



WERWOLVES

Elliot O'Donnell

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Post Scriptum

CHAPTER I
What is a Werwolf?

WHAT IS A WERWOLF? To this there is no one very satisfactory reply. There are, indeed, so many diverse views held with regard to the nature and classification of werwolves, their existence is so keenly disputed, and the subject is capable of being regarded from so many standpoints, that any attempt at definition in a restricted sense would be well-nigh impossible.

The word werwolf (or werewolf) is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *wer*, man, and *wulf*, wolf, and has its equivalents in the German *Währwolf* and French *loup-garou*, whilst it is also to be found in the languages, respectively, of Scandinavia, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Balkan Peninsula, and of certain of the countries of Asia and Africa; from which it may be concluded that its range is pretty well universal.

Indeed, there is scarcely a country in the world in which belief in a werwolf, or in some other form of lycanthropy, has not once existed, though it may have ceased to exist now. But whereas in some countries the werwolf is considered wholly physical, in others it is looked upon as partly, if not entirely, superphysical. And whilst in

some countries it is restricted to the male sex, in others it is confined to the female; and, again, in others it is to be met with in both sexes.

Hence, when asked to describe a werwolf, or what is generally believed to be a werwolf, one can only say that a werwolf is an anomaly—sometimes man, sometimes woman (or in the guise of man or woman); sometimes adult, sometimes child (or in the guise of such)—that, under certain conditions, possesses the property of metamorphosing into a wolf, the change being either temporary or permanent.

This, perhaps, expresses most of what is general concerning werwolves. For more particular features, upon which I will touch later, one must look to locality and time.

Those who are sceptical with regard to the existence of the werwolf, and refuse to accept, as proof of such existence, the accumulated testimony of centuries, attribute the origin of the belief in the phenomenon merely to an insane delusion, which, by reason of its novelty, gained a footing and attracted followers.

Humanity, they say, has ever been the same; and any fresh idea—no matter how bizarre or monstrous, so long as it is monstrous enough—has always met with support and won credence.

In favour of this argument it is pointed out that in many of the cases of persons accused of werwolfery, tried in France, and elsewhere, in the middle of the sixteenth century, when belief in this species of lycanthropy was at its zenith, there was an extraordinary readiness among the accused to confess, and even to give circumstantial evidence of their own metamorphosis; and that this particular form of self-accusation at length became so popular

among the leading people in the land, that the judicial court, having its suspicions awakened, and, doubtless, fearful of sentencing so many important personages, acquitted the majority of the accused, announcing them to be the victims of delusion and hysteria.

Now, if it were admitted, argue these sceptics, that the bulk of so-called werwolves were impostors, is it not reasonable to suppose that all so-called werwolves were either voluntary or involuntary impostors?—the latter, *i.e.*, those who were not self-accused, being falsely accused by persons whose motive for so doing was revenge. For parallel cases one has only to refer to the trials for sorcery and witchcraft in England. And with regard to false accusations of lycanthropy—accusations founded entirely on hatred of the accused person—how easy it was to trump up testimony and get the accused convicted. The witnesses were rarely, if ever, subjected to a searching examination; the court was always biased, and a confession of guilt, when not voluntary—as in the case of the prominent citizen, when it was invariably pronounced due to hysteria or delusion—could always be obtained by means of torture, though a confession thus obtained, needless to say, is completely nullified. Moreover, we have no record of metamorphosis taking place in court, or before witnesses chosen for their impartiality. On the contrary, the alleged transmutations always occurred in obscure places, and in the presence of people who, one has reason to believe, were both hysterical and imaginative, and therefore predisposed to see wonders. So says this order of sceptic, and, to my mind, he says a great deal more than his facts justify; for although contemporary writers generally are agreed that a large percentage of those people who voluntarily

confessed they were werewolves were mere dissemblers, there is no recorded conclusive testimony to show that all such self-accused persons were shams and delusionaries. Besides, even if such testimony were forthcoming, it would in nowise preclude the existence of the werwolf.

Nor does the fact that all the accused persons submitted to the rack, or other modes of torture, confessed themselves werewolves prove that all such confessions were false.

