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*East Tennessee State University*

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The Rage of the Wolf: Metamorphosis and Identity in Medieval Werewolf Tales

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

Jessica Lynne Bettini

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Dr. Thomas Crofts, Chair

Dr. Karen Cajka

Dr. Shawna Lichtenwalner

Dr. Isabel Stanley

Keywords: Identity, Werewolves, Metamorphosis, Medieval, Middle Ages

## ABSTRACT

### The Rage of the Wolf: Metamorphosis and Identity in Medieval Werewolf Tales

by

Jessica Lynne Bettini

The metamorphosis of man to beast has fascinated audiences for millennia. The werewolves of medieval literature were forced to conform to the Church's view of metamorphosis and, in so doing, transformed from bestial and savage to benevolent and rational. Analysis of Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, the anonymous *Arthur and Gorlagon*, the Irish tale *The Crop-Eared Dog*, and the French *roman d'aventure* *Guillaume de Palerne* reveals insight into medieval views of change, identity, and what it meant to exist in the medieval world. Each of these tales is told from the werewolf's point of view, and in each the wolf undergoes a fury or madness where he cannot seem to help turning savage and harming people. This 'rage of the wolf' lies at the root of the identities of these werewolves, reflecting the conflict between good and evil, the physical and the spiritual, and Church doctrine and a rapidly changing society.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The metamorphosis of man to beast has captivated audiences for over four thousand years. The interest in human metamorphosis is visible in ancient art and literature, originally transmitted through oral tradition, medieval secular and clerical writing, as well as contemporary movies and novels. While modern, Hollywood werewolves are often the bestial, savage counterparts to the sexy, predatory vampire, they are merely the latest metamorphosis of a creature which has fascinated humanity for millennia.

#### Ancient Predatory Werewolves

The earliest recorded secular mention of werewolves is in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dated approximately 2000 BCE. The goddess of love, Ishtar, attempts to seduce King Gilgamesh, who reminds her of a former lover: “You have loved the shepherd of the flock; he made meal-cake for you day after day, he killed kids for your sake. You struck and turned him into a wolf; now his own herd-boys chase him away, his own hounds worry his flanks... And if you and I should be lovers, should not I be served in the same fashion as all these others whom you loved once?” (25). In addition to being the first literary indication of interest in metamorphosis, the story also links women—malicious women, in particular—to metamorphosis, as well as indicates a single or prolonged transformation: she “*turned* him into a wolf” and “*now* his own herd-boys chase him.” The shepherd was transformed and remains so. Also significant is King Gilgamesh’s companion, Enkidu, a half-man, half-beast who was covered with matted hair and lived as a beast until learning of human desires. Clearly, an interest in human transformation and with human/beast hybrids was alive in ancient Mesopotamia.

After *Gilgamesh*, werewolves disappear from surviving literature for two millennia, resurfacing in Virgil's eighth *eclogue* from 37 BCE and then only briefly: "These herbs of bane to me did Moeris give,/ In Pontus culled, where baneful herbs abound./ With these full oft have I seen Moeris change/ To a wolf's form, and hide him in the woods,/ Oft summon spirits from the tomb's recess,/ And to new fields transport the standing corn" (91). Moeris' ability to change his form is not mentioned to emphasize werewolves, but to highlight the herbs' potency. However, it should be noted that Moeris (the second werewolf in literature) controls his transformation, unlike Ishtar's lovers, through the use of potions and magic. It should also be noted that Moeris transforms himself in order to "hide in the woods," not to harm others in a bestial fury.

Four decades after Virgil, Ovid finished *The Metamorphosis* and the werewolves' place in literature and imagination was solidified. Widely read and highly influential during the Middle Ages, *The Metamorphosis* fueled interest, if not belief, in werewolves, as well as other human transformation. Ovid's werewolf is King Lycaon of Arcadia, transformed after attempting to trick Zeus by feeding him a child sacrifice. Zeus figured it out, of course, and Ovid writes the most complete description outside modern literature of a werewolf transformation:

About his lips the gather'd foam he churns,/ And, breathing slaughters, still with rage he burns,/ But on the bleating flock his fury turns./ His mantle, now his hide, with rugged hairs/ Cleaves to his back; a famish'd face he bears;/ His arms descend, his shoulders sink away/ To multiply his legs for chase of prey./ He grows a wolf, his hoariness remains,/ And the same rage in other members reigns./ His eyes still sparkle in a narr'wer space:/ His jaws retain the grin, and violence of his face. (Dryden 391)

Lycaon's transformation is permanent and complete, what Leslie Sconduto describes as "a final evolution, a deepening of what already was, since Lycaon's appearance now matches his true character" (10). Lycaon cannot transform back because, for Ovid, the transformation is merely a revelation of Lycaon's already wolf-like nature. Lycaon also represents a much different sort of werewolf than Moeris or Ishtar's shepherd—a savage, dangerous creature.

The final ancient werewolf appears approximately fifty years later in Petronius' *Satyricon* and displays King Lycaon's penchant for violence. While feasting at Trimalchio's house, a guest and former slave named Niceros claims to have witnessed an actual werewolf transformation while on the way to visit a lady one night. He convinced another lodger, a soldier, to come along, but when the two men arrived at a graveyard, Niceros states: "what should I see but mine Host stript stark-naked, and his Cloaths lying by the High-way side. The sight struck me every where, and I stood as if I had been dead; but he Piss'd round his Cloaths, and of a sudden was turned into a Wolf ... set up a Howl, and fled to the Woods" (231-3). Niceros eventually recovers himself, continuing on to Melissa's house. Upon his arrival, he learns that a wolf has just attacked and killed Melissa's cattle, escaping with a wound on its neck. Niceros hurries back home and "found mine Host lying a-bed like an Oxe in his Stall, and a Chirurgeon dressing his Neck" (233). Because he willingly transforms in order to feed, Petronius' soldier is much closer to the modern, savage werewolf than any earlier descriptions.

Transforming himself at will, he does so with the intention of killing. The soldier is a more dangerous being, a more cunning predator than any previous werewolves. One can assume, because he invited the soldier along, that Niceros never sensed anything amiss about the man's character prior to witnessing his transformation, stating only that he was "a stout Fellow, and as bold as the Devil" (231). In addition to providing a portrait of the first cunning, predatory

werewolf, Petronius also emphasizes the fear inspired by a creature who willingly transforms in order to kill. Niceros describes his reaction: “I stood as if I had been dead... my eyes were sunk in my Head, and Sweat ran off me by more streams than one, and I was just breathing my last, without thought of recovery” (233). This mind-numbing terror (found only in Petronius’ werewolf account) disappears from literary werewolf accounts until the late fifteenth century, when it resurfaces with a vengeance, eventually adding fuel to the devastating witch trials of the seventeenth century.

Taking a more logical approach to werewolves in his *Historia Naturalis*, Pliny the Elder, writing at the same time as Petronius, discredits the existence of werewolves. Unlike the entries for other species, where he includes long descriptions of respective physical attributes, Pliny merely states of werewolves: “We are bound to pronounce with confidence that the story of men being turned into wolves and restored to themselves again is false” (qtd in Scoduto 12). However, acknowledging popular belief in werewolves, Pliny provides two Greek stories (both of which connect the werewolf metamorphosis to the Ovidian taboo of consuming human flesh), leaving his readers to make their own assumptions about their veracity.

These ancient werewolves demonstrate the discrepancy between what Kirby Smith termed the “voluntary” (or “constitutional”) and the “involuntary” werewolf. Virgil’s Moeris is a “constitutional” werewolf, a “person who, either from a gift inborn or from the use of certain magic arts... is in the habit of changing himself into a wolf from time to time” (Smith 4). Petronius’ soldier is also a “constitutional” werewolf, fitting the bill more nicely than the passive Moeris. On the other hand, Ishtar’s shepherd is an “involuntary” werewolf; his metamorphosis “was unavoidable, owing to the curse or charm of some outside power” (5). King Lycaon’s demonstrates a unique blending of the “constitutional” and the “involuntary.” While his



transformation was out of his control, ultimately, the transformation reflects his true self—his constitution.

Narrowing Smith's definitions, Philippe Menard clarifies Lycaon's unique classification by further distinguishing between the "false" and the "authentic" werewolf. The "authentic" werewolf, found often in writing of antiquity or in modern werewolf tales, submits itself to bestial desires and instincts multiple times (as Moeris and Petronius' soldier do). On the other hand, "false" werewolves are portrayed as victims who, through enchantment or magic, assume the shape of wolves only once and retain their human rationality throughout. According to Menard, Ishtar's shepherd and King Lycaon are both "false" werewolves, victims of the whims of others. The werewolf-as-victim motif becomes increasingly relevant as werewolf tales begin to resurface during the Middle Ages.

### The Church and Metamorphosis

Nearly two millennia after the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, werewolves began appearing in the writings of clergymen, having finally drawn the notice of the Church. For the Church, the goal was not to disprove the existence of werewolves but to prove that no one except God could perform true metamorphosis. After all, 'truth' in the Middle Ages meant word of mouth (or occasionally an eyewitness account), but rarely did it require hard facts. Almost a hundred years after Petronius and Pliny cast their opposing lots, a Church apologist named Tertullianus, in *De anima*, argued against the possibility of men becoming animals during reincarnation. He points out that while two substances may have the same *nature*, such as hard or soft, they may not necessarily be made of the same *substance*. As a result, "it is impossible for the human soul to pass into beasts... though we may call a man a wild beast or a harmless one, we don't mean that he has the soul of a beast... By the very fact that you consider a man to be like a beast you admit

that the souls are different; notice that you say ‘similar’ and not ‘identical’” (qtd in Sconduto 15). With this statement, Tertullian has underscored the root of medieval opposition to werewolves—the inner self is of different material than the outer self; one can appear a werewolf in *nature*, without changing one’s *substance*. A century later, Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, supported this conclusion, pointing out that the soul is in the likeness of God and cannot be transformed into any other substance, even if the body can be. According to Ambrose, one’s form changing would be less marvelous than one’s soul also undergoing metamorphosis because the latter denies the power of God (Sconduto 16-17).

Saint Augustine of Hippo, writing shortly after Saint Ambrose, cites in *City of God* several werewolf stories and argues that although men’s bodies turned to wolves, their minds remained human—the body was transformed, but the mind remained “of God,” to use Ambrose’s term. Subsequently, Augustine declares the transformations false, the result of a “phantasm,” an illusion or distortion of reality brought on by fatigue or demons, who “do not create real substances, but only change the appearance of things created by the true God so as to make them seem to be what they are not” (624). Augustine believed, as did many medieval theologians, that there was a difference between the outer, physical being and the inner, spiritual being (the *nature* and *substance*, if you will). One’s outer appearance can be manipulated by demons or can appear transformed under delusion or illusion, but only God can transform both the inner and outer being—a true metamorphosis. Augustine’s views are reflected throughout Church writings, condemning belief in a true metamorphosis.

The dually influential Germanic penitential, *Canon Episcopi*, included in a compilation to assist bishops in their dioceses, condemns sorcery using Augustine’s concept of the “phantasm.” The *Canon Episcopi* attributes both the power of illusion and the power of witches to Satan,

declaring that he works his will “on the minds of infidels” (qtd in Sconduto 20). Sconduto points out that “the *Canon Episcopi* rationalizes sorcery, while at the same time condemning belief in it, by explaining that witchcraft, like metamorphosis, is not real but only illusion and the result of demonic trickery” (20). Going beyond mere warning, the *Canon Episcopi* denounces as heretics those who believe that the devil (or any man) has the power to transform substances: “Whoever therefore believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed... is beyond a doubt an infidel” (qtd in Sconduto 20). Reprinted in various penitentials and books to assist bishops when visiting their dioceses, the *Canon Episcopi* was nearly as influential as Augustine’s *City of God*, but the central question in these texts was not whether a man could transform his image, but whether one declares any man or demon the equivalent of God.

