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Monstrous Werewolves

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In the twenty-first century, it is not at all unusual to encounter monsters on the covers of glossy magazines or newspapers, or even to hear about monsters on the evening news; monstrous actions, monstrous people, or monstrous behaviour. The terms are familiar ones and the shared cultural meaning is understood; these actions, people, and behaviour are morally bankrupt, or reprehensible in some way. Cultural nuances in language are notoriously difficult to define, and even a term like monstrous might be applied in a variety of contexts (the monstrous size of an object, for example). However, because *monster* is such a vast and weighty tag, it does lend itself to a broad but universal understanding. Monster most often refers to that which is not normal by the standards to which normal is applied to the majority of a population in a given society.² The term monstrous is always negative, and when applied to people and their conduct, it reduces them to something *other* – something not like *us*. But what makes you and I so definitely normal, and according to whose standards? What boundary must be crossed in order for a man or woman to be considered monstrous?

The term monstrous is typically no longer used to describe physical exceptionalities in human or animal infants. In modernity we are taught from a young age that *real* monsters do not exist, so now these words are typically used to describe behaviour.³ English usage of the term monster to particularly refer to behaviour or events came into fashion in the late sixteenth century, especially in reference to political propaganda. Before, and even during the sixteenth century monstrosity was most often used to describe the physical characteristics of a person or animal. But how do you classify a monster who looks like a human, or who may share human features? Attitudes changed depending upon the larger events taking place in Europe, and the religious and social credo of a particular population. In antiquity monsters

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² 'Each culture has its own preoccupations and fears, its own definitions of 'normal', Bremmer, J. 'Monsters en fabledieren in de Griekse cultuur' in *Vereniging van Vrienden Allard Pierson Museum Amsterdam: Mededelingenblad* 68 (1997) p.2.

³ *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition of "monster": 'Originally a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening' 'Monsters' in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rkey=TPXocw&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> March 2016. A very good, if very disturbing, example of this is the Joseph Fritzl case – made into a documentary in 2010 by David Notman-Watt, Joseph Fritzl: Story of a Monster. dir. Notman-Watt, D. Back 2 Back Productions, 2010. [DVD]

like centaurs and the gorgons were in opposition to the gods and civilised man; a moral lesson for people on earth. In the high middle ages, stories of saints and dragons were common place as the deep woods receded and people felt in control of their own world, but by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after the horrors of multiple plagues in England, the pre-modern populace was rife with horrific monsters and instances of monstrous births. In order to simplify discussion over the monstrous from the first century in Rome until the 1580's in Germany, this paper will narrowly focus on werewolves as representations of human hybridity and the monstrous. Beginning with Ovid's Lycaon in *Metamorphosis*, followed by a brief analysis of Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, and ending with *The Most True and Dreadful Discourse* of Peeter Stubbe, this article will offer some contribution to the understanding of monsters as representative of transgressions over established boundaries. Or rather, monsters in opposition to what we have always understood to be human.

Classical monsters

It is probably fair to assume that most of the modern Western world has a passing familiarity with classical monsters like centaurs and the gorgon Medusa. What is amazing is that these monsters still have an impact on our understanding of the natural world and human behaviour. Perhaps this is more true now than ever before as the world shrinks around us and we have to look back in time to find representations of hybridity that offer explanations for the bestial behaviour we see on television and online.⁴ For Greeks and Romans, what constituted 'unnatural' or 'abnormal' was often something that was not clearly human or animal, but rather an in-between, a hybrid mixture.⁵ Rightly or wrongly, these are fears that we still grapple with, and it is so much easier to explain behaviour with mythological representations rather than admitting to ourselves that humanity always has the potential to act in a monstrous way. Excellent examples, if somewhat colloquial, include making a titanic effort, or for a woman to be described as a siren or an old harpy. Though of course it is a given that these terms are not used exclusively in the negative, they are still in use because there is a general cultural awareness (in the west) of what a comparison to each of these creatures means when placed side by side with our humanity.

⁴ Taylor, P. and Harris, J. *Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now*. (Maidenhead. 2008) offers an insightful commentary on mass media and the Medusa myth, see pages 198-200 specifically.