Granted also that some of the charges of lycanthropy were groundless, being based on malice—which, by the by, is no argument for the non-existence of lycanthropy, since it is acknowledged that accusations of all sorts, having been based on malice, have been equally groundless—there is nothing in the nature of written evidence that would justify one in assuming that all such charges were traceable to the same cause, *i.e.*, a malicious agency. Neither can one dismiss the testimony of those who swore they were actual eye-witnesses of metamorphoses, on the mere assumption that all such witnesses were liable to hallucination or hysteria, or were hyper-imaginative.

Testimony to an event having taken place must be regarded as positive evidence of such an occurrence, until it can be satisfactorily proved to be otherwise—and this is where the case of the sceptic breaks down; he can only offer assumption, not proof.

Another view, advanced by those who discredit werewolves, is that belief in the existence of such an anomaly originates in the impression made on man in early times by the great elemental powers of nature. It was, they say, man's contemplation of the changes

of these great elemental powers of nature, *i.e.*, the changes of the sun and moon, wind, thunder and lightning, of the day and night, sunshine and rain, of the seasons, and of life and death, and his deductions therefrom, that led to his belief in and worship of gods that could assume varying shapes, such, for example, as India (who occasionally took the form of a bull), Derketo (who sometimes metamorphosed into a fish), Poseidon, Jupiter Ammon, Milosh Kobilitch, Minerva, and countless others—and that it is to this particular belief and worship, which is to be found in the mythology of every race, that all religions, as well as belief in fairies, demons, werwolves, and phantasms, may be traced.

Well, this might be so, if there were not, in my opinion, sufficient accumulative corroborative evidence to show that not only were there such anomalies as werwolves formerly, but that, in certain restricted areas, they are even yet to be encountered.

Taking, then, the actual existence of werwolves to be an established fact, it is, of course, just as impossible to state their origin as it is to state the origin of any other extraordinary form of creation. Every religious creed, every Occult sect, advances its own respective views—and has a perfect right to do so, as long as it advances them as views and not dogmatisms.

I, for my part, bearing in mind that everything appertaining to the creation of man and the universe is a profound mystery, cannot see the object on the part of religionists and scientists in being arbitrary with regard to a subject which any child of ten will apprehend to be one whereon it is futile to do other than theorize. My own theory, or rather one of my own theories, is that the property of

transmutation, *i.e.*, the power of assuming any animal guise, was one of the many properties—including second sight, the property of becoming invisible at will, of divining the presence of water, metals, the advent of death, and of projecting the etherical body—which were bestowed on man at the time of his creation; and that although mankind in general is no longer possessed of them, a few of these properties are still, in a lesser degree, to be found among those of us who are termed psychic.

The history of the Jews is full of references to certain of these properties. The greatest of all the Superphysical Forces—the creating Force (the Hebrew Jah, Jehovah)—so says the Bible, constantly held direct communication with His elect—with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, while His emissaries, the angels, or what modern Occultists would term Benevolent Elementals, conversed with Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and hosts of others. In this same history, too, there is no lack of reference to sorcery; and whilst Black Magic is illustrated in the tricks wrought by the magicians before Pharaoh, and the infliction of all manner of plagues upon the Egyptians, one is rather inclined to attribute to White Magic Daniel's safety among the lions; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's preservation from the flames; Elijah's miraculous spinning out of the barrel of meal and cruse of oil, in the days of famine, and his raising of the widow's son. Also, to the account of White Magic—and should anyone dispute this point let me remind him that it is merely a difference in the point of view—I would add Elisha's calling up of the bears that made such short work of the naughty children who tormented him. There are, too, many examples of divination recorded in the Bible. In Genesis,

