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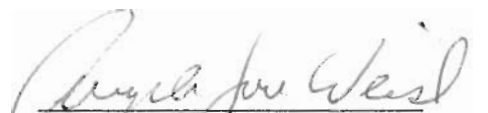
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The Werewolf Pride Movement: A Step Back from Queer Medieval Tradition

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“Werewolf Pride”: An Abstract

The current popularity of the werewolf in modern film and literature marks a great departure from the traditional myth. Rather than emphasizing ambiguity through the hybrid body, the modern werewolf has come to represent excess or lack in terms of gender and sexuality. The werewolf can now no longer be considered “queer”: that is, as an unusual, unfamiliar, and ambiguous creature that does not conform to the laws of beasts *or* men. Queer sexual and gender identity, which once found an analog in the werewolf “curse,” would seem to be denied by this current “Werewolf Pride” movement; the movement promotes heteronormative standards in its favored representations of an essentially queer figure. Hybrid identity, through physical transformation from man to wolf to man-wolf, becomes interchangeable with queer sexual identity in the medieval werewolf bodies in *The Romance of William of Palerne* and Marie de France’s “Bisclavret.” Despite persistent attempts, the werewolf’s trans-species body cannot be successfully heteronormalized without sacrificing its essential hybridity which blends man and animal.

The werewolf would have been universally acknowledged as “queer” during its reign of terror over the medieval mind: that is, as an unusual, unfamiliar, and ambiguous creature that does not conform to the laws of beasts *or* men. Relegated to the liminal space between man and beast, the werewolf’s awkward condition was instinctively repulsive to civilized humanity on principle alone; it was also uncomfortably appealing on a primal, individual level, thus ensuring its inclusion in oral tradition and popular literature. The wolfman was fear, and it was also fantasy. Werewolf texts from the Middle Ages -- namely, the early thirteenth-century romance, *William of Palerne*, and Marie de France’s early twelfth-century lay, “Bisclavret” -- suggest that the curse of fur might, after all, be a blessing to the individual dissatisfied with his or her place in society. Beyond the restrictions of humanity, the werewolf could publicly act and *desire* in ways which the average man could only dream.

When an individual’s species is in constant flux, how can its representations of gender or sexuality possibly remain static? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s classic definition of “queer” also holds true for the medieval werewolf; in fact, abstract “queerness,” in terms of gender and sexuality, is made physical through the werewolf’s hybrid body. Sedgwick explains that “when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (8), “queer” can signify instead. The transgendered female also particularly struggles against implicit notions of sexuality and identity; she and the werewolf undergo similar treatment in the medieval texts which results in their transformations. The transvestite narratives of *Silence* and “Yde et Olive” present more obviously queer figures whose queerness persists in their equivalents today. Modern narratives which revolve around transvestitism, such as Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) and Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* (2000), also follow females’ struggles against the prevailing monoliths of gender and

sexuality. For the modern werewolf, however, Sedgwick's words simply no longer apply.

The werewolf, along with a score of other formerly horrific and fantastic creatures, can no longer be considered queer; its hybridity has somehow been made to signify monolithically. Popular culture has finally domesticated the werewolf in the best and most complete way it knows how: by crudely shaping it according to the standards of heteronormativity. The werewolf myth now lacks both the pathos and terror which once made it so compelling. Medieval werewolf curses are only temporary, but their subversive effects are lasting. Modern culture has finally accepted the werewolf as an equal entitled to the possession of a transformative body, but it has also provided rules which must be abided in order to maintain that status. In *Skin Shows*, Judith Halberstam identifies the modern film monster as "the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the mechanism of failed representation" (9). Identifiable as neither wolf nor man, the werewolf is the result of the individual's "failed representation." Halberstam's description, though aimed at horror movies, seems more appropriate for the medieval, rather than the modern, monster. *William's* Prince Alphonse and Marie de France's knight, Bisclavret, cannot perform masculinity according to society's standards, but their social coding will not allow them to entirely accept the roles of beasts. Without any available sexual identity to represent, whether due to individual or social restraints, the only acceptable outlet for aberrant sexual behavior lies just outside humanity. Hybrid identity, through physical transformation from man to wolf to man-wolf, becomes interchangeable with queer sexual identity in the medieval werewolf body. The refusal to accept a gender role and the inability to embrace sexuality mark the monster.

The physical werewolf has not evolved much from its earliest appearances in classical works. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes King Lycaon of Arcadia -- from whom

“lycanthrope” derives -- as a transformed creature looking not unlike the werewolf familiar to twenty-first-century horror movie audiences. By the curse of Jupiter, the bestial king’s “garments are changed into hair, his arms into legs; he becomes a wolf, and he still retains vestiges of his ancient form” (Ovid I.241-242). Ovid does not identify which parts of Lycaon’s former humanity remain, but such ambiguous phrasing effectively conveys monstrous hybridity. Likewise, Odysseus’ men are terrified by the queer behavior of Circe’s guardwolves -- they appear to be “formidable beasts,” yet they stand on their hind legs (Homer 130) -- which are later revealed to be transformed men (136). Classical werewolves are thus unconsciously acknowledged as amalgamations of man and beast.

In more recent representations, ambiguous treatment of the transformed body has been avoided in an effort to present the actual werewolf transformation as realistic. So as to accurately depict the likely transition from man to man-beast, the camera captures each bulging muscle and every sprouting hair. Realism, however, does not necessarily ensure horror; the uncanny can evoke a more powerful visceral response, especially from an audience desensitized by countless similar representations of the unfamiliar. Maintaining the werewolf in “that class of frightening which leads backs to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 515), paradoxically, keeps the myth fresh. If “the body that scares changes over time” (Halberstam 8), a standardized, graphic werewolf transformation, varying only in degrees of gore, can no longer scare. While many other monsters also continue to exist in modern culture as static representations of formerly terrifying ambiguities, the modern werewolf’s failure to scare is most obvious and most damaging because of the myth’s investment in change. “Monsters of modernity are characterized by their proximity to humans” (Halberstam 23), but the werewolf’s proximity has gotten much too comfortably close. The werewolf’s essential hybridity is at stake when the monster only

mirrors the society it was meant to challenge, rather than hinting at the possibility -- and exploring the consequences -- of intermingled humanity and bestiality.

