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BESTIALITY, SEXUALITY, AGGRESSION:
THE TRACK OF THE WEREWOLF IN FRENCH LITERATURE

By

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French

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By

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in French
2012

Abstract

BESTIALITY, SEXUALITY, AGGRESSION:
THE TRACK OF THE WEREWOLF IN FRENCH LITERATURE
by Andrew Scott Pyle

"Bisclavret", the fourth of Marie de France's twelfth-century *Lais* and one of the earliest extant texts in French literature, is the story of a werewolf. In giving such a prominent position to a lycanthrope, she was making use of a figure with an already potent established value as a symbol of, and repository for, the fears of savagery, deviance and otherness that haunted the culture in which she lived and wrote. At the time the werewolf was not merely a frightening creature in the realm of fiction, but a real scapegoat for the most heinous violence wrought by humans. This dissertation examines the combined qualities of violence and carnality intrinsic to the figure of the werewolf, and follows this shapeshifting monster's literary tracks from its appearance at the roots of the French canon to its survival in the literature of nineteenth-century France, where it will adapt to a changed set of social and sexual concerns by adopting different animalistic guises and behaviors.

The trail begins with "Bisclavret", in which Marie de France depicts a werewolf, who is in all other respects a model citizen, revealing his secret to his curious wife, who swiftly uses it betray him and become involved with another man. This dissertation argues that Marie de France structures her werewolf story after the manner of the medieval bestiaries, ecclesiastical texts which used accounts of animal life to impart moral lessons to audiences, but that she does so in a surprising way. "Bisclavret" opens with a detailed description of the werewolf as a brutal masculine figure, but in the ensuing story, the cruelty and savagery attributed to him are realized in his wife, setting up the lycanthrope as a worker of violence through subversion of sexual, societal and gender norms. Successive chapters of the dissertation move to the nineteenth century and consider the transformative, animalizing effects of passion in Barbey d'Aurevilly's "Le Bonheur dans le crime", with reference to Hélène Cixous; the Freudian nightmare of the primal scene in Mérimée's "Lokis"; and the boundless therianthropic cruelty of Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*.

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Introduction

Dusting for Prints

> Werewolves were a stark reality in the Middle Ages. Their physical presence was not doubted; at a symbolic level the werewolf represented all that was base in man, especially savagery and lust. If… to love what was good in the wolf was really to express self-love, and to hate what was evil in the wolf was to express self-hate, then the hunting down of werewolves was simply the age-old attempt to isolate and annihilate man's base nature. That it went on for so many hundreds of years indicates an abiding self-hatred in man.
>
> – Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*

After a few successful centuries of menace and wanton destruction, the lycanthrope went undercover, with all the stealth and speed he was infamous for. Where the woods and farmyards had been crawling with werewolves, only the occasional print remained. The gilded (or more aptly, blood-spattered) age of the lycanthrope seemed to have run its course. He'd had a good run through the years, there could be no doubt of that. For a panoply of subterranean reasons, the cultural terrain of early modern France had proved an especially fecund breeding ground for werewolves.

This is not to say that only the French found themselves susceptible to stories and legends of men imbued with the properties of animals and able to shift into beastly form. Every culture and ethnic group to have existed in the world has had its shapeshifters. Wherever man has lived in close proximity to the animals, stories have arisen of humans

able to jump the barrier between the two. To tweak the werewolf's naming convention, one could take a therianthropic tour of the world and encounter werebears, werefoxes, werejaguars, werecrocodiles, and so on. These storied hybrids have their roots in the religious sphere of the pagan world, most often in the contexts of violence and reproduction. The Olympians, for instance, changing themselves into animals to cavort with mortals, as Zeus did to seduce Leda and Europa, or transforming mortals into beasts for vengeance or entertainment; witness the fates of Actaeon, Io, Callisto, Lycaeon and others. Farther north, in Celtic Britain, similar myths were handed down of gods and magicians taking on animal shape, or forcing others to do so[1].

The French werewolves did not engage in such fanciful activities. There was no glamour or enchantment to the atrocities they left behind them. They were, in fact, looked on as the serial and spree killers of the day… which, shorn of superstition, is precisely what they were liable to be. Any man found to have committed the same sort of brutality upon his fellows that would later be wreaked by such as Jack the Ripper and Jeffrey Dahmer, or simply suspected and accused with enough volume of having done so, could stand trial for lycanthropy and be executed. In the witchcraft scares that swept through Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, werewolfery was a special accusation reserved for alleged male perpetrators of especially heinous crimes: mutilation, dismemberment, cannibalism. The best-known of these *loups-garous* may be Gilles Garnier, said to have

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[1] One such tale is that of Blodeuwedd, a beautiful maiden conjured up by the wizard Gwydion out of "the flowers of oak and broom and meadowsweet" (*Mabinogion*, 111) as a bride for his nephew Lleu Llaw Gyffes; when she betrayed him for another, Gwydion turned her into an owl and damned her to fly by night, hated by all other birds. Just such a sequence of betrayal and vengeful deformation will be significant in Chapter One.

Earlier in the same branch of the *Mabinogion*, the links between sexuality and animal transformation are evoked by the misadventures and punishment of that same Gwydion when younger: after he and his friend Gilfaethwy have conspired to send the land to war, so that they may have their way with King Math's attendant virgin in his absence, Math curses the two to spend three years in the wilderness as three mated pairs of animals, such that each man gets at least one taste of being female and bearing children.

been a killer and devourer of children in the vicinity of Dôle, in the Franche-Comté:

> The indictment against him, as read by Henri Camus, doctor of laws and counsellor of the King, was to the effect that he, Gilles Garnier, had seized upon a little girl, twelve years of age, whom he drew into a vineyard and there killed, partly with his teeth and partly with his hands, seeming like wolf's paws—that from thence he trailed her bleeding body along the ground with his teeth into the wood of La Serre, where he ate the greatest portion of her at one meal, and carried the remainder home to his wife… (Mackay 283-84)

He was burned alive at Dôle on January 18th, 1573, the usual fate of accused werewolves. He was far from the only one[2].

A simple question suggests itself: why werewolves? When confronted with evidence of grisly havoc caused by a man of the community, or even with just a supposition of such, why dub this person a lycanthrope? Werewolf trials were directly akin to witch trials, and male witches were not unheard of; why were they not branded warlocks, or victims of demonic possession[3]?

In *Of Wolves and Men*[4], Barry Holstun Lopez gives the following concise summary of just what the wolf signified to the average European of the Middle Ages:

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[2] A name that often comes up in discussion of these real-life *loups-garous* is Gilles de Rais, with his well-known fall into the worst kind of depravity; born into the nobility, educated in the court of Charles VII, and a companion-in-arms of Jeanne d'Arc, he was later found to have molested, murdered and sodomized a great number of children. He was not, however, accused of lycanthropy, and was not burned alive, but hanged until dead and subsequently burned.

[3] They *were* labeled as possessed, in a sense; the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the 1487 user's manual for witch hunters, claimed that a werewolf did not truly change his shape, as only the power of God could bring about such a transformation; rather, the Devil would place a man's soul in the body of an ordinary wolf, and send him into the night to do his evil.

[4] This is an excellent book, and a required read for anyone interested in the wolf. Lopez' primary concerns are with wolves in the wild and man's mass extermination efforts against them, but he gives plenty of space to an examination of the historic and cultural reasons for their maligned status.

> The medieval mind, more than any other mind in history, was obsessed with images of wolves. A belief in werewolves was widespread and strong. Pagan festivals in which wild men, mythic relatives of wolves, played the central roles were popular. Peasants were in revolt against their feudal lords, and the hated nobles were represented by wolves in the proletarian literature[5]. Medieval peasants called famine "the wolf." Avaricious landlords were "wolves." Anything that threatened a peasant's precarious existence was "the wolf." (Lopez 206)

It is not surprising that the wolf should have come to represent the hobgoblins of the medieval mind. The wolf was a wild creature at a time when even in the towns, people lived closer to the wilderness. The howl of a wolf in the night was a concrete reminder of the vast, incomprehensible natural world on the other side of the wall, where those things one desired and fought for in the human sphere were unknown and radically useless. Out there a man was in constant danger; out there a man needed weapons and cunning to stay alive, and the protection of numbers. Even worse, the wolf couldn't be relied on to *stay* out there and restrict his menace to those who came into his[6] domain. He prowled at the edges of human settlements. He stole chickens and lambs from the farmyard. He and human poachers competed for the same game. He avoided men when

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[5] Cf. *Le Roman de Renart*. Lopez mentions Karen Kennerly's observation that in fables, the wolf is often the animal character who comes the closest to a realistic portrait of a human being: greedy and lusty, but also flawed and weak, a foil and target for the cleverer characters. Ysengrin the wolf, cuckolded and humiliated by Renart the fox, is as much a figure of identification as he is a symbol of hated authority figures. Members of the medieval audience were far more apt to be Ysengrins than Renarts.

[6] The wolf is almost exclusively masculine in French lore, but Lopez does point out a feminine counterpart to the ravenous male version: the wolf as giving mother figure, typified by *la louve romaine*, wetnurse to Romulus and Remus, and by extension the Roman Empire and Western civilization. The female wolf was viewed less than kindly by contemporary medieval texts, as shall be seen in Chapter One.

he could, and attacked when he couldn't[7]. In short, his presence threatened the populace at a base, primal level, and the populace responded in kind by hunting him without mercy.

Consequently, those men judged to have made the most severe and threatening breaks with what was good and decent were identified with the wolf, and deemed to have been infected with the wolf's presence in their own beings. The crimes attributed above to Gilles Garnier are emblematic of the savagery of a typical *loup-garou* in the public mind. Not content to kill, a werewolf would also tear at the victim's flesh for food or for sport, and quite likely rend the body limb from limb. Defilement, cruelty and savagery separated ordinary murders from the work of lycanthropes[8]. The wolf was the scapegoat for all that terrified the medieval consciousness. When the acts of a member of the community crossed that line from behavior that was understandable (if criminal and reprehensible) into appalling and excessive violence, he was doing so under the influence of the beast.

By the 19th century, the werewolf in France seemed to have retired from public life. There was no apparent need of him on the surface of society. His services as an ambassador of evil were no longer required in a century that had begun in the wake of the decapitation of the monarchy, and gone on to include several wars, two Napoleons, an ever-shifting political structure and rapid expansions in both literature and literacy. The

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[7] Here one must mention *la bête du Gévaudan*, a mysterious animal resembling an enormous wolf, several of which are said to have attacked over two hundred people in the central French countryside in the mid-18th century. Great hunting expeditions were mounted to catch the beasts, but they remain unidentified to this day. This *bête* has no real place in my work, being of principal interest to historians and cryptozoologists, but it occupies enough of a place in the French cultural landscape that I can't overlook it entirely. Cf. *Le Pacte des loups*, a 2001 French film from Christophe Gans, released in English as *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, which offers a novel explanation for *la bête du Gévaudan* amid much silliness, swashbuckling and mixed martial arts.

[8] This is perhaps the more proper term to use, more analytical and less weighted with spooky atmospherics than *werewolf*, but the two may be used somewhat interchangeably. In later chapters, when the wolf is no longer the malicious animal in question, I will continue to use *lycanthrope* while modifying the *were-* word to incorporate the appropriate beast.

literal wolf at the door, or *le loup dans les blés*, was purely metaphor to all but the rural population, a shrinking demographic as the cities grew and modernized, attracting people from the countryside to populate them.

The figurative wolf, however, had jumped the wall between wilderness and civilization. When his prey relocated to *les grandes villes*, he went along with them. And though lycanthropy was no longer a crime for which one could be tried in court, the werewolf persisted in the realm of the imaginary, and so in literature. The modernized world was still an inhabited world, and its inhabitants continued to behave in ways that could not be comfortably apprehended without recourse to a fantastic surrogate. So the werewolf survived by doing what he does best – changing his shape to fit the fears attributed to him[9]. An examination of 19th century anxieties and neuroses will reveal his tracks all over the cultural map.

Those anxieties will be seen to have much to do with the position and function of the individual in the face of the century's physical and social remodeling. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray has given attention to the werewolf as depicted literally in several 19th century British texts, including *The Albigenses*, Charles Maturin's 1824 Gothic novel. The meat of her observations is as applicable to Paris as it is to London; she links the monster's physical transformations and gruesome appetites to the day's anxieties about alien influences changing the culture from without (influences from the colonies and, in the case of Britain, from the Continent) and within (emergent feminism and the

[9] It would be false to assert that traditional lycanthrope narratives disappeared from the landscape; indeed, a novella that approaches this designation will be at the center of Chapter Three. To give an example, George Sand wrote her account of *le meneur de loups*, a figure from country lore, a man gifed with the supernatural ability to lead and communicate with wolves. She included the tale in her *Légendes rustiques*, titled "Le meneu de loups" in the *berrichon* accent of its setting (also the home she loved). However, it is fair to say that the werewolf was more active behind the scenes than on the stage in France. He could be seen more openly in literature north of the Channel, as noted below.

shifting balance of sexual power, as well as the rigid and labyrinthine Victorian class structure)[10]. The fear of the werewolf is the fear of alterity, the dread of the Other; in this respect, the city is an ideal home for him, as a place where one cannot avoid being jammed up against any variety of Others during the course of a typical day.

By the second half of the 19th century, the urban rush of Paris will be sufficiently well established to be poeticized by Baudelaire, and subsequently theorized by Walter Benjamin, and to be the focus of a way of life for that specimen of idle, observant masculinity called the *flâneur*, who will spend his days in the cafés and along the boulevards, taking in the stream of beings around him with the zeal of a naturalist. Paris was the epitome of a cosmopolitan city, with men and women of all kinds, creeds, ethnicities and temperaments there to be seen and studied… but this extreme variation brought its own brand of homogeneity. With modernity, the people had become what Poe called *the crowd*, a mass of life in continual motion, as if all of those potential frightening Others had joined together to cancel out each other's menace. To track the lycanthrope in this context, one must start by examining those who do not take part in this cycle, who stand willfully apart from it or who are driven away from it. The social order may have changed, but the equation has not – order is order, anyone whose actions set them apart from it is a threat to that order, and if the perceived threat is great enough, the animalistic

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[10] The paper in question is called "Upright Citizens on All Fours," and in it she persuasively ties fear of the werewolf's monstrous appearance to the notion that the lower classes did in fact verge on feral in their miens and mannerisms:

"Werewolves consistently embodied difference in their human forms, and their transformation into the animal form of a wolf distanced them still further from the model of the white, middle-class male which was assumed to represent the 'human' in most nineteenth-century discourse. […] Lycanthropy was often presented as a threat emanating from the underclasses, for example. In the context of degenerationist discourses which envisioned the reversion of humanity to the bestial origins from which it had evolved, these classes were perceived as a threat to civilization and the future prosperity of the human race." (2)

She goes on to note that street people and werewolves (mentioning Gilles Garnier in particular) were frequently physically described using the same unpleasant vocabulary. Cf. Edward Hyde in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and the human/humanoid antagonists of virtually any story by H.P. Lovecraft.

Other presents itself in the guilty party.

What could be so threatening in this environment, with no livestock to be stolen, and no dark forests to dismember screaming children in? An unconventional relationship could be a sign of lycanthropy when, as du Coudray suggests, the very notion of what is human is founded upon a certain set of social behaviors. The beast is present, then, in an erotic relationship that flouts socially approved models, or in the figure of the unrepentant criminal[11]. A foreignness that will not be folded into the crowd is another mark of this new modern beast, given again a refusal or inability to adapt itself to its current locale[12]. Even someone who sets himself apart from the system for the wrong reasons, not just to observe as the *flâneur* does, but to mock and laugh, thereby endangering the tacit understandings that keep the whole structure together, may be read as a monster.

As I have mentioned, though it held plentiful prey for him, the 19th century also required the werewolf to find new ways to hide himself. My task, then, was to examine the *loup-garou* in his old stalking habitat, the literature of the Middle Ages, and follow the trail I found there on through the centuries.

For a medieval starting point, one would be hard-pressed to do better than "Bisclavret", one of the *lais* of Marie de France, which occupies a doubly distinct position at the origin point of werewolf narratives in print, and at the very beginning of French literature. And even at this early point, the violent sexual dynamics that will be

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[11] *Unrepentant* being the key term here. As I will show in the coming chapters, transgressive behavior becomes truly *beastly* when it is engaged in without remorse. The lovers to be examined in Chapter 2 are elevated to the level of the lycanthrope when their passion for each other not only survives their awful crime, but flourishes from it.

[12] I must mention Lovecraft again; he is known best for his stories of cosmic dread and dark elder gods, such as "The Call of Cthulhu," but one cannot overstate the potent racism that permeates his work. Miscegenation is the horror at the center of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (the townspeople breed with an aquatic extra-dimensional race in exchange for sunken treasures and good hauls of fish); and in stories like "The Horror at Red Hook", dark skin and a non-English language are enough to mark a person as not merely foreign, but *alien*.

essential to understanding the beast's modern movements are already apparent. "Bisclavret" establishes the werewolf's malevolent credentials in the reader's mind immediately with an educational preface, and just as immediately inverts them – the titular werewolf is a paragon of honorable medieval masculinity who happens to suffer under a lycanthropic curse, and the troubles of his story spring directly from the misdeeds of his wife, who turns his attempt to come clean with her to her own erotic advantage. Marie de France indicates to her readers the wicked behaviors of the lycanthrope, and presents a narrative in which he is the victim of those behaviors rather than the culprit; by the end of the *lai*, it will be the wife who has become monstrous and descended to the level of the beasts.

The animalizing effect of sexual desire on human characters, and the sexualization of animal behaviors, is impossible to miss centuries later in Barbey d'Aurevilly's "Le Bonheur dans le crime", one of the stories in his *Les Diaboliques*, published in 1874. A doctor relates a story of passion and murder as encountered through his practice, implicating beautiful and deadly swordswoman Hauteclaire and besotted nobleman Savigny in the poisoning of Savigny's wife. The reader's first encounter with these two criminals comes at the Jardin des Plantes, as they interact with a caged panther; the presence of the cat and its attendant value as a feminine signifier alters the monster's expected gender and animal nature. Female and feline, "Le Bonheur dans le crime"'s cat-woman brings the transgressive menace of the lycanthrope into the realm of consuming love and the intimacy of the bedroom.

My third chapter also imbues its deadly animal-person with this sex-soaked horror, and couples it with elements of geographic and linguistic otherness, extending the above

notion of the lycanthrope as an unknowable foreigner. Mérimée's 1869 story "Lokis" stands as a darkened reorchestration of his earlier "La Vénus d'Ille", and gives beastly flavor to that piece's themes and skeletal plot: a scholar travels far from home on an intellectual errand and falls in with a young man on the cusp of full adulthood, about to marry and put away the pleasures of youth, until a purported supernatural influence puts a stop to this sequence of events. In the case of "Lokis", young Lithuanian count Michel is haunted by a possibility of bestial parentage – his mother was attacked by a bear and driven mad while pregnant with him, and the fear of an ursine curse has been with him since his birth.

Lastly, in Chapter Four I turn to Isidore Ducasse, "le comte de Lautréamont", and the eponymous being at the center of 1869's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the extreme end of this parade of monstrosity. The transformations (spiritual and physical) in the preceding texts have been fixed and, for the most part, involuntary. The curses on Bisclavret and Michel descend from a past beyond the reader's view, and Barbey d'Aurevilly's cat people are caught up in their passion for each other. This passivity will not hold true for *Maldoror* – the text is fevered and nightmarish, a kind of Rosetta Stone for the later Surrealists who will make it their own, and the savage Maldoror wills himself through multiple capricious changes of shape. If preceding shapeshifters confined their changes to one member of the animal kingdom, Maldoror aspires to transform into all creatures, as needed to inflict his cruelty on the world. The common threads of bestial sexuality and the blurring of boundaries between species and bodies give the work one of its most crucial and discussed scenes, an erotic liaison between Maldoror and an enormous female shark, in the midst of a stormy sea filled with blood and corpses.

Chapter One

Monstres Sacrés: "Bisclavret" and the Medieval Bestiary

> La destinée de la femme est d'être comme la chienne, comme la louve; elle doit appartenir à tous ceux qui veulent d'elle; c'est visiblement outrager la destination que la nature impose aux femmes, que de les enchaîner par le lien absurde d'un hymen solitaire.
>
> – Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*

"Bisclavret", the fourth of Marie de France's *Lais* is, in the broadest of terms, a story of love and its consequences. In a narrower sense, it is a moral illumination of the author's conceptions of love and its varied manifestations in medieval France. This is not surprising – the same preoccupation guides much of the remaining eleven lays in the set. "Bisclavret" examines the love of a man for his king and country, the love (and lack thereof) between man and wife, love as the impetus behind a life of piety and dignity, and as the force that can drive a life to ruin by its absence. Love is, to state the blindingly obvious, a complicated creature, and in Marie's works, in which "the ideal life involves mutual love in a social context" (Ferrante 55), it is a creature not examined in abstraction, but in how it moves and functions between people. This social love is by necessity a thing of exchange and transmission. Love bestowed upon others is a thing of joy. Love kept within and directed at the self is a poison. In the weave of the *Lais*, this is one of the common threads.

"Bisclavret" is set apart by the fact that the central character is a werewolf.

This was a load-bearing character trait at the time, rather than an exciting whiff of supernatural interest. The werewolf existed in medieval France as a malevolent presence in the public consciousness, much as witches existed there and elsewhere. The most violent murderers were liable to be labeled as loups-garous, so the threat of being ripped apart and devoured in the night by a *loup-garou* was a terrifying reality, if there happened to be a murderer about the place. The crimes, real or imaginary, that could get a woman branded a witch, could just as easily get a man pegged as a werewolf. He was an ordinary man imbued, most often through the agency of the Devil himself, with the worst aspects of what was deemed one of the lowest, most execrable animals on God's earth, on which more below. He was, therefore, a tempting character type, and his presence in the *Lais* is not surprising. What is surprising, and the focus of this chapter, is what Marie de France does with him.

Marie begins her lay with an act of courtesy for the unaware, telling us what we are about to encounter - the story of what the Normans call "garwaf" or "garual," the werewolf, a creature which some men become – "humes plusurs garual devindrent" (10-12)[13]. By way of description, she tells us that this beast is a savage one: "Tant cum il est en cele rage/Hummes devure, grant mal fait/Es granz forez converse e vait" (ibid.).

In short, she presents us with a perfectly succinct description of the werewolf as he existed in the culture around her: a transformed man, consumed by rage, driven to devour men, do great evil, and run wild in the forest. This beginning will merit further consideration shortly. Of more immediate importance is the story that follows this description, intended to provide an illustration of it.

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[13] All verse citations in the original are taken from Alfred Ewert's 1944 edition of the *Lais*.

Bisclavret is a nobleman, and a noble man, with a cherished wife from whom he keeps a great secret. For three days of the week, he absents himself from home for a reason he will not reveal. His wife suspects he is leaving her on those days to consort with a lover, and plays upon his love for her to coax the truth from him. The reason, of course, is lycanthropy – each week he must go out into the woods, remove his clothes and run wild in the woods as a werewolf for three days. The wife is not relieved to learn that he has not been unfaithful to her, but reacts with disgust and commences removing herself from him. She manages to extract a further secret from her husband: his ability to regain human form is dependent upon his clothes. To his detriment, Bisclavret reveals where he keeps his clothes during his lupine days. The wife wastes no time in contacting a knight who has been vying for affections, and arranges for him to steal her husband's clothes during the next period of transformation. The deed is done, Bisclavret is trapped in his lupine shape, and the wife marries the rival. A year passes.

One day, the King comes upon the wolf during the course of a royal hunt. His fear of the animal is soon allayed when it prostrates itself before him and kisses his feet. He is touched by this humanoid gesture of homage, and brings the wolf to live at court, where he becomes a favored companion and pet. In due course, the King holds a banquet for all nobles in the realm. The cuckolding knight is in attendance, which prompts a surprising attempt at attack from the wolf. The king must warn the hitherto-peaceful beast off with a stick, and all of the court mutter that the knight must have mistreated the wolf in someway, for only that could provoke such a gentle animal to such aggression. Soon after, the king goes on another hunt, and this time the wolf accompanies him. They happen to lodge for the night near the home of the treacherous wife. She comes to the hunting

party's lodgings, bearing gifts, and the wolf attacks again, this time with success – he bites off her nose. Once again the court, in the person of a sage, suggests that the woman must have done something to deserve this violence. This sage then raises the spectre of the missing Bisclavret, suggesting that his wife may know more than she says about his disappearance, and should be made to talk through torture.

Once the story comes out, the wife brings the stolen clothes to court, and Bisclavret the wolf retreats with them to the royal bedchamber, for he will not appear nude before the monarch. Human again, he resumes his post at the king's side and is richly rewarded for his devotion. The wife and her second husband are banished from the realm. Of the children they conceive in exile, the daughters the mark of the mother's treachery – they are born without noses.

It cannot escape notice that while the story does contain actions of cruelty and destruction, the source of these actions would seem to be in the wrong place. We are directed to expect evil from one half of a relationship, and that half conducts himself in a manner that is almost entirely above reproach. This discrepancy is the crux of the reading presented here.

The Study of Beasts

The lay of Bisclavret is intimately connected, in a stylistic sense as well as one of intent, with the genre of medieval text known as the bestiary. These texts were, on a superficial level, exactly what they sounded like – beasts collected and described on paper, an effort to group and classify the animal kingdom for purposes of understanding.

However, one ought to skirt the temptation to regard these texts as any kind of precursor to scientific taxonomy. The bestiaries were not scientific texts but religious ones, often illuminated, dedicated to the examination and elucidation of the world's animals, and meant to serve as pedagogical tools for the Church[14].

It must be understood from the first that the animals described in a bestiary, even such homely creatures as the partridge and the ant, are not the animals encountered in the material world, sometimes on a daily basis. Even the most cursory look at the table of contents of a medieval bestiary will effectively harpoon any notion that the work might be based on anything like zoology. The fantastic and the banal are stabled together in these menageries. One finds the lion, the beaver, the goat and their quite earthly kin cheek-by-jowl with such creatures as the phoenix, the dragon, the mermaid, and the sawfish[15]. Occasional vegetable and mineral specimens make their way in among the animals, i.e. the magnet and the mandrake root. Animal or otherwise, earthly or paranormal, the residents of the bestiary are all regarded with the same eye, and that eye is not looking for for such trifles as size, diet and habitat. Readers are not told how the panther stalks its prey, or how the beaver goes about constructing its dam, or in what sort of terrain the hedgehog likes to make its home.

In the bestiary of Pierre de Beauvais[16] we learn, rather, that the panther will roam

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[14] The European bestiaries descended from an original theological text called the *Physiologus*, written in Greek and later translated into Latin. Per Guy Mermier, *Physiologus* was "written during the second century after Christ and used subsequently by the priests of the Christian Church to preach and to deliver moral lessons to the Faithful. This public, for the most part was ignorant, could not write or read, and therefore animal stories were used so that these naive souls could grasp more concretely the lessons and stories of the Old and New Testaments, the basis of the new Faith." (*Medieval Book of Beasts* vi-vii)

[15] Called *serre* in French, this was an enormous marine mammal with wide fins like wings, something like a manta, that could fly through the air and had a habit of racing against sailing ships.

[16] As with Marie de France, little is known about Pierre de Beauvais apart from his works. He was known only as Pierre until 1851, when Charles Cahier published an edition of the *Bestiaire* that named him "Pierre le Picard", claiming that the earliest manuscript of the text was written in the dialect of Picardy. Only in 1892 did "Pierre le

the earth, ingesting all manner of food, after which it will sleep in its lair for three days and then reemerge, drawing all other creatures to it (save the dragon) with the beauty of its roar and the sweetness of its breath. We learn that the testicles of the beaver carry powerful medicinal properties, and that if a hunter chases it to claim them, the beaver will escape by castrating itself and flinging the testicles in its pursuer's face. We learn that the hedgehog tends to cut grapevines and roll around in the fallen grapes on the earth, spearing them on its spines like cocktail party nibbles to take them home to its young. We learn, in short, nothing of zoological significance, but a great deal of anecdotal knowledge that lends itself to definite moral interpretations. For the bestiaries are intended as tools of spiritual instruction for young Christians, wherein the animal kingdom is transmuted into a series of signs, a living vocabulary by which lessons about the sacred and the profane may be apprehended: "Le bestiaire représente enfin un répertoire de métaphores, utilisables en toutes circonstances de la vie du croyant, pour lui servir à déchiffrer le monde à travers un réseau d'équivalences symboliques" (*Bestiaires du Moyen Âge* 10).

These "équivalences symboliques" are concentrated from an aggregate of antique, folkloric and legendary sources, and a bestiary entry provides a useful summing-up of the people's beliefs and suppositions about the creature in question, past and then-present.

An entry in the Beauvais bestiary[17] will, on inspection, resolve itself into two parts. The first half consists of a presentation of the beast at hand with a description of its

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Picard" become Pierre de Beauvais - scholars deduced that the bishop called Philippe, who had commissioned the *Bestiaire*, must have been Philippe de Dreux, Bishop of Beauvais from 1175 to 1215 (see Mermier's 1977 edition of the bestiary for the details).

A dozen works may be definitively ascribed to Pierre de Beauvais, including the *Bestiaire*; they run from hagiographies and histories to didactic works in poetry and prose.

[17] Unless otherwise specified, all upcoming references to the *bestiaires* may be understood to refer to the Beauvais text.

nature. Many (though not all) of Beauvais‘ section titles are in fact qualified with the terms “nature” and “propriété”; witness “Des propriétés de la panthère”, “De la nature de l’éléphant”, and so forth. Behavioral nature is stressed in favor of physiology. What matters is the animal’s most telling behavior, not what it looks like. Only those physical traits which may have some bearing on the entry’s moral content are described, and those creatures assumed to be readily envisaged by the reader may be given no verbal portrait at all, i.e. the beaver, the dragon, and the fox.

The remainder of the entry, and the greater half, will be an illustration of how this significant behavior corresponds to spiritual actions taken by mortal men, to carry them closer to Heaven or Hell. To continue with the above examples, the panther, with its gorging followed by sleep and reemergence, is Christ, taking into himself all the sins of the world and descending into death for three days, to then resurrect to the joy and adulation of his followers (and the chagrin of the Devil, in the person of the dragon). The self-mutilating beaver is the man of true faith, who when pursued by the Devil will rip all vice and temptation from himself and cast them in the Adversary’s face. The hedgehog is another face of the Devil, luring men into his trap with the promise of worldly goods, “car le souci des biens de ce monde et les plaisirs temporels sont fichés sur ses épines” (*Bestiaires* 35).

Cats and Dogs

A study of the werewolf must, of course, begin with the wolf, and the bestiary entrenches the wolf squarely on the side of darkness in the war for men’s souls. The

battle lines of this war are, indeed, shown to mirror those of another age-old conflict - the supposed animosity between all creatures feline and canine. If one scans the bestiary for those two families, it is interesting to note that while the cats are aligned with the angels, the Devil gets the service of the dogs.

The panther, and its purported reenactment of the Passion, is not the only great cat to get a chance at being a vessel for God's power. The lion is also on hand as an avatar of divinity. As described in the text, the lion is not only an incarnation of the wonder of Jesus Christ, but an embodiment of the older power of the God of the Old Testament. It is given pride of place in the Beauvais bestiary as the king of beasts, and is said to possess three "natures". Firstly, the lion's supposed habit of evading the hunter by erasing its tracks with its own tail is a remembrance of the way the line of Jesus lay hidden among men for generations, before coming to fruition in Bethlehem:

> La première [nature] est qu'il demeure volontiers dans les montagnes; et s'il arrive qu'il soit poursuivi par un chasseur, il perçoit l'odeur de celui-ci, et de sa queue il efface alors derrière lui ses traces en quelque lieu qu'il aille, afin que le chasseur qui le poursuit ne puisse pas, grâce à ces traces, trouver le lieu où il demeure et le capturer.
>
> De la même manière que le Sauveur, notre lion céleste de la lignée de Juda, racine de Jessé, fils de David, envoyé du Souverain Père, dissimula aux intelligences humaines les traces de sa nature divine... (ibid. 22)

Secondly, the lion is ever watchful and sleeps with open eyes, in keeping with the words of the lover in the Song of Songs, and the watchfulness of Christ over his flock:

> La seconde vertu du lion consiste en ce que, lorsqu'il dort, ses yeux

> veillent et sont réellements ouverts, ainsi que dans le Cantique des Cantiques en témoigne le vrai époux, qui dit: «Je dors, et mon coeur veille.» C'est là un symbole; Notre-Seigneur dormit sur la croix, mais sa nature divine veillait: «Celui qui a la garde d'Israël ne dormit pas alors et ne dormira pas.» (ibid.)