chapter xxx., verses 27-43, a description is given of a divining rod and its influence over sheep and other animals; in Exodus, chapter xvii., verse 15, Moses with the aid of a rod discovers water in the rock at Rephidim, and for similar instances one has only to refer to Exodus, chapter xiv., verse 16, and chapter xvii., verses 9-11. The calling up of the phantasm of Samuel at Endor more than suggests a biblical precedent for the modern practice of spiritualism; and it was, undoubtedly, the abuse of such power as that possessed by the witch of Endor, and the prevalence of sorcery, such as she practised, that finally led to the decree delivered by Moses to the Children of Israel, that on no account were they to suffer a witch to live. Reference to yet another property of the occult—namely, Etherical Projection—which is clearly exemplified in the Scriptures, may be found in Numbers, chapter xii., verse 6; in Job, chapter xxxiii., verse 15; in the First Book of Kings, chapter iii., verse 5; in Genesis, chapter xx., verses 3 and 6, and chapter xxxi., verse 24; in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zechariah; and more particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Revelation of St. John. Lastly, in this history of the Jews, which is surely neither more nor less authenticated than any other well established history, testimony as to the existence of one species of Elemental of much the same order as the werwolf is recorded by Isaiah. In chapter xiii., verse 21, we read: “And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.” Satyrs! we repeat; are not satyrs every whit as grotesque and outrageous as werwolves? Why, then, should those who, regarding the Scriptures as infallible, confess to a belief in the satyr, reject the possibility of a werwolf? And for those who

are more logically sceptical—who question the veracity of the Bible and are dubious as to its authenticity—there are the chronicles of Herodotus, Petronius Arbiter, Baronius, Dôle, Olaus Magnus, Marie de France, Thomas Aquinas, Richard Verstegan, and many other recognized historians and classics, covering a large area in the history of man, all of whom specially testify to the existence—in their own respective periods—of werwolves.

And if any further evidence of this once near relationship with the Other World is required, one has only to turn to Aristotle, who wrote so voluminously on psychic dreams (most of which I am inclined to think were due to projection); to the teachings of Pythagoras and his followers, Empedocles and Apollonius; to Cicero and Tacitus; to Virgil, who frequently talks of ghosts and seers of Tyana; to Plato, the exponent of magic; and to Plutarch, whose works swarm with allusions to Occultism of all kinds—phantasms of the dead, satyrs, and numerous other species of Elementals.

I say, then, that in ages past, before any of the artificialities appertaining to our present mode of living were introduced; when the world was but thinly populated and there were vast regions of wild wastes and silent forests, the Known and Unknown walked hand in hand. It was seclusion of this kind, the seclusion of nature, that spirits loved, and it was in this seclusion they were always to be found whenever man wanted to hold communication with them. To such silent spots—to the woods and wildernesses—Buddha, Mohammed, the Hebrew Patriarchs and Prophets, all, in their turn, resorted, to solicit the companionship of benevolently disposed spirits, to be tutored by them, and, in all probability, to receive from

them additional powers. To these wastes and forests, too, went all those who wished to do ill. There they communed with the spirits of darkness, *i.e.*, demons, or what are also termed Vice Elementals; and from the latter they acquired—possibly in exchange for some of their own vitality, for spirits of this order are said to have envied man his material body—tuition in sorcery, and such properties as second sight, invisibility, and lycanthropy.

This property of lycanthropy, or metamorphosing into a beast, probably dates back to man's creation. It was, I am inclined to believe, conferred on man at his creation by Malevolent Forces that were antagonistic to man's progress; and that these Malevolent Forces had a large share in the creation of this universe is, to my mind, extremely probable. But, however that may be, I cannot believe that the creation of man and the universe were due entirely to one Creator—there are assuredly too many inconsistencies in all we see around us to justify belief in only one Creative Force. The Creator who inspired man with love—love for his fellow beings and love of the beautiful—could not be the same Creator who framed that irredeemably cruel principle observable throughout nature, *i.e.*, the survival of the fittest; the preying of the stronger on the weaker—of the tiger on the feebler beasts of the jungle; the eagle on the smaller birds of the air; the wolf on the sheep; the shark on the poor, defenceless fish, and so on; neither could He be the Creator that deals in diseases—foul and filthy diseases, common, not only to all divisions of the human species, but to quadrupeds, birds, fish, and even flora; that brings into existence cripples and idiots, the blind, the deaf and dumb; and watches with passive inertness the most

acute sufferings, not only of adults, but of sinless children and all manner of helpless animals. No! It is impossible to conceive that such incompatibilities can be the work of one Creator. But, supposing, for the sake of argument, we may admit the possibility of only one Creator, we cannot concede that this Creator is at the same time both omnipotent and merciful. My own belief, which is merely based on common sense and observation, is that this earth was created by many Forces—that everything that makes for man's welfare is due to Benevolent Forces; and that everything that tends to his detriment is due to antagonistic Malevolent Forces; and that the Malevolent Forces exist for the very simple reason that the Benevolent Forces are not sufficiently powerful to destroy them.