It can be argued that werewolves were ultimately disowned by medieval texts -- and the society which produced them -- by pointing to the narratives' reclaiming of the werewolves into the ordered realm of humanity. However, the transformative spirit of (sexual) autonomy present in the medieval texts ultimately empowers the werewolf myth. Monstrous extremes of sexuality and gender feature in modern werewolf horror films, but not to the myth's complete advantage. Six films in particular have successfully portrayed the werewolf as empathetic -- and even sympathetic -- other, while still maintaining some element of horror: *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Wolfen* (1981), *The Company of Wolves* (1984), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Ginger Snaps II: Unleashed* (2003), and *Dog Soldiers* (2002). Ironically, set in societies somewhat less restrictive than those of the European Middle Ages, the films convey the curse's desirability more obscurely than the medieval texts. However, there is no displacement in the best of these films: the werewolves suffer literal, not figurative, deaths. The narratives do not provide or impose a return to humanity. They do, however, offer a place for the female in the myth which the medieval werewolf narratives lack.

If the "original" or "medieval" werewolf myth succeeds by revealing the potential for queerness in humanity, modern representations send conflicting messages regarding masculinity: is it queerness in excess, if ideal masculinity is "tremendous strength and sex appeal" (Schell 116)? In "The Big Bad Wolf: Masculinity and Genetics in Popular Culture," Heather Schell addresses "popular culture's rehabilitation of the werewolf" (109) through modern film into the "central character in a success story who can keep his sanity, his life, and his mate" (112). She contrasts *Wolf* (1994) with *The Wolf Man* (1941) in terms of the transformation's desirability.

Jack Nicholson's werewolf succeeds socially where Lon Chaney's werewolf does not, but not in terms of horror. Prior to *Wolf, An American Werewolf in London* suggests that a bestial form of masculinity -- achieved by transformation into a werewolf -- is attractive, if inevitably fatal.

After the protagonist, David, is attacked by a large beast, he is nursed back to health by a woman who soon becomes his live-in lover. Even before David physically shows any of the curse's tell-tale signs, the female seems to sense something different in him: something worth pursuing despite his lunatic ravings about ghosts and Nazis. Her last words to David's completely transformed body profess her love; the werewolf curse itself appears to be responsible for her inexplicable attraction. As the ghost of the werewolf's first victim says, the responsibility to end the curse, to end the violent deaths, lies with the masculine werewolf: "The wolf's bloodline must be severed; the last remaining werewolf must be destroyed. It's *you*, David." Although "successful men have discovered a way to tap into their inner wolves" (Schell 117), they are still not always able -- or willing -- to regain their humanity in its entirety. Humanity intervenes via outside sources when the police kill transformed David.

The Company of Wolves promotes a similar, uncontrollable masculine sexuality which appeals to the vulnerable female. The fleshed-out "Little Red Riding Hood," Rosaleen, goes to live with her over-protective grandmother after her sister falls prey to a pack of hungry wolves. Her sister's killers continue to pick off villagers, until Rosaleen eventually comes face-to-face with one of them in the woods. One could argue that female sexuality is at the heart of the film adaptation of Angela Carter's short story, but young Rosaleen faces isolation -- sexual and otherwise -- if she does not accept the wolf's advances. Without a strong woodsman to save her, she must save herself using the power of her own sexuality. While excessive masculinity as a defining factor of the werewolf myth results in undeniable sexual attraction, the myth's horror

remains effective for any potential victim of the werewolf's charms.

Whereas the modern werewolf often exudes an excessive masculinity which attracts the opposite sex, the medieval werewolf does not have the same allure. Even same-sex attraction would not be based on the werewolf's untamed, spontaneous nature and executions of brute strength. Alphonse and Bisclavret's actions are careful and deliberate. Their wild appearances are deceiving, for they are submissive and passive beasts. Bisclavret's aggression towards the knight who married his wife is not mistaken as the randomly violent behavior of a wild animal: "all over the palace people said / that he wouldn't act that way without a reason" (Marie de France 207-208). The king easily calms Bisclavret by threatening him with a stick (202). Alphonse does not kill man or beast to provide for William and Melior; he only scares a man with "a rude roring as he him rende wold" (*William* 1851), so that he can snatch up the dropped bread and meat. He would rather harm himself, "rore & rente al his hide" (86), than anyone else. Alphonse and Bisclavret are acknowledged and accepted by the texts as hybrids; Bisclavret is a "beast," not a man, with an "animal form" (Marie de France 284-285). Their queer behavior is accepted: the protagonist heterosexual couple pray for Alphonse's safety (*William* 2406-2407) even though they are unsure of his motives when he runs off with the provost's son (2373).

The modern werewolf trope of masculinity gone wild is matched by an equally horrific femininity. Female biology has come to be equated with the werewolf curse much like the *vagina dentata*, a classic symbol of the male's fear of heterosexual sex, in furry disguise. *The Company of Wolves'* conclusion that "if there's a beast in men, it meets its match in women, too," seems a precarious position when sex and gender differences play such significant roles in the modern werewolf myth. The female werewolf, however, shatters traditional expectations of femininity. The *Ginger Snaps* series aligns the werewolf curse with the menstrual cycle, thus

still promoting a sexuality which “shackles women to reproduction” (Miller 281). The films present their two female heroines, Ginger and Brigitte, as “two subversive forms of female subjectivity” (283). While “Ginger eventually welcomes her monstrosity and embraces her newly gained sexual potency and violent longings,” Brigitte limits her sexual and animal desires to daydreams (296). The same “tremendous strength” (Schell 116) and sexual vigor so attractive in male werewolves make female werewolves repulsive.