Nearly a thousand years later, as werewolves began appearing in secular literature, the Church revisited the question of metamorphosis. Guillaume d’Auvergne, the bishop of Paris, wrote *De Universo*, which Sconduto calls “an ambitious work dealing with the world of creatures” (22). Within this text, Guillaume includes the tale of a man who was possessed by an evil spirit and would imagine himself a werewolf. When this would happen, a demon would throw him into a cave and terrorize the countryside in wolf form, so the man came to believe that he had been committing the crimes. Interestingly, in this version, a priest discovers the truth, reveals the man in the cave, and explains to the people their fault in believing that a man could become a wolf (Sconduto 22-3). Incorporating Augustine’s belief in phantasm and illusion, Guillaume presents the story as legend or superstition and reiterates the *Canon Episcopi*’s denunciation of heretics who believe demons can perform true metamorphosis.

Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* contains the final significant appearance of werewolves in writing of the medieval Church. Rather than expanding on werewolf theory,

Aquinas, in true medieval style, cites authority, reviewing and rewording Augustine's *City of God* to support his discussion of metamorphosis. "It is to be noted, however that although these works of demons which appear marvelous to us are not real miracles, they are sometimes nevertheless something real. Thus the magicians of Pharaoh by the demons' power produced real serpents and frogs" (1023). Like other medieval theologians, Aquinas makes no effort to disprove the veracity of the accounts themselves; rather he reminds his audience that, although magicians and demons can temporarily deceive the senses, true metamorphosis is only accomplished by God. Aquinas also asserts that any perceived transformation is "not real but a mere semblance of reality," citing Augustine's claim that the "imagination... takes the forms of an innumerable number of things, appears to other men's senses, as it were embodied in the semblance of some animal" (1024).

Saint Augustine's views remained influential throughout the Middle Ages and were reflected in medieval secular literature. As Sconduto points out, "Augustine established a direct link between metamorphosis and the imagination, whether he meant to or not" (25). The growing fascination with human metamorphosis is visible in what Caroline Bynum terms the "werewolf renaissance of the twelfth century" (94), when werewolves begin reappearing in literature all over Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, these werewolves had undergone their own metamorphosis, in keeping with Church doctrine.

### Struggle for Reconciliation

While the werewolves of the Middle Ages were bestial and occasionally savage, they retained their sanity and rationality. Unlike their literary ancestors, the secular werewolves of the Middle Ages were restricted by the Church's views on heresy, metamorphosis, and demonolatry. Demonstrating Menard's adaption of Smith's terms, medieval, "involuntary/false"

werewolves are always transformed by an outside person (usually a wife or stepmother), they always retain their sanity and humanity (although this sanity often undergoes its own metamorphosis), and they are always returned to human form after a certain amount of time has passed, after performing a good deed, or after befriending a clever king—who discovers the metamorphosis and facilitates the change back into human form.

Gerald of Wales, in his (approx) 1187 *Topographia Hibernica*, relates the tale of the wolves of Ossory, reflecting, as Guillaume d’Auvergne demonstrated above, a struggle to reconcile church teaching with secular superstition. Unlike Guillaume, however, Gerald presents his information as a historical account rather than a superstitious legend: “I will now proceed to relate some wonderful occurrences which have happened within our time.” Specifically dating his tale “about three years before the arrival of Earl John in Ireland” (57), Gerald tells of a priest who was traveling through the woods between Ulster and Meath and was accosted by a talking wolf. The wolf quickly assures him there is nothing to fear, and the priest asks him what sort of creature “in the shape of a beast uttered human words” (57). Here the priest is careful to distinguish between real beasts and creatures merely in the shape of beasts, reflecting his awareness of Augustine’s “phantasms” and his own caution against heresy. The wolf explains his unique situation:

There are two of us, a man and a woman, natives of Ossory, who, through the curse of one Natalis, saint and abbot, are compelled every seven years to put off the human form, and depart from the dwellings of men... At the end of the seven years, if [the werewolf couple] chance to survive, two others being substituted in their places, they return to their country and their former shape. (57)

It is then revealed that the wolf's companion is dying, and the wolf implores the priest to accompany him and administer the final sacrament. Upon reaching the dying wolf, however, the priest exhibits fear and doubt, and to prove the truth of his tale, the male wolf tears his companion's wolf skin apart to reveal an old woman inside. Replacing her wolf skin as soon as the rites are performed, the woman returns to her "original form" (58). To lend historical credibility to his tale, Gerald recounts that two years after hearing the tale he was passing through Meath and was asked to preside over the trial of the priest who administered the rites to the she-wolf. Unable to attend the trial, Gerald writes a letter advising the council to refer the matter to the pope (59); they take his advice, but Gerald does not provide any information about the fate of the priest upon arrival in Rome.

The story of the wolves of Ossory demonstrates the difficulty of reconciling Church theology with tales of human metamorphosis facing the medieval author or "makere," as Chaucer refers to himself in his late fourteenth century *Canterbury Tales* retraction. It should be noted that the curse was bestowed on the village of Ossory by a "saint and abbot," not a wielder of magic. In the late twelfth century Welsh *Mabinogi*, two young men are cursed and changed into animals by a sorcerer named Math. As their punishment for raping a woman, the men undergo three separate transformations and are made to wander the earth for three years as different animals (96-98). Gerald's wolves of Ossory and this account from the *Mabinogi* are two of the few stories in which metamorphosis is the result of a curse functioning as a punishment. As the Welsh *Mabinogi* is likely not reflecting church theology, one can see—through Gerald's account—the way a traditional oral story may have been manipulated by a "makere" to conform to Church doctrine. A curse bestowed by a saint or abbot was more legitimate and less arbitrary than a curse bestowed by a sorcerer. Similarly, a woman in the skin

of a wolf is less heretical than the metamorphosis of a woman into a wolf since her transformation was not true metamorphosis, but merely a disguise.

Like Gerald's Irish story, Gervase of Tilbury also provides a 'historical' account of werewolves in his 1211 French *Otia Imperialia, or Recreation for an Emperor*, written for Otto IV. Gervase mentions early in Book I that "in England *we have often seen* men change into wolves according to the phases of the moon. The Gauls call men of this kind *gerulfi*, while the English name for them is werewolves" (qtd in Scoduto 35, italics mine). Gervase had been appointed judge of Provence in Arles and his assertion that he has not only "seen" a man become a wolf but has seen it "often" is calculated to lend significant credibility to werewolf stories. As if to support his claim, Gervase follows, in his chapter "Human Beings Who Turn into Wolves," with two brief werewolf tales and, as usual, references Saint Augustine. Scoduto points out that "Gervase seems to be caught between his own beliefs and those of the Church, never quite able to give up one side for the other" (38). His failure to reconcile the werewolf tales attests to the uncertainty of medieval scholars regarding metamorphosis and emphasizes the gray area between medieval metamorphosis stories and medieval dogmatic truths.

Three other tales follow the Ossory storyline, the Middle Irish "On the Wonders of Ireland," the eleventh century Latin "On the Marvels of Ireland," and the thirteenth century Latin "Men Who Change Themselves Into Wolves." In each of these tales, men leave their bodies in order to become wolves. Voluntarily transforming themselves, they ask their family and friends to watch over their bodies until their return. Similar to the practice of hiding one's clothing, if anything should happen to their human bodies while in wolf form, they would be forever trapped as wolves. Wounds they receive while in wolf form appear on their human bodies and bits of food from the wolves' prey could be found in their mouths. Oddly, the Middle Irish version also

links Gerald's wolves of Ossory to the Irish ruling family, indicating contemporary familiarity with werewolf tales and presumably well-known associations between werewolves and negative qualities, as well as providing an interesting link between political writing and secular metamorphosis tales.

Metamorphosis in the above stories differs from other werewolf tales of the Middle Ages, blatantly reflecting the conflict between theology and superstition. In the three Irish tales, men leave their bodies to become something else, rather than their bodies physically changing form. Gerald's she-wolf of Ossory is said to return to her wolf form after the priest administers the final sacrament. Having been in wolf form for seven years, it would seem that her true 'form' is now a wolf. Leslie Sconduto correctly posits that "the form of the old woman that is revealed when the wolf skin is pulled down is a metaphor for her humanity that has remained unchanged" even while her true form is that of a wolf (29). Gerald supports this truth (as would any medieval theologian worth his salt) by citing Saint Augustine: "true reason declares that whatever answers to the definition of a man, as a rational and mortal animal, whatever be its form, is to be considered a man" (60). The idea that a person could change shape, could become something else, while incredible to modern readers, was believed mainly because it could not be disproven.

The medieval concepts of 'truth' and 'fact' must be understood before attempting to analyze tales which rely on the acceptance of and belief in outrageous events. As Caroline Bynum points out, "William of Newburgh, fiercely skeptical about reports of miracles, feels compelled by eyewitness accounts to accept the story of the green children born from the earth, but he is decidedly uncomfortable in doing so" (93). William's acceptance of unbelievable stories reflects the medieval belief that 'facts' were eyewitness testimonies or word of mouth and



were true until proven false. As T.H. White pointed out, “‘Why? Because’ was the leit-motif of the ages of faith, which paradoxically made them able to say, ‘Credo qua absurdum est.’ It was sufficient if there was a link in pattern” (245). In order to discover ‘facts’ about the medieval world, the contemporary medieval scholar must approach each text as the medieval community did and credit their beliefs.

### Changing Worlds and Shifting Identities

As outlined above, the intimate influence of the Church on everyday life both prompted and allowed medieval storytellers, through tales of human metamorphosis, to address what it meant to exist as a human being in the medieval world. Medieval werewolf tales played with such questions as truth, identity, and change, situating their characters in such a way that caused the reader to wonder about his or her own humanity while remaining safely in accord with Christian doctrine. Marie de France’s incorporation of identity in *Bisclavret* demonstrates the rapidly changing world of the late twelfth century, as well as the questions its inhabitants were asking about themselves and those around them. As Burgess and Busby point out, “[a]s a result of the Norman invasion, political, cultural and personal interchange between the continent and England increased enormously” (20). This expanded “interchange” meant new faces, new ideas, revolutionary concepts, and the forced acceptance of an all-around bigger world than medieval England was accustomed to. Its inhabitants were entering a world of ever increasing knowledge.

And what a world of knowledge it was. According to Burgess and Busby in the introduction preceding their translation of *Bisclavret*, the latter half of the twelfth century was:

[A] period of intense literary activity. Chansons de geste (long epic poems about heroes such as Charlemagne and Roland), romances of antiquity (Greek and Roman subject-matter), Arthurian romances... love-lyrics of the troubadours in the South... drama, both

religious and secular, chronicles, saints' lives... all of these were produced in a vernacular on a scale unknown before in Western Europe... the period is one of outstanding innovation and creativity... the building of some of the great cathedrals and the founding of some of the great universities also rank amongst the major achievements of the twelfth century. (20)

This flourishing growth of literature and creativity is reflected through Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, where several of the tales feature a student(s) of Oxford or Cambridge who is infinitely more intelligent and appealing than the simple miller or reeve (at least to their wives and daughters). *The Canterbury Tales*' merchant group also reflects shifting social roles following the Norman Conquest. As Bynum reminds the reader, "agricultural, economic, and urban growth in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries had led to transformations of familial and social structure that made it increasingly possible for people... to change their social roles" (26). Such options must have seemed both a great relief and a daunting uncertainty to those who were less than thrilled to take up the family profession or balked at the rigid discipline of the church.

