DISEASES OF THE IMAGINATION AND IMAGINARY DISEASE IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

edited by

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LYCANTHROPY IN
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND:
THE CASE OF JOHN WEBSTER’S
THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

Brett D. Hirsch

In Of Englishe Dogges, the physician John Caius suggests that the reason why
the English 'shepherdes dogge is not hiege, vaste, and bigge', and is 'of an
indifferent stature and growth' when compared to sheepdogs found elsewhere
in Europe, is because

[...] it haz not to deale with the bloudthirsty wolf, sytence there be none in England,
which happy and fortunate benefit is to be ascribed to the pursuait Prince Edgar, who
in thistyr [shot]; the whole coutrie might be evacuated and quite elered from wolves,
charged & commanded the welthe: [u] (who were pleased with these butcherly
beastes above measure) to paye him yearly tribute which was (not the wisedome of the
King) three hundred Wolles.1

As a result of intense hunting, increased deforestation, and the sort of state-
sponsored campaigns that Caius refers to, 'none of those noysome, and pestilent
Beastes were left in the coastes of England and Wales' and the wolf was effectively
extince by the end of the fifteenth century.2 There were, of course, exceptions,
such as those reported by Edward Topsell as 'kept in the Tower of London to be
scene by the Prince and people brought out of other countries',3 and others Caius

1 John Caius, Of Englishe Dogges (London, 1576; STC 4347), sig. D4. Presumably this is the
'tribute of wolves paid in England' referred to in John Webster's The White Devil (London, 1612;
STC 25120), sig. G2.
writes of as 'brought over from beyond the seas, for greediness of gain and to make money, for gazing and gaping, staring, and standing to see them, being a strange beast, rare, and seldom seen in England'.4

The werewolf enjoyed even less of an appearance on English soil: despite growing popularity on the Continent there were no reported cases against lycanthropes in early modern England. Given the general lack of wolves, real or transformed, in England, why did John Webster insert a lycanthropic character into The Duchess of Malfi? This chapter will explore the theological, philosophical, and medical backgrounds of the lycanthrope in early modern English thought in an effort to reconcile Webster's unique choice with the wider concerns of his time: the precarious boundaries between animal and human, male and female, body and soul, sanity and madness, good and evil. Exploration may shed some light on the reasons for Webster's construction of the first werewolf to appear on the early modern English stage.5

The term lycanthropy carried multiple meanings in the early modern mind, due to varied treatments of the subject in the discourses of theology, demonology, medicine, and folklore. For example, the term lycanthropy referred both to the perceived reality of the phenomenon of metamorphosis from human form to wolf, and to the delusion that one was capable of such transformations (whether this delusion was the result of madness, melancholy, hallucinogenic drugs, illness, or the diabolic exacerbation of any number of these causes). In our present age, these two divergent definitions have been distinguished between the terms werewolf, relegated entirely to the domain of fiction and folklore, and lycanthrope, which has been absorbed into the scientific discourses of medicine and psychology. However, this distinction was not current in the early modern period, and 'at this point in English linguistic history the words werewolf and lycanthrope seem to be interchangeable'.6

The Biblical Tradition

Biblical literature was seen to endorse physical transformations (whether into animals or pillars of salt) as divine punishments for wickedness and disobedience. According to Dennis Kratz, while the controversial doctrine of transubstantiation recognized the miraculous transformation of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist, the Church, despite this scriptural and liturgical precedent, 'steadfastly refused to accept the physical reality of the werewolf' and 'it became the doctrine of the Church that werewolves do not exist'.7 It was inconceivable that God would allow the transformation of man into wolf (and thereby replace his soul with that of an animal) because it conflicted with the doctrine of divine charity. Therefore, the theological dismissal of the reality of the werewolf was based on the distinction between illusory and actual change. This distinction was already articulated by St Augustine in Book XVIII of The City of God, arguing that reports of such transformations are 'false, or incredible, because unusual', adding that

[... we must firmly hold God's power be omnipotence in all things; but the devil], can do nothing beyond the power of their nature (which is angelic, although malevolent) unless he whose judgments are ever secret, but never unsound, permit them. Nor can the devil create anything (what ever shews of theirs produce these doubts) but only that which God hath made, altering only in show.8

For Augustine, the power to alter and transform Nature is the prerogative of God alone. Consequently, he dismisses the belief that 'the devil can form any soul or body into bestial or brutish members, and essences', postulating instead that 'they have an inseparable way of transporting mans fantasies in a bodily shape', so that

5 While Webster's werewolf was the first (and arguably the most memorable), there are a handful of analogous dramatic cases: a werewolf appears as part of the 'masque of melancholy' in John Ford's The Lover's Melancholy (London, 1629; STC 11163), sig. K1; and a soldier is attacked by 'a company of Hell-ears' that are later found to be metamorphosed witches in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's The Late Lancashire Witches (London, 1634; STC 13722), sig. K2. Other references are largely figurative, such as the description of Shakespearean characters with 'Wolish' desires (The Merchant of Venice, TLN 2047, 4.1.37) or a 'Wolish visage' (King Lear, TLN 827, 1.4.288). All quotations from Shakespeare are from the First Folio of 1623, and are cited parenthetically throughout with references to The Through Line Numbers from The Norton Facsimile, ed. by Charles Hinman, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1996), followed by corresponding act, scene, and line references from the Oxford Complete Works, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
'while the bodies of the men thus affected lie in another place, being alive, but yet in an ecstatic state more deep than any sleep', the demonic can appear to alter reality by affecting a sensory experience skin to dreaming, in that it be not corporeal, yet seems to eare itself in corporeal forms.  

Augustine's distinction between real and illusory change was affirmed by St Thomas Aquinas and incorporated into canon law with the Canon Episcopi, which denounced many popular beliefs including transformations other than those by God:

Whoever therefore believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed to better or to worse, or be transformed into another kind of likeness, except by the Creator Himself who made everything and through whom all things were made, is beyond doubt an infidel.  

The notion that God could transform a man into an animal (or allow the Devil to do so) was certainly terrifying for medieval and early modern Christian thinkers, since it threatened not only the concept of a charitable, loving God, but also that of sin and salvation: indeed, if a man is transformed into a beast (and thereby divorced of his rational nature), he is not responsible for any sinful act he commits, since the rational consent of the sinner is lacking. This is not the case when relinquishing one's own sense of rational control, since any indulgence in carnal desire flows from the consent to abridge restraint — a man who chooses to live like a beast is answerable for his sins. Thus, as Kratz observes, the Christian theological rejection of the reality of the werewolf is essentially a rejection of two frightening notions: that God or the Devil can divorce a living person from the possibility of Heaven' and 'that a man can commit a sinful act for which he is not responsible'.  

By way of illustration, let us briefly consider two responses available to early Jacobean readers of the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, where the King was 'driven from men' for seven years as punishment for his pride, during which time he 'did eat grass as oxen', living like a beast, with his body 'wet with the dew of heaven', till his hair grew long like Eagles feathers, and his nails like birds claws.  

In his Hexapla in Daniel, published in 1610, Andrew Willet prefaces the question 'Of Nebuchadnezzar's transmutation' by considering 'first in general of the diverse kinds of transmutation', of which he identifies five varieties. The first kind is characterized by Willet as 'a fabulous and poetical fiction, rather than any true alteration and change', citing the bestial transformations found in the myths of Homer, Apuleius, and Pliny. A 'kind of natural and phisical transmutation', such as 'how certaine worms become butter-flies', forms the basis of Willet's second category of transformation. The third kind includes 'phantastical changes, such as are wrought by sorceries and art Sorciere', such as the Pharaoh's magicians turning rods into snakes (Exodus 7, 10-12), or reports of 'changes of men into the forme of wolves and other beasts' in other countries. God's turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19, 26) is cited as an instance of the fourth kind of transformation — 'those true changes, which have beene made by the power of God' — which includes also the transformation of 'Moses['] rodde into a serpent' and Christ's 'water into wine'. Willet's final category of transformation is the 'spirituall change', which is 'in the minde and understanding', whether for the better, such as 'when men are renewed by grace, and from ignorance, infidelitie, carnall lusts, are turned', or for the worse, such as 'when the spirit of God left Saul' and an evil spirit possessed him in its place. For Willet, Nebuchadnezzar's change from 'a reasonable man, who became in his minde an unreasonable beast' falls under this last category of transformation, since he 'had not lost his shape, but his minde'. To explain the biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar's physical deformities, Willet suggested that 'as his minde was become sorrithe and britnish, so the constitution of his bodie was much changed'.  