Aside from a shared otherness, little explicit connection exists between the female and the werewolf myth in medieval literature. A more modern understanding of the werewolf involves a “ritualistic transformation from human into wolf taking place on the full moon, thus allowing the beast to spend nights devouring flesh, only to change back to its human form at sunrise;” a connection between the werewolf and the female via the monthly menstrual cycle can thus be made, as seen in the *Ginger Snaps* series (Miller 284). Neither *William’s* Alphonse nor Marie de France’s Bisclavret are dependent on the lunar cycle to transform. Alphonse’s single transformation confines him to a bestial body, and Bisclavret’s multiple transformations from beast to man can be willed every week so long as he has a set of men’s clothing. Beyond this disconnection from the feminine, a noticeable tension between the medieval werewolf and the medieval female exists. Transformation on the species level remains inaccessible to troubled females in the werewolf narratives and in the cross-dressing narratives which they often parallel. In many origin stories of the werewolf myth, especially in those of the Norse tradition, the female curses the male into a bestial transformation. Baring-Gould recounts such a tale from the *Hrolfs Saga Kraka*, in which a Norse king’s young wife slaps her stepson with a wolf-skin glove to initiate his transformation into a sheep-hungry bear (15). The stepmother-stepson relationship instantly recalls the archetypal evil stepmother of fairy tale: an archetype which is present in

William. The Norse queen also recalls the seductive and the inconstant wife of *Bisclavret*: the women are portrayed negatively in their respective texts. While Baring-Gould's translation mentions that the queen is "not liked of the people" (14), a modern sensibility can justify the sexual frustration of a young female unwillingly married to a much older man. When the king goes abroad, his queen takes this opportunity to tell her stepson "how much pleasanter it was for them to be together, than to have an old fellow like [the king] in the house" (15). As a young girl, the queen had been separated from her mother where they dwelled in isolation, "far from the haunts of men" (14), to be presented like a souvenir to the newly widowed king. The rejection of the queen's advances by her stepson -- the only male whom she has been given an opportunity to sexually pursue of her own free will -- only results in her making physical the innate qualities of his character: he is "ill-pleased and red as blood," and defies all of the codes of his social status as an upper class male by boxing her in the ear (15). The queen's stepson was fated to turn into a bear according to his animal namesake: a "Björn." Once transformed, Björn no longer has to worry about how he will marry his lower-class sweetheart, how his father will react to the abuse of his stepmother, or how to continue warding off his stepmother's advances. Although she is aware of how to transform her stepson from man to beast, the queen unfortunately has no such escape from the greater trappings of her own sex -- marriage without consent, subjection to male violence -- and ultimately faces a dishonorable death. To call her an "evil" stepmother is not completely fair; although, bringing out her stepson's latent bear-ness is far more morally ambiguous than force-feeding Björn's lover his remains. All the "evil" she has done results from exposure to equally "evil" conditions.

Cursed already by a lower status in society, females like Björn's stepmother must inevitably deal with social problems involving inheritance, marriage, and offspring; when they

transform men into beasts, directly or indirectly, those problems intensify. Peggy McCracken acknowledges this “curse of Eve” in her book bearing the same name. Her attitude towards menstruation is an ambivalent one; she argues that its positive role in medieval culture, including its use as an ingredient in many medicines, *balances out without negating* its negative connotation so prevalent in the discourse (ix). McCracken thus paints a sympathetic portrait of the women represented so negatively in medieval literature: unlike men, they are the performers of murder and never sacrifice (41). As seen in the transformation texts, just one human error made by a woman is enough to recall the female curse; the curse cannot be negated nor can it even be balanced out. If the blood on her hands is not condemnation enough, the blood she receives monthly serves as further proof of her guilt. Women are cursed by the paradoxical combination of fate and free will as seen in Genesis: God knew, but Eve also *desired* to know. Females extend the sexually restrictive curse of their bodies onto males. They transform males into werebeasts forced to live outside the safety of a patriarchal society structured by sex. Ironically, the transformed males gain sexual autonomy and bodily freedom in the curse of Eve’s distortion from female to male; for a medieval female, the werewolf curse is an enviable curse indeed.

Disassociating the binaries of sex and gender from the myth is no small feat; the modern werewolf reveals them as monstrous through their melodramatic performance. The myth’s “privileging of sexual difference implies not only that sexual difference should be understood as more fundamental than other forms of difference, but that other forms of difference might be *derived* from sexual difference” (Butler 167), including a difference in species. Humans, however, can mate with werewolves, if only to produce unbalanced hybrids. If the human bloodline is to remain pure, the modern werewolf remains characteristically “other”: an “other”

whose queer sexuality can never serve a function within a heteronormative human discourse. The modern werewolf, therefore, is faceless and expendable. *Wolfen* presents the werewolf as a misunderstood, sentient creature struggling for a place alongside, if not within, humanity. The film's detective protagonist gains access to the underground society of an ancient, highly evolved race of shape-shifting men. He learns that "they kill to survive. They kill to protect. In their eyes, *you* are the savage." In the more recent *Dog Soldiers*, British Army soldiers defend themselves against an aggressive werewolf pack when they realize that "these things aren't about to give up the fight and go home...they *are* home." In both films, humans disrupt functioning, if not thriving, fringe societies by assuming a superior knowledge of what is natural. Those same assumptions cause medieval werewolves Alphonse and Bisclavret to flee humanity. The lowered camera angles and heat-based imagery in *Wolfen* suggest that humans look at the film's crises from a werewolf's perspective. As members of a dying race related to, but incompatible with, humanity, the wolfen and dog soldiers kill only to survive. Still, the werewolves' empathetic motives will not bring viewers to applaud the disemboweling of an everyman. The creatures' otherness can be understood but not excused. Werewolves need a space of their own, but humans must still be able to regulate their actions within that given space.