Finally, and most tellingly, we learn, the life of every lion begins with a replay of the Passion. Lion cubs come into the world through the mother, but are only granted access to life through the father's intervention, after three days:

> Au troisième jour arrive le lion: il souffle sur le lionceau et pousse un grand rugissement au-dessus de lui; et il tourne autour de lui en rugissant et en soufflant sur lui jusqu'à ce que par son souffle, il lui ait donné la vie; et il le ressuscite autant par son haleine que par sa voix. Et le rugissement que pousse le père fait bondir le lionceau sur ses pattes, et celui-ci se met à le suivre. Ainsi le Père miséricordieux ressuscita au troisième jour son saint Fils Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ, au sujet duquel Jacob a dit: «Il a dormi comme le lion et comme le petit du lion.» (ibid. 23)

It is pertinent here to make note of the lion's position in the bestiary as well as his attributes. It is placed as the first named and studied beast in the text, and it is endowed with only the most positive qualities: divine inspiration, vigilance, generosity, the capacity to unite the disparate and sow harmony, parental love, the gift of life. The lion is equally an embodiment of God the Father and Jesus the Son, and furthermore of the ideal Christian man, keeping his head down to spread the faith in adverse circumstances, always mindful of the health (physical and spiritual) of those in his care, favoring the

world with compassion and mercy. At the far end of the bestiary, in the penultimate position, sits the wolf. Its depiction, relevant as it is to the werewolf and to "Bisclavret", also functions as a dark reflection of that of the lion. If the lion is a Christian role model, the wolf is a crystallization of the worst sort of behavior. Here, in its entirety, is the first part of the wolf's entry:

> Loup: l'origine de ce nom est un mot du sens de «enlever de force», et pour cette raison, c'est à juste titre que l'on appelle louves les femmes dévergondées qui détruisent les bonnes qualités des hommes qui les aiment. Le loup est fort dans la poitrine, mais faible dans les reins. Il ne peut fléchir la tête vers l'arrière à moins de tourner le corps tout entier. Il se nourrit à la fois de proies et de vent. La louve met bas au mois de mai, quand il tonne, et absolument jamais dans une autre période. Son instinct est tel que lorsqu'elle a ses petits, elle n'ira jamais en quête de sa proie à proximité d'eux, mais au contraire loin d'eux. S'il lui arrive d'aller chercher sa proie de nuit, elle se dirige silencieusement vers la bergerie et vers les brebis, tout comme un chien bien dressé. Elle marche toujours contre le vent, afin que les chiens, le cas échéant, ne puissent pas sentir l'odeur de son haleine et éveiller les bergers. Et s'il arrive à la louve de marcher sur une brindille ou sur quelque chose qui fasse du bruit, elle se mord très fort à la patte. De nuit, ses yeux brillent comme des chandelles. (ibid. 63-64)

The entry goes on to paint the wolf as, of course, the Devil. The wolf's strong chest and weak hindquarters are emblematic of the Devil before and after the Fall, with the

inability to turn the head representing the inability to turn from the path of evil, and its glowing eyes embody the temptations that lead men from the righteous path. The she-wolf abandoning her cubs to hunt for food encapsulates the Devil's way of lavishing rewards on those who shirk the good works they are meant for. These comparisons in themselves do not stand out in great relief from those in other entries in the bestiary. What makes this wolf a compelling beast, and pertinent to my work in this writing, is made plain in the first sentence's reference to the human world - this wolf is markedly feminine. A demonization of the feminine is perhaps to be expected in a Christian text of this time period, but Beauvais' wolf hits this nail squarely on the head.

The slinking wolf is painted as a moral reversal of the upright lion, with the three key points I highlighted above explicitly overturned. With regard to these points, the wolf stands as apart and distinct from the lion as does a negative image from its photograph; a point of light in the one makes a blot of darkness in the other. Where the lion seeks out the scent of man and takes confident steps to hide its presence (brushing away his prints with his tail), the wolf must sneak through the natural world to conceal itself and its glowing eyes at night (walking against the wind, and so against the will of God), and mutilates its own paws in punishment for noisy steps. Where the lion is always watchful and sees all by night or day, the rigidity of the wolf's body blinds it to what might be beside or behind it. Where the lion and lioness come together to bring their cubs into life and walk with them into the world, the she-wolf raises her brood alone, and roams abroad in search of prey. So, in summary: active discretion versus passive stealth, omniscience versus tunnel vision, a perfect family unit versus a broken one. Beauvais uses the generic masculine term "loup" when referring to the creature's physical attributes, but for all

salient behaviors and mannerisms, he points the reader to the “louve”. After the explicit equation of female wolves with debauched and rapacious women, a reading of this entry as a castigation of women, and those men susceptible to them, is irresistible.

First, with motivations attributed to the Devil put aside, the she-wolf is still depicted as enslaved to the rhythms of the natural world. The first thing we learn about her is the strictness of her reproductive schedule – she gives birth to her litter in the month of May, during the time of storms, “et absolument jamais dans une autre période”, at that time and no other. No mention is made of a union with a male wolf, or of the birth of the litter as anything resembling a familial event. The litter is a function of the seasonal cycle, being generated “quand il tonne”, issuing from the she-wolf in an impersonal way under cover of thunder, more effluent than offspring. Once the cubs have been delivered at their appointed time, she leaves them alone in the den while she hunts far from them[18]. And once she is abroad and on the hunt, she relies on the whim of the wind to direct her path and conceal her scent, and much of what she does is held captive by the passive voice and the uncertainty of the impersonal si-clause. “S’il lui arrive de chercher sa proie de nuit”, *if she should happen* to be hunting by night, she stalks the sheep in silence. *If she should happen* to step on a twig and make noise, she is compelled to hurt the offending paw with a strong bite. The wolf, the she-wolf, is a malleable and drifting creature, lacking all at once a moral compass, the ability to read it, and the impetus to move in the directions it indicates. This, suggests the bestiary, is the nature of woman, following the path of least resistance straight to perdition and, as stated directly

[18] In the *Livre du Trésor*, Brunetto Latini is a bit kinder to the she-wolf than Beauvais in this regard; he writes that she strays from the lair to hunt "[p]our la sauvegarde de ses louveteaux" (*Bestiaires* 234). But he also further specifies her rigid way of procreating, stating that she only breeds within a set twelve-day period, and that confronted with a troop of potential mates, "elle les regarde tous l'un après l'autre; et choisit le plus laid pour s'accoupler avec lui" (ibid).

by the text, dragging their man down with her. The sexual rhythm that enslaves her may also trap any susceptible male who comes into her orbit.

The bestiary entry then draws to a close with a description of this doomed hypothetical encounter, which also illustrates the "taking by force" posited as the source of the beast's name:

> Le loup ôte toute force de crier à un homme quand il le voit le premier, et cet homme ne peut donc recevoir le secours de personnes qui se trouvent loin de lui : que celui-ci laisse alors tomber ses vêtements à ses pieds, et qu'il les piétine en frappant deux pierres l'une contre l'autre de ses mains : il ôtera ainsi sa force et son courage au loup, qui prendra la fuite tandis que l'homme demeurera sain et sauf. (ibid. 64)

According to the religious interpretation that follows, the wolf deprives the man of his voice because Man, in the grip of the Devil, is removed from the grace of God and cannot be heard by Him. To repel evil and be saved, he must first divest himself of worldly sin, symbolized by the removal and trampling of his clothes. He must then, by means of striking two stones together, call out in prayer to the saints and apostles, beseeching them to intercede with God on his behalf. This is standard bestiary fare, a virtual retelling of the aforementioned story of the self-castrating beaver's flight from the hunter. To continue the sexualized reading of the entry, two elements of this passage present themselves as points of purchase.

Firstly, and most obviously, one must note the man's nakedness. He may only regain his strength and courage, embodied by his voice, from the ravenous wolf by stripping to the skin and making a primal display of violent aggression. His casting-off of

sin is also a removal of all obstacles between an observer's eye and the visual proof of his masculine power; his baring of the breast is also, conveniently, a baring of the phallus, the sight of which will cause the wolf to avert its gaze and take flight. This gaze is the second point, and it is given extra significance by an ordinal number: "premier". The man is not struck dumb and helpless by the fact that the wolf sees him, but that the wolf sees him *first*. A man who catches sight of a wolf without the animal noticing him has nothing to worry about; it is only a man perceived unawares who is in danger. Though the wolf is now referred to as the generic masculine "loup", coming as it does on the heels of a passage in which the beast was gendered feminine, one cannot help but see this "quand il le voit le premier" as an instance and indictment of the unabashed female gaze. Medieval masculinity is confronted by open female sexual hunger, turned into a voiceless shadow of itself, and thrown into a place where only a primal baring of the self can restore the previous order. In effect, when the female preempts his privileged gaze, the male is transformed, and must take drastic action to regain his shape. Tovi Bibring highlights this monstrous feminine carnality *chez* Beauvais in her own work on Marie de France:

> Dans l'imaginaire collectif, le loup souffre donc d'une réputation d'animal corrompu dont la sauvagerie, l'appétit insatiable et la violence sont les marques de sa bestialité (une image certes absente des différentes branches du Roman de Renart où il est plutôt ridiculisé et abaissé), et la bestialité dans l'imaginaire médiéval renvoie généralement au désire charnel débridé, discourtois et déréglé. On désigne les prostituées par le terme latin de lupa, la louve, désignation qui apparait également dans le bestiaire

de Pierre de Beauvais. (Bibring 4)

We have the wolf as a repository for human sexual anxiety and dread, coded as feminine and marked by a lack of self-will before the rhythms imposed by the outside world, and a narrative in which this voracious female robs a male of his power, exerted through his speech, and he must change himself back into a man through an episode of violence and nudity. In the case of Bisclavret, the man and the wolf complicate matters by sharing a body.

I concede that similarities of shape, intent and content are not yet enough to permit an identification of "Bisclavret" with the bestiary genre. The *Lais* are romantic fiction on their surface, after all, while the bestiaries discuss animals in fantastic terms, but do at least have the semblance of a link to the visible world. Beauvais' beastly lessons are not spun purely out of the imagination. They are derived in part from concrete, observed sources. One may never see the beaver castrating itself, but one may easily see a beaver in the wild, or hear a hunter telling tales of its magic. This veneer of reality, however thin, adds weight to the moral lessons of the bestiary; for one who has heard the story of the beaver and absorbed its lesson, a sighting of a live specimen may recall that lesson to mind and cement it. This pretense of a connection to reality, tenuous but undeniable, also presents itself in the *Lais*, and goes far in allowing an *à la bestiaire* reading of "Bisclavret." The connection appears as an etymological nuance, which I shall soon draw attention to.

A Telling Beginning

"Bisclavret" is a case-study in two-handed storytelling, in which the author sets out to ostensibly furnish one kind of narrative, with its own givens and expectations on the part of the reader; then, while on this path and without announcing a diversion from it, she in fact tells a tale to counteract all that the reader expects, and that she had given the reader to expect. Bisclavret accomplishes this duplicity not only through the story it tells, but through the shape it gives to the story, through form as well as content. “Shape” would be the superior word choice here. Is it not fitting that a narrative of a shapeshifter should shift its own shape, and so effect a transformation on its own reading?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, "Bisclavret" opens with a short passage, fourteen lines, in which Marie de France informs her audience about the tale she will shortly tell, in brief fashion. This sort of passage is not unique among the Lais – similar passages open “Lanval”, “Yonec” and “Chaitivel”. In all of them, Marie provides her readers (or listeners) with the barest essentials: the title of the piece; a nod to the Breton origin of the lay; and perhaps a taste of what is to come by way of explaining the title. For example, she lets us know that in some quarters, “Chaitivel” has the alternate title of “The Four Sorrows” (“*Les Quatre Deuls*”). The opening to "Bisclavret" carries more weight than its equivalents in the other lays. It exceeds them in length, and uses that length to bear a greater narrative function. Here I give those fourteen lines in the original, for reference:

> Quant de lais faire m’entremet,
> Ne voil ublïer Bisclavret:
> Bisclavret ad nun en bretan,

Garwaf l'apelent li Norman.

Jadis le poeit hume oïr

E sovent suleit avenir,

Humes plusurs garual devindrent

E es boscages meisun tindrent.

Garualf, c[eo] beste salvage:

Tant cum il est en cele rage,

Hummes devure[19], grant mal fait,

Es granz forez converse e vait.

Cest afere les ore ester;

Del Bisclavret [vus] voil cunter. (1-14)

This opening goes beyond the simple convention of preparing the audience to hear a tale, by furnishing a nutshell-sized definition of a werewolf. As such definitions go, it does the job, and the basics of lycanthropy are covered: transformation, savagery, and the forest. Each of these merits consideration.

It is worth remarking that Marie de France declines to ascribe the werewolf's transformation to any particular cause, or to any specific kind of person. She certainly could have done both, had she chosen to. Montague Summers, writing in 1933, traces the werewolf in French lore as far back as the time of the Gauls, and finds a definite heretical

[19] The words *humes* and *hummes* here, while certainly referring to human beings, do leave room for some interesting ambiguity as to what the werewolf is eating. *Hume* appears in Old French and Norman dictionaries as one of many variants of the word for "person", some others being *home*, *ome* and *on*. Yet *humes* also appears, gendered feminine, as the word meaning "damp, wet earth", which links it to a further bit of wolf-lore from the bestiaries. Barry Holstun Lopez includes the following 13th century quote from Albertus Magnus in his book:

"It is said the wolves eat the mud called *glis*, not for the sake of getting nourishment but to make themselves heavier. Having eaten it the wolf preys on very strong animals—the ox or stag or horse—by leaping at them straight on, and clinging to them. If he were light he would readily be shaken off, but when he is weighed down by *glis*, he weighs so much that he can neither be shaken off nor gotten rid of. Presently when his prey is worn out and collapses, he tears at their throats and windpipes and so kills them. Then he vomits out the *glis* and feasts on the flesh of the animal he has slain." (219-20)

source for the lycanthropic change, while joining with Marie and giving the beast a Breton provenance:

> Although the Bretons are truly enlightened by the Catholic faith and very devout, there yet endure in dark corners goetic practices and necromancies. There are, and there have always been, impious men so lost and abandoned that they do not hesitate to make pacts with the prince of evil in order to acquire temporal advantage and supernatural powers. Many of these warlocks, the Bretons relate, either dress themselves at night in wolf-skins, or assume the shape of wolves in order to repair to those assemblies over which Satan (it is averred) presides in person. These masqueradings or shape-shiftings of the men-wolves, a craft descending from the earliest days of ancient Armonica [sic], may be fitly compared with what history tells us of the Irish lycanthropes as also with the werewolfery recorded by Herodotus, Pliny, and other classical authors (Summers 218-19)[20].

But here, it is only “humes plusurs” who become werewolves, “some men”, not warlocks or blasphemers. The use of the simple plural noun “humes” opens up the range of lycanthropy to include men of every social stratum and all levels of virtue, and potentially even further, given the generic nature of the word. This broadening will have a direct bearing on the lay to come, and I will return to it further on.

The remaining two concepts are tightly bound up with each other, and Marie will likewise broaden them as the lay unfolds. The passage into or through the forest is a well-

[20] Summers goes on to make specific mention of "the famous lay *Bisclavret*, by that sweet and gracious poetess Marie de France, who dedicated her collective work to our King Henry II," and to highlight her "very considerable knowledge of the traditional craft of werewolfery" (219). A somewhat grand claim, which he makes based only on the vague opening and the plot element of Bisclavret's clothes, but given the importance of the clothes to the plot, it can be forgiven.

known topos for literary scholars in general, and for medievalists and folklorists in particular. The forest is what lies outside the confines of human settlement, and so it represents all that lies outside human understanding and ability. Humans may carve paths through the trees to connect one settlement with another, but one step off the path can be a step into savagery. The forest is the stage for the hunt, where men engage in the acts of bloodshed that provide nourishment for their families. It is also where an ordinary person may brush up against another world, to his ultimate improvement or detriment. In the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, the forest of Brocéliande furnishes the knight Yvain with his earliest chivalric contests, and the woman who will become his wife[21]. Red Riding Hood steps off the path on the way to her grandmother's house and falls into the belly of a wolf (and, depending on which version of the story one reads, may or may not survive the experience). If Red's path represents her received knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, up and down and so on, then the woods past its borders represent a moral vacuum nearly as dark and uncertain as deep space, where one is truly on one's own. This forest is a locus for the violent, the bloody, and the unpredictable, all of which fall under the umbrella of savagery.

The French word *sauvage*, or *salvage* as it appears in the lay, contains a wider meaning that is lacking in the equivalent English word. *Sauvage* may imply violence and brutality, or it may equally imply wildness, and a simple distance from civilization. A plant found growing on its own in the wild is described as *sauvage*, uncultivated; so may a man who prefers to keep his own company away from his peers. *Un chien sauvage* may well be a savage dog that will take a chunk out of one's arm at the least provocation; it

[21] This type of forest encounter is a signature element of Celtic folklore, to which *Bisclavret* can be linked through its Breton derivation.

could just as well be a member of a roaming pack of well-behaved wild dogs, or a domesticated dog that has been abandoned and turned feral for survival reasons. These ambiguities are all present above when Marie de France presents Bisclavret as a "beste salvage", followed by two actions that embody his *sauvagerie*: devouring people and living in the forest. She is quite definite about the nature of the monster's violence. The werewolf she describes does not restrict himself to hurting people, or even to killing them. He goes so far as to *devour* them, to incorporate them into himself through ingestion and digestion, an act of self-satisfaction that is also a complete annihilation of another. That this werewolf should be a monster that not only destroys, but one that takes and consumes, will be a key point.

In just the way that Pierre de Beauvais introduced us to the self-gelding beaver and the hedgehog with its back-borne tidbits, Marie de France names her beast[22] and delineates its distinguishing behaviors. She names it Bisclavret, and those behaviors are as follows: leaving home to live in the woods, transforming into an animal, and eating people. This "beste salvage", then, is one that regresses to a more primal state of being, rejects social constraints in favor of savage independence, and feeds its own appetites to the ruination of others. After a break in the text comes the requisite parable to illustrate this description – it turns out to be the sort of illustration that alters it subject as much as it illuminates it.

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[22] Her naming is a two-pronged maneuver – as used in the opening, *bisclavret* is the generic name for the werewolf, the Breton synonym for the Norman *garwaf* and, therefore, the French *loup-garou*. Then, as the lay progresses, *bisclavret* also serves as the protagonist's proper name. This will become important; I will refer to him by it from the beginning, although it is not attached to him until a certain later point in the text.

R. Howard Bloch's reading of the lay includes an extensive tangle of interpretations of *bisclavret* by several philologists (Bloch 82), dominated by Breton and Welsh derivations that imply an animal with human intelligence: *bleiz lavaret*, "speaking wolf"; *bleidd Ilafar*, "dear little speaking wolf"; *bleiz laveret*, "rational wolf." "Wolf-sick" is also mentioned as a possible meaning, as is the curious Breton *bisc lavret*, suggesting a wolf that wears trousers. Poor Bisclavret is nicely contained by all of these possibilities, a man with an unfortunate condition who will show himself able to communicate his points even without words, and for whom clothes will be of vital importance.

As I indicated at the beginning of this section, the form and position of this expository passage is just as important for my reading as the content, and my direction should not be hard to guess. "Bisclavret" is of a piece with the other texts that make up the *Lais*, but in form and function it also mimics the bipartite structure of an entry in a medieval bestiary. My reading of "Bisclavret" sees it, in brief, as a bestiary entry for the werewolf, in which the author spins a tale of a deadly beast known to all who will encounter her work, but makes it into a vehicle for a parable about love and sexuality in her own time, rather than a timeless (or timeworn) lesson in how to get into Heaven. She extends her reach by manipulating the conventions of folklore and gender relations to make the werewolf (and, by extension, any sort of human-animal shapeshifter) into a vessel for sexual confusion, regression and perversion. Given its position at the very dawn of popular literature in the French language, "Bisclavret" may be seen as the founding text for a literary trend of lycanthropic dysfunction, of which I will explore more recent specimens in the coming chapters.

Loup **and** ***Louve*****, Werewolf and Wife – A Marital Exchange**

After Marie's dire description of the beast called Bisclavret, comes the presentation of the man who will be the reader's own encounter with the monster. This presentation contains no horror, no blood, no torn limbs or bodies rent to pieces. It would seem to have more in common with the opening of a fairy tale, lacking only the "il était une fois..." to start it:

En Bretaine maneit un ber,

Merveille l'ai oï loër;

Beaus chevalers e bons esteit

E noblement se cunteneit.

De sun seinur esteit privez

E de tuz ses veisins amez.

Femme ot espuse mut vailant

E que mut feseit beu semblant. (15-22)

A noble knight, a fine gentleman, in the good graces of his seigneur and respected by his peers, with a worthy and beautiful wife at home. This is surely the kind of specimen who ought to braving the forest in pursuit of the werewolf, certain to return home with the creature's pelt slung across the back of his horse. One would be hard-pressed to live further within the structure imposed by the social world than this character. This brief description is of a man who has everything he ought to have and could rightly want, and with so much respect for him coming from all quarters, he has presumably gotten all of it through just and proper means. The jewel in this crown, given last in the list, is the wife, "vailant" and "beu semblant" as she is. This is a verbal portrait of the concept of the ideal life cited at the beginning of this chapter: mutual love in a social context. Or, in the next line of the lay: "Il amot li e ele lui" (23). Yet the romantic idyll described here also lays the seeds for what it to happen, and what is to come from one half of this perfect partnership.

This is the wife who will, in the space of a few lines, move from this supposed state of love and admiration into abject disgust. She will cajole her husband's hairy secret out of him, she will learn the weakness that will condemn him to his animal's shape in

perpetuity, and she will draw his sexual rival into the picture to effect this condemnation. Paul Creamer draws attention to the presentation of the wife at her first appearance, noting that due to its brevity and nature, "[w]e sense immediately that the woman, in comparison to her husband, is being damned with faint praise" (Creamer 262). Those two lines, "Femme ot espuse mut vailant/E que mut feseit beu semblant," are as ambiguous as they are brief. The man Bisclavret's praises are definite things, qualities that adhere to him with the verb "être" as glue. He is good, and handsome, and beloved of all who know him. Closer inspection of the wife's qualifications does leave one in some doubt. The first descriptor applied to her, "vailant", may be positively read to carry connotations of worthiness or excellence, but it is more neutral than that. The 1978 Hanning-Ferrante translation of the *Lais*[23] gives "estimable" as the English equivalent to "vailant", and it is true that a wife and lover may be estimable. So may a mountain to be climbed, a task to be accomplished, a foe to be vanquished. Then, swift on the heels of this, comes the seeming evidence of the wife's beauty. This estimable wife "feseit beu semblant," and this turn of phrase makes all the difference in the world. Though her husband has the narrative fortune to be handsome and good, the wife is "of lovely appearance" (ibid..). What he is, she appears to be, and the use of the word "appear", or of "semblant" in French, can only suggest to the reader the presence of a contradictory truth waiting to emerge. The original text could imply an even stronger dissonance, going beyond a simple discrepancy between the wife's mien and her essence to a willful lie; "faire semblant" does not merely mean to seem, but to pretend. These eight verses present a love situation that is too good to be true, and in so doing telegraph to the reader that one

[23] When English translations of the text are needed, they will come from this version.

half of the blissful couple is all of the wonderful things he is supposed to be, while the other lives behind a beautiful mask[24]. What the man is, the woman seems:

> This distinction is essential: we are being offered the observation very early in the text that the baron is genuine while his wife is a trafficker in illusions. This is a particularly delicious double irony when we consider the revelation he offers her a few dozen verses later, as well as in the betrayal she orchestrates immediately after learning his secret. (Creamer 262)

His only secret, one must note, and the wife wastes no time in employing every emotional weapon in her arsenal to pry it out of him. She appeals to his sense of pity by evoking her fear of his wrath at her presumption:

> ‘Sire,’ fait el, ‘beau duz amis,
> Une chose vus demandasse
> Mut volenters, si jeo osasse;
> Mes jeo creim tant vostre curuz,
> Que nule rien tant ne redut.’ (32-36)

Bisclavret responds with an assurance that she need not fear to ask him anything, and that he will freely give any answer he knows: “‘Dame,’ fait il, ‘[or] demandez!/Ja cele chose ne querrez,/Si jo la sai, ne la vus die.’” (39-41) She proceeds to ask him where

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[24] The complete definitions of the words "vailant" and "semblant" in a Norman dictionary reveal further telling depths. In addition to connotations of worthiness, goodness and estimability, "vailant" is also connected to material worth, possessions, money, etc. (as in the modern French "valoir" and the English "value". And "semblant" leads not only to the current "semblance" and "sembler", but to "similaire"; "faire semblant" may then carry the meaning of copying, making oneself resemble another. By means of these words, Bisclavret's wife is defined as a worthy woman of good and decent appearance *and* an acquisitive and deceitful woman who makes herself look like what she is not. What's more, this juxtaposition of the good Bisclavret and the good-seeming wife already implies that she is making herself *like him*. At this point in the lay, that entails putting up a good façade to match his; by the end, she will truly have remade herself in his supposed monstrous image.

it is he goes for three days of the week, but couches her question in pure emotional blackmail. When he is away from her, says she, she finds herself in such a sad state, afraid of losing him, that she could die if she does not learn the truth: "Si jeo n'en ai hastif cunfort/Bien tost en puis aver la mort" (47-48)[25]. She follows this salvo with a barb of suspicion, the suggestion that he is leaving her for the favors of another woman – "Mun escïent que vus amez/E si si est, vus meserrez" (51-52)[26].

As might be expected, her husband bridles at answering this request, echoing the emotion of her plea as he warns of dire consequences should he reveal the truth, of harm to himself, loss of her love, even his own loss of self. She will have none of it, and insists he tell her everything:

> 'Dame,' fet il, 'pur Deu, merci!
> Mal m'en vendra, si jol vus di,
> Kar de m'amur vus partirai
> E mei meïsmes en perdrai.'
> Quant la dame l'ad entendu,
> Ne l'ad neent en gab tenu
> Suventefeiz li demanda;
> Tant le blandi e losenga
> Que s'aventure li cunta;
> Nule chose ne li cela. (53-62)

This passage, the prelude to the husband's confession, contains the key to the aforementioned link to the bestiaries: the word *aventure* in line 62. In *The Anonymous*

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[25] "that if I don't get quick relief/I could die of this very soon"

[26] She finds it necessary to remind him that infidelity is bad behavior - "I think that you must have a lover/and if that's so, you're doing wrong."

Marie de France, R. Howard Bloch highlights this word's recurrence throughout the *Lais*, as follows:

> Referring to the brute material out of which the *Lais* are made, the word *aventure* designates that which exists before and beyond the text in the fantasy of an unrecounted, unremembered, chaotic realm of unarticulated consciousness, the very opposite of the assemblage—the form and the structure—that literature represents. This is why so many of the tales are literally framed by the word *aventure*, which, appearing at either the beginning or the end of both, marks the bounds of where literature begins and ends, sets in relief that which it contains. […] "Aventure" refers to the material of the tale, that which lies outside of its formal telling, and also carries the unmistakable resonance of orality. (Bloch 26-27)

Aventure, beyond a literal translation into modern French or English as *adventure*, takes on extra spatio-temporal significance when used by Marie de France. When she informs the reader of a story's nature as *aventure*, or places the word in a character's mouth (as she does with her werewolf), she is attempting to situate her creation within observable reality. By recounting an *aventure*, she is not merely fabricating a tale, but passing along received information from a supposed real-world source, a tale passed from mouth to mouth and ear to ear, impossible to verify as fact, and so impossible to deny as truth. Even if one has never seen a hedgehog carring away morsels of food on its spines, can one prove the negative and confirm that it has never done such a thing? When Marie presents "Bisclavret" as a legend that she has heard passed on by "li Norman" and "le poeit," she paints an added layer of plausibility over the text to come. She is relaying the

story as she heard it, not as she wrote it[27].

She is careful to inform the reader that her lays, "Bisclavret" included, came to her from outside, that these stories are a part of the world and are, in a sense and by extension, real and observable. The events of the tale have happened before, she suggests; she is not inventing them, for she has heard about them. And what's more, as Bloch points out, *aventure* is embedded with the future as well as the past, it "carries the valence of an advent" (ibid. 28); the etymological leap from *aventure* to *avenir* is not much more than a hop. Marie's use of *aventure* thus implies: *what I am telling you really happened, is happening now and will happen again.* It is this appeal to observed reality that unites her with Pierre de Beauvais, and establishes her werewolf as a cousin to the wolf in the bestiary. She, too, sketches a moral narrative around a beast that her audience might encounter at any time in the everyday world, through the ear rather than the eye. She and Beauvais are not working toward the same final result in their compositions, or even out of the same motives, but they are making use of the same toolbox, and "Bisclavret" stands as evidence of this creative coincidence.

To return to the domestic drama: under the pressure of his wife's cajoling and flattery ("tant le blandi e losenga"), he relents and keeps his promise to hold nothing back. He describes his plight in four lines, the same textual space allotted to the werewolf's doings in the opening, with a telling difference. According to his own words, this lycanthrope shows a less violent disposition, and displays more dietary restraint than is expected of him. And once this secret is brought to light, a startling change comes over

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[27] Several centuries after the *Lais*, authors will continue to use similar techniques to give their works the kick of verisimilitude, sometimes demanded by convention (and by publishers). Laclos will elevate this illusory *vraisemblance* to an artform by presenting *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in 1782 as a collection of found letters, too different in style and voice to *ever* have been invented by a man alone; he will also give his readers the added joyful *frisson* of speculation as to who these scheming aristocrats could *really be*.

the wife, signaling the beginning of a sharp descent:

‘Dame, jeo deviene bisclavret:
En cele grant forest me met,
Al plus espés de la gaudine,
S’i vif de preie e de ravine.’
Quant il li aveit tut cunté,
Enquis li ad e demaundé
S’il se despuille u vet vestu.
‘Dame,’ fet il, ‘jeo vois tut nu.’
‘Di mei, pur Deu, u sunt voz draz.’ (63-71)

Bisclavret’s self-description here merits some consideration, not least because it contains the first appearance in the narrative of the titular name/condition. What he gives is a muted version of the portrait in the lay’s opening. As a werewolf he does confine himself to the woods, to the deepest part of the “grant forest”, but there is no mention made of great injury, or murder, or the devouring of men. He lives “de preie e de ravine,” which is not at all the same thing as his supposed anthropophagous diet. Hanning and Ferrante give line 66 in English as “and I live on the prey I hunt down,” which could be stretched to include people, if one wanted to assume the worst.[28] Creamer goes further into the roots of the old French words “preie” and “ravine”, and his findings preclude ingestion of human flesh from Bisclavret’s diet.

Preie in this context would have meant animals that humans habitually

[28] David Leshock's paper "The Knight of the Werewolf" is an example of this assumption. He suggests that many critics deliberately ignore the opening passages claim that the werewolf is a maneater, out of a desire to paint Bisclavret as a sympathetic character. In his reading, Bisclavret is assumed to have been eating people before and after his wife's betrayal, and he is set to continue doing so after the lay's end.

> hunted during the Middle Ages, such as game birds and deer, or else kept penned up as livestock, such as lambs or cows, and ravine would have meant stolen or plundered material property, particularly pirated foodstuffs. This detail emphasizes that this particular werewolf is not a man-eater and so is not a danger to the wife, especially when coupled with the baron's claim that the creature does not venture out from the depths of the forest (65). (Creamer 269)

With this admission, Bisclavret has revealed all, as Marie lets us know with line 67, "Quant il li aveit tut cunté." We have first encountered him as a paragon of nobility, not given to lying, and now freed of any secrets whatsoever. His forthrightness with his wife serves to strengthen this positive impression. He has, in fact, acted the role of the perfect knight with regard to his lady. To assuage her dire distress, though it may be (and turns out to be) hyperbole and emotional *chantage*, he has left himself open for the very real peril that may come to him. It is fitting that his wife's next question concerns his nudity, for he has just laid himself completely bare to her[29]. The wife's response to his baring commences the transformation that is the true focus of the lay.

Gone are the emotional declarations of fear and devotion with which she drew the story out of him. Now that she has her answer, Marie's text shows her demeanor cooling, and her "beau semblant" to be slipping to the side. She does not respond to the news of

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[29] Michelle Freeman refers to this whole exchange as a verbal striptease with the normal gender roles reversed, complete with coyness on one side and desire on the other, and describes it as "a humiliation [Bisclavret] accepts in the name of love service" (293).

The power accorded to Bisclavret's clothes, and the contradictory weakness and power of his lycanthropic nudity (the animal's freedom and physical attributes playing against his loss of human agency) call to mind the naked man of the Beauvais bestiary, stripping and banging his rocks together. He must leave himself radically bare and open to the power of evil, while pleading with the powers of Heaven to intercede and save him. Note that this is what Bisclavret is doing here, exposing his secrets and pleading with the wife for love and clemency; her subsequent betrayal shows him to have been entreating the wolf by mistake.

her husband's lycanthropy with an exclamation of horror, or even of shock, but with two further questions, and very pointed ones – she wishes to know if her husband is naked or clothed when the change takes place, and on learning he is naked, she demands (with force, as shown by the "pur Deu"), where he keeps his clothes. She will return to her emotional mode in a few lines, but the tenor of those two questions has the effect of flipping the dynamic of the piece, of exchanging the roles of human and monster, victim and villain, and even the roles of masculine and feminine.

Bisclavret tries to deflect her questions by appealing to her regard for his life and well-being, again echoing her entreaties:

> 'Dame, ceo ne dirai jeo pas;
> Kar si jes eüsse perduz
> E de ceo feusse aparceüz,
> Bisclavret sereie a tuz jurs;
> Jamés n'avreie mes sucurs,
> De si k'il me fussent rendu.
> Pur ceo ne voil k'il seit seü.' (72-78)

The wife's interrogation resumes in much the same manner as before. Yet now, a key verbal change has been wrought. Here is her second barrage:

> 'Sire,' la dame li respunt,
> 'Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund:
> Nel me devez nïent celer,
> Ne [mei] de nule rien duter;
> Ne semblerait pas amisté.

Qu'ai jeo forfait? Pur queil peché

Me dutez vus de nule rien?

Dites [le] mei, si ferez bien!'