The second response to this biblical episode for our present consideration comes from William Perkins's The Whole Treatise of the Case of Conscience, published posthumously in 1606. On the topic of melancholy, Perkins describes 'Beastiall or Beastlike Melancholy', a 'disease in the braine whereby a man thinkes himselfe to be a beast of this or that kind, and carries himselfe accordingly', such

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9 St. Augustine, The City of God, XVIII, p. 694.
11 Kratz, 'Fictus Lupus', p. 78.
12 Daniel 4, 29-37. All biblical references are to the King James Version.  

12 Andrew Willet, Hexapla in Daniel (London, 1610; STC 25689), pp. 130-32 (pp. 130, 131).
13 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 130.
14 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 130.
15 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 131.
16 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 131.
17 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 131.
18 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 131.
19 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, pp. 131-32.
20 Willet, Hexapla in Daniel, p. 132.
as those 'which have thought themselves to be wolves, and have practiced woulish behavior'.

Turning to Nebuchadnezzar, Perkins acknowledges that 'some are of opinion that his humane shape was taken from him, and that he was transformed into a beast', and that 'at least he had the soule of a beast in stead of a humane soule for a time'. 'But they are deceived', he continues, 'for there is no such transportation of soules into bodies, either of men or beasts.' Rather, 'others thinke, that Nebuchadnæzzar was smitten in the braine with this disease of beastslike Melancholy', leaving him 'so bereft of his right minde, that he carried himself as a beast'. While Perkins notes that 'this interpretation is not against the text', he is apparently uncomfortable reading the biblical account in wholly medical terms, conceding 'the like is true in historie, by divers examples, though it were not true in Nebuchadnæzzar'.

**Classical Metamorphoses**

Animal transformations are frequently found in Classical literature, such as men 'turned to swine' by Circe in Book X of Homer's _Odyssey_ or any of the vivid tales in Ovid's _Metamorphoses_, where men and women undergo metamorphoses into a diverse range of animal species. Of particular interest for our present purposes is the first tale in Ovid's _Metamorphoses_. Calling a council to address mankind's increasing degradation through the ages, Jove describes his descent to the earth where Lycaon, King of the Arcadians, impiously doubts Jove's divinity and plots to kill him, and, as an added insult, serves Jove the flesh of a hostage:

> In deed of Night, when all was whist and still,  
> Me, in my sleepe, he purposeth to kill,  
> Nor with so foul an enterprise content.

21 William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge, 1606; STC 19669), p. 192. See also the chapter by Yasmin Haddad in this volume.


25 George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologised and Represented in Figures* (London, 1632; STC 18986), sig. A3. Earlier English readers were no doubt more familiar with Arthur Golding's translation (London, 1567; STC 18956), where Lycaon, 'thristing still for blood as heretofore', has 'his garners turned to shackel his hair, his arms to ruggid paws' [So is he made a ravenous Wolf, whose shape expressly drawes] 'To that the which he was before' (B4).


Lycanthropy in Early Modern England

Satan quelquefois endort le sorcier dertiére ce buisson, & qu'il va luy seul executer ce que le sorcier a en volonté, se faisant voir en apparence de loup). Upon completion of these acts Satan 'so confuses the witch's imagination that he believes he has really been a wolf and has run about and killed men and beasts' (ce përs dëv n'ët il trouble tellëmë n'i l'imagination du sorcier, qu'il luy semble qu'il ait été loup, & qu'il ait couru, & tué des personnes, & des bestes). This scenario also allowed Satan to inflict on the body of the witch whatever sympathetic wounds had been sustained whilst in wolf form. Boguet, however, did not excuse the witch from responsibility for these demonic acts, '[since] even if they were guilty in nothing but their damnable intention [those who harbour such intentions have] first renounced God and Heaven' (Et puis quand il n'y auroit autre chose, que la damnable intention qu'ils ont [...] qu'au préalable ils n'ayent renoncé à Dieu, & au Ciel). Nicholas Rémy, agreeing with Boguet, argued that although lycanthropic acts were instigated or carried out by demons, prosecution was justified on the grounds of moral violation, that these criminals were 'so notoriously befouled and polluted by so many blasphemies, sorceries, prodigious lusts, and flagrant crimes [that they were] justly to be subjected to every torture and put to death in the flames' (videfect tot impietatibus, veneficiis, portentosus libidinis, flagitusque; sacrorum vitam illas aperea esse inquinatam ac contaminatam [...] vt c[e]tius esse non dubie[m] omnibus tormentis excutarios igni interficiere). However, there were some authorities who insisted on the reality of lycanthropic shape-shifting, such as Jean Bodin, who maintained in De la Demonomanie des Sorciéres that actual physical transformation was 'an absolutely certain, true and undoubted thing' (pour chose tres certaine, veritable & indubitable), since so many respectable witnesses - classical and contemporary historians, poets, doctors, and philosophers - firmly believed its reality. Bodin attacked sceptics

28 Sandidy, Ovidi Metamorphosis, sig. D3v.
30 Such as in the case of Peter Stumpp (1589), discussed in detail later in this chapter.
31 As Veeren reports, 'in his Metamorphosis, Apuleius parodies this magical shape-shifting when he describes the ironic fate of the magician Lucius who turned himself into an ass by using the wrong ointment, and that Apuleius himself had to face trial for his detailed descriptions of the ointments which inured a charge for sorcery' ('The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast', p. 143). The use of ointments also is described in the trial records of Pierre Bourger (1521), Georges Gandillon (1598), and Jean Grenier (1603), the last discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
32 Quotations are taken from Henri Boguet, Discours des Sorciéres, 2nd edn (Paris, 1602), sigs 13, 16. The English translation is from An Examen of Witches, trans. by E. Allen Ashwin, ed. by Montague Summers (London: Rodker, 1929). The earliest extant edition is from Lyon, 1602, although an earlier original publication is likely. Summers speculates that the original was published in Lyons in 1590 (pp. xii-xiv).
33 Nicholas Rémy, Demonomanie (Lyon, 1595), 384. The English translation is from Demonology, trans. by E. Allen Ashwin (London: Rodker, 1930), p. 188.
such as Johan Wier, who argued in his De Praestigiis Daemonum that lycanthropy was the result of the demonic exacerbation of mental illness. As Stuart Clark has observed, authors like Bodin were in the minority, and most had trouble accepting that the phenomena of physical transformation were real, on the grounds that, as we have seen, 'it was philosophically and morally distasteful to suppose that the human anima could function in an animal body (and vice versa)', and equally impossible 'for the devil to either effect the transfer or transmute substantial forms'. Instead, other Continental demonologists suggested that lycanthropy and other supposed transformations were wrought by demonic or hallucinatory illusions, or by melancholic delusions.

For the most part, English demonologists were similarly sceptical. Examination of the demonological tracts published in England during this period uncovers a trend from the representation of lycanthropy as a manifestation of the demonic exacerbation of illness, madness, or melancholy, through to an understanding of lycanthropy set out in wholly natural terms. In The Discoverie of Witchcraft, Reginald Scot dismissed lycanthropy and actual transformations as 'verie absurdities', holding that 'the transformations, which these witchmongers do so rave and tage atop' is 'a disease proceeding partly from melancholie', denying outright the possibility of demonic intervention in such cases. Henry Holland, in A Treatise Against Witchcraft, considered the 'transformation of men and women into wolves and cattes' to be 'cleane contrary to nature', and the product of 'Sathanicall delusions' in those who 'abound in melancholy'. Later authors would expand on this theme, suggesting that the Devil preyed on those who suffered from abundant melancholy, and were therefore more susceptible to delusions of this sort; for example, in A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcrafts, George Gifford found that the Devil can 'make the witches in some places believe that they are turned into the likeness of wolves', since he 'can set a strong fantasie in the mind that is oppressed with melancholie.' Likewise, William Perkins's A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft argued that lycanthropy was the result of 'brains possessed and dispossessed with melancholy', which the Devil exacerbated:

Again, the devil knowing the constitutions of men, and the particular diseases whereto they are inclined, takes the vantage of some, and seendeth the nature of the disease by the confusion of his own delusion, thereby corrupting the imagination, and working in the mind a strong persuasion, that they are become, which in truth they are not.

