The Werewolf in the Wardrobe
By Siamak Tundra Naficy

Professor Lupin, who appears in the third book, is one of my favorite characters. He's a damaged person, literally and metaphorically. I think it's important for children to know that adults, too, have their problems, that they struggle. His being a werewolf is a metaphor for people's reactions to illness and disability.

-Joanne K. Rowling, quoted from 'The Scotsman', November 2002

The Big and Not So Bad Wolf

One of the most interesting, complex, and peculiar characters in the *Harry Potter* universe is that of Professor Remus Lupin. As you may recall, Lupin (a.k.a. "Moony") is Harry's Defense Against the Dark Arts professor during Book Three, "Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban", and also appears in the film version of the same title. He later returns in Books Five and Six. Because professor Lupin also happens to be a shape-shifting werewolf, he suffers to keep his condition a secret lest others stigmatize him for it.

Often harried by his need to conceal his condition, Lupin is described in the books as being sickly-looking. "He looked ill and exhausted. Though quite young, his light brown hair was flecked with gray." (Prisoner of Azkaban 74). Perhaps it is his condition itself that makes him ill and exhausted—he is after all, with perhaps a nod to menstruation, purported to go without sleep for four days a month. Either way this fact is engaging, but it is just the tip of the iceberg, and if one were to look below, it would seem that an iceberg is sometimes, more than just an iceberg.

It can be argued that maybe *because*, and not despite the fact that Lupin is a werewolf, his fans are legion: there is an international fan website, www.remus-lupin.net, devoted entirely to him. The werewolf myth itself is so popular in fact that it is almost ubiquitous. That is, while the idea of a half-man, half-beast, or of a human being who can turn into an animal is almost universal, and pretty much every culture seems to have its beastmen—from the the kitsune (werefox) of Japan, to the rakshasa (weretigers) of India, to the boudas (werehyena) of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the skinwalkers of the American southwest—the werewolf arguably always was, and today certainly is, the most common shape-changer in myth and fantasy.

One reason perhaps the werewolf is so popular a stand-in for us is due to the presence of the wolf within the were*wolf*. The wolf itself is a great place holder for us is because it has so many convergent, analogous traits in common with us. Like us, it cooperates to get food. Like us, it dotes on its babies and takes care of its own. This is in fact why dogs could be so easily domesticated. Our hierarchies are quite similar. Up until the 20th century, in fact, the wolf's similar adaptable nature allowed it to be the second most widely distributed mammal in all the world, after man. It is only because of us that they no longer are. And indeed, in many ways, since roughly 1.6 million years ago and the advent of *Homo erectus*--as hominins began to really enter the predatory guild--it can be argued that we have become more and more wolflike and less and less apelike. The apes,

after all, do not share food like we do. Or like wolves do.

The wolf is also a predator. H. Clark Barrett, from the University of California at Los Angeles, has done very interesting work detailing children's knowledge and understanding of predators, and especially of predator-prey interactions. His cross-cultural findings shed light on why the behavior of dangerous predators is particularly interesting to people everywhere. According to Barrett, children would have been extremely vulnerable to the dangerous animals that existed in the evolutionary past. Children pay special attention to what animals eat—categorizing easily between predator and prey, and seem to specialize in how animals are dangerous (e.g., a tiger has a deadly bite while a boa constricts). Psychologists call cognitive adaptations that allow us to learn particular bits of information faster and more permanently "prepared learning." Barrett has demonstrated that when it comes to animals, children are especially prepared to learn what they eat and how they are dangerous. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the world of children's fiction is rich with an inspired bestiary. From velociraptors, and unicorns, to el chupacabra and the werewolf, children can easily categorize and remember the fantastic animals we adults present to them. It would be fascinating, in fact, to see what kinds of bestiaries the modern urban child can construct.

