

**Niceros, Hermotimus and Bisclavret: Werewolves, Souls and Innkeepers**  
Daniel Ogden, University of Exeter and UNISA

**Niceros' werewolf tale**

We thank Petronius and his *Satyricon* (ca. 66 AD) for the richest werewolf tale to survive from the ancient world.<sup>1</sup> At Trimalchio's dinner the host himself and his fellow freedman Niceros compete with each other in a mini-*agon* of what might be described as camp-fire horror stories. Trimalchio's tale will feature body-snatching witches, but Niceros' features a werewolf:

When I was still a slave, we lived in a narrow street. The house is now Gravilla's. There, by the will of the gods, I fell in love with the wife of Terentius the innkeeper. You knew Melissa of Tarentum, that gorgeous creature. But, by Hercules, I didn't love her just for her body or for sexual reasons, but because she had such a nice personality. If I asked her for anything, I was never refused. If she made tuppence, she gave me a penny. She kept my money for me, and never cheated me. Her husband met his end one day out on the estate.<sup>2</sup> I did everything I could to get to her. People make themselves your friend when they're in need. By chance the master had set off on his way to Capua to deal with some odds and ends. I seized the opportunity and persuaded our guest to come with me to the fifth milestone. He was a soldier, as brave as Orcus. We shifted our arses just before dawn. The moon was shining like the midday sun. We arrived among the tombs.<sup>3</sup> My man went for a pee against a gravestone. I held back, singing and counting the stones. Then, when I looked back at my companion, he had taken all his clothes off and laid them beside the road. I almost died of fright, and I stood there like a dead man. He peed a circle around his clothes and suddenly became a wolf. Don't think I'm joking. No one's inheritance is so valuable as to make me lie. But, as I'd begun to say, after he had become a wolf, he began to howl and ran into the woods. At first I didn't know where I was, but then I went to his clothes to pick them up. But they had turned to stone. Whoever died with fright, if I didn't then? But I drew my sword and + hacked at the shades, until I arrived at my girlfriend's house.<sup>4</sup> I was like a ghost when I got in, and almost bubbling out my final breath. My groin was awash with sweat, my eyes were dead, and I have still barely recovered from the experience. Melissa expressed amazement

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<sup>1</sup> For werewolves in the ancient world see in particular Smith 1894, Cook 1914-40, i, 63-99, Schuster 1930, Eckels 1937, 32-69, Miller 1942, Piccaluga 1968, Kratz 1976, Tupet 1976, 73-8, 1986, 2647-2652, Gernet 1981, 125-39, Burkert 1983, 83-134, Mainoldi 1984, 11-35, Jost 1985, 258-267, Paroli 1986, 281-317, Buxton 1987, Moreau 1989-90, Forbes-Irving 1990, 51-7, 90-95, 216-218, Hughes 1991, Johnston 1991, Kunstler 1991, Gantz 1993:725-729, Marcinowski 2001, Veenstra 2002, Zolotnikova 2005, Bremmer 2007, Metzger 2011 (much of the discussion of werewolfism in the ancient context focuses, misleadingly, on the rites of Zeus Lycaeus).

<sup>2</sup> I consider Schmeling's attempts (2011, 255) to differentiate Melissa's husband Terentius (to whom she is *uxor*) from her *contubernalis* (the word used here) sophistic; contrast Marmorale 1961, 121-122.

<sup>3</sup> Petronius imagines a highway lined with tombs, on the model of the well known Via Appia Antica; cf. Schmeling 2011, 256.

<sup>4</sup> For the ability of iron to resist ghosts, cf. Homer *Odyssey* 11,48, Virgil *Aeneid* 6,260, Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 2,32,6; Schmeling 2011, 258.

that I'd walked there so late and said, "If you'd come earlier, at least you could have helped us. For a wolf got into the estate and among the flocks. He was draining the blood out of them like a butcher. But even if he got away, the last laugh was ours, for our slave managed to get a spear through his neck." When I heard this, I could not even think of sleep, but when it was fully light I ran off home like the robbed innkeeper. When I came to the place where the clothes had turned to stone, I found nothing but blood. But when I arrived home, my soldier was lying on his bed like an ox, and a doctor was attending to his neck. I realized that he was a werewolf/shape-shifter [*versipellis*],<sup>5</sup> and I could not thereafter bring myself to taste bread with him, not even if you had forced me on pain of death. Others can make up their own mind about this. But if I'm lying, may your guardian spirits exercise their wrath upon me.