Tant l'anguissa, tant le suzprist,

Ne pout el faire, si li dist. (79-88)

She continues to place pressure on his knightly sense of duty to the truth, especially where his lady is concerned (80-82). She throws doubt on the depth of his love for her, though she now knows he is not an adulterer (83). She asks him what she has done, what sin she has committed, that he should mistrust her, and orders him to do right by her and tell her (84-86). And then, to seal the fact of the wife's change, comes a verse nearly identical to an earlier one, differing in the flavor of its verbs. Line 60, "Tant le blandi e losenga," has reformed and reappeared as line 87, "Tant l'anguissa, tant le suzprist"[30]. The wife's sweet, solicitous manner now stands revealed to the reader as so much poisoned honey. She heaps guilt upon his head instead of flattery. Her loving insistence has crossed the line into nagging. "Anguissa" is not an ambivalent word, and "suzprist" adds deceit into the mix. Where she lavished, she now anguishes; where she coaxed, she now cozens. Her husband succumbs to the onslaught once more, after which he truly has revealed everything. As if to provide further proof of his goodness, Marie de France's telling has Bisclavret stash his garments on the grounds of a church:

'Dame,' fet il, 'delez cel bois,

Lez le chemin par unt jeo vois,

Une vielz chapele i esteit,

[30] Hanning and Ferrante give the former as "coaxed and flattered him so much," and the latter as "She harassed and bedeviled him so."

Ke meintefeiz grant bien me feit:

La est la piere cruose e lee

Suz un buissun, dedenz cavee;

Mes dras i met suz le buissun,

Tant que jeo revi[e]nc a meisun.' (89-96)

So ends the exchange between husband and wife that is the engine of "Bisclavret." It will prove to be their only verbal exchange in the piece – Bisclavret is about to be expelled from the conjugal home and locked into his four-legged guise, and when he meets his wife again, he will be in neither the state nor the mood for conversation. Let us now reexamine the movements of this long passage, in themselves and as they relate to the opening.

Having prepared us for horror with what I might call the zoological portion of this werewolf's *entrée de bestiaire*, Marie de France transitions us into the exemplary portion. She presents us with a medieval couple who are, to all appearances, living the dream. She does not present this with an objective eye, as her word choice from the start suggests that the husband is the more admirable of the pair, but rather than make an authorial intervention to insist on this, she lets the two of them speak for themselves at length. The husband has a secret, which he is loath to reveal. The wife presses him to break his silence by dint of an emotional display. He does as she wishes. The sequence of events repeats itself. More information the man wishes to hide, more manipulation from the woman, another revelation. And in between those two repetitions, lines 69 and 71, two verses that change everything.

I have already mentioned how these two questions, posed so briskly and

dispassionately (apart from that insistent "pur Deu"), serve to paint the wife's high emotion as disingenuous. It cannot be doubted now that the author has taken sides in this argument, and wants us to do the same. Though the wife may be "damned with faint praise" as soon as she is introduced, that introduction does proceed as though she will be our figure of identification. She is in a situation that invites us to feel sympathy for her, even to fear for her: her husband has a secret that takes him to an unknown place, on an unknown errand. It could be a hidden life of crime, another woman, or any one of a host of horrors that can plague the uncertain mind. She is vexed by the unknown, but professes fear at what might happen if she seeks the truth. This narrative device tends to signal a damsel-in-distress in the making. In a few centuries, for instance, Perrault's *Bluebeard* will make grisly use of it. We are given no further reason to doubt her sincerity as she presses her husband; we may even want her to leave off the questioning for her own safety, if we are sympathetically inclined. But we are in the presence of a noble *chevalier*, not a Bluebeard, and her husband acquits himself perfectly. His confession is complete, and reassuring. He poses no threat to his wife. He is, in fact, a domesticated werewolf.

The wife's dispassionate questions in the wake of this do more than belie her histrionics. The specificity of her questioning shows us, but not the husband, that her wheels are turning:

> But the lady is still not yet satisfied. Seeking precise details about his lupine state, she demands still more information. She asks him whether, when in werewolf form, he goes about dressed or nude (69). This simple question, though brief, reveals on the part of the female character a

> mastery of lycanthropic praxis, foreshadowing her skullduggery. This single question constitutes her first betrayal of him. (Creamer 264)

The lady knows how werewolves work, she knows the importance of clothes to the transformation process, and as soon as she knows of her husband's condition, her thoughts turn to how she can take advantage of it. Her actions henceforth are triggered by an initial burst of fear ("De l'aventure se esfrea," 99), but she does not take the expected course of a terrified person, which would be to flee, or even to alert the clergy. Rather, she commences calculating how to rid herself of the husband she now finds abhorrent, so much so that she can no longer stand to share a bed with him: "[E]n maint endreit se purpensa/Cum ele s'en puïst partir;/Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir" (100-102).

Her supposed love and devotion have all but withered and died at this point. When she conceives of the plan to seduce the husband's rival for her affections and use him as her cat's-paw (or wolf's-paw), the writing of that moment pounds the final nail into their coffin:

> Un chevaler de la cuntree,
> Que lungement l'aveit amee
> E mut preié' e mut requise
> E mut duné en sun servise—
> Elle ne l'aveit unc amé
> Ne de s'amur aseüré—
> Celui manda par sun message,
> Si li descovri sun curage.
> 'Amis,' fet ele, 'seez leéz!

Ceo dunt vus estes travaillez

Vus otri jeo sanz nul respit:

Ja ni avrez nul contredit;

M'amur e mun cors vus otrei

Vostre drue fetes de mei!' (103-116)

To extricate herself from her newly complicated marriage, the wife offers herself in no uncertain terms (115-116) to another knight, and Bisclavret's year in exile begins. The truly damning moment comes in lines 107-108: "Elle ne l'aveit unc amé/Ne de s'amur aseüré." She has, in truth, managed to betray two men with one blow here. She strikes at her husband's most vulnerable spot after playing upon his love for her to learn its whereabouts, and seduces another man to be her instrument, though she has no love for him and has never claimed to love him; she will compound her mockery of love by marrying him. Out of revulsion, she has destroyed the idyllic situation in which we found her, and brought low two men in the process.

At this point, also the point at which Bisclavret receives his name, it is his wife who has fulfilled the three qualifications for lycanthropy (or perhaps *bisclavrétisme*) delineated by Marie de France in her zoological preface: she has consumed men ("Hummes devure"), she has done great harm ("grant mal fait") and, by betraying her husband and profaning marriage with a man she does not love, she has strayed from the path and gone into the "granz forez" to live. Her position as the true central monster of the lay has been well noted by others, sometimes quite explicitly:

> The wife has indeed devoured the human being who was her husband, having made him, as well as her lover, prey to her own ambitions and

> pride. In this sense, the bisclavret's Lady turns out to be the real werewolf, or *garvalf* of the story which "Tant cum il est en cele rage/Hummes devure, grant mal fait". (Freeman 294)

I would broaden this statement, to say that the wife is not the werewolf promised us by Marie's introduction *in a sense*, but in every way. The fact that her husband grows fur every week and must spend three days in the woods, running down stags and rabbits for his dinner, is almost incidental. His condition is only brought to light through her intervention, and it is she, through her two cold questions, who works the betrayal that will change him from an occasional animal into a permanent one (or so she intends). Lines 69 and 71, the two questions spoken by her, serve as the magical incantation that alters the balance of power between the two. They are also a mirror, and passages on either side are structural reflections of each other, but the mirror is warped and the image twisted. The magic mirror is a just image for this moment, the sort of mirror through which one may pass into an altered existence where different rules apply. The text and the characters both pass through, and both are transformed. The story of a man's fearsome revelation to his wife becomes the story of a wife's carefully orchestrated ruination of her husband. The secretive *bisclavret* becomes the trusting *preie*, about to be cast aside as no longer worth chewing on. And the wife, damned with such faint praise, becomes the violent shapeshifter and destroyer of life. In fact, their dialogue also reflects the parable in the Beauvais entry on the wolf. She, *la louve*, has caught him in her sights, and her knowledge of the clothes gives her power over him – she has seen him first. He stands before her, transfixed by her gaze, stripping himself bare and seeking to protect himself with his words, while she starts moving in for the kill. She strips him of his

potency, his dominance, and ultimately his shape. Her betrayal disfigures him as surely as a powerful set of teeth would do, although less irretrievably, as shall be seen.

She is the true *bisclavret*. The vagueness inherent in the introduction's broad use of "humes plusurs" may allow for this – if "humes" can contain both genders, as in the modern tongue's "les droits de l'homme", then truly anyone can become a werewolf. If that won't hold, the twofold uses of the name, generic and proper, make it clear. Marie and the titular character use "bisclavret" as a synonym for "werewolf", but once he is damned to the woods, it is revealed as his proper name. He is not just a *bisclavret*, he is Bisclavret, and that being his proper name, one mustn't forget the way a man's proper name behaves when he takes a wife: "Le loup extérioriserait la sexualité de la femme car dans le couple – dans l'amour partagé avant qu'il ne se change en haine – il constitue sa moitié, elle est Dame Bisclavret" (Bibring 8-9).

The wife is also a Bisclavret, and her monstrous potential is already inscribed upon her by the name. Hers has always been the horrible change we were meant to witness. Indeed, hers is the *only* transformation we witness. Bisclavret's shifts occur offstage at both ends of the lay. We are not privy to the change after which his wife betrays him; the moment of his return to human form is a focal point of the narrative, but it happens *in absentia*. Moving ahead to the end of the lay, we find Bisclavret enjoying the attentions of the king and court, where he has gained favor as a beloved pet. After the wife has been forced to give back his clothes, one more condition must be met for him to return to himself:

> Li produm le rei apela,
>
> Cil ki primes le cunseilla:

‘Sire, ne fetes mie bien:

Cist nel fereit pur nule rien,

Que devant vus ses dras reveste

Ne mut la semblance de beste.

Ne savez mie que ceo munte:

Mut durement en ad grant hunte.

En tes chambres le fai mener

E la despoille od lui porter;

Une grant piece l’i laissums.

S’il devient hum, bien le verums.’ (281-292)

This passage is the last in a series of events that showcase the transformed Bisclavret’s behavior to be the very opposite of monstrous. His treatment at his wife’s hands has been a dreadful combination of humiliation, deformation, castration and cuckolding, and he has met the world thereafter with perfect knightly aplomb, with paws. He wins over the king as thoroughly as he did as a knight, becoming once again “de tuz ses veisins amez.” He sleeps at the king’s side. His only two acts of lupine violence are covered by (correct) assertions that the wounded must have done something to deserve it. And now, at his moment of triumph, his knightly modesty prevents him from appearing nude before his king. He is led to the king’s bedchamber and left alone – the king soon finds him there, asleep on the royal bed, clothed and human again, and joyously wakes him as if he were a sleeping princess[31]. To use a loaded phrase, it seems Bisclavret can’t

[31] The king greets him with many kisses and an embrace, in fact; "Le reis le curut enbracier/Plus de cent feiz l'acole e baise" (300-301) This may be poetic hyperbole, but the homosocial/homoerotic aspect of *Bisclavret* is fodder for more work outside the scope of this writing. The wife is not only a *louve* and a virago, she is the only woman in the story. Does this king not have a queen?

do it if there's anyone watching.

But the wife's transformation? That one happens in full view of the reader right to the end, when she dons the best of her finery to visit the court and receives a physical disfigurement to broadcast her misshapen spirit to the world:

> Quant Bisclavret la veit venir,
>
> Nul hum nel poeit retenir;
>
> Vers li curut cum enragiez.
>
> Oiez cum il est bien vengiez!
>
> Le neis li esracha del vis.
>
> Quei li peüst il faire pis? (231-236)[32]

The "beste salvage" has been savagely treated in turn, and fully assumes the hideous shape we have been warned about. The wife's disgrace is complete. She is tortured, interrogated, banished with her paramour, forced to scratch out a living far from her native land. She will bear children from this shameful second marriage, and her own daughters will continue to bear her mark of Cain, being born without noses.

What to make of this peculiar disfigurement? There is no mystery in the association of the nose with the wolf, or with any animal. The nose occupies a place in the hierarchy of the senses that is both ignoble and invaluable. Smell is the most vulgar type of perception the human sensory apparatus is capable of, even more so than taste. Within a framework of sinful desire, for instance, the nose may lead one as far from the straight and narrow in search of sensual pleasure as the tongue, but without the mitigating alimentary benefits of eating. To rely on the sense of smell is to turn away from its nobler

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[32] Bisclavret's gesture is more than an expression of rage – removal of the nose was a traditional punishment meted out to adulterous women in the lands "enlightened" by the Crusades.

relations, sight and hearing. An animal puts faith in its nose and mouth, but a worthy man trusts words and visions.[33]

Yet as low as it is, the nose is the vital organ of last resort. Visions and words may be deceiving, but smells don't lie. In uncertain times, one may be exhorted to *follow one's nose*, to trust one's instincts. A false proposition or a shifty deal *doesn't smell right*. The sense of smell is ungracious, but it is also the least likely to steer one wrong, and its loss represents a disconnect from the world at a fundamental level, an inability to navigate. Witness Gogol's *The Nose*, in which a highly-placed Russian gentleman's nose departs from his face for a life of its own, and leaves him a hapless wreck until it can be found and reattached; indeed, his nose takes on human shape and lives the life he is meant to be living, to perfection.

Loss of nose, loss of smell would in fact be a grievous punishment for a character like Bisclavret, but it is he who inflicts it upon his wife. Bloch finds the answer in etymology once again, with a close look at the word *neis*:

> But a quick look at the Old French dictionary shows us how tricky the nose is. For *nes*, also spelled *neis, neys, neiz, naes, nees, nes, nis, nois, neies, nedes,* is an adverb meaning *même, même pas, pas du tout*—"even," "not even," "not at all." The nose is, in other words, the equivalent of "noes", and "Bisclavret," seen from this perspective, can be understood as the tale of a man who just can't say "no," or whose failure to say "no" to

[33] Physiognomists after the example of Lavater judged a person or animals level of goodness, and closeness to God, to be inversely proportional to the size of the nose, specifically to the degree in which the frontal view of the head differed from the profile; snakes and rodents are visibly low creatures, with their prominent snouts, whereas blunt-nosed animals like the bull are much closer to divinity, and among humans the aquiline slope of a Roman nose is the best of all… the theory being that a head with nearly the same shape in profile as from the front bears the strongest resemblance to the head of God, who, always watching his children on Earth, has no profile at all.

> his wife's curiosity, a strange reenactment of the Fall, leads in effect to his wife's loss of her nose, exile or expulsion […] and heritability of the lack of nose/noes. (I wouldn't presume to know which way to spell it.) (Bloch 82)

This equation of *nose* with *noes*, or as I would formulate it, of the French *nez* with the English *nay*, provides an answer that fits neatly with both Bisclavret's dilemma and with the monstrous wife's crimes. "Bisclavret" may be read as a narrative of choices. The werewolf hero exists in a state of impossible choices, possessed of two identities that require different environments to thrive, and rather than make a choice between them what would exclude the other option forever (such a choice may in fact be impossible), he alternates between man and wolf, hearth and forest. The ensuing plot is a catalogue of unfortunate choices, from Bisclavret's decision to let his wife in on his secret, to her making his impossible choice for him by binding him in wolf-shape, and then reneging on her choice of husband to be with the rival knight. And at the climax of the story, when wolf meets wife, he bites off her nose and deprives her of more than the ability to follow a scent: as punishment for her cruel choices, he takes away her ability to choose. Without a *nez/nay*, without the ability to say *no*, she has also lost the ability to say *yes*.

This marital exchange has come to embody multiple meanings of the noun "exchange". What begins as an exchange of words between husband and wife develops into an exchange of social roles, with the wife assuming the mantle of power from her denuded husband, and so of gender roles; Bisclavret hands his masculine authority over to the wife he trusts, and is robbed of the capacity to speak as a man, walk as a man, and

dress as a man, while she takes the initative to seek out a new mate in short order.[34] Her embodiment of the villainous attributes present in the culture's *idée reçue* of the she-wolf (opportunistic sexuality, ravenous appetites, stealth, deceit) leads her through a metamorphosis into a being that violates her culture's codes of social and sexual decency, culminating in an attack that renders her monstrosity an anatomical fact – the exchange is now a physical transfer of the hideous. The removal of her nose casts her out into the woods to live in shame, and enables Bisclavret to resume being the paragon of noble manhood he had been before, now elevated to even greater favor with the court.

In "Bisclavret", at the beginning of the French canon, Marie de France gives the werewolf the bestiary treatment, manipulating and deepening the popular conception of the creature to give us an entity that fairly fulminates with violence, angst and *eros*. The werewolf, hereinafter referred to as the lycanthrope[35], will never again hold the spotlight as it does in "Bisclavret," but the regressive drive and erotic dysfunctions it incarnates will persist, and after literature has acclimated to several centuries of modernization, it will continue to make periodic *sorties* from its lair in the phantom zone between the human and the animal, to leave muddy (and sometimes bloody) tracks across the page.

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[34] In Tovi Bibring's reading of "Bisclavret" the wife's appalled reaction to her husband's lycanthropy is heavily sexual; the knowledge that she has been engaging in intercourse with a part-animal implies the intolerable potential for an animal side to herself, and she recruits and unloved-but-normal replacement to wipe this slate clean.

[35] The term *werewolf* will be less appropriate in reference to the coming texts, which will not be directly connected to the folklore of the *loup-garou* as is "Bisclavret"; besides, the term is plainly inaccurate when the other half of the human-animal equation is not a wolf.

Chapter Two

The Feral Feminine: Cixous, Cat Women and *Les Diaboliques*

> Quand on se retournait de cette forme idéale de beauté souple, de force terrible au repos, de dédain impassible et royal, vers les créatures humaines qui la regardaient timidement, qui la contemplaient, yeux ronds et bouche béante, ce n'était pas l'humanité qui avait le beau rôle, c'était la bête. Et elle était si supérieure, que c'en était presque humiliant!
>
> – Barbey d'Aurevilly, "Le Bonheur dans le crime"

It is only fitting that in "Le Bonheur dans le crime", the third of Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Diaboliques*, the beast should first manifest itself in the zoo. The dark forests of the Middle Ages and "Bisclavret," in which the wilderness and its beasts were a concern to be met on one's own doorstep, are now far in the past. In the 19th century, if the average city dweller wished to encounter animal life beyond domesticated creatures and urban vermin, he or she had to make a trip to the zoo; and in Paris, that meant the zoological park at the Jardin des Plantes.

As a site of scientific exploration that was also open to the public, the zoo was a popular place to visit then as it is now, though the reasons for this popularity differ. The current conception of the zoo, with its landscaped and climate-controlled habitats designed to mimic the natural surroundings of the animals they housed, was a foreign concept to the planners of parks like the Jardin des Plantes. That zoo and its kin were descendants of the old royal menageries, and such a place served as a kind of stationary

circus, now for the diversion of the populace at large rather than the royal court and guests. The animals were caged and fed in constant view of the public, to fulfill their function as objects of entertainment, and also as points of emotional and psychic transference.

The point has been made elsewhere, and will be further explored below, that the popularity of the zoo skyrocketed as mental asylums began to close their doors to the public – where people could once divert themselves and assure themselves of their humanity and rationality by observing lunatics, they now had to make do with a visit to the elephant cage. The confines of zoos and sanatoria may have had dubious benefits for the creatures incarcerated there, but they did afford the ordinary citizen a safe space to confront living embodiments of forces they were required to repress within themselves. This scheme of things tends to fog the distinction between the bound and the free. On one side of the barrier one finds a being, human or otherwise, trapped in a limited space but with access to unlimited expression of its baser impulses and appetites; on the other side, observers with the liberty to move about in the world as they wish, but bound and repressed by social constraints and their own reason, trapped as it were by the very sanity that lets them roam freely[36]. "Le Bonheur dans le crime", a story of blissful love attained

[36] The space of the zoo may also lead one to consider the concept of the heterotopia, as outlined by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* as a space of classification that destroys the very possibility of a continuity between the things it classifies. Appropriately enough, the textual example that leads him to this definition is a reference to a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" in a passage by Jorge Luis Borges, which groups the world's animals together using a system of apparent logic, but with nonsensical criteria for classification; under this system an elephant and a newt might be grouped together, for instance, in the class of animals that resemble flies from quite a long way away. The humorous reaction inspired by Borges is underlaid with unease for Foucault, who recognizes the violence being done to the very idea of classification. A heterotopia, being the opposite of a utopia (an imaginary site in which every thing has a place to occupy and a function to fulfill), is a place in which things that cannot possibly be reconciled with each other rub elbows. Each object brings with it its own necessary order, with the effect that the larger order into which they are all meant to be classed ceases to exist: "*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also

through evil, opens with just such a stroll through the Jardin des Plantes. As it is this opening scene that will concern us most plainly, let us look at it now.

The Savage Doctor and the Heartbroken Cat

The story proper of "Le Bonheur dans le crime" sits at the heart of a series of narrative shells, each opening like a *matryoshka* doll to reveal the next inside. An unnamed narrative first person, addressing the reader through an unnamed female listener, tells the story of an old acquaintance of his who told him a story, about a hidden love story culminating in a murder. The old acquaintance is a doctor called Torty, and through the terms under which we first encounter him, we taste the significance that animals and confined spaces (existing within them and breaking free of them) will have in the ensuing pages.

"Bonheur"'s very first description of Torty sets him up to us as in animal terms. After thirty-odd years of a rural practice in Normandy he chafes at his situation "comme un animal qui a toujours marché sur son bridon et qui finit par le casser" (*Les Diaboliques* 111), and he flees the country to install himself in Paris near the zoological park, on rue Cuvier, yet. This is not a subtle moment – on the very first page we have a

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opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (Foucault xviii). A zoo, then, can be nothing *but* a heterotopia, even a modern zoological park with exhibits landscaped and climate-controlled to mimic the animals' natural habitats. The ordered presentation of a global sampling of wildlife has in fact created an impossible space wherein animals that would never stand a chance of meeting in nature now exist mere feet from each other, and behave in ways counter to their natures (waiting for food to be provided to them, performing tricks, surviving for years beyond the age they would reach in the wild). A trip to the zoo allows a person to experience an extreme variety of otherness, not glimpsing animals in the wild but meeting them on the middle ground of a literal alternate universe where different rules apply. One goes to the zoo to learn, but also to experience what Foucault called "disturbing": a window into a system where the divisions we live by, between human and animal, between tamed and savage, no longer carry their habitual weight. This exhilarating alternate universe will appear in this chapter *à plusieurs reprises* and in different guises, most importantly as a lovers' bedroom, but it will always be a locus of transformation.

man depicted as a restless animal breaking free of his leash and setting up house adjacent to other wild creatures, on a street named for a famed zoologist. He is soon further described with more images of savagery, noble and otherwise: as a redoubtable man who embodies the proverb "chat ganté ne prend pas de souris" (112); as a misanthrope interested in people only when they have symptoms to be treated; as an able rider more at home on a horse than on foot, riding without trouble "dans des chemins à casser en deux des Centaures" (113); as a transatlantic equivalent to Natty Bumppo of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*; and as an alternative misanthrope to Molière's Alceste, one whose misanthropy comes not from virtuous indignation, but as a natural action of character, allowing him to scorn his fellow man "aussi tranquillement qu'il prenait sa prise de tabac, et même il avait autant de plaisir à le mépriser qu'à la prendre." (114) Thus the story opens with a litany of Torty's otherness in which animal images are prevalent, and the above-mentioned confusion between the inside and outside of the cage is present. He is a man who dedicated thirty years to preserving the life of a community of which he felt himself to be the master, and also a man held prisoner by that community who can only escape when his patients have died. He is a man who bridles at the social company of others, but takes great interest in people as objects of study. Barbey takes care to point out Torty's peculiarly possessive relationship with his erstwhile patients. Indeed, he seems to view them less as people, and more as interesting pets – he does not press himself to take on new patients when all of *his* have moved on (emphasis in the original), and expresses pride at the things his patients have accomplished by virtue of his keeping them alive and well, as though surveying a stable of prize stallions.[37]

[37] Barbey evokes Moses here, and his hypothetical pride "en montrant la baguette avec laquelle il changeait des rochers en fontaines" (113).

There is a definite human-animal inversion at play here, with an animal-coded man rising above the fray to show mastery of a human mass that falls short of him, a mass he relates to as he might a herd of barnyard animals. This animal-man goes on to flee confinement in the open expanses of the French countryside, and to find his liberty in the confines of urban Paris, in the vicinity of what amounts to an animal prison, on a street with a name evocative of detached classification, examination and dissection. Alone and trapped among men, he is at his liberty in the company of animals. Torty's nature will become largely irrelevant in a few pages, but it serves as a useful forecast of what those pages will introduce.

On their walk through the Jardin, our animalized man is soon confronted with a humanized animal – to be specific, a feminized animal. Torty and friend come to a stop before the cage of the zoo's black panther, and the story takes pains to gender the animal beyond its feminine definite article. The animal is endowed with a human eroticism in its very first textual mention, which comes with a look ahead to the end of its life:

> ...et un joli soleil d'arrière-saison nous chauffait agréablement le dos, dans sa ouate d'or, au docteur et moi, pendant que nous étions arrêtés, à regarder la fameuse panthère noire, qui est morte, l'hiver d'après, comme une jeune fille, de la poitrine. (114)

In the space of a subordinate clause, "la fameuse panthère noire" is characterized as a tender and feminine creature. Barbey arranges this clause in modular units separated by commas, allowing for a more poetic interpretation of the events it describes. A more prosaic arrangement of the same elements, perhaps "... qui est morte de la poitrine l'hiver d'après, comme une jeune fille" would have conveyed the same details and some of the

same flavor – the animal died the following winter of consumption, with “comme une jeune fille” implying a delicacy of health. But in Barbey’s order, the feminine is embedded in the middle of the event, and the panther dies “comme une jeune fille” before the cause of death is announced. The cat’s femininity, rather than serving as an offhand comparison at the end of the phrase, is a central part of the matrix. It has a closer connection to the fact of the death, and cannot help but color the reader’s understanding of its cause. Coming just after the image of a delicate young woman, “poitrine” cannot be read in a purely anatomical or medical way, merely indicating the chest, the cardio-pulmonary region. It is the breast, the maiden’s bosom with its heavy burden of romantic connotations, and the heart that rules the emotions as well as the circulatory system. In short, as the text informs us that the panther’s death will be a result of consumption, it also invites us to infer that it will die consumed by heartbreak[38].

Just after this, it is revealed that the panther is of the Javanese variety, and its feminine carnality is trumpeted aloud by the text’s description of Java:

> ...l’île de Java, le pays du monde où la nature est le plus intense et semble

[38] Cf. Balzac's "La Fille aux yeux d'or," in which the girl of the title is stabbed to death by her jealous lesbian lover/captor, and said in the novella's last line to have died "de la poitrine." Paquita is a golden-eyed feline female likewise trumped and bested by a cat-woman; the marquise (also the lost sister of Paquita's paramour Henri de Marsay) is shown as a monstrous animal in the aftermath of her crime, scratched, bitten and covered in blood: "Sa tête avide et furieuse respirait l'odeur du sang. Sa bouche haletante restait entrouverte, et ses narines ne suffisaient pas à ses aspirations" ("La Fille aux yeux d'or" 346).

Balzac also visits this territory in "Une passion dans le désert," this time with a literal big cat. A stranded soldier bonds with the panther after it refrains from attacking him; the two exist side by side in the desert, the man describing the cat in terms of feminine sexual beauty much like those used here (naming it Mignonne after his first mistress) and coming to regard it as a companion and lover, who even reacts with jealously when he gives his attention to a passing bird. Their passion ends in tragedy - he panics and stabs Mignonne in the throat after a gentle bite on the leg, and is shattered by her death.

Both stories place archetypal male figures (a dandy and a soldier) in sexualized situations that knock their genders out of true. The lesbian Paquita enjoys dressing de Marsay in women's clothes before they make love. She later feminizes him undeniably (if accidentally) when she calls him by a woman's name in the heat of the moment, which drives him into the rage that breaks them up, and would have led to her death if his sister hadn't gotten there first. Anca Vlasopolos notes in "Une passion" an exchange of gender and power brought on by the isolation and hostility of the desert, with the soldier "opening to (that is, being feminized to some extent by) the secret beauties and song of the desert and skies" (26), and also by the panther's initial perceived threat to his life. Feminizing the panther as Mignonne and taking her as a lover allows him to reestablish his manly equilibrium, albeit so successfully "that masculinity can be regained only by the animal's ultimate objectification: death" (25).

> elle-même quelque grande tigresse, inapprivoisable à l'homme, qui le fascine et qui le mord dans toutes les productions de son sol terrible et splendide. A Java, les fleurs ont plus d'éclat et plus de parfum, les fruits plus de goût, les animaux plus de beauté et plus de force que dans aucun autre pays de la terre... Étalée nonchalamment sur ses élégantes pattes allongées devant elle, la tête droite, ses yeux d'émeraude immobiles, la panthère était un magnifique échantillon des redoutables productions de son pays. (115)

Once again, the implications are not subtle. The panther is the product of a place described as another savage and womanly feline, one that tantalizes men with its wild fecundity while wounding them with its teeth. The place is subsequently described as a virtual Eden filled with those two reliable symbols of burgeoning femininity, fragrant blossoms and ripened fruits. There is a distinct flavor of Orientalism to this passage, and to the luxuriant description of the nonchalant panther – stretched out here, elegant and framed by such florid sensuality, the cat could be an Ingres odalisque.

It is this image of the panther that is referenced in the citation that opens this chapter, and continues the trend of human-animal reversals, this time through the act of gazing. The humans who have gathered to stare at the panther, wide-eyed and slack-jawed, are gazed at in turn by the cat, and it is they who are reduced in the scheme of things. The humans have come to partake of the animal with their eyes, and the animal, by fascinating them, seems to leech them of their humanity. The panther is all seduction and consumption, right down to Barbey's description of the blackness of its fur: "Nulle tache fauve n'étoilait sa fourrure de velours noir, d'un noir si profond et si mat que la

lumière, en y glissant, ne la lustrait même pas, mais s'y absorbait, comme l'eau s'absorbe dans l'éponge qui la boit..." (ibid.) The attractive powers of this fur are evidently comparable to those of a black hole. How can mere humans resist an entity that sucks up everything, even light?

This big cat, as a "forme idéale de beauté souple" is certainly "presque humiliant"; one might even leave off the "presque". The textual description turns it into an impossible creature composed entirely of human ultimates and superlatives – beauty, womanhood, exoticism, luxury, darkness. It exudes a human intrigue, and leaves the bipedal humans around it gaping dumbly like fish. However, it is about to meet a female who will not be so easily lessened, and only Torty the animal-man will be able to recognize her for what she is.

The Cat Woman

Now, after the erotic buildup, comes the sex.

Torty draws attention to the arrival of two particular people at the panther's cage – "... mais voyez maintenant! Voici l'équilibre rétabli entre les espèces!" (ibid.) This woman and man are Hauteclaire Stassin and the Comte de Savigny, though they are not named as such for some time yet[39]. They approach the great cat in a nameless state, all the better for Barbey to describe them at length in the same otherworldly vein, as works of art. As a striking couple dressed all in black, timelessness is key to the limning of their beauty. The text makes certain to let us know that these two people are not young, even

[39] I will refer to them by their proper names, for simplicity's sake.

estimating their ages (late forties at least for him, early forties for her), and also points out their thorough lack of concern for their lack of youth. The separate portraits of each of them follow slightly diverging paths, with each somehow entangled with the cat before them.

Savigny, interestingly, is described in rather womanly terms. His clothing is immaterial to his appearance, which all hangs on his face and bearing; he would give the same impression, we are told, if he appeared in the sort of garments found in a Titian portrait, rather than his precisely buttoned *redingote*. Hauteclaire, beside him, equals him in height and implies possession of the physical fortitude he lacks. She is not compared to a painting, but to a black stone sculpture of Isis, "par l'ampleur de ses formes, la fierté mystérieuse et la force." (116) What stands out upon a closer reading of the passage is the way that these two people seem to have divided the cat's defining characteristics between the two of them. Savigny, apart from his "air efféminé et hautain" and his "moustaches aiguës *comme celles d'un chat*"[40], does have one eye-catching peculiarity in his wardrobe: he wears two deep blue sapphires in his ears, a detail which cannot help but send the reader back to an earlier gem, the emerald of the panther's eyes[41]. He carries the feline's delicate senses and hint of jewel-toned glamour, and Hauteclaire gets the animal's muscular power and goddess-like presence; in the text's succinct summation, "c'était la femme qui avait les muscles, et l'homme qui avait les nerfs..." (ibid.)

Hauteclaire also mirrors the cat's reductive gaze, and starts this unusual scene on its way to a climax (of multiple sorts) by giving the cat a taste of its own treatment:

> Quant à ses yeux, je n'en pouvais juger, fixés qu'ils étaient sur la panthère,

[40] Italics mine.

[41] Barbey doesn't want us to miss this connection – the sapphires remind the narrator of "les deux émeraudes que Shogar portait à la même place" (ibid.).

> laquelle, sans doute, en recevait une impression magnétique et désagréable, car, immobile déjà, elle sembla s'enfoncer de plus en plus dans cette immobilité rigide, à mesure que la femme, venue pour la voir, la regardait (...) la panthère, après avoir clignoté quelque temps, et comme n'en pouvant pas supporter davantage, rentra lentement, sous les coulisses tirées de ses paupières, les deux étoiles vertes de ses regards... – Eh! eh! panthère contre panthère! – fit le docteur à mon oreille; – mais le satin est plus fort que le velours. (117)

In short, and in a moment that recalls the optical battles between man and wolf suggested by the medieval bestiaries, Hauteclaire stares down the cat and makes it blink, thereby owning it. She out-panthers the panther.