Moving further away from the supernatural model, the then King James VI of Scotland wrote in his Daemonologie that lycanthropes, or 'men-woolfes', are the product of a natural super-abundance of Melancholie, which had reportedly 'made some thinke themselves Pitchers, and some horses, and some one kind of beast or other'. Similarly, John Deacon and John Walker rejected the diabolical aspects of lycanthropy in favour of a medical model, in a fictitious dialogue between the figure of a lycanthrope, Lycantropus, and a physician, Physiologus:

You are called Lycanthropus: that is, a man transformed to a wolf: which name is verie felle derived from the verie disease is called disorders your braine, called Lycanthropia. Which word, some Physicians do translate Daemoniacus Lupinum, that is, a wooleish Demoniacus; others Lupina melanobola, and Lupina insana, that is a wooleish melancholic, or a wooleish furie and madness. And it is nothing else in effect, but an infirmarie arising upon such phannacetical imaginations, as do mightily disorder and trouble the braine.

39 For a more detailed examination of Wier's treatment of metamorphosis, see Guido Giglio, Becoming Animal: Johann Weyer's Critique of the Imagination as an Agent of Metamorphosis, in Metamorphosis in Antiquity and Beyond, ed. by Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zastrow, forthcoming.


41 See, for example: Henriëtten Inquisitor and Jacob Spranger, Medendi maleficorum (1486–87), ed. and tr. by Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59C–65C, 119A–121A; Claude Précourt, Dialogue de la lycanthropie (Louvain, 1596), fol. 172r–55v; Jean Beavonius de Chauvincourt, Discours de la lycanthropie (Paris, 1599); Philipp Ludwig Ellrich, Daemonologie (Frankfurt, 1607); Francesco Maria Guazzo, Compendium maleficiorum (Milan, 1608), pp. 50–51; Pierre de France, Tableau de l'encontre des mauvais anges et demons (Paris, 1612), pp. 234–45; and Francisco Torribla, Daemonologia (Mainz, 1623), pp. 240–44. In his De la lycanthropie (Paris, 1613), Jean de Nysnald provides an extensive list of the ingredients used by witches to prepare their ointments (pp. 27–63), concluding that their hallucinatory qualities explain all reports of transformation (pp. 67–81).

Other English authors on witchcraft were hesitant (or simply unable) to accommodate transformations within the discourse of medicine, and so clung to the familiar territory of supernatural causation. However, it must be noted that the majority of these writings barely mention lycanthropy, or transformations in general for that matter, and those rare occasions mention only in passing. For example, while Thomas Cooper’s *The Mystery of Witchcraft* provides a voluminous examination of all aspects of witchcraft, his discussion of transformations, ‘as a Witch into an Hart and Cat’, is completed within a single paragraph — that Satan ‘cannot change one creature into another’, and that ‘this is a mere delusion of the sense’.

These infrequent (and insubstantial) deviations aside, perhaps more the product of neglect than intention, the overall trend returned to its course: the physician John Webster’s *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* argued that ‘many persons, by reason of Melancholy in several kinds’ had been ‘mentally and internally (as they thought, being deprived in their imaginations) changed into Wolves’, emphasizing that ‘the change was only in the qualities and conditions of the mind, and not otherwise’.

It is significant that lycanthropy was incorporated into discourses of demonology and witchcraft in England, since this reflects a broader popular concern with evil and *malice*, particularly from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards when witchcraft pamphlets, trial accounts, and demonological treatises were increasingly imported from the Continent. Whether or not the increased dissemination and consumption of witchcraft publications, local and imported, points to an increase in belief in witchcraft itself, English readers could afford to be more sceptical than their Continental counterparts when it came to werewolves, since the chances of being attacked by a wolf, let alone a werewolf, on English soil, were negligible. Both creatures were, at best, theoretical threats for the English: Edward Topsell felt that little ‘benefit shal come to the knowledge of them by the English reader’ simply because direct contact with wolves was so unlikely. At any rate, no let an authority than the King insisted that if werewolves existed in England that they were to be found solely in the deluded minds of severe melancholics.

**Medicine, Madness, and Melancholy**

Attitudes towards lycanthropy were changing by the close of the sixteenth century, and this change was reflected in the approach adopted by the courts on the Continent. The last major werewolf trial of the century began in 1598, with the discovery of the body of a fifteen-year-old boy in Angers. A group of men stumbled upon the corpse being mutilated by a pair of wolves, which scurried into the undergrowth when the men gave chase. Following the trail of bloody paw prints, the men found a half-naked man crouching in the bushes — his teeth were chattering and his hands, described as claws with long nails, were marked with blood. The man was a poverty-stricken mendicant named Jacques Roulet, and at his trial Roulet testified that his lycanthropic ability was the result of a magic salve in his possession. The trial court sentenced Roulet to death, but an appeal was lodged. The court of appeal held that there was more folly in the poor idiot than malice and witchcraft, and his sentence was commuted to imprisonment in a madhouse, where he was to receive religious instruction. Subsequent cases, such as that of the young werewolf Jean Grenier in 1603, affirmed the new approach.
by the courts, which tended to view the werewolf as 'no longer the product of a fleshy, demonic transformation, but of an unstable mind'.

It is at this point that the discourses of demonology and medicine intersect as we have seen. English demonological opinion on the werewolf and transformations in general tended towards ascribing lycanthropy to madness and melancholy, although a minority view continued to profess its supernatural origins. The opinions of the corporal physicians of the time elicited a similar trend: they move towards a wholly medical model based on natural infirmity, while at the same time severing any lingering earlier distinctions between spiritual and natural causes. As Carol Thomas Neely has shown, Thomas Bright's Treatise of Melancholy attempts to draw careful distinctions between spiritual and physiological melancholy, but she points out that these 'repeatedly collapse', since 'both states are characterized by the same symptoms' and each predisposes the sufferer to the other. The publication of Edward Jorden's A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother continued the effort to distinguish the spiritual from the natural, bewitchment from insanity. Jorden argued that experienced physicians, like himself, were 'best able to discern what is natural, what not natural, what preternatural, and what supernatural' and so could give unique insight into the credibility of witchcraft victims at trial. Appearing simultaneously was Samuel Harsnett's A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures, which attacked the (then illegal) Catholic and Puritan practices of exorcism, on the grounds that both demonic possession and exorcism were fraudulent spectacles.

Although witchcraft prosecutions continued in England until the end of the seventeenth century, Neely has observed that the growing tendency to medicalize the behaviour of witches and the bewitched' evinced by these treatises and others functioned to question not only the authority of the trials, but the supernatural mentality that supported it and in the case of bewitchment, possession, witchcraft and lycanthropy, the emerging medical model would provide 'a psychological alternative to conditions formerly defined as supernatural in origin and treatment'.

Perhaps the most representative contemporary English medical diagnosis of lycanthropy is to be found in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, which refers lycanthropy to Madness, as most do, although he reports that some authorities have considered it 'a kind of Melancholy'. Renaissance medical authorities treated the terms melancholy and madness promiscuously, or, as Burton puts it, the terms 'are confounded by many Writers', and consequently at times it is difficult to discern the distinction between them. Burton's own distinction between the two terms is based on the degree of violence involved:

'Madness is therefore defined to be a vehement Desyre, or raging without a ferre, faire more violent then Melancholy, full of anger and clamour, wrong doings, and troubles the Patient with fierce greater vehement both of Body and Mind, without all feare and sorrow, with such imperious force, and boldnesse, that sometimes three or four men cannot hold them.'

The testament of the later physician Robert Bayfield affirms Burton's position in his account of lycanthropy: 'Wolf-madness, is a disease', writes Bayfield, who follows with the story of a patient of his, 'a certain young man with a wild and strange look' who set about 'barking and howling'. In the course of his inspection, Bayfield 'opened a vein, and drew forth a very large quantity of blood' which was 'black like Soot'. The patient, having been provided with a potion and an emetic to remedy his abundance of black bile, 'became perfectly well'.