Petronius *Satyricon* 61-62 (Ogden trans.)<sup>6</sup>

In the following paper I will draw parallels between this tale and medieval werewolf narratives, regarding them as, for the most part, independent witnesses to a deeply embedded and largely conservative folklore of werewolves that was already old when Petronius wrote.<sup>7</sup> It is important to establish that it is unlikely that our medieval authors were themselves aware of and reworking Petronius' story. The werewolf narrative in §§61-2 survives, like most of the *Cena*, only in a single MS, H, the so called Traguriensis that was discovered in 1650 at Trau in Dalmatia (Paris. lat. 7989), with its *editio princeps* (a poor one by Mentel) following in 1664.<sup>8</sup> Prior to that, in the eleventh-century John of Salisbury cited Petronius for the tale of the unbreakable glass in §51, which is not found in any of the other Petronian fragment collections and so may have derived from a manuscript similar to H, whether or not its direct antecedent.<sup>9</sup> But it is only after 1664 that Petronius' werewolf tale can be considered to have entered truly wide circulation.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of the significance of term *versipellis*, see Metzger 2011, 237-242.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of and commentaries on this text in the Petronian literature see: Pischel 1888 (with some partial Indian comparanda), Friedlaender 1906, 287-289, Rini 1929, Schuster 1930, 149-165, Spaeth 1933, Miller 1942, Maiuri 1945, 196-199, Perrochat 1952, 107-110, Marmorale 1961, 119-127, Smith 1975, 169-175, Pinna 1978, Grondona 1980, 38-39, Valentini-Pagnini 1981, 16-20, Blänsdorf 1990 (on the techniques Petronius deploys to project his tale as an oral narrative), Boyce 1991, 85-87, Fedeli 1995, Panayotakis 1995, 92-93, Lefèvre 2003, Schmeling 2011:, 252-60. For discussion of this text in the werewolf literature, see: Smith 1894, 5-10, Summers 1933, 153-156, Douglas 1992, 41-44, Scoduto 2008, 10-12. Metzger 2011, 233-236 (a sadly thin discussion given the subject and substance of her book). It is to be regretted that the excellent Stramaglia 1999 did not find space to discuss this episode, and also that the werewolf tale goes unmentioned in so many of the modern monographs devoted to Petronius, despite being his finest episode.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Smith 1898, 40-41, Summers 1933, 1, Thompson 1966, D113,1,1. But Panayotakis 1995, 92 goes too far in claiming that the tale was to be found in Novius' ca. 30 BC Atellan farce *Fullones Feriati* or *Fullers on Holiday* (FF31-33, Frassinetti 1955, 54-55) on the basis of his fragment i, *vortit se in omnis bestias, comest quidquid tetigit tantum*, 'He turns himself into all beasts and eats anything he can as much as touch.'

<sup>8</sup> For the details see Schmeling and Stuckey 1977, 18, Schmeling 2011, xx.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Miller 1942, 319, Smith 1975, :xi, xxii-xxiii, 136-137. John of Salisbury *Policraticus* 4,5 (i. p.248 Webb), reproduced at Smith 1975, xxvi-xxvii.

### Werewolves and ghosts

In the ancient world werewolves were strongly associated with two phenomena above all: on the one hand, sorcerers and witches; on the other, ghosts. It is the latter association that I wish to pursue here. In his 39 BC *Eclogues* Virgil closely associates Moeris' use of Pontic herbs to turn himself into a wolf with his use of them to rouse ghosts from the bottom of their tombs. As she prepares her love spells, Virgil's latter-day Simaetha tells of her Pontic herbs and poisons:<sup>10</sup>

By their power I often saw Moeris change into a wolf and hide himself in the woods,  
and I often saw him use them to rouse ghosts from the bottom of their tombs, and  
spirit sown crops away into another field.

Virgil *Eclogues* 8,97-99 (Ogden trans.)

Marcellus of Side's ii AD poem on medicine is lost,<sup>11</sup> but his words on lycanthropy are refracted in a series of later authors, with Aëtius of Amida's mid vi AD summary being the most important. It begins:

Marcellus *On Lycanthropy* or *On Cynanthropy* ["Were-dog-ism"]. Men afflicted with the disease of so-called cynanthropy or lycanthropy go out by night in the month of February<sup>12</sup> in imitation of wolves or dogs in all respects, and they tend to hang *around tombs* until daybreak.

Aëtius of Amida *Libri medicinales* 6,11 (Ogden trans.)<sup>13</sup>

Pausanias (mid ii AD) preserves the enthralling story of the Hero of Temesa. When, in the course of his wanderings. Odysseus put in at Temesa, one of his men got drunk, raped a virgin and was stoned to death by the locals. Thereafter the locals were attacked by the demon (δαίμων) of the man willy-nilly until they enclosed a precinct for him and gave him each year the prettiest girl for his bride. When Euthymus of Locri (who won Olympic victories between 484 and 472 BC)<sup>14</sup> stopped by, he fell in love with the girl being offered at that time and resolved to deliver her from the demon. Lying in wait for him, he defeated him in battle and drove him into the sea, liberating Temesa forever and duly marrying the girl himself. Pausanias finishes by describing a painting he has seen of the episode:

It showed a young man, Sybaris, and a river, Calabros, and a spring, Lyca. There was also a hero's shrine and the city of Temesa, and in the midst of these things was the demon that Euthymus cast out. His skin was awfully black and he was utterly

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<sup>10</sup> Virgil *Eclogues* 8,94-100.

<sup>11</sup> For Marcellus of Side and his medical poem, see Metzger 2011, 150-152.

<sup>12</sup> Metzger 2011, 161-162 finds the significance of February in the fact that this was the month of the Roman Lupercalia, for which see Wiseman 1995, Beard, North and Price 1998, ii §5.2.

<sup>13</sup> Note also the refractions of Marcellus' words at: Oribasius *Synopsis* 8,9 (a less accurate representation of the original text than Aëtius'); Paul of Aegina 3,16 (dependent upon Oribasius); Paul Nicaeus 24 (in turn dependent upon Paul of Aegina); and Psellos *Ponena iatrikon* 837-841 (xi AD, similarly turn dependent upon Paul of Aegina). See Metzger 2011, 150-170, 256-259.