The aforementioned werewolf films have recently been overshadowed by the teen drama/romance/horror hybrid series of books and movies featuring an entire pack of heartthrob werewolves: Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga. Meyer's series has been largely responsible for a huge upsurge in werewolf appreciation over the past half-decade: a "Werewolf Pride" movement. At the end of 2008, *Rolling Stone* predicted that 2009 would be the "Year of the Werewolf;" formerly monstrous werewolves are the now relatable "hairy blue-collar loners, contemptuous of civilization, motivated by hunger and bitterness" (Hill 79). If the werewolf is traditionally

otherness or queerness embodied, could this new appreciation and identification signify the beginnings of a more accepting, more flexible society? Meyer's werewolves, along with the werewolves in *Underworld* and *True Blood*, are not converted or cursed; they are comfortable with their native hybridity, and they have little desire to become human. However, the Werewolf Pride movement has been allowed only under certain conditions. Werewolves can be oversexed, but only if they are heterosexual. Werewolves can pursue relationships with humans, but they are doomed to unhappiness and premature death. They are thus restricted to heterosexual unions among their own kind. Jacob Black, the series' lead werewolf, persists in lusting after Bella Swan over the course of *Twilight*. Bella, unfortunately, prefers the undead to wolfmen, no matter how tan and muscular they might be in human form. Edward Cullen is a monster, but he was at least once fully human; he can play the part well. Unlike the werewolf, the vampire does not exhibit any frustrating fluidity of form which acts as a reminder of the fluid identity it has come to represent. Modern acceptance of the werewolf as equal successfully squelches the inherent queerness of the werewolf, which in turn limits the werewolf's sexual freedom from which many other freedoms derive. Even if Meyer's werewolves are not technically werewolves at all, but "more a product of her imagination and of the romantic and patronizing Western stereotype of the 'Noble Savage'" (Jenson 92), her handsome Native-American-to-wolf shapeshifters have replaced previous popular notions of the werewolf. Meyer has started a trend which allows any identifiable element of the myth -- the full moon, a curse, the werewolf's loss of control -- to be dispensed with so long as a man-to-wolf transformation occurs. There is no deeper conflict between beast and man, male and female, or individual and society: at least none which Meyers will acknowledge. Meyer's werewolf features human-like eyes (Jenson 93) which reveal a civilized consciousness piloting a typically untamed body. In the films, the seamlessly

transformed werewolf body is unidentifiable from that of a sleek, muscular wolf; its CGI-perfection is nothing like the piles of misaligned bones and patchy fur featured in many pre-*Twilight* werewolf films and suggested in “Bisclavret” and *William of Palerne*. Acceptance of Meyer’s werewolves largely depends on their domestication into attractive and heterosexual creatures whose actions and desires are completely unambiguous. The medieval werewolves, while docile, are not domesticated in the same way as Meyer’s werewolves, who are allowed to perform as men -- ignored when they overact -- although they sometimes walk on all fours. Meyer’s werewolves are not “walking performative contradictions”: especially not in “self-reflexivity and mindlessness” (Birrer 229). Their bodies and behavior reinstate binaries rather than contradict them.

In the first *Twilight* novel, Edward sums up his attraction to Bella: “And so the lion fell in love with the lamb” (274). In Meyer’s take on the werewolf myth, the wolf would also dwell with the lamb, but the juxtaposition would be far less striking. Team Jacob fans hope for werewolf-human romance in vain, because, although Jacob proves merely a man in wolf’s clothing, sexual intimacy between the two races somehow remains a taboo. The werewolf’s trans-species body cannot be successfully heteronormalized without sacrificing its essential hybridity which blends man and animal. Placing standard human limitations on the werewolf -- including those of gender and sexuality -- robs it of that uncanny quality which evokes an emotional response: whether horror, sympathy, or empathy. Werewolves powered by machismo and regulated by their menstrual cycle horrify, but they also find sympathy among those who feel the social and biological pressures of their sex. Even feeling empathy for Meyer’s werewolves is difficult; their exaggerated performances of status quo humanity, rather than their identification as mythical creatures, renders them lifeless. While modern pre-*Twilight* werewolf narratives

generally support a heteronormative world view in which naturally monolithic gender and sexuality are to be regulated, the monstrous transformation scenes at least visually separate the werewolf from the human. Transformation into a queer body is the end result of sexual desire which could not be stabilized despite the individual's social desire to act appropriately; horror and attraction derive from the powerlessness of both the individual and society to stop the public acts of violence and sex. Paradoxically, Meyer's werewolf is so detrimentally domesticated -- its gender and sexuality closely regulated despite the allowance of a hybrid body -- that its sole horrific attribute is an aggressive heterosexuality which cannot result in violence *or* sex.

Heterosexuality structures the typical wolf pack which acts as the natural model for Meyer's werewolf tribe. A pair of "breeding wolves," the alpha pair, leads about four or seven lower-ranked wolves (Busch 42). The Werewolf Pride movement, with Meyer's conservative "breeding werewolves" at the forefront, would not disrupt the present culture's heteronormative progression. The wolf pack can easily symbolize the ideal community, one that happens to be characteristically heterosexual, but it also realizes Sedgwick's claim that "heterosexuality does not function as a sexuality" as it is marked by "discretionary *choice* between display and concealment" (Sedgwick 10). The lower-ranked wolves are defined by the sexual behavior of the breeding pair which must continue for the pack to function: what goes on among the beta and omega wolves is irrelevant from a social standpoint, but they fit into a heteronormative social order by association. Thus the wolf pack as a symbol for human community and a model for werewolf community simultaneously reinstates and undermines heterosexuality. Heterosexuality operates primarily as a means of reproduction, and not as a sexuality: of serving the pack's needs, but not necessarily its desires. The choice of display -- of the mated alpha male and female leading the way -- is just as necessary, because it maintains an established social order in which

heterosexuality is not only the norm, but also the preference.