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50 Erica Fudge, Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 54. It is unclear whether Fudge intended 'fleshy' or 'fleshy'.

51 Of course, as Jeremy Schmidt reminds us, the vigorous tradition of applying 'spiritual physic' to treat melancholy survived well into the eighteenth century, even as the language of consolation was taken over by the language of pathology: Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), passim.

52 Carol Thomas Neely, 'Documents in Madness': Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture', Shakespeare Quarterly, 42 (1991), 315-38 (p. 319).

53 Edward Jorden, A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother (London, 1603; STC 14790), sig. C1.


58 Roberts Bayfield, A Treatise De morborvm capitis essentia & prognosticis (London, 1663, Wing B1467), pp. 49-51.
Webster’s Werewolf

Having duly considered the theological, demonologial, and medical backgrounds of the werewolf up to Webster’s time, the discussion will now turn to the lycanthropic character of Ferdinand, with particular attention to the cause of his lycanthropy. The Duke’s affliction is first reported by the doctor as a ‘very pestilent disease’ which ‘In those that are possed with’t here there fore-flowes | Such mellencholy humour, they imagine | Themselues to be transformed into Woluiues’ (L2, 5.2.5, 8–10). The doctor proceeds to inform Pescara (and the audience) that lycanthropes not only imagine themselves wolves, but also act accordingly, running about ‘Church-yards in the dead of night to dig dead bodies up’ (L2, 5.2.11–12). As it turns out, Ferdinand has been seen at midnight behind a church, ‘with the leg of a man | Upon his shoulder’ (L2*, 5.2.14–15) and howling. When approached during this particular incident, Ferdinand claimed ‘he was a Wolife’ and that while ‘a Wooliffe skinne was hairy on the out-side, his was hairy on the In-side’ (L2*, 5.2.16–18). This diagnosis reveals that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is a natural illness, since it is referred to as a ‘very pestillent disease’ and a ‘madnesse’ (L2*, 5.2.26), and it is treated as such: although he ‘is very well recouered’, this ‘is not without some feare | Of a relapse’ (L2*, 5.2.21–22).

It has been argued that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is a supernatural phenomenon, more precisely, an episode of demonic possession. Typically, this argument relies on the supernatural overtones of other events in the play and on a heavy-handed interpretation of the doctor’s use of the word ‘possed’ (L2, 5.2.8). There is nothing in the text of the play to suggest that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is an instance of demonic possession — in fact, the only reference to any character being possessed with the ‘diuell’, or anything else for that matter, is to the Cardinal, who is ‘able to possesse the greatest | Diuell, and make him worse’ (B1*, 1.1.64–66). Notwithstanding, an element of the demonic undoubtedly informs the play — in particular, the scenes featuring a dead man’s hand, the parading of grotesque wax figures of the murdered Antonio and his children, and the ghostly graveyard echo — but this, coupled with the literal interpretation of a term intended to be taken figuratively, is not enough to maintain that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is an inadequately understood, rare but terrible spiritual disease that possesses his whole being. On the contrary, Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is clearly treated in medical, naturalized terms, as are other instances of disease in the play.

Aside from Ferdinand’s lycanthropy, there are many cases of actual and supposed illness in The Duchess of Malfi: Antonio diagnoses Bosola’s ‘Courte Gall’ (B1*, 1.1.23) as resulting from ‘foul melechloye’, too immediate sleep, and ‘want of action’ (B2*, 1.1.71, 72, 75); upon eating the apricots offered to her as a pregnancy test, the Duchess remarks ‘these greene fruites and my stomake are not friends’ (D3*, 2.1.149), and her subsequent swelling and sweating is passed off as a stomach ache or possible poisoning in order to safeguard her secret and hide her having gone into labour; and, before the masque of madmen begins, the servant explains each individual’s madness in terms of emotional and occupational stress:

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There’s a mad Lawyer, and a secular Priest,  
A Doctor that hath forfeited his wits  
By jealousy: an Astrolagian,  
That in his worke, sayd such a day o’th’moneth,  
Should be the day of doomsday, and flying of’.  
Run mad: an English Taylor, craied’r’d braine,  
With the studdy of new fashion: a gentleman wher  
Quite beside himself, with care to keepes in minde.  
The number of his Ladies salutations:  
Or how do you, the employ’d in each morning.  
A Farmer too, (an excellent knace in Grave.)  
Mad, ’cause he was hindred transportation.  
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In each of these instances, illness is treated in wholly natural, medical terms. So too is its cure. For example, to counter the effects of the apotropics, Delio suggests that the Duchess ‘use some prepar’d Antidote’ (D3, 2.1.171); and Ferdinand calls for rhubarb ‘to purge this choller’ (E4, 2.5.12–13), although he later suggests a more radical therapy:

Apply desperate physic.
We must not now use Balsamum, but fire;
The amazing cupping-glass, for that’s the means
To purge infected blood.

(E4, 2.5.23–26)

Noting the plentiful medical references in Webster’s plays, Lawrence Babb concluded that Webster had ‘considerable physiological, pharmaceutical, and psychiatric learning’, and his presentation of lycanthropy reflects this accumulated medical knowledge. Although the doctor is unable to cure Ferdinand, Maurice Hunt suggests that his failure is but one of a number of poignant instances of Webster’s condemnation of ‘corrupt physicians and bogus cures’, such as the Duchess’s censure that ‘Physitians thus, With their hands full of money, use to give ore | Their Patients’ (H2, 3.5.7–9). In other words, the doctor’s failure does not of itself establish that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is a supernatural affliction — this is not a case, like that of Lady Macbeth, of needing more ‘the Duine, then the Physician’ (Macbeth, TLN 2166, 5.1.64), but rather an indication that Ferdinand should seek a second opinion, and enlist the services of a more competent medical practitioner.65

Having established that Ferdinand’s illness is a natural phenomenon, we must now examine its cause. According to humoral theory, the body is comprised of four humours (blood, phlegm, choler, melancholy) and pathological conditions are the result of humoral imbalance or abnormality. These imbalances may be due to excess or deficiency of a particular humour, or improper concentration of a humour in parts of the body, or to the putrefaction and transformation of a humour into a kind of unnatural melancholy (usually the result of adustion, or unnatural heat, arising from excessively hot passions). The term melancholy carries multiple meanings, encompassing the cold, dry humour itself, as well as the various diseases brought on by its excess. Melancholic personalities are characteristically cold and distant, tending towards solitude, and plagued by fearfulness and sorrow. When in excess, the pathological condition only differs from the complexion in degree, and is occasioned by exaggerated sadness and fear, hallucinations, sclexy and lethargy, aloofness, and darkness.66

Ferdinand is clearly not of a melancholic character. Rather, he is choleric in disposition; he is passionate, intemperate, and prone to rashness and anger. He is constructed as having ‘a most pernicious, and turbulent Temper’ (B3, 1.1.157), and his passionate, furious eyes ‘mocke the eage violence of fire’ (H1, 3.3.48). During a particularly telling scene with the Cardinal, Ferdinand becomes ‘so wild a Tempest’ that he needs ‘to purge [his] choller’ (E4, 2.5.17, 13) with rhubarb. The Cardinal, so taken aback by this ‘startling mad’ (F1, 2.5.66) spectacle, compares his brother’s belligerent shouting to ‘violent whirle-winders’, whose ‘intemperate noyce’ is likened to ‘dfeafe mens shrill discourse, | Who talk aloud, thinking all other men | To have their imperfection’ (F1, 2.5.51–54).