<sup>14</sup> See Currie 2002.

terrifying to see. He had a wolfskin for his clothing. The picture was inscribed, and gave him the name Lybas.

Pausanias 6,6,7–11 (Ogden trans.)

The obscure name Lybas may be a transmission error for Lycas, ‘Wolfy.’ What we have here is evidently some kind of returning, vengeful ghost, for which the terms ‘hero’ and ‘demon’ are wholly appropriate. Blackness was also a traditional characteristic of ghosts and the dead in the ancient world.<sup>15</sup> The wolfskin that Pausanias specifies that the demon wears in the painting does not seem like an incidental detail, especially in view of its symbolic connection with the spring of Lyca, and it also seems to chime in with his blackness. It does seem that the painter was trying to say that the demon inhabited the form of wolf or at any rate had some significant lupine affinity. For all that the setting of the Hero of Temesa tale is Magna Graecia, it seems relevant that Aita, the Etruscan Hades, is shown clothed in a wolfskin in tomb-paintings from the Golini I tomb at Orvieto and the Orcus II tomb at Corneto (Tarquinia).<sup>16</sup>

Philostratus tells how Apollonius of Tyana destroyed a ‘demon’, also described as an ‘apparition’ or ‘ghost’ (φάσμα) at Ephesus. He declared that the plague with which the city was afflicted was caused by an old squinting beggar he found in the theatre: ‘He carried a wallet and a morsel of bread in it. He was dressed in rags and had a squalid face.’ At Apollonius’ behest the Ephesians reluctantly stoned the man, who turned out to have fiery eyes, until he was quite buried beneath the pile of their stones. When the stones were removed, the body of a great dog resembling a Molossian, but the size of a lion, was found beneath, spitting foam from its mouth, like the rabid (ὅσπερ οἱ λυττῶντες).<sup>17</sup> Does this entity count as a werewolf? It is not far off: Marcellus has told us that lycanthropy and cynanthropy were kindred conditions. Molossians were perhaps the most lupine of ancient domestic dogs. And the verb utilised here to signify ‘the rabid’, λυσσάω/λυττάω, is derived directly from the word for wolf, λύκος, and would certainly have been heard and read as such, ‘those that go wolf.’ There are broader motifs in common with the Hero of Temesa tale too: the motif of the monster’s effect on the community as a whole and the motif of stoning.

Why does Philostratus draw our attention to the bit of bread the supposed beggar had in his wallet? Is it just a bit of colour? My supposition is that we are to read it as a vehicle of the monster’s transformation. That a bit of magical food could effect an animal transformation is clear from Augustine’s note on Italian landladies that transform their guests into beasts of burden with a bit of cheese, to which we will turn shortly. The complex evidence for Arcadian werewolves tells at least that their transformations were effected by the tasting of human flesh amongst the sacrificial meats of Lycaean Zeus.<sup>18</sup> And, I would suggest, the notion that a werewolf transformation could be effected by ingestion underlies Niceros’ final protestation in Petronius’ story: ‘I could not thereafter bring myself to taste bread with him, not even if you had forced me on pain of death.’ This is no mere metonymic assertion that Niceros henceforth eschewed the werewolf’s company: he was staying away from him specifically at those times when he thought him likely to transform.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Winkler 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Cook 1914-1940,i,98-9, with figures 72-73. For Aita and his place in the Etruscan underworld, see Jannot 2005, 54-71.

<sup>17</sup> Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 4,10 (after 217 AD).

<sup>18</sup> Plato *Republic* 565d-566a, Pliny *Natural History* 8,82 (incorporating Scopas *FGrH* 413 F1), Augustine *City of God* 18,17 (after Varro), Pausanias 6,8,2 (discreet).

The association of werewolves with ghosts is particularly prominent too, of course, in Petronius' own tale. Before the featured soldier is shown to turn himself into a werewolf, Niceros describes him as 'as brave as Orcus' (i.e. Hades), no doubt in anticipatory irony.<sup>19</sup> And here it is worthwhile noting once again that the Etruscan Hades, Aita, wore a wolfskin. As Niceros travels with the soldier he tells that they moved amongst the tombs in the moonlight, where the soldier made his transformation. Thereafter, Niceros tells, 'I drew my sword and hacked at the shades, until I arrived at my girlfriend's house. I was like a ghost (*in larvam*) when I got in, and almost bubbling out my final breath.' Niceros concludes his narrative by asserting its truth in a forceful way: 'But if I'm lying, may your guardian spirits exercise their wrath upon me (*genios vestros iratos habeam*).'<sup>20</sup> The ghostly context could not be stronger: not only does Niceros' experience of the werewolf induce him to imagine that he is confronted by ghosts in all directions, they are also invoked by him in his par-narrative.

