. Not only do werewolves feature prominently in paranormal romance and dark fantasy literature, but they are on our screens as well. MTV’s *Teen Wolf* (2011-), a reboot of the 1985 film of the same name, is in its sixth season, while the television series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-), and its offshoot *The Originals* (2013-), which both feature central werewolf characters, have garnered a huge following. With the sighting of ‘real-life’ werewolves in the United Kingdom, it seems the popularity of the werewolf is unlikely to wane any time soon.

Yet the werewolf is often considered secondary to its long-time companion, the vampire. In *The Encyclopaedia of Vampires and Werewolves*, Rosemary Ellen Guiley argues that though literature ‘delivers us noble lineages of werewolf clans, [...] no matter how beautiful and crafty and intelligent, they remain in the shadow of the vampire’ (2011: xiv). Discussing the potential reasons for this neglect, Fred Botting notes that werewolves, ‘too hairy, animal, sexual in their associations to assimilate to a slick corporate and post-human context, are generally given supporting and antagonist roles or, hidden away in the wilds of Scotland (*Dog Soldiers*, Neil Marshall, 2002), they remain provincial throwbacks’ (2014: 199). Though the werewolf is a familiar, if not archetypal, monster, akin to the zombie and the vampire, it is clear that it has not achieved the status of these other creatures – yet.

This is where creative writing and the academy merge. As Botting and Guiley's previous comments suggest, the bestial qualities of the werewolf have meant that it has been presented as a simple monster indicative of the 'beast within'. In this sense, the werewolf is read as a metaphor for the bestial aspects of humanity – violence and a voracious appetite for sex and food – which are indicated by its animal form. The transformation into a werewolf is a loss of the human subject and should be avoided at all costs. Those who have become werewolves are to be, at best, shunned and, at worst, destroyed, in order to protect society. Read in this manner, the complex relationship between popular culture and its monsters is ignored. This edition of *Revenant* seeks to counteract this by showcasing the multiple forms the werewolf takes and the multifaceted ways in which this 'monster' can be interpreted.

The articles start with the introduction of the werewolf into English literature during the long nineteenth century. Barring the mention of lycanthropy in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) and Charles Maturin's *The Albigenses* (1824), the werewolf becomes part of the panoply of monsters that haunt literature through the medium of the short story. The first article, by Janine Hatter, postulates that in nineteenth-century werewolf short stories, the werewolf's hybridity offers a vehicle to engage with the changing landscape brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Utilising an EcoGothic perspective, she argues that the werewolf in these tales speaks to the nostalgia for a purer, untouched form of nature that pre-figures our own ecological outlook. The use of the werewolf as a motif in nineteenth-century literature speaks to its mutability. The second article, Abigail Boucher's reading of G. W. M. Reynolds's penny dreadful, *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf* (1846-7), engages with anti-Catholic sentiment in Gothic literature. Her article argues that Reynolds aligns the superstitions surrounding the werewolf with Roman Catholicism in a reductive manner. In comparison, the third article, Melissa Purdue's 'Fear of the New Woman in Clemence Housman's *The Were-Wolf*', contextualises the werewolf not as a symbol of Gothic superstition, but the embodiment of the threat of proto-feminism during the *fin de siècle*. Housman's novella of 1896 uses lycanthropy to examine contemporary fears; in doing so she reveals the power of the werewolf in exploring a variety of culturally specific identities.

The fourth article continues the consideration of the threat of femininity. Hanan Alzaz's 'Salu'ah: The She-Wolf of Arabia' concentrates on Bedouin folktales about a creature who roams the deserts of Arabia in search of her prey. Drawing on Barbara Creed's work, Alzaz contextualises the Salu'ah within the discourse of monstrous femininity, but as symptomatic of Bedouin patriarchal culture. Thus, though the Salu'ah may share traits with