Whether Ferdinand’s intense fascination with his sister is the manifestation of latent incestuous desires or otherwise,67 the result is the same; he is ‘so


deform'd, so beastly by his 'intemperate anger' (F.I. 2.5.57–58). His intemperate anger, according to the humoral model of the body, is the direct cause of his later lycanthropic affliction: Ferdinand's sustained and intemperate anger heats the choler in his system to an excessive and unnatural level, which, according to a contemporary account, then 'becometh blacke' and 'dries up and burns'. This burnt, unnatural substance that has been created is called *adest* melancholy, and it is the presence, and excess, of this unnatural form of melancholy that manifests itself in Ferdinand's lycanthropy.69

While it is possible to diagnose the cause of Ferdinand's illness by turning to the prevailing medical knowledge of Webster's age, it does not answer what, to me, seems the more important question: out of all of the pathological conditions in the catalogue of Renaissance medical lore, why was lycanthropy Webster's affliction of choice? Why would Webster choose a malady that was unfamiliar enough to his English audience that he needed to outline its symptoms, in detail, onstage?

Ferdinand's lycanthropy was unquestionably an intentional addition to The Duchess of Malifi, since there is no mention of it in Webster's source for the plot, an Italian novella available in English translation in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*.70 It is generally agreed that Simon Goulart's *Admirable and Memorable Histories* was a source (if not the source) for Webster's werewolf, in particular his report of a man

In the year 1541 who thought himselfe to bee a Wolfe, seeing upon divers men in the fields, and slowly. In the end being with great difficulty taken, hee did constringe affirmative that hee was a Wolfe, and that there was no other difference, but that Wolves would make hayr without, and hee was bestrawd the skinner, and the flesh. Some too barbarous and cruel Wolues in effect desiring to rule the truth thereof, gave him manie wounds upon the armes and legs, but knowing what ever end, and the innocency of the poor melancholy man, they commised him to the Surgeons to cure, in whose hands hee dyed within fewe days after.71

As Gunnar Boklund has noted, the resemblance between the doctor's description of Ferdinand's lycanthropy and Goulart's passage 'is so striking as to settle the question of Webster's source immediately'. However, identifying Goulart's passage as a source hardly provides a satisfactory answer to the question of why Webster incorporated lycanthropy into his play, and for this we must look elsewhere. Albert H. Tricomi has argued that the following case, reported in Henri Boguet's *Diverses des Sorciers*, is a 'pertinent source' for the werewolf as well as the 'dead-mans hand' (II. 4.1.42–52) episode in the play:

One evening a gentleman, standing at the window of his château, saw a huntsman whom he knew passing by and, asked him to bring some of his bags on his return. As the huntsman went his way along a valley, he was attacked by a large wolf and discharged his arrows at it without hurting it. He was therefore compelled to grapple with the wolf, and caught it by the ears but at length, growing weary, he let go of the wolf, drew back and took his big hunting knife, and with it cut off one of the wolf's paws, which he put in his pouch after the wolf had run away. He then returned to the gentleman's château, in sight of which he had fought the wolf. The gentleman asked him to give him part of his bag; and the huntsman, wishing to do so and intending to take the paw from his pouch, drew from it a hand wearing a gold ring on one of the fingers, which the gentleman recognized as belonging to his wife. This caused him to entertain an evil suspicion of her; and going into the kitchen, he found his wife nursing her arm in her apron, which he took away, and found that her hand had been cut off. Thereupon the gentleman seized hold of her; but immediately, and as soon as he had been confronted with her hand, he confessed that it was no other than she who, in the form of a wolf, had attacked the hunter, and she was afterwards burned at Lyon.72

While The Duchess of Malifi and Boguet's narrative share the common elements of a werewolf and a severed hand (complete with wedding ring), the suggestion that Boguet is the ultimate source for this episode in the play is not convincing. There is no evidence that Webster read in French, and Boguet's treatise — popular as it was on the Continent — was only available in the original French. Tricomi is certainly aware of this, since he admits that the 'defect in designating Boguet as a source is that despite Webster's strong attraction to Continental sources, he usually resorted to them in translation',73 but nonetheless maintains his case for Boguet.


70 Alternatively, as Burton suggests, lycanthropy may be the result of madness, which differs from melancholy only in its degree of violence; as it stands, there is not enough evidence from the text (distinguish with any degree of certainty whether Webster's werewolf is the product of the one or the other). In either case the real cause of the affection is Ferdinand's intemperate anger and its effect on his constitution.


75 Tricomi, 'The Severed Hand', p. 351.
Even if we entertain the possibility that Webster read in French and had access to Boguet's tale, the narratives are barely analogous to one another: the hand in question in The Duchess of Malfi is not severed from the lycanthropic character Ferdinand — whose hands remain intact throughout the play — but rather it is intended to be mistaken by the Duchess as belonging to her husband, Antonio. Whereas the audience knows that her husband is still alive, the Duchess is momentarily shocked by the possibility that the severed hand does in fact belong to her husband. However, as soon as the lights return she recognizes that the hand is not Antonio's, but is instead 'a dead-mans hand' (II, 4.1.54). We never learn the actual origin of the severed hand in Webster's play, unlike the origin of the severed hand in Boguet's tale, which is unequivocally certain. Thus, even in the unlikely event that Boguet was the source for this scene, Webster is only faithful to Boguet's narrative insofar as he retains the three separate elements of a severed hand, a werewolf, and a wedding ring. What is noticeably lacking in Webster's version is the precise link between the three found in Boguet. In light of these doubts, Boklund's earlier assertion that Goulart's Admirable and Memorable Histories is Webster's ultimate source for the lycanthropy motif remains persuasive, since textual traces are clearly identifiable in Webster's play, and the material was readily available in English translation.

As we have seen, an increased interest in witchcraft and demonology during this period saw a number of texts imported from the Continent and translated for consumption by English readers. One of these is a pamphlet of 1590 detailing the 'damnable life and death of one Stubbe Peeter [Peter Stumpff]', described as 'a most wicked Sorcerer' that 'in the likeness of a Wolfe, committed many murders' and continued in 'this diuellish practise 25 yeres, killing and devouring Men, Women, and Children'. Although Webster clearly would have enjoyed reading such a provocative, blood-curdling pamphlet, it does not appear to be a source for his play. While both works feature a werewolf and incestuous desires, the incest motif in Webster's play remains debatable, and differs from the Stubbe

73 A True Discourse Declaring the Damnable Life and Death of One Stubbe Peeter, trans. by George Bores (London, 1590; STC 23375), title page. In A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence (Antwerp, 1605; STC 21361), Richard Verstegan refers to the trial and grisly execution of 'One Peter Stumpf for being a werewolf, and having killed thirteen children, two women, and one man' (sig. 2G3) as part of his discussion of the origin and use of the term werewolf.

74 The implications of the Stubbe Peeter pamphlet in relation to The Duchess of Malfi are discussed by Wiseman, who argues that the play 'foregrounds the social and psychic dimensions of wolf transformation that are implicit in the Stubbe Peeter narratives' ('Hairy on the Inside,' p. 59). See also: Fudge, Perceiving Animals, pp. 51–52.
The Borders of the Human

The significance of the werewolf is that it is a liminal creature. By virtue of its precarious position between the human and bestial, the werewolf "constantly threatens the ontological status of being human," and as such engages in a range of anxieties about identity. The phenomenon of the lycanthrope blurs the line between man and beast, a distinction that was under increased scrutiny during the early modern period, and raises an unsettling question: are we indeed that far removed from the animal? For Webster's generation, the possession of a human body itself was no longer sufficient to distance the human from the animal, since

"Theology taught that human form was no guarantee of humanity when angels or devils might take that shape; when, under certain circumstances - as in the case of children, the mad, the colored other - creatures that appeared human might also be understood to be closely associated with the animal." 89

If, then, the only intrinsic difference between man and beast is our capacity for reason, 90 is our humanity forfeit upon our loss of that capacity? It is on this basis alone that animals, unlike man, are not capable of sin. 80 The werewolf therefore threatens the identity of being human and straddles the precarious boundary between man and beast, as well as undermining the theological framework of sin and salvation. The werewolf may seem to partake of the human, but, insofar as it is an animal (or non-human), it is excluded from divine judgement and the possibility of salvation that proceeds therefrom.