⁵ Felton, D. 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome' in Simon A. (ed.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Surrey, 2012) p.104.

In Greek and Roman culture monsters were not only of rare size and “morphological oddities”, but could be supernatural creatures like werewolves who fed on human flesh.⁶ In this paper the discussion will be on the transformation of King Lycaon from a man into a werewolf; among the earliest recorded instances of werewolfism. An excerpt from Petronius’s *Satyricon* will sit alongside Ovid’s myth of Lycaon to be used as a comparative study. Lycaon’s metamorphosis aptly demonstrates classical ideas surrounding monstrosity and boundaries between humanity and *other*.

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Zeus describes to the gods of Olympus the tricks and savagery of King Lycaon of Arcadia, who plotted to kill Zeus while he slept and “not satisfied with this he took a hostage sent by the Molossi, opened his throat with a knife, and made some of the still warm limbs tender in seething water, roasting others in the fire” with the intention of feeding them to the god.⁷ In a rage, Zeus brought down the roof of Lycaon’s house and sent him howling into the fields as a wolf, but one who “kept some vestige of his former shape.”⁸ Not content with merely changing the shape of one man, Zeus intended to destroy all of mankind, but reassured the other gods that the next generation of men would be better and brighter than those who went before. This is in keeping with the standard Greek and Roman mythological tradition of heroes and gods rising up to destroy the monstrous chaos in order to achieve social order via the towns and the roads.⁹ The story of Lycaon not only served to aggrandise the rule of law as upheld by the king of the gods, but also to establish the bestial nature of those men who were disinclined to civil and social order.

Unlike the Greeks, who kept monsters at a distance, the Romans embraced monstrosity and were fascinated by the grotesque. They were spellbound not only by monstrous animals and impossible beings, but also by monstrous births and deformed humans – like Lycaon. Though Lycaon is not a unique example of a werewolf who maintained some “vestige of his human shape,” he is among the few who are absolutely specified to be a hybrid in this way. This “predilection for the unusual” may have been a result of the expanding empire under Augustus and the later emperors.¹⁰ Whatever the reason behind the proliferation of monsters

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. trans. by Raeburn, D.. (Toronto. 2004), book 1. p. 199-243.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Felton, ‘Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome’, p.114.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.127.

in Roman literature, the werewolf Lycaon stands out as the first significant human transformation into a wolf in recorded history.¹¹ That the transformation was a result of a punishment, and that it was so unreservedly negative and monstrous set a precedent for future werewolf narratives. Lycaon's natural monstrosity was externalised by Zeus, and his humanity all but stripped away because of his cannibalism and his disregard for sacred *xenia*.¹²

The Satyricon of Petronius, written in the late first century C.E., features a short story told by Trimalchio's friend Niceros which proceeded thusly: Niceros convinced a soldier to accompany him along a dark road, but when they arrived at a cemetery, Niceros turned to see his friend strip, making a ring of water around himself and then turn into a wolf. The soldier's clothes turned to stone, and Niceros continued on his way to the house of his lover where he learned that they had recently been worried by a wolf. But the beast 'did not make fools of (them) even though he got off; for (the) slave made a hole in his neck with a spear.'¹³ When Niceros reached home again, he found the soldier being administered to by a doctor for a wound he had received to his neck. Much like a folkloric tale or legend, the narrator concludes with 'may all your guardian angels punish me if I am lying.'¹⁴

The werewolf story in *The Satyricon* is different from the story of Lycaon in the *Metamorphoses* in two key aspects: the soldier, unlike Lycaon, is never named, and the soldier can apparently transform at will into his supernatural shape. The monstrosity in Niceros's story is therefore somewhat muted compared to the story told by Ovid. It is also in *The Satyricon* that the theme of clothing, which will become a recurring addition to werewolf stories, is first integrated.

