Wolves and Werewolves: How Our Beliefs About One Influence the Other

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Introduction

While modern research into the behavior and socialization of wolf packs positively influences the portrayal of werewolves in contemporary fantasy literature, in horror novels, or other stories portraying lycanthropy as undesirable or dangerous, past prejudices about real wolves tend to eclipse fact-based observations. In texts portraying lycanthropy in a positive or desirable light, the contemporary scientific parallels are significant, but in literature portraying lycanthropy in a negative way, these parallels are absent. This is significant because while scholars have discussed werewolves from a historical, folkloric, and even literary standpoint, my research indicates that no one has studied how our changing view of wolves has resulted in similar evolutions of the portrayal of werewolves in the various genres of contemporary fiction.

As modern research educates the public regarding wolves' behaviors and social patterns, people increasingly empathize with wolves and seek to treat them humanely. However, previous generations of "naturalists," nature writers and field biologists of varying experience, spread lurid and hostile fabrications about wolves. Those stories remain embedded in the public consciousness. This sets up a clear contrast between the more positive views of werewolves in contemporary fantasy literature, where authors use modern lupine research from approximately the last sixty years to humanize their werewolves, and werewolves portrayed as a source of horror, where authors rely on the monstrous preconceptions still held about wolves to craft their werewolves, thus perpetuating stereotypes that influence individual and collective responses to the treatment of actual wolves. If fantasy authors were to include more positive portrayals of werewolves in their fiction, it could create a more positive contextualization for the protection of wild wolves.

The Reality

According to Valerie M. Fogleman, a leading environmental lawyer and professor at Cardiff University in Wales, "…[M]odern scientific research about wolves began in the 20th century." Prior to and even after that, sensationalist, exaggerated, and outright false stories about wolves' viciousness and bloodthirstiness spread far and wide, mostly via dramatic magazine articles. She states that the first study using modern research techniques took place in 1944; therefore, all accurate scientific knowledge we have about wolves today has been gathered since then (Fogleman 81). Modern research on wolves has helped to dispel an incredible amount of misinformation, but much more is left to learn. As L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani say in the introduction to their seminal book, *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*:

> The wolf is truly a special animal. As the most widely distributed of all land mammals, the wolf, formally the gray wolf (Canis lupis), is also one of the most adaptable… The great variation in the wolf's environment, and in the creature's behavior and ecology as it contends with that environment, makes generalizing difficult. This problem can lead to false generalizations and misunderstanding about the animal. (xv)

Therefore, this paper will provide as accurate and up-to-date scientific information as was available at the time of writing, but it is worth noting that there is likely an exception to every anecdote and discovery that wolf researchers have made. For example, we know today that a wolf pack is, first and foremost, a biological family unit. However, as wolves leave their natal packs and disperse in search of territory and a mate, sometimes they are adopted into other packs. Sometimes they find a mate and start their own pack. Sometimes they spend a year or more splitting their time between their natal pack and another that they have been adopted into. Therefore, the designation of a biological family unit does not necessarily hold for all instances. As a result, this discussion will necessarily deal with some of the generalizations that Mech and Boitani warn us about. It is important to keep this in mind moving forward.

Common knowledge has spread the notion that the hierarchy within a wolf pack is rigid, with the alpha male and female at the top, followed by the less dominant beta wolf or wolves, all the way down to the supposedly abused and submissive omega member. However, although the number of members fluctuates far more than the members of a human family, the two otherwise display a large number of similarities. Instead of alpha, beta, and omega members in a wolf pack, consider a human family: the parents (or, more correctly, the breeding pair) are the dominant members, and the children range below them. Dominance is not based on size or age alone; in fact, in both humans and wolves, personalities are the greatest indicator of dominance. Additionally, dominance doesn't necessarily mean bullying more submissive pack members. For example, many people today consider their pets to be part of the family. A pet is the equivalent of an omega wolf, because while pets are cherished and taken care of, they are not allowed to attempt to dominate the humans in their families. If a pet attempts to do so, it is reprimanded and subsequently put in its place, just as a so-called omega wolf would be.