Torty's remark is appropriate for what comes next. Hauteclaire also shares with the panther a lovely black coat (a literal coat in her case), and all of the potency that goes with it. The doctor's analysis of the situation hints at the erotic, connecting the two panthers with the intimate "contre" suggesting tactile contact as well as opposition, and identifying each one with a luxuriant textured fabric. What Hauteclaire does next will turn this erotic subtext into blatant text. Having asserted her dominance through the gaze, she will attempt to take further possession of the beast, in an encounter that bears the marks of a sexual one.

> Mais la femme – si c'en était un – ne se contenta pas de ce triomphe. Elle manqua de générosité. Elle voulut que sa rivale la vît qui l'humiliait, et rouvrît les yeux pour la voir. Aussi, défaisant sans mot dire les douze boutons du gant violet qui moulait son magnifique avant-bras, elle ôta ce

> gant, et, passant audacieusement sa main entre les barreaux de la cage, elle en fouetta le museau court de la panthère, qui ne fit qu'un mouvement... mais quel mouvement!... et d'un coup de dents, rapide comme l'éclair!... Un cri partit du groupe où nous étions. Nous avions cru le poignet emporté : Ce n'était que le gant. La panthère l'avait englouti. (117-18)

Exposed flesh, violent movement, penetration and engulfment – the opening movement of "Le Bonheur dans le crime" comes to a head here, with Barbey's carefully and explicitly delineated ambiguities of human and animal, male and female, coming together in a sexual stew in full view of an avid public. Hauteclaire, the heroically proportioned woman on the arm of the poised and delicate Savigny, performs a silent striptease with her long glove as a prelude to a penetration of the most audacious and frightening kind. She thrusts her hand into the cage, a virile movement into an intimate space, then gives the cat a coquettish slap with the glove. The panther's mouth, a black-furred *vagina dentata* if ever there was one, threatens the intruding member with penetration in turn from its great teeth, just before swallowing the offending glove. A cry from the crowd completes the coital moment, as Savigny brings the panther-woman back to his side with an exclamation of "Folle!", uttered as something other than a condemnation of her rash action. It is a term of extreme endearment, spoken between lovers in what is definitely some kind of afterglow. On that note, with the panther out-panthered and penetrated, the magnificent couple leave the zoo, and leave an opening for Torty to introduce the story proper. The cat will not return, but its presence here has telegraphed all that is to come (or all that has come before, in the story's chronology), marking this magnificent couple as shapeshifters, and "Le Bonheur dans le crime" as

another tale of the beast.

As we have moved from the wolf to the cat, so the nature of the beast has shifted. The monster of "Bisclavret" was shown to be unable to exist in concert with the love between men and women, while existing perfectly happily within the rigidly coded, homosocial love of the world of knights and court. Bisclavret had to flee the conjugal hearth to give his inner wolf its head, and his attempt to bring the two together set off the avalanche discussed in the previous chapter. What we now have in "Le Bonheur dans le crime" is a story-world in which the beast is not irreconcilable with the bedroom; they are, in fact, essentially bound up with each other. Its incarnation as a cat rather than a wolf, then, is not an idle one.

The cat, domestic or otherwise, embodies many of the qualities ascribed to an idealized feminine figure: softness, poise, delicate movements, fastidious hygiene, sweetness of voice. The link is strong enough to have been assimilated into modern language on the vernacular level. Domestic cats are often assumed to be female, and addressed by default as *she* by visitors to their home. It is also a creature imbued with fear, a noted scapegoat for superstition just as bound up with the feminine on the dark side as it is in the light. It presents the traits that have brought down the wrath of male culture upon women since Biblical times: independence, refusal to be led, seemingly capricious changes in mood, vocal sexuality. The cat was an avatar of deviant female sexuality in the pre-modern era, which is to say, a sexuality driven by pleasure rather than procreation. In American English, a bordello may be a *cathouse*; a feline comparison is also explicit, in English and French, in common vulgar terms for the vulva, *pussy* and *chatte*, with the English term also applicable to males who display weakness. Cats are

rumored to suck the life from babies in their beds, in what might be termed acts of post-natal abortion; European witches were accompanied in their dark deeds by cat-shaped familiars, and what better specimen of a licentious, deviant female could be wanted than a witch? The cat, therefore, carries a violent aura of rebellion similar to that borne by the wolf, and a similar libidinous weight, but with an added flavor of *domesticity* that makes it uniquely threatening, and uniquely suited for feminine identification[42].

The wolf is a creature of the unknown outdoors, even when considered by extension through its tamed analogue, the domesticated dog. A dog must always be an outdoor animal to some degree. The cat, however, can be made to exist in confinement. A housecat may live its entire life within a small apartment and be thought content, but for those unnerving moments of unpredictability that remind its humans of the latent savagery that may emerge at any time. This comes close to the heart of the masculine dread of feminine sexuality that underpins "Le Bonheur dans le crime," the knowledge that every woman who respects male privilege, who dresses and behaves *comme il faut*, also carries within her the power (and the organs) to dominate men. When female desire is tamed to allow male dominion over society, male fear of that repressed sexual power allows it to swell into a near-supernatural threat to masculine vitality. Witness Freud's account of the ancient taboo upon virginity, which deemed the breaking of a virgin's hymen to be such a potential threat to the husband that all brides in primitive cultures

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[42] Cf. J. Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla," antecedent to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and one of the finest of all vampire stories, in which the titular female vampire takes the shape of a great black cat to feed upon her young victim Laura (in bed), and stakes possessive claim on the girl in heavily homoerotic terms. I will have more to say about the vampire in the chapters to follow, but the connections between it and the werewolf are inescapable; the two are often only distinguishable by gender and manner (werewolf = masculine, disruptive, destructive; vampire = feminine, insinuating, smothering), with male vampires presented as especially alien and threatening to male victims precisely because of characteristics that mark them as monstrously feminine (draining sleeping men of their vital fluids, frightening reproductive behavior). In the opening sequence of *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker is aghast at the attentions of Dracula's vampire brides, but the crowning horror comes when the Count dismisses the women and claims him for himself.

were subject to ritual defloration before the wedding night, by a male third party or by means of an artificial phallus[43]. Flash forward to modern times: whether or not the wives of 19th century Paris (and even of 21st century America, all too often), utterly framed in by their husbands' lives, resent their sexual subjugation, they have ample reason to, and this menacing resentment can strike the men at any time and at home, at the most vulnerable places and moments.

Enter the cat, with all the menace of the wolf, and the ability to scratch its master's eyes out while he sleeps[44]. The cat is the monster brought into the home, often right into bed, ready and able to strike at any moment of weakness, right where it will hurt the most; it combines the savagery of the beast with the proximity of a loving wife, who may yet realize the oppression of her situation and flex her untried claws.

This brew of love and menace is crucial. The cat-beast feeds on the eroticism that Bisclavret was denied. It depends on the gaze and interaction of another for its very existence, and also on a degree of separation from the world, with only that one other entity for company. Barbey's beast, in short, is a creature of love, and its behaviors (as embodied in Hauteclaire, Savigny and that delicate little girl of panther) are common to anyone and everyone who has ever been in love. Love is, of course, a sort of transformative dance, wherein two lovers influence and change each other in a cyclical fashion, in what one might go so far as to call a mutation.

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[43] Freud posits a woman's defloration as the final, clinching proof that she does not possess the penis that she desires, denying her any claim to phallic power, and provoking rage against the male responsible for her disillusionment. He notes a pathological case in which a married woman, in love with her husband and with a healthy appetite for sex with him, "[gave] unconcealed expression to her hostility towards the man by abusing him, raising her hand against him or actually striking him" (*Freud on Women*, 208). It follows that in the interest of maintaining a harmonious marriage, someone other than the husband should be the object of this rage. It is tempting, and correct, to read Hauteclaire's glove as analogous to this surrogate phallus, removing the panther's dominance with high drama but no physical harm to the wielder.

[44] Cf. Maupassant's short story "Misti," in which a beloved domestic cat takes on the role of jilted beau when its mistress takes a lover, and literally does scratch the man's eyes out.

Outside the sphere of literature, on a quotidian level, this presents itself to an observer of people in the way that romantic partners come to mirror each other's habits, absorb each other's mannerisms and ways of speaking, perhaps even resemble each other physically. "Le Bonheur dans le crime" presents its middle-aged couple in just this way at first – longtime companions whom the passage of time has begun to blur together. Onlookers at the Jardin des Plantes might presume to see a manifestation of Hauteclaire's feminine influence in Savigny's delicate bearing and nervous tension, the ghost of Savigny's maleness in Hauteclaire's dominant presence. Torty's narrative, and so Barbey d'Aurevilly's, will serve to refute such a notion of love as a passive influence, transforming lovers as gently and gradually as water reshapes rock. The changes of love, they tell us, are violent and rapid, even vicissitudinous, and the great caged panther is the catalyst for the shifts we see in the story. Everyone in the situation is, it seems, also everyone else in the situation. Savigny's whiskers and coiled-spring tension align him with the cat, which is also the svelte and muscular Hauteclaire, who dominates it like a superior beast, causing it to respond with human humility. She strikes it with her glove, engaging in both aggression and flirtation with an unknowable animal other, which is also her lover, and herself, and a rival to be topped and vanquished. After she has won, the interchange between man and woman continues as they take their leave, in a passage evocative of the Classical idea of the androgyne:

> Ils passèrent auprès de nous, le docteur et moi, mais leurs visages tournés l'un vers l'autre, se serrant flanc contre flanc, comme s'ils avaient voulu se pénétrer, entrer, lui dans elle, elle dans lui, et ne faire qu'un seul corps à eux deux, en ne regardant rien qu'eux-mêmes. (ibid.)

A tangled web, indeed. The lycanthrope is with us again, this time as the violent mutating force that binds two together in love, to the exclusion of all others. It may be a hoary cliché to equate erotic love with a wild creature, unpredictable and liable to take a person apart, but it takes some deeper truth to make that kind of cliché. In this case, the deeper truth is a flicker of humanity within that uncaged animal, which provokes the animal within the humans it touches; a specimen of this shifty, alluring beast is on display not only in tales of adult passion (whether in the canon or on the romance racks of innumerable bookshops and supermarkets), but in a tale for children which also happens to be perhaps the most emblematic literary manifestation of the wolf in the Western world.

An Uncanny, Isolated Parasite

The love delineated in the pages of Hélène Cixous' *L'amour du loup*[45] is not the province of turtledoves and wistful sighs, even before the equation of animal with emotion. Love shifts from guise to guise in the text, all of them uncomfortable at best, outright deadly at worst. It is an invader from an outer world, always conserving a piece of the outside when it is inside. It is a malady, experienced as a burning in the chest. It is a parenthesis, walling off those who feel it from those who do not: "La parenthèse sépare le monde entre ceux qui comprennent et ceux qui ne comprennent pas. L'amour installe toujours sa parenthèse au milieu du discours" (*L'amour du loup* 18). In every one of these guises, love is characterized as an unwelcome interloper, introduced by one means or

[45] Cixous' essay itself makes frequent references to the translated writings of Marina Tsvetaïeva; my own references to Cixous will circumvent those as far as is possible.

another like a parasitic organism into a host body, hiding its inherent terror beneath an appealing name.

> Un jour, je ne sais quand, on a donc décidé d'appeler amour un ensemble de phénomènes physiques étranges, inqualifiables, est-ce douleur? – mais à partir du moment où on met le nom sur la brûlure dans la poitrine, on interrompt la violence de l'étrangeté et on commence à oublier l'horreur antique cachée sous le mot nouveau. (ibid.)

Having thus identified the mysterious, viral thing underneath the friendly name, Cixous proceeds to examine how the thing operates and under what conditions. The first two keys to the mutative process about to unfold are isolation and silence, each feeding the other.

The secretive nature of people in love, the intimate mutual dialogues and compulsion to hide from the world, are yet more clichés grounded in more profound truth. Cixous finds that these behaviors are more than affectations or romantic trifles. They are, in fact, matters of life and death. Love begins "par le secret gardé, par la séparation silencieuse du reste du monde" (19), and escalates into a system in which two erstwhile individuals now exist only for each other. The silence of lovers *vis-à-vis* the world around them does not necessarily arise from external interdiction, she precises, as was the case with Romeo and Juliet – love tends to hold its tongue in even a permissive environment.

No, lovers infected by this invading organism retreat into their own private sphere because they have become different beings from those around them, and continue to change, now speaking to each other in "la langue que personne d'autre ne parle une langue qu'on ne parle qu'à deux." (ibid.) Each lover transforms in the eyes of the other,

growing in stature and power thanks to the ideals and feelings imposed upon them. Indeed, each swells in the other's world to the dimensions of a god, become both an object of reverence dependent on the vigilance of one soul, and the sole worshipper of another such being. These two must keep their silence and their severance from the world in order to keep their entire system from falling to pieces.

> Personne d'autre ne croit en toi sauf moi. Ce très-dieu on doit bien le cacher pour le protéger de l'incrédulité. Mon dieu est en verre, un rien peut le briser. Mais tant qu'il est intact il donne l'univers. Invisible transparent dieu de verre. Je voulais dire en vers. (ibid.)

This closed system comes loaded with the constant looming threat of annihilation. When one exists in a world wholly dependent upon the complicity and survival of another, death is present at every moment and in every action. When we exist in and for ourselves and ourselves alone, she argues, we are immortal. We may think of death, accept its existence and even its inevitability, but we cannot truly conceive of it ever happening to us. It is a shadowy vagueness that can always be pushed out of the mind, "elle est plus loin plus tard, elle est faible, oubliable" (20). Death is something that happens to others, but never to us.

However, and fatally, as soon as we fall in love and enclose ourselves in its cage with the object our devotion, we place our life within one of those same others whose deaths are all too conceivable, and that idea of immortality leaves us forever. To know love is to know death, and in this situation, a phrase like *I can't live without you* or *I'll die if you leave me* ceases to be hyperbole. To love someone is to take the first step into the grave. More in keeping with this work, it is to put one's head in the lion's mouth,

knowing that one day, sooner or later, it will bite. This is the love that Cixous will identify with, and as, the wolf. We hold it close, knowing that one day it will be the end of us, out of natural progression rather than malicious intent, just as the wolf stalks the lamb without ill will. Lovers hold knife blades to each other's lifelines just by being together, and constantly fluctuate between predator and prey.

> Nous aimons le loup. Nous aimons l'amour du loup. Nous aimons la peur du loup. Nous avons peur du loup – il y a de l'amour dans notre peur. La peur est amoureuse du loup. La peur aime. Ou bien : nous avons peur de la personne aimée. L'amour nous terrorise. Ou bien la personne que nous aimons, nous l'appelons notre loup ou notre tigre, ou notre agneau dans la paille. Nous sommes pleins de dents et de tremblements. (23)

This equivalence of love and fear with some kind of animal-other also equates those emotions with a state of infancy. The realization of sudden mortality which turns me into an animal, to preserve myself against the rapacious advances of the animal that is my lover, strips me of my adult senses and reduces me to the level of a child, in a sense little more than an animal with the potential for speech who may one day grow into a rational adult. The text paints a human child as animalistic both emotionally and physically, unable to walk upright and dependent on raw sensation to move through the world, in constant close proximity to the lower things of the world, "à quatre pattes parmi les odeurs, les appétits, les nourritures, les vers de terre, les morts." (24) Love turns us into hungry, yearning children, and with the same stroke assures that relief from this hunger can only come from one source. I must consume another to stay alive, and that other has the same dependence on me. This truly is a parasitic relationship – a parasite

must drive a living host toward death, but shortens its own life with every bit of nourishment it takes. So, the two organisms arrange it between them to let the vampiric cycle continue for as long as it can.[46]

So how do we move from this grim place toward affection and pleasure?

Having moved from fear, to the animal, to the infantile, Cixous subtly connects *l'amour du loup*, this love of/for the wolf, with one of the bedrock principles of Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny, without naming it as such: the unexpected, and unconsciously recognized, reemergence in adulthood of a childhood belief. The situations that Freud's text described as *unheimlich* had more to do with fear and dread than love, but the influence of the child is the common factor. For instance, if I have an irrational fear of dolls and puppets, or of furniture with feet made in the shape of actual animal feet, what I am experiencing is the clash of my reasonable adult mind against a lingering idea from my infancy, long rejected and presumed gone, but still there.

Many people are afraid of dolls, especially the realistic ones, because they seem (or threaten) to possess some sort of life. A child accepts this very notion with no fear, but often with matter-of-fact delight; to a child's mind, toys *are* alive, dolls *can* walk and talk and be one's friends. The adult rejects the notion, but still it remains, and if anything should ever happen to confirm that dormant belief (such as a doll changing position on a shelf), the infantile voice inside the adult will be vindicated, and the adult will experience Freud's uncanny feeling.

The love of/for the wolf has its genesis, says Cixous, in a similar childish place,

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[46] Of side interest: these ideas of love as a parasite and as regression into sensual chaos are expressed fully, and literally, in the 1975 horror film *Shivers*, directed by David Cronenberg. Under the aegis of organ transplant research, a medical doctor creates a sluglike parasite that reverts its host to a sex-crazed primitive state, and perpetuates itself through sexual contact. All of the residents of an exclusive Montreal apartment building, including geriatrics and young children, are contaminated by the phallic leeches, resulting in what could be called venereal version of a zombie film.

where frightful things are met with shivers of joy:

> Oui, l'amour du loup est indissociable de l'amour pour la peur. Quand nous étions petits, comme nous aimions avoir la peur heureuse! C'était une peur d'une grande pureté. C'est que l'enfant est capable de deux choses à la fois, d'une part de croire absolument au danger, et en même temps de ne pas le croire. C'est de cela qu'il peut jouir. Plus tard nous n'avons plus que la moitié des croire, l'ou bien et adieu le loup chéri : ou bien nous croyons absolument au danger, ou bien nous n'y croyons pas du tout. Sauf au bord de mourir : alors nous croyons et ne croyons pas ce que nous craignons et ne craignons pas en une seule pensée invivable. (30-31)

So, the ever-present menace of death inherent in relations with the wolf is what provokes the pleasures of love, rather than running counter to them. Love, it would seem, may be likened to such extreme athletic activities as freerunning or bungee-jumping, though it packs a more profound punch than the exhilaration of an endorphin rush. On the verge of death, with the wolf able to leap and kill at any moment, we have access to the pure fear of childhood, far removed from the dreary fears and neuroses of adulthood (sexual dysfunction, financial worries, and so on). We are permitted to re-experience a child's complete helplessness in the face of innocent terror, coupled with a child's complete faith that we will survive it. Loving the wolf provokes an elevated version of the frightened jouissance a child might experience in the darkened passages of a carnival haunted house, engrossed in a scary movie, or held rapt by a story of blood and monsters. Which is where, in Cixous, the wolf appears as the Wolf, the one with the famously large eyes, ears and teeth.

The Wolf in the Bed

One would be hard-pressed to find a person in the modern western world who hasn't heard some version of the tale. A little girl ventures from home on a journey through the woods, to bring food and drink to her ailing grandmother. Along the way she meets the Wolf, and as he is friendly to her, she tells him where she is going. He takes a swifter path to the grandmother's house while the girl dallies on the road, tricks his way into the house, devours the grandmother and takes her place in the bed. When the girl arrives, she joins her "grandmother" in the bed and is soon eaten in turn. The Charles Perrault version, "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge", does not approach the happy resolution familiar to readers of other versions of the tale. There is no valiant Huntsman to slit open the Wolf's belly and release the girl and the old lady – the Wolf eats the girl, as described by the definitive, cutting preterite "mangea", and the curtain falls.

The Red Riding Hood story is easy pickings for anyone on the lookout for potential sexual symbolism, with its tender young girl diverted from her intended path by the influence of a pleasant-seeming masculine character, only to meet with what amounts to a violent defloration in the most positive versions of the plot, violently consumed by one male force and just as violently liberated by another. The color of her cloak evokes blood in contexts both sexual and fatal; in Perrault's tale, her superlative girlish prettiness is stressed[47], and the whole thing reaches its climax in bed, where the girl greets the wolf/grandmother's nudity and hirsuteness with much interest, but no immediate fear; my

[47] She is described as "une petite fille du Village, la plus jolie qu'on eût su voir" (*Contes* 41), and the moral lesson appended to the story highlights the perils faced by "de jeunes enfants/Surtout de jeunes filles/Belles, bien faites, et gentilles" (44).

copy of the French story bears a late 19th century illustration by Épinal of the girl in bed with the wolf, unafraid, propped on one elbow and holding the beast's paw with her free hand, looking positively flirtatious. She and the Wolf are enjoying that *jouissance* of terror and spinning it out for as long as they can. Her exclamations at the size of the Wolf's body parts, leading up to the jaws that will eat her, work perfectly to make small children squeal in anticipation; a great many adults, and too many creators of pulp horror fiction and *louche* sex comedies, see this scene as the teasing foreplay before the sexual act. How big it is, and how big they are, indeed[48].

The scene is also a great aid in understanding Cixous' "seule pensée invivable," that feeling of pleasure in hanging on the precipice between safety and danger. She does, however, have a problem with the scene, and it is a problem of foreknowledge.

> Quand on nous raconte cette histoire... nous avons horreur de la grand-mère dans le lit, parce que nous savons que c'est le loup. Ceci n'est pas juste selon la vérité de l'amour. La vérité de l'amour c'est les-deux-à-la-fois : d'un côté en tant que petits chaperons rouges, nous nous précipitons dans la gueule du loup, nous pensons que c'est notre grand-mère, mais elle n'est pas une pure grand-mère, et nous aimons de plus la grand-mère-loup, qu'elle est le loup, car aimer une grand-mère gâteau c'est facile, mais de l'autre côté voilà que cette loup-grand-mère qui dévore tout le monde fait une exception, ne nous mange pas... Il n'y a pas d'amour plus grand que

[48] A fine modern purveyor of this material is the late Angela Carter, whose "The Company of Wolves" is a specifically lycanthropic version of Red Riding Hood, wherein the handsome huntsman *is* the wolf. The story ends with the girl in a post-coital sleep "between the paws of the tender wolf" (*Bloody Chamber* 118). Neil Jordan's curious 1984 film of the story muddies the waters with clumsy symbolism and overt references to Freud, but keeps this moment intact. Other lustful cinematic lycanthropes are cruder in their pursuits – the big bad wolf of Joe Dante's *The Howling* (1981) is also a wanted rapist and murderer, and attacks the film's heroine in a porn store video booth.

> l'amour que le loup porte à l'agneau-qu'il-ne-mange-pas. (*L'amour du loup* 31-32)

Those experiencing the tale are informed well in advance that the "grandmother" in the bed is not what she seems. Since Red is given no such caveat, the moment is a notable example of the basic structure of a suspense scene (the audience is provided with information that the characters lack and desperately need), but that perspective blocks us from the full impact of the erotic implications. If we superimpose Red's limited vision over our own reader's omniscience, we see Cixous' nexus of love and death at play, and get more clarification as to what makes the situation a desirable one.

Children listening to the story do not draw their pleasure from the fact that Red Riding Hood is eaten, or even from the version-dependent fact of her ultimate survival. Their pleasure comes from that long moment in which the Wolf could eat her, and yet does not. This goes beyond the pleasing agony of waiting for the rollercoaster car to crest the hill, or the jack-in-the-box to pop out on its spring. This is a feeling of being chosen, "élue", to use Cixous' own word. In Red's place in that bed, I am at the mercy of an animal legendary for its people-eating tendencies, and yet it chooses not to eat me... *yet*. My earlier example of parasitic interdependency gains an additional complication here, which transforms the cycle of need into a cycle of desire. A tapeworm only holds back from consuming its host entirely because to do so would mean its death; the Wolf chooses to show restraint when he could swallow the girl outright, and love is born out of that choice.

> Le loup est la vérité de l'amour, sa cruauté, ses crocs, ses griffes, notre aptitude à la férocité. L'amour c'est quand tout d'un coup on se réveille

> cannibale, et pas n'importe comment, ou bien promis à la dévoration. Mais le bonheur c'est quand un vrai loup ne nous mange pas. L'éclat de rire de l'agneau c'est être sur le point d'être dévoré, et alors, à la dernière seconde, ne pas être mangé. On imagine l'alléluia. Avoir failli être mangé et ne pas avoir été mangé, c'est le triomphe de la vie. Mais il faut les deux instants, juste avant les dents et juste après, il faut entendre claquer les mâchoires sur rien, pour qu'il y ait jubilation. Même le loup est surpris. (33)

In sum, then, love in *L'amour du loup* is a contract between two forces that must by necessity bring each other to destruction, agreeing to forestall the inevitable for as long as possible, imbuing each half of the relationship with the double *jouissance* of escaping the clutches of death, and of sparing another from the same grip. To refer again to Cixous' wolf-lamb dyad (with Red Riding Hood being the lamb, of course), that choice to not destroy has the effect of arousing in one half of the pair the qualities of the other. In fact, the one becomes the other, and reverts, and becomes again, over and over.

There is not as much irony in the love between wolf and lamb as might be supposed. In the first place, the wolf must fall in love with the lamb because, since love is at root an act of consumption, it must fall for something it wants to consume. If the lamb wasn't so potentially delicious, where would the attraction be? "Pour nous, manger et être mangé appartiennent au secret terrible de l'amour. Nous n'aimons que la personne que nous pouvons manger. La personne que nous haïssons nous ne pouvons pas «l'avaler». Elle nous fait vomir. La personne que nous aimons nous ne rêvons que de la manger" (34).

The wolf, by refusing to eat the lamb, demonstrates the gentle manner associated

with the lamb, and so becomes tender and defenseless before it. And the lamb, cheating death and finding the wolf curled at its feet, finds its own wolfish strength. Each then sees the qualities it knows and respects manifested in the other, and by recognizing itself in the other, feels love for it: "L'agneau aime la fragilité du loup, et le loup aime la force du frêle" (40). And, most importantly, this dance must take place in isolation, exclusively *à deux*. The delicate *va-et-vient* between the lovers, on which their lives depend, must not be exposed to the scrutiny of any third party whose incredulity, as quoted above, would destroy the invisible glass god that the beloved is to the lover, fragile enough to be shattered by the slightest blow. As they shift back and forth between stalker and quarry, predator and prey, lovers must refrain from devouring each other completely, they must keep their silence, and they must wall themselves off from any who might disrupt their system, so delicate as to almost be an extended conjuring trick. Should a skeptic or a rival persist in interfering, they must be banished, trumped, or eliminated.

Dead, Defiled, Diabolical

Back to "Le Bonheur dans le crime," where the zoo scene shows the Cixousian love paradigm behaving as it ought to. It is interesting to note that the two stories preceding it seem to show this same system malfunctioning, and fatally in one case. In the first, "Le Rideau cramoisi," old Brassard recounts the love story of his youth, and it perfectly represents the idea of necessary silence, of love as something that is literally unspeakable, and something quasi-magical that must be hidden. The text establishes him as a young man given to some fancies, parading in his military finery for no one but himself, and

comparing the story's beautiful girl to a work of art just as the narrator of "Le Bonheur dans le crime" will do (he relates Alberte, his paramour, to a painting by Velasquez). The two of them are forced to keep their love affair very quiet for reasons of physical necessity (so that her parents, who are renting him his room, will not hear them making love), but Brassard expresses a keen pleasure in the act of concealment, in a way that could have appeared in L'amour du loup: "Je compris le bonheur de ceux qui se cachent. Je compris la jouissance du mystère dans la complicité, qui, même sans l'espérance de réussir, ferait encore des conspirateurs incorrigibles" (*Les Diaboliques* 73). But love's engulfing, murderous nature moves from concept into concrete fact as Alberte dies mid-coitus, and Brassard must flee into the night to escape the wrath of her family; in the present of the story he has decayed into dandyhood, his capacity for love taken to the grave with his dead lover[49].

The second story, "Le Plus Bel Amour de Don Juan," takes a wryer approach to an instance of excessive communication and lack of secrecy doing the damage. Asked by a circle of aged admirers (all of whom would willingly submit to his advances) to describe the greatest love he ever inspired, the old scoundrel relates a tale that reads more like a nasty joke – his proudest passionate conquest was a virginal young girl whom he never touched, but who was so frightened by his libidinous reputation that after sitting in his recently vacated armchair, she believed herself impregnated.

Hauteclaire and Savigny, the otherworldy couple cut off from *les foules* and coded

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[49] Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* remark upon this moment as emblematic of the unanswered, unanswerable question at the heart of the novella as a literary form: *what happened?* "That is the question, not only because it is really not known what the cold young woman just died from, but also because it will never be known why she gave herself to the petty officer, or how the third party-savior, here the colonel of the regiment, was able to arrange things" (193). Their description of the novella as a form in which the reader's questions are directed at an unknowable past event, leads naturally to trauma theory and to psychoanalysis, which will come to the forefront in the next chapter.

more as divine works of art than as people show evidence of the reflected attributes that would allow each one to fall prey to the other, to hold sway over the other, to see and love her/himself reflected in the other. A literal beast appears, one that mirrors aspects of the both of them. As Hauteclaire approaches the cage with beastly audacity, and the panther reacts to her with human humility, we see the interchange of love between them, capped off with a physical penetration and a cry of release. Given the couple's subsequent blissful behavior, it seems likely that what we have just witnessed is a metaphor for the incredible sex going on between them behind closed doors; it will not be the only such event in the story. The zoo scene is the crystallized end result of the narrative Torty is about to reveal.

The kernel at the center of Hauteclaire and Savigny's love story is a basically tawdry one. The two met and fell in love when the count already had a countess at his side, and in fine adulterous tradition, they conspired to do away with her, with Hauteclaire infiltrating the house disguised as a servant called Eulalie, and slowly poisoning the wife to death[50]. After the expected proper mourning period, the two marry and live in the château, ostracized by the community and quite unbothered by it, lost in the luxury of their grand love affair. This affair fits the above paradigm to the letter, couched in silence, subterfuge and isolation, and laced with mutual violence that leads to mutual adoration.

Hauteclaire Stassin is a bundle of mystery and contrasts from her childhood as described by Torty. Raised by an old soldier who began teaching her the skills of swordplay as soon as she could stand upright, she spends her young adulthood building

[50] Perhaps not so slowly – a rumor reaches Torty's ears that Eulalie, possibly by accident, confused her vials and fed her mistress a bottle of ink in place of her medicine.

renown as a peerless fencer, and instructing the young gentlemen of the area in *l'art de l'escrime*; it is in the course of these classes that she and the count come together. One must notice the extreme levels of concealment about her at all times, in every facet of her life.

It would be an understatement to say that she is not forthcoming with her fellow citizens, not given to mingle. She only interacts with men when teaching them to manipulate a sword, and she is even less of a presence with the feminine element; as much as the other young ladies are fascinated by her, she will not deign to talk with them. Indeed, both men and women are hard-pressed to even say what she looks like, apart from her legendary beauty – in her classes, in the chapel, virtually everywhere that can be, she is covered from head to toe and fully masked. She hides her face behind thick veils in public, and behind a protective mask in the fencing arena. Torty's analysis of her reasons for this behavior should set a few mental bells ringing with regard to Cixous' invisible glass god:

> ...cette fille bloquée, pendant des années, par ses leçons, au fond d'une salle d'armes, et qui, aperçue de loin, à cheval ou à l'église, portait des voiles qu'elle épaississait à dessein, — car Hauteclaire (je vous l'ai dit) avait toujours cette fierté des êtres très fiers, que trop de curiosité offense, et qui se cachent d'autant plus qu'ils se sentent la cible de plus de regards. (139)

Already, even before being caught up in the cycle of the wolf, Hauteclaire is protecting herself against that observation, that "incrédulité", that could destroy her idea of herself. She makes her living with a cutting weapon, and proofs herself totally against

any kind of penetration, optic or verbal or mental, until she connects with Savigny. Her next action, once in love: to disappear, fall off the map, and resurface in the château as Eulalie the domestic, to busy herself with the countess' poisoning and continue hiding herself from any visitors who might recognize her (though Torty, obviously, is not fooled). The count himself acts as admirably as a husband in his position should, keeping a vigil at his ailing wife's bedside, mourning her in the ideal and expected manner, and keeping his passions with Hauteclaire almost entirely offstage. On a textual level, the reader's presence makes this necessary; is a reader of the details of a love story not the ultimate destructive outside observer?

Torty has occasion to wonder about what kind of feelings the murderous lovers can have for each other, before and after the act, especially when they so plainly choose to stay in the area touched by their crime, rather than fleeing to some distant paradise to start afresh. Shut up in that great house, surrounded by scorn, with only occasional jaunts to Paris to liven things up, what can it be that keeps them together? Torty gets a forbidden glimpse of the answer mid-story, before the countess has expired; what he sees in another cloaked sex scene, verging on pornographic, that points the way toward Hauteclaire's encounter with the panther, and provides the mutual violence of the Cixous paradigm.