The Wolf in Shepherd's Clothing

Even though many adults read the Harry Potter books, they are generally regarded as belonging in the children's, or at least young adult section of the bookstore. For this reason, the themes and metaphors conveyed are often discounted as being "childish". This tendency to look on creatures and characters that appear in children's literature as being simplistic can be misleading, however, because the denizens of these stories are ultimately the creations of adult minds—that is, of adult fears, adult fantasies, and adult categories. These past years, many books, such as the one in your hand just now, have sought to deconstruct the obvious as well as the somewhat nebulous themes, metaphors and references that appear in popular media. Perhaps because of all this, many kids today have wizened up to the "real" themes, motifs and meanings of familiar fairy tales. Talk to a savvy young adult or even a slightly precocious 'tween, and they will know. Go ahead. Ask them about "Little Red Riding Hood". Ask them why we call her "little" red riding hood? And they will tell you: "Well, because she's too small to understand the complexity of an adult sexual relationship." Ask why does she wear "red"? "That's because red signifies the raw, it's violent—it's sex." Enquire about what is she actually carrying in that basket of hers? Many will laugh and say, "now, what do you think?"

In fact, even the average young adult today usually understands what the "big and bad" wolf is. Or rather, what it is supposed to be—no actual wolf at all—he's the bad boy, or sometimes the bad man who will exploit our precious, hooded innocence. What is interesting is that he can be bad, or at least naughty, but he can also be sympathetic. The villainy of the big bad wolf is common knowledge to kids. He is popular. He has a hold over our imagination. But, if there was not something we liked about the big bad wolf,

then he would have no hold or power over us. The point is that there is often something about his villainous, predatory behavior we like—because we can identify with it.

So, too, like the *wolf* of the old-fashioned fairy tale, the *werewolf* is oft seen as a rapacious and bestial creature that will sneak up on you and eat you (or worse) if you are not careful! But today, the werewolf has become a more common placeholder of the big bad man (and woman)—for he is at once a man and animal—and in this way is a more obvious representation. It can be argued even that in many ways, the wolf of fairy tale has been replaced by the werewolf of modern fantasy. As we have come to understand animals as animals and not just playthings in a human-centered universe, we've gone from using them as iconic representations of us, to using an outright amalgam of them *and* us. From Curt Siodmak's cult classic *The Wolfman* to the latest *Underworld* serial, the werewolf is becoming a more common iconic representation of the hidden wild side of man. This is especially true, perhaps, of the werewolf as he appears in the *Harry Potter* universe. Here, the subtext of closeted danger is as subtle as the exceptionally large teeth that Grandma had—a fact which led Little Red Riding Hood to deduce that this was no Grandma at all, but actually someone or something else. Something perhaps *bad*, but at the same time something tantalizing, too.

This is nothing new, of course. Throughout history, we have attributed onto others what we viewed as undesirable in ourselves, finding scapegoats upon which we could pin our notions of fault and blame and whose sacrificial death then could bring our atonement. In this way, we put our sins upon the wolf and then put the wolf, instead of ourselves, to death—in literature, in folklore, in myth, in films, and unfortunately too often in real life. In his wonderful book, *Of Wolves and Men* (Lopez 226-7), Barry Lopez writes that the central conflict between man's "good" and "evil" natures is revealed in his twin images of the wolf as ravening and lusty killer and as nurturing and devoted mother. The former has been the bloodthirsty and rampaging werewolf, from the beast of Gevaudan to Siodmak's *The Wolfman*; the latter the mother to children who founded nations, from Zoroaster and Romulus and Remus to Ataturk.

The legend of the werewolf or a shape-shifting man-wolf is the apotheosis of this idea—a figure who frightens us especially for he is at once a man, but also *something else*; a defector from the social contract, one who can transform himself into something else that is primeval and outside convention in both form and morality. Moreover, he is a beast that can hide amongst us—he is a wolf in shepherd's clothing. Considering the level of voyeurism often involved in these tales of cruelty and depravity, one is struck with the clarity that these acts have really no connection with the real wolf, but more so with us. Indeed, in this way, the phenomenon of shape-shifting itself is small when juxtapositioned next to the levels of violence and perversion that the creature often engages in. And it is important to keep this fact in mind because when thinking about the werewolf, it is easy to want to impose backward such modern ideas as to how or why one becomes a werewolf—ideas that were only recently developed.