In both wolf packs and human families, siblings tend to make up the bulk of the pack. These siblings can be the children of the breeding pair, or they can be the siblings of one member of the breeding pair. While the former is considered standard, the latter is not at all uncommon and would occur in cases where one member of the breeding pair aged out or died. The dynamics between these siblings and half-siblings depends on a number of factors, including ages and environmental influences, while personality is, again, generally the most accurate indicator.

Even families with adult children and aging parents can find their situation mirrored in a wolf pack, because the hierarchy within a wolf pack can be approximately as fluid as a human family. Adult children have a different relationship with their parents than young children do with theirs. Furthermore, the relationship between children and their parents evolve as the children grow. In

wolf packs where one or more of the breeding pair's children do not disperse to find their own territories and mates, the hierarchy shifts as family members come of age, grow ill or injured, recover their strength, and accept or reject newcomers into their pack.

Dispersal is the process by which the offspring of a breeding pair leave their natal pack to individually search for their own mate and territory. "Some wolves disperse when as young as 5 months of age, whereas others may remain with the pack for up to 3 years, or occasionally longer" (Mech and Boitani, *Ecology* 11). Dispersal has been recorded as late as five years of age, though it generally occurs when the offspring is between 10 and 36 months. Dispersal usually occurs during puberty, when tensions between the maturing wolf and the pack's breeding pair rise. A low food supply can also trigger a higher dispersal rate. According to Brenda Peterson, author of *Wolf Nation: The Life, Death, and Return of Wild American Wolves*, only approximately 20 percent of the wild wolf population are dispersed at any given time (179).

When a young wolf disperses from their natal pack, they go in search of a few things: a mate, enough food to feed them both, and a territory of their own. A successful wolf is one who has found those things and gone on to have a litter. Until a dispersed wolf finds a mate and settles down, however, it is considered a lone wolf. Almost none of the common knowledge or connotations held today about "lone wolves" is accurate—for one, real lone wolves are never as violent as a "lone wolf" human killer. As Peterson states:

> Not only does comparing a man who opens fire with a military-grade automatic weapon on a helpless crowd of people to a lone wolf betray our blatant prejudice against this most maligned animal; it also is not based in any biological fact. A real lone wolf has deeply diminished powers to hunt or kill. A solitary wolf must live off smaller ground prey like squirrels and rabbits. Without family for protection and alliance, the wolf endures the most endangered time of his life and will survive only half as long as the eight- to ten-year life span of wolves in the wild (159).

For wolves, being alone is always temporary. They, like people, are not meant to live in isolation. A wolf named OR7, nicknamed Journey for dispersing over 1,200 miles after leaving his natal pack, traveled as far as he did in search of a mate. Additionally, the "slender, black" female wolf that he eventually paired with had also dispersed from her natal pack, likely based in northeastern Oregon (Peterson 185-86).

OR7, born in 2009, was special in several ways. First was the epic journey for which he was nicknamed—he traveled hundreds of miles farther west than any wild wolf had since their reintroduction to the lower 48 states. He was also the first wolf in Western Oregon in sixty years. Additionally, in December 2011, he made international news by being the first wolf to cross the border from Oregon into California since 1924, when the last wild Californian wolf was killed. As OR7 reached milestone after milestone, he accumulated thousands of fans from across the U.S. who followed his progress online. Everyone from schoolchildren to seasoned field biologists spent years rooting for him; even some hardline anti-wolf politicians allowed that they would at least

consider supporting bills that only permitted the hunting of wolves that had "a history of going after livestock" (Peterson 186).

OR7 did not change everyone's minds, of course, but his stardom raised the profile of all wolf conservation and why that conservation is important. People who had never given a second thought to wolves before grew genuinely invested in OR7's health and progress across the western U.S. Documentaries and other media coverage brought wolf conservation into the public consciousness; a San Francisco librarian even wrote a successful children's book about OR7's journey, which further endeared him to the public. We are lucky that OR7's dispersal closely followed a hero's epic journey because it illustrates so clearly that when humans can look at wolves with empathy, it can help us learn to value and protect them. Furthermore, when authors imbue werewolves with genuine wolf-like characteristics, rather than the horrific and untrue attributes humankind has long associated with wolves, readers' attachments to these werewolf characters can help them to see wolves with a clearer and less fearful eye.