In brief, he sees the two of them fencing through the window one night, but the text allows the scene to unfold as teasingly as a sexual encounter witnessed by an enraptured peeping tom. It begins with noises of exertion drawing his attention, noises he compares to those of a housewife beating a carpet... so, rhythmic beating, panting and grunting, one may assume. As he draws nearer, the sounds of metal against metal tell him what he is

hearing, and the carnal charge persists as the sounds are described in a sexual tangle of reflexive verbs:

> C'était un cliquetis d'épées qui se croisent, et se frottent, et s'agacent... J'entendais, à ne pouvoir m'y méprendre, le froissement animé du fer. Une idée me passa dans l'esprit; mais, quand je débouchai du bois de sapins du château, blêmi par la lune, et dont une fenêtre était ouverte:
> « — Tiens! — fis-je, admirant la force des goûts et des habitudes, — voilà donc toujours leur manière de faire l'amour!» (149)

Torty has his duplicitous patients down exactly, and knows that what he is hearing is, bluntly, the two of them screwing each other's brains out; the violent sport is a round of vigorous sex, with a *froissement* of iron rather than linen, and *frottage* occurring between blades and not erogenous zones. And this is all coming to Torty through the ear. When he gets close enough to the fencing pavilion to see the pair of them, the animalistic interchange of the relationship explodes in his face. There they stand, both male and female[51], clothed yet nude like the velvet panther, and magnificent. At such moments, as at the zoo, we are privileged to see them as they see each other, all violence and veneration:

> Hauteclaire était vêtue, si cela s'appelle vêtue, comme je l'avais vue tant de fois, donnant ses leçons à V..., lacée dans ce gilet d'armes de peau de chamois qui lui faisait comme une cuirasse, et les jambes moulées par ces

[51] They are, of course, wearing fencing garments, which not only cover the face but pad and flatten the body so as to render masculine and feminine contours largely indistinguishable. This nudity that is not nudity calls to mind Bisclavret's clothes, the removal of which was also a covering, a revelation of his truth and a concealment of it at the same time. Another form of the monstrous/erotic *va-et-vient*; "Bisclavret" depicted the switching of positions between monster and human, theorized above in Cixous' examination of the mingling roles of consumer/consumed, destroyer/destroyed. And here, as Hauteclaire and Savigny make love with their blades, even the distinction between male and female is an impossible one to make.

> chausses en soie qui en prenaient si juste le contour musclé. Savigny portait à peu près le même costume. Sveltes et robustes tous deux, ils apparaissaient sur le fond lumineux, qui les encadrait, comme deux belles statues de la Jeunesse et de la Force. Vous venez tout à l'heure d'admirer dans ce jardin l'orgueilleuse beauté de l'un et de l'autre, que les années n'ont pas détruite encore. Eh bien! Aidez-vous de cela pour vous faire une idée de la magnificence du couple que j'apercevais alors, à ce balcon, dans ces vêtements serrés qui ressemblaient à une nudité. (150-51)

The reversed chronology of the story makes the lycanthropic dimension of "Le Bonheur dans le crime" come clear upon a second reading, when one returns to the panther cage at the Jardin des Plantes after learning of this unearthly couple's violent sexuality and criminal past. These two magnetic, attractive people have been caught up in a consumptive, transformative cycle of love, wherein one is in constant (and rather delicious) danger of being devoured by the beast; by riding this tempest with success, the other woman who became the wife has effected a metamorphosis into a dazzling, intimidating feline beauty, who must go to the zoo to confront and vanquish the only true threat to her power, and so keep the wheels turning. The beastly nature of this love, of all love, is what allows this woman and man to skate over any sort of remorse for the life they have taken, and live a life of luxuriant, unrepentant *bonheur* in the wake of their crime. Let it not be said that love is a thing for the faint of heart.

A Cinematic Coda

Film readers may hear some of the above chords being played in *Cat People*, the 1942 film from Jacques Tourneur that was producer Val Lewton's studio-mandated entry[52] in the horror subgenre of the werewolf film, only two years after Lon Chaney Jr. appeared in, and as, *The Wolf Man*. *Cat People*, based on a story by DeWitt Bodeen, claims no direct textual relation to Barbey d'Aurevilly or "Le Bonheur dans le crime", but both stories revolve around enigmatic, beautiful women and their contentious relationships with big black cats in urban zoos.

Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon) first appears to the audience as Hauteclaire did, standing in rapt contemplation before a caged panther, wrapped in a velvety black coat. She is sketching the cat, though she refuses to show her work to Oliver Reed (Kent Smith), the blandly handsome young man who soon finds himself invited up to her apartment for tea. The script establishes Irena's virginity and forecasts her erotic dysfunction in the way it introduces us to where she lives – her apartment, to which she has never brought a man before, is adjacent to the zoo, and at night she can hear the panther screaming "like a woman," which she does not like. Irena and Oliver are soon married, and a cloud descends as soon as they return home as man and wife. She is unable to consummate the marriage, for lycanthropic reasons. The lycanthrope does not hide behind words or associations in this story; my perceived subtext in "Le Bonheur dans le crime" is plain and simple text in *Cat People*. Irena comes from a village in

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[52] Studio heads made a habit of handing Lewton lurid titles around which to craft sensational, cheap B-pictures, and he just as reliably gave them quiet psychological thrillers with depth and character, spiked with his trademark jump scares, or "buses", so named after this film's encounter in the Central Park transverse. Apart from *Cat People*, see also *I Walked With A Zombie*, a dreamlike story of voodoo and colonial decay spun from a ripped-from-the-trash-tabloids title.

Serbia, whose ancestors were said to have made a pact with dark forces to protect their home from marauding Turks, and gained the ability to transform into monstrous cats. Irena will not make love to her husband, or even allow him to kiss her, out of fear that any strong emotion will cause her to shapeshift into a panther and stalk human prey. This apparent neurosis drives her to the couch of crooked psychiatrist Dr. Judd (Tom Conway), and Oliver toward a warmer relationship with steady pal and confidante Alice Moore (Jane Randolph). Irena is able to restrain herself from sex, but jealousy proves harder to resist, and in the film's two most famous scenes she stalks Alice through the city in feline form, unseen by the camera, her presence conveyed through camera work and a careful orchestration of silence, shadow and well-timed growls. Alienated from husband and friends, and sexually pressured by Dr. Judd's grossly unethical couchside manner, she finally gives in to her rage and transforms in his office; having killed him, she returns to the zoo, opens the panther's cage and allows it to knock her to her death as it jumps free, only to be run over by a car. The film's final shot shows her dead on the pavement, as a panther, with the blade of Judd's sword cane sticking out of her side.

The tragedy of Irena the cat woman is that Cixous' metaphoric play becomes her literal truth. For her, the fact of love *does* transform her into a raging beast, and she has no equal to play against her, no one to share her secret language or combat her ferocity. No one can love her and live. The man she loves, and in whom she sees herself and her own mortality, is certain to die at her claws; the only character in the film who can possibly contend with her is that panther at the zoo. The film returns her and us to the zoo at regular intervals, and she makes some significant trips there between the happy first and the tragic last. She visits the cage early on to dispose of a dead pet – Oliver has given

her a canary (after the kitten he tried to give her first had a bad reaction to her), and the bird has died of fright at her touch... rather than bury it, she feeds it to the panther. Later, on a bleak day, she is joined there by Dr. Judd, who talks with her about the death drive and the nuance between mind and soul[53]. On both of these visits, the friendly zookeeper has absent-mindedly left the key to the panther's cage in the lock, and Dr. Judd cannily remarks on what a temptation she must have felt to steal it; still later, she goes back to the cage and does steal the key, preparing the way for her own death. That key works as phallically for her as the swallowed glove did for Hauteclaire, providing the release she craves. Irena, sadly, has not got the resources or the backup to cheat death and leave the panther's realm in triumph. She opens the panther's cage, in fulfillment of the "psychological need to loose evil upon the world" spoken of by Judd, and crumples dead from a penetrating wound and a blow from the animal whose womanish screams upset her in the night.

She meets a less definite end in the film's lurid, hyper-sexual 1982 remake, directed by Paul Schrader and replete with sultry New Orleans atmosphere and a theme song by David Bowie. This version of *Cat People*, heavy with mood and full of nudity and gore, makes no bones about the messier aspects of the story, and celebrates all of the perverse

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[53] *Cat People* stands out for its willingess to engage with psychoanalysis, certainly not the norm in film at the time. Though positioned and marketed as a scary story about werecats, it's really a sad film about the dissolution of a sexless marriage, with a lashing of the supernatural for flavor. According to film historian David J. Skal, this cerebral quality came about through a minimizing of the original idea for the film, which would have situated it closer to the traditional horror topography the final result moves away from: "In Lewton's first treatment, a Nazi Panzer division invades a Balkan village. The inhabitants put up no immediate resistence [sic]. They don't have to – at night they are able to transform into giant werecats and kill their oppressors. Lewton imagined a village girl fleeing to New York, and taking the cat-people curse with her" (Skal 219-20). Moving the werecat ancestors into the unglimpsed past, along with Irena's European origins, makes the "cat-people curse" an evocative story element rather than a piece of observed narrative fact. This allows *Cat People*, as well as the Mérimée texts in the next chapter, to satisfy Todorov's definition of the *fantastique*: an outlandish sequence of events with a rational explanation that does not fully suffice, but which cannot be discounted. The fantastic must always end with room for doubt an implied question mark as to the veracity of the story's supernatural content, even if the question is already settled in the reader's mind.

possibilites only implied in 1942. Irena Gallier, now an orphan played by Nastassja Kinski, is reunited with a long-lost brother called Paul (Malcolm McDowell), whose job is to outline the mythos of the cat people to her and serve as villain for the first part of the film. In screenwriter Alan Ormsby's update of the rules of their kind, once sex or rage has forced a cat person to transform, they can only resume human form by killing. Paul is glad to have found Irena, for as the last of the cat people, they are able to have safe sex with each other, incest be damned. Before he can broach the subject with her, he hires a prostitute but fails to kill her, and winds up in a holding cell at the zoo, where he becomes the panther that Irena observes and sketches. He gets to observe, too, as Irena catches the eye of Oliver (John Heard), now the curator of the zoo, who offers her a job and will eventually take her to bed. The feminine rivalry of the Tourneur film has become a masculine one[54], and the excluded Paul is thoroughly vanquished in due time, only for Irena to give in to her sexual urges and become the beast in turn. Once she has killed and regained human form, she begs for Oliver to kill her. When he cannot bring himself to do it, she comes closer to a realization of the love cycle than Simone Simon's Irena did, in what may even be a happy ending, depending on one's point of view. Oliver ties her to the bed and makes love to her again, and she takes up residence in the panther cage recently vacated by her brother. She sits and watches as Oliver falls into a safe relationship with fellow zookeeper Alice (Annette O'Toole)[55], and occasionally gives her a tidbit of meat and a wistful scratch on the head.

The taboo of the virgin makes itself felt again in both films: the tragedy of the cat-

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[54] Irena does have a rival for Oliver in this version, but that dynamic is reduced in importance; see next note.

[55] O'Toole does well in her update of the Jane Randolph role, but the movie seems to forget about her once she's played through revamped versions of the original's iconic stalking scenes. And since John Heard plays a much more complex and interesting Oliver than Kent Smith did, there's simply less for her to do.

women may be read as one of bottomless rage that exceeds any attempt to defuse it through defloration, and so renders the women perpetually virginal, unable to weave themselves into society's fabric. Any attempt at integration with the larger world, at sexual normalization, results in transformation and murder. Significantly, each film does tease its beleaguered cat-woman with a potential way out of the sex/death trap, but an unacceptable one for her. At the celebratory dinner for her marriage, Simone Simon's Irena meets a mysterious lady in a fur coat (Elizabeth Russell), who greets her as "my sister" in her native language. Irena will have none of her, and protects herself with the sign of the cross. Marked as a cat person by her furs and her feline demeanor, the lady's overture to Irena is also coded as a lesbian invitation, due in no small part to the fact of its delivery at Irena and Oliver's wedding banquet[56]. Kinski's Irena will face a less clear-cut choice. Schrader's film does include a somewhat unsuccessful[57] transplant of the "my sister" scene (relocated to a bar where Irena and Alice are enjoying an after-work cocktail), but Heard's Oliver is far from the all-American straight arrow played by Kent Smith: somewhat awkward and intellectual, and quietly yearning for a woman to be obsessed with (we find him reciting Dante as he finishes a day at the zoo, a deliberate choice by Schrader to set up Irena as a modern-day Beatrice to be worshiped). Given the

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[56] Cf. James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* from 1935, which contains a thread of homosexual menace lacking in the 1931 original, in the person of Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger), disgraced former teacher of Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive), whom he persuades to resume his experiments and create a mate for Boris Karloff's Creature. Pretorius is heavily implied to be an effete gay man, a sly slap in the face from the openly gay Whale to the restrictive morality of Hollywood's Breen Office; his first appearance in the film is a sneering incursion into the bridal chamber on Henry's wedding night, "[sweeping] into Henry Frankenstein's bedchamber, bitchily banishing the young man's bride and tempting him with the promise of an alternative way to create life" (Skal 189). The film's original scripted ending would have seen this condemnation of heterosexual relations brought to a peak, with the killing of Elizabeth (Valerie Hobson), the new Baroness Frankenstein, and the transplant of her heart into the Bride (Elsa Lanchester). As released, *Bride* ends with the young couple alive and well, and Pretorius' "alternative way" blown to bits when the Creature destroys the laboratory.

[57] Unsuccessful in that the presence of another cat-woman takes the urgency out of the incest storyline, at least on Paul's side of the matter… though it does make his fixation on Irena even more threatening and perverse, if he is rejecting the possibility of non-incestuous satisfaction to pursue her.

choice between bestiality, in the role of the animal, and incest that will allow her to retain her humanity, she chooses to live on as an exhibit. Perhaps out of revulsion at the thought of killing… or perhaps because Oliver has told her plainly that he prefers the company of animals to people[58].

Something has happened to lycanthropy in the centuries since "Bisclavret," on the level of agency and intent, and in tandem with society's move from the wolf-haunted forests to the cities. The beast has retained the wildness that made it feared, the exclusion from society's strictures that led it to be branded a menace. Yet in "Le Bonheur dans le crime," and to an extend in the *Cat People* films, what was once a curse has become a useful faculty. These texts are steeped in the fatal sexual dynamic described by Cixous. To make love, to simply feel love, is to brush against death. Hauteclaire and Savigny's union is stained with the blood of the murdered wife; the two lovers come together, first on the sly and later in romantic exile, under the aegis of violence. Irena's sexual passion will lead her to literally kill the man who has aroused it in her. The beast's role in these situations, it seems, is one of surrogacy, as was the role of the proxy husband or artificial phallus in Freud's taboo of the virgin: to take the place of a more fragile entity in a perilous situation. No longer an outside menace that makes frightening incursions into the human realm, the beast is now a resident of the human characters, embedded in the fact of love itself, and ready to take the reins when needed. Within "Bonheur," it is the literal cat at the Jardin des Plantes that allows the passionate relationship of Hauteclaire and Savigny to be perceived, and the inner bloodthirsty animal that guides them through their murder and its aftermath, while keeping their visible erotic life alive through violence;

[58] As if Bisclavret, rather than biting off his wife's nose and earning back his human shape, had decided to enjoy his circumstances and live out his days as the king's favored pet. Given *her* circumstances, Irena cannot be blamed for bidding farewell to life as a human.

the cat and the lovers' catlike behaviors and appearances stand in for what Barbey d'Aurevilly cannot or will not express explicitly, seething passion that leads to killing. In the films, Freud's taboo is crystallized on screen; when either Irena is menaced by lust for a man, and the denial of the penis that comes with it, the panther takes over her body to carry out the vengeance that the ancient proxy-phalluses were employed to forestall.

Bisclavret's werewolf curse was a thing to be endured once a month; for these characters, the feline aspect of the beast is something to be taken advantage of, consciously or no. From a wolf-man banished to the woods by a deceitful wife, we have come to modern cat-people incorporating their beastliness into their urbane environments. The next chapter will combine the two scenarios, contrasting a true old-world monster legend and its attendant culture of superstition with a rational intellectual of the 19th century. Between these poles, we will find a young man hungry for the lessons and innovations of the present, but in the grip of a bestial past he fears will consume him. The central text of Chapter Three will showcase and profile a lycanthrope in detail, through the lenses of both psychology and mythology; he will be as definite a shapeshifter as Bisclavret and Irena, and once again, a new animal will make up the non-human side of his being.

Chapter Three

The Beast in the Bridal Suite: Mérimée's Conjugal Nightmares

> – Comment expliquez-vous, monsieur le professeur, me dit-il brusquement vers la fin du dîner, comment expliquez-vous la dualité ou la duplicité de notre nature?... Ne vous êtes-vous jamais trouvé au haut d'une tour ou au bord d'une précipice, ayant à la fois la tentation de vous élancer dans le vide et un sentiment de terreur absolument contraire?...
>
> – Prosper Mérimée, "Lokis"

The transgressive transformation from human to beast, portrayed as fluid, ambiguous and intersex in "Le Bonheur dans le crime," is more commonly found to fall within more rigid gender constraints. Marie de France subverts these constraints *sub rosa* in "Bisclavret," with its vicious wife and well-behaved wolf-husband, but before and after in the lore of the people, and in stories excluded from the canon for reasons of taste or talent, lycanthropy was a largely masculine business[59]. A notable example of this within the canon is Prosper Mérimée's "Lokis," which will also continue to broaden this paper's own menagerie – having dealt with examples of the feline and the lupine, we now move on to the ursine.

The story is simple, and sits comfortably among the fantastic works of such contemporaries as Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu as an antecedent to the genre that would come to be called the weird tale. A German scholar, Wittembach, travels to Lithuania to

[59] True in life as well as lore – women in pre-modern France who incurred the wrath of the Church would stand accused as witches, the men as werewolves (see introduction).

study the library of Michel Szémioth, a young count. He finds a house, Médintiltas, that lives under a cloud, due to the count's mother. Mad ever since being attacked by a bear while out hunting during her pregnancy, she denounced her child as a monster at his birth and ordered him killed on the spot. Wittembach's first encounter with Michel does prove to be an unsettling one – the apparition he sees climbing down the tree outside his window on his first night, is revealed the next morning to have been the count himself. Friendship grows between the older scholar and the young noble, the count being a reader and polyglot himself. He is involved with a young beauty and coquette, Ioulka, "une petite fille qui n'a lu que les romans" ("La Vénus d'Ille" 195), with whom he is alternately enraptured and disgusted, and not only because of her disinterest in learning and her wearying manner. He has taken his mother's madness to heart, and evinces belief that he might in fact be a beast. Wittembach observes in him a fascination with bloodshed and violent death, and notes a few worrying elements in his behavior. He judges that Michel might not be ready for marriage, to phrase it mildly, but is powerless to prevent the unfolding of the count's noble obligation. Michel and Ioulka are married, and the morning after finds him missing and her dead in the marriage bed, her throat torn out by a bite.

Two powerful psychological tropes should be apparent in "Lokis," even after this brief summary – the return to present life of a threatening repressed past, and the disparity between roles in homosocial society and heterosexual marriage. Mérimée explores both in the narrative of his werewolf (or werebear), and to a lesser degree (and in a lighter key) in another story, perhaps better known, that forms a worthy companion

piece for this one. “La Vénus d’Ille” may be regarded as the fraternal twin of "Lokis"[60]. In both stories, a scholarly protagonist journeys far from home in pursuit of enlightenment, there to encounter a wealthy family, impending nuptials, and sinister rumor. Each would-be bridegroom is reluctant or uncertain about the marriage, and each wedding ends in a violent death. "Vénus,” as might be inferred from the title, has a more significant feminine presence bound up with the story and the sense of menace. The goddess herself is the reason for the nameless scholar’s *entrée sur scène*, incarnated as an imposing bronze statue unearthed by an amateur antiquarian, Peyrehorade. His son Alphonse, the young *fiancé*, places his bride’s wedding ring on the statue’s finger in a thoughtless moment, and dooms himself – the statue will not release the ring for the ceremony, and comes to the conjugal bed to crush him to death, and frighten the new wife into insanity. Peyrehorade dies of grief some months later, and the statue is melted down and cast into a bell for the church.

The events of both stories would seem to illustrate a common theme of homosociality (approaching homoeroticism in "Lokis") in which young men’s reluctance to move beyond the male-only stage of life, into the heterosocial/sexual unions mandated by their environments, is met with violent death. Within this theme, the difference between the two stories involves the gender divide, and on which side of it the ax falls. Mérimée welcomes the reader into a universe where that gender divide is less a line than an impasse (perhaps a fault line), and flawed or presumptive attempts to cross it lead only to tragedy.

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[60] Or perhaps a reincarnation, given the space of years between the stories.

Eppur Si Muove - Venus Sets a Deadly Precedent

The supernatural in these tales, the unknowable and incomprehensible element in each that pushes the narratives to their dark ends, comes in the mantle of feminine sexuality... in the case of "La Vénus d'Ille," quite literally so. In these stories of males resisting manhood by clinging to their youthful ways (athletic games in one case, scholastic pursuits in the other), the hand that intervenes to make ripples in the water is always a woman's, and that woman cannot be said to exist as a character far (if at all) beyond her capacity to disturb. Nothing new here, after Marie de France's wife-as-termagant and Barbey's magnetic Hauteclaire, each one the only woman in a boy's club world (the queenless king and his retinue of knights, the young lady teaching the menfolk to wield their swords), and each one turning a man to a beast by seduction and guile (though not unwillingly, in the case of Barbey's count). What stands out in Mérimée's universe is the way the male perspective inflates the menace of the sexual female to a cosmic scale, radically alien, approachable only through the lenses of art or scholarship, and as dangerous as a forgotten elder deity. "Lokis" contains more fertile ground for this idea, but the simpler, more direct "Vénus d'Ille" provides a useful look at an earlier version of it[61].

Dark portents fly thick and fast as soon as the titular Venus is unearthed in an olive grove – Mérimée's text evokes the return of the dead to the waking world (the statue's protruding hand is thought to be that of a corpse), the dread of foreign and heathen cultures (the statue is not described as such, but as "une grande femme noire plus qu'à

[61] "Vénus" has much more of the *conte* about it than "Lokis," and has some of the feel of a campfire tale; the later story treats the themes with greater gravity and psychological depth.

moitié nue" [32], and repeatedly as "une idole"), and the capricious violence of the gods of antiquity (the goddess' first "act" is to break a man's leg by falling on it). There is also an undeniable sexual flavor to this first description of the bronze lady, and a confusing one; the peasant who helped to dig her out is quick to debunk the scholar's idea that she might be "[q]uelque bonne Vierge en bronze d'un couvent détruit" (33), and yet just as quick to assure him that she is intact, that "il ne lui manque rien" (ibid.). She is no Virgin, and thus no virgin; yet she is also inviolate, "entière, bien conservée" (ibid.), and her first action after being born from the earth is to lay low a man who, we are told in short order, is also an excellent athlete. She is endowed with the carnal experience of Aphrodite on top of the renewing chastity of Hera, and her attack on the unfortunate Jean Coll echoes that of Artemis upon Actaeon, whose only crime was lingering too long after happening upon her by chance. After less than a page's presence in the story, this Venus is already a catalogue of antique feminine threat from on high, and the scholar hasn't even seen her in "person" yet.

Of the mortals who will suffer her malice, it cannot pass notice that only the women share the statue's connection with the supernatural in any way[62]; the menfolk would be hard-pressed to be more down-to-earth than they already are. M. de Peyrehorade, lord of the manor, is an acquisitive would-be antiquarian who approaches the remains of antiquity with a collector's eye, almost as a salesman pitching "his" Venus to the scholar. He makes no attempt to shroud the financial motivations behind his son's

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[62] Mme de Peyrehorade is the voice of superstition in the house, whose words of caution to her husband about the statue (and the flawed wisdom of holding the wedding of Venus' day, Friday) go unheard. The bride, Mlle de Puygarrig, is presented as a lovely, mute sacrificial lamb (the narrator lingers over the cutting-up and distributing of her garter among the young male guests at the wedding feast), absent at the story's beginning as she is in mourning (women also having to do all the spiritual lifting for funerals), and going to her marriage bed at the end as "la plus honnête fille du monde livrée au Minotaure!" (53)

This evocation of the Minotaur will be one of several elements of "Vénus" that returns in "Lokis" with greater heft and darker significance.

nuptials and treats all aspects of the union, up to and including arrangements for the couple's first night together, as necessary transactions to be gotten out of the way... which would have to be especially galling to a resident avatar of the patronesses of love, sex and marriage[63]. When the nuit de noces arrives, the new father-in-law's crass behavior extends to a graceless comparison between la mariée and the statue as two Venuses under his roof: "Mon fils, choisis de la Vénus romaine ou de la catalane celle que tu préfères... La romaine est noire, la catalane est blanche. La romaine est froide, la catalane enflamme tout ce qui l'approche" (51). What with the fate of so many mythic cities and characters after such mortal boastings, one can hardly be surprised at the result of this one; considering that an insult to a goddess' beauty led to the sacking of Troy, one might even find the family to have gotten off easily.

Alphonse is as much the salt of the earth as his father, handsome and stylish, but coarse and visibly unconcerned with the anticipated benefits of his handsomeness and style; he will go on to disgust the narrator with his vulgarity and drunkenness on the wedding night. His chief concern at all times is to get back to playing *paume* – the narrator is careful to note that Alphonse's hands[64] are the one part of him to belie his *chic* outfit, "grosses et hâlées, ses ongles courts... C'étaient des mains de laboureur sortant des manches d'un dandy" (34-35). The narrator's physical description of the young man also implies his connection/opposition to the bronze goddess, while fixing him as a domestic earthbound figure:

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[63] One moment in particular, meant to establish the house's layout for the story's climax, also contains a rather humorous reference to/dismissal of what would certainly be a landmark occasion for a young bride and many a young groom of the time. Peyrehorade explains why he has given the scholar a room at the opposite end of the hall from the bridal suite: "Vous sentez bien, ajouta-t-il d'un air qui voulait être fin, vous sentez bien qu'il faut isoler de nouveaux mariés" (37).

[64] Given Alphonse's apparent indifference to marriage and the attention drawn to his hands, it is tempting here to make a prurient reading of *paume*, the hand-based activity he can't wait to get back to with the other young men.

> Au milieu des allées et venues de ses parents, M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade *ne bougeait pas plus qu'un Terme*. C'était un grand jeune homme de vingt-six ans, d'une physionomie belle et regulière, *mais manquant d'expression*. Sa taille et ses formes athlétiques justifiaient bien la réputation d'infatigable joueur de paume qu'on lui faisait dans le pays. Il était ce soir-là habillé avec élégance, exactement d'après la gravure du dernier numéro du Journal des modes. Mais il me semblait gêné dans ses vêtements; il était roide comme un piquet dans son col de velours, *et ne se tournait que tout d'une pièce*[65]. (34)

It is hardly unusual for an author to describe an attractive character as he would a fine piece of sculpture, but in a story where a statue already bears such ominous weight, one must pay extra attention to any further statuary. Alphonse is no mere statue as he stands still amid the rushings of his family; he is "un Terme," a boundary god designated to preserve the sanctity of a household and the safety of its members... so, a doubly immovable statue, one not only unable to move, but unable to be moved. In addition, his planes and shapes are fine and regular, but stiff and expressionless. His statue status signals a connection with the unearthed Venus, and in the same gesture prophesies his domination and destruction by her; not only is she larger, but the descriptions of her are laced with paradoxical hints of *motion*, first implied by the position of her hand in the ground (as if she were digging herself out, reaching for help), then backed up by actual movement as she cripples Jean Coll. *En plus*, when narrator and reader finally get an extended look at her in the light of day, she can even be said, in a manner of speaking, to

[65] Italics mine.

speak.

She certainly possesses what is sometimes called a speaking face. She has none of the expressionless immobility of the classical Grecian statues evoked in Alphonse's portrait, none of those calm and graceful lines:

> Ici, au contraire, j'observais avec surprise l'intention marquée de l'artiste de rendre la malice arrivant jusqu'à la méchanceté. Tous les traits étaient contractés légèrement : les yeux un peu obliques, la bouche relevée des coins, les narines quelque peu gonflées. Dédain, ironie, cruauté, se lisaient sur ce visage d'une incroyable beauté cependant...
>
> «Si le modèle a jamais existé, dis-je à M. de Peyrehorade, et je doute que le ciel ait jamais produit une telle femme, que je plains ses amants!...» (40)

The level of expression in the goddess' face is uncanny, in every sense, and serves to continue the feminine affiliation with *motion* that passes from subtext into text by means of the inscriptions on her body and plinth.

These words in Latin are the focus of a half-amusing, half-foreboding scene of linguistic discussion between the scholar and the *parvenu* Peyrehorade, whose enthusiasm for the language outstrips his ability with it. A bit of dedicatory writing on her arm, partly effaced by the elements, provides for one difference of opinion. The amateur is desperate to read her incomplete dedication, VENERI TVRBVL..., as the remains of an antique toponym, Turbulnera, and runs through a ludicrous etymological obstacle course (encompassing the Romans, the Greeks and the Phoenicians) to claim her as the local goddess of the nearby village of Boulternère. The scholar takes the path of least resistance and greatest logic, and guesses the unfinished line to be Venus Turbulenta,

Venus the Troublemaker, a fitting epithet for a divinity with such a threatening face... and with the handy additional connotation of sudden, violent movement. His hypothesis is shot down, naturally – Peyrehorade won't have *his* Venus being thought of as *that* kind of Venus: "Ah! vous croyez donc que ma Vénus est une Vénus de cabaret? Point du tout, monsieur; c'est une Vénus de bonne compagnie" (42).

The more ominous inscription, and the shorter one, is found on the plinth of the statue: CAVE AMANTEM. The accusative object *amans* allows for some ambiguity, so the scholar proposes two translations. The first, and the one Peyrehorade prefers (after some equally tortuous mental acrobatics involving the god Vulcan) is "beware those who love you". He would read the verse as a warning to *coquettes*, lest their ways land them with an ugly brute of a husband. The scholar is inclined to prefer the second option, which is better Latin and suits her facial expression: "if *she* loves you, beware"[66](41).

The rift between the complicated, dangerous feminine and the straightforward, earthbound masculine extends even into the abstract realm of language, where the two warring sexualities are unable to communicate on any level. The feminine sexuality, embodied by Venus and respected by the women, is portrayed as a transformative heterosexual embrace that consumes the males, turning boys into men... or into corpses, if the boys lack the proper respect for it. It is the sexuality of ambiguity, mystery, life and death, wherein even words are charged with fatal meaning. This sexuality is presented as a literal foreign language to the men of the story – the Venus of Ille waits in the garden like the Sphinx, with her riddle printed across her pedestal; and the males who fail to divine the correct answer, are rewarded with death. Their masculine sexuality, such as it

[66] Italics in the original: «Prends garde à toi si *elle* t'aime.»

is, is puerile, masturbatory and homocentric. Peyrehorade treats all of his acquisitions, including both of his Venuses, as tools to impress his male colleagues and countrymen. Alphonse prefers the familiar, consequence-free *jouissance* of tossing balls back and forth with his mates to what awaits him after the feast[67]. Of the four men who play significant roles in the story (the narrator, Peyrehorade, Alphonse, Jean Coll), only the narrator escapes intact and alive, and for a reason that should be crystal-clear by the end – his respect for the sexual union between husband and wife, Venus' province:

> ... Je pensais à cette jeune fille si belle et si pure abandonnée à un ivrogne brutal. Quelle odieuse chose, me disais-je, qu'un mariage de convenance!... Deux êtres qui ne s'aiment pas, que peuvent-ils se dire dans un pareil moment, que deux amants achèteraient au prix de leur existence? Une femme peut-elle jamais aimer un homme qu'elle aura vu grossier une fois? Les premières impressions ne s'effacent pas, et j'en suis sûr, ce M. Alphonse méritera bien d'être haï... (53)

This nameless man is presented as being definitively *hors de combat* with regard to sexuality, describing himself as a "garçon" in the French euphemistic sense, a bachelor: "Je me tournais dans mon lit de mauvaise humeur. Un garçon joue un sot rôle dans une maison où s'accomplit un mariage" (ibid.). Though he may not engage in carnal relations, he recognizes in them a potency that the men of the house would reduce to a score or a punchline. His detachment makes him the only male observer able to correctly decipher the statue's riddle, and thus the only male allowed to survive.

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[67] It should be noted that Alphonse's particular reason for removing the ring and placing it on the statue is a match against a difficult opponent, a large Spaniard whom he offends, who later comes under brief suspicion of his murder, and who represents the juvenile-leaning world of *les coureurs de paume* as the real-world threat to the marriage.

The template is now set for the drama of "Lokis", which will follow similar pathways to a conclusion that is less showy than this one, but will effect a disturbance on a deeper level. The same menacing sexual energy will return, having dilated in the interval to encompass the natural world. The gender gap will be present again, causing problems across generations and across species. The problem of language will reemerge, this time as a driving force rather than one enigma of several. And all of these will once again be brought to bear (excuse me, please) upon the head of a young man on the brink of societal adulthood. However, in this iteration, the alternative will not be a comparatively innocuous life of sporting and carousal with the boys, but to follow in the tracks of the lycanthrope.

A "Wolfman" *Avant La Lettre*

The temptation of a reading of "Lokis" as it directly corresponds to "Vénus" has been noted in literary scholarship, and also been found a potentially awkward task; such a reading of the two texts, one right after the other and in the original order of publication, makes visible "tellement de points communs qu'il est à la fois confortant et embarrassant d'en faire la lecture tout de suite après" (Bellemin-Noël 161). The proximity of such a reading might do a disservice to "Lokis", allowing the many common threads to rush the reader along the path to the expected ending. However, reading "Lokis" through a reading of "Vénus", as through a transparent overlay, brings the differences of the later text into prominence.

The Mérimée of the story of the Lithuanian werebear is thirty years older than the

creator of the amorous bronze goddess, and the passage of time has weathered the shapes of the story's recycled skeleton; one might say the bones have darkened with age. A highly significant change is the reduced position of the supernatural in the narrative. Apart from a telling *rencontre* with a witch in the forest, "Lokis" contains relatively little of the mythic fantasy of "Vénus" - it persuasively grounds its monstrosity and connubial murder in psychology. Alphonse died for having offended a goddess through a thoughtless gesture. The making of Michel Szémioth's doom is rooted in a concrete series of earthly events that warp his mind (and possibly his flesh), dating from the time of his conception... which brings us into the sphere of psychoanalysis.