Interestingly, *The Satyricon* and the *Metamorphoses* are both narrated tales, rather than direct references to action taking place. The reader (or listener) is invited into the story by both the author as well as a character within the text. But while Ovid's poem is clearly a piece of

¹¹ I differentiate here from the Neuri of Herodotus. Lycaon was a named werewolf, and an individual with a unique place in Roman literature, while the Neuri were a faceless mass and living on the fringes of the known world. For the story of the Neuri see Herodotus. *The Histories*. trans. by Marincola, J. (Toronto. 1999), book 4 p.105.

¹²The concept of guest-friendship in ancient Greece, by which a host had a sacred duty to his guest.

¹³ Petronius. 'The Satyricon,' trans. by Michael Heseltine in *The Perseus Project*.

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0027%3Atext%3DSatyricon%3Asection%3D62>> March 2016, section 62.

¹⁴ Ibid.

political propaganda, *The Satyricon* is understood to have been written as entertainment. Trimalchio's party, at which the story of the werewolf is told, is full of outlandish tales and the entire scene is set as a picture of copious self-indulgence on the part of the host.¹⁵ The story of the werewolf is therefore just another extreme narration, while in the *Metamorphoses* Lycaon's story is isolated and fits within the logical chronology of the world's beginnings and the foundations of mankind. In Lycaon's case his humanity is stripped from him because he did not honour human customs, while in Niceros's story the soldier willingly gave up his humanity to suite the audience. These two very different interpretations of werewolves, one as a tool to describe imperfect masculinity and one as a vehicle for entertainment, are still at odds in the twenty-first century, with werewolves appearing and disappearing from the silver screen and in literature at the whim of the audience.¹⁶

Medieval monsters

Unlike the ancient world, medieval Europe was dominated by one God, whose message was disseminated by His books, followers, and sometimes by His saints.¹⁷ The Christian Church was a universally acknowledged power in Western Europe and so the institution must be taken into account in any study of monstrosity, and especially human transformation. In fact, the role of the Church was directly influenced by the bodily transformation of God into man, and of course, the transformation of the host at every mass.¹⁸ One may even consider these to be the greatest human transformations of all, with the literal transformation of the host being one of the key issues leading to the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in northern Europe. Unfortunately it is not within the scope of this paper to even touch upon such a complicated liminal boundary, but it meant that Catholicism underpinned many of the dialogues on the subject of man into wolf.

¹⁵ Ovid even mentions Augustus, to whom the entire *Metamorphoses* is dedicated, 'subjects loyalty is no less pleasing to you, Augustus, than theirs was to Jupiter.', book 1. pp.199-243.

¹⁶ A good modern example of a werewolf intended to describe extreme masculinity and the resistance towards socially constrained boundaries can be found in *Wolf*. dir. Nichols, M. Columbia Pictures. 1994. [DVD], while the werewolves in *Dog Soldiers*. dir. Marshall, N. Pathè, 2002 [DVD] were much more akin to the unnamed, featureless werewolf of Petronius. 'The Satyricon,' trans. by Michael Heseltine in *The Perseus Project*. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0027%3Atext%3DSatyricon%3Asection%3D62>> March 2016.

¹⁷ Monotheism was the primary belief system by the twelfth century in Europe, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

¹⁸ For more on this theme see Walker-Bynum, C. *Metamorphosis and Identity*. (New York. 2001) and Mills, R. 'Jesus as Monster' in Bildhauer, B. and Mills, R. (eds.) *The Monstrous Middle Ages*. (Toronto. 2003) pp.28-54.

By the end of the thirteenth century the wolf and the werewolf had emerged as primary characters in fable, *lais*, and travel narratives. These werewolves were not the Ovidian creatures of *Metamorphoses* – men who transformed into hairy brutes, villains fit only for killing; in fact, by the high middle ages it was not unusual to encounter werewolves who chose to transform of their own free will and who were the protagonists in their own heroic *lais*, or at the very least sympathetic. Even more significantly, these were not werewolves disassociated with the author's own regional identity, but even included members of the aristocracy. The characters were purely fictional, including Bisclavret from the *lais* of the same name and *Roman de Guillaume de Palerne*; often characters such as these were written as having lived in a distant time, or an unknown part of the country, like Arthur's Gorlagon.