Fantastic Werewolves

Charles de Lint's short novel *Wolf Moon* features a werewolf named Kern on the run from an evil musician with a magical harp. The book opens with the werewolf going over a waterfall rather than confronting the musician's golem. He washes up near an inn where he is taken in and healed. Kern and the innkeeper, Ainsy, fall in love, but before Kern can tell her his secret the harper finds him and turns Kern's newfound family against him. Ainsy's cousin fights her way free of the magic and helps Kern kill the harper.

Although De Lint's version of a werewolf exhibits a much higher tendency toward violence against humans than is realistic for actual wolves—Kern kills a brigand who was torturing Ainsey's uncle and, later, the evil musician—for the most part Kern's journey follows that of a young wolf. His first transformation occurred at thirteen, "hard on the heels of puberty" (42). His parents, who were completely human, drove him away in fear.

In reality, "dispersals do not seem to be actively chased away;" it is usually a mutual parting due to puberty-related aggression (Mech and Boitani, "Ecology" 13). Conflicts within the pack become more common when young wolves reach sexual maturity. When these conflicts become intolerable, the young wolves disperse. The young wolf's quest, however, is the same as Kern's. He wants to find a mate (Ainsy), find a territory he can call home (the inn), and have a pack (the rest of the inn's ragtag permanent guests, and presumably any children that Kern and Ainsy may have down the road).

Wolf Moon is significant because, above and beyond the implicit similarities between Kern's journey and that of a young wolf's, de Lint draws a direct line between the werewolves in the world of Wolf Moon and real wolves:

> What was it about [Kern's] gray brothers that filled people with such terror? They spoke of a pack numbering thirty or more, but that was never the case. A pack of twelve wolves was

> extraordinarily large. Folk told tales of atrocities that only men were capable of and laid the blame on a wolf. Not that wolves were gentle creatures, incapable of violent actions. They were the rulers of the forest, fierce and implacable when aroused. But first there must be a threat of some sort… (129)

Even Kern's new family, before they learn he is a werewolf, openly despises wolves as terrifying predators, capable of bloody and horrific "atrocities" (129). When the antagonist, a musician named Tuiloch, begins telling people that he's seen a wolf in the woods nearby, even Ainsy wants to know: "Is anything being done to hunt the [wolf] down?" (129). The wolf's supposed presence is what frightens people, not its actions.

The reader sympathizes with Kern as he listens to people he respects and is growing to love disparate creatures like him. Additionally, part of what makes the musician a villain is his use of the preconceptions people hold about wolves to stoke fear and hatred for the supposed lone wolf in the nearby woods—he turns people against Kern before revealing to them that Kern is the wolf. Granted, the musician uses dark magic to complete Kern's ostracization, but Tuiloch's actions stem from the belief that wolves—and werewolves—should be hunted into extinction. Tuiloch treats Kern like an animal that would make a good hunting trophy.

De Lint uses the reader's sympathy for Kern and his efforts to defeat Tuiloch to build an indirect yet equally sympathetic link between the reader and nonfictional wolves. The reader feels for Kern, who in turn dislikes that regular wolves are hunted as he is being hunted—relentlessly, and by someone who cares not at all if the wolf has a family similar to Kern's new one. Over the course of Wolf Moon, the reader becomes willing to take Kern at his word that wolves deserve the same dignity and respect that he does.