the European lycanthrope of folklore, she is a reflection of the culture in which she roams. Fear of the 'Other' is explored in both the fifth and sixth articles, Simon Bacon's 'Dirty, Wild Beasts! Representations of the Homeless as Werewolves in Horror Films from *Werewolf of London* (1935) to *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009)' and Jaquelin Elliott's 'Becoming The Monster: Queer Monstrosity and the Reclamation of the Werewolf in Slash Fandom'. Bacon demonstrates how the werewolf suffers from being viewed as a second-class citizen, especially in comparison to the increasingly sophisticated vampire. Starting with *The Werewolf of London* (1935), his article charts how the werewolf has become synonymous with poverty, culminating in *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009), in which vampires are feudal lords and werewolves are their serfs. The underrepresentation of the werewolf is translated into their lowly status. Similarly, in considering the relationship between queerness and the werewolf, Elliott argues that in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997-2007), and the aforementioned series *Teen Wolf*, the homosexual elements of the werewolf have been disavowed and queer storylines have been appropriated for heterosexual characters. In reparation, fans have used fanfiction as means of returning queer characters to these narratives.

The idea of lycanthropy as identity returns in the seventh article, 'Talking with the Wolf Man', in which Andy and Sylvia Dean explore how real-life self-identifying lycanthropes express themselves. The study engages with the difficulties of navigating what it means to be a lycanthrope, which has, especially within Hollywood depictions, been considered a monstrous entity. Finding the voice of the werewolf is a central concern as it involves navigating multiple senses of self. The experience of being a werewolf is also explored within the realm of computer games in Melissa Bianchi's 'Claws and Controllers: Understanding Werewolves in Videogames'. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's 'being animal', Bianchi shows how computer games allow the human player to interface with the animal 'Other' through adaptive skills and visuals. She argues that video games are moving away from depicting werewolves as indicative of the 'beast within', instead recreating them to suit the environment of each alternate reality. The importance of re-envisioning lycanthropy returns in the ninth article, 'Brand New Ancient Legends: Creating Werewolves for a Welsh Halloween'. In this article, Richard Hand explains how, as part of a Halloween event commissioned by the Welsh council, practice-as-research was used to (re)create local folklore and urban legends that made the werewolf a contemporary entity that evoked terror. Hand's discussion presents the multiple incarnations of the werewolf that influenced these

‘brand new ancient legends’ and, in doing so, elucidates the continuing relevance of the werewolf in popular culture.

Melding with these academic considerations, the creative pieces develop the ways in which werewolves are reimagined for contemporary popular culture. Through modern twists on fairy tales, folklore, World War One accounts, and gothic noir, each of the short stories expands the werewolf’s literary horizons. Kaja Franck’s ‘The Wolf Girl and the Hunter’ inverts the feral child brought up by a wolf narrative, imagining feral children as transformed wolves. Evoking traditional fairy tale tropes and Angela Carter-styled language, Franck offers a new perspective on social conditioning and the relationship between animality and humanity. Beth Mann’s ‘The Last Werewolf in Germany’ picks up this latter theme, with an examination of psychological disturbance in First-World-War-torn Germany. Mann examines the similarities between lycanthropy and shell shock caused by war time trauma, the influence these have on her soldier protagonist, and the resultant effects on his family once the war is over.

Moving into the twenty-first century, Kevan Manwaring and Martin Lloyd re-invision the werewolf using technological advancements. Manwaring’s ‘The Wolf Flute’ draws upon Welsh folklore, as discussed in Richard Hand’s article, to create a narrative that mixes the traditional Welsh setting of remote villages and meat-eating forest workers, with modern GM foods. Lloyd on the other hand, presents a gothic noir tale set on a university campus, with the school newspaper reporter dead and a sinister tweet from ‘@True_Wolf’. Engaging with the modern day werewolves of the internet, the university’s rugby team as a ‘wolf pack’ and initiation rights as traditional masculine aggressive behaviour, Lloyd uses the online werewolf as a metaphor for anonymous multiple identities.

Throughout the process of compiling and editing this special issue of *Revenant*, it has become apparent that we limit the werewolf if we read it solely as the ‘beast within’. Lycanthropy may evoke a fear of the loss of the human subject, but it is also a vehicle for challenging the most problematic elements of being human. An encounter with a werewolf is an encounter with the limitations of identity as uniform. This hybrid, shape-shifting monster has emerged from a Gothic past, becoming a contemporary being. The increasing number of mediums and forms that the werewolf takes in popular culture – including novels, television, films, graphic novels, fanfiction and computer games – demonstrates its continuing power. As this issue’s contributions suggest, the werewolf is certainly a subject for creative writing and the academy alike.

List of References

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