In myth, how a human being became a werewolf or even a vampire was often a mystery as it varied from place to place. Often, no real distinction was even made between witch,

vampire or werewolf. Sometimes a person could transform because that person was a witch, other times it was because he happened to be born on Christmas Day. The Neurians were a tribe of people, said by Herodotus to inhabit Russia and purportedly all transform into wolves for a few days, once a year. Even the now well-known connection between shape-shifting and the appearance of a full moon, attributed to the medieval chronicler Gervase of Tilbury, was rarely associated with the werewolf until the idea was picked up by modern fiction writers in the last century. Since the development of Germ Theory for the etiology of disease, however, our myths have changed and they have become more structured. In the modern tale, vampires are made through blood-transfusion. Werewolves, in the modern myth, as in *Harry Potter*, become werewolves by being bitten by another werewolf. It is thus *communicable*, and this means that in order not to become a werewolf yourself, you must learn to avoid werewolves entirely, for werewolves, as we know, all have a penchant and an aptitude for biting. It is one of the hallmarks of werewolves, along with all the hair. And in this way, the character of Lupin references the theme of the stigmatized outsider. The homosexual for example, is defined through the act or desire for homosexual sex—and of course sex is one way in which the HIV virus can be transmitted.

"Catching" Werewolves

Consider the fact that though now relegated to fantasy literature, film, role-playing games and Halloween costumes, werewolves were seen as an uncomfortable and harsh reality in the Middle Ages. At a time before knowledge of Mendelian genetics, the idea that a person suffering from Downe's syndrome—small ears, a broad forehead, a flattened nose, prominent teeth and webbed fingers and toes—was the offspring of a woman and a wolf was perfectly plausible. And for this reason many people who were thought to be half-wolves or werewolves were stigmatized, ostracized and worse—untold numbers were put to death. Why? Because, we tend to fear the stigmatized since we fear they can contaminate us with their condition.

Now, social exclusion is a common feature of our everyday lives. Sometimes these rejections come from idiosyncratic differences between individuals, but other instances of social exclusion are due to the shared values, inclinations, and goals of groups of individuals. Through the processes of stigmatization and exclusion, specific individuals can be completely ostracized from particular social interactions simply because they happen to have a certain characteristic or happen to be a member of a marked category or group. Social exclusion often exists for members of many groups, such as the obese (e.g., Crocker, Cornwell, & Major), homosexuals (e.g., Shears & Jensema), HIV/AIDS patients (e.g., Weitz), the mentally ill or retarded (e.g, Farina & Ring), cancer patients (e.g., Bloom & Kessler), as well as members of numerous racial, ethnic, and religious groups (e.g., Steele & Aronson).

So, when Severus Snape takes over Lupin's class to give the children an impromptu lecture on werewolves—a lecture on lycanthropy was scheduled for weeks later, at the end of the class, we can assume that he believes there is a special need to discuss it *now*.

The children must be in danger. We feel this imminent danger. Here, Snape informs the students that it may be hard to distinguish werewolves from "regular people," and they need understand that *anyone* might be a werewolf. And the metaphor is especially obvious at the end of the film version of *Azkaban*, when Harry discovers Lupin busily packing his possessions away—closeting things up, and Harry asks if Lupin has been sacked from Hogwart's. "No", Lupin tells Harry. He's resigned from Hogwart's, because someone has discovered and let slip his secret life—he's been *outed* you see, and tells Harry that there are a lot of parents who would not want "someone like him" teaching their children. And now it becomes clear, professor Lupin is the fall guy for the stigmatized outsider. You know, the one we fear, the one we demonize—he is the homosexual, he is the immigrant, he is the AIDS victim, he is the one with a "bad" religion, etc,.

Did J.K. Rowling herself intend Lupin as such? Certainly, the quote that begins this essay shows he is meant to represent otherwise good people stigmatized and maligned because they are different. Snape says that *anyone* can become a werewolf, should they be bitten by a werewolf. The fact that the werewolf has the power to make anyone a werewolf, simply by biting him, is quite significant and doubly frightening, for that makes this an affliction that is *contagious*. Lupin himself provides the supportive evidence. "I was a very small boy when I received the bite" (Prisoner of Azkaban 352) says Lupin, and one is now sympathetic to Lupin for we are prompted to think of him as a once-innocent-victim, now turned into the monster.