Wolf Moon stands out as a particularly clear example of the parallels between real wolves and werewolves portrayed in a positive light, but it's not the only one. *Huntress Born* by Aimee Easterling and *Raised by Wolves* by Jennifer Lynn Barnes both feature a protagonist who disperses from their natal pack. Furthermore, Easterling's werewolves behave remarkably like real wolves. At one point, Ember, the werewolf protagonist of *Huntress Born*, is sexually harassed by another werewolf on her way home from work. "A teaspoon-ful [sic] of bile clawed its way up my throat and I opened my mouth to release odors that should have cued any sane werewolf in to my lack of interest" (71). Easterling uses the moment to show the reader that there is something mentally wrong with the attacker—he can smell that his advances are physically making Ember want to throw up, but it doesn't phase him at all. As it turns out, the assaulter is under the sway of magic that radically impairs his judgment. Real wolves rely heavily upon olfaction for communication. Most biologists agree that it is a wolf's most acute sense.

In *Huntress Born*, Ember leaves her family to travel to the big city in search of her biological brother. Ember was adopted by her maternal uncle and his wife as a baby but considers her adoptive parents (both werewolves) her real mother and father. Her father is the alpha of their pack, and he treats Ember with warmth, understanding, and respect. He is a good father, and that

is what makes him a good alpha. Jane Packard notes that there are two theories that deal with leadership within a wolf pack. A deterministic view concludes that a wolf pack is a "qualified democracy" within which "the male leader guides the activities of the pack and initiates attacks against trespassers." On the other hand, a stochastic view concludes that "parents influence the offspring, but offspring also influence their parents. Wolf families can be so diverse that both models probably have merit, depending on… the history of relationships within the pack" (Packard 60).

The werewolves in *Huntress Born* use urine to scent mark; it tells other werewolves who left the scent and the leaver's approximate mood. As Easterling writes, "My brother had been present in this very spot no more than a week earlier. And in the way of wolves, he'd imbued not only his identity but also his mood into the chemicals that laced his urine" (32-33). Fred H. Harrington and Cheryl S. Asa discuss wolves' use of urine to communicate at length in their chapter "Wolf Communication" in *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation* (83-86). The werewolves' body language described also tends toward accurate depictions of wolf behavior and interactions: "… [P]awing at the earth, I whined out my confusion;" "…[T]he alpha's displeasure bent down my spine until my tail tucked between my legs;" and "…[S]lobber soaked the bedspread where I'd drooled out my distress and my ears pinned back against my skull" (33, 37, 93).

Easterling plays with the delineation between human and animal through the use of bourgeois mores. Ember, who is blond and white, uses words like "darn," and regularly refers to herself as a "pack princess," believes that certain cultural norms must be followed (16, 63, 127, 71, and 98). Ember is also a baker, and Easterling plays up the harmlessness of creating, sharing, and eating desserts such as apple turnovers, oatmeal cookies, and triple chocolate cupcakes. Through her baking and upper-middle class mores, Ember is among the most harmless of werewolves in existence.

By crafting werewolves that behave similarly to real wolves while keeping them relatively harmless with middle-class backgrounds and an emphasis on behaving civilly, Easterling draws a line directly between how harmless werewolves of *Huntress Born* are and how harmless real wolves generally are to humans. Like de Lint's more overt attempt to spread understanding about wolves as social animals instead of monsters, it is a method of garnering sympathy and understanding for non-supernatural wolves.

The werewolves in Jennifer Lynn Barnes's *Raised by Wolves* exist within a pack, in contrast to *Wolf Moon* and *Huntress Born*. There is a certain level of jockeying for hierarchy inside the pack, as well as an undercurrent of violence that threatens to manifest whenever someone steps too far out of line. Like real wolves, aggression is used to assert dominance and solicitous or humble body language and behavior is used to placate anyone whose dominance has been threatened. In this way, the werewolves in *Raised by Wolves* are dangerous in the same way that wild animals are dangerous: if one cannot read a wolf's body language, it can be impossible to know how to deescalate an encounter.

Raised by Wolves is noteworthy because the protagonist, Bryn, is not physically a werewolf. She is one of the lone humans who grew up in a werewolf pack. As such, she understands werewolves better than she understands humans. Aside from the physiological differences, being a werewolf comes with different body language, expectations, and culture, and Bryn understands those better than she understands humans'. In this way, she is a werewolf in every aspect except the physical ones—she cannot transform into a wolf and lacks the supernatural senses, strength, and advanced healing abilities. However, she behaves and thinks like a werewolf.