Russell and Russell argue in "The Social Biology of Werewolves" that *The Satyricon* of Petronius was the last werewolf story of its kind until the novel *Monsieur Oufle* written in 1710.¹⁹ After the first century authors stopped writing about werewolves as fiction and began writing them as fact.²⁰ However, this argument comes under severe strain when considering *Bisclavret*, composed in the twelfth century, the fourteenth century Latin version of the Celtic *Arthur and Gorlagon*, and the French *Roman de Guillaume de Palerne*, translated into English in 1350;²¹ all romantic *lais* written with the werewolf as sympathetic hero. It is hard to imagine that these highly romanticised, formulaic narratives were taken as fact. Literal belief in werewolves is impossible to prove and in examples like *Bisclavret* it seems unlikely that the inclusion of werewolves was meant to serve anything other than entertainment purposes. For this paper, an assumption can be made that though the monstrosity of the werewolf was universally accepted in thirteenth century Europe, belief in human transformation outside of the *lais* was disputed.

¹⁹ The full title being *A History of the Ridiculous Extravagancies of Monsieur Oufle Occasioned by his reading books treating of Magick, the Black-art, Daemoniacks, Conjurers, Witches, Hobgoblins, Incubus's, Succubus's, and the Diabolical-Sabbath; of Elves, Fairies, Wanton Spirits, Genius's, Spectres and Ghosts; of Dreams, the Philosopher's-Stone, Judicial Astrology, Horoscopes, Talismans, Lucky and Unlucky Days, Eclipses, Comets, and all sorts of Apparitions, Divinations, Charms, Enchantments, and other Superstitious Practices.* (London. 1711).

²⁰ Russell, W.M.S. and Russell, C. 'The Social Biology of Werewolves' in Porter, J.R. and Russell, W.M.S. (eds.) *Animals in Folklore.* (Cambridge.1978) p.144.

²¹ Otten, C. *A Lycanthropy Reader.* (Syracuse. 1986) p.7.

One of the best examples of a werewolf narrative is Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, a thirteenth century romantic werewolf story.²² It is typical of the Old French vernacular style; Marie de France wrote to the standard literary traditions in France and northern Europe and she included the ideals of chivalry, a wicked-wife folkloric archetype, a benevolent "wise-man" or king, and finally the fairy-tale happy ending for the hero. *Bisclavret* took place in a time distant to the author's writing, lending it an air of credibility and antiquity and (much like *The Satyricon*) the tale ends with the assurance that 'the adventure you have heard actually took place. Do not doubt it.'²³ The author demonstrated a profound understanding of transformation and the fear associated with unalterable change in one's body, lifestyle and environment. Specific transformation of a man into a wolf was all the more horrible as passages from the Holy Bible demonised the wolf and referred to wolves as ravenous, vicious, false prophets, and compared the wolf in sheep's clothing to the idealised image of the Saviour as a lamb.²⁴ For *Bisclavret*, the horror was not in the crimes he might have committed while a wolf, but in the transformation itself, and the imprisonment of his human mind in an animal body.

Bisclavret, originating in eleventh century Brittany and thought to have been composed in the twelfth century by Marie de France, is the story of a baron who was known to disappear three times each week, and neither his wife nor any of the servants knew where he went while absent. His wife begged him to tell her where he went, for she suspected adultery. Though at first he refused she pleaded with him so fervently that he finally told her. When she learned that he was a werewolf she became afraid. Contacting her lover, she promised to become his wife if he would only steal the clothes of *Bisclavret* and force him to remain a wolf forever. This was accomplished. An entire year passed, and the king came to the forest with the intention of hunting the wolf. When *Bisclavret* was finally cornered by the king's hounds he took hold of the king's boots and kissed them, his eyes pleading for mercy. Seeing that this was an intelligent beast the king took the wolf home and treated him with every favour. Some time passed and *Bisclavret*, proved his absolute loyalty to the king, becoming a palace

²² The following analysis of *Bisclavret* is taken from Monteith-Chachuat, J. *Horribly Transformed: Werewolves in Medieval Text, Literature, and the Witch-Trials*, unpublished M.A. thesis, School of Graduate Studies (Laurentian University, 2012).