Although wolves are commonly thought of as belonging to packs, more than half of the animals accounted for in the wild have been identified as lone wolves (Busch 43): those who have challenged the pack hierarchy or, for whatever reason, have been rejected from the pack. While a “lone wolf” mentality is a trope attributed to the modern human protagonist, modern werewolves rarely act alone. Narratives -- as in *Ginger Snaps III: The Beginning* and several installments of *The Howling* series -- spurred by sightings of a single, wolf-like beast in conjunction with a string of murders often conclude with the discovery of an entire werewolf family. However, the modern werewolf, save for Meyer’s version, reproduces -- that is, transmits the curse -- through a bite or scratch rather than sexual intercourse. Despite representations of the werewolf as the masculine extreme, the feminine extreme, and pack mentality embodied, this violent act of reproduction occurs without concern for gender, sexuality, or any other identity. Such reproduction is possible, but is it pleasurable? Accompanying deaths could suggest otherwise, but the werewolf’s violence does produce impressive offspring -- humans reborn in hybrid bodies -- which can expand the pack. Still, the most impressive werewolf is a lone werewolf -- the medieval werewolf -- which exhibits the monstrously queer form left for non-heteronormative identity; it seems to share a reasonable proximity to humans (Halberstam 23) in its motives and actions, but its physical hybridity suggests otherwise. *William* repeated reference to Alphonse as a “*buxum* best” (*William* 3085, 4062, 4106, 4406) with a “*mannes munde*” (4123) calls attention to the unnatural shape which does not exactly match any known animal body. Likewise, the court considers it a great wonder (Marie de France 170) that the unidentifiable “beast” -- never a wolf or even a wild dog -- Bisclavret is “so noble and well behaved” (179).

The modern trans-species body and the modern transgender body occupy the same problematic space. With recent acknowledgment of the genderqueer body -- a body which does not commit to either completely masculine or completely feminine gender roles -- fictional representations of those who “experience themselves outside of the gender binary” (Factor 236) have become more prevalent: for instance, see Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* (1994) and Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex* (2002). The traditional werewolf possesses a “speciesqueer” body: not man or wolf, but both and neither. The genderqueer and the speciesqueer are “those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered [or specied]; it is their very humanness that comes into question” (Butler 8, additions mine). The werewolf, then, becomes the ideal metaphor for queer identity -- a resistance *to* established identity -- whether regarding sexuality, gender, or both. It exists so that its “very humanness” might be questioned. The werewolf, physically marked by an undecidability in terms of species, renders the possibility of an undecidability in terms of sex even more possible.

An essentially “queer” medieval werewolf identity might seem unlikely considering the modernity of queerness and its sexual implications. In *Queer Medieval: Uncovering the Past*, Graham N. Drake addresses the difficulty in applying queer theory to medieval texts. The vocabulary of queer theory is problematic, because “*queer* [in the modern sense] is not a medieval word...neither is *gay*, *lesbian*, or *homosexual*” (639). As Drake points out, *queer* is often wrongly made synonymous with *homosexual* when “queer” approaches to history can be used to “promote a gay male hegemony” (642). Despite Drake’s aforementioned reluctance to label medieval texts as queer, the werewolf texts actually lend themselves quite well to multiple kinds of queer readings. Homoeroticism is only one facet of the queerness which pervades the narratives of *The Romance of William of Palerne* and “Bisclavret.” Same-sex desire has been

cited more than once as the driving force behind “Bisclavret,” in which a king takes the place of his knight’s wife. The knight does not reject the replacement. Homosexual motives can also be identified in the beginning of *William*, in which the werewolf Alphonse selfishly snatches the infant William from his mother’s arms: the intended poisoning the narrative suggests is a happy coincidence which would allow Alphonse to couch his atypical desire in an act of chivalry. Sexual gratification, after all, has long been the motivation for chivalric acts; though faced with the passivity of their love object, knights “ask repeatedly for the hope and encouragement that will lead eventually to their ‘deserved recompense,’ their ‘sweet reward’” (Burns 34). Looking *in between* the binaries of heterosexual and homosexual, instead of *across*, might be more useful, however, considering sexuality’s negligible impact on medieval identity and the werewolf’s resistance to *any* monolithic signification: hence this particular use of the word “queer.”

Werewolves are not, however, simply convenient metaphorical stand-ins for homosexuals: especially in a time when self-proclaimed homosexuals had very little social presence. Instead, werewolves are stand-ins for the spaces that allow non-normative experiences of identity which includes, but is not defined by, sexuality. For instance, in “The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves,” Philip A. Bernhardt-House maintains the werewolf’s position as a homosexual figure. Bernhardt-House points to the homosocial groupings of werewolves, both male and female: an element of the myth he considers a recent trend shown in film. The werewolf myth, however, has its foundation in groups and packs of often malevolent shape-shifters: the Devil’s followers (Baring-Gould 27-29). The groups tend to have a male majority; a breeding pair becomes unnecessary thanks to the bite of recruitment. The leading werewolves in *Twilight* are all male. Just as heterosexuality lends itself to a pack mentality, so too does homosexuality. The undisturbed homosocial scenes of the two medieval

werewolf texts -- in secluded woods and guarded palaces -- provide ample opportunity for bestial, homosexual interaction. Thus, based on the conventions of the myth which still persist today, attributing homosexuality to the medieval werewolf is not difficult. The underpinning of Bernhardt-House's argument is his connection between the bite of the werewolf and the perceived propagation of homosexuality through "recruitment." From a certain heteronormative perspective, the werewolf and the homosexual become equally cursed: both are "unnatural and against the will of God," the results of a "lifestyle choice" (Bernhardt-House 164). A similar comparison to homosexuality can be made regarding the bite of the more overtly sexualized vampire, but the werewolf's bestial sexuality calls to mind a cultural taboo few would even deign dignify as a "lifestyle choice." The werewolf's implicit bestiality -- or at least the *uncertainty* of whether it desires man or beast -- makes it a stronger codifier of not only homosexuality, but queer sexuality in general. The medieval werewolf narratives concern individuals unaffected by any sort of pack mentality: the aforementioned "lone werewolves" of non-heteronormative identity determined not so much by what it is as by what it is not.