In *Raised by Wolves*, Bryn ends up leaving her natal pack and founding her own. She originally leaves under duress, essentially spirited away by her adoptive mother after a disagreement with the alpha of their old pack. The alpha had allowed Bryn to be corporally punished for breaking a pack rule as if she was physically a werewolf. Bryn accepted the punishment, essentially telegraphing submission as a real wolf would, but her adoptive mother (who is also human) decided to leave the pack and take Bryn with her. In biologist terms, they dispersed together. Although there has been no recorded anecdote in which a mother-daughter pair dispersed together, under the right circumstances (for example, if a pack fractured) it is not out of the question. Additionally, after a time Bryn's romantic partner joins them in their new home, helping Bryn carve out a small piece of territory between two existing territories just as real wolves would.

Part of Bryn's emotional journey involves coming to terms with the violence indicative of life among werewolves. She learns to protect herself and surrounds herself with people she trusts not to treat violence as a panacea, as several wolves from her natal pack did. In founding her own pack, Bryn also finds a level of connectedness and family that she had never expected. She grows to accept that a certain amount of violence is part of growing fangs and claws at will, but trusts that her packmates, who are a number of new, young werewolves, are not bloodthirsty in the least. Bryn maintains a relationship with her prior alpha, but both understand that Bryn's new pack is her future. Although they have access to cell phones, email, and other methods to stay in touch, the physical distance between their territories prevents any kind of blending of packs.

Horrific Werewolves

In an unpublished essay obtained via private correspondence, Steve Cave's Stonecoast third semester paper "From Hellhound to Hero: Tracking the Shifting Shape of the 21st Century Werewolf" discusses a shift in the portrayal of werewolves from the monstrous creatures that naturalists historically pushed to protagonists with close family ties and an affinity with the natural world. It has been a gradual evolution occurring over the last two decades or so, but one I predict will continue as solid and meaningful research into wolves progresses. However, Cave's essay overlooks the fact that in horror fiction, werewolves remain as monstrous as wolves have ever been viewed. This holds true even in non-horror novels where lycanthropy is portrayed as something undesirable or dangerous. In novels such as Glen Duncan's *The Last Werewolf*, Carrie Vaughn's *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, and Steven Graham Jones' *Mongrels*, werewolves in their transformed

state are dangerous killing machines without any qualms or morals whose bloodthirstiness often leads to cannibalism.

The Last Werewolf in particular relishes the horror that its protagonist, Jake, creates. It is a gory book full of all the worst characteristics a werewolf can have—in the protagonist's grotesque wolf-like form he is hideous, horrific, and deadly. While reading, one might even conclude that the author intended to disgust the reader as much as possible. Jake has killed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people over his extended lifespan, beginning with the graphic murder and cannibalism of his pregnant wife the first night he transformed. Additionally, and perhaps most tellingly, the protagonist has spent his life since that first transformation as a lone wolf. Some naturalists describing wolf behavior prior to the application of modern research techniques held that wolves only came together to hunt or to mate (Fogleman 72). Because wolves supposedly only tolerated the company of other wolves during mating or at times of bloodshed, all wolves, then, were necessarily lone wolves.

Jake has never held out hope that he might be able to find a mate, although the possibility of sex with a female werewolf (a "She") eternally taunts him.

> On the Curse you're desperate for sex with a She… while off the Curse your regular libido's amped up by the frustration of not having had sex with a She. It's a numbers problem. Infection rates for females have always been low, WOCOP [the werewolf hunting organization] estimates one to every thousand years. As you can imagine, we don't run into one another. (38)

Despite the book's various depravities, the parallels between Jake and dispersed wolves such as OR7 are clear, even though Jake treats the absence of a female werewolf as a problem only because it is impossible to be completely satiated by sex with a human women. What he discovers upon meeting a "She" later in the novel, however, is that meeting the right female werewolf (or in this case, the only one) is rather like meeting one's soul mate. This is a distinctly human idea, of course, but again we see parallels to OR7 and his own mate.