²³ "Bisclavret" in *The Lais of Marie de France*. trans. by Burgess, G. and Busby, K. (Toronto. 2003) p.72. Compare Gerald of Wales and Gervais of Tillbury whose texts were written in their own lifetimes and the narrators claimed to have seen the marvels themselves.

²⁴ Matt. 7:15, Acts 20:29, and Genesis 49:27, King James Bible. (Oxford. 2010). In fact, the wolf is only ever mentioned in negative terms in the bible, and is referenced no less than 14 times.

favourite. When the king lodged in the same forest that Bisclavret had inhabited the treacherous wife came to pay homage to her liege. In a fit of rage the werewolf bit off her nose. Suspecting some reason for the violent behaviour on the part of Bisclavret, the king had the wife tortured until she revealed what she had done to her previous husband. Bisclavret's clothes were brought before him and in the privacy of the king's own bedchamber the werewolf turned back into a baron. The baron was honoured with more land and the king's favour; the wife was banished and her daughters were cursed thereafter with a noseless face. Marie de France opened the lay of Bisclavret with a short introduction to the topic of werewolves: 'a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage, and dwells in vast forests.'²⁵ This description was typical of the horrific transformation into a wolf for medieval France. But Bisclavret's monstrosity as a werewolf was barely hinted at, so that the chivalrous moral of the narrative would not be diluted by the horror of the actual transformation. Marie de France relied upon her audience's willingness to suspend disbelief and to enter into a dialogue with the characters of her story.²⁶ The audience was willing to believe in the shape shifting and could suspend disbelief in the evil associated with horrific transformation as understood and appreciate culturally via the werewolf. That the audience never experiences any of the 'great damages' that surely must have been caused by Bisclavret (especially as the king himself made a special journey to the forest of the werewolf in order to hunt the creature), is indicative of the focus of the *lais* being addressed primarily at the knight's chivalry compared to the treachery of the wife. The horror of her disloyalty to her husband is made even more clear when it she who is punished by disfigurement, along with her daughters.

When Bisclavret explained to his wife where he disappeared for three nights of every week, he said that he entered 'the vast forest and live(d) in the deepest part of the wood where (he) (fed) off the prey (he) c(ould) capture.'²⁷ What prey he was referring to was left to conjecture, but the narrator had already insinuated that a werewolf, who lived in vast forests, devoured men. This seems contradictory to the sympathetic creature that Bisclavret is portrayed as for the entirety of the *lais*. But Marie de France was writing as a revisionist in the literary history of the werewolf, a new sympathetic monster instead of the cannibalism that had previously

²⁵ "Bisclavret" in *The Lais of Marie de France*. p.68

²⁶ In 1817, Samuel Coleridge Taylor defined fiction, in part, as the 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of the reader, thereby suspending judgement regarding the implausibility of the narrative; Coleridge, S. *Biographia literaria or biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*. (London. 1894) p.145.

²⁷ "Bisclavret" in *The Lais of Marie de France*. p.69

been associated with horrific transformation. Even as the werewolf fit neatly into the medieval ideal of a man who overcomes his animalistic behaviour by the grace of the king, the horrific transformation scene played a role in determining the audience's understanding of what Bisclavret underwent while he was a wolf. One of the differences between the sympathetic *lais* and the accusations levied during the witch-trials was that the understated violence came to the fore.

Bisclavret typifies the sympathetic werewolf. The audience was never given to know how Bisclavret was stricken with his lycanthropic curse, or if he was born a werewolf, but it is clear that the transformation was for some reason beyond his control. Without clothing, the baron could not transform back into a man. He consistently transformed three times a week, an act that he could neither decrease nor increase at a whim, which would indicate that the transformation was a compulsion rather than a choice. By his hesitancy to inform his wife of his transformations, it is apparent that Bisclavret was aware of the social stigma attached to werewolves and their activities. Bisclavret is a fine example of the most sympathetic of monsters in literature and folklore: a werewolf who was born with his affliction and forced to hide his true self from his wife and contemporaries. Thus *Bisclavret* consistently demonstrates the social construct that heroism and chivalry can be associated with dire consequences.