Changing one's social role invariably leads to questions of identity and self; these questions are evident in the proliferation of metamorphosis tales in the years around 1200—in every genre and nearly every European country. Bynum points out that the new and growing discourse communities were "newly and explicitly concerned with the question of change [and] concepts of change themselves tended to change in the years around 1200" (21). The idea of the change undergoing its own metamorphosis reflects the evolving sense of identity and self that accompanied widespread social changes. Metamorphosis tales, reveal "a new fascination with the other and with images of change in which one thing is, for better or worse, really replaced

with something else” (27). Difficult to comprehend in a world of constantly upgraded technologies, the medieval world slowly began to view change as replacement rather than evolution or alteration.

The shifting concepts of change are also apparent when comparing early and late medieval literature. As Bynum points out,

[H]eroes and heroines of [early medieval] literature tend to display an essential self... behavior revealed character or type; a self was always what it was... heroes and heroines were understood to develop psychologically but in order to fill a given social role and become better versions of virtuous selves... the hero or heroine of secular literature grows into or unfolds rather than replaces a self. Toward the end of the twelfth century... a new model of change emerged... people were increasingly fascinated by... radical change, where an entity is replaced by something completely different. (23-5)

Of course, when one’s body is replaced by something completely different, inevitably questions of identity and self emerge.

As Gervase demonstrated when he validated accounts of werewolves while quoting Saint Augustine, the fantastic was only discredited when it conflicted with church doctrine. As many of these tales reveal, “makers” went to great lengths to avoid such conflict. The protagonists of medieval metamorphosis tales are so altered from Ovid’s bestial Lycaon as to appear comical. Analysis of Marie de France’s *Bisclavret*; examination of the anonymous *Arthur and Gorlagon*, the Irish romance *The Crop-Eared Dog*, and a close reading of the French *roman d’aventure* *Guillaume de Palerne* provide insight into medieval views of change and identity. Differing from the accounts mentioned above, each of these tales is told from the werewolf’s point of view. In each of these tales, the wolf undergoes a fury or madness where he cannot seem to help

turning savage and harming people; this 'rage of the wolf,' as I will refer to it, lies at the root of the conflicted identities of these unusual werewolves.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE WEREWOLF'S IDENTITY

Marie de France, writing in the English court at the same time Gerald was writing in Ireland and only shortly before Gervase was writing in France, popularized the werewolf in medieval romance with her “Lay of the Werewolf” or *Bisclavret*. She was also the first “makere” of romance to emphasize the werewolf’s ‘self’ and to question whether one’s identity changed with one’s form.

#### Animals as Exempla

In addition to her twelve “Breton lais,” Marie de France is also the attributed “makere” of a collection of Aesopian fables called *Ysopets*, as well as moral tale called *L'Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, or *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*. While her fables are by no means tales of metamorphosis, they reveal much about the way the medieval audience understood tales about animals and, therefore, are helpful for developing an accurate understanding of medieval werewolf tales. Medieval fables, unlike modern fairy tales, were not composed for children, although children would have undoubtedly been among the audience. In fact, Chaucer’s Nun’s Priest retells one of Marie’s fables to the group of adult pilgrims, ending with an explication of the moral and receiving much praise from the host.

Of course, fables composed for adults were often intended to achieve some other end than teaching a simple moral. Joyce Salisbury argues that classical fables were “designed to criticize the social order... However, in the twelfth century... they were transformed from a literature of social criticism to a literature of social conservatism... Their use by society’s elite made the animals in the tales reveal a sharp image of how the authors viewed the medieval hierarchy” (50-1). Literature as a means of social critique is not a new concept, but it warrants a

pause when one considers the medium of such critique. Marie used her fables, tales of animals, to make statements about the world around her. “For Marie a weak animal represented powerless groups: peasants or servants. Similarly, a strong animal no longer represented just a strong person; Marie converted such an animal into a strong social class: the nobility or the rich” (Salisbury 51). The fact that Marie’s “The Cock and the Fox” was adapted by Chaucer nearly two hundred years later demonstrates a continued penchant for fables (and fiction) as social critique.

In addition to demonstrating social critique, animals in fables were presented as models for correct behavior. Joyce Salisbury points out that “animals of the imagination strongly affected people’s views of themselves and the animal world... works use animals to discuss human society, to mirror humanity. Animals... were portrayed as models for the ideal human behavior” (49). Animals as models for human behavior can also be found in medieval bestiaries. According to a twelfth century Latin Bestiary translated by T.H. White, a wolf (*lupus*) will “massacre anybody who passes by with a fury of greediness... Wolves are known for their rapacity... and hankering for gore. He keeps his strength in his chest and jaws... His neck is never able to turn backward” (56-7). This description of wolves as greedy, bloodthirsty, and rapacious most likely result from attacks on small children and animals, leading to a nearly universal fear of wolves during the Middle Ages. Jack Zipes points out that one of the most common warning tales “in the Middle Ages involved hostile forces threatening children who were without protection. Either an ogre, ogress, man-eater, wild person, werewolf, or wolf was portrayed as attacking a child in the forest or at home” (2). The antagonist in the earliest versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” is speculated to have been a werewolf (Zipes 2); this

makes sense when one considers its supposed capacity to devour a fully grown human—a quality generally not attributed to regular wolves.

In addition to interesting descriptions and illustrations, bestiaries offered spiritual advice as well. Hugh of Saint Victor, writing in the early twelfth century, cautions against a physical reading of the text, i.e. merely reading the descriptions and looking at the illustrations—and encourages a spiritual reading—noticing the allegory behind the description (63). The bestiary also encourages a close reading but is laden with explanations of the allegories for the less spiritual reader. For instance, after the description of the wolf, the manuscript compares the devil and the wolf: “he who is always looking over the human race with his evil eye, darkly prowling round the sheepfolds of the faithful... [A wolf’s] eyes shine in the night like lamps because the works of the devil are everywhere thought to seem beautiful and salubrious, by darkened and fatuous human beings” (White 59). Such a vivid description of the wolf prowling around the sheep with shining eyes while the devil prowls around the pastor’s flock with shining temptations is enough to awaken even the least astute reader.

If wolves were to be hated and feared, dogs, on the other hand, are praised in medieval bestiaries for their faithfulness and intelligence. The bestiary expounds:

[N]one is more sagacious than the Dog, for he has more perception than other animals and he alone recognizes his own name. He esteems his Master highly... Dogs, moreover, have often produced evidence to convict culprits with proofs of murder done—to such an extent that their mute testimony has frequently been believed. (White 60-4)

Dogs, among other animals such as cats and horses, were believed to be able to detect the presence of Otherworldly creatures. The two bestiary descriptions present an interesting contrast when examining medieval werewolf tales. In some tales, such as the oldest Irish werewolf tale,

*The Crop-Eared Dog*, the word used in the original manuscript could be translated as either ‘wolf’ or ‘hound.’ In such a scenario, the word one chose would change the connotations and, therefore, the meaning and reading of the text.

### *Bisclavret and Identity*

In light of twelfth century descriptions of wolves, the use of animals in literature to demonstrate correct behavior, the views of the Church on metamorphosis, and the fact that ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ were not synonymous medieval concepts, it is no wonder Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* appears to be a werewolf suffering an conflict of identity. The preface of her *lai* reflects the tradition of portraying werewolf tales as historical ‘fact,’ and she states: “indeed it often used to happen, that many men turned into werewolves and went to live in the woods” (Burgess 68). Similar to Gerald and especially to Gervase’s later account, Marie leaves no doubt about the veracity of werewolf tales. She follows this assertion of truth with a physical description of werewolves as mad, ferocious beasts that devour men (68). In direct contrast with this frightening description, her next line states: “I leave such matters for the moment, for I wish to tell you about *Bisclavret*” (68). Before she even begins her *lai*, Marie lets it be known that, while adhering to Smith and Ménard’s definitions of “voluntary” and “authentic,” her werewolf will contradict the classical terrifying image of a werewolf.

In Marie’s werewolf tale, *Bisclavret*, a baron knight, well-loved by the king, disappears for three days each week, causing his wife great worry. She questions him repeatedly until he reveals his secret; the next time he transforms, the wife’s secret lover steals *Bisclavret*’s clothing at her request, condemning him to remain in wolf form indefinitely. After a year, during which time *Bisclavret* lives as a werewolf in the forest, the king goes hunting, meets and becomes enamored of the clever wolf, and takes him back to court as a pet. Unaware of *Bisclavret*’s new



elevated position, the wife appears before the king with a gift, and Bisclavret promptly attacks her, tearing off her nose. The king suspects foul play, tortures the wife, and learns the truth; she returns the clothing, and all is put right again. Well, mostly—as punishment for her betrayal, the lady remains noseless, as do all her female descendants.

Most striking in this tale is the conflicting desires of Bisclavret after he becomes a wolf. Mainly a benevolent character, Bisclavret has moments when he is not able to control himself and succumbs to his beastly desires. Apparently aware of this difficulty, Bisclavret cautions his wife not to press him for his whereabouts for fear that she will betray him. Marie uses explicit language in this scene to draw the reader's attention to Bisclavret's conflict of identity due to incompatible human-animalistic desires. In Eugene Mason's 1911 translation, Bisclavret implores his wife not to press him for his whereabouts, stating "If you but knew, you would withdraw yourself from my love, and I would be lost indeed" (257). Here Bisclavret is worried about both losing his love to betrayal and losing himself to his wolf-like nature. In her 2008 translation, Leslie Sconduto interprets the line: "Harm will befall me if I tell you,/ For you will no longer love me/ And I will lose my very self" (41). The use of the word "self" in Sconduto's translation highlights Marie's emphasis on identity and conflicting human-animal desires.

Other translations of the text reveal a similar caution on the part of Bisclavret. Burgess and Busby in their 1986 prose edition translate this line as: "If I tell you this, great harm will come to me, for as a result I shall lose your love and destroy myself" (68-9). This translation is even more intriguing because it implies that 'the rage of the wolf' actually causes these werewolves to destroy their human side; the rage compels them to destroy their own humanity. This reading parallels the twelfth century Latin bestiary, which states of wolves: "if a twig or anything else should make a noise when her foot presses it, she punishes her own foot with a

regular nip” (White 57-8)—illustrations of wolves biting their own legs can be found throughout medieval artwork (see Appendix). The wolf, it would seem, was believed to be compelled to cause itself harm; similarly, ‘the rage of the wolf’ compels the werewolf to harm those around him and, as a result, his own humanity.

In each of these translations, the results of Bisclavret revealing his secret to his wife are presented as separate clauses and separate events, not as one resulting from the other. He will lose her love, and, separately, he will lose himself. In each, Bisclavret implies that he will be lost or will lose himself if his wife betrays him, forcing him to remain in wolf form longer than his typical three days. While Edith Benkov claims that “Marie makes Bisclavret an unfortunate who has no control over his nature” (28), I would argue it is more likely that, until his wife betrays him, he does have awareness and possibly even control over his transformations. In fact, Marie portrays Bisclavret’s disappearances as a somewhat rejuvenating experience, telling the reader that Bisclavret “returned home in high spirits” after one of his weekly forays (Burgess and Busby 68). He does not seem concerned about being in wolf form for short periods of time, but providing his wife with the knowledge that he must return to his clothing to regain his human form concerns him greatly. He fears permanent transformation and being overpowered by his animalistic desires.