Sigmund Freud's case history of the protracted treatment of Sergei Pankejeff, known to history as "The Wolfman," broke considerable new ground with its controversial assertion that neurosis, with its libidinal basis, might not be restricted to adults. The text, under the extended title "From the History of an *Infantile* Neurosis" (my italics), makes the case that though children's bodies may be incapable of erotic functions, the same cannot be said of their minds, and that an adult's psychological dysfunction might be traced back to a child's traumatic confrontation with a sexuality at once powerful and incomprehensible; the childish mind applies terms and symbols it knows, masking the unfamiliar with the familiar, and the analyst's job becomes one of decoding these symbols as they survive in the memory of the adult. Pankejeff came to Freud suffering from debilitating depression, alienation and a panoply of physical complaints, including a chronic inability to defecate without the assistance of an enema. Freud was able to deduce the earliest kernel of experience at the root of Pankejeff's malaise by deciphering an especially terrifying dream of his, the dream that provided him with his

case history sobriquet: a dream in which he awoke on a winter night to see a number of wolves, motionless and white in color, perched in the tree outside his window, staring fixedly at him, seemingly on the point of pouncing on him to gobble him up.

I will not belabor the collection of elements present in Freud's deconstruction of the wolf dream, except to say that the child's mind culled them from stories in which castration images run rampant (wolves with their tails pulled off, wolves cut open, children devoured), and that a dream-reversal of a key image from one of those stories (the wolves high in the tree, not gathered below it) leads Freud to reverse other facets of the dream and guess at the reality hidden behind it. In a sense, the dream is the negative, and under analysis it develops into a positive image of a possible truth. The dream-scene of being observed in still silence thus translates into a real-life scene in which the child himself observed a scene of distressing motion and noise, the memory of which terrified him: "What was activated that night out of the chaos of unconscious traces left by a memory imprint [Eindruck] was the image of coitus between the boy's parents in conditions which were not entirely usual and which lent themselves to observation" ("Wolfman" 234). In the interval between this observation of coitus (described in Latin as both *a tergo*, "from behind," and *more ferarum*, "in the manner of beasts") at the age of eighteen months, and the wolf-dream shortly before his fourth birthday, the child has experienced his first sexual traumas (seduction/molestation by his sister, fear of masturbation-provoked castration instilled by a nanny) and developed erotic desires for his father. On the night in question, as the child anticipates receiving a double load of gifts in the very near future (as his birthday falls on Christmas), the wolf-dream reminds him that he has seen what getting the gift he most desires from his father would entail

(exchanging his penis for a vagina, which he believes to be a wound), and recoils in fright. The dream of animals caught up in unsettling human stillness, when unraveled, reveals a memory of humans caught up in their lower animal urges.

The psychological effects of the infantile witnessing of just such a parental coupling are well known and accepted to be traumatic. Indeed, this scene, the primal scene, may be said to be the original traumatic experience, impossible to apprehend at the moment of its occurrence, only comprehensible through its aftereffect (*après-coup*), as the mind forces the whole being to re-experience the event until it has been processed and assimilated... at least, as far as such assimilation is possible. The "Wolfman" case history was published some years + can claim no link to or inspiration from Freud's conception of the primal scene, or his hypothesis of observed animalistic sex manifesting as a physical/emotional disturbance in later life. But a reading of the story by a reader familiar with even the most general tenets of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and in particular those precised in "The Wolfman", cannot but be struck by the way Mérimée's plot anticipates those ideas. The Lithuanian count is a young man damaged by an incident of sexual violence in his infancy (in his very extreme infancy, on which more below), whose ability to engage with potential objects of adult sexual interest is limited and compromised. He spends much of the story engaged in intellectual, therapeutic dialogue with an older learned man, who wishes to keep him on the healthy path but can only do so much. He expresses morbid thoughts of violence against animals and humans, and on one occasion the desire to lose himself in sudden death. He suffers from dreams of cannibalistic bloodshed. He is surrounded by examples of the fatal, castrating femininity so terrifying to the Wolfman's juvenile mind. In keeping with its position as a darker

reorchestration of "Vénus," the feminine in "Lokis" will continue that story's identification of women with the supernatural, the wild, and the ambiguities of foreign language – this last point will prove important, for while the Latin inscriptions on the bronze Venus served as one dark portent among others, unknown tongues drive this narrative and carry more significant weight.

That frightening feminized force, in the guise of a bear, is the Wolf once again, provoking a masculine transformation nearly as literal as the one in "Bisclavret." Freud's white wolves merely gazed through the open window as symbols; the beast of "Lokis" makes a very real final exit through its own open window, and leaves a very real trail of blood behind itself.

Enter, Pursued By A Bear - Michel Szémioth's Primal Scene(s)

The sexual witnessing at the heart of "Lokis" distinguishes itself from the expected standard of such an event, by its means of transmission. One would expect, and indeed hope, that a child would come to come to witness parental intercourse by accident, perhaps blithely walking through the parents' bedroom door unexpected – the Wolfman himself was privy to the *a tergo* coupling because he was sleeping in a cot in their room at the time, and wakened by the noise. Michel is denied the luxury of accident in the matter of his traumatic vision, which contains actual horrific violence, for his primal scene, the moment that will consign him to his metamorphosis, is the bear's attack on his mother during her pregnancy with him, which carries the symbolic weight of a rape scene; and though he cannot be said to have "witnessed" this scene from within the uterus,

he is forced to witness it every day of his life after birth, through his mother's visible mental scarring and the event's status as something of a local legend. The transient, fugitive animality of the "expected" primal scene is a concrete reality for him, reiterated every day as his mad mother is treated like a wild creature.

The countess' attending physician, Dr. Froeber recounts the bear attack to the newly arrived Wittembach over dinner, interspersing the details of his narrative with urgings to taste this, try that, and generally fill his belly; Mérimée will continue to draw connections between food, sex and violence in an almost Hitchcockian way, beginning with this flashback. Much is made of the fact that bears tend to make off with their food rather than eat it where they find it; given the buildup and atmosphere of the countess' ursine molestation, eating and devouring retain the sexual flavor they held in Chapter Two.

> Toute la chasse accourt au point qu'il désigne; point de comtesse! Son cheval étranglé d'un côté, de l'autre sa pelisse en lambeaux. On cherche, on bat le bois en tout sens. Enfin un veneur s'écrie : Voilà l'ours! En effet l'ours traversait une clairière, traînant toujours la comtesse, surtout pour aller la dévorer tout à son aise dans un fourré, car ces animaux-là sont sur leur bouche. Ils aiment, comme les moines, à dîner tranquilles. Marié de deux jours, le comte était fort chevaleresque, il voulait se jeter sur l'ours, le couteau de chasse au poing; mais, mon cher monsieur, un ours de Lithuanie ne se laisse pas transpercer comme un cerf. (188)

In the end the count's gunbearer kills the bear with a fortuitous shot (he was blind drunk at the time, but in Froeber's words, "Il n'y a que les ivrognes pour ces coups-là"

(ibid.). The choice of the word *chevaleresque* is apt for this scene, as it plays out like a climactic moment from one of very many stories of knights, princesses and scoundrels. We have a young woman, understood to be headstrong and beautiful[68], who is abducted from the first days of wedded bliss by a rival for the possession of her flesh, and pursued by the gallant husband with flashing blade... a heady and hoary old moment, except that the rival is an animal. The countess is recovered in a condition that could indicate a rape as easily as the advances of a hungry bear; she has a broken leg, she is "fort égratignée" (188), and the examining doctors pronounce her pregnant.

Mérimée is working with an established archetype here, noted by Anne Hiller as a holdover from sources in classical antiquity. The bear lends itself easily to identification with human actions and motivations; she refers to its "qualité d'archétype thériomorphe" (Hiller 18), depicting it as animalized human (theriomorphic) rather than a humanized animal (anthropomorphic), and goes on to make explicit the sexual dimension of the attack on the countess:

> L'animal semble se présenter spontanément comme l'objet d'une assimilation symbolique: l'ours est l'animal ravisseur et joue aussi parfois le rôle d'animal dévorant, comme dans la légende d'Adonis, fils d'Aphrodite. L'enlèvement de la comtesse introduit, dans "Lokis", le thème de l'animal séducteur et, en corrélation, celui de la femme fécondée à son insu. (ibid.)[69]

A theme only given further credence by the countess' reaction to her newborn son,

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[68] "Nos dames lithuaniennes sont des Amazones, comme vous savez," winks Froeber (187).

[69] I must also make mention of Philippe Bonnefis' elegant remark on why the bear, and no other animal, is perfectly suited for a story of this type – it is the only member of the animal kingdom, outside of the primates, able to walk upright like a man.

months later, calling him “la bête” and having to be restrained from wringing his neck. This is the only mother Michel has known, insane and wild in appearance, communicating through shouts and wails, and wishing death upon him whenever she sees him. The mythic heritage bubbling around the story of the prenatal bear attack assigns him the bear as “father,” while the mother’s constant hysteria keeps this savage origin story forever in the present[70]. To compound the problem, Froeber treats her like an ill-mannered dog.

To be sure, the glimpses the reader gets of her daily treatment are hardly extraordinary in their details; we learn that she is prone to violent outbursts, some suicidal in nature, and she must be restrained to keep from hurting herself and others. But it is no accident if the descriptions of her outings and constitutionals evoke shades of the menagerie as well as the mental hospital[71]. Wittembach first observes her through his window, being escorted (unloaded might be a better word) from her carriage by the doctor and a trio of mannish women (Wittembach does indeed take one of them for a man in women’s clothing for a moment), and her demeanor reflects that of an object and that

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[70] Here we come back to the Minotaur, invoked as a symbol of a crude and boorish (or bullish) male sexual hunger in "Vénus," and now called to mind in a much more literal fashion. The myth is well known: when King Minos of Crete decides that the magnificent white bull he is meant to sacrifice to Poseidon is too fine a specimen to part with, Poseidon curses his queen Pasiphaë with lust for the animal. She bears and nurses her half-bovine offspring until he grows too fierce, at which point Daedalus constructs the Labyrinth for him to reside in, where he consumes a regular sacrifice of young men and women, and where the hero Theseus will eventually slay him.

The origin story in "Lokis" inverts some of the foundations laid by this myth: the bestial intercourse between woman and bear is presented as a violent rape instead of an infatuation, the mother does not care for the fruit of this union but condemns him from birth, and the monster-child grows into a prize of a handsome (if unusual) young man. What remains intact is the idea of beastly impregnation by an outside supernatural force, as punishment for a trespass. The Cretan queen's bull-child may be seen as collateral damage for her husband's failure to honor a contract with the God of the Sea, a grievous mistake for the head of a thalassocracy to make; the Lithuanian hunting party is stepping into a separate world away from the safe human path, a world which "Lokis" will depict as a place of pagan divinity. We seem to have come back to a version of the *forêt sauvage* of "Bisclavret"; this version is more apt to make incursions into the human world if not treated with respect. More on this later, when Michel and Wittembach take a significant walk in the woods.

[71] Recall the look at the Parisian zoological garden in the previous chapter, and how zoo attendance increased when the mental hospitals closed their doors to the public. In the eyes of the average man of the day, the differences between animals and the mentally ill were not pronounced.

of a savage creature, without passing through the human realm. She is strapped into the carriage by a leather belt, and Wittembach remarks the seeming lifelessness of her staring eyes: "on eût dit une figure de cire" (185). When the women touch her she reacts without words, only a silent panicked clinging to the carriage, from which the women "l'enlevèrent comme une plume" (ibid.).

Froeber later confirms to the professor that she must be restrained outside the house ("On est obligé de l'attacher pour lui faire prendre l'air," 188-89) – his use of the verb *attacher* cannot help but conjure up images of leashes and muzzles alongside more human-appropriate restraints. He equally admits that he can only calm her down from one of her rages by means of physical threats (specifically, to cut off her long hair, once a point of vanity with her), and that if he were given leave to cure her as he saw fit, he would beat the madness out of her; the only thing keeping him from trying this method, by which he claims to have "cured" twenty mad Russian peasant women[72], is Michel's denial of permission.

A small child walking in on his parents making love might think they were hurting each other, doing some appalling kind of violence to each other, but one hopes he would be disabused of that notion, and sooner rather than later. Michel, on the contrary, has grown up with apparent confirmation of this notion always at hand[73]. Yet it is not enough for the primal scene to be witnessed... it must also be reenacted, as a traumatic experience must be repeated until it can be received, processed and digested. Near the end of his dinner-table narrative, Froeber recounts Michel's own close encounter with a bear only a

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[72] A note within the text identifies "cette curieuse folie russe, le *hurlement*" (189) not as madness, but as *possession*.

[73] Little mention is made of his real father, apart from his impotent attempt to stab the she-bear. He is only significant to "Lokis" in that it is his library that brings Wittembach to Médintiltas.

year before, and the sexual significance of the event is sealed: this bear is pointedly female.

> Le comte a voulu l'attaquer l'épieu à la main. Bah! d'un revers elle écarte l'épieu, elle empoigne M. le comte et le jette par terre aussi facilement que je renverserais cette bouteille. Lui, malin, fait le mort. L'ourse l'a flairé, flairé, puis, au lieu de le déchirer, lui donne un coup de langue. Il a eu la présence d'esprit de ne pas bouger, et elle a passé son chemin. (189)

This anecdote's most obvious value is as an ominous precursor to other events that will highlight Michel's otherness; the bear spares him, whereas other animals (notably dogs and horses) react to him with instinctual fear. But if it is true that we learn about sex by observing our parents, Michel has learned well. This is an overtly sexualized scene; the phallic implications of the spear are self-evident, as is the significance of the she-bear knocking it away before she grasps Michel (she doesn't swipe or claw, she *grasps*) and flings him to the ground to, in essence have her way with him. By not resisting her, Michel escapes with his life. By submitting to the bear that has been pursuing him, in one way or another, since he came into the world, he has conquered it, for the time being.

If "La Vénus d'Ille" dealt with the grisly results of a supernatural incursion into the rational world, "Lokis" concerns itself with the tragedy of a man who exists in both spheres at once; so, the tragedy of the *loup-garou*, or perhaps here, *ours-garou*. Michel has not yet come onstage himself at this point in the plot, but his survival of his own molestation-by-bear positions him at a unique and hazardous point in the story's cosmology, basically similar again to that of "Vénus". It is a system of oppositions, masculine and feminine, intellect and superstition, civilization and nature, human and

animal... and on a much greater level in the later story, oppositions of a linguistic nature.

The Witch, the Snake, and the Language of Beasts

For all of the blood and thunder waiting under the surface of the text, "Lokis" begins innocuously enough, as anything but a horror story. The reader's point of entry is a question of language. Mérimée's familiar device of a translation-based riddle, used to provide a pleasurable shiver from Venus' plinth, is expanded here into a frame for the whole story – the tale does not end with the death of Ioulka, but with Wittembach returning to the mysterious word *lokis* and the accompanying epigram at the head of the narrative, which would have explained the whole thing in advance, if only the reader knew the language[74]. The pages between the title and its explanation are littered with moments at which languages are set against each other, and identified with different sides of the rift between the genders, the human and the animal, the sacred and the profane. In the landscape of "Lokis," language is everything; it is a landscape changed by linguistic difference into a frightening dream-sea of animal parliaments and pagan customs, dotted with islands of modern European culture and Christian values.

The language of this primal hinterland is *jmoude*, the Samogitian dialect of

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[74] This epigram, *Miszka su Lokiu/Abu du tokiu*, is revealed by Wittembach to mean something like *MIchel and the bear/One and the same*. It can't have helped young Michel with his bear complex to know that Slavic folklore and fairy tales frequently give his name to bears, so frequently that the folkloric name has come to equal or surpass the zoological one in use (even today, the Russian Bear mascot is known as Misha or Mishka). Wittembach compares this to the influence of the *Roman de Renart* on the French language – the fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, once called *le goupil* in French, would only ever be *le renard* after those stories became popular. Cf. Victor Hugo's renaming of the octopus in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*; thanks to his riveting description of Gilliatt's battle with the slimy creature, the Norman name *pieuvre* soon dominated the established Latin world *poulpe* in frequency of use. We will meet *la pieuvre* again in the next chapter.

Lithuania, given a twofold coding by Wittembach as what I might call a "beastly" language as soon as it is introduced: it is notably close to the ur-language Sanskrit ("langue qui se rapproche du sanscrit encore plus peut-être que le haut-lithuanien," 184), and so notably primitive; and though there exists a corpus of legends, fairy tales and folk stories in *jmoude*, there are no translations of the Gospels. This is the spur for Wittembach's journey to Médintiltas, the project to immerse himself in authentic *jmoude* and come up with a sufficient vocabulary for a *version jomaïtique* of the Gospel of St. Matthew; he is, in addition to being a scholar and linguist, an Evangelical minister. His *mission civilisatrice* will come to focus on Michel Szémioth in particular; the count's psychic struggle between tactile rationality and the incursive supernatural will also be a spiritual tug-of-war over him, with sensible males speaking sensible languages (German, Russian, Polish) at one end of the invisible rope, and incomprehensible or incoherent females (and animals) at the other.

The first meeting between the scholar and the count, the morning after the latter's bizarre appearance in the tree outside the former's window, contains two essential points about the language of "Lokis", one made at length in center stage, the other made in passing, almost thrown away. The first, more blatant point I will return to in the next section; the second deserves closer examination, for what it indicates about language and animality.

Wittembach is attempting to impress upon Michel the value of his as-yet unwritten Gospel *en jmoude*; one hesitates to use the phrase "sales pitch" in reference to a learned man of the cloth, but the scholar is nothing if not earnest. In response to the count's observation that "parmi les gens qui ne savent d'autre langue que le jmoude, il n'y en a

pas un seul qui sache lire" (192), Wittembach invokes the potential of his unwritten work as both a teaching tool (again the specter of the indoctrinating *mission civilisatrice*) and a means of preserving a language that might otherwise die out (he makes mention of the recent decease of the last person to know Cornish, and the incipient extinction of the Prussian language). Michel then makes a curious, telling interruption:

> – Triste! interrompit le comte. Alexandre de Humboldt racontait à mon père qu'il avait connu en Amérique un perroquet qui seul savait quelques mots de la langue d'une tribu aujourd'hui entièrement détruite par la petite vérole. Voulez-vous permettre qu'on apporte le thé ici? (193)

This may be meant as a mildly interesting anecdote suitable for tea, but it should not be overlooked that Michel's remark lends intellectual cachet, if only by implication, to a bird. On a factual level it is clear foolishness to ascribe to a parrot the capacity to preserve a language in any sense but one of mimicry. To place an equals sign between a speaking human and a mimetic animal is folly, even in jest. And yet beneath, on the connotative level, this interruption makes a provocative linkage between animal sounds and forgotten languages, which is to say, forgotten knowledge, old orders, surviving cultural remnants... *le jmoude*, for instance.

This linkage soon expands to incorporate the feminine, when Michel and Wittembach embark on a journey through the woods to visit a site of archaeological interest, and then the neighboring estate of Dowghielly (though the count does not make this second intention clear at the outset). In the course of asking the scholar his opinion as to why animals do not like him, with reference to the horses they are preparing to ride (it takes the count twice as long as other men to break in a horse, we learn), Michel

volunteers that he does not have “ce qui s’appelle du goût pour les animaux... Ils ne valent guère mieux que les hommes...” (198); once again, even when expressing a measure of disdain for animals, he judges them not lower than humans, but *equivalent* to humans. Having inferred a language of the animals, he then openly confers upon them the capacity for self-government, as defined by local lore:

> Je vous mène, monsieur le professeur, dans une forêt où, à cette heure, existe florissante l’empire des bêtes, la *matecznik*, la grande matrice, la fabrique des êtres. [...] Là vivent en république les animaux... ou sous un gouvernement constitutionnel, je ne saurais dire lequel des deux. Les lions, les ours, les élans, les joubrs, ce sont nos urus, tout cela fait très bon ménage. Le mammouth, qui s’est conservé là, jouit d’une très grande considération. (198-99)

The mythical and the mundane are confounded again here, and it is difficult to judge the levels of amusement and gravity in Michel’s depiction of this “grande matrice”. The left hand erases what the right hand writes; there is a nearly audible *clin d’oeil* when he tells of how few people have ever managed to penetrate the woods and marshes of the *matecznik*, “excepté, bien entendu, MM. les poètes et les sorciers, qui pénètrent partout” (ibid.), and another when his list of animal residents places the ordinary (bear and elk) alongside the improbable (lion) and the long extinct (aurochs and mammoth). Then, in the same breath, he avers to Wittembach that his father himself killed an aurochs “avec une permission du gouvernement, bien entendu” (199), the head of which may be seen mounted on a wall at the estate.

This stretch of "Lokis" has placed the reader hip-deep in a morass of traditional

feminine symbols and iconography, here tinted with the threat of death: marshes and bodies of water, fertile earth, rampant growth through which the two men may only penetrate with difficulty (and through which at least one old woman is able to pass with ease). The object of their trip is a tumulus[75], or burial mound, reminiscent of a swollen pregnant belly, and filled indeed with bodies. The female, pre-Christian, indecipherable world announces itself through this tumulus and the remnants of a stone circle on top of it, the sight of which provokes Wittembach to raise the specter of human sacrifice, and then banish it as ignorance. No sooner has he done so than an emissary of this world appears in the flesh at the foot of the tumulus: a bent old beggar woman, gathering mushrooms, who affirms Michel's description of the *matecznik* with decidedly less irony.

This woman, or rather this witch (one of those few "qui pénètrent partout"), appears as a concretization of the the text's otherworldly implications about the land and its people. Her status as a caricature is not lost on the characters, with Michel openly describing her as a suitable subject for a painting by Knaus. She is laden with symbols of deadly sex – her basket, as surely tied to the womb as the sacred hump of the tumulus, is filled with phallic mushrooms[76], some of which Wittembach identifies as poisonous and begs her not to eat, but which Michel claims she and all peasants of the region can consume in safety, having stomachs "doublés de fer blanc" (200). And out from beneath her collection of toxic severed penises comes the malignant phallic symbol to top all

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[75] Coming from the Latin *tumere*, "to swell", this word is heavy with sex and death, connected to both "tumor" and "tumescence". Even the *mat-* that begins the word *matecznik*, suggestive as it is of maternity, endows the great menacing *forêt sauvage* with a grotesque reproductive quality, which leads once again to the Minotaur. Pasiphaë was cursed with love for the bull after her husband's transgression; "Lokis" hints at the possibility that Michel's mother was similarly punished for her hunt. This would seem to link back to the switch I noted in my introduction, the move from the medieval fear of the beast lurking outside the wall to the 19th century dread of the beast that infiltrates civilization.

[76] Phallic in senses factual and figurative – they resemble the human phallus, and are the reproductive fruitbodies of the underground mycelium.

others, a snake, which the woman addresses as “Pirkuns” (a local god whom Michel describes as a Slavic Jupiter), and to which she speaks, pronouncing “quelques mots inintelligibles qui avaient l’air d’une incantation” (201). Fittingly for one who talks to the animals, she claims to have just been at the heart of the *matecznik*, and to have attended the conference of the animals, where a new king is due to be elected... and perhaps, she says, that new king will be the count. The mechanics of the horror story do not run quietly.

If the witch scene’s affective purpose is that bit of foreshadowing, and a second further in, its psychological accomplishment is to crystallize the story’s three-way identification between the feminine, the incomprehensible, and the Beast. We have encountered the parrot as the last surviving “speaker” of a dead language, an embodiment of *speaking without understanding*, and now with this hag talking to her snake and recounting a visit with the governing body of the animal kingdom, we are confronted with *hearing without understanding*. Note that Wittembach (so, Mérimée) takes care to describe the woman’s words to the snake as unintelligible, where the phrase “comme une incantation” by itself would have been more than adequate to convey the strangeness of the act. On the heels of this, the old woman advises Michel, à propos of nothing he has said to her, not to end his excursion at the nearby estate as he intends:

> – Non, ne va pas à Dowghielly, reprit la vieille. La petite colombe blanche n’est pas ton fait. N’est-ce pas, Pirkuns? – En ce moment, la tête du serpent sortit par le collet de la vieille capote et s’allongea jusqu’à l’oreille de sa maîtresse. Le reptile, dressé sans doute à ce manège, remuait les mâchoires comme s’il parlait. – Il dit que j’ai raison, ajouta la vieille.

(202-03)

This will turn out to be good advice in the end, but rendered untrustworthy and dismissable by its source, the “petite colombe blanche” being Michel’s future wife and victim, whose whiteness and lightness will define her character.

The above block quote could serve as an epigram for the monster-language situation of "Lokis": a threatening woman mingling truth (or at least an educated guess) with the fantastic, humanizing a snake while reducing a young lady to an animal, treating the reptile’s hissing as if it were comprehensible, and surrounding a piece of wise counsel with enough nonsense and jumble to discredit it. This manner of speaking is rightly described as *duplicitous*, and duplicity is the sinew that links the three components of the woman-beast-language triad.

The parties on either side of the tug-of-war mentioned above exemplify this. If we leave Michel in the middle, we have at this point four “speakers” in the story, two on either end of the rope. Wittembach and Froeber hold the solid, truthful position by virtue of their grasp of modern language (so, catalogued language, understood language), and by virtue of the attitude of their speech. Wittembach may refrain from comment at inopportune times, notably concerning the climactic marriage, but his words are always clear, lucid, reasonable. As a scholar and a minister, the intelligible word is his calling. And if Froeber has a language problem, it is not incomprehensibility. If anything, the doctor is too truthful and clear, innocent of decorum, honest to the point of vulgarity. Recall his chewing his way through dinner while recounting the countess’ ursine episode; later on in the story he will appall the staid Wittembach by suggesting a rustic way for Michel to improve his mental and spiritual well-being”:

> Il s'enferme quelquefois pendant plusieurs jours; souvent il rôde la nuit; il lit des livres incroyables... de la métaphysique allemande... de la physiologie, que sais-je? Hier encore il lui en est arrivé un ballot de Leipzig. Faut-il parler net? [...] A son âge, moi, le diable m'emporte!... Non, il n'a pas de maîtresse, il ne se marie pas, il a tort. Il lui faudrait un dérivatif. (212)

So, Michel would be better served by dropping the books and getting laid. Froeber may not say pleasant things, but his meaning is never in doubt, and his position is not unknown.

In contrast, the two women at the other end of the conflict are uncertain and opaque. The mad countess behaves in an animalistic way and is treated in kind, and her speech is confined to a small set of shouted or cried phrases. All she is ever observed to say in the text are variations on "kill it!" applied to her son; she is, in fact, analogous to the preservationist parrot, speaking without speaking. She is joined by the witch who talks to the *matecznik*, whose obfuscations drain meaning from everything. The words of the men are inclined to help Michel, and those of the women would kill him, castrate him, consume him. To illustrate the perils of the *matecznik*, the count tells of a stag (perhaps the most classic icon of positive masculinity in the animal kingdom) that he once shot, subsequently blundering into the marsh and being inexorably sucked down. This is the feminine animal-language of "Lokis," a swamp that will eat up any man who doesn't know how to traverse or resist it. Michel will lose, of course. A third female character will join the women's team and give them the advantage, to her own ruin.

Lost In Translation

The bulk of Wittembach's first conference with Michel, apart from the story involving the parrot, comprises a long recitation by the scholar of what he believes to be an authentic *daïna*, or *légende jomaïtique*, recounted to him elsewhere in the country, earlier in his voyage. The story itself, "Les trois fils de Boudrys," is less significant than its provenance, though it does deal in the same heroic, manly Slavic images that "Lokis" plainly calls into question. Michel gives the *daïna* his full attention and asks the name of the original teller; he is not surprised to recognize the name.

> – Mlle Ioulka! s'écria le comte. La petite folle! J'aurais dû la deviner! Mon cher professeur, vous savez le *jmoude* et toutes les langues savantes, vous avez lu tous les vieux livres, mais vous vous êtes laissé mystifier par une petite fille qui n'a lu que les romans. Elle vous a traduit, en jmoude plus ou moins correct, une des jolies ballades de Miçkiewicz, que vous n'avez pas lue, parce qu'elle n'est pas plus vieille que moi. (195)

Ioulka, the pluperfect pink and white *coquette*, has announced herself as a warper of words even from her position offstage. By presenting what amounts to a popular (perhaps even populist) novel of the day as an aged cultural document, shrouding its recent origin in treacherous *jmoude*, she has inadvertently set up Wittembach for ridicule at home with his fellow academics – imagine someone conversant in old Egyptian, translating a hit song from the radio and vouching for its "authenticity" to an eager learner in no position to know better.

In some respects she will be the least dangerous, least offensive of the story's twist-tongued females, for she is simply a thoughtless girl, acting only to amuse herself. This

thoughtlessness is borne out by the descriptors applied to her by count and author. In the above passage she is *folle*, and twice mentioned as *petite*, markedly different from *jeune*; she is frequently animalized, here as a cat, there as a dove, always as a flighty or impulsive creature. She is also, as I mentioned earlier, overwhelmingly *white*, evoking for Michel both the allure of soft feminine skin and the coldness of winter ("Elle n'a point de coeur... Elle est blanche comme la neige et froide comme elle!…"[77] (196), but also blankness, the white of a page with nothing on it. However, she also takes the most *active* role of all in the matter of perverting language, interpolating herself between *destinateur* and *destinataire* to alter the content of speech, or else block it altogether. The above episode, what might be called the Boudrys episode, is but a tame foreshadowing of a notable pair of graver episodes, in which her linguistic meddling throws a kink into the fabric of Michel's relationship with Wittembach, and so with the forces of rationality that could help him; the count's dialogues with the scholar come to bear a decidedly therapeutic flavor, and Ioulka's voice manages to interrupt at just the wrong moments. That soft white flesh of hers would make a tempting friandise for any hungry bear, let alone the one suggested to have sired Michel, and her words and manner will tease out the monster in him as surely as Wittembach's will attempt to explain it away.

The first of these instances occurs at the estate of Dowghielly, after the encounter with the witch. To entertain Wittembach before dinner, Ioulka coaxes Michel into

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[77] Cf. Baudelaire's "La Beauté" in *Les Fleurs du mal*, contrasting the passion Beauty inspires with her own distaste for anything that troubles the waters: "Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,/Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris." The poem draws attention to her breast, "où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour." A similar image of breasts and wounding will appear at the close of "Lokis," inverted, as it will be Ioulka who suffers the grievous injury.

Cf. also Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*, another story about a young man who is caught between youthful freedom and adult responsibility, and makes a grasp at the chance to retain his youth, a grasp he comes to rue. The enchanted skin of the title drains away a bit of Raphaël's life for every inch of itself it sacrifices to grant his wishes; he is soon seeing his life dwindle before his eyes as the skin makes his every idle desire a reality. After extreme efforts to remove all desire from his life, he cannot keep himself from surrendering to his love for Pauline, and dies making love to her, biting down on her breast.

demonstrating a local folk dance, the *roussalka*, named for a ravenous species of water nymph said to inhabit every pool in the region's forests (and the *matecznik*, presumably), who emerges from the water upon seeing a handsome young man and "vous emporte au fond, où selon toute apparence elle vous croque..." (205). She will dance the part of the hungry nymph, and Michel will be the fisherman who falls prey to her charms. He inserts his own steps into the dance – at the end, when the *roussalka* is meant to tap her lover to make him fall dead, he instead seizes her in his arms and kisses her, and hard, too. Ioulka voices some irritation (feigned or not) at his variant, "en se plaignant qu'il l'eût serré, comme un ours qu'il était"[78] (206). Not a considerate remark to make to a man with a bear complex, it has a darkening effect on Michel's mood just in time for dinner, where the game will continue.

In the course of the dinner conversation, Wittembach tells of an earlier linguistic voyage of his, this one to the wilderness of Uruguay, where due to extreme isolation and lack of potable water, he was "réduit à faire comme les gauchos qui m'accompagnaient, c'est-à-dire à saigner mon cheval et à boire son sang" (207). Ioulka reacts, predictably, with squeals of horror, in tandem with the other young ladies in attendance at the dinner party, while Michel has a couple of pointed questions for the professor: he wants to know what it was like to drink the blood, and where on a horse one should make the cut to bleed it for drinking. This scene serves in the main to continue layering on the portents (those loud horror mechanics again), but it does perpetuate the pattern of reasoned, explicative language vs. jumbled, obstructive non-language. Michel comes near to a public avowal of his inner bearish desires here, making no effort to hide his interest in

[78] Anne Hiller remarks upon the way this moment forecasts precisely what will happen in the couple's bridal chamber, and also points out the lack of a real-life source for this dance.

drinking blood, and Wittembach treats this in, therapeutically, the best possible manner, by engaging with his questions and shining the light of reason as far as he is allowed. The president of Uruguay, he avers, gave one of his most moving speeches after a throatful of horse blood, and he was "un homme très distingué, d'un esprit supérieur," (208) and not, as Ioulka interjects, "un affreux monstre" (ibid.). By assuring this president's humanity and excellence to the dinner party, he is offering Michel some *sub rosa* reassurance of his own humanity; and by cutting off this dialogue, first with her blanket condemnation and then by a direct (if coquettish) order, Ioulka denies this reassurance and asserts that Michel is, indeed, a monster. The professor never gets to answer the count's second question, which he likely would have done with great stress on how the horse survives the bleeding none the worse for wear, for the girl stops him:

> – Pour l'amour de Dieu, mon cher professeur, s'écria Mlle Iwinska avec un air de frayeur comique, ne le lui dites pas. Il est homme à tuer toute son écurie, et à nous manger nous-mêmes quand il n'aura plus de chevaux.[79] (ibid.)