Before we leave the affinity between werewolves and ghosts, I indulge myself with a more recent British example. In 1912 O'Donnell reported a tale of case of werewolfism based in Cumberland, told to him the previous year. The Andersons' newly built house in the country was long beset by nocturnal lupine howlings, causing the servants to depart, and then eventually on Christmas night the family encountered in the children's bedroom a terrifying, huge, naked grey form with a wolf's head, which disappeared when the mother brought a candle in. Bones were subsequently discovered in a cave in the hills behind the house: a human skeleton without a head, together with a wolf's skull. These were burned, and the hauntings duly ceased.<sup>21</sup> Fans of Plautus, Pliny the Younger and Lucian (etc.) will recognise the bones of the ancient world's most popular haunted house story here.<sup>22</sup>

### Werewolves and soul-flights

I now wish to pursue a different sort of association between werewolves and disembodied souls. A persistent, though hardly a dominant, notion in medieval and subsequent werewolf narratives and werewolf lore holds that the wolf-form of the wolf-form is a manifestation of the soul projected forth from his body as the (humanoid) werewolf sleeps. Before 1084 AD Bishop Patrick of Dublin published his poem *De mirabilibus Hiberniae* ('On the Wonders of Ireland') in which he seemingly collected much Irish and Irish-language lore. He tells as follows 'of men who transform themselves into wolves':

There are certain men of the Irish race having a wondrous nature, derived from their ancestors, whereby they are able suddenly, whenever they wish, wickedly to change themselves into the shapes [or in the manner of] wolves with mangling teeth. This they are often seen to kill moaning sheep; but when they are frightened by the shouts or the approach of men, coming with cudgels or weapons, they run back in flight [i.e.,

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<sup>19</sup> For the significance of Orcus, see Smith 1894, 6 n.3. Donecker 2012, 293 bizarrely takes 'Orcus' to be the soldier's personal name!

<sup>20</sup> Petronius *Satyricon* 62.

<sup>21</sup> O'Donnell 1912, 39-41 (pages according to the 2013 reprint); cf. Summers 1933, 189-191.

<sup>22</sup> Plautus *Mostellaria* 446-531, Pliny *Letters* 7,27,5-11, Lucian *Philopseudes* 30-31; cf. also Constantius of Lyon *Life of St Germanus* 2,10 Gregory the Great *Dialogues* 3,4,1-3, Jacobus de Voragine *Golden Legend* no.85, and Bram Stoker's short story 'The Judge's House', in the Stoker 1914 collection, and the modern Italian folktale reported at Rini 1929, 85. For analyses of this story-type, see Nardi 1960,80-118, Felton 1999, Stramaglia 1999, 133-169, Ogden 2007, 205-24.

like true wolves]. But when they do these things, they leave their true bodies, and tell their own folk [i.e., their wives] that no one should move them. For if it should happen thus [i.e., that they should be moved], they will not be able to return to them [to their own bodies] again. If anything should injure them, or any wounds pierce them, they are truly always seen in their bodies [i.e., by their pursuers]. In this way raw meat [i.e. of the sheep which they devour] is seen by their companions, sticking in the mouth of the true body – a thing at which we marvel, and so do all.

Bishop Patrick of Dublin *De mirabilibus Hiberniae* xvi (ll.66-79),  
(as translated at Carey 2002:53, slightly modified)<sup>23</sup>

This material is also found in the Middle Irish poem *De Ingantaib Érenn* ('On the Wonders of Ireland' again), which may indicate that it originated in an Irish medium.<sup>24</sup> The *De Ingantaib Érenn* version includes the additional information that these werewolves are the descendants of Laigne(ch) Faelad in Ossory, the werewolves of Ossory famously being the subject of engaging exposition and narrative by Gerald of Wales.<sup>25</sup>

A medieval Latin text of the earlier thirteenth century AD, Guillaume d'Auvergne's *De universo*, has this tale to tell us:

A man was possessed. Some days an evil spirit would take hold of him and would make him lose his reason to the point that he imagined that he was a wolf: during these periods of possession, a demon threw him in a deserted place and abandoned him there, as if he were dead. Meanwhile, the demon entered a wolf or assumed the appearance of a wolf, showed himself to all and engaged in terrifying massacres of men and beasts: everyone fled at his sight, afraid of being devoured. The rumour spread that it was this man that was transforming himself into a wolf on certain days, and the man himself believed it. He was persuaded as well that he was the wolf responsible for these massacres. But a holy man, learning about the story, went to the village and explained to the people that they were wrong to believe in the metamorphosis of one man into a wolf. He took them to the place where he was lying, as if he were dead, showed him to the spectators, woke him up in front of them, freed him from his possession, showed him, as well as the others, the wolf that he thought he had turned into, and heard his confession publicly.

Guillaume d'Auvergne *De universo* at *Opera omnia* ii,3,13 (trans. Sconduto 2008, 23)<sup>26</sup>

This looks like a theologically-aware attempt to explain the same phenomenon of soul-projection: the action normally ascribed to the detached soul is transferred to a masquerading

<sup>23</sup> The square-bracketed portions seem to represent Patrick's own glosses on his poem. The work is also known as *De rebus Hiberniae admirandis*. For the text see Gwynn 1955, 62-63. Discussion at Summers 1933, 206-7, Carey 2002, 53-56 and Sconduto 2008, 33-34, the latter two of whom makes the important point that this exposition seems to be independent of Augustine, and so to report genuine folk beliefs.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Carey 2002, 54.