To say that Alphonse and Bisclavret represent all medieval werewolves would be an over-generalization, but there are very few medieval werewolves to exemplify. In "The Body Hybrid: Giants, Dog-Men, and Becoming Inhuman," Jeffrey Cohen discusses the early fifteenth-century romance of *Sir Gowther*. Cohen describes the romance's titular character as a werewolf-like figure who, unlike Alphonse and Bisclavret, is more monstrous within than without; it is suggested, however, that if he continues to rape and pillage, he will soon physically match his monstrous actions just as his father does. "To be a man," Cohen explains, "Gowther is going to have to become a dog" (128). Sir Gowther does not undergo an instantaneous physical

transformation into a dog. He imitates their submissive behavior by only eating the food that has been in a canine mouth. Gowther's place amongst Alphonse and Bisclavret as a medieval werewolf is tenuous at best, but Cohen's labeling of him as such, due to his transformation narrative, suggests a medieval cultural understanding that identity cannot always be found within the bounds of humanity.

Criticism on medieval werewolves is as elusive as the werewolf literary figures themselves. In keeping with *Werewolf Pride*, the werewolf as cultural icon has become a popular dissertation subject in recent years. Papers such as Renee M. Ward's "Cultural Contexts and Cultural Change: The Werewolf in Classical, Medieval, and Modern Texts" and Brent Stypczynski's "Evolution of the Werewolf Archetype from Ovid to J.K. Rowling" tend to look at medieval portrayals of the werewolf as only minor parts in the myth's development. In fact, Stypczynski sums up the medieval werewolf in just one word: "sympathetic" (3). Dana Morgan Oswald's "Indecent Bodies: Gender and the Monstrous in Medieval English Literature" steers away from the cultural studies which overshadow the medieval texts, but her work is not werewolf-centric. However, her central argument that "Middle English literature teems with bodies that are both sexualized and monstrous" (ii) resists recent reduction of the myth and indicates the popular line of literary analysis from which Drake's "queer history" (642) can emerge. Miranda Griffin also examines several different types of medieval transformation narrative which "reflect upon the precarious nature of categorization and classification, especially in terms of the distinction between the human and the animal (139)," including Marie de France's werewolf, in "The Bestly and the Courtly in Medieval Tales of Transformation: Bisclavret, Melion and Mélusine." Griffin, like Oswald, suggests that the texts are projections "of the instincts and desires which cause so much anxiety onto a fantasized originary entity, the beast"

(140).

“Bisclavret” remains the favorite medieval werewolf text despite its short length, while *William of Palerene* is often mentioned but rarely explored in depth. Much of what has been written on “Bisclavret” concerns the titular character’s wife. In one feminist response to the lay, Paul Creamer criticizes Marie de France’s “slow shift of the mantle of villainy away from the werewolf and onto the baron’s wife” (259). Hannah Priest also analyzes the unhappy marriage in “The Witch and the Werewolf: Rebirth and Subjectivity in Medieval Verse.” She considers the gynocritical implications of Marie de France’s casting the female as scapegoat. Donna Birrer’s “A New Species of Humanities: The Marvelous Progeny of Humanism and Postmodern Theory” is a rare, postmodern analysis of *William*, but it draws a similar conclusion as papers on medieval monsters, transformation narratives, and “Bisclavret;” the medieval werewolf is “more human than beast -- in fact more human than two humans, and nobility at that” (218). Being human, of course, does not guarantee sympathy.

Perhaps a resistance to criticism exists because medieval werewolves’ transformed bodies lack the visible, often instantly repulsive hybridity of the monsters produced by Golden Age Hollywood. Instead, they uphold the classical tradition of King Lycaon, who transformed into a wolf which was not quite a wolf: a queer wolf. Rather than possessing just a few vaguely canine facial features, medieval werewolves are predominantly more wolf than man, and yet they are never mistaken for common wolves. In his first appearance in the body of *William’s* text, Alphonse is described as “un grans leus” or “a huge wolf” (86). He is subsequently identified as merely a “wolf” (103, 105, 112-113) and a “wild beast” (120) up until the queen’s lamentation for her lost son. In a burst of sorrow, the queen suddenly re-identifies what had appeared to everyone in attendance at the festivities, including the reader, to be a wolf: just one of the

“mainte sauvage beste” (65) in the Palermo orchard. She cries “werwolf” (151) -- though she happens to be right -- so that the identity of her child’s captor suits the monstrosity of his kidnapping. Similar uncanny recognition of a werewolf occurs in “Bisclavret,” but in reverse order. The king interprets the submissive behavior easily suited to a domesticated canine -- running to the master (Marie de France 146), licking the master’s feet (148) -- as the rational behavior of a man (157). Even with this initial acknowledgment of human character -- whether it is instinctual recognition of a kinsman or wishful thinking which happened to be right -- the text continues to refer to Bisclavret as the king’s “beast” (168) and “creature” (178) who acts “well behaved” (179) and lovingly follows his master (183-184). Because of the predominantly bestial nature of his form and the loss of all masculine artifacts, the text’s domestication of Bisclavret seems acceptable.