The reason for Bisclavret’s concern is, of course, ‘the rage of the wolf.’ Comparing translations of Marie’s preface also proves fruitful when specifically discussing and attempting to define this ‘rage.’ Eugene Mason’s early translation states that a werewolf “lurks within the thick forest, mad and horrible to see” (256). In Ferrante and Hanning’s 1978 edition, a werewolf “is a savage beast;/ *while his fury is on him*/ he eats men, does much harm/ goes deep in the forest to live” (qtd in Bynum 170, italics mine). This translation is significant because it

specifically defines animalistic behavior in terms of “fury” or ‘rage.’ The use of the word “while” implies that werewolves can exist without causing harm, so long as their fury is not evoked; when the ‘rage of the wolf’ is kindled, the werewolf’s must succumb.

Other translations follow this notion of ‘the rage of the wolf’ as well. Burgess and Busby, in their prose version, translate: “A werewolf is a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage and dwells in vast forests” (68). Leslie Sconduto supports this notion in her more recent translation: “The werewolf is a savage beast;/ As long as he is overcome by this rage,/ He devours men, he does much harm” (40). The use of the words like “when” and “as long as” imply that werewolves are not always harmful. Drastically different from the early savage werewolves such as Ovid’s King Lycaon or Petronius’ soldier, medieval “makers” created their werewolves with consciousness and invented an explanation for any savage behavior: uncontrollable animalistic rage brought on by deception, lies, or revenge—although, as we will see in *Arthur and Gorlagon* and again in *Guillaume de Palerne*, ‘the rage of the wolf’ can also be used for the purpose of helping someone.

It should be noted that in *Bisclavret*, Marie does not share whether the baron voluntarily facilitates his weekly transformation, stating only that he could not transform back without his original clothing. Similarly, she remains elusive in regards to Bisclavret’s behavior during the year in the forest before he is found by the king, but one can assume he followed his usual habit of living in “the deepest part of the wood where I feed off the prey I can capture” (Burgess and Busby 69). Examining the regularity of Bisclavret’s metamorphosis, the method of transformation, and his desire to hunt prey in the woods, one cannot help but notice the similarities between Bisclavret and Petronius’s soldier in *Satyricon*. The soldier strips naked,

protects his clothing by turning them to stone, returns to them when he wants to transform back, and seems to have no reason to transform besides a desire for the local livestock. It would seem that Bisclavret's transformation was originally voluntary, and yet, he is obviously frightened of a permanent transformation.

The reconciliation of human reason, knightly chivalry, and animalistic rage manifests itself differently in each werewolf tale but always circles back to the question of identity. Discussing medieval identity is difficult because scholars can do little more than study texts and speculate accordingly. However, as Dana Oswald demonstrates, a study of the monstrous in medieval literature can prove fruitful when attempting to define identity. She points out that in Old English literature, "monsters are born and not made. To be a monster is to possess permanently a physical body that differs significantly from the norm... There can be no hope of inclusion or acceptance by the community... when the monster threatens this distance by getting too close to the community, it is removed" (23). This can be demonstrated through texts such as *Beowulf*, where the identities of both Grendel and Beowulf are defined by their inclusion in or rejection by the community, as well as through their interactions with one another. Beowulf's character functions to maintain the early medieval norm of the hero and the separation from that which is monstrous.

However, in mid- to late-medieval literature, due in part to the societal changes discussed above, the identity of the hero and subsequently of the monster begin to change. In Old English literature, the monster is fixed and easily definable; in Middle English literature, however, the monster is able to transform, sometimes at will. As Oswald points out, Middle English "monsters are capable of changes both spiritual and physical... the body is no longer the primary indicator of identity: instead of revealing monstrosity, the transformative body can conceal it in

dangerous ways” (23). A monster who could hide its identity or could conceal its animalistic rage, remade the definition of a monster and, consequently, the definition of human. According to Oswald, “This new possibility... to be at times one thing and at others something entirely different destabilizes both individual identity and cultural certainty ... If a monster can pass as a human, then that changes what it means to be human” (125). The destabilization of individual identity and cultural certainty was frightening to the medieval community, as is demonstrated through the writing of the Church concerning metamorphosis. However, as Caroline Bynum argues, metamorphosis tales are essential for understanding identity. Werewolf tales provide:

[I]mages to think with that do not force us to choose between mind and body, inner and outer... Rather, we are, as the old tales suggest, shapes with stories, always changing but also always carrying traces of what we were before... we are Bisclavret... really changing but bearing our story through the change and bearing it *out there in our bodies*, visible to others as well as to ourselves. (188-9)

Werewolf tales of the mid-to-late Middle Ages provided the medieval world with concrete examples of a physical change through which one is allowed to retain one’s humanity. This was, no doubt, reassuring in a world where change was visible and the future uncertain.

The later medieval understanding of identity as fluid, as evolving, and as separate (or at least not defined by) body, is demonstrated in Marie’s *Bisclavret*. Examining instances of Bisclavret’s conflicting desires helps to strengthen understanding of ‘the rage of the wolf,’ revealing motivations, as well as usages of such ‘rage.’ Because the deception used by Bisclavret’s wife takes place while he is away in the forest, the reader is told only that “a whole year passed” (Burgess and Busby 70). One pictures Bisclavret returning from his hunt, refreshed and eager to see his wife again, only to discover terrible betrayal when his clothes were missing

from their hiding place. Most likely, as does Petronius' soldier, Bisclavret sent up a howl of 'rage' before returning to the only place remaining to him—the deep wood. During this year, one is led to believe, or at least hope, that Bisclavret avoided the werewolf's hunger for human flesh and continued living off prey and wild animals; this is not to say that Bisclavret's identity remained the same during that year, as the bestial behavior of killing and eating an animal raw, as well as his anger over his wife's betrayal most likely affected his rationality.

As his year of solitude draws to a close, the king takes a hunting trip to Bisclavret's forest and Bisclavret seizes this opportunity to escape perpetual solitude. After all, he still maintains his human reason, and humans naturally desire fellowship. The king becomes enamored of the wolf who, in his supplication "took hold of his stirrup and kissed his food and his leg" (70). Immediately recognizing the unusual intelligence of the wolf, the king makes him a sort of pet at the castle:

He considered the wolf to be a great wonder and loved it dearly, commanding all the people to guard it well for love of him and not do it any harm. None of them was to strike it and plenty of food and water must be provided for it... It was loved by everyone and so noble and gentle a beast was it that it never attempted to cause any harm... It accompanied [the king] constantly and showed clearly that it loved him. (Burgess and Busby 70)

The good behavior of the werewolf, emphasized by the use of "never," is important for the development of Bisclavret's identity. As Leslie Sconduto points out, "Bisclavret is able to reveal his nobility—his humanity—to those around him by behaving chivalrously. Thus, in spite of his lupine appearance, Bisclavret is well-liked by everyone at court" (46). Despite his lack of voice and human form, Bisclavret continues to behave as the knight he once was.

By highlighting Bisclavret's behavior and his love for the king, Marie establishes the groundwork for the sharp contrast in the next scene. After some time had passed, the king holds a festival and the knight who stole Bisclavret's clothing and married his wife appears at court. For the first time, Bisclavret demonstrates 'the rage of the wolf.' Upon seeing the knight, Bisclavret "sped towards him, sinking his teeth into him and dragging him down towards him. He would have done the knight serious harm if the king had not called him and threatened him with a stick. On two occasions that day he attempted to bite him" (70-1). It should be noted here that each of the four editions discussed above translates this description the same way, with the only variation being the king's "stick," which is occasionally referred to as a "rod" (Mason 256). After seeing the knight who helped to betray him, Bisclavret either willingly gives in to his bestial 'rage' or is unable to stop himself, although, his repeated attempts to bite the knight throughout the day indicate the former.

As a result of his 'rage,' Bisclavret's identity begins to be questioned by the court. "Many people were greatly astonished at this for never before had he shown signs of such behavior towards anyone he had seen. Throughout the household it was remarked that he would not have done it without good reason. The knight had wronged him somehow or other" (Burgess and Busby 71). Marie is sparse in her details, but the matter appears to be forgotten after the festival comes to a close. However, this first scene of 'rage' reveals an important aspect about 'the rage of the wolf.' Bisclavret makes no attempt to control his 'rage' until he is threatened with physical beating, behavior more reminiscent of an animal than a human. It would appear, then, that once given over to bestial 'rage' the werewolf thinks and can only be dealt with like an animal. Once Bisclavret attacks, there remain no vestiges of human rationality or behavior and could only be stopped by the king threatening to beat him.

Shortly after this, the king goes hunting again in the forest Bisclavret used to inhabit and takes lodging for the night at a local inn. Bisclavret's wife, apparently unaware of her husband's near demise via werewolf, appears before the king with a gift, and Bisclavret "dashed towards her like a madman. Just hear how successfully he took his revenge. He tore the nose right off her face" (Burgess and Busby 71). This time, nothing hinders Bisclavret from his 'rage' and he succeeds in repaying his evil wife for her betrayal. Significantly, after he has achieved his revenge, he calms down and regains his sanity—his 'rage' is satiated.

After a second demonstration of violence, however, the court is not as forgiving, and "[f]rom all sides he was threatened and was on the point of being torn to pieces" (Burgess and Busby 71). One of the king's counselors advises him to question the lady to ascertain the cause of Bisclavret's unusual violence, and after being tortured, she reveals everything. The clothes are recovered, and Bisclavret is returned to his human form. This second display of 'rage' demonstrates a second important aspect of 'the rage of the wolf.' As Scoduto points out, with "the werewolf's mutilation of his wife, Marie reminds the audience of his bestial side. But in providing motivation for his actions, she transforms his wolflike behavior into the deeds of a knight" (50). It would appear, then, that bestial 'rage' is acceptable if it is used for revenge.

In *Bisclavret*, Marie demonstrates an attribute found in every single metamorphosis tale from the mid-to-late Middle Ages—the reconciliation of Church teaching and physical transformation. Scoduto points out that, "Reflecting Augustine's theory of metamorphosis, which insists that the humanity of the 'transformed' creature is untouched, Marie emphasizes the incongruity between Bisclavret's appearance and his behavior" (45). This incongruity also reflects the conflict of identity during the Middle Ages between natural human desires and proper spiritual actions. Rachel Kaufman emphasizes that "[t]hrough the Bible was the more



traditional source to address the question ‘what is a man,’ courtesy books and werewolf stories played an important role in the medieval period’s answer” (83). While the medieval community firmly believed in the teachings of the Church and their lives were structured around the Church, metamorphosis texts such as *Bisclavret* demonstrate an awareness of and an attempt to reconcile conflicting physical and spiritual identities in a way that conformed to Church doctrine.

In addition to reflecting an awareness of the conflicting identities of the medieval world, *Bisclavret* reveals three important aspects of ‘the rage of the wolf’—the loss of self to animalistic savagery, the recovery of self upon completion of the ‘rage,’ and societal approval of using the ‘rage’ for the revenge of injustices. Furthermore, in the moments before and after his ‘rage,’ Bisclavret’s actions reveal his noble blood. In a time when social classes were beginning to shift, this confirmed the belief that noble birth would reveal itself, even under the worst circumstances; this would have been affirming for the nobility and would have served to remind the audience of the importance of class divisions. The confirmation of nobility through tales of metamorphosis is found in nearly all medieval werewolf tales, including *Arthur and Gorlagon* and *The Crop-Eared Dog*. An investigation of these texts also reveals that revenge is not the only time it is acceptable to succumb to ‘the rage of the wolf.’