Jake's ideal romantic partner, however, has his same appetites, and it is on these that the book lingers. Jake and Tallulah's meeting is portrayed as a monstrous communion. Even as they retain their human forms between full moons, their inner monsters are only temporarily caged; neither attempts to control their base urges. Tallulah fought it for her first three months as a werewolf when she only ate animals when she transformed, but the combined effort and act nearly killed her (231). Since then, she has adopted Jake's resigned acceptance that if there's no way to reign in the monstrous side of her wolf, then she might as well enjoy it.

> "I'm smarter when I change," she said. "In all the worst ways. In all the ways that matter."
>
> "I know, Lu."
>
> "You think some sort of red cloud would come down, some sort of animal blackness to

> blot everything out and just leave the dumb instinct, but it doesn't… I know what I'm doing. And I don't just like it—I don't just like it…"
>
> "I know."
>
> "I love it… I tasted it," she continued calmly. "All of it. His youth and his shock and his desperation and his horror. And from the first taste I knew I wasn't going to stop until I had it all. The whole person, the whole fucking feast." (232-33)

All this, as they make love in a hotel room. Jake's narration emphasizes that it is his lycanthropy that makes him a monster; although he makes no attempt to control it, without the lycanthropy he would have been a normal human. The same holds for Tallulah.

Fogleman recounts various stories about naturalists from the 1800s and 1900s: "One naturalist ignored the opinion that wolves did not ordinarily attack people by stating that some wolves preferred human flesh to animal flesh. Another naturalist stated that once a wolf tasted human flesh, the animal would then attack people instead of animals" (71). Jake and Tallulah's transformed bodies look more like cinema's traditional humanoid wolf-man than an actual wolf, but it is clear that all their animal urges stem from historical attitudes and misconceptions toward wolves.

It is easy to see the parallels in horror fiction, specifically, to past descriptions of wolves, but it is important to note that in all instances that lycanthropy is portrayed negatively, werewolves' negative traits have roots in historical attitudes. This is true even of non-horror literature such as Carrie Vaughn's *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, in which Kitty Norville, a werewolf, works to balance her lycanthropy with her job as a radio DJ. The novel itself is urban fantasy, but the traits Vaughn gives to its werewolves are both disturbing and similar to those employed in *The Last Werewolf*. Upon transformation, werewolves in *Kitty and the Midnight Hour* experience "innate bloodlust": "…[I]f you didn't hunt deer you'd be hunting people, and that would get you in trouble. How do you feel about hunting people, Pete? How about eating people?" (28). Kitty's pack of fellow werewolves also joins together only at the full moon. The rest of the time, the farther-flung members are essentially lone wolves; recall that common knowledge for centuries insisted that all wolves were lone wolves.

In order to stress Kitty's struggle to maintain a balance between her civilized and wild sides, Vaughn makes the contrast as stark as possible. Like Ember from *Huntress Born*, Kitty is white, blond, and comes from an upper-middle class background with a loving, normal (albeit human) family. She went to college, is working in her preferred field, and—unlike Ember—is only a werewolf because of one terrible night of bad luck. Where in *Huntress Born*, Ember's lycanthropy binds her to her beloved family, Kitty's lycanthropy restricts her job options and time spent with her family because she is unequivocally unavailable once a month.

In addition, Kitty is the most submissive member of her pack. Misconceptions about hierarchy and dominance struggles within wolf packs have led to the mistaken idea that life is

always miserable for the "omega" wolf. While this is generally not true for wild wolf packs, it is absolutely true of Kitty's werewolf pack. The pack's alpha pair —there is no breeding pair in Kitty's world because no werewolf pregnancy is viable—emotionally abuse Kitty while protecting her from physical abuse by the rest of the pack. The alpha male also regularly takes her to bed without giving her the option to say no. Although there are occasions when a pack's most submissive member is abused, sometimes to the extent of dispersal, this is not the way most packs operate.