The transformation of Bisclavret from a man into a wolf and living loyally amongst his king's hounds has obvious references to a man learning what it means to serve humbly and obey his liege in all things – in short, to be a good knight. As a wolf, Bisclavret managed to exemplify the courage and resilience that the Greeks and Romans were so enamoured of, and to take his revenge upon his unfaithful wife. But Bisclavret was not cruel or unhappy at the beginning of the story, and we are not given any reason to believe that he was an unkind lord or treasonous subject; so why was the transformation necessary at all? It was under the civilising influence of his king that Bisclavret regained his humanity. Marie de France made it abundantly clear to her readers that werewolves were “ferocious beast(s) which ... devour(ed) men” and so we must assume that Bisclavret was no exception to this established truth. Learning to serve humbly was a deeply Christian message; with Christ washing the feet of his disciples in John XIII 1-20 and in Peter V.6 man being encouraged to humble himself before the might of God. And as a reward for his meek behaviour and servile attitude, Bisclavret's life was spared and he accepted a place of honour by the king's side. The

monstrosity of the werewolf was overcome by the king's moral censure of the wolf, and his insistence that the wolf abide by human laws. Just like the fable of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio, *Bisclavret* reflects the anthropomorphic assumption that animals share with humans a common sense of good and evil.²⁸ Unlike the Greeks, who used monsters juxtaposed against heroes to prove the inherent goodness of men, Marie de France used *Bisclavret* to demonstrate the inherent humanity of compassion and humility.

Pre-Modern monstrosity

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the church considered that belief in human transformation was heresy and the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1487 declared that belief in literal, physical transformation of a man into a wolf a heretical notion.²⁹ Heinrich Kramer wrote that the belief in werewolves killing people was a punishment based on illusion created by evil spirits; but that evil could not create like God, but only alter what had already been created.³⁰ By the sixteenth century there had been an alarming (and significant) shift away from Marie de France's somewhat warm and fuzzy appreciation for human transformation. The witch-trials, the plagues, and reforestation had a significant influence on popular culture. In northern Europe the stresses of the Reformation had an enormous impact on considerations of monstrosity and hybridity. Werewolves who could be named and tried were a new phenomenon in Europe, and the best examples of such trials can be found in sixteenth century northern France and Germany.

Though the greatest number of werewolf trials in France took place between 1598 and 1609, there was already precedence for the trials in the French-Lorraine region.³¹ The werewolf trials in the Lorraine, as recorded by Robin Briggs and Sabine Baring-Gould, lasted from 1520 to 1620; a century of werewolf activity in the area. In Besancon, France, in December 1521, Pierre Bourgot and Michael Verdung were accused of witchcraft and cannibalism, and admitted to transforming into wolves by the aid of Satan. Nineteen years before the trial, Bourgot had lost his sheep during a particularly bad storm. When the servant of the devil

²⁸ Salter, D. *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature*. (London. 2001) p.29.

²⁹ Kramer, H. and James S. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. trans. by Summers, M. (New York. 1971), Part I Question X.

³⁰ Asma, S. *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of our Worst Fears*. (New York. 2009) p.115.

³¹ The following analysis of Michael Verdung and Pierre Bourgot is taken from Monteith-Chachuat, *Horribly Transformed: Werewolves in Medieval Text, Literature, and the Witch-Trials*.

returned his flock, Bourgot renounced Christianity and ‘fell on (his) knees and gave in (his) allegiance to Satan.’³² Because his pact with Satan was so successful, Bourgot grew bored and recommenced his attendance at Church, until Michael Verdung brought him back to the devil. At this meeting, Bourgot stripped down, was smeared with a salve, and believed himself thereafter to have been transformed into a wolf. After being smeared again, Bourgot and Verdung both regained their human form. During their many misdeeds in their wolfish form, Bourgot was obliged to strip every time, while Verdung could transform while still fully dressed.³³ Both men were burned as werewolves.