## CHAPTER 3

### WELSH AND IRISH WEREWOLVES

Marie de France, by using specific language to indicate a distinction between a werewolf's mere existence and its bestial 'rage,' introduced werewolves into the tradition of romance and simultaneously drew attention to the question of a werewolf's identity. In his 1966 study of what he terms "versions of the Werewolf's Tale," G.L. Kittredge presented the unknown, anonymous, and undated *Arthur and Gorlagon* to the scholarly community. Edited from manuscript Rawlinson B149, Kittredge asserts that the origins are most likely Welsh and "the Latin can hardly be dated later than the thirteenth century, though it is preserved only in a manuscript of the late fourteenth" (116). His extensive and comprehensive study pairs the Latin text with the contemporary Irish folktale "Morraha" and the anonymous French *Lai de Melion*—a tale so similar to *Bisclavret* in plot, structure, and diction that it does not warrant further discussion here. As Kittredge points out, "Morraha" and *Arthur and Gorlagon* are both frame narratives following a similar structure and reflecting features distinct to Welsh and Irish storytelling.

Despite Kittredge's thorough study, he may have overlooked one key text, as John Carey pointed out in his study of medieval Irish werewolves. *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* or *The Crop-Eared Dog* is "the oldest surviving version of 'The Werewolf's Tale' in Irish" and is also an Arthurian tale (43). In light of this information, *The Crop-Eared Dog* must be compared with *Arthur and Gorlagon* since it has more in common with that text than do *Melion* or "Morraha." Such a comparison, to my knowledge, has never been attempted and will prove fruitful to a deeper investigation into 'the rage of the wolf.' *Arthur and Gorlagon* and *The Crop-Eared Dog*, situated as they are in this study between two French werewolf tales, provide insight into

medieval Welsh and Irish portrayals of werewolves and reveals similarities and differences in the ways each medieval community approached identity.

### *Arthur and Gorlagon*

Both *Arthur and Gorlagon* and *The Crop-Eared Dog* are narratives which begin, as do many Arthurian stories, with Arthur and his knights either hunting or feasting. In *Arthur and Gorlagon*, Arthur is carried away by his excitement at the feast of Pentecost and kisses Guinevere passionately in front of his knights. This embarrasses her, and she reprimands him, teasing “you have never yet fathomed either the nature or the heart of a woman” (Milne 234). This portrayal of Guinevere is similar to Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” in which a knight rapes a woman, and Guinevere sends him on a one year quest to save his life by discovering what women most desire—which is “maistrie” or control over men (line 1236). Like the rapist knight, Arthur vows “I will never taste food until by good hap I fathom them” (Milne 234) and sets out immediately, leaving the rest of his guests feasting. While the reader realizes that Guinevere was most likely embarrassed because Lancelot would have seen the display of affection, as usual, Arthur remains oblivious to his wife’s infidelity and leaves on his quest. After stopping to ask his question at two different kingdoms during dinnertime with equally fruitless results, Arthur arrives at King Gorlagon’s castle where he too is feasting. Refusing to dismount or partake of any food, Arthur insists upon hearing Gorlagon’s tale, whereupon the king replies, “I will relate to you what happened to a certain king, and thereby you will be able to test the heart, the nature, and the ways of women” (237). Here the frame narrative ceases (with the exception of Gorlagon’s repeated attempts to persuade Arthur to dismount and eat) and the werewolf tale begins.

The main character is a king who remains unnamed until the end, but, as there is more than one king in this tale, I will refer the main character as King Lupus. When Lupus was born, his “humanity and sanity are enshrined in a sapling exactly as old as he is and precisely as tall, which is protected by a walled garden” (Wilson 3); fate decreed that “whoever should cut it down, and striking his head with the slenderer part of it, should say ‘Be a wolf and have the understanding of a wolf,’ he would at once become a wolf, and have the understanding of a wolf” (238). Lupus builds a high wall around the sapling and visits it daily, partaking of no food until he verifies its safety (paralleling Arthur’s vow of fasting). Similar to *Bisclavret*, Lupus’ beautiful wife (already in love with another man) pressures him into telling his secret and soon takes advantage of her knowledge. However, as she taps him on the head, she accidentally says “Be a wolf, be a wolf... and have the understanding of a man.” Lupus immediately becomes a wolf and runs away into the forest, while “his human understanding remained unimpaired” (239). Gorlagon pauses here, thinking he has revealed the nature of women as treacherous, and implores Arthur to eat. Ironically, Arthur remains unaware of female treachery and refuses; Gorlagon continues.

Lupus roams the country for two years and then mates with a she-wolf who produces two cubs. Leslie Sconduto posits that “the author uses [Lupus’] relationship with his mate to demonstrate the depth to which the king has sunk in his despair” (79), though it is not likely that Lupus mated with a female wolf simply out of despair. Reflecting the conflict between animalistic desire and human reason, Lupus was most likely following his bestial needs which had been raging unchecked for two years. However, still in possession of his human rationality, Lupus uses his new pack to take revenge on his wife. With his small army in tow, he returns to his castle and, together with his mate and cubs, kills his wife’s two children by her new husband.

As seen in *Bisclavret*, Lupus uses ‘the rage of the wolf’ to take revenge on his unfaithful wife. Sconduto notices that “[t]he author’s use of the diction of combat and chivalric justice—‘avenged’—in this passage also points to the disparity between his lupine form and his inner reality” (85). The pack escapes unharmed but soon returns, this time killing his wife’s two brothers; however, the servants are waiting for them and capture and hang Lupus’ cubs while he escapes. Overwhelmed by his sorrow, Lupus gives himself over to the ‘rage,’ becoming more and more wolf-like and nearly losing his humanity. Roving the countryside, “greedy for bloodshed” (241) he kills livestock in droves until news reaches the king who vows to hunt and kill the terrorist wolf.

When Lupus overhears these plans, he becomes frightened, and “he returned trembling to the recess of the woods, deliberating what would be the best course for him to pursue” (241). When the king catches him, Lupus approaches him in a penitent manner and wins the king’s affection by licking his hand. As Sconduto correctly asserts, “[t]his is not the reaction of a bloodthirsty, depraved monster that has totally lost touch with his humanity, but rather the reaction of a human being who sees that perhaps there is some hope for him after all” (80). Just as *Bisclavret* could only conquer his ‘rage’ by fear of being beaten by the king, so does fear for his life finally allow Lupus to overcome his ‘rage’ and regain some of his former sanity.

Also mirroring *Bisclavret*, Lupus becomes a pet, eating and drinking from the king’s plate and sleeping by his bed. When the king leaves for a long journey, he chains Lupus to the bed, charging his wife to look after the wolf in his stead. Here the poet states, “the Queen already hated the wolf because of the great sagacity which she had detected in him (and as it so often happens that the wife hates whom the husband loves)” (243). The wife is frightened of the werewolf’s intelligence and human-like ability to discern the truth, and with good reason. When

Lupus witnesses the queen's infidelity with the king's steward, he attacks the steward, fatally wounding him. Scoduto points out that "[h]e is not seeking revenge, but is acting out of devotion to his lord, although perhaps the queen's behavior further enrages him because it recalls his own wife's infidelity" (83). Whereas in *Bisclavret*, 'the rage of the wolf' was used for revenge and only then would it subside, in *Arthur and Gorlagon* that 'rage' can also be employed in order to help a friend, acting as the voice of the mute werewolf. 'The rage of the wolf' as helpful instead of harmful is a concept abundant in *The Crop-Eared Dog* and *Guillaume de Palerne* as well.

To conceal her unfaithfulness, the queen hides her son in a room in the basement and tears her clothes, telling the king that Lupus devoured their son and attacked the steward when he tried to help. The king becomes suspicious when the wolf acts joyful instead of penitent at his return, and Lupus leads him by his cloak to the room where the queen hid their son. After a trial, the two lovers are killed in various unpleasant ways. As in *Bisclavret*, the king soon suspects Lupus is a transformed beast, follows Lupus to his wife, tortures her repeatedly to discover the truth, and then transforms Lupus back with the aid of the sapling. Interestingly, when the wolf is transformed, he appears "far more beautiful and comely, being now possessed of such grace that one could at once detect that he was a man of great nobility" (249). The poet is implying that, as the result of his experiences as a werewolf and having learned to control his bestial instincts, Lupus is now more noble and wise; the mastery of one's animalistic identity leads to a happier, wiser, and more human life.

Having heard the entire story, Arthur asks one final question before he dismounts and eats: "Who is that woman sitting opposite you of a sad countenance, and holding before her in a dish a human head bespattered with blood, who has wept whenever you have smiled, and who

has kissed the bloodstained head whenever you have kissed your wife” (249). Gorlagon replies that she is the treacherous wife of the werewolf and reveals that he was the werewolf from the tale. Her punishment is “that she should always have the head of her paramour before her, and when I kissed the wife I married in her stead, she should imprint kisses on him for whose sake she had committed that crime” (250). To modern sensibilities, this is a cruel punishment and certainly one more calculating than can be explained through an impulse such as ‘the rage of the wolf.’ Anne Wilson posits that the “punishment he chooses for her reveals a vindictiveness which leaves Gorlagon without any of the nobility of the good king who restored him to his humanity and kingdom” (6); however, the poet insists that Gorlagon, “of his inborn clemency spared her life, though she well deserved to lose it” (249). This echoes the societal approval of the use of ‘rage’ for the revenge of injustices found in *Bisclavret*. After this final punishment, as Scoduto points out, “it would seem that his [rage] has finally been transformed into this last act of vengeance” (87). With this final punishment, Gorlagon’s revenge was complete, and the last vestiges of ‘the rage of the wolf’ subsided. For the medieval werewolf, peace can only be found on the other side of ‘rage;’ for the medieval human, true fulfillment could only be found through the mastery of animalistic desires.

### *The Crop-Eared Dog*

The only English version of the Irish *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* or *The Crop-Eared Dog* is Stewart Macalister’s 1908 edition, translated from the Egerton 1782 manuscript and dated late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. While Macalister translates the Irish term *mhadra mhaoil* as “crop-eared dog,” the phrase “earless wolf” would be equally accurate (Bruford 150). Like *Arthur and Gorlagon*, *The Crop-Eared Dog* is also an Arthurian tale, but it does not follow the standard conventions of Arthurian literature. As Arthur Brown has pointed out, the scholar

“who examines these stories with an expectation of finding other borrowings from Arthurian romances . . . will be disappointed. In plot, in incident, and in details of description, they follow unmistakably the traditional ways of Irish story-telling” (120-1). For instance, the narrative begins thus:

A chase, a hunting, and a warrior-battue was convened by King Arthur . . . in the Dangerous Forest on the Plain of Wonders . . . the aforesaid chase was extended and arranged and turned aside by them, under dense groves, hard to know, and under savage waste thickets, and under smooth very beautiful ramparts, and through secret glens, hard to know, and under fair woods, rich in nuts, and through the smooth, very beautiful plains of that same forest. (3)

From the first paragraph, one can see that diction, syntax, and wording are dramatically different from the French or British Arthurian traditions. The repetition of such phrases as “hard to know” and “smooth, very beautiful” demonstrates “the elaborate system that existed for the oral transmission of traditional stories,” (Brown 122), and the savage descriptions of nature distinguish the text from the typical Arthurian traditions of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, or even Thomas Malory.

In addition to diction and syntax, the werewolf in *The Crop-Eared Dog* is also a different sort of transformed being. Like *Arthur and Gorlagon*, the dog does not immediately appear in the narrative. After the hunting scene described above, a glorious knight called the Knight of the Lantern approaches the King Arthur and challenges the entire household to combat, calling to mind images from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Knight of the Lantern succeeds in defeating each of Arthur’s knights in turn and “bound them all save Galahad de Cordibus, who was a young beardless boy” (9). This reference to Galahad implies that the Knight of the



Lantern did not battle Galahad because he was too young. Elsewhere in the text, Galahad is called Arthur's foster, referencing the medieval Romance tradition of sending one's children to the home of an uncle or close friend to be raised.