The werewolf is not only dangerous because it is capable of committing such depraved acts, but because it is a hidden threat: unlike the wolf, which is 'ha'iry on the out-side' and clearly identifiable, the werewolf is 'ha'iry on the in-side' (1.2, 5.17-18). Identifying evil within early modern society was particularly problematic for this reason, and was not limited to the case of the werewolf alone. In 1612, while Webster was writing The Duchess of Malfi, ten of the nineteen persons accused of being witches were sentenced to death at the assizes in Lancashire. 81 Witches, werewolves, and seer Jews all threatened a Christian society concerned with identifying and purging a perceived evil that was no different in appearance from itself. Cannibalism was one method of establishing otherness in early modern representations of all three groups. 82 According to Charles Zika, this anxiety about the hidden other, the ever-present cannibalistic enemies within the society, threatened, stemmed from a growing fear for the disintegration and loss of Christian community and identity, of which the figure of the werewolf is but one articulation. 83


89 For a brilliant and comprehensive examination of this question, as it was asked and variously answered in the early modern period, see Erica Fudge, Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).


91 As reported by the assises clerk, Thomas Wattle, in The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancashire (London, 1613). 4.3.


The Borders of the Wo/Man

Among other things, Webster’s werewolf also engages in contemporary anxieties about sexual identity, as Ferdinand’s lycanthropy not only threatens his human identity, but his masculine identity as well. In The Duchess of Malfi, female sexuality is represented as being essentially aggressive, and as presenting a challenge to the normative construction of gender roles: the Duchess initiates the controversial relationship with Antonio; and Julia is at once Casrucho’s wife, mistress to the Cardinal, and the initiator (at pistol-point, no less) of the short-lived affair between Bosola and herself. Male sexuality, on the other hand, is for the most part represented as passive, or otherwise asserted defensively. For example, although the Duchess laments that she is ‘for’c’d to woe, because none dote woe v’ (C4, 1.1.428) Antonio recognizes her usurpation of his role when he admits that ‘these words should be mine’ (C4, 1.1.457). Similarly, Julia usurps Bosola’s role in initiating their short-lived relationship, and is apparently frustrated by his failure to perform his manly roles, ordering him to ‘put your selfe to the charge of courting me, Whereas now I woe you’ (L4, 5.2.174–75). Further, Bosola feels he has to distance himself from the feminine act of crying, resolved that his tears are ‘manly sorrow’ and ‘neuer grew’ In [his] Mothers Milk’ (K4, 2.2.349–50). The Cardinal appears to be the only assertive masculine figure, although he too seems under Julia’s control, with her ‘tongue about his heart’ (M1, 5.2.214). Ferdinand, at the other end of the spectrum of masculine sexual behaviour, is incapacitated sexually by his melancholy and seems able only to engage his ‘poynard’ (C2, 1.1.317) vicariously through his sister. As Lynn Entwistle has insightfully argued, it is in this way that melancholy is figured as a disruption in the symbolic order, a social contagion. Whereas lycanthropy disrupts the corporal order, melancholy disturbs the ‘functional order of the body’ and its representation, and it ‘profoundly unsecdes’ the ‘recognizable difference between male and female subjects’.84 While the boundary between masculine and feminine is already distorted by the aggressiveness of female sexuality in the play, Webster’s representation of masulinne sexuality, whitied away by melancholy, burs these distinctions further.

Melancholy is not the only vehicle through which the traditional boundaries between male and female are examined by the play. The opposition between Ferdinand and the Duchess further highlights the contested site of masculinity:


84 Entwistle discusses these oppositions and their implici forms in detail at pp. 111–13.


she is the ‘Excellent Hyenna’ (E4, 2.5.39) set against his lycanthropic wolf. Edward Toppell reports that, since Pliny, the hyena was thought to be a hermaphrodite, where both male and female ‘have under their tails a double note or passage’. That is, in the male ‘there is a scissure like the secrets of a femal’ and ‘in the femal a bunch like the stones of the male’.85 This ambiguity is reinforced visually with the inclusion of a woodcut (see Fig. 3), derived from the original in the second volume of Konrad Gesner’s earlier Historiae animalium (Zürich, 1554), of the rear-end of the hyena. Aside from matching the Duchess, the ‘Excellent Hyenna’, with Antonio, himself described as ‘an hermaphrodite’ (G2, 3.2.219), in constructing oppositions of wolf and hyena, male and hermaphrodite, Webster frames an anxious masculine identity whose ontological status is severely undermined, since it can only be defined in terms of opposition from its other.86 In other words, how different can the male be when the female is described as possessing ‘a bunch like the stones of the male’? It seems that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy figures not only the precarious boundary between man and beast, but between man and woman.

The Babylonical Circe

The werewolf is, among other things, a site of contention between civility and wildness and, as Karen Edwards has argued, lycanthropy (like any other cultural form) may be seen as having a political dimension. Lycanthropy was used as a literary motif expressing un-Englishness: Milton and Marvell, in charging their ‘Proreant phononts with lycanthropy’ imply that ‘Salmiasus and [Samuel] Parker are types of the deeply perverse, darkly superstitions, un-English intellect, who are ‘guilty of intellectual, if not theological, Catholicism’.87 Webster’s characterization of Ferdinand clearly has similar motivations — by presenting an Italian character as a werewolf, Webster endorses the popular association between Italians and depravity. For Webster’s audience, Italy was perceived as a site of political intrigue, economic power, decadence, and moral decay, as Lara Bovilsky eloquently summarizes:


86 Edwards discusses these oppositions and their implications in detail at pp. 111–13.

Italy represented a nation among whose famous identity effects were Popery, atheism, sodomy, murder and poison, deceit, ‘practice’, erotic obscenity and sexual promiscuity, and a preternatural propensity for revenge, any and all of which were available for the playwright’s use in plot devices that both shocked and thrilled.80

Even the mythical city-state of Venice was tainted by its Italianate excesses: for example, in The Merchant of Venice Shakespeare depicts Venice as a mercantile state whose economic openness, the very reason for its financial success, literally threatens the lives of its (Christian) citizens.81 Jonson’s vision of Italy in Volpone is one of such moral decay that men of wealth and power use their position only for decadence and deceit, whilst others disinherit their sons and sacrifice their wives in the pursuit of monetary gain. Amidst these contemporaneous examples, Webster’s corrupt and unbridled Machiavellian, a duke whose depravity is literally inhuman, is hardly out of place or without precedent.

In The Scholemaster, Roget Ascham expressed the fear of the corrupting influence of Italian depravity in terms of physical transformation, warning young travellers ‘Some Circes shall make him, of a plaine English man, a tighe Italian’.82 Ascham refers to Circe eleven times in order to drive his point home, namely that even those ‘partyng out of England frequent in the loue of Cristes doctrine, and well furnished with the feare of God’, nevertheless ‘returned out of Italy worse transformed, than euer was any in Circes Court’, with ‘some into Swine, som[e] into Ases, some into Foxes, and some into Wolves’.83 Although he stresses the transformative power of Italy on impressionable young Englishmen, Ascham recognizes that some travellers were Italians ab initio, ‘byeing Mules and Horses before they went, returned verie Swayne and Asses home agayne’, or ‘verie Foxes with subtile and busie heads’ and ‘verie wolues, with cruell malicious hartes’,84 hestial before they arrived on the island of Circe. Had Ascham survived to attend a performance of The Duchess of Malfi, he would not have been surprised to witness Ferdinand’s hestial transformation at one of the Circean courts of Italy.