<sup>25</sup> The text is reproduced and translated at Todd 1848:, 204-205. Cf. Summers 1933, 206-207, Reinhard and Hull 1936, Carey 2002, 48-64 and Sconduto 2008, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Summers 1933, 222-223; Sconduto 2008, 22-3.

demon, just as in Christianised versions of traditional pagan ghost stories the ghosts similarly tend to mutate, often at the expense of their tales' logic, into masquerading demons.<sup>27</sup>

In their famous *Malleus Maleficarum* ('Hammer of Witches') of 1487 Kramer and Sprenger report a tale they derive from William of Paris, about a man who believed that he turned into a wolf and who went to live in a cave:

For there he went at a certain time, and though he remained there all the time stationary, he believed he was a wolf which went about devouring children; and though the devil, having possessed a wolf, was really doing this, he erroneously thought that he was prowling about in his sleep. And he was for so long thus out of his senses that he was at last found lying in the wood raving.

Kramer and Sprenger *Malleus Maleficarum* (Summers trans., 1928, 65)

In his 1883 *Essai sur l'humanité posthume* Adolphe D'Assier tells of a miller that had lived at Serisols some thirty years before:

A miller by the name of Bigot had a certain renown for sorcery. One day his wife got up very early in the morning to go to wash some linen close to the house. He sought to dissuade her from doing it, repeatedly saying, over and over, 'Don't go there, you will have a scare.' 'But why should I have a scare?', his wife responded. 'I tell you that you will have a scare.' She took no notice of these warnings and went on her way. She had hardly started work at the washtub when she caught sight of a creature coming and going before her. Since it was not yet day, she could not make its shape out clearly, but she thought that she recognised a type of dog. Inconvenienced by these comings and goings, but unable to drive the creature off, she threw her beater at it, and this struck it in the eye. The creature disappeared at once. At the same time Bigot's children heard the man give out a cry of pain in his bed, exclaiming 'The hussy! She has just taken out one of my eyes!' And indeed, from that day forward, he became one-eyed. Several people have told me about these events, including the very children of Bigot.

D'Assier 1883, 283-284 (Ogden trans.)

This sort of notion has persisted even into the century of our own births. In Algernon Blackwood's 1908 short story 'In the Camp of the Dog' ('case v' in his collection *John Silence, Physician Extraordinary*), a group of campers in Sweden are terrorised by a large dog, which turns out to be an ethereal projection from the sleeping body of one of the campers, an embodiment of his desire for one of the women in the group. When the dog is shot, the camper is left psychically wounded, but these wounds are (one is relieved to discover) healed by the love of the woman in question.<sup>28</sup>

I do not make it my task, as others have, to attempt to explain werewolfism as a historical phenomenon. My interest, as always, is in reconstructing traditions of narrative and belief. But I note that already in 1865, at the beginning of what might be considered the modern scholarship of werewolfism, Sabine Baring-Gould was suggesting, in an admittedly vague and unfocused way, that a belief in metempsychosis underlay a wide range of werewolf traditions, including even that of Lycaon's transformation into a wolf, which is

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<sup>27</sup> As is the case with the medieval reflexes of the Plautus-Pliny-Lucian haunted-house tale referred to above.

<sup>28</sup> Discussed at Frost 2002, 93-95.

hard to justify.<sup>29</sup> Closer to our own time Carlo Ginzburg has argued that the notion of werewolfism in the late Middle Ages was a hang-over from an ancient shaman ritual, this being part of broader thesis that the key to the Witches' Sabbath lay in shamanism.<sup>30</sup> One case cited by Ginzburg is particularly striking, for all that it does not include an explicit claim of soul flight (though the assumption of it is rather demanded for intelligibility). In 1692 a supposed idolator named Thiess was interrogated in Jürgensburg in Livonia (Estonia-Latvia). His testimony was as follows (in Douglas' summary):

Thiess said that he and other Livonian and Russian werewolves, both male and female, went out on three nights of the year, on St Lucy's night before Christmas, on St John's night, and on the night of the Pentecost, and visited Hell, which was located 'at the end of the sea.' The werewolves were the dogs of God, he said, armed with iron whips. In Hell they battled the devil and sorcerers, who were armed with broomsticks wrapped in horse tails. The sorcerers had stolen the shoots of the grain, and it was the werewolves' job to battle for them back, otherwise famine would sweep the land. Their battle that year had been successful, Thiess said; the harvest of barley and of rye was going to be plentiful, and there would also be enough fish to go around.

Douglas 1992, 151-152

One is struck here by the alignment between these claims and the beliefs and rituals of shaman cultures of modern times, not least those of the Inuit. Burkert summarises the anthropological reports of Rasmussen made in 1920:

The most vivid examples comparable to our tale pattern come from the Eskimos of Greenland, who live mostly on seal hunting. They believe that seals belong to a mistress of animals, Sedna, the old woman 'down there.' If a tribe fails to find enough seals and is threatened by famine, it must be due to the wrath of Sedna; and this is the situation for the shaman to step in and help by appeasing Sedna. A festival is called, and the shaman, in a trance, sets out to travel to the deep sea; he meets Sedna and asks why she is angry. It is because of human sins, especially those of women, who have broken certain taboos; Sedna herself is covered in filth on account of their uncleanness. The shaman has to tidy up Sedna, to ask her forgiveness. Of course he succeeds, finally, and comes back from his ecstatic travel bringing with him the animals. The hunters start real hunting immediately, their optimism renewed, and as a result will prove successful.

Burkert 1979, 88-89<sup>31</sup>

Both adventures, we note, secure the variety of fertility relevant to their communities.