These Malevolent Forces, then—the originators of all evil—created werwolves; and the property of lycanthropy becoming in many cases hereditary, there were families that could look back upon countless generations possessed of it. But lycanthropy did not remain in the exclusive possession of a few families; the bestowal of it continued long after its original creation, and I doubt if this bestowal has, even now, become entirely a thing of the past. There are still a few regions—desolate and isolated regions in Europe (in Russia, Scandinavia, and even France), to say nothing of Asia, Africa and America, Australasia and Polynesia—which are unquestionably the haunts of Vagrarians, Barrowvians, and other kinds of undesirable Elementals, and it is quite possible that, through the agency of these spirits, the property of lycanthropy might be acquired by those who have learned in solitude how to commune with them.

I have already referred to the werwolf as an anomaly, and for

its designation I do not think I could have chosen a more suitable term. Though its movements and actions are physical—for what could be more material than the act of devouring flesh and blood?—the actual process of the metamorphosis savours of the superphysical; whilst to still further strengthen its relationship with the latter, its appearance is sometimes half man and half wolf, which is certainly more than suggestive of the semi-human and by no means uncommon type of Elemental. Its inconsistency, too, which is a striking characteristic of all psychic phenomena, is also suggestive of the superphysical; and there is certainly neither consistency as to the nature of the metamorphosis—which is sometimes brought about at will and sometimes entirely controlled by the hour of day, or by the seasons—nor as to the outward form of the werewolf, which is sometimes merely that of a wolf, and sometimes partly wolf and partly human; nor as to its shape at the moment of death, when in some cases there is metamorphosis, whilst in other cases there is no metamorphosis. Nor is this inconsistency only characteristic of the movements, actions, and shape of the werewolf. It is also characteristic of it psychologically. When the metamorphosis is involuntary, and is enforced by agencies over which the subject has no control, the werewolf, though filled with all the passions characteristic of a beast of prey, when a wolf, is not of necessity cruel and savage when a human being, that is to say, before the transmutations take place. There are many instances of such werewolves being, as people, affectionate and kindly disposed. On the other hand, in some cases of involuntary metamorphosis, and in the majority of cases of voluntary metamorphosis—that is to say, when the transmutation is

compassed by means of magic—the werwolf, as a person, is evilly disposed, and as a wolf shows a distinct blending of the beast with the passions, subtle ingenuity, and reasoning powers of the human being. From this it is obvious, then, that the werwolf is a hybrid of the material and immaterial—of man and Elemental, known and Unknown. The latter term does not, of course, meet with acceptance at the hands of the Rationalists, who profess to believe that all phenomena can be explained by perfectly natural causes. They suggest that belief in the werwolf (as indeed in all other forms of lycanthropy) is traceable to the craving for blood which is innate in certain natures and is sometimes accompanied by hallucination, the subject genuinely believing himself to be a wolf (or whatever beast of prey is most common in the district), and, in imitation of that animal's habits, committing acts of devastation at night, selecting his victims principally from among women and children—those, in fact, who are too feeble to resist him.

Often, however, say these Rationalists, there is no suggestion of hallucination, the question resolving itself into one of vulgar trickery. The anthropophagi, unable to suppress their appetite for human food, taking advantage of the general awe in which the wolf is held by their neighbours, dress themselves up in the skins of that beast, and prowling about lonely, isolated spots at night, pounce upon those people they can most easily overpower. Rumours (most probably started by the murderers themselves) speedily get in circulation that the mangled and half-eaten remains of the villagers are attributable to creatures, half human and half wolf, that have been seen gliding about certain places after dark. The simple country-folk, among

whom superstitions are rife, are only too ready to give credence to such reports; the existence of the monsters becomes an established thing, whilst the localities that harbour them are regarded with horror, and looked upon as the happy hunting ground of every imaginable occult power of evil.