After the Knight of the Lantern departs, King Arthur laments his plight, expresses thanks that the ladies of the court are not there to witness it, and resolves to wait for help to arrive. This scene of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table tied up and waiting for help is a bit ridiculous. Even more comical is the realization that Galahad is sitting in the camp by himself, the only one not restrained. The helplessness of men in comparison with the usefulness of the werewolf is a theme which reoccurs in *Guillaume de Palerne*. Tied up as he is, Arthur soon develops a great thirst, and Galahad offers to fetch water from the closest well. Arthur protests that the closest spring is surrounded by "valley-warlocks and air-demons and unreasoning, hateful, horrible monsters" (13), but Galahad swears by the "elemental gods" that he will do it. Arthur hands over his armor, pronounces Galahad a knight, and gives him a "four-peaked, jeweled, fair-spined horn (the Quartered Cup is its name) in to which would go drink for fifty men at once, and [tells him] to go to the Fountain of Virtues on the Plain of Wonders" (13). Taking the drinking horn, Sir Galahad finds the Fountain of Virtues with no further mention of any "horrible monsters," leaving the audience wondering about King Arthur's bravery.

As he approaches the well, there is a great thundering from the base of a nearby green tree and the Crop-Eared Dog emerges "without ears or tail... with ugliness on him and full on contentiousness, so that a small apple or large sloe would stay on the top of every hair of the rough, grayish pelt that was on him. A rough chain was on his neck, and he spoke with mild, truly-clever words" (13). The impression of the ferocious dog with his hackles raised is dispelled by his "clever words" and, along with the chain which in Irish literature usually

indicated a transformed human (Bruford 150), puts Galahad at ease. Interestingly, the Crop-Eared Dog can use speech to convey his nature, unlike Bisclavret or Gorlagon who are mute and must rely on actions.

The Crop-Eared Dog insists on hearing Galahad's tale and when the new knight proudly answers "[o]f the people of the King of the World am I," the Crop-Eared Dog rejoices. Revealing inside knowledge of treachery in a way that the voiceless Bisclavret and Gorlagon could only express through 'the rage of the wolf,' the dog tells Galahad that Arthur is in danger, "for the Knight of the Lantern will come to behead him and to behead his people with him tonight, for... no one of the men of the world can fight with him for the quality of his druidry, and the excellence of his intellect, and the greatness of his strength, and the nobleness of his heart" (15). Upon hearing of the danger awaiting his king, Galahad takes the dog with him and returns to the captive Arthur, but before Arthur can drink from the horn, the Knight of the Lantern approaches. The Crop-Eared Dog sees the Knight and uses the now familiar 'rage of the wolf,' running toward him and barking furiously. "When the Knight of the Lantern saw the Crop-Eared Dog, he returns back by the same road, and pours a dark druidic mist behind him on the plain of Britain, in every way that the Crop-eared Dog and Sir Galahad should come after him" (17). Interestingly, the undefeated and obviously magical knight was driven away only by the barking and ferocity of a similarly magical creature.

After this, Sir Galahad and the Crop-Eared Dog leave the company of the king and embark on many adventures as they track down the Knight of the Lantern. The Knight, with the help of magic and various people, evades capture five times before fleeing to Egypt. On the way to Egypt, Galahad finally asks the dog "who thou art, or what put thee in that form, with human speech" (35), and the frame narrative ends for a time. The dog reveals himself to be Alastrann,

son of the king of India, whose father had five sons. When their mother died, the king remarried and had a sixth son by his new wife. She was a jealous woman and wanted her son, who just happened to be the Knight of the Lantern, to be the king's only heir. Working "druidry and devilry" (39) on her stepsons, the wife turned them into three male dogs and two female dogs. The hounds and beagles of the castle chased them to the borders of the land, where the five dogs lived together, the two females each bearing fourteen whelps. The pack then ravaged the countryside: "to the end of the world and to doomsday there cannot be reckoned the slaughter of champions and warriors, the loss and damage, the clattering, the confusion and the active lopping down we gave to the people, the wealth, and the animals of Greece" (41). As in *Arthur and Gorlagon*, the dogs gathered this small army in order to avenge themselves.

After the dogs wreak havoc in Greece, the king and his counsel decided to hunt and kill them. Chasing Alastrann into a cave, they prepared to burn him out and kill him. This version is unique in that Alastrann actually provides a physical description of 'the rage of the wolf:'

When I saw the cave darkening on me, and my foes and enemies about me, without a friend or companion near me to bring me help, I filled with anger and wrath, and my courage and my strength arose, and I thought it was... more fitting for me to avenge myself on my enemy, than to die to no purpose... I came out and face[d] the hosts. (43)

This is perhaps the fullest description of 'the rage of the wolf' and confirms the conclusions found in *Bisclavret* and *Arthur and Gorlagon* that, once invoked, only completion of revenge could assuage it. Alastrann describes this as well stating, "I approached them without delay, and began to destroy and maim them... So that this is the loss I inflicted on them at last, seven hundred and ninety powerful knights, not counting the rabble" (43). His 'rage' quelled, Alastrann jumped into the arms of the king of Greece and, like *Bisclavret* and *Gorlagon*, became

his pet, sleeping by his bed on a chain. Later, the Knight of the Lantern came to Greece. Enlisting the help of the king's daughter, the Knight tried to have Alastrann killed, but she succeeded only in cutting off his ears and tail before he woke and disemboweled her. Alastrann fought side by side with the king to defeat the Knight, but he evaded capture; the king fell in battle, and Alastrann pursued the Knight and continued pursuing him until he met Galahad.

Returning to the frame narrative, Galahad and Alastrann follow the Knight through many other lands, eventually catching up with him on the Black Island. Planning to trick the Knight, the Crop-Eared Dog hides inside the Red Cave but is tricked himself and is sealed inside, leaving Galahad to fight the Knight of the Lantern by himself. Meanwhile, a year has passed, and Arthur gathers his knights to go in search of Galahad. They arrive at the Black Island in the middle of the fight and the Knight flies away, escaping again. Rescuing Alastrann from the cave, he and Galahad pursue the Knight once again. One night, however, the Crop-Eared Dog is stolen from Galahad. He mourns a while and marries the king of Sorcha's daughter. One day, the Crop-Eared Dog returns with the Knight of the Lantern bound and in tow. They take the Knight to the Island of Shape, where he is forced to return Alastrann to his former shape. Galahad and Alastrann return to King Arthur's land, and there is much rejoicing.

The comparison of *The Crop-Eared Dog* with *Arthur and Gorlagon* and with other medieval European werewolf tales reveals much about the way medieval Ireland thought about metamorphosis and human transformation. Of the tales in this study, the ability of werewolves to speak is only found in Gerald's Ossory tale and *The Crop-Eared Dog*, both of Irish tradition. In all other versions, the werewolf is cut off from humanity and must communicate through actions, proving himself to be chivalrous without the use of language. The verbal connection found in the Irish stories allows the transformed beings to maintain enough humanity to control

‘the rage of the wolf’ until it is necessary, instead of being controlled by their ‘rage,’ as the mute werewolves seem to be. Also unique to *The Crop-Eared Dog* is Galahad’s pledge to the “elemental gods” instead of a Christian god, revealing the tale to be of a much older oral tradition and indicating Church doctrine to be less influential in Irish storytelling than in Britain or France. It would seem that Irish storytellers had more freedom to experiment with questions of transformation, identity, and humanity without risking the stigma of heresy.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WEREWOLF AND THE CHILD

Just as there are certain aspects of ‘the rage of the wolf’ which persist in nearly every medieval werewolf tale regardless of origin, there is also a common thread throughout these tales in their portrayals of children. Not generally associated with werewolves, children appear in many of the tales to further the plot or to emphasize a wolf’s docile nature. Similarly, in medieval werewolf tales, the act of producing a child functions in a similar manner, developing the plot by the formation of a pack (usually for revenge purposes) or the execution of a punishment. However, before one can discover the literary function of placing children in medieval werewolf tales, several hitherto unmentioned tales must be explained and the medieval attitude toward children must first be determined.

In the Irish legend of Finn mac Cumail, found in manuscripts as early as the late twelfth or early thirteenth century but much older in oral tradition (Carey 38), Finn’s hounds Bran and Scéolang are also his first cousins. According to Reinhard and Hull in their 1936 study, Bran and Scolang’s mother Uirrne was given to a married man, “but she met with no favor from [his first wife], who changed her, while pregnant, into the form of a bitch. The thaumaturgy whereby she regained her proper shape had no effect on her offspring, who were born as dogs—Bran and Sceolang” (44). This is perhaps the most fascinating of medieval child transformations. Not the victims of voluntary transformation, a punishment-curse, a stepmother’s jealousy, or a wife’s manipulation, Bran and Scéolang were quite simply and unavoidably in the wrong place at the wrong time. The fact that their mother was transformed into a dog and back again while pregnant is intriguing, but the fact that she gave birth to two dogs after being restored to human form is even more so.

Child transformation is also found in the fourth branch of the Welsh *Mabinogi*, along with a slightly disturbing rape punishment. In this tale, a powerful sorcerer named Math was the ruler of Gwynedd and “could only live while his feet were in the lap of a maiden” (91) by the name of Goewin. Math’s nephews, Gilfaethwy and Gwydion, concoct a plot to lure Math away from the castle so they can rape Geowin because Gilfaethwy has decided he is in love with her. The next time Math tries to recline at her lap, she says he must “seek a maid who may sit beneath your feet now; I am a woman... An attack was made upon me, Lord... there wasn’t anyone in the court who didn’t know it” (96). As punishment for the rape, Math transformed Gilfaethwy and Gwydion into a stag and hind, a boar and sow, and a male and female wolf over the course of three years, alternating one male and one female. At the end of each year, their offspring were given to Math and transformed into three young boys. John Carey points out, “[h]ere can be found both the idea of animal transformation... as a punishment, and the imposition of that punishment on a couple who unite with one another while in wolf form” (62). In addition to this being one of the few examples of child metamorphosis, this tale also confirms the harsh sense of Welsh justice as previously demonstrated by Gorlagon’s punishment for his wife.

In *The Crop-Eared Dog*, prince Alastrann and his four brothers are turned into three male and two female dogs and produce twenty-eight offspring from each other; however, this transformation is not the result of a punishment but of a stepmother’s jealousy. The new and extremely large pack wreaks havoc on the countryside and on Greece (43). In *Arthur and Gorlagon*, after two years of being a wolf (also the result of a treacherous woman, this time his wife), Gorlagon takes a female wolf as a mate and has two pups for a similar purpose. Gorlagon uses his new pack to kill his wife’s children and nephews. When his pups are killed by his wife’s household, Gorlagon is shown lamenting their deaths, as a father would mourn the death

of his children; in fact, it is this tragedy that first causes Gorlagon to suffer ‘the rage of the wolf,’ killing livestock all over the countryside (241).

In addition to these rather disturbing accounts, John Carey points out that “in a Connemara folktale [a wolf] encounters a she-wolf who is herself a woman under enchantment, pregnant with a son whom he releases from her womb by fatally biting her in her sleep” (63). As we will soon discover in *Guillaume de Palerne*, the werewolf was transformed while still a toddler and subsequently kidnaps the four year old Guillaume. So, what does it mean that children are featured so prominently in tales of metamorphosis and especially the more gruesome tales? Did Uirne’s maternal love simply end at birth or did she love Bran and Scéolang as she would her children and as Gorlagon seemed to care for his? What happens to the psyche of a child who becomes a wolf while still a toddler? Clearly such tales raise more questions than they answer, but a clearer picture of the medieval view of children and of childhood may help to answer some of them.