As aforementioned, most wolf packs in the wild are comprised of biological family members. An excellent example of a horror novel that blends both the accurate and inaccurate traits attributed to real wolves is Stephen Graham Jones's *Mongrels*. The story follows a boy who lives with his aunt and uncle as he grows up. They are a biological pack. His aunt and uncle are werewolves; so was his maternal grandfather, who dies early in the story. The protagonist's mother died in childbirth and his father (the biological outsider in this situation) is hardly mentioned. The violence in *Mongrels* remains front and center—it includes both grave robbing and cannibalism—but blends the horror sourced from old stories and modern knowledge about real wolves.

In *Mongrels*, all the characters consider 16 years old to be full maturity. When the protagonist reaches 16, his aunt and uncle leave him to join their respective romantic partners and the pack effectively disbands. This would be realistic but unusual in a real wolf pack. According to Jane M. Packard, a pack without a breeding pair doesn't generally last very long. It fractures, and the members disperse (38).

However, wolves' devotion to their young is well documented. Siblings from every generation have been recorded helping to take care of their brothers and sisters or nieces and nephews. Though unlikely, it is not impossible to imagine that a pair of siblings might rear their dead sister's pup. In a wild wolf pack, if the puppies' mother dies, the primary job of raising them usually falls to the father. Because the father of *Mongrels*' protagonist is absent, however, this is not possible. Although violence is a given in the hard-scrabble life of *Mongrels*' werewolves, it is never turned inward on the pack. There are squabbles between the members, but no actual fights.

Despite the similarities between the *Mongrels*' pack and real wolf packs, many of the horrific traits ascribed to werewolves in *Mongrels* stem from the same common misconceptions that the public once held about real wolves. In *Mongrels*, grave robbing is unfortunate, rather like eating out of the garbage, but needs must be met. Murder is frowned upon in that it will bring attention from authorities, not for its moral implications, and the bloodlust is so intense that cannibalism is a given.

While some werewolf books emphasize the gory impulses that stem from historical inaccuracies about real wolves, others use stark contrasts between the horror that is an innate part of the characters' werewolf sides and the gentler, more natural and civilized human sides. This contrast allows both the positive and negative traits to shine more brightly. Readers are more deeply horrified, but also more deeply moved to empathize with the werewolves. It could be argued that what readers empathize with is the werewolves' human sides and ascribed desires, but

the werewolves' more admirable traits are present in both humans and wolves. The fact that the admirable traits exist in wolves as well as humans has simply been overlooked.

Conclusion

Werewolves are intimately tied to wolves, and the perception of one influences the other. In her essay "American Attitudes Toward Wolves: A History of Misperception," Fogleman says, "If no-one had been interested in hearing or reading about werewolves, accounts of them would not have been influential in shaping American attitudes toward wolves" (78). Werewolf fiction influences how we view real wolves, and vice versa. For hundreds of years, wolves were "the very symbol of avarice, viciousness, and guile," and tales of monstrous werewolves were the only kind found in literature (Busch 109). However, as Fogleman states,"…[T]he negative attitudes toward wolves are slowly beginning to change" and she attributes the most important factor in this evolution to an "increased knowledge of wolves" (80).

The more we learn about wolves, the harder it is not to see the similarities between them and ourselves. This is reflected in werewolf fiction, which portrays werewolves either as monstrous creatures, depictions of which draw on the sensationalist and inaccurate stories about wolves that naturalists pushed for centuries, or on modern wolf studies and research dating from approximately 1944. The former is used in literature intended to showcase werewolves in a negative light, while the latter is used in stories meant to humanize werewolves.

Learning about wolves and using those characteristics to craft sympathetic or heroic werewolves in contemporary literature could create a positive feedback loop—as the public begins to associate "good" werewolves with real wolves, wolf conservation will grow more popular with the public as well. When we begin to admire or empathize with an endangered species, we are more inclined to create and enforce public policies that protect that species. In the long run, werewolves could help protect their nonfictional counterparts in the wild.

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