Merely by their ways of speaking, to the neurotic ears of the count, these two people have just offered up their views of his character. He is either a noble man or a bloodthirsty monster, and he cannot be both. That night, the two men share a room at Dowghielly for the night, and Wittembach has his first cause for serious alarm. First Michel locks his gun in the cupboard for safety – he has been known to fire off his guns

[79] Mention should also be made of Ioulka's after-dinner game, in which the gentlemen are blindfolded and made to touch a spot on the wall, whereupon she makes sure their fingers instead find a pot of honey, the favorite snack of bears. On a repeat reading, she seems to be willfully courting her own demise.

in his sleep, and nearly killed his bunkmate during his military service. And later, while asleep (in a fetal position, grunting like an animal), Wittembach observes the following sleep-monologue:

> – Bien fraîche!... bien blanche!... Le professeur ne sait ce qu'il dit... Le cheval ne vaut rien... Quel morceau friand!... – Puis il se mit à mordre à belles dents le coussin où posait sa tête, et en même temps il poussa une sorte de rugissement si fort qu'il se réveilla. (211)

The professor vows, in dry understatement, to never again sleep with the Count.

Ioulka's first linguistic interruption, in a delayed effect, turned the two men away from intellectual discussion in the library, and led Michel to dwell on her *blancheur*, her lack of heart, and to evoke the image of red wine running visibly beneath her white skin (he quotes a line of erotic Turkish poetry). Her second incursion here leads to the closest thing in "Lokis" to a physical transformation on the page. The third will be what calls Wittembach back to Médintiltas to witness her murder scene.

I will not linger on the wedding itself here, except to point out that the ceremony matches and perhaps surpasses the disheartening spectacle of the marriage at the climax of "La Vénus d'Ille", down to the conspicuous drunkenness and the sharing of a piece of the bridal trousseau among the guests (there a garter cut up and distributed, here the bride's shoe, from which all drink)[80]. What matters most here is that after two further months of *études jomaïtiques* elsewhere in the country, Wittembach receives a letter from the count, a wedding announcement and invitation to attend not only as guest, but as

[80] I have not made much reference to Wittembach's marital views and status, though they do come into play. He has deferred his own marriage to make the trip to Lithuania, and the behavior he sees makes him glad to have done so. His ecclesiastical standing also instills in him a respect for the rite of marriage unshared by the guests, or even the bride. He is appalled to see Ioulka's aunt slap her across the face and leave a mark, so that she can claim to have married the count under threat of brutality, should she ever want a divorce. (218)

officiating minister (the usual clergyman is down with the gout). Michel's letter is humble, almost apologetic in voice, and written in German: "Je ferais encore plus de solécismes, si je vous écrivais en jmoude, et vous perdriez toute considération pour moi" (215). He presents the union with Ioulka as something like a boring *fait accompli*, and most of the letter is given over to a presentation of the wedding as an attraction suitable for a cultural tourist: "Vous verrez des costumes et des coutumes dignes de votre observation" (ibid.). The tone is diffident, while free of the gravity one might expect (and which Wittembach does expect) concerning the institution of marriage, but a clear attempt to maintain a foothold on the sane, safe side of the linguistic divide. Beneath this is a postscript from the bride, significantly en *jmoude*:

> «Moi, muse de la Lithuanie, j'écris en jmoude. Michel est un impertinent de douter de votre approbation. Il n'y a que moi en effet qui sois assez folle pour vouloir d'un garçon comme lui. Vous verrez, monsieur le professeur, le 8 du mois prochain, une mariée un peu chic. Ce n'est pas du jmoude, c'est du français. N'allez pas au moins avoir des distractions pendant la cérémonie!» (ibid.)

In other words, she has won. Michel Szémioth's transformation into the sexually violent bear, and so his assumption of his horrific primal scene, is now sealed. Her intrusive postscript is a literal and figurative takeover of the dialogue, and in a narrative where words and language have such currency, it is also a hostile takeover. She is, in effect, signing for her husband in the language that has taken him over, with all of its attendant metaphysical-metamorphic baggage. Her written words, though again thoughtless and meant to be amusing, are a rebuke to what Wittembach stands for, and all

that he might have represented to Michel. She refers back to her fraudulent, potentially humiliating translation (“Moi, muse de la Lithuanie”); she simultaneously denigrates his esteem in Michel’s eyes and brands anyone who would care for him as mad; she presumes, if only in jest, to teach a polyglot the French language. Above all else, she is claiming him for her own, and for her side. It will be a short-lived victory.

The beast is the other, as woman is the other, and in Mérimée’s macabre scheme of things, a young man’s primal sexual trauma can have only one end result – the beast will eat him up. The threat of the wolves to leave their tree and pounce becomes a fact; the savage animal memory of the past consumes and reshapes him in its own terrible image.

"Lokis" is a story of inexorability, a man moving towards a bloody end he fears but feels powerless to avoid. This inexorability in the face of the beast is a common thread running through the texts examined in my first three chapters. Bisclavret is compelled by an unknown transformative cause, but still compelled, and is vulnerable enough to be confounded by the theft of his clothes. Hauteclaire and Savigny are not complaining about the erotic magnetism that leads them to murder, yet this does not make them less prey to it. This passive character recalls the wolf of the bestiaries, caught in the dark rhythms of nature (like those emanating from the *matecznik* to ruin the lives of those at Médintiltas). The lycanthrope has evolved over the course of these texts, in terms of gender, species and mode of attack; the lycanthropic manifestations in the fourth and final chapter will tackle another hurdle, that of self-will. And *willful* is the mildest adjective that can be applied to the character about to come onstage.

Chapter Four

Swimming With Sharks: The Glaucous Mass of *Maldoror*

> La nature bestiale de Maldoror apparaît souvent sous sa forme humaine. Il a des «griffes», des «ventouses», un «groin». Il «marche comme une hyène» et a le visage de cet animal. Il est capable de nager, de courir, de voler comme une bête, mais ne sait pas rire. Dès le Chant I, il est étranger au genre humain aussi bien qu'au règne animal…
>
> – J.M.G. Le Clézio, "Maldoror et les métamorphoses I"

In the most literal terms possible, *Les Chants de Maldoror* is an unholy mess. It defies criticism, comprehension, categorization, and even ready description. Approaching the text with an eye to biographical interpretation is something of a fool's errand, for compared to his literary contemporaries, so little is known of the pseudonymous author that *Maldoror* itself is a significant portion of his biography. It cannot be apprehended in terms of plot or narrative, for apart from a "story" that arises in the last of six cantos, *Maldoror* refuses to be about any fixed thing from moment to moment. The only constant is Maldoror himself, and he is defined by his indefinability as much as his studied cruelty. The book stands as a manifestation of Goya's words on the sleep of reason, birthing monster after monster with no purpose other than to disorient, disturb, and then dissolve into another shape before it can be caught.

An entire book or course would be required to give the whole of *Maldoror* the attention it merits; I will, therefore, confine my work in this chapter to one specific

section of the piece, after a flyover of a few points of interest.

Maldoror the character, insofar as he can be called a character, may be regarded as the final iteration[81] of the Beast as presented in my previous chapters, differentiated from them and placed above them by a key missing component. If one considers together the shapeshifting cuckold of "Bisclavret," the metamorphic *va-et-vient* between the illicit lovers of "Le Bonheur dans le crime," and the tragic lycanthrope of "Lokis," the lack of will forms a common linking thread. The medieval werewolf sheds his clothes and runs about on all fours because he must, he is compelled to do so, and is robbed of even the passive power to resume human shape by his wife. Hauteclaire and Savigny, murderers though they be, are borne along by an erotic force too powerful to resist, and their killing of the wife carries a feeling of relaxing into inevitability. Michel's descent into savagery is presupposed and predetermined from his first breath. These characters confront their situations in their own ways, but they all share a lack of control. They do not choose to be monstrous.

Enter Maldoror, the perfect monster, who does exactly as he wishes.

The biographical approach may have little to no relevance in modern literary criticism, but as I have mentioned, the brief life of Isidore Ducasse, who wrote under the titled pseudonym "le comte de Lautréamont" (itself a rearranged character name borrowed from the works of Eugène Sue), is so bound up with his creative work that biographical interpretations are irresistible to an extent. The solid details known of his

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[81] Perhaps not chronologically ("Lokis" and *Maldoror* are contemporaneous texts, and *Les Diaboliques* will appear five years after them), but certainly thematically, Maldoror appears as an open realization of the lycanthropic attributes that have run through the my previous chapters, coming closer to the skin each time. The monstrous behaviors hung around the neck of the literal werewolf in "Bisclavret" stir the waters of the Barbey d'Aurevilly and Mérimée texts (destruction, devouring, defilement of human nature), but overt monstrosity remains offstage in the realm of speculation. Maldoror will bring them into full view. To refer to a different sort of shapeshifting, he is the imago at the end of a period of metamorphosis, ready to dry his wings and fly away.

extra-literary life boil down *in extremis* to: his parentage; his childhood in Uruguay, *lycée* years in the southwest of France, and young adulthood in Paris; his acquaintanceships and correspondances with other contemporary writers; his history of migraine headaches; and his death at 24, in his home and of unattributed causes, during the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870. This largely undocumented past, coupled with his early decease, depicts his life as the set-up for a developed character who never came into being, outside of the written word. Enough of these vague details appear in the pages of *Maldoror* to justify some blurring of the line between author and creation. Both men are young, highly intelligent, of a scholarly bent and appreciative of the grandiose and the morbid; Ducasse was a known admirer of Poe, Baudelaire and Milton, and all three make themselves known in his work. The author's crippling migraines have their echo in "un poids dans la tête" (*Maldoror* 171), noted to have kept Maldoror from sleeping since childhood, generating nightmares and phantasms for him to contemplate and address. And the social and political upheavals Ducasse lived through, on both sides of the Atlantic, are impossible to unsee in *Maldoror*'s cyclone of violence of all kinds.

Violence, as I hope I've established by now, is an essential indicator for tracking the lycanthrope. A violent environment, inner or outer, is inseparable from the werewolf. What separates Maldoror from the pack is a lack of passivity with regard to this violence, as compared to the three cases above. Maldoror is not merely transformed by his circumstances – he changes himself, as fluidly as Proteus, to match the shifting, oneiric landscape of the *Chants* and make the most of his innate evil... being, as we are told at the outset, "né méchant" (101). He changes his shape to suit the victim before him, the piece of the world that stands ready to be wounded by him. Confronted with blood to be sucked,

he becomes a leech. Before a thick skin, he sprouts talons, fangs, tentacles for squeezing. He is a golden seducer when there is youth to be corrupted, and a brutal murderer when this corruption has been achieved. By turns godlike, demonic, romantic and sadistic, Maldoror represents a decadent evolution from Marie de France's afflicted nobleman, so pathologically honest and true about his condition. Bisclavret changes as he must, at regular intervals, according to rules foisted upon him from the outside, and hunts to survive. Maldoror's transformations are capricious and willful, and he makes a point of not making any use of his casualties. He kills and wounds for the sake of causing pain, and has an immense menagerie of creatures at his disposal in his *batterie de cruauté*.

One particular episode of *Les Chants de Maldoror* stands out for me as an apotheosis of the book's lycanthropic lifeforce, wrapping the beast's skin around Lautréamont's fusion of elements already present in the werewolf's character, and here dialed up to extreme levels: outside existence, blasphemy, perverse sexuality and an appetite for flesh. Before reaching this moment I will move through the larger text, examining the parts that will make up the whole; as *Maldoror* is scarcely a book that adheres to a chronology, my leaps from song to song should pose no problem.

Alone Among the Crowd – The Shade of Poe

Maldoror alters his shape to confront the world, first to blend in with it, and then to attack. The initial change involves a blade (a penknife, to be precise), and sets him firmly on the side of truth. Unable to see glory in the brutal, stupid actions of men in the world as all around him seem to do, and unable to laugh with joy at the sight, he attempts a

drastic imitation:

> J'ai pris un canif dont la lame avait un tranchant acéré, et me suis fendu les chairs aux endroits où se réunissent les lèvres. Un instant je crus mon but atteint. C'était une erreur! Le sang qui coulait avec abondance des deux blessures empêchait d'ailleurs de distinguer si c'était là vraiment le rire des autres. Mais, après quelques instants de comparaison, je vis bien que mon rire ne ressemblait pas à celui des humains, c'est-à-dire que je ne riais pas. (102)[82]

The decisive step on the road away from the old guard of lycanthropy is in the distinction between the true and the false. The monstrous has up to now been classed as a thing to be kept hidden in the dark at all costs: the dark of the forest primeval, the dark of the illicit lovers' chambers, the dark of the repressed past. The *loup-garou* is a blasphemy unfit for the eyes of God, and so it must go about by night, as the wolf of the *bestiaires* was forced to slink about in the dark and poach what food it could. According to the magistrates of pre-modern France, the *loup-garou* was a product of the profane, the black

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[82] This cosmetic mockery of laughter can't help but call to mind Baudelaire's "De l'essence du rire," in which laughter is posited as an act of rebellion so complete as to be satanic. In brief: excepting the purely joyous laughter of children (coming from a place of delight and novelty), a laugh is an act of distancing. By laughing, a man separates himself from the object of his laughter and expresses his superiority over it, and in Baudelaire's formulations, to laugh at any part of the world is to separate oneself from God and claim a superior position, making laughter something that holy people avoid as they would a brothel: "Le Sage tremble d'avoir ri; le Sage craint le rire, comme il craint les spectacles mondains, la concupiscence. Il s'arrête au bord du rire comme au bord de la tentation. […] Aux yeux de Celui qui sait tout et qui peut tout, le comique n'est pas" (*Oeuvres complètes* 527). Maldoror's bloody smile-that-isn't has the effect of portraying the world as a satanic place in which the only way to fit is to mock the desire to fit by laughing at it, and Maldoror himself as both angel and devil, sufficiently respectful at this point to not be able to laugh, but right on the cusp of giving in to evil.

Maldoror's gruesome wound has on occasion been thought, wrongly, to refer to the titular Gwynplaine of Hugo's *L'homme qui rit*; the timing of the two works makes this unworkable. Interestingly, and much more recently, this scene is directly evoked by the 2008 film *The Dark Knight* in which Heath Ledger's Joker (very much a Maldoror type) gives a version of it as one of several possible explanations for his own grotesque smile (in his version the cuts are made by an abusive father). I can find no direct proof that the filmmakers intended such a parallel, but it is present nonetheless. Several direct attempts have been made to turn *Les Chants de Maldoror* into a film; Ledger's "unofficial" version of the character may come the closest to a faithful representation.

arts, the occult... coming as it does from *occultus*, the Latin for *hidden*. Yet here we find the monster Maldoror, mutilating himself in an attempt to hide among the masses.

The gesture would have the reverse effect on a physical level, but the statement explicit in his self-wounding is a mini-manifesto for the whole of the *Chants* – the true falsehood is now the claim to normality. The thing to be rebelled against, to be judged profane and abhorrent, is the idea that modern life is anything but a scrim of lies above destructive human evil. Maldoror, being "né méchant," is fully cognizant of this; his adherence to the truth is so powerful that the only way he can even attempt to fake normality is to razor a bloody smile into his cheeks. Ghastly, but no more of a lie than the smiles given to the atrocities he sees, and as soon as the ruse is seen to be in vain, it is dispensed with. Maldoror cannot be faulted for dishonesty. The beast is a beast, and makes no claim to be anything but a beast – though he does take care to denote the others he cannot imitate as "humains."

The observed behaviors Maldoror cites as the impetus for lacerating his face are crimes, made criminal by their dishonesty more than their brutality. This is an important distinction to make, for it strengthens the barrier that separates Maldoror from the masses: on the one side, crooks and liars living behind a façade of smiles, and on the other side, evil without mercy, yet also without illusion (or as without illusion as is possible within the book's hallucinatory universe). In this scheme, the great swing to modernity came when the borders and populations of cities grew so vast, and the villages and countryside so correspondingly empty, that those on the run from the law could no longer hide in the wilderness as they had always done - the safest place for a criminal to

seek refuge was in the city, hidden in plain sight among the hordes[83].

This shift in the nature of crime is more known in the literary sphere for its effect on the nature of crimesolving, and its generation in print of the intellectual gentleman detective, distinct from the investigators of earlier thrillers in that he is a keen observer from a point of detachment. Those old-model investigators, and their methods of beating the bushes and rounding up the usual suspects until they got their man, would be lost in the city, where one cannot plunge into the human tide without be swept away.

The benefits of that outsider status are the center of Poe's stories of Auguste Dupin, credited as the prototype for the above new breed of investigator. Dupin is a man of leisure, an aesthete and a dandy, ill-equipped for standard police work, not the sort to engage in fisticuffs – all just as well, for by application of his logic, he is able to provide solutions to baffling crimes based on little more than hearsay. His best-known appearance in the American canon comes with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; in this story he deduces that the perpetrator of a grisly murder is not a man, but an ape, based on the observation that while the murderer's voice was heard by speakers of every international language present in the city of Paris, each witness described the voice as utterly foreign. In "The Purloined Letter," famously analyzed by Jacques Lacan, Dupin's unemotional

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[83] Cf. Baudelaire, "Crépuscule du soir" and others. The impersonal, blurring crush of urban life could correctly be called an obsession of his, impressed as he was with the figure of the *flâneur*, the dandyfied man of leisure who spends his days in the cafés and *terrasses* of a Paris in the full throes of modernization, observing society as a full-time occupation. He returns again and again to the urban crowd, in his own writings and those he translates (like the Poe text below). Walter Benjamin notes a somewhat Maldororian duplicity in Baudelaire's interest in the push and menace of the crowd, a desire to experience what they experience coupled with an inability to fully engage with them: "If he succumbed to the force by which he was drawn to them and, as a *flâneur*, was made one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman makeup. He becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt" (Benjamin 172).

Per Maurice Blanchot in *Lautréamont et Sade* a considerable Baudelairean influence on the writings of Isidore Ducasse should go without saying: "Qui a vingt ans autour de 1865 et sent planer au-dessus de soi le rêve de la toute-puissance du mal, doit nécessairement s'approcher de l'oeuvre de Baudelaire, où il respire la densité satanique la plus forte de notre littérature." (25)

cool allows him to retrieve a document for a panicked acquaintance, "hidden" on the thief's mantelpiece, the last expected place. His clarity of vision comes from isolation and reflection – without his precedent, there would be no Sherlock Holmes in Baker Street, and no Hercule Poirot exercising his little gray cells.

This necessary isolation becomes a physical barrier in "The Man of the Crowd", not a Dupin piece but a brush against the same concerns, and a different facet of Maldoror's social illumination before the mirror. Another of Poe's introspective narrators, this one recovering from an extended illness, spends his time in a London coffeehouse, observing the constant rush of people in the street outside. He takes the voyeuristic joy of the *flâneur* to the level of the naturalist, slotting those he sees into callings and professions based upon their physical characteristics, as if they were birds or fish; secretaries, for instance, are distinguishable by having one ear malformed from the habit of keeping pens behind it. One face in particular fascinates him, with a quality he can neither name nor describe, but which he must learn about. He leaves his post (his observation deck, as it were) and resolves to follow the man, find out where he goes and who he is. The ensuing journey is the aimless, rudderless progression of a nightmare. The man goes nowhere, seems to have nowhere to go, and remains just out of reach to the desperate narrator, still keeping pace with him through the human crush. He is notably at greater ease with more people about him, and visibly pained and skittish, when the streets empty out. When the sickly *flâneur* does manage to catch up to his quarry, after a night and a day of pursuit, the man of the crowd favors him with an unseeing glance and continues on his way, not having registered his presence at all. The narrator guesses at who, or what, he has been dealing with: "'This old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and

genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone.’” (Poe 481)

These investigators cannot immerse themselves in their fields of observation without compromising their powers. They must remain on their side of the glass (real or figurative) and exercise their minds, to understand the world of crime at a remove. Maldoror, the honest beast appalled by the social charade, also seeks to apprehend the mess, yet is at the same time compelled to interact with it. His hyperactive shapeshifting may then be read as an attempt to stave off the forced anonymity of the crowd, of the Man of the Crowd. If the crowd would change him, he would change himself to confound it.

It is no longer possible for the werewolf to show his monstrosity, to *épater la bourgeoisie* or indeed anyone, by roaming the woods and living on prey. The woods have relocated to the city with everything and everyone else, and beastly brutality is now a condition of daily life. To be effective, the werewolf must attack on a deeper level, in a more devious fashion, and assume any shape than can be thought of to do violence in every direction.

Beastly Blasphemy – The Animals and the Fallen God

The opposition between the animal world and the divine sphere, so present in the *matecznik* of “Lokis", receives an even clearer expression in *Maldoror*. The fourth chapter of the third song consists of a precisely constructed sacrilege: raising the animal kingdom to a position of moral superiority over God, while debasing the Almighty with a portrait in blasphemy.

The chapter begins as a parody/paean to the virtues of hard work and industry, and the useful (read, cleanly) application of energy. There is piety contained in this buzz of activity, and in it humans and animals are united: “Les oiseaux répandaient leurs cantiques en gazouillements, et les humains, rendus à leurs différents devoirs, se baignaient dans la sainteté de la fatigue. Tout travaillait à sa destinée: les arbres, les planètes, les squales. Tout, excepté le Créateur!” (*Maldoror* 202) To be holy is to be employed, and to be so in a repetitive and unthinking manner – to be included within the social machinery as Maldoror tried and failed to include himself. The reflexive cadences of birdsong resolve into “cantiques,” and the fatigue of humans exhausted from their “devoir” is a sacred state. All organisms are complicit in the hubbub, from cosmic to vegetal, and from sky to sea (tree, planet, shark). This hivelike activity calls back to the impersonal crowd-society highlighted above, and signals an incipient inversion of *sacred* and *profane*, as occurred early in the book with *good* and *evil*. Maldoror’s conscious *méchanceté*, pure and honest, stood opposed to the world’s smiling herd behavior in the face of atrocities. It should be no surprise that seen through this lens, God Himself becomes a broken drunk by the roadside, stained with his own fluids.

The elements of the scene are those of the story of the Good Samaritan, as a parade of characters passes a fallen figure by the roadside and passes judgment upon him, by offering aid or denying it. God is indeed a pathetic figure here, wounded and bleeding from the nose and mouth. But there is wine mingled with the blood[84], and whereas the Samaritan was set upon by criminals and left by the road, Ducasse makes clear that God

[84] There is just as much of the vampire in *Maldoror* as there is of the werewolf, a fact stressed by J.M.G LeClézio in his essay, "Deux mythes de *Maldoror*." This specific image of God with blood and wine pooling from his mouth, coupled with unavoidable thoughts of transubstantiation and the Eucharist, paint Him in a doubly horrific light: as a self-cannibalizing vampire.

has no one to blame for his deplorable condition but Himself:

> Il était soûl! Horriblement soûl! Soûl comme une punaise qui a mâché pendant la nuit trois tonneaux de sang! Il remplissait l'écho de paroles incohérentes, que je me garderai de répéter ici; si l'ivrogne suprême ne se respecte pas, moi, je dois respecter les hommes. Saviez-vous que le Créateur… se soulât! (203)

The passersby on this road are a bestiary of resident creatures, each of whom takes a moment to give the *ivrogne divin* a lesson. This lesson follows a regular form, consisting of a damning comment (usually with reference to other absent members of the animal kingdom) and some further physical injury. First to pass is the hedgehog, who sticks the Heavenly Father in the back with his quills, admonishes Him to "travaille, fainéant, et ne mange pas le pain des autres" (203), and threatens to call the hook-beaked cockatoo to hurt Him some more. Next come the woodpecker and the owl; they bite into His chest, register their own disgust, and inform Him that "ni la taupe, ni le casoar, ni le flammant ne t'imiteront, je te le jure" (ibid.). Then the donkey: a kick in the head and a complaint about his long ears, for which even the crickets make fun of him. The toad: a gout of spit and that statement that he would have hidden God's shameful state "sous une pluie de renoncules, de myosotis et de camélias" (ibid.), if only He hadn't cursed him with such huge and ugly eyes. In the penultimate position comes the lion, the only one to maintain respect for Him; he scolds the other creatures for attacking Him in his sleep. Last of all, in what was a position of honor in the medieval *bestiaires* this scene harks back to (animals named, biologically precised and imbued with moral content), comes Man, who defecates on the Lord's face for three days "aux applaudissements du morpion

et de la vipère" (204).

The falling fecal matter rouses God out of his stupor at last – he hobbles dejected to sit on a rock, where a passing beggar takes him for a holy man under a vow of poverty and tosses him a crust of bread. Maldoror ends the chapter with an indirect plea for sympathy, directed at the reader: "Oh! vous ne saurez jamais comme de tenir constamment les rênes de l'univers devient une chose difficile!" (ibid.) This closing plea is typical of the style of the whole of *Maldoror*, jamming disparate elements together in one place to make a startling whole, sliding from willful *grotesquerie* into dry humor while still accomplishing a strong effect[85]. The effect here is to humanize God and endow the animals with divine judgment, but only in the worst light on each side. On the godly side, this results in pathos tinted with laughter. As Maldoror suggests, who could fault a God with human weaknesses, after ages of controlling everything in the universe, for getting blind drunk and sleeping in a ditch on occasion? The portrayal of the animals, however, drills in closer to the lycanthropic force of the book.

These animals represent and espouse moral positions, but they are not the creatures one would expect to find pulling such a weight, if *Maldoror* were a text that occupied itself with satisfying reader expectations. The animals in this bestiary are a curious selection, remarked upon at length by Gaston Bachelard in his book on the author, in a chapter plainly titled "Lautréamont's Bestiary." He counts 185 animals in total throughout the *Chants*; what criteria lie behind this menagerie? Violence, to be sure, the ability to cause damage, but with violence with a difference. Lautréamont/Maldoror has announced, from early in Chant I, his resolution "à peindre les délices de la cruauté"

[85] It is this style, of course, that would make Lautréamont a significant figure for Surrealists. *Maldoror* contains the famous quote on beauty, used by Breton and others in relation to Surrealist techniques of juxtaposition: "Il est beau… comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie" (289).

(101). The combination of violence with cruelty, then, limits the field of choice. Bachelard notes the diminished role, for instance, of the role of the dog in Maldoror, a potential dealer of violence, but an expected one: "[t]he dog is limited to the aggressive behavior one requires of him. His is a sort of delegated aggression; it lacks that directness peculiar to Ducasse's violence" (Bachelard 14). If a cruel man orders his dogs to tear a trespasser to bits, the dogs are merely following orders. Likewise, a tiger devouring a live meal is not being cruel, it is merely being a hungry tiger.

This cruelty in the line of duty, which Bachelard calls "orthodox cruelty," will not do for painting *délices*. In keeping with the values of the Decadents who would embrace *Maldoror* as the Surrealists did, novelty is essential for maximum potency. The cruelest, most delicious sort of animal cruelty (as opposed to cruelty to animals) comes from those animals who have the least apparent ability to inflict it, and who have no profit by it but pleasure. The hedgehog gains no sustenance from poking God with his spines. A bite from a woodpecker would hurt, no doubt, but the bird does not eat the flesh it bites[86]. Animals with known hurtful attachments, appendages given to them to confront the violence of life, are barred from the first ranks of this bestiary; we do not witness a bull or a stag goring God with its horns, because that is what horns are for. Instead we get toad spit, not deadly, only shameful. The purpose of animal violence in *Maldoror* is reflexive; the point is that it has no point but itself. The owl is not biting into the heavenly body for painful dietary reasons, any more than the object of des Esseintes' black-dyed mourning feast for his virility, in the opening pages of *A Rebours*, was to give his guests a good meal. Even though the mouth is a pillar of the violence of *Maldoror*, its principal

[86] Birds and bird behavior are a running favorite of Ducasse, but one bird in this passage may seem an ill fit to this group of enraged gentle creatures. *Le casoar*, the cassowary, is a very large flightless bird, known to have injured and killed humans; perhaps its exoticism makes up for this in terms of the unlikely and the unexpected.

functions are not eating and drinking, but biting and sucking.

Bachelard expounds upon the centrality of mouth, tooth, claw and sucker[87] in the text, and their prominence in the physiologies of the animals given the spotlight in the *Chants*: the louse, the crab, the octopus[88], and others. Of course, they are also the lycanthrope's instruments, so it only makes sense that a lycanthropic text should swarm with such creatures. Maldoror the willful werebeast, or were-everything, lauds those animals who possess both the physical endowments to inflict pain and the capacity to gain access to victims through seeming innocuousness. One suspects he would have enjoyed the imagery of the end of Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge," with the wolf's meat sure to taste all the sweeter because it was unwary. Roaming through his oneiric chaos, a world shaped by the real chaos of Ducasse's world, he is an ur-Monster, an aggregate of potential animal attacks, ready to generate a beak or talon to use against whatever targets will elicit the greatest horror. He needs no magical agent or curse to effect his changes – will alone is sufficient. He shifts his shape because he *wants*, and because, according to Bachelard, he simply has too much life for a fixed shape to contain: "For Lautréamont, as I shall show, animalized life is the sign of the bounty and fluidity of

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[87] He boils this brew down to claw and sucker alone, teeth and mouth being respectively analogous to them, but having digestive functions to fulfill that reduce their perfection in cruelty.

[88] Here is a connection to Hugo not ruled out by timelines; *Les Travailleurs de la mer* had already given the octopus a firm hold in the mind of the French readership, and Ducasse plays upon the same aspects of the creature that Hugo did (see below). The difference: Hugo's monster of the Douvres reef was an object of pure revulsion (referenced by the local Norman word *pieuvre*, and so more alien than the known and edible *poulpe*), while Maldoror assumes the octopus' shape (in song II, chapter 15) to do battle with God.

This comes down to a radical difference in the natures of the protagonists of the two works. Hugo's Gilliatt is a virginal young man with a developed intellect and Promethean ingenuity (he does in fact conjure fire out of almost nothing in the middle of the ocean), who spends weeks alone at sea salvaging a lost ship, to earn the love of a beautiful girl. His slaying of the foul *pieuvre* represents both the slaying of a dragon to win a lady's favor, and the conquering of his fears of feminine sexuality, with which he has no experience (Hugo describes the octopus as a cold, gelatinous vaginal nightmare; see note further on for his description of the creature's embrace). Gilliatt's toils at sea have the effect of elevating him to frightening, superhuman status when he returns to town, having done the impossible and saved the ship's engine; when he finds the girl he loved has fallen for another in his absence, he allows the sea to claim him in a scene heavy with implications of an ascension to godhood.

subjective impulses It is the excess of a will-to-live that distorts beings and causes metamorphoses" (4).

One of the deftest ways to send violence into the red zone of horror, and a sure indication of the lycanthrope's trail, is to sexualize it[89]. A current of beastly copulation runs through *Maldoror* as through the preceding works in this paper; it is perhaps needless to say that its treatment here is more graphic than any of those texts could have been.

Problems of Penetration – Blood and Those Who Drink It

One cannot examine the werewolf without dealing with the vampire.

These two figures trace paths that, though in apparent opposition, converge in the same bloody place. Present conceptions of the two of them are heavily influenced the conceptions of the theater and Hollywood. In world folklore the vampire and the werewolf are not nearly so distinct from each other, and are indeed sometimes referred to under the same name[90]. The legends of the Slavic cultures of eastern Europe often conflate the two under one identity, and the two are bound together in origin and habit. An executed werewolf may rise from the grave as a vampire if he is not buried with proper care; a vampire may assume lupine shape to drink his ration of blood[91]. Both are

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[89] Sexual violence is the most horrific due to the absolute exposure inherent in it; this leads back to the horror of cats in Chapter Two, and the associations of cats with women and sexuality, and male dread of sharing bed and flesh with a being with a psychological urge to kill him.

[90] In a highly interesting linguistics paper, Francis Butler writes of the Russian word *vurdulak*, meaning both "vampire" and "werewolf", and ascribes the word's appearance in the language to Pushkin, who borrowed it from literary sources including Lord Byron… and Prosper Mérimée.

[91] Dracula, the most famous vampire in print, is a testament to this; his shapeshifting in Bram Stoker's novel aspires to athletic levels. Stoker also makes direct reference to these ambiguous words, citing "'vrolok' and

beings expelled from the human schema and thrown into the liminal space of the monster by the act of consuming human flesh and blood. Montague Summers finds this blurring of the boundary occurring as far back as Classical Greece:

> At the wizard sanctuary of Mount Lycaeus the mactation of human victims continued regularly even until after the advent of Christianity. It is extremely significant, moreover, that the ceremonies and lore of the Arcadian mountains were closely connected with a number of legends concerning werewolves and often in modern accounts and Slav superstition it is very difficult to distinguish the werewolf from the vampire." (*Vampire* 19-20)

This ambiguity persists in *Maldoror*; thus it is worthwhile to treat werewolf and vampire as *recto* and *verso* of the same page. Present in both figures is the irresistible compulsion to destroy life, a compulsion so strong in the vampire as to transcend death. The werewolf's unthinkable border crossing is that of the fixed physical body, the vampire's that of mortality. The one suffers from too much life, Bachelard's "excess of will-to-live"; the other must drain life from humanity in perpetuity, to replace the life it has lost. In both is a dependency on the human world they cannot inhabit; their difference from it defines them. The parasitic give-and-take in the relationship between werewolf and victim has already been noted in Chapter Two with Barbey d'Aurevilly and Cixous; the vampire is of course a literal parasite, gorging on living blood.