In his preface to *William*’s original Early English Text Society edition from 1832, Sir Frederick Madden confesses continued ignorance “with regard to the supposed form of these werwolves [sic], and whether they differed from those of natural wolves” (xx) despite having consulted various sources on the matter. Madden suggests that they might differ from natural wolves in that they do not possess tails: a possibility Sabine Baring-Gould explores in his *Book of Were-wolves* in 1865. Baring-Gould identifies such appendage-less animals as the transformed forms of malevolent witches, so it seems unlikely that Alphonse and Bisclavret, as model, upper-class males, would be depicted without tails. As Madden points out, the woodcut accompanying the *William* manuscript depicts the werewolf Alphonse with a tail “of due proportion” (xx). Still, existing to the contrary is the Irish Arthurian romance of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*, in which an “earless, tail-less, talking wolf” is the transformed son of the king of India (Bernhardt-House 166). The prince-werewolf has not one but *three* lost appendages which do not require an

equivalent loss in “goodness.” While the matter of whether Alphonse and Bisclavret have tails or not seems of very little significance in the overall texts, reader speculation and its ensuing scholarship reveal an essential human discomfort with the kind of ambiguity so inherent in hybrids. In “Metamorphosis,” Caroline Walker Bynum sees a wide-spread obsession with transformation specifics as “indications of the anxiety caused by the question of the wolves' status” in not only studies of Gerald of Wales' encounter with werewolves, but across the past and present discourse involving werewolves (1011). No matter how open-minded or progressive a society considers itself, there persists a common, if not entirely shameless, desire to reduce complex hybrids, such as the werewolf, to a formula which is easy to understand and accept: a wolf-man monster whose origins, motives, and self-identity are irrelevant. The myth, of course, suffers from this reduction. Direct-to-DVD werewolf horror movies of the past decade -- such as *Werewolf: The Devil's Hound* (2007) and *Never Cry Werewolf* (2008) -- spend most of their budget on the transformation scenes, and with good reason; it was makeup artist Rick Baker's meticulous work for the transformation scene in *An American Werewolf in London* which gained the film an Oscar and its place in the horror film canon (Vespe). The *Twilight* films do not dwell on the werewolf transformation; in fact, they do not dwell enough. The hybrid bodies of Meyer's werewolves do not complicate or motivate the plot. Although they are inconspicuously segregated by the text as “others,” Jacob and his packmates might as well be members of any human minority.

Bisclavret's dependency on clothing to return to human form is a medieval remnant of the werewolf transformation's foundation in drag: thus the medieval myth's “real world” parallel, where transformation is a focal point, can be found in the female-to-male transvestitism exhibited in “Yde et Olive” and Heldris of Cornwall's *Silence*. The werewolf curse was once

only the willed *performance* of a beast on the battlefield, culminating only in a show of amplified fury during combat (Baring-Gould 19). The berserkers wore their wolf and bear skins over their armor much like the female cross-dressers of the medieval texts wear the ornaments of masculinity to battle: their battle gear is as much socially necessary as it is physically. The usurpers of fur and helm must allow others -- their allies and their adversaries -- to believe that they are beasts and men, so that they are allowed to perform as such. The introduction to the Fall 2008 issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* on "Trans-, Trans, or Transgender" states that "any gender-defined space is not only populated with diverse forms of gender embodiment, but striated and cross-hatched by the boundaries of significant forms of difference other than gender, within all of which gender is necessarily implicated" (Stryker 11). The relativity of terms like "transsexual" and "transgender" make them difficult to apply definitively to the medieval texts: not only can they be used to describe the horizontal movement "between two established gendered spaces, 'man' and 'woman'" or the "spectrum...that occupies the space between the two" (13), but also to describe the tension between body and society which has nothing to do with sex-influenced gender (14). This third understanding of "transgender" can be applied to both types of transformation narratives: it allows for complete, if temporary, sexual autonomy for the socially displaced characters. However, if associations with the more traditional definition involving horizontal movement cannot be shaken, the medieval werewolf should use the suffix "queer" rather than the prefix "trans." Most importantly, the two terms -- "genderqueer" and "transgender" -- are terms of empowerment used by those who wish to articulate themselves as subjects. While medieval transvestites might be more comfortably labeled "transgendered," commitment to either end of the gender or species binaries disrupts transvestite and werewolf curses.

The shared nature of the medieval werewolf and transvestite curses, whatever label suits them, is generally fortunate, in that they disrupt the medieval social order for individuals it does not suit. Performance is an aspect of the curses -- as seen in the berserker-origins of the werewolf and as expected in the typical cross-dressing of the transgendered -- but it does not encompass them. The curses go deeper than performance: they articulate the afflicted individual's underlying desires which are in conflict with an established social order.

In *William*, a stepmother's curse brings "freliche schapen" (126) Alphonse down to all fours. His stepmother fears that, because of her stepson's beauty, her own son will never ascend the Spanish throne. The stepmother's rationale is problematic, and it points to other reasons why Alphonse is struck by the curse: one being the protection of an heir-reliant monarchy when it is threatened by the potential of sexual autonomy. As the older son of the King, Alphonse would be automatically entitled to the throne; his physical features would have no influence on his crowning. Still, if his beauty is the stepmother's concern, the werewolf curse allays it: young Alphonse "wex" (104) into a "wilde werwolf" (144). The text assures the reader again and again that Alphonse retains his human "witt" (142) after his transformation; "wilde" must reference his new looks which are no longer completely "fayre" (124). While human attractiveness is subjective and certainly not the basis of kingship, a werewolf king would prove difficult to endorse. A werewolf would make an unlikely and unattractive king, but an even more unlikely and unattractive spouse. In his new form, even if provided with a willing wife, Alphonse's ability to produce an heir is doubtful. Would Alphonse be proactive about producing an heir without the stepmother's magical interference? By transforming Alphonse into a werewolf, his stepmother eliminates the elements of chance and choice: he is now unfit for the throne, and whether he produces a male child or not is of no concern to society.

