

***Werewolves, Wolves, and the Gothic*, ed. by Robert McKay and John Miller**
(Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017)

Werewolves, Wolves, and the Gothic is an ambitious and comprehensive study of the wild beasts in literature and across the media. As editors Robert McKay and John Miller state, '[t]he wolf is both determined by the Gothic and a point at which the Gothic imagination is subject to a certain exposure' (p. 5). However, rather than just focus on the nature of the wolf, this critical study explores its representations, challenging how the wolf is perceived and depicted through different media, from classic novels to modern-day portrayals on the big screen. From their beginnings in myths and legends, through their emerging roles in late-Victorian literature, to more contemporary imaginings of these monsters, this book critically evaluates (were)wolf figures in literature, exploring how they are seen and portrayed. The wolf usually exists at the conjunction between the aesthetic and the supernatural. However, this text goes beyond such concerns to force a reconsideration of the creature from the 1890s to the present. In their Introduction, McKay and Miller explain that wolves and werewolves 'raise unsettling questions about the intersection of the real and the imaginary and the natural and the supernatural, foregrounding the instability of categories of human identity and the worldliness and political weight of the Gothic' (pp. 1-2). This questions the werewolf's hybridity – half human, half beast – a hybridity that makes a concrete link between reality and the supernatural. They explain that '[a]t the heart of this study is the ever-vexed arena of identity politics' (p. 4), which is central to understanding the werewolf as a supernatural being composed of two real creatures, the human and the wolf. How the wolf is portrayed in certain media shapes the preconceptions about the behaviour of said beast. The editors rigorously investigate the identity of the wolf in Western culture by bringing together critical essays on, for instance, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Guy Endore's *The Werewolf in Paris* (1933), and the romantic teen supernatural drama, *Twilight* (2005) by Stephenie Meyer. Taken together, the essays trace the development of the wolf's identity over more than a century through literature, film, and television. The text comprises ten chapters, examining a range of topics centred on how the werewolf has developed in fiction and popular perceptions. The chapters are grouped into two sections – 'Social Anxieties' and 'Species Troubles'.

As McKay and Miller point out in their Introduction, the section entitled 'Social Anxieties' 'traces the multifarious ways in which the werewolf imaginary figures a series of concerns that we can regard as peculiar to human society' (p. 6). Hannah Priest's opening

chapter, ‘Like Father Like Son: Wolf-Men, Paternity, and the Male Gothic’, and Jazmina Cininas’s ‘Wicked Wolf-Women and Shaggy Suffragettes: Lycanthropic Femmes Fatales in the Victorian and Edwardian Eras’, both draw on the political, gendered, and geographical landscapes inhabited by the wolf. These chapters discuss sexuality, race, and ethnicity, and capture the obsession with lycanthropy in addition to the various political and social elements that have surfaced over the years through several media. These chapters question how the werewolf’s origins resulted in their westernisation, and how the creature has struggled to determine its identity – as a villain, a victim, a hero, and even a love interest.

Next, Michelle Nicole Boyer pays close attention to the postcolonial and contemporary depictions of the wolf, evaluating films such as *Dances with Wolves* (dir. by Kevin Costner, 1990), and *Last of the Dogmen* (dir. by Tab Murphy, 1995). As Boyer explains, the characterisation of werewolves is problematic; their ‘identity is non-existent because popular cinema has written them out of existence’ (p. 76). The wolf figure is, she asserts, representative ‘of the colonised indigenous peoples of North America’, a trend that ‘continues in later filmic texts’ (p. 8). Specifically, Boyer argues that ‘popular culture expects that Native Americans should become the human embodiment of wolves’ (p. 8). Boyer then explores popular contemporary teen franchises such as *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-17) and *True Blood* (2008-14), and considers the identity of the wolf across different North-American cultures, as well as the supernatural elements of each culture’s depiction of the wolf. This chapter is useful as it not only looks at the identity of the werewolf as a supernatural character, but also as a postcolonial product that both empowers and stigmatises the colonised indigenous peoples of America. This section also includes chapters by Roman Bartosch and Celestine Caruso, who focus primarily on *Twilight*, a work of fiction that sparked a four-part film franchise (2008-12), depicting the werewolf as a potential love interest for the protagonist, instead of as a cursed villain, as seen for example in *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). As Bartosch and Caruso explain, *Twilight* ‘endorses the character constellation of the vampire, werewolf and human in ways to help understand the *ubernatural*, although it cannot be considered “horror” in the strict sense’ (pp. 87-88, italics in original). Instead of typical ‘horror’ werewolves who are the villains, this popular teen franchise opens up more discussion about the werewolf being a romantic love interest for the characters and, for some, even the hero of the story.