Drawing on the logic of evolutionary psychology—that is, the supposition that the mind, as the body, is a product of natural selection, and thus to understand the psyche of a species, it is important to consider the everyday problems ancestral environments would have posed—it is interesting to explore this conflation of a marginalized, "other" category, with contagious disease. The "magical law of contagion", one of the laws of sympathetic magic, was first introduced by anthropologists over a hundred years ago (e.g., Mauss). This "law of contagion" holds that people, objects and so forth, that come into contact with one another can influence each other through a permanent transfer of some essential property: contagion (once contaminated, always contaminated—once in contact, always in contact), and similarity (the image is the *same* as the actual thing).

Paul Rozin, from the University of Pennsylvania and his colleagues found that people often conflate exposure to contamination, and essential qualities to be transmittable. For example, they demonstrate (Rozin *et al.*, 1986) that university undergraduates tend to avoid even their juice of choice, if they saw a sterilized cockroach briefly immersed in the drink; they were also less reluctant to eat a piece of chocolate if it happened to just be in the shape of dog feces rather than the somewhat more mundane shape of a muffin! Likewise, when offered with a choice, undergraduates were much more reluctant to drink sugar water from a glass labeled 'Cyanide' than they were to drink from a glass labeled 'Sucrose'. Further studies show that preference for a glass of sugar water was shown even if the alternative glass was labeled in the negative ('Not cyanide, not poison') (Rozin *et al.*, 1990). A similar magical transfer of an undesired quality from a person to an object was shown in the domain of the fear of contagion; undergraduates rated a

sweater briefly worn by someone they were told had AIDS as being significantly less desirable to wear than one worn by someone they were told was healthy (Rozin *et al.*, 1992).

A number of other investigators have articulated evolutionary accounts of stigmatization and prejudice (e.g., Kurzban & Leary; Neuberg; Smith, & Asher). The general logic follows as such: Throughout much of our history, we humans existed in relatively small groups. While group living can provide us with many survival benefits, it likewise brings many costs and particular problems that are peculiar to group life, such as a greatly increased risk from contagious disease—if your room-mate has a cold, chances are, you will too. Therefore psychological adaptations have likely evolved in response to, for example, the type of threat identified by Kurzban and Leary: the interpersonal transmission of parasites (viruses, bacteria, worms, etc.) that may cause illness, causing us to avoid and fear those who may be different and therefore carry such threats.

Now, because there is a high cost in social interactions with diseased others, it would have been adaptive for individuals—and ultimately, within functional populations—to quickly identify sick individuals and to avoid interacting with them. Others, Bishop *et al,* have demonstrated that individuals quickly respond to explicit linguistic labels such as "HIV" or "hepatitis" that index the presence of contagion in other individuals. One possible critique of such work is that written language is relatively recent, and so perhaps of more significance is Kurzban and Leary's point that many contagious diseases are often accompanied by observable phenotypic cues: "markers, lesions, discoloration of body parts . . . and behavioral anomalies" (Kurzban & Leary 198). They argue that specific psychological mechanisms that attended to and precipitated avoidant reactions to these cues would have been adaptive. Therefore, in present-day populations, we should not be surprised that these cues trigger specific affective (e.g., disgust, fear), cognitive (e.g., activation of disease-connoting concepts), and nonverbal behavioral (e.g., avoidance, shunning) responses in the perceiver. You shouldn't have to think about it. As with most evolved mechanisms, these responses are likely to occur quickly, with little conscious or rational deliberation, precisely because you cannot afford to take the time to think about it.

Of course, one could argue that many such "markers" come from non-contagious environmental or genetic effects, such as catastrophic accidents in the former or dwarfism in the latter. Would this not have created a signal-detection problem? Perhaps. It is not very likely that the psychological disease-avoidance processes could have evolved to make fine distinctions between actual symptoms of contagious disease and the broader category of peculiar physical and behavioral features that may be unrelated to contagious disease. Because the adaptive costs of a "false positive" (incorrectly judging a healthy individual to be diseased—and missing out on social interactions with such) are less than the potentially deadly consequences of a "false negative" (erroneously judging a diseased individual to be healthy—and contracting a costly illness) it is likely that this disease-avoidance mechanism evolved to be biased toward false positives. In other words, the evolved disease-avoidance mechanism is likely to be sensitive and mistake a broad range of physical or behavioral features as worthy of fear and avoidance.