### **Soul-flights in the ancient world**

Was soul-flying associated with werewolves already in antiquity, despite Baring-Gould's ill-judged claim about Lycaon? I believe that it was, for two reasons. The first is that the notion

<sup>29</sup> Baring-Gould 1865, 113-122; Lycaon at 114.

<sup>30</sup> Ginzburg 1991; cf. Douglas 1992, 26-27, 31-34, 37, 57, 66, 71-72, 89, 80-83, 151-170, 224-225, 261, Metzger 2011, 143-1144. For the anthropological concept of shamanism in general see Eliade 1964.

<sup>31</sup> After Rasmussen 1926.

already seems to underlie Augustine's treatment of the question of human-animal transformation in general. And the second is that ancient beliefs about werewolves and their clothing coincide in a significant fashion with ancient beliefs about one particular group of soul-fliers, the so-called Greek shamans.

The passage of Augustine in question is a protracted one from the *City of God* (413-423 AD).<sup>32</sup> Augustine's starting point is the myth of the transformation of Diomedes' companions into birds after the fall of Troy. He relays at length Varro's defence of the truth of this story. In doing this he briefly mentions Homer's Circe changing Odysseus' companions into beasts (no particular creature is specified), and then speaks at some length about Arcadian werewolfism in connection with Zeus Lycaeus, including the experiences in this context of the boxer Demaenetus, and indicates that Varro somehow connected these rites to those of the Roman Luperci. He then passes on to Italian folk beliefs:

For we too, when we were in Italy, used to hear such things about a particular district of those parts, where it was said that women that kept inns, imbued with these evil crafts, used to give things in cheese to such travellers as they wished, or as they were able to, as a result of which they were immediately turned into beasts of burden, made to carry whatever was demanded and to returned to their own form again once they had performed their tasks. But their minds did not become those of beasts, but were preserved in their rational and human state, just as Apuleius told or pretended happened to himself in the books that he wrote under the title of *The Golden Ass*, namely that after taking a drug he became an ass but retained his human mind.

Augustine *City of God* 18,18 (Ogden trans.)

Next, clearly taking such reports of animal transformation seriously, Augustine goes on to offer his explanation of the mechanics of the phenomenon. In essence, animal transformations derive from the faculty of imagination (*phantasticum*) of sleeping individuals, which creates projections that may of course appear real enough to the dreamers themselves, but they can also do so to others too. These imaginary constructs are inevitably insubstantial. To the extent that they exercise physical force in the external work, this is the work of 'demons', by which Augustine denotes not ghosts but malign supernatural entities.<sup>33</sup> Augustine concludes his discussion with some ring composition: he affirms that this is what he believes to have been the mechanism underlying the Arcadian wolf transformations and Circe's transformations. Finally returning to Diomedes' companions, he declares, rather curiously, that these considerations do not bear upon their case after all, and that here the demons simply just substituted birds for the companions they had spirited away. Clearly, Augustine is not speaking exclusively about werewolfism here, though given that it forms the inner ring of his three principal examples of animal transformation in pagan culture (Diomedes-Circe-Arcadia – Arcadia-Circe-Diomedes), it does seem to be at the forefront of his mind.

Pagan stories of soul-projection seem to offer a plausible background to Augustine's thought. In ancient context soul-projection was most distinctively the feat of the so-called 'shamans' of the Pythagorean tradition. The most famous example is Aristeas of Proconnesus, supposedly of the early seventh century BC, upon whom the ii AD Maximus of Tyre offers the following succinct note, whilst associating him with Pythagoras and his reincarnations:

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<sup>32</sup> Augustine *City of God* 18,16-18. Discussion at Scoduto 2008, 15-25.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine *City of God* 18,18.

The body of a man of Proconnesus would lie there breathing, albeit indistinctly and in a fashion close to death. His soul would escape from his body and wander through the ether like a bird, observing everything beneath, land, sea, rivers, cities, peoples, their experiences and the natural world. Then it would enter into his body again and set it back on its feet, as if it were making use of an instrument, and it would recount the various things it had seen and heard among the various peoples.

Maximus of Tyre 10,2 (Ogden trans.)

The ca. 425 BC Herodotus had already spoken of Aristeas and these shamanic abilities, albeit in a slightly confused way.<sup>34</sup> But the most germane example of the soul-flying Greek shaman for our purposes is in fact that of Hermotimus of Clazomenae (supposedly vii BC?), of whom the ii BC paradoxographer Apollonius recounts the following story:

The following sort of thing is reported of Hermotimus of Clazomenae. They say that his soul would wander from his body and stay away for many years. Visiting places, it would predict what was going to happen, for example torrential rains or droughts, and in addition earthquakes and pestilences and the suchlike. His body would just lie there, and after an interval his soul would return to it, as if to its shell, and arouse it. He did this frequently, and whenever he was about to go on his travels he gave his wife the order that no one, citizen or anyone, should touch his body. But some people came into the house, prevailed upon his wife and observed Hermotimus lying on the floor naked and motionless. They brought fire and burned him, in the belief that, when the soul came back and no longer had anything to re-enter, he would be completely deprived of life. This is exactly what happened. The people of Clazomenae honour Hermotimus even to this day and have a temple to him. Women may not enter it for the reason above [i.e., the wife's betrayal].