The motif of transformation and one’s state of undress hearkens back to the classical and medieval werewolf traditions, in which Niceros’s soldier and then Bisclavret could not transform back into men unless they were clothed. However, Bisclavret’s dogged disinterest in the clothing when he was presented with it does suggest that he is ‘indifferent to a return to quotidian humanity, and thus offers no reaction at all to (the) powerful symbolic accoutrements.’³⁴ Just like Verdung, who could transform regardless of what he was wearing, Bisclavret was not bound to his humanity through his clothing. The werewolves in these narratives are forced to undergo their transformation back into human form in private, and to cover their nakedness with their human clothing. This is not merely a comment on Lorraine or Breton civilised anxiety about nakedness, but a comment on the horror of shape-shifting itself.³⁵ Clothing was a strong indication not only of a real and physical link with the transformation scene, but also a deeply rooted belief in the shame associated with being subjected to a bodily transformation. The audience in a court-room never saw the transformation of the accused into a wolf or back into a man. That they could never witness the transformation only increased their fascination with the horrific scene. The association of werewolves with clothes was a symbolic association of man with his human form – that Michael Verdung could transform while dressed up in his human accrements was a comment on how diabolical he had become.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen wrote in 2011 that ‘werewolves would seem to remind us why species divisions must remain fixed – so keen is the desire to keep a divide between what is human

³² Baring-Gould, S. *The Book of Werewolves*. (New York. 1973) p.70.

³³ *Ibid.* p.69-74.

³⁴ Cohen, J. ‘The Werewolf’s Indifference’. <<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2011/10/werewolfs-indifference.html>> October 2011.

³⁵ Walker-Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*. p.95.

and what is animal that some werewolves are just humans covered with wolf skin.’³⁶ The werewolf trials in the French-Lorraine region, and the literature surrounding the witch-craze, were defined by questions regarding how a man was able to transform. These questions demonstrated an overwhelming desire to place the werewolf somewhere in the natural world order, and to make the werewolf a creature that is either man or animal, rather than a liminal creature who inhabits both wild and domesticated spaces. The obsession with dressing and undress is just one example of this thought-process. Another example is the physical appearance of those accused, and the mental state in which their persecutors found them.

According to *A True Discourse Concerning the Damnable Life and Death of Stubbe Peeter...*, Stubbe sold his soul to Satan, and in return received a girdle which, ‘being put about him, he was straight transformed into the likeness of a greedy devouring wolf, strong and mighty, with eyes great and large, which in the night sparkled like unto brands of fire, a mouth great and wide, with most sharp and cruel teeth, a huge body, and mighty paws.’ Peeter ‘was exceedingly well pleased, and the shape fitted his fancy and agreed best with his nature, being inclined to blood and cruelty.’³⁷ This description is a far cry from the sort of beast presented to the audience by Marie de France. But the world had moved on in the 400 years or so since *Bisclavret*, and the Stubbe pamphlet was a remarkably good representation of persecution in Europe in the sixteenth century. Europe had suffered through various plagues as well as climatic upheaval in the thirteenth century, reforestation and the Reformation, and by the time of writing of Peeter Stubbe’s trial, the Scientific Revolution was underway. The perception of monstrosity and man’s humanity had changed and so Stubbe’s monstrosity could never have been the same as *Bisclavret*’s.

The transformation of Stubbe into a wolf happened via the assistance of Satan, and so the very act of transformation itself was evil. Here we see the first inklings of what monstrosity was becoming; until the French-Lorraine werewolf trials and the Stubbe case monstrosity had been reserved for the fringes of the known world, species entirely separate from man, or men who were completely transformed. Monstrosity had been associated with moral lessons and fable-like stories. By the sixteenth century werewolf trials the men and women who were hanged or burned for the crime of werewolfism were real; the neighbours, sons, and

³⁶ Cohen. ‘The Werewolf’s Indifference’.