Batia Boe Stolar completes the ‘Social Anxieties’ section with a chapter dedicated to ‘girl power’, concentrating on the ‘monstrous feminine’ in the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy (2000-

04). As the werewolf figure is stereotypically male, Stolar discusses how *Ginger Snaps* (dir. by John Fawcett) and the subsequent sequels challenge cinematic convention by depicting a female werewolf. Stolar assesses these ‘feminist films that invite us to read werewolf narratives beyond a Freudian psychoanalytical lens’ (p. 114), highlighting how the figure of the werewolf can be utilised to overthrow outdated and misunderstood ideals. This is an incredibly interesting chapter as it explores the werewolf as female when in books, films, and legends, werewolves are predominantly male, embodying a masculinity that is also associated with particular forms of power. When a female character becomes a werewolf, she is therefore effectively transformed into a masculine beast, which arguably entails denying her female self. Therefore, not only do these films figure the monstrous woman as a beast (rather than a seductress, such as Dracula’s brides); they also depict a prominent power struggle between different gender roles, further complicating the identity politics of the werewolf.

The chapters in the second section, ‘Species Troubles’, ‘consider werewolf narratives whose social horizons reach beyond the human to trouble the very distinction between humans and all other animals’ (p. 11). Examining the symbolic and metaphorical connotations of the wolf and werewolf, this section foregrounds issues relating to identity, and specifically, the ‘politics of human-animal relations’ (p. 11). The section opens with Kaja Franck’s chapter on the gothic-horror classic *Dracula*, followed neatly by John Miller’s ‘Saki, Nietzsche, and the Superwolf’, and Robert McKay’s analysis of *The Werewolf in Paris*. These essays focus on (in)famous depictions of werewolves and how the market for beastly horror villains has expanded, allowing older texts to be reconsidered in light of new forms of representation and interpretation. In a cultural climate hungry for depictions of supernatural beasts, a new perspective of the creature’s symbolism therefore emerges.

No study on werewolves would be complete without a discussion of Angela Carter. Margot Young explores the world of Carter’s wolves in a new light, concentrating on animal studies and the ecoGothic within her stories. This is followed by Bill Hughes’s examination of the *Shiver* series (2009-12) by Maggie Stiefvater, which builds on the previous chapter, exploring non-antagonistic relationships forged between lycanthropic narratives. The concluding chapter by Matthew Lerberg, ‘Transforming the Big Bad Wolf: Redefining the Werewolf through *Grimm* and *Fables*’, begins with a quotation from ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, coming full circle to the legend of the wolf that many of us first encountered as children. Lerberg examines whether the werewolf archetype exists merely within imagination or acts as a metaphor for contemporary anxieties (p. 252). Lerberg focuses on NBC television

series *Grimm* (2011-17), and connects it to the contemporary fairytale revival seen in other popular films and TV programmes such as *The Brothers Grimm* (dir. by Terry Gilliam, 2005), *Once Upon A Time* (2011-18), and *Maleficent* (dir. by Robert Stromberg, 2014), a trend that has produced further adaptations and re-imaginings of the archetype. *Grimm* portrays the wolf in a new light, set as it is in a world where supernatural beings exist, including a ‘modern’ version of the werewolf, the ‘Blutbad’. *Grimm* challenges the werewolf’s fantasy origins by looking at its identity once again. Lerberg explains that the ‘Blutbad, or wolf/werewolf species suffer from negative representations because of their storied past’, a past that associates them with ‘violence and gore’ (p. 255). Consequently, rather than focus on how becoming a werewolf dehumanises the lycanthropic individual, in *Grimm*, the emphasis is placed on the werewolf’s identity. For example, the wolf character, Monroe, battles with his personality, experiencing an inner conflict regarding his own integrity, as he attempts to negotiate the negative fairytale representations of his species. This chapter acts as a conclusion to the text as a whole, while also taking a thought-provoking approach, intended to stimulate further conversation about the creatures and ‘problematic representations of nonhumans in Western culture’ (p. 251). It is an incredibly useful chapter as it also ends with a discussion on how werewolves are perceived in the modern day, and how we can only imagine what portrayals of the werewolf are to come in future years. This chapter exemplifies what the collection is trying to convey overall; it takes the wolf in a different and inventive direction, examining its role a contemporary setting, and in particular as a misunderstood and victimised figure, rather than the terrifying beast from horror films.

McKay and Miller’s ground-breaking critical text – the first of its kind concerned with the depiction of wolves and werewolves across a variety of media – is an invaluable guide to wolf-related myths for anyone studying within the realm of the Gothic. The wolf’s significance is analysed by passionate and dedicated scholars who challenge conventional interpretations of the creature as a villainous beast fuelled by violence and gore. The werewolf is shifting away from its westernised connotations and beginning to be reinterpreted. The wolf can now be empowering, worthy, and a deserving beast in the horror genre, but also a victim, a hero, and even a love interest, or an individual searching for its identity through its ancestral origins. As a whole, the book presents a compelling and persuasive argument for reassessing the wolf, its history, values, and perception.

Rebecca Bruce