Carys Crossen, *The Nature of the Beast: Transformations of the Werewolf from the 1970s to the Twenty-First Century*
(Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2019)

As Carys Crossen's volume *The Nature of the Beast* makes clear from its premise, for decades, the werewolf has been a neglected area of study among scholars and experts in gothic and horror fiction and within Supernatural Studies more broadly. This volume enters a debate that has risen with the new millennium and has been stimulated by the publication of a notable number of (literary, cinematic, and television) texts. Indeed, there has been a plethora of texts and media that represent a resurgence of popularity for the figure of the human being who transforms into a frightening, hirsute, and voracious creature.

The volume's Introduction brilliantly presents the author's central argument by distinguishing between two different conceptions of the werewolf. The first sees it as an isolated human being whose self is divided – torn between his civilised and bestial natures (the quintessential Freudian 'beast within') – and who finds release only in death. The second is a new representation of the werewolf dating from the late 1980s onwards, in which the divide between the two polarities is less and less marked, and in which the notion of lycanthropic subjectivity begins to emerge. As Crossen summarises, such a subjectivity 'is defined as consciousness: an awareness of self, thoughts, feelings and the possession of memories, and lived experiences. It is also based upon the possession of agency' (p. 10). The male and female werewolves present in stories such as Suzy McKee Charnas's story 'Boobs' (1989), Crossen argues, shape their identities in relation to others and become subjects in society, whether that is the human community or the pack. In this way, they perfectly represent the concept of the fluid, continually evolving self in relation to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea of 'multiplicities' in their 2013 work *A Thousand Plateaus*, a concept that serves as the critical basis for the central argument and that is returned to frequently throughout the volume.

The evolving subjectivity of the werewolf and its different forms are examined here via numerous texts, which include stand-alone novels such as Alice Borchart's *The Silver Wolf* (1993), Toby Barlow's *Sharp Teeth* (2008), Glen Duncan's *The Last Werewolf* (2011), Benjamin Percy's *Red Moon* (2013), and the series by Kelley Armstrong (*Women of the Otherworld*, 2001-21), Anne Rice (*Wolf Gift Chronicles*, 2012-13), Carrie Vaughn (*Kitty Norville*, 2005-15), and Rachel Vincent (*Faythe Sanders*, 2007-10). Crossen also explores young-adult works such as Christine Johnson's *Claire de Lune* (2010), Annette Curtis Lause's *Blood and Chocolate* (1997), Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books (2005-08), J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), and Maggie Stiefvater's *The Wolves of Mercy Falls* (2009-

14). The analysis also covers films such as *The Wolf-Man* (1941) and its 2010 remake, *Wolfen* (1981), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), and *Wolf Cop* (2014), as well as TV series, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Being Human* (2008-13), *Bitten* (2014-16), and *Wolfblood* (2012-17).

As this broad range of texts indicates, in the five chapters constituting the book, Crossen examines many aspects and facets of the figure of the werewolf. These include the struggle to come to terms with lycanthropy and the revelation of the existence of such creatures to humanity (Chapter 1); inclusivity and diversity – whether in relation to humans or within the pack (Chapter 2); and the necessity to abide by the law (its effectiveness and the forms of punishment) or to enforce the law – when werewolves assume the roles of vigilantes or police officers and select those who they consider to be evil as their victims (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 focuses on the werewolves' lives in the peaceful but boring suburbs, and in the anonymity-granting and corrupt metropolis – both of which, Crossen demonstrates, are constructed as gendered spaces. The last chapter (Chapter 5) examines the association between lycanthropy and adolescent rebelliousness, impulsiveness, and the struggle to attain a sense of self, along with the issues of being an orphan, of maturity, romance, and sexual awakening. What unites the various chapters – and creates a smooth progression from one chapter to the following one – is the analysis of themes such as the differences between male and female werewolves (including the issues of fertility, pregnancy, and abortion), and that of self-control and self-discipline. The contents and plots of the novels are excellently summarised, and their relevant themes are meticulously discussed and examined.

The Nature of the Beast thus illuminates an under-researched area, continually engaging with the past and current critical debates on the figure of the lycanthrope. The book engages with such recent critical texts as Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray's *The Curse of the Werewolf* (2006), Kimberley McMahon-Coleman's *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture* (2012), Brent A. Stypczynski's *The Modern Literary Werewolf* (2013), and Hannah Priest's *She-Wolf* (2015). Crossen also situates the argument firmly within the genre of the gothic more broadly, via the work of Chris Baldick, Barbara Creed, Andrew Tudor, Linnie Blake, Bill Hughes, and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. She provides readers with the definitions of all the central critical terms employed in the volume, from 'werewolf', 'lycanthrope', 'pack', and 'subjectivity' to 'law', 'nature', 'suburb', and 'adolescent', making use of a large and varied corpus of primary sources (such as Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1927) and Angela Carter's short stories). The volume is therefore fully grounded in current academic debates on

the subject, while providing valuable context for readers who might be unfamiliar with the history of and academic discourse around werewolves.

Among the most interesting elements of the book are the comparisons made with the behaviour of wolves in nature (the different hierarchies of their packs, for example); the comparisons with the more popular figure of the vampire; the engagement with Victorian fictional works on ferocious werewolves (especially female werewolves preying on children); and the attention to queer-related and racial issues (such as the exploration of why the majority of werewolves are heterosexual and white). Crossen also establishes some interesting parallels between the lifestyle and habits of werewolves and contemporary events such as the widespread support of the death penalty in the United States during the mid-1990s; the post-9/11 fear of terrorism; the MPs' expenses scandal in the late 2000s in the United Kingdom; and the 2008 recession.

The Nature of the Beast is therefore a welcome addition to the study of what is undoubtedly one of the most popular monsters in our culture.

Antonio Sanna