³⁷ *A True Discourse Concerning the Damnable Life and Death of Stubbe Peeter, Truly translated out of the high Dutch, according to the copy printed in Collin, brought over to England by George Bores ordinary post, the 11th day of this present month of June 1590.* (London. 1590) chapter 4.

daughters of a community who took the place of the imagined monsters that had previously only haunted fairy tales. It is with the Stubbe trial that we begin to see the type of monstrosity we are most familiar with in the twentieth and twenty-first century; men and women imbued with monstrous characteristics in order to separate them from the larger population by way of undermining their humanity.³⁸

The human/monster threshold in the Peeter Stubbe case is subtle, though it may not seem so at first. If a man transforms into a wolf, you would be within your rights to consider that a blatant case of hybridity. But a human being cannot physically transform into a wolf – with or without the help of the devil. With this in mind, it is most logical to assume that Peeter Stubbe lived in a community which experienced some level of misfortune; children or women killed by wild animals, perhaps a series of particularly grisly murders, and Peeter was made into a literal monster by those seeking justice. Persecution of minorities is not uncommon, even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries during times of trial or increased stress in a community. During WWII all Japanese immigrants in Canada were rounded up and herded into camps, as a precaution when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour.³⁹ The Japanese-Canadians were persecuted for their appearance and presumed allegiance to an ethnic group rather than homeland. A paper delivered at the University of Reading 2015 Fairbrother Lecture, entitled *Governing Britain's Muslims: how effective is counter-radicalisation?* discussed the effects of counter-radicalisation policies in the U.K. in order to counter-act the marginalisation of minority groups and the radicalisation of young people who feel at odds with the larger society.⁴⁰ In modernity we do not believe that people can physically change shape into a wolf, but the reliance upon scape-goating tactics and the need to assimilate otherwise culturally and ethnically unique groups within a society creates monsters out of thin air.

³⁸ Cole, P. *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy*. (Edinburgh. 2006) is an excellent account of the marginalised members of modern society who are imbued with 'evil' characteristics in order to maintain a distance between *them* and *us*.

³⁹ For a particularly insightful recounting of the Japanese internment, see Nakano, T. *Within the Barbed Wire Fence: a Japanese Man's Account of his Internment in Canada*. (Toronto.1980).

⁴⁰ Ali, N. *Governing Britain's Muslims: how effective is counter-radicalisation?* Fairbrother Lecture, (The University of Reading) 11th March 2015.

Conclusion

The monsters presented in this paper are a microcosm of the era from which they originate. Lycaon and the soldier-werewolf lived in a world also populated by flying horses, three headed-dogs, and sentient whirlpools.⁴¹ Bisclavret was joined by witches and dragons, Cynocephali, and unicorns. In the early modern period, hybridity was not reserved for the pages of poetry and romantic *lais*, but could be found within legal documents and codices to try and persecute werewolves legally. The prevalence of monsters in the Classical, Medieval, and Early Modern world should not be considered unusual, or backward. There is no evidence for absolute, unwavering belief in monsters – indeed, many contemporary scholars negated their existence.⁴² More importantly it is not for us in the modern world to ‘throw stones’, especially as we cling to our own understanding and reinterpretation of monstrosity. Lycaon, Bisclavret, and Stubbe are all good examples of monsters who are both human and in opposition to what is considered normally human in the time in which they lived. The ability to transform their shape into a wolf was abhorrent in itself, but it was the character of the man which determined how monstrous the boundary was.

Perhaps in the twenty-first century we no longer believe that monsters walk in the skin of a wolf. But metaphorical monsters abound in modernity, and can anyone say that we are better for it, that we do not try to dress up our abhorrence of otherness in a fantastic guise? This paper has used Lycaon, Bisclavret, and Peeter Stubbe to demonstrate monstrosity and hybridity in opposition to what is normally considered to be human, or rather, what we prefer to believe it means to be human. The audience implicitly understood the negative connotations in transforming from a man into a beast, especially a beast who might prey upon his neighbours. Werewolves and monsters are abhorrent, and the three examples here given are apt examples of the monstrous negative juxtaposed against normalcy, or *humanity*.

⁴¹ Pegasus, Cerberus, and Charybdis, respectively.

⁴² Amazingly, by the time of the French-Lorraine werewolf trials most scientific authors believed werewolfism (or lycanthropy to give the disease its medical term) was merely a figment of a deranged mind. One of the exceptions was Bodin, J.. *De la démonomanie des sorciers*. Trans. by R. Scott (Toronto. 1995).

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