

'Open, open; let me in!': The Female Werewolf and the New Woman

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The New Woman was often demonised—monsterised—in the press. She was a hideous, shrieking harridan, probably a lesbian, and she sought to tear down all institutions held dear by middle-class Victorians. She was vicious and unfeeling; maternity disgusted her.

The New Woman possessed a liminal identity; she was woman plus monster, or woman minus femininity. The press shapeshifted her as needs be: one day she would be crazed, with the potential for violence; the next a sexually aggressive predator, seeking the company of *your husband!*

Female werewolves respond to many of these fears and anxieties concerning New Woman. Their changing identities; their capacity for violence (even against children); and their sexual appetites offer a new kind of female monstrosity.

Frederick Marryat's Christina ('The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains') and Clemence Housman's White Fell ('The Were Wolf'), for example, appear in their respective stories with a veneer of beauty and respectability. It is not long before their true identities are revealed, as they devour the families who have taken them in.

Unlike other female monsters in Gothic, female werewolves are intensely and intimately violent. A discreet bite on the neck or breast does not suffice for these women: their victims are torn apart. In the case of Christina, she even violates the graves of her stepchildren, that she may feast.

I will use Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Book of Were-Wolves* (1865) to first examine how female werewolves are formed (as opposed to male werewolves); then engage with critical works on Victorian werewolves, including, but not limited to works by Hannah Priest, Marina Warner, and Linda Hughes. Alongside this will be discussion of the New Woman, with an examination of works by Angelique Richardson and Sally Ledger, amongst others.

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