### Childhood in the Middle Ages

Even before Philippe Aries posited in his 1962 *Centuries of Childhood*, that “there was no place for childhood in the medieval world” (33) and, further, the “awareness of the particular nature of childhood” did not exist until the fifteenth century (128), scholars have been speculating on the phenomena of the medieval child. While Aries’s thesis is undoubtedly too simple, Sophie Oosterwijk identifies the causes of such a theory to be “the apparent absence of children from medieval art” and the fact that “medieval child mortality rates were extremely high compared to those in Western society” (230-1). Jack Zipes agrees, stating that violence was much more real in the medieval world: “[l]ittle children were attacked and killed by animals and grown-ups in the woods and fields. Hunger often drove people to commit atrocious acts.”



According to Zipes, this violence also explains the inclusion of children in werewolf tales, since “[i]n the 15th and 16th centuries, violence was difficult to explain on rational grounds. There was a strong superstitious belief in werewolves and witches, uncontrollable magical forces of nature, which threatened the lives of the peasant population” (6-7). While the commonality of violence may partially explain the presence of children in tales of metamorphosis, it does not validate Aries’s thesis.

Sheila Egoff is one of the few scholars in Aries’s camp, pointing out a different reason for her hypothesis: “[t]he Middle Ages, by default as it were, show the link between what a society think of its young and what it provides (or does not provide) for them in reading material” (23). This argument is a bit weak, however, since what little “reading material” existed was hand-copied and hard to come by, and since (as she herself points out) “few children were taught to read or write unless they belonged to nobility” (23). Hand-copying manuscripts was tedious work, and vellum is not the drool-proof cardboard employed in contemporary children’s books.

Since Aries’s book, mainstream medieval scholarship concerning children reflects portrayals of children in medieval literature, as well as the consideration that what little children’s literature existed reflected a distinct knowledge of the difference between children and adults. Thomas and Karen Jambeck point out that Chaucer, in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, not only demonstrated an “awareness of his son as a child but also a concern for an appropriate pedagogical discipline” (117). Shulamith Shahar, in the best recent study of medieval childhood, grants Aries that “there is no place for idealization of the life of children in the Middle Ages,” but she argues that there were distinctly different views of men and women, masters and servants, and therefore also adults and children, causing childhood to be “perceived as a distinct

stage of the life cycle” (2-3). Sophie Oosterwijk supports Shahar’s claim, pointing out that “[t]he hugely popular [medieval] theme of the Ages of Man, in all its variations, included at least one stage dedicated to childhood with its specific characteristics” (231), and Nicholas Orme examines written texts (chronicles, miracle collections, coroners’ records, and works of literature), visual sources (toys and artwork), as well as archeological finds, to prove the existence of a thriving children’s culture in the medieval world (49-50).

Despite scholarly study of the treatment or education of children or literary analysis of children in medieval texts, modern scholars will never fully grasp the medieval child. Just as the culture of the Middle Ages influenced the medieval community’s view of the world around them, current concepts of the terms *child* and *childhood* are the result of modern social conditioning. No amount of literary analysis or historical study can alter or undo this. However, an analysis of texts like *Guillaume de Palerne*, which feature children as the main characters, prove invaluable to the study of medieval self and identity in the context of childhood.

#### *Guillaume de Palerne*

In 2004, Leslie Sconduto translated the only English version of the twelfth century Old French *roman d’aventure Guillaume de Palerne*. Much longer than any of the werewolf tales mentioned above (9667 lines compared to the 318 lines of *Bisclavret*), *Guillaume* is not usually considered when studying werewolves. However, if one sifts through the many lengthy descriptions of battles and dress, the intriguing portrait of an eager, helpful werewolf emerges, paralleling a new kind of ‘rage,’ the ‘rage of the knight.’ As Nona Flores notes, “[s]everal critics have pointed out that the most interesting character in this fourteenth-century Middle English romance is the enchanted prince Alphouns of Spain, who appears throughout much of the poem as an unnamed werewolf” (Flores xiv). In addition to fascinating characters, the poet “sets up a

parallel between the evaluation of identity and the interpretation of the elusive truth that is concealed behind appearances” (Sconduto 1). Reflecting the familiar conflicts between appearance and reality and reason and ‘rage,’ *Guillaume* also plays with the issues of violence to children and child transformations.

As the poem begins, Guillaume is four years old and gathering flowers in the orchard while his mother and father, the king of Apulia, recline nearby in the shade. Despite scholarly assertions that children had no specific place in the Middle Ages, the poet emphasizes the queen’s concern over her child’s health and education, telling the audience that the queen had entrusted Guillaume’s care to two ladies: “She ordered them to watch over him,/ To teach him, to instruct him,/ To show him and school him in the law... In them she placed her confidence,/ But she was horribly betrayed,/ Tricked and deceived” (ll. 38-49). The two women accepted bribes from the king’s brother, who wanted to kill Guillaume so he could inherit the kingdom.

Before the women could do any damage, however, “[a] great wolf jumps out, his mouth gaping open;/ He comes rushing like a tempest.../Right in front of the king himself/ The wolf takes his son in his mouth./ Away he goes” (ll. 86-91). The queen’s grief at losing her only child mirrors Gorlagon’s grief at the loss of his cubs: “The queen screams over and over:/ ‘Help! Help! Holy Mary!/ Household of the king, what are you doing?/ I will kill myself now, if he is not rescued’” (ll. 95-8). She laments thus for a long while before the king is finally able to calm her.

Meanwhile, the wolf carries Guillaume across the Strait of Messina and eventually ends up near Rome. Resting for a week in a great forest, the werewolf takes care of little Guillaume. “Whatever the child needed/ The noble beast provided for him;/ Never did he experience any discomfort./ In the ground the wolf dug a den;/ He carried and placed grasses within it/ And ferns

and reeds/ That he strewed inside” (ll. 174-180). Sleeping next to the boy, “In this manner he tamed the son of the king” (ll. 184). One day, while the werewolf is out gathering food, a cowherd hears Guillaume crying, finds the den, and takes Guillaume back to his house, where he is raised for the next seven years. When the werewolf discovers that Guillaume is missing, he laments, mirroring Guillaume’s mother’s sorrow: “Never did any man born of a mother/ See a beast demonstrate such grief./ Whoever might have heard him shriek/ And see him wring his feet together... And see how he is almost dying of chagrin and how overwhelmed he is,/ How he searches low and searches high,/ Tears flowing from his eyes” (ll. 234-43). Eventually, the werewolf finds the cowherd and, seeing how much the cowherd and his wife love the boy, leave him in their care.

Here the poet leaves Guillaume for a moment and relates the story of the werewolf’s transformation, informing us that the werewolf “[w]as not at all a beast by nature” (ll. 275) but was Alphonse, the son of the king of Spain. His father had remarried upon the death of Alphonse’s mother, but his new wife, Brande, like Alastrann’s stepmother from *The Crop-Eared Dog*, wanted to ensure that her son would be the only heir to the throne. “She anoints his body with an ointment/ Which was very strong and powerful;/ It was so potent that/ As soon as the child was anointed with it/ His condition and appearance changed;/ A wolf he became and he was transformed into a beast./ At once he became a werewolf” (ll. 301-7). Like Alastrann, Alphonse is helpless and has no control over his own transformation.

It is difficult to imagine a four year old child coming into contact with ‘the rage of the wolf.’ As Sconduto points out, “[u]nlike the werewolf condition of Bisclavret... and Gorgolagon, Alphonse’s ‘werewolfness’ is totally foreign to him... Alphonse has no personal potential for becoming a werewolf; the condition is imposed on him from the outside” (“Rewriting” 31). In

addition to being helpless over his own transformation, Alphonse is assaulted by the unfamiliar ‘rage of the wolf’ and is not able to control it when he experiences it for the first time, just after he is transformed. “Alphonse’s first and immediate response to his transformation, before he escapes, is an aggressive one as he attempts to attack his stepmother” (Sconduto *Metamorphosis* 99). Unlike Alastrann’s stepmother, however, Brande does not have a pack of hounds to chase Alphonse away. No longer a human child, Alphonse can now defend himself.

The poet’s word choice when describing ‘the rage of the wolf’ is also worth noting. Just as the *Gorlagon* poet used words like “avenged” to describe ‘the rage of the wolf’ in chivalric terms, in *Guillaume*, as soon as Alphonse is transformed, “[a]gainst his stepmother he begins a war;/ Toward her he runs, his mouth stretched open./ He would have hurt Brande had her people not run to her” (ll. 314-16 ). The continued discussion of ‘the rage of the wolf’ in terms of chivalric justice reflects society’s approval of ‘rage’ for revenge purposes.

After being chased out of his homeland, Alphonse flees to Apulia to recover, for “[t]ired he was and in great pain./ He had been in that land for two years/ Where he grew very fierce, strong, and big” (ll. 330-332). This is the only information the poet gives concerning Alphonse’s childhood as a wolf. One can assume that, while Alphonse’s human consciousness would be six or seven, the wolf is now fully grown and its instincts seem to guide Alphonse in the right course of action. After overhearing the plot to kill little Guillaume, Alphonse, because “[h]e could not tolerate this great suffering,/ Nor the arrogance of a traitor./ Because of this he kidnapped the child” (ll. 337-9). Alphonse’s ‘rage’ and the seeming savage act of kidnapping Guillaume in front of his mother and father are here justified and praised, revealed to be protective rather than malicious.

Returning to Guillaume, the poet describes his childhood as he grows up under the care of the cowherd and his wife. When the boy is eleven, the emperor of Rome goes hunting in the woods and is separated from the rest of the hunting party. Using ‘rage’ again to be helpful, Alphonse, chasing a stag, leads the emperor to Guillaume, who is wandering alone in the forest. His noble birth is recognizable through his “beauty, his appearance,/ And because of his noble countenance” (ll. 419-20). As in *Bisclavret* and *Gorlagon*, here is reflected the idea that one’s noble self will shine through, regardless of one’s outer appearance. Suspecting Guillaume’s noble birth, the emperor takes the child back to Rome, where he is given to Melior, the emperor’s daughter. Guillaume lives in the household of the emperor of Rome for three years until he is fourteen, at which point he and Melior realize they love each other. After much lengthy dialogue on both sides, all is revealed, and “so they remained for a long time/ Until at court there arose a situation” (ll. 1784-5). The duke of Saxony had revolted against the emperor and would have won if Guillaume had not rallied the Roman knights’ courage.

Here is described a ‘rage’ not seen in the texts above, ‘the rage of the knight.’ Guillaume is in the thick of the battle, and “[i]n his fist he holds his naked sword./ His eyes are red like those of a dragon,/ His face is fierce like that of a lion/ Inflamed with anger and rage... With his steel blade he gives them such blows/ That he splits them and cuts them in pieces,/ He strikes and kills and massacres them,” (ll. 2035-2211). Guillaume’s ‘rage’ is described in stronger language even than Alphonse’s ‘rage of the wolf,’ and is portrayed as a metamorphosis of sorts. The poet states “His gentle appearance has totally changed./ There truly appears on his face/ The great fierceness of his intentions” (ll. 2042-4). ‘The rage of the knight’ is a transformative force and one that is more socially acceptable than ‘the rage of the wolf;’ however, this transformation is only temporary and Guillaume returns to his former, gentle self after the battle. This supports

the notion of the medieval werewolf as affirmation of nobility and confirmation of existing social classes. Guillaume's use of the 'rage of the knight' to win battles also emphasizes the need to maintain a strong upper class for the protection of the masses.