As Gareth Roberts has noted, the figure of Circe was conflated ‘by some Protestant exegetes’ with that of the Whore of Babylon, and so ‘became a figure for the Church of Rome’.85 For example, William Fulke’s sermon at Hampton Court in November 1570, in which he protested against ‘the Babylonish Circe the church of Rome’ and ‘proud Babylon to be Rome, both by Scriptures and doctors’, was evidently so popular that it required reprinting in 1571, 1572, 1574,

81 Ascham, The Scholemaster, sigs H4, H5.
82 Ascham, The Scholemaster, sig. I2.
The Romish Wolf

In this atmosphere of suspicion and fear, Webster’s inclusion of a lecherous, murdering Cardinal in The Duchess of Malfi is hardly unexpected, since it belongs to a tradition of anti-Catholic rhetoric and ad hominem attacks that already spanned a century since the Reformation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned his followers to ‘Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheepe clothing, but inwardly they are rauening wolves’ (Matthew 7, 15), and medieval anti-clerical satires frequently depicted the clergy as dissembling foxes and ravenous wolves.108 This trope continued after the Reformation, and Protestant polemics used the fox to indicate a member of the Church of England who harboured secret Romish beliefs and the wolf to represent ‘a committed and outwardly professed member of the Catholic Church’.109 For example, consider the series of Protestant pamphlets by William Turner and his collaborators: The Huntynge & Fyndyng Out of the Romish Fox (1543) bemoans the failure of the Hentnic Reformation to completely rid the English church of popery, laying no small portion of the blame at the feet of the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, ‘master steward of the stews’110 and The Resynnyng of the Romyshe Fox (1545), opening with ‘the bannisshed foxe of rom’ lamenting that while ‘My son stauen gardiner with wepyng teares | Hath cut away the toppes of myn eares’, that ‘the rest of my body abydethe hole still’ and that even ‘myn eares shal grow again | When all the gospellers ar ones slayn’.111 In The Huntynge of the Romyshe Wolfe (1555), the ‘Romyshe Foxe latelie returned into Englande’ with the death of Edward VI and accession of Mary, announcing that his ears ‘are growen and heale agayn’.112

The Huntynge of the Romyshe Wolfe also included a folded, engraved print entitled The Lamb Speakes (Fig. 4) that simultaneously circulated as a

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94 William Fulke, A Sermon Preached at Hampton Court (London, 1570; STC 11449.5), sig. G3, and titlpage.
95 William Perkins, Lecyres Upon the Three First Chapters of the Resurrection (London, 1604; STC 19731), 3Bl.
98 Leier, Defenders of the Catholike Faith, p. 247.
99 On this confusion in travel literature, see also Steven J. Masello, ‘Thomas Hob: A Protestant Traveller to Ciers’s Court’, Cahiers Elisabethains, 27 (1985), 67-81.
102 The Huntynge & Fyndyng Out of the Romyshe Fox (Bonn, 1543; STC 24353), sig. O.
103 The Resynnyng of the Romyshe Fox (Bonn, 1543; STC 24355), sig. A1.
104 The Huntynge of the Romyshe Wolfe (Emsden, 1555; STC 24563), sig. A3.
broadsheet in Latin, German, and English versions, depicting Stephen Gardiner as a bishop with a wolf's head biting the neck of the Christ-lamb while other Catholic bishops and clerics—all wolf-headed—catch the lamb's blood in their chalices. Applauding the carnage from above is a winged devil with a head curiously shaped like a papal crown, and below the altar bound at Gardiner's feet are six more lambs awaiting slaughter, identified as the Protestant reformers John Bradford, Thomas Cranmer, John Hooper, Nicholas Ridley, and John Rogers.

To which Diggon replies, 'Yes, but they gang in more secreete wise, | And with sheepes clothing doen hum disgrace.'

John Milton also engaged with the tradition, not least as a result of his reading of Spenser. Thus, the 'grim Woolf with privy paw' in Milton's Lycidas is glossed by Roy Flannagan in The Riverside Milton as a reference to 'the agents of the Roman Catholic Church, seeking converts', noting that 'the Jesuits, whose coat of arms included two wolves, were especially liable to be accused of such secret proselytizing'. Since the coat of arms of its founder Ignatius Loyola includes two grey wolves about an argent cauldon and sable chain (Fig. 5), the wolf became emblematic of the Jesuits, whose papish plots and conspiracies (both real and imagined) constantly threatened the English state and faith.

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112 The traditional explanation for the Jesuit coat of arms comes from the etymology of the name Loyola as a contraction of loboyolla (wolf and pot), supposedly referring to the reputation of the House of Loyola being so generous to its armed retainers that even the wolves could feast on the leftovers.
Irish Wolves

When considering the question 'How the English Colonies in Ireland became degenerate', John Davies drew on the same motif of Circean transformation that Roger Ascham had previously used in relation to Italy: English colonists made the perilous mistake of embracing Irish customs

after they had rejected the Cunnit and Honorable Laws and Customs of England, whereby they became degenerate and metamorphosed like Nefastheleknis, who although he had the face of a man, had the heart of a Beast; or like those who had drunk of Circe's Cuppe, and were turned into very Beasts.'

Other commentators made the same association between the degeneration of English colonists in Ireland, old and new, and the myth of Circe. For instance, Richard Stanyhurst’s description and history of Ireland, absorbed into Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles, related how even ‘the verie English of birth, consenuent with the sauege sort of that people’ had ‘become degenerate’ and ‘quite altered’, as ‘though they had tasted of Circes poisoned cup’.

As with the myth of Circe, the figure of the wolf in early modern England was emblematic not only of Italians and Catholics, but of the Irish as well. According to medieval authorities, the Irish shared a special bond with wolves: in his Topography of Ireland, Gerald of Wales includes the tale of a ‘wolf that talked with a priest’ in that country, describing how his fellow ‘natives of Osory’ are ‘compelled every seven years to put off the human form’ and to ‘assume that of wolves’.

Gerald’s relation of a ‘creature [...] in the shape of a beast utter[ing] human words’, for Caroline Walker Bymum, reflects his anxiety about ‘human-

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116 John Davies, A Discourse of the True Causes why Ireland was Neuer Entirely Subdued (London, 1612; STC 6348), sig. 2A2.


119 Giraldus Cambrensis, ed. and trans. by Forester and Wright, 2:19, p. 80.
animal hybrids that result from human-animal sex, a practice he thinks "barbarous" and particularly Irish.\textsuperscript{130} Although sceptical of such "merc fable[s]", William Camden nevertheless reports in his Britannia that the Irish "are yeareely turned into Wolves", supposing that the inhabitants, "through that malicious humour of predominant unkind Melancholie" are possessed with the malady of 'lycanthropia', which 'raiseth and engendreth such like phantasties, as that they imagine themselves to be transformed into Wolves'.\textsuperscript{131} Edmund Spenser confirms these representations of the Irish in A View of the State of Ireland, concluding, 'the Irish are descended from the Sycobians', since both are wild and bloody pagans who are reportedly 'once a year turned into Wolves'.\textsuperscript{132}

References to the association between the Irish and wolves are also found in literary and dramatic texts of the period. In The Newe Metamorphosis (c. 1615), an unpublished epic satire based on Ovid's Metamorphoses, Gervase Markham relates how Jove descended to 'Bernia Lande' (Ireland), and, upon finding 'the kerns practising all kinds of unnatural vice', transforms 'the inhabitants into wolves which can take man's shape'.\textsuperscript{133} Andrew Hadfield has also suggested that Roslin's description of the interplay between the would-be lovers in Shakespeare's As You Like It as 'like the howling of Irish Wolves against the Moone' (TLN 2516–17, 5.3.92–93) is 'possibly a reference to Hugh O'Neill's rebellion' against Queen Elizabeth, since Elizabeth was invariably associated with the moon.\textsuperscript{134}

There are even surviving official communications from Elizabeth's reign instructing deputies in Ireland 'to refuse none that proffer submission, nor to credit any [of] their promises; but to think of them as wolves or foxes'.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} Bynum, 'Metamorphosis', p. 1000.

\textsuperscript{131} William Camden, Britannia, trans. by Philemon Holland (London, 1610; STC 4509), sig. 4G6.

\textsuperscript{132} Edmund Spenser, A View of the State of Ireland (1596), in Two Historias of Ireland, ed. by James Ware (Dublin, 1653; STC 25067), sig. D3.

\textsuperscript{133} Gervase Markham, The Newe Metamorphoses, London, British Library, MSS Additional 14824–26. The manuscript is described in J. H. Lyon, A Study of the Newe Metamorphoses (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), and I have quoted his description of the episode (xiv), which is found in MS Additional 14824, fol 19–21'.


The association between wolves and the Irish are also reinforced in visual representations: as Richard McCabe has noted, the title-page woodcut (Fig. 6) of John Bale's The Vocacyon of Iohn[n] Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelan[n]de\textsuperscript{136} displays 'two contrasting figures, "The English Christian" and "The Irish Papist", the former 'meek and civil, like the sheep that shelters by his legs', and 'the other violent and savage, like the wolf that accompanies him'.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{136} John Bale, The Vocacyon of Iohn[n] Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelan[n]de (Wisel, 1553; STC 1307).