Apollonius *Historiae mirabiles* 3 (Ogden trans.)<sup>35</sup>

Now, the importance of the protection of the shaman's body whilst his soul is off on its flights, so that he can recover his physical form, finds a striking parallel in the importance attached to the protection of the werewolf's clothes, whilst he is off as a wolf, so that he can recover his human form.<sup>36</sup> In both cases, a vital shell must be recovered. The clearest ancient example of this is to be found in the precautions taken by Petronius' own werewolf as he changes:

He peed a circle around his clothes and suddenly became a wolf... then I went to his clothes to pick them up. But they had turned to stone.

Petronius *Satyricon* 62 (Ogden trans.)

<sup>34</sup> Herodotus 4,13-16; cf. Ogden 2009 no. 7, with commentary. On Aristeas and the Greek shamans more generally see Bolton 1962.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Clearchus of Soli *On Sleep* F7 Wehrli (iii BC).

<sup>36</sup> For the importance of recovering his clothes to a werewolf, see Smith 1894, 8, 11, 25

Evidently, the werewolf deployed magical means to preserve the clothes it was essential for him to recover. The notion that a circle of urine can magically confine is found elsewhere too in Petronius: ‘If I pee around him, he won’t know which way to escape.’<sup>37</sup>

Pliny (79 AD) reports Evanthes’ words on the werewolves of the Arcadian rites of Zeus Lycaeus:

He hangs his clothes on an oak tree, swims across the marsh, goes off into the wilderness, is transformed into a wolf, and joins a pack with others of the same kind for nine years. If he has held himself back from human flesh in that time, he returns to the same marsh, swims back across it, and recovers his form, with nine years’ aging added to his erstwhile guise. Also . . . he recovers the same clothing.

Pliny *Natural History* 8,81  
incorporating Evanthes *FGrH* 320 F1<sup>38</sup> (Ogden trans.)

It seems to be latent here that the recovery of the clothing is, if not in this case essential to the return to human form, then at any rate a part of the rite that symbolises it.

In an Aesopic fable known only from a Byzantine collection, but likely to be ancient, a cloak-thief and bogus werewolf pretends he is about to change into a wolf:

A thief stayed in an inn. He passed a few days there with the hope of stealing something, but he could not manage to do so. Then one day he saw the innkeeper wearing a smart new cloak (there was a festival on) and sitting in front of the inn gate. There was no one else about. The thief approached and sat down beside the innkeeper and started a conversation with him. After talking for some time the thief yawned and at the same time howled like a wolf. The innkeeper asked him why he was doing this. The thief replied, ‘I’ll tell you, but I must ask you to look after my clothes, for I shall leave them here. Now, my good man, I do not know for what reason the urge to yawn comes upon me, be it for my errors or for some other reason unknown to me. But whenever I yawn three times, I become a man-eating wolf.’ With this he yawned a second time and howled again, just like the first time. The innkeeper, hearing this and believing the thief, took fright, and got up with the intention of running off. But the thief seized hold of him by the cloak and besought him with the words, ‘Stay, my good man, and take my clothes, so that I don’t lose them.’ As he besought him he opened his mouth and began to yawn a third time. The innkeeper was terrified that he would eat him, abandoned his cloak, bolted into the inn and secured himself within. The thief went off with the cloak. This is what happens to those that believe lies.

Aesop *Fable* 419 Perry = 196 Halm (Ogden trans.)

It initially seems awkward that it should be the innkeeper that ends up losing his clothes, as opposed to the pretended werewolf, but at any rate the ruse and indeed the tale evidently depend for their success upon the prevalence of the knowledge that werewolves need to keep their clothes safe if they are to return to their human forms. We shall return to this innkeeper and his plight shortly.

<sup>37</sup> Petronius *Satyricon* 57: *si circumminxerit illum, nesciet qua fugiat*. Cf. Smith 1894, 8, Summers 1933, 155, Schmeling 2011, 257.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also now the commentary of M. Jost and J. Roy at *BNJ* ad loc. (‘Anonymous, Testimony on Arkadia (Testimonium de Arcadia)’).

### Faithless wives, inkeepers and lost clothes

Some of the medieval werewolf tales exhibit a strong parallelism with the central motif of the Hermotimus tale. Just as Hermotimus' wife betrays him as he is on a soul-flight by letting his enemies destroy his body, so the perfidious wives of the medieval werewolf tradition make off with their husband's clothes whilst he is wolf-form so that he cannot transform back. A strong example is provided by Marie de France's Anglo-Norman French ballad *Bisclavret* (1160-78 AD). Here, we are told that Bisclavret, a Breton knight, loves his wife and she him. But he disappears for three days a week and nobody knows what happens to him. One day his wife accuses him of having another lover, but he tells her he cannot tell her what his disappearances are about, for she will no longer love him, and he will lose himself. She insists and he tells her he is a werewolf that runs into the woods to live on plunder. She asks him whether he takes his clothes off, and where he keeps them. He refuses to tell her, for if he lost them he would never be able to recover his human form, but she presses him until he does: in a hollow stone under a bush near a chapel. The wife is horrified by what she has heard and terrified of her husband, whom she never wants to sleep with again. She sends for a knight who has long admired her, explains all and sends him to filch the clothing. So far as the community is concerned, Bisclavret has disappeared, and in due course his wife marries the knight. After many adventures, during which he becomes the treasured pet of a wise king, Bisclavret is eventually able to retrieve his clothes and his human form, but not before, in his final act as a wolf, he has bitten off his faithless wife's nose. Several of her descendant women are accordingly born noseless.<sup>39</sup> As in the Hermotimus tale, the consequences of the wife's treachery are visited upon the women of future generations. In connection with the Bisclavret tale I note Schuster and Schmeling's interesting contention that Petronius' werewolf's technique of turning his clothes to stone with a circle of urine is a parody of an already traditional motif in accordance with which the werewolf hides his clothes under a stone.<sup>40</sup> The motif of the werewolf's faithless wife is similarly found in the 1190-1204 AD *Lai de Melion* (again in connection with the werewolf's clothes) and in the xiii-xiv AD Latin romance *Arthur and Gorlagon*.