Now, although such an explanation of werwolves might be applicable in certain districts of West Africa, where the native population is excessively bloodthirsty and ignorant, it could not for one moment be applied to werwolfery in Germany, France, or Scandinavia, where the peasantry are, generally speaking, kindly and intelligent people, whom one could certainly accuse neither of being sanguinary nor of possessing any natural taste for cannibalism.

The rationalist view can therefore only be said to be feasible in certain limited spheres, outside of which it is grotesque and ridiculous.

Now a question that has occurred to me, and which, I fancy, may give rise to some interesting speculation, is, whether some of the werwolves stated to have been seen may not have been some peculiar type of phantasm. I make this suggestion because I have seen several sub-human and sub-animal occult phenomena in England, and have, too, met other people who have had similar experiences.

With our limited knowledge of the Unknown it is, of course, impossible to be arbitrary as to the class of spirits to which such phenomena belong. They may be Vice Elementals, *i.e.*, spirits that have never inhabited any material body, whether human or animal, and which are wholly inimical to man's progress—such spirits assume an infinite number of shapes, agreeable and otherwise; or they may be

phantasms of dead human beings—vicious and carnal-minded people, idiots, and imbecile epileptics. It is an old belief that the souls of cataleptic and epileptic people, during the body's unconsciousness, adjourned temporarily to animals, and it is therefore only in keeping with such a view to suggest that on the deaths of such people their spirits take permanently the form of animals. This would account for the fact that places where cataleptics and idiots have died are often haunted by semi and by wholly animal types of phantasms.

According to Paracelsus Man has in him two spirits—an animal spirit and a human spirit—and that in after life he appears in the shape of whichever of these two spirits he has allowed to dominate him. If, for example, he has obeyed the spirit that prompts him to be sober and temperate, then his phantasm resembles a man; but on the other hand, if he has given way to his carnal and bestial cravings, then his phantasm is earthbound, in the guise of some terrifying and repellent animal—maybe a wolf, bear, dog, or cat—all of which shapes are far from uncommon in psychic manifestations.

This view has been held either *in toto*, or with certain reservations, by many other writers on the subject, and I, too, in a great measure endorse it—its pronouncement of a limit to man's phantasms being, perhaps, the only important point to which I cannot accede. My own view is that so complex a creature as man—complex both physically and psychologically—may have a representative spirit for each of his personalities. Hence on man's physical dissolution there may emanate from him a host of phantasms, each with a shape most fitting the personality it represents. And what more thoroughly representative of cruelty, savageness, and treachery than a wolf,

or even something partly lupine! Therefore, as I have suggested elsewhere, in some instances, but emphatically not in all, what were thought to have been werwolves may only have been phantasms of the dead, or Elementals.

Werewolf as a hybrid of the material and immaterial, of man and elemental force

The core view of paranormal investigator Elliott O'Donnell, regarding the wer(e)wolf, was that he assumed a serious occult phenomenon, rather than a folkloric fantasy, that could easily be dismissed by science. Within this scope *Werwolves* (1914) is as pioneering as the book is entertaining. It combines O'Donnell's – ahead of his time – linking of the werewolf to shamanism, the etheric double and astral projection with the traditional dark romantic aura that hangs around the subject. His conclusion, that the werewolf was most likely linked to psychic projection skills, was re-examined by Claude Lecouteux in 1992 in his *Witches, Werwolves and Fairies*.

The word werewolf (werewolf) is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *wer* (man) and *wulf* (wolf). There is scarcely a country in the world in which belief in werewolves, or in some other form of were-animals, has not existed. However, attempts to unravel the real phenomena remain very scarce. In *Werwolves* a lot of historical werewolf-cases are described which took place in several parts of Europe (France, British Isles, Germany, Austria-Hungaria & Balkan, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, Russia and the Scandinavian countries). Whereas in some regions the werewolf is considered wholly physical, in others it is looked upon as partly, if not entirely, astral or etheric. There is also an overlap with the Ghoul and Vampire.

