

Wilderness Disrupted: Nineteenth-Century Werewolf Short Fiction

Dr Janine Hatter

University of Hull

As Andrew Barger notes, the ‘transformation of the werewolf in literature made its greatest strides in the nineteenth century when the monster leapt from poetry to the short story’, inspiring authors as diverse as Catherine Crowe, Rudyard Kipling and G. W. M. Reynolds. This change brought with it varied literary representations of werewolves as the Victorian period experienced numerous social changes, such as the fear of the ‘animal within’ due to Charles Darwin’s seminal text *On the Origin of Species* (1859). His focus on human evolution led to growing concern regarding personal atavism and social decline, which culminated in a fear of devolution. This paper extends Victorian devolution theories by examining werewolf short stories in relation to the waning natural environment. Werewolf literature relies on the permanence of the natural world, such as the moon, and explores mankind’s relationship with it. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century significant environmental changes occurred; the industrial revolution caused an influx of people from rural to urban areas, and native wolves became extinct. My paper addresses the effects of urbanization on werewolves: how the destroyed natural environment echoes back through the modernised landscape; how werewolves embed their transformation onto their new environment; and how the memories of this past environment remain as the werewolf leaves its mark. As a figure divided, the werewolf transformation either forces a return to nature in the midst of busy urban life – an involuntary return reversion to a savage state suited to scavenging the wilds – or its hybrid form allows communing with nature as well as an investment in the modern world. The werewolf is the perfect creature to live in this tumultuous and uncertain setting, gaining the best of both environments.

Dr Janine Hatter is Honorary Research Associate in the English Department at the University of Hull. Her research interests centre on nineteenth-century literature, art and culture, with particular emphasis on Mary Braddon, popular fiction and short stories. She has published on Braddon in *Notes & Queries*, *St John’s Humanities Review* and *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*, as well as on her wider research interests of twenty and twenty-first century

Science Fiction and the Gothic for *Supernatural Studies* - with whom her special issue on 'Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century' is due out summer 2015.