The fact that Lupin is a werewolf—a stigmatized, deviant other—also allows us to erroneously read in all sorts of other penchants and aptitudes that may be "deviant" from the norm. Psychologists call this the conjunction effect. The basic idea follows from probability theory. Imagine two independent conditions, A and B. Probability theory dictates that the probability of both A and B occurring cannot exceed the probability of either A or B. And yet, this is the kind of errors we make quite often.

An example of this sort of error can be found in the "Linda problem" (Kahneman and Tversky 126), where subjects were presented with personality sketches of the type illustrated below:

> 'Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.'

Then, in one version of the problem, subjects were asked which of the following two statements was *more* probable: A.) Linda is a bank teller; B.) Linda is a bank teller who is active in the feminist movement. Again, based on probability theory, the first statement must be more probable. And yet, the authors report that within their sample of undergraduates, 86% judged the second statement to be more probable! And so, we assume all sorts of attributes and behaviors follow from the one. In a very basic and naive universe, there are bad guys and bad animals—who are bad in almost every way, and good guys and good animals—who are good in almost every way. And it is for this reason that Lupin makes such a great metaphor—if he is a stigmatized outsider, then it is easy for us to heap upon him a wide range of other negative attributes (e.g., is he diseased?, a pedophile?, etc,).

Of significance is work conducted (Crandall, Glor, & Britt) that looks into the extent to which a heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuals ("HATH" score assessed with social distancing measures) predicts prejudice against people with AIDS. The authors show that social distancing from the person with AIDS is highly correlated with "HATH" scores when the person with AIDS was homosexual and only modestly correlated when the person was heterosexual. Surprisingly, the same precise pattern of correlations is found when the person was presented not as an AIDS victim, but as an amputee who had lost a leg because of a motorcycle accident. The same personality construct similarly predicted social distancing from both people with contagious disease and people with a disabling condition that was clearly non-contagious. This result suggests, indirectly, a relation between concerns about disease and the desire to avoid physically disabled individuals. The werewolf metaphor as used in Harry Potter, is just one example of how we often do the same thing when it comes to all sorts of negative-associated behaviors. We tend to correlate and assume that all deviant behaviors covary to some extent.

With modern Germ Theory, we have a better estimate of contagion risk, but it is important to remember that, in our ancestral environments until only a few generations ago, how and why people became sick was largely a mystery. The kind of information state required to avoid contagion then would require strategies that would recognize any

possible contagion risk. If the reason why someone is sick is cryptic or a mystery, it might possibly be best to avoid them altogether.

Manimals

Let's consider at this point a second story left out of the film version of "The Prisoner of Azkaban", namely the reasons behind Sirius Black's dog form, Peter Pettigrew's rat morph, and Harry's own father James' stag shape. In the book, JK Rowling declares that the three set about to learn the art of shapeshifting in order to keep their good friend Lupin company, when he was out on the prowl in his beast form. Thus, they were not just friends with Lupin the man, but Lupin the beast. This does not mean that Sirius or any of the other boys are the same as Lupin. Note that while all learned in time to assume their beast forms, they all have different beast forms.

We can use evolutionary theory to understand popular culture, and then use popular culture as a window into modern society. Our evolutionary past can help us to see why the werewolf is so scary and popular, and that the development of portrayals of the werewolf from terrifying monster to sympathetic victim over the last fifty years may be an example of the way all this talk of tolerance may actually be working!

And this is where we can have a warm and yes, fuzzy, ending. So yes, maybe we have evolved cognitive mechanisms that predispose us to make categories of others and then to make essentialist and sometimes misinformed judgments based on those categories. So what! Because these categories are often learned, they can be unlearned. The answer may not be to control the baser primal urges we all have, but to be more tolerant of the tapestry of it all. As long as you are not really hurting anyone, that is—unless they really want you to (and then still, not too much). After all, we are all beasts, one way or another, and the admission of that itself can be freeing.

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