As Joan Fitzpatrick has insightfully observed, 'like the wolf with whom they are associated, the Irish have not yet been controlled but rather lurk on the periphery of civilized society ever ready to attack'.\textsuperscript{138} Thus the emblem of the wolf cemenned

\textsuperscript{138} Joan Fitzpatrick, Shakespeare, Spencer and the Contours of Britain: Reshaping the Atlantic Archipelago (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004), p. 32.
iconographically the danger of the bloody Papist, whether this threat was from over the waters on the Continent, beyond the Pale in Ireland, or hidden away in secret on English soil. Webster was certainly aware of this popular conception of the Irish when he penned his earlier play, *The White Devil*, which is replete with derogatory references to the 'wild Irish' and the 'howling' at 'Irish funerals' (G4). Although *The Duchess of Malfi* lacks direct references to Ireland and the Irish, it is not implausible to suppose that Webster and his original audiences may have noted the similarities between the Italian lycanthrope and the howling, wild Irish closer to home.

**Degenerating Dukes and Diminishing Returns**

In the same way that Jacobean audiences perceived Italians or the Irish (or any Catholic foreigners for that matter) as a threat to notions of Englishness, the spectacle of the werewolf presents a challenge to notions of acceptable, civilized behaviour. Ferdinand's lycanthropy is symptomatic of the political turmoil, 'the corruption of the times' (B1, 1.1.18), that occupies the court: in the words of Susan Wiseman, it is both 'specifically a mania generated by the court' and an 'index of its moral crisis'.

Consider Ferdinand's behaviour at the beginning of the play:

**[Ferd.]** How do you like my Spanish Geniss?  
**Rod.** He is all fire.  
**Ferd.** I am of Plancis's opinion, I think he was begot by the wind.  
**Sil.** True (my Lord) he steels from the Till often.  
**Rad. Gris.** Ha, ha, ha.  
**Ferd.** Why do you laugh? Me thinks you that are Courtiers  
Should be my touch-wood, take fire, when I give fire;  
That is, laugh when I laugh, were the subject neuer so witty.  
(B2–B5, 1.1.111–19)

Upon entering the stage, Ferdinand is established as 'the great *Calabrian Duke*' (B2, 1.1.82), and the description is fitting. Ferdinand immediately dominates the scene and its participants: he cuts Castruchio off mid-sentence, makes bawdy jokes and *doubles entendres* — for example, 'drawne their weapons, | And were ready to goe to it' (B2, 1.1.107–08) — and, as we have seen, asserts control over the actions of his courtiers, even their laughter.

Although Ferdinand begins as a towering figure in the opening scenes, by the final act he is reduced to a cowering, confused madman attacking his own shadow:

**Ferd.** Leave me.  
**Mal.** Why doth your Lordship lose this satisfayce?  
**Ferd.** Eagles caimmonly fly alone. They are Crowes, Dawes, and Sterling that flocke together. Looke, what's that, Followes me?  
**Mal.** Nothing (my Lord):  
**Ferd.** Yes.  
**Mal.** 'Tis your shadow.  
**Ferd.** Stay it, let it not haunt me.  
**Mal.** Impossible; if you move, and the Sun shine:  
**Ferd.** I will thryde it. ([*Throws himself on the ground*].)  
**Mal.** Oh, my Lord: you are withy with nothing.  
**Ferd.** You are a foole;  
How is't possible I should catch my shadow  
Vnleaste I fall upon't?  

(L2, 5.2.28–40)

We have witnessed the transformation of an assertive, socially dominating stage presence to a solitary, paranoid, cowering figure of abjection. What has happened between the opening scenes of the play and the final act to bring about such a radical change in character? Ferdinand's steady decline into madness parallels the rising intrigue and erosion of justice at court, as both stray further away from their civilized, ideal forms. Thus, Ferdinand's lycanthropy represents not only the degeneracy of the individual from the human, but also the degeneracy of society from the civil.

What is the essential cause of this degeneration? Perhaps it is, as Alfred North Whitehead has suggested, that evil 'promotes its own elimination by destruction, or delegation' since it is by its very nature unstable. Whitehead's analysis seems pertinent to *The Duchess of Malfi*, since both Ferdinand and the society in which he resides are clearly diminished by their involvement with evil: whether in the guise of temperate anger, incestuous desires, cruelty, or corruption and injustice, each is degenerated from the human to the bestial, and from the civil to the chaotic.

**Conclusion**

As Nicole Jacques-LeFèvre has observed, the werewolf 'inherits all of the attitudes underlying the real wolf' as well as 'the tradition which metaphorically situates the

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relations between man and animal in terms of individual or social morality, and, as such, is a rich and complex figure. The wolf had been employed as an emblem of Catholic deception and savagery by poets and pamphletereers alike, as well as symbolically encapsulating the perceived wild and uncivil nature of the rebellious Irish and the depravity of the Italians and their Circassian courts. Similarly, medieval chronicles noted the propensity of the Irish to turn into wolves, and contemporary pamphlets and trial transcripts told of the havoc wreaked by lycanthropes on the Continent. Whilst earlier and contemporary authorities on the Continent turned to witchcraft and the supernatural to explain these accounts of bestiality, the English (for the most part) cultivated a growing scepticism that looked to medicine and natural causes to explain such episodes.

Webster was no doubt aware of all this when he incorporated Ferdinand’s lycanthropy into The Duchess of Malfi. Webster was familiar with and critical of Jacobean medical knowledge and practice, and his scepticism is reflected in his treatment of illness and those that fail to minister to it in his plays. Webster was certainly also aware of the cultural stereotypes and suspicions surrounding Italians and the Irish, and he was not above deploying these in his drama: The Duchess of Malfi can boast some of the most striking examples of Italianate depravity and Catholic savagery on the Jacobean stage. Against this cultural and intellectual background, it is hard to accept the suggestion that Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is simply a case of demonic possession. This is simply inconsistent with Webster’s construction of the play primarily as a medical universe with eschatological overtones. The evidence is there in Webster’s treatment of illness throughout the play as a natural phenomenon. There is no reason to extrapolate from the doctor’s use of the term ‘possessed!’ (L2, 5.2.8) an entire world of demonic possession and diabolic intervention. This is not to say that Webster’s world is one completely free of supernatural intervention, since the graveyard echo clearly has ghostly connotations; but Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is not one of them. The horror in The Duchess of Malfi comes, for the most part, from the knowledge that real people are capable of committing depraved acts, that intertemporal anger and Machiavellian ambition can push a man past the limits of civility, and perhaps even past the border of the human.132


132 Although the current essay is much revised, an earlier version was published as ‘An Italian Werewolf in London: Lycanthropy and The Duchess of Malfi’, Early Modern Literary Studies, 11 (2005), 1–34. I wish to thank Matthew Steggle for permission to republish those earlier portions here. I also wish to thank Chris Worthing, Gabriel Egan, and Yasmine Haskell for their useful comments and suggestions in revising this essay.

Vampires as Creatures of the Imagination: Theories of Body, Soul, and Imagination in Early Modern Vampire Tracts (1659–1755)

Koen Vermeir

Introduction

In the summer of 2006, Matteo Borroni, a forensic anthropologist from the University of Florence, found the remains of a female ‘vampire’. The skeleton was found in a mass grave from the plague of 1576, on Lazzeruco Nuovo, a sanatorium for plague sufferers north-east of Venice. The woman could be identified as a vampire because she had been buried with a brick jammed between her teeth, to prevent her from preying on the survivors.1 ‘Vampires’ from the late sixteenth century did not suck blood, but they were hungry. It was believed that some corpses masticated in their graves, that they ate their shroud, and sometimes even their own limbs. The effects of this mastication were not confined to the tomb, however. These ‘masticating bodies’ were believed to be the origin of

1 The main facts of the discovery were presented by Matteo Borroni at the reunion of the Italian Anthropological and Ethnological Society, 22 May 2008 as ‘La scoperta di una sepolcreta di “vampiro”: archeologia e antropologia forense analizzano la genealogia di una leggenda’. A summary of this presentation is published as part of ‘Rendiconti della Società Italiana di Antropologia ed Etnologia’, Archivio per l’Antropologia e l’Etnologia, 138 (2008), 215–17.