The Petronius and Aesop tales clearly presume an alternative narrative should the werewolf be unsuccessful in retrieving his clothes, and such a narrative seems to be manifest in the Bisclavret and to a certain extent the Melion tales. That the motif of the adulterous wife (actual or latent) that takes advantage of her husband's absence whilst on his supernatural outing itself existed already in antiquity is demonstrated by the Hermotimus story. I think, accordingly, it is highly likely that antiquity already knew a werewolf story in which a perfidious wife made off with her werewolf-husband's clothes.

Now, it gives pause for thought that Petronius' werewolf tale does actually include a faithless wife, Melissa, the wife of the innkeeper Terentius, who is maintaining an adulterous relationship with the narrator Nicerus himself.<sup>41</sup> These details, though expounded with some colour, play no significant role in the central action of the tale, and one has to wonder why they are there and what their broader significance might be. Could it be that the motif of the cheating wife is knowingly borrowed from another, already traditional, werewolf tale, perhaps one already broadly resembling the Bisclavret tale? That the ancient world was familiar with tales in which the hero was trapped in animal form and faced the central

<sup>39</sup> For *Bisclavret* see Smith 1894, 11-13; Summers 1933, 219-20, Otten 1986, 26-61, Douglas 1992, 112-116; Sconduto 2008, 39-56.

<sup>40</sup> Schuster 1930, 158-162, Schmeling 2011, 257-8.

<sup>41</sup> For the possibility that Melissa may be projected as or assimilated to a prostitute, see Schmeling 2011, 253-4.

challenge of recovering his human form is well illustrated by the other great Classical Latin novel to survive. This is precisely the plot of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in which Lucius is magically transformed into an ass, as of course it was of its mysterious Greek antecedent, reflected in the epitome *Onos*, whether penned by Lucian, Lucius of Patrae or person unknown.

Such considerations may shed light on the proverbial image Petronius deploys: 'I ran off home like the robbed innkeeper [*tamquam copo compilatus*],' says Niceros. The justification of this metaphor conventional in the Petronius scholarship is distinctly underwhelming. It makes appeal to the notion that innkeepers were traditionally themselves thievish, so that a robbed innkeeper would experience as it were a double dose of consternation.<sup>42</sup> The evidence adduced for this notion consists of:<sup>43</sup>

1. One of Theophrastus' *Characters*, which merely observes that the victim of *aponoia* (folly) is likely to go in for innkeeping.<sup>44</sup>
2. A fragment of Varro's *Mysteria* which may mean, 'that an innkeeper cheated [sc. someone] of money [*aes defraudasse coponem*], smeared a good woman [or a snake, according to the MSS] with mud and had a quarrel [literally 'drew the saw'] with a ferryman', but would more naturally be construed to mean, 'that he [or she, person unidentified] cheated an innkeeper of money, smeared... [etc.]'.<sup>45</sup>
3. Quintus Cicero's abuse of Gaius Antonius in his *Commentariolum petitionis*, where he accuses him of 'robbing all the innkeepers' in one or more of the provinces whilst purportedly undertaking a free legation, when he should rather have been canvassing in Rome in support of his candidacy for the consulship. The phraseology used (*caupones omnes compilare*) is quite similar to Petronius', whilst the general sense seems to be metaphorical, or at any rate heavily metonymic.<sup>46</sup>
4. The Aesop tale just quoted, which rather projects the innkeeper as the victim of theft rather than the perpetrator of it.<sup>47</sup>

All of these cases suggest, simply, that an innkeeper was, proverbially, far more likely to be a victim of robbery than a perpetrator of it. Petronianists would do better to support their claim with some texts passed over in silence by both Smith and Schmeling in their commentaries.

<sup>42</sup>E.g. Smith 1975, 174 (on §62), Citroni 1984 (arguing for the inherent paradoxicality of the proverb of the robbed innkeeper) and Schmeling 2011, 259 (on §62).

<sup>43</sup> The relevance to the Latin sources of innkeeper figures in early Latin drama is unclear. Ennius had a comedy entitled *Caupuncula* ('Little Landlady'; Warmington 1935-1940, i,360-1 no. 381) whilst Novius wrote an Atellan farce entitled *Maccus Copo* ('Innkeeper-Clown'; Frassinetti 1955:59). Cf. Schmeling 2011, 259.

<sup>44</sup> Theophrastus *Characters* 6,5.

<sup>45</sup> Varro *Menippean Satires* F329 Astbury = Nonius Marcellus *