The lycanthrope and the blood-drinker bring to the party the charge of sexual release; witness Hauteclaire and Savigny's erotic holiday while the mistress of the house

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'vikoslak' — both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Servian for something that is either werewolf or vampire." (*Dracula* 6) Interestingly, this novel's great contribution to vampiric nomenclature, *nosferatu*, is wholly an invention of Bram Stoker.

slowly dies, and Michel Szémioth's orgasmic murder of Ioulka by biting her on the neck. The vampire, however, is given leave in literature to wield sexual power more overtly and insidiously than the werewolf, for he/she possesses that disarming mien shared by the cruel animals of *Maldoror*, coupled with a seductive (or at least a human) appearance. The vampire can inject evil into a person's life from very close range; this evil will be pernicious rather than explosive. Those who write of the vampire have found it a useful character type for instance, for stories of addiction, as both the addict and the addictive thing[92]. Baudelaire paints the subject of his poem "Le Vampire" as an enslaving force akin to a list of human vices, with a generous flavoring of rot, to whom he is bound:

> Comme au jeu le joueur têtu,
> Comme à la bouteille l'ivrogne,
> Comme aux vermines la charogne
> — Maudite, maudite sois-tu! (*Fleurs du mal*, 82)

A noxious substance or behavior that works a change on one who knows it to be harmful, but cannot live without it; the vampire is a fruitful literary placeholder for drugs, gambling, illicit sex, and so on. And from the other side, what is the vampire but a blood addict, and one who was once alive, changed into a monster by death and yet unable to die? With the vampire's sexual baggage comes a dark variety of reproduction, made horrific by its *provenance d'outre-tombe*. The vampire's attack consists of a sexual encounter with all erotic charge displaced to the mouth, and if the encounter goes on for long enough, the victim becomes a vampire in turn. Monster begets monster, vice breeds

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[92] One need look no further than the nearest bookstore for evidence of this; it is nearly impossible to find a modern vampire story in which the vampire is not portrayed to some degree as a romanticized addict. Anne Rice's introspective blood-drinkers owe a conspicuous debt to *dandyisme* and 19th-century Decadent sensibilities, though perhaps not to *Maldoror*; the vampire Lestat enjoys his status as an undead *flâneur* too much for that.

vice, *ad infinitum*. So, the cyclical flux at the root of the werewolf narrative also exists *chez le vampire*, and the tone of *Maldoror* enlarges the cycle to a *tourbillon*. Ducasse's text takes occasional pains to invoke the vampire while retaining its werewolf's heart; the deadly carnal power of *Maldoror* is a double-edged blade, as able to destroy with vampiric languor and indolence as with bursts of lycanthropic violence.

A key element of the vampire's attack in *Maldoror* is the location: the bed. The folkloric vampire is defined by his/her bed, the earth, and inability to find rest in it; the victims are likewise troubled on their couches. The vampire is as linked to immobility (recall the image of God-as-*ivrogne* from III-4 as a supine figure stained about the mouth with blood and wine) as the werewolf is to a surfeit of violent motion. The vampire savors where the werewolf rends apart; to do so requires stillness, verging on paralysis, and *Maldoror* evokes in this paralysis both the dreadful and the erotic. What better place than the bed for a vampire to engage a victim in a mortal penetrative act?

One of Maldoror's earliest acts of cruelty in the text is one of these, with much vampiric weight behind it. Bachelard's anatomical qualifications for cruelty are met: the weapons of the moment are claws, or rather nails. The flesh they pierce is pierced only for pleasure, the blood tasted more for *gourmandise* than for thirst. The passage, which I will quote, stands out for its resemblance in part to a tutorial in cruelty. Coming early in the text, the scene finds Maldoror visiting grievous harm upon a child, and narrating the event *avec délices*:

> On doit laisser pousser ses ongles pendant quinze jours. Oh! comme il est doux d'arracher brutalement de son lit un enfant qui n'a rien encore sur la lèvre supérieure, et, avec les yeux très-ouverts, de faire semblant de passer

> suavement la main sur son front, en inclinant en arrière ses beaux cheveux! Puis, tout à coup, au moment où il s'y attend le moins, d'enfoncer les ongles longs dans sa poitrine molle, de façon qu'il ne meure pas; car, s'il mourait, on n'aurait pas plus tard l'aspect de ses misères. […] Rien n'est si bon que son sang, extrait comme je viens de le dire, et tout chaud encore, si ce ne sont ses larmes, amères comme le sel. (*Maldoror* 103)

This is Maldoror's first and most blatant act of vampirism (comprising I, 6), and as such it sets a template for gory sexualized destruction that will soon be given more recherché variants. What I have quoted is merely the opening of the chapter; the text goes on to describe with masturbatory[93] zeal the attack upon this beautiful youth, which Maldoror/Ducasse manages to ascribe to the reader by shifting the perspective from *on* to *tu*. After having spent long hours destroying his "chairs palpitantes" (104), and having had the foresight to bandage his eyes, says Maldoror, *you* must leave the room and re-enter as a stranger to "save" the poor child, and to reveal yourself as his victimizer after drinking in more of his misery. The confession script Maldoror furnishes is plainly a projected love scene between the monster and the ruined youth, and a blood-drenched echo of the process of *l'amour du loup*, with the two bound together in mutual rending in the afterworld:

> Adolescent, pardonne-moi. Une fois sortis de cette vie passagère, je veux que nous soyons entrelacés pendant l'éternité; ne former qu'un seul être,

[93] No doubt of this; Maldoror encourages "you" to drink the child's blood by appealing to the fact that surely, at one time, "you" tasted your own blood and tears and found them tasty, didn't you? The reader is pressed into raping and brutalizing a child, urged into intercourse through the recall of a masturbatory moment. The act of eating oneself, which will be suggested in the Dracula mouth of the drunken God, also implies a broader form of self-consumption.

> ma bouche collé à ta bouche. Même, de cette manière, ma punition ne sera pas complète. Alors, tu me déchireras, sans jamais t'arrêter, avec les dents et les ongles à la fois. Je parierai mon corps de guirlandes embaumées, pour cet holocauste expiatoire; et nous souffrirons tous les deux, moi, d'être déchiré, toi, de me déchirer… ma bouche collée à ta bouche. (105)

Maldoror has yet to shift into animal shape this early in the *Chants*; the song immediately preceding this contains his self-mutilation with the penknife. These two instances together, the initial physical transformation and the rape of the youth, will inject a vampiric flavor in the developing character of the *lycanthrope lautréamontéen*. The *cruauté* on display is perfect. Bachelard notes the significance of the use of a penknife to carve Maldoror's smile, rather than a dagger, "whose effect is murderous rather than cruel" (Bachelard 19). Anticipation and premeditation are obvious in the mandate to "laisser pousser ses ongles pendant quinze jours", the better to plunge them into a breast as the woodpecker and owl will do in III, 4. Maldoror cradles the child like a ghoulish lover and laps up his blood before, during and after the massacre, just as Stoker's Dracula will do to Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker at century's end; yet the werewolf's drive to rip it all apart is present, too, as the attack leaves the boy with "les chairs qui pendent à différents endroits de [son] corps" (*Maldoror* 105). An animal presence is all that is needed to let the lycanthrope equal footing with the vampire in this bloodsucking bedroom scene. Several will present themselves as the *Chants* continue to unspool.

Song II, 9 might be entitled "l'éloge du pou", for Maldoror dedicates the entirety of it to a meditation on a wholly non-supernatural vampire. The first few pages limn the louse as an agent of the liberation-through-violence referenced by Robert E. Ziegler as a

fundamental trope of the *Chants*, inexorably tied up with images of liquidity and flow:

> While liberation through violence is associated with a liquid medium, Lautréamont often evokes man's inclination toward selfishness and resistance to change by references to bodies in a solid state. In his fantasy involving the introduction of lice into the homes of men, he depicts a solid being broken down by a liquid. (Ziegler, 174)

Maldoror's louse is a savage and omnipresent god on earth, apparently formidable enough that it "serait capable, par un pouvoir occulte, de devenir aussi gros qu'un éléphant, d'écraser les hommes comme des épis" (*Maldoror*, 157). The reader walks the circle of life, death and rebirth with the louse, in which mankind buries it (after an old-age mercy killing) with pomp and circumstance, with its innumerable family of incubating nits in our collective hair to console us for the loss. The text evokes the tone of a hyperbolic sermon, one larded with other animals, to depict the awesome strength of his parasite: "Malheur au cachalot qui se battrait contre un pou. Il serait dévoré en un clin d'oeil, malgré sa taille. Il ne resterait pas la queue pour aller annoncer la nouvelle" (158). Maldoror pronounces that it is only the weakness of the louse's anatomy that prevents our entire bodies from being consumed by it: "Soyez certains que, si leur mâchoire était conforme à la mesure de leurs voeux infinis, la cervelle, la rétine des yeux, la colonne vertébrale, tout votre corps y passerait. Comme une goutte d'eau"[94] (ibid.). The louse is further personified, or deified, as the inspiration and progeny (in a dark mirroring of the self-begetting God) of Filth, "la saleté", an ur-prostitute whose unions with humanity

[94] Again the phantom of Hugo's vampiric octopus, repugnant where Lautréamont's ravening animals are revered. Of Hugo's long and detailed list of horrors concerning the octopus, a crowning one is the creature's supposed way of consuming its victims: "Il vous tire à lui et en lui, et, lié, englué, impuissant, vous vous sentez lentement vidé dans cet épouvantable sac, qui est un monstre. Au-delà du terrible, être mangé vivant, il y a l'inexprimable, être bu vivant" (*Travailleurs 498-99)*.

allow it to increase its number.

A parasitic, penetrating thing, impossible to resist and empowered by brute sexual behavior – a fine vampire of an insect, even when not blown up to elephant-size by occult influence. It is when Maldoror engages with the louse on a fleshly level that the werewolf's bestial hybrid spirit becomes apparent. He speaks of his creation in a large pit (forty square leagues deep and wide, to be precise – the louse isn't the only beast capable of assuming enormous dimensions) of "une mine vivante de poux" (160) that he harvests and seeds the world with, and each louse bears his intimate stamp:

> J'arrachai un pou femelle aux cheveux de l'humanité. On m'a vu se coucher avec lui pendant trois nuits consecutives, et je le jetai dans la fosse. La fécondation humaine, qui aurait été nulle dans d'autres cas pareils, fut acceptée, cette fois, par la fatalité; et, au bout de quelques jours, des milliers de monstres, grouillant dans un noeud compacte de matière, naquirent à la lumière. (ibid.)

The conjugal dimension, so recently ascribed to the louse in its background and so integral to the werewolf's presence, is now textual. Maldoror's action here is vampiric and lycanthropic. He is set to penetrate the population of the world by means of millions of proxies, infecting them and drawing their blood on a level largely below their perceptions, and he has created these proxies in the oldest of old-fashioned ways. His "fécondation" of the female louse allows him to become the beast at a generational remove; his hybrid children will now sow discord with his dark energy behind them. Coupled with the presence of the vampire, the sexuality of the lycanthrope, heretofore deadening and deformed (Mme Bisclavret's noseless daughters, Hauteclaire and

Savigny's isolating romance, Michel's bloodless bachelorhood and fatal wedding night), is now ludicrously fruitful. "L'éloge du pou" sets up the tiny bloodsuckers as able to reproduce themselves on their own rather as vampires do, slowly, at something like a one-to-one ratio compared to what Maldoror makes possible. His coupling allows the production of Ziegler's river of lice, breaking down the walls of men with bestial force.

The melding of loneliness, obscenity, cruelty and animality that make up the *lycanthrope lautréamontéen* is almost complete. All elements are in place; they will come together, and achieve apotheosis, in the cauldron of the sea.

The She-Shark: Ichthyology and Etymology

Le Clézio has the following general statement to make on the animal metamorphoses present in *Maldoror*:

> La transformation de l'homme en animal, au fond même de l'imaginaire, s'exprime sous ce thème de la métamorphose, comme dans les mythes grecs et latins. C'est par ce thème que l'homme peut découvrir la force des instincts et cette présence animale qui est au fond de lui. Mais c'est surtout le moyen d'énoncer cette fascination, cette très grande proximité du règne animal, et la fragilité des formes qui bouleversent l'ordre de la création. ("Métamorphoses I" 3)

Greco-Roman myth does leave its marks on *Maldoror* (so does virtually everything else, in one way or another). Maldoror alters himself as fluidly as a nymph fleeing the embrace of a god, and works violent change on others with Olympian caprice. The key

difference, of course, is the nature of the lust that drives the change – if Zeus introduced himself as a shower of gold into Danaë's chamber to conceive Perseus, Maldoror would likely do so with a different end in mind. This is not to say that Maldoror evinces nothing like love. I come now to the thirteenth chapter of the second song, and by way of opening, a look at a classical metamorphosis with a relevance that will soon become apparent.

I refer to the story of Glaucus, as found straddling the thirteenth and fourteenth books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Glaucus is something of a lesser, nautical Dionysus figure, given his human origins.[95] He began life as a mortal fisherman, laying out his day's catch on the grass in a cove "which no cattle,/No sheep, no goats, had ever grazed" (Ovid 336). His dying fish nibble this virgin grass, which rejuvenates them enough to let them flop back into the sea. Curious, Glaucus tastes the grass himself and is overcome with desire to leave the land and live in the sea, which he does at once. Moved by his desire, the sea gods Oceanus and Tethys change him into one of their own, with "this beard, dark green,/These locks that flow behind me over long waves,/These shoulders and blue arms, these legs that trail/Into a fish-like end" (337). Once Glaucus completes the shift into his merman's shape, he falls desperately in love with the sea-nymph Scylla, who rejects him outright because of his appearance. The end of this story is perhaps better known than its beginning; Glaucus turns for help to the witch Circe, herself a dab hand at turning men into other creatures. Circe offers her love in place of the nymph's, and when Glaucus rejects her in turn ("Leaves will grow on the sea,/And sea-weed flourish on the mountain-tops,/Before I change my love, while Scylla lives", 339), she wreaks vengeance on Scylla by changing her into the dread monster encounted by

[95] Dionysus was placed on Earth to be raised by mortals after his human mother's death and his own birth from Zeus' thigh; as a youth he made his own pilgrimage to Olympus for recognition, and is the only one of the Twelve Olympians to have ascended from human roots.

Odysseus and his crew, across the Strait of Messina from Charybdis. In fine werewolf tradition, metamorphosis breeds metamorphosis.

That the sea should be a locus for a transformation charged with *eros* goes almost without saying. The ancient equivalency between the female body and the oceanic one is so inculcated in the Western mind as to require little to no explanation, visible even in the homophonic relationships between the very words for “mother” and “sea” in the Romance languages. The sea is vast, unknown, tempting to explorers and always potentially deadly. Its salt water is analogous to blood and the fluids of the womb, making a sailor’s ship voyage a penetrative act. The sea provides much that enables human life, yet humans cannot live in it. It cannot be mapped as the land can. Its influence warps and erodes the shape of whatever it touches, be it rock and wood or human flesh. These elements combine to make the ocean the logical evolution of the dangerous other-place where the werewolf finds sanctuary, far more alien and unknowable than the dark woods of "Bisclavret" and "Lokis". Bachelard, remarking on the presence of flying and swimming creatures in *Maldoror*, often reversed in nature (the octopus legions flying across the sky in II, 15), sees a freedom in this confusion of creatures and elements: “The bird and the fish live within a volume, while we live only on a surface. They have more ‘liberty,’ as mathematicians put it, than we” (Bachelard 28). This discrepancy between surface and volume, and the metamorphic drive to pass between them is a cornerstone of *Maldoror*, reminiscent of Glaucus’ enchanted yearning for an aquatic life (on which more to come), and harking back to my remarks on Poe’s observer in “Man of the Crowd,” observing society’s animal movements through a sheet of glass like the wall of an aquarium, and being quite out of his element (at sea, if you

will) when he plunges in to investigate up close. The song in question here, II, 13, features just such a passage from observation to participation. In this case, the crush on the far side of the glass is the desired goal.

As narrator, Maldoror casts the passage as, above all, a love story, by opening with a key line that is also an entreaty: "Je cherchais une âme qui me ressemblât, et je ne pouvais pas la trouver" (*Maldoror* 174). Resemblance, already a crucial and loaded term as it pertains to the werewolf (a human coming to resemble an animal in form and action), here bears the double burden of romantic signification (as we fall in love with those who show us the best of ourselves, or ourselves as we would like to be). The text is careful to take the narrator's unstable physicality into account; what is important to this search is the soul, the constant at the heart of the lycanthropic storm that could permit a Bisclavret to retain his mind and morals in the woods. Maldoror commences what might be termed a brief audition period, in search of this soulmate, and the first two of the three candidates are deemed incompatible. The first, a young man "dont la présence engendrait des fleurs sur son passage"(ibid.), appears to him with the rising sun and is summarily turned down. The second, a young woman who comes to call at dusk, gets more in the way of rejection. Maldoror sends her from him with a statement worthy of many lesser monsters in lesser works to come, more powerful here because the book up to this point is the proof of what he says:

> Dès que je la vis: «Je vois que la bonté et la justice ont fait résidence dans ton coeur: nous ne pourrions pas vivre ensemble. Maintenant, tu admires ma beauté, qui a bouleversé plus d'une; mais, tôt ou tard, tu te repentirais de m'avoir consacré ton amour; car, tu ne connais pas mon âme. Non que

> je te sois jamais infidèle: celle qui se livre à moi avec tant d'abandon et de confiance, avec autant de confiance et d'abandon, je me livre à elle; mais, mets-te-le dans la tête, pour ne jamais oublier: les loups et les agneaux ne se regardent pas avec les yeux doux.» (174-75)

In a lesser work, and indeed at the onsets of more than a few real-world romantic liaisons, such words might serve as enticements, of a male setting himself up to a prospective conquest of either gender as a distant and dangerous (read: challenging and sexy) figure. But I would call attention to this brief passage's masterful capturing of the same dynamic elucidated in the Cixous text, the self-cannibalizing cyclical attraction of *l'amour du loup*: the chiasmic use of the reflexive verb *se livrer*, from "qui se livre à moi" to "je me livre à elle"; the two-handed potential for joy or destruction in that verb (one can give oneself over to any number of things, for good or ill); and the overt reference to "les loups et les agneaux". We learn from the Cixous text that when the wolf and the lamb do look at each other "les yeux doux," it is each one's own reflection that softens the heart and forestalls annihilation (the weakness within the wolf, the strength within the lamb). Though the text makes it clear here (and frequently elsewhere) that Maldoror has a beautiful shape in some guises, he sees nothing of himself in this beautiful girl. If they joined together, he would eat her right up.

The third candidate takes her time to arrive; she is preceded by a long stretch of sexualized carnage in the form of a shipwreck. Maldoror seats himself on a rock at the beach, and watches a warship at anchor being torn apart by a storm. Those aforementioned sanguine/amniotic ocean waters come together in overwhelming “masses aqueuses” (175) to overwhelm the ship, said *à plusieurs reprises* to have “flancs”. The

ship is portrayed, unmistakably, as a living creature thrashing in the agonies of death and birth *à la fois*. It fills the air with noises of distress, firing cannons and clanking chains, until, at the point of sinking entirely, "il s'échappe un cri universel de douleur immense d'entre les flancs du vaisseau" (ibid.), and the ship's womb disgorges its human crew into the sea, where they will surely die: "Chacun se dit qu'une fois dans l'eau, il ne pourra plus respirer; car, d'aussi loin qu'il fait revenir sa mémoire, il ne se reconnaît aucun poisson pour ancêtre" (176).

This lack of a fishy precedent is about to prove a readily surmountable obstacle for Maldoror. He receives the death throes of the ship, and the men's embrace of their own watery grave, with orgasmic pleasure: "Ô ciel! comment peut-on vivre, après avoir éprouvé tant de voluptés!" (ibid.) He remains fixed on the beach to continue enjoying the agony, marking the time by stabbing himself in the cheek with a blade every fifteen minutes (this also gives him the additional *jouissance* of extrapolating the sailors' large suffering from his small one). He readies his gun, in case any of the men should be impertinent enough to survive a swim to the shore and confound his pleasure. He does in fact shoot one, a strong young lad likely to reach the shore, and notes that this single near-automatic murder, though pleasurable, cannot stack up against the death unspooling around it. Naturally it isn't long before the sharks arrive, six of them, and Maldoror's nautical orgy becomes a floating dinner table – the sharks' hungry agitation turns the foundering men into a literal buffet, detailed as "une omelette sans oeufs," "pâté de foie de canard," and "du bouilli froid" (179). Then a gigantic female shark arrives at the table and fights the smaller males away, killing three of them.

The charmed third candidate has arrived, and the moment has come. Maldoror

passes through the barrier between observer and participant; a change from first-person to third-person marks his passage. He drives off the remaining males with his gun, takes the plunge into the gory water and has the she-beast all to himself. I reproduce the remarkable encounter here:

> Alors, d'un commun accord, entre deux eaux, ils glissèrent l'un vers l'autre, avec une admiration mutuelle, la femelle de requin écartant l'eau de ses nageoires, Maldoror battant l'onde avec ses bras; et retinrent leur souffle, dans une vénération profonde, chacun désireux de contempler, pour la première fois, son portrait vivant. Arrivés à trois mètres de distance, sans faire aucun effort, ils tombèrent brusquement l'un contre l'autre, comme deux aimants, et s'embrassèrent avec dignité et reconnaissance, dans une étreinte aussi tendre que celle d'un frère ou d'une soeur. Les désirs charnels suivirent de près cette démonstration d'amitié. Deux cuisses nerveuses se collèrent étroitement à la peau visqueuse du monstre, comme deux sangsues; et, les bras et les nageoires entrelacés autour du corps de l'objet aimé qu'ils entouraient avec amour, tandis que leurs gorges et leurs poitrines ne faisaient bientôt plus qu'une masse glauque aux exhalaisons de goëmon; au milieu de la tempête qui continuait de sévir; à la lueur des éclairs; ayant pour lit d'hyménée la vague écumeuse, emportés par un courant sous-marin comme dans un berceau, et roulant, sur eux-mêmes, vers les profondeurs inconnues de l'abîme, ils se réunirent dans un accouplement long, chaste et hideux!… (180-81)

I have placed this scene as the culminating point of my final chapter not because it makes any great new revelations about the figure of the werewolf, but because it contains the elements I've examined and highlighted elsewhere, gathered in one place and thrown into sharp relief. The human-animal barrier is there to be transgressed, and transgressed it surely is. Sex, violence and food are juxtaposed so thoroughly as to become one single creative/destructive/regenerative act, as is the case with the vampire and the werewolf, and as in "Le Bonheur dans le crime"'s carnally charged swordplay and murderous domestic bliss – Maldoror's thighs clasp the shark's hide "comme deux sangsues," two leeches whose close embrace incorporates the lover's grip and the draining of life to extend life. The atavistic regression of "Lokis" is equally implied; being morphologically adaptable to any cause for cruelty, Maldoror can devolve and survive where the sailors were doomed to drown. And the scene fairly rings with that rejection of known for unknown, space for volume, village for woods, order for chaos that underlines the tales of those who change from man to beast.

I would draw attention to what I judge to be a crucial phrase in the above passage: together the monster and the shark make "une masse glauque." The word *glauque* carries several dictionary meanings, all applicable here. *Glauque*, or *glaucous* in English, could refer to a color, a shade of blue-green that appears in the taxonomical names of several animals – in fact, ichthyologists know the blue shark as *Prionace glauca*. *Glauque* may equally refer to a state of cloudiness, fogginess, as it does at the root of *glaucoma*. Or, more abstractly, a sinister or louche nature could be called *glauque*. But given all of the elements on display, I find it impossible to not see this "masse glauque" as a callback by Lautréamont to the myth of Glaucus, and the powerful understanding of human-animal

metamorphosis that radiates from the oldest recorded stories in the world to make itself felt in the modern age. By inserting a taste of Ovid into his surreal prose-poetic nightmare, he is reminding that reader that within the mass of *Maldoror* is an evolution of history's fictional and mythic men and women who turned into creatures for a rainbow of reasons. Maldoror's distinction, his triumph, is to make the change for his own purposes. Admirable or reprehensible, as the ultimate lycanthrope, Maldoror does exactly as he wishes.

Conclusion

Taming the Beast

> Stevenson suggests that the Werewolf's face is our face, and it takes some of the humor out of Lou Costello's famous comeback to Lon Chaney, Jr. in *Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein*. Chaney, playing the persecuted skin-changing Larry Talbot, mourns to Costello: "You don't understand. When the moon rises, I'll turn into a wolf." Costello replies: "Yeah, you and about five million other guys."
>
> – Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*

In the 21st century, the lycanthrope remains as omnipresent a cultural figure as he was in the Middle Ages, but perception of him could scarcely be more different. A considerable share of the changes in his image may be attributed to the rise of the moving image at the beginning of the 20th century. Since it became possible to put him on the screen, the werewolf has been a largely visual beast. In fact, he has been denied the foothold in the literary realm given to his kinsman, the vampire. Though I have just examined several texts in which he plays a fundamental role, he has no story with the reach and popularity of *Dracula* to call his own[96].

Part of this is due to a lack of work for him to do. As the 19th century bled into the 20th, with psychological ideas moving into the home and two world wars about to shock society with human-wrought violence on a scale hitherto unknown, the small-scale

[96] With one possible English-language exception; see next note.

carnage of a lycanthrope would soon be seen as positively tame. His evil actions were fated to lose much of their evil, and most of them would unfold on the screen.

Stories of werewolves, vampires and other monstrosities, from sources literary and folkloric, were ideal material for the nascent film industry to visualize for a hungry public. Monsters started creeping across the screen in the cinema's infancy; many silent horror shows were produced, and just as many lost to time and lack of preservation. This trend continued as movies gained the power of speech, with the nadir of the Great Depression in 1931 seeing the release of two films containing what may be the two most iconic performances of horror cinema, Bela Lugosi in, and as, Tod Browning's *Dracula*, and Boris Karloff as the heartbreaking Creature in James Whale's *Frankenstein*. That grim year also featured *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Rouben Mamoulian's adaptation of the Stevenson novel, and an early example of what would become the primary draw of the werewolf movies to come: a man becoming a monster right before the audience's eyes[97].

Literal lycanthropes began to make their mark on celluloid in earnest, and in short order: standouts include *Werewolf of London* in 1935, *The Wolf Man* in 1941, and of course, *Cat People* in 1942. In all of these the threat of the beast-man or beast-woman is tempered with a generous dose of sympathy[98]. Irena Dubrovna's feline trouble has been discussed in Chapter Two; *Wolf Man*'s Lawrence Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr.) is a simple,

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[97] In my introduction I noted the close proximity between Edward Hyde and the generalized physical unpleasantness seen as a mark of lycanthropic alterity in the Victorian mind. Stephen King, who should know, concurs in his comprehensive survey of horror in 20th century America (at least up to the point of its 1981 publication), *Danse Macabre*. He makes the case that these three stories embody three horror classifications, referred to by him as *the tarot*, into which much of the genre may be grouped: The Vampire, The Werewolf, and The Thing Without a Name (*Frankenstein*).

[98] The same may be said of other totemic horror characters as well, and certainly the other two above. Frightful appearance notwithstanding, Karloff played the Creature as a confused child with murderous strength, earning much sympathy from audiences. And Lugosi's suave Dracula may be credited (or blamed) for starting the vampire down the path towards the position of highly sexed, only occasionally bloodthirsty romantic hero it often enjoys today; Stoker's original vision of the character was colder and more brutal, and that of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* was nothing short of repulsive.

honest Welshman (Chaney's accent is explained away by years of study in America) who is bitten while defending a girl from attack, and spends his days anguished by what he does at night. This would remain the template for werewolf players for decades to come. The fundamental decency of "Bisclavret" resurfaced to inform the characters played by Chaney, Henry Hull, Oliver Reed and others; what was once an embodiment of the terror felt before invasive, destructive otherness in human life, slowly broadened its reach to include fears of unchecked emotion and untethered id, common to all who might encounter it. The werewolf became a tragic figure of audience identification, step by step, story by story, perhaps culminating in 1957's *I Was A Teenage Werewolf*, in which Michael Landon's perpetually angry rebel-without-a-cause only needs regression therapy from Whit Bissell's shifty psychiatrist (who apparently shares a moral compass with *Cat People*'s Dr. Judd)[99] to make him go wolf in the high school gymnasium.

Meanwhile, with readers and moviegoers becoming comfortable with psychiatry in their entertainment, it was no longer necessary for storytellers to cloak the actions of a psychopathic killer or sexual deviant in the skin of a werewolf. So as the werewolf became housetrained, recognizably human monsters stepped up to claim his mantle. There was no longer any need to identify a serial killer as a lycanthrope, or to ascribe an incident of sexual abuse to the animal within. Norman Bates in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, as written by Robert Bloch and scripted by Joseph Stefano, is able to have his murders in Mother's clothing calmly explained away in precise terms by a psychiatrist. By the tumultuous American year of 1969, the split between the old savage werewolf and the new sympathetic model will have become a rift: while Charles Manson (who certainly

[99] Mad psychiatrists make a fascinating subset of the mad-scientist variety of horror, and would be a fine subject for another dissertation.

would have been a lycanthrope a few centuries earlier) directed his Family in their acts of slaughter, American television's Gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows*[100], a favorite of schoolchildren, dedicated the year to the attempted redemption of rakish werewolf Quentin Collins, played with pathos and matinée-idol good looks by David Selby. After this, there would be werewolf toys, action figures and games[101], but little genuine horror[102].

This is not to say that the fears and anxieties the lycanthrope used to embody have gone away. But their value has changed, perhaps not lessened but moved away from center stage. Violence is widespread in life and the media, and sexual politics are more varied than they have ever been. As I have stated, the werewolf is well in view at the present time. He appears to be waiting for his chance to be frightening again. What he has not lost is his connection to sexuality.

L'amour du loup is alive and well in literature, and visitors to a bookstore do not

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[100] This daily program, which ran from 1966 to 1971, broke ground by presenting the supernatural in the milieu of the American soap opera, and also provided its eager viewers with a grounding in Gothic and horror literature, likely without their being aware of it. Regular storylines included vampires, werewolves, witches, ghosts, cultists and others, and drew liberally from a shelf of literary classics. *Dark Shadows* counted two werewolves among its cast, both of them in this kinder, gentler mold – attractive, damaged, and appalled by their condition.

In television terms, *Dark Shadows* continues the integration of the monstrous into the normal initiated by two comedy programs that were cancelled the year it began, *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*. Both of these were situation comedies and parodies of the squeaky-clean sitcoms of the 1950s. *The Munsters* were a family of classic movie monsters ensconced in, and devoted to, suburban banality; *The Addams Family* were a clan of decadent eccentrics who seemed to worship death and decay. Both of these shows played upon society's rejection of these families, and the families' refusal to accept it; *Dark Shadows* is able to position the Stokeresque storyline of its chief vampire, Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid) as on a par with such ordinary soap opera staples as marital infidelity, alcoholism and children born out of wedlock.

[101] Even a breakfast food – General Mills included a werewolf, Fruit Brute, in their lineup of sugary monster-themed breakfast cereals in the mid-1970s; he shared the table with Count Chocula, Franken Berry and Boo Berry. There are fewer things less threatening than a breakfast cereal. Maldoror would not have approved.

[102] Horrific lycanthropes did make a return in the first years of the 1980s. I have already mentioned the remake of *Cat People*, *The Howling* and the adaptation of *The Company of Wolves*; others include John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* in 1981, and Daniel Attias' *Silver Bullet* in 1985 (based on a novella by Stephen King). To my mind, *Cat People* is the only one of these in which the lycanthrope functions as the figure of violent carnal dread it used to be; the other films have most of their *raisons d'être* in the fact that special effects technology had evolved the point that werewolf transformations could be spectacular, gory showpieces. Apart from that, they are reminiscences of older films; Landis' film makes overt references to *The Wolf Man* and 1961's *Curse of the Werewolf*, right down to its tragic ending.

have to look far to find characters of both genders jumping into bed with animal-people as freely as Red Riding Hood did with Grandmother, but for definite sexual purposes. As of now in 2012, this is occurring at all registers of writing; those esteemed as literary authors are noticing the rich territory to be mined (and money to be made) by adding a few monsters to their work[103], and even a cursory search of the burgeoning branch of popular erotica called "paranormal romance" will reveal sexual entanglements involving human-animal half-breeds male and female, gay and straight, earthly and otherwise. Though the research has yet to be done (by me, at least), I would posit that the field of queer studies and the literature under its purview might offer fruitful ground for those interested in literary lycanthropy. The werewolf is clearly still of use in the bedroom, though the former terror of sexual difference has metamorphosed, and is still metamorphosing, into celebration of it. It seems to no longer be the case that to separate a werewolf from his clothes is to damn him – indeed, popular culture now has difficulty letting werewolves keep their clothes *on*.

He cannot be said to have gone to ground again, but it may be that the lycanthrope has surrendered his menace to other fearsome figures. The neuroses of the modern world may be too big for him to bear. However, he remains a fascinating figure for study. In view of this, it can only be a boon if he has been rendered more approachable and accessible by cultural movements. An approachable werewolf is a tamed werewolf, and in dealing with a tamed werewolf, one is far less likely to be torn to bits.

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[103] For an example of this, see *The Last Werewolf* from 2011, by British author Glen Duncan. Hailed as something of a second coming for the werewolf novel, and met with high praise from literary critics, it presents a hard-drinking, navel-gazing, 200-year-old lycanthrope, supposed to be the last of his kind, who spends his time having sex with prostitutes, eating people when the moon is full, and longing for death.

Another note: in 2012, and much later than many expected, given her success with vampires, Anne Rice has just published her first werewolf novel, *The Wolf Gift*. That an author of her stature in the genre has come around to writing about him would seem to signal a rise in popularity.

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