Life in Rome returns to normal for Guillaume and Melior, until the Emperor decides to marry Melior to the son of the king of Greece. With the help of Melior's servant, Guillaume and Melior, disguised under the skins of two large bears, escape the palace together. Here the poet begins an interesting contrast between Alphonse and the two humans in disguise, contradicting typical medieval metamorphosis theory that "an appearance is a skin put on over" (Bynum 109). Gerald's Ossory tale reflects the Augustinian teaching that true metamorphosis is only achievable by God and the subsequent theory that medieval werewolves were men in animal disguises. However, the word 'metamorphosis,' implies a change of some sort; even if a werewolf retains his rationality after transformation, his personality, as well as his concepts of self and identity would be altered. Gorlagon demonstrates this when he is described as being more noble and wise after his years as a werewolf. Similarly, Alphonse, transformed as a toddler, would certainly have changed and transformed during his growth to manhood as a werewolf.

Guillaume and Melior, however, undergo no such metamorphosis. Covered by their bear skins, they continue to be helpless and would have starved or been captured had Alphonse not protected them. Assuming his previous role of Guillaume's guardian, Alphonse uses his 'rage' to acquire food and drink for the human couple but reveals his noble countenance when presenting it to them: "[w]hat he carries very humbly/ the werewolf sets before them,/ Then he retreated again/ Into the forest at a rapid pace" (ll. 3294-7). Just as Guillaume's nobility was recognized even in his peasant's garb, Alphonse's actions are recognized by Guillaume, who

wonders “[h]as such a miracle ever been seen,/ When God by means of a transformed beast/  
Sends us our sustenance?” (ll. 3309-11). Guillaume distinguishes, through the actions of the werewolf, that Alphonse is not a true beast by nature.

In addition to supplying the couple with sustenance, Alphonse also protects them by leading the Emperor’s search parties away or “when the hunters would get close/ With their dogs to the place where/ The two lovers were, the wolf would leap out;/ He would put himself at risk/ In order to protect and defend them” (ll. 3767-71). Leading them, the wolf continues to ensure the couple’s survival “with great fatigue and with great difficulty” (ll. 3778). When Guillaume and Melior are discovered sleeping in a cave and are nearly captured, “[a]t that moment appeared in the middle of the rocks/ The werewolf with his gaping mouth./ Right through and beyond the army/ He goes and seizes the provost’s son,/ He would rather lose the soul from his body/ Than not bring aid to the two lovers” (ll. 4080-5). The assertion here that the werewolf has a soul implies that if he were to lose it, “he would lose his human intelligence and understanding, any hope of recovering his human form” (Sconduto *Metamorphosis* 107). The werewolf is unwilling to take such a risk and, kidnapping another child, leads the search party away from the couple.

Alphonse continues to care for the lovers as he leads them toward Guillaume’s homeland of Apulia. Realizing that the bear skins have been discovered, Alphonse kills a stag and a doe and assists Guillaume and Melior into their new disguises. Guillaume again praises the wolf, saying “[i]n you I place all my trust./ Well do I think and believe that you understand/ And that you possess reasoning and intelligence./ I know not what you are,/ Except that in no way are you a wolf” (ll. 4376-80). Mirroring the roles of the kings in *Bisclavret* and *Gorlagon*, Guillaume recognizes the beast’s humanity and will soon become Alphonse’s protector as the roles are reversed.



Upon arrival in Apulia, the couple realizes that a war is underway. Alphonse's father, the king of Spain, wants to marry his son Brandin to Guillaume's sister Florence and is waging war against Guillaume's mother, the queen of Apulia, who will not consent to the match. Alphonse leads the couple to an orchard where they are discovered by the queen, who notices a bit of their clothing sticking out from under the skins. Gaining favor with the queen, Guillaume and Melior are taken into her household, where Guillaume, carrying a wolf on his shield, fights for Apulia, again demonstrating 'the rage of the knight.' The poet describes it, "Guillaume is in the great crowd/ Where he does not stop nor does he cease,/ He tortures those from Spain./ So many does he kill, so many does he mutilate,/ So many does he fell, so many does he slaughter,/ That all the ground is bloody from it" (ll. 6629-34). As demonstrated in *Bisclavret* and *Gorlagaon*, 'rage'—whether it be that of the wolf or that of the knight—is acceptable only if properly motivated. As a wolf, Alphonse, is able to use the 'rage' for defense and for assistance, whereas Guillaume only displays animalistic behavior in battle and is praised for killing many men. Unlike previous werewolf tales, the poet parallels the knight's 'rage' and the werewolf's helpfulness.

After Guillaume's second display of 'the rage of the knight,' the role of protector begins to shift. Following the battle and subsequent capture of the king of Spain, Alphonse appears to Guillaume several times in the orchard before venturing into the palace.

At that moment came the werewolf  
Right through the hall, in the presence of everyone,  
Near the king he kneels before him,  
He wets his feet with his tears.  
With his two paws he picks up his foot,  
And he tightly embraces it

Moreover, he seems to be asking  
That he gets up to leave and bows down to him  
And then to Guillaume and the queen  
And to the maidens as well. (ll. 7207-12)

Despite this obvious display of tenderness, the court is terrified, and the poet emphasizes that Alphonse “would already have been killed from all directions” (ll. 7222) had Guillaume not intervened on the wolf’s behalf. Sending out a proclamation that the wolf is not to be harmed, Guillaume now assumes the role of protector. His experiences on his journey and in battle have transformed him and prepared him for his natural role of leader and king.

As a result of the werewolf’s display, the king of Spain “about his dear son he remembered/ That his men said he was a werewolf/ Transformed by the magic spell of his wife,/ Afterward they had to pay dearly for saying it” (ll. 7251-4). Guillaume also wonders about the wolf’s behavior and learns the sad story of Alphonse’s transformation from the king. Guillaume and the king of Spain send for Brande and when she arrives Alphonse displays, for the first time since his transformation, a ‘rage’ which is used for revenge. The poet describes his ‘rage:’ “[w]hen he thoroughly recognized her./ He saw her and his eyes roll;/ He does not delay any longer,/ At top speed, his mouth gaping open,/ He runs as fast as he can to seize her” (ll. 7635-9). The king of Spain jumps in front of Brande while Guillaume rushes to restrain Alphonse and quickly explains to the wolf that Brande can restore him to his former shape. “The wolf looks at the lord;/ For what he says he manifests great joy,/ by signs and by his appearance he gives him his consent” (ll. 7672-4). The relief of the helpless boy who grew up a wolf against his will is heartbreaking. However, the tale ends well—Brande restores Alphonse to his former shape and

is forgiven, Guillaume marries Melior, Alphonse marries Guillaume's sister Florence, and all live happily ever after.

For the scholar who will undertake the challenge, *Guillaume de Palerne* delves more deeply into issues of medieval identity, metamorphosis, and child transformation than any of the texts discussed above. Differing from other medieval "makeres," the *Guillaume* poet attempts more than a simple werewolf story, using his protagonists as examples of ideal behavior, as well as confirmation of social norms and class. As Scoduto asserts, the werewolf "in Guillaume de Palerne thus challenges the romance's aristocratic audience to conform to the high standards for noble sacrifice" (*Metamorphosis* 126). The heroes Guillaume and Alphonse function jointly as exempla, demonstrating ideal courtly behavior, as well as acceptable uses of 'rage,' revealing an essentially dualistic identity of nobility, while confirming the need for a regulatory, protective upper class.

Like Marie de France, the *Guillaume*-poet even manages a bit of social critique, contrasting the peasantry and the nobility; "The werewolf's 'wittiness'... is constantly played against human dullness, humorously raising some potentially embarrassing questions" (Flores xiv). Similarly, after he is restored, Alphonse loses much of his intrigue, becoming "trapped in the conventional attitudes and postures that has stultified the human character throughout the poem" (Hinton 143). As a result of this loss of bestiality, Brande goes unpunished for her treachery, fortunate in a way that Biscavret and Gorgolon's wives are not. When Alphonse returns to his human form, he loses 'the rage of the wolf' and, with it, the ability to enact his revenge. Emphasizing this one final, essential quality of the ideal nobleman, *Guillaume de Palerne* reveals that, for the medieval audience, it is the ability to show mercy and forgive one's enemies which ultimately distinguishes man from beast.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Through tales such as *Bisclavret*, *Arthur and Gorlagon*, *The Crop-Eared Dog*, and *Guillaume de Palerne*, one comes to understand the meaning of the difference between Ovid's King Lycaon, whose wolf form merely revealed his savage nature, and the benevolent, medieval werewolves suffering 'the rage of the wolf.' 'The rage of the wolf' reflects the very real conflicts medieval discourse communities saw in the world around them—good and evil; Church doctrine and a rapidly changing world; physical and spiritual textual readings; even between, as the Romantics would later say, Heaven and Hell. Additionally, the twelfth century werewolf performs a regulatory function, confirming the belief that noble breeding is visible despite even the most savage circumstances and supporting the existing social structure by emphasizing the need to maintain a strong, yet compassionate upper class which utilizes 'rage' only when necessary. Unlike his predecessors, the medieval werewolf, in his noble glory, raged against evil, deception, and trickery, striving always to help instead of harm.

While some may question the sanity of a scholar researching fictitious animals with the intent of deriving concrete answers, T.H. White reminds us, "St Augustine stated in so many words that it did not matter whether certain animals existed; what did matter was what they meant" (245). The modern scholar must approach these texts as the medieval audience would have, reading beyond the fictitious to ascertain truth. Dana Oswald asserts that "[i]n Middle English literature... the monster has infiltrated the human community of readers, forcing readers to reconsider the nature of monstrosity and the permanence of human identity" (121). This would have been difficult in an environment where changing one's form was to flirt with heresy. Oswald claims that because monsters such as werewolves "are reduced only to their bodies, and

to the identity that is clearly articulated through their embodiment, we can also recognize how fundamental the body is in constructing medieval identity” (19). Discovering the true “body” of the werewolf in medieval tales reveals much about the medieval community and the questions they were asking about the changing world around them.

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APPENDIX

IMAGES OF WOLVES FROM MEDIEVAL BESTIARIES



Bibliothèque Municipale de Chalon-sur-Saône, MS 14, Folio 85v



Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1951, Folio 4v



Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 308, Folio 89r

VITA

JESSICA LYNNE BETTINI

- Personal Data:                   Date of Birth: August 30, 1984  
                                          Place of Birth: Wilson, North Carolina
- Education:                        Public Schools, Raleigh, North Carolina  
                                          BA in English, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill,  
                                                          North Carolina, 2006  
                                          MA in English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,  
                                                          Tennessee, 2008-2011
- Professional Experience:       Graduate Teaching Assistant, East Tennessee State University,  
                                                          Department of Literature and Language, 2009-present
- Conference Papers Read:       “A Woman Must Have: Varying Concepts of Womanhood in Jane  
                                                          Austen’s Persuasion,” Southeastern American Society for  
                                                          Eighteenth-Century Studies (SEASECS), 2010  
                                          “The Crucible of the Chicken: Fallible Knights in Geoffrey  
                                                          Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales,” Southern Appalachian  
                                                          Student Conference On Literature (SASCOL), 2009
- Other Experience:                Board of Directors, Vagantes, Medieval Graduate Student  
                                                          Conference, May 2009-May 2011  
                                          Treasurer, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor’s Society,  
                                                          East Tennessee State University, August 2009-May 2011  
                                          Vice President/President, Sigma Tau Delta, International English  
                                                          Honor’s Society, Mars Hill College, Aug 2005-May 2006