Alphonse's transformation into a werewolf can be read as a kind of tragedy, in which a beautiful boy of noble birth is cruelly brought "out of kinde" (107) by the curse of an evil witch. But his transformation is perhaps not as tragic as narrator and reader sympathy would make it seem. The insecure stepmother's curse is also necessitated by Alphonse's own unconscious desire to be cursed: his werewolf curse is a self-fulfilling one which he does nothing to prevent or remedy. As the ending of *William* proves, and as reinforced by a tradition in werewolf and other monster lore, only the curser can undo the curse. Once Alphonse recognizes his stepmother's responsibility for his transformation, he tries "to haue hire a-strangeled" (150): to kill his curser would leave him indefinitely cursed. With new sets of fangs and claws at his disposal, and the added hindrance of clumsy paws, strangulation would be Alphonse's most ineffective method of murder. One could attribute the mistake to a human mentality which has yet to accustom itself to a bestial body, but Alphonse runs away at his stepmother's first cry. Under the pretense of masculine vengeance, he would kill his curser to remain cursed. But if other members of the court answered his stepmother's cry, he would either be slain as a werewolf or returned to his former human state: either alternative putting an abrupt end to his newly gained freedom. Alphonse spares his curser, who is also his savior, and runs off into the uncivilized forest.

Bisclavret's curse is more obviously a happy one. Bisclavret does not share the narrator's negativity regarding the werewolf condition: in fact, aside from his wife, nor does anyone else in the tale. The narrator does not even particularly aim his description of the werewolf at Bisclavret; she suggests that he is the exception to a race of savage beasts who eat men and do much harm "deep in the forest" (Marie de France 12-13). The only harm Bisclavret's curse does is to his marriage. Like the curse of Alphonse, his curse disrupts the flow of heteronormativity

which powers an heir-reliant monarchy. His curse does not harm any individual other than his wife, who is repulsed by the curse Bisclavret embraces weekly. Bisclavret has the advantageous ability of masking his essential hybridity -- the potential for both man and wolf in one person -- by returning to his hidden clothes and, thus, to human form for one half of the week. During this period when Bisclavret goes off into the “great forest, / in the thickest part of the woods” (64-65), his wife remains completely ignorant of his activity, and can only fear that he has taken a lover: a more rational fear than that her husband is a werewolf. By contrast, Bisclavret’s dual identity is the king’s delight: he embraces the werewolf’s human form, hugging and kissing him “again and again” (300-301). By taking an extended leave from humanity, and finally making his curse public, Bisclavret rids himself of the social restrictions of marriage, so that he can receive the acceptance as an individual -- and not just as an upper-class male spouse -- which he so desires. He knows exactly what will happen when he reveals his true nature to his wife: “If I tell you about this / ...I’d lose your love / and even my very self” (54-56). Bisclavret will become a blank slate upon which he himself can write.

Comfortable, lop-sided portrayals which betray hybridity are also found in the cross-dressing narratives. Before the threat of disrobement, no one suspects that Silence or Yde might be a girl in masculine disguise. So long as Silence is kept covered up (1758), the secret of her nature is safe. Prior to Cador’s declaration that he wants to “make a male of a female” (2041), the text dedicates many lines to personified and feminized Nature’s creation of Silence. The text does not give God any responsibility in creating Silence’s body. Why, besides evading the king’s curse on female inheritance, would Silence’s parents mess with Nature’s female perfection? Because they can. Cador not only *has* to raise his daughter to be a man, he *wants* to (2041). Silence’s father and the text recognize that ideal aesthetics do not make for ideal living. The

narrative gives voice to Nature, but its assertion that “the body is mere sackcloth” (1845) does not imply that Silence is living an evil lie contrary to her good and true nature. With the reinforcement of Silence’s success as a man, the text instead implies that the body can and should be modified without social, moral, or spiritual detriment; an individual’s physical appearance has nothing to do with his or her essential self. *Silence* breaches a resistance to essentialism so often present in discussions of medieval sexuality (Drake 640).

The endings of the medieval transformation narratives offer very different solutions to the problem of hybridity, with *William* and *Silence* on one end of the spectrum, and “Bisclavret” and “Yde et Olive” on the other. At the end of *William*, Alphonse returns to human form and all of the responsibilities and pressures of male royalty: a kingdom to rule, a wife to impregnate. *Silence* is stripped of her masculinity and must, too, return to the trappings of her own female gender: a kingdom to watch be ruled, a husband to impregnate her. “Bisclavret” and “Yde and Olive” are much more hopeful, but they, too, restrict the individual into new gender roles.

The ending lines of *Silence* recall Yde’s fate by the end of her story in *Huon de Bordeaux*: “And as for those -- male and female -- who listened to it, / may Jesus grant them their dearest wish” (6705-6706). Only by being a man, could Silence have been a good woman. Yde is granted a penis, making her biologically male to align with her perceived gender, but only once she is bound in holy matrimony to Olive and immediately produces an heir. Her reward for a first-rate masculine performance -- in contrast to the punishment Silence receives for her equally convincing portrayal of a man (25) -- is thus very functional and restrictive; the text spares Yde's life by granting her wish, but it does not liberate her much more than Silence. Although Bisclavret returns to human form and is liberated from his marriage, his social role has transformed into that of the King’s pet; in the traditional sense of “transgender,” Bisclavret has

been unwittingly transgendered to face a whole new set of inequalities and responsibilities.

If the werewolf transformation can be perceived as fortunate in the medieval texts, how can it possibly succeed in terms of horror: the standard by which all monsters are held? *William of Palerne* and "Bisclavret" are not horrifying according to modern standards of horror film gore: nor do they further the current Werewolf Pride movement. The medieval werewolf texts resist the reduction of a complex myth into either excessive or controlled sexuality and gender. Instead, the hybrids Alphonse and Bisclavret embody complex and fluid human identity. Like Yde and Silence, they are queer; they reject the conventions of their given sex and gender through physical transformation. The werewolves take queerness a step further, however; by refusing to align with one species, they cannot be socially bound by the conventions of *any* sex or gender. Unfortunately, the price for such freedom is a monstrous form: horrific in its unquantifiable hybridity. The medieval werewolf's ambiguity frustrates modern readers and viewers familiar with the newly heteronormalized myth. A queer reality, presented only in the guise of fiction, might still prove an appealing alternative despite its physically dehumanizing effects: that is fantasy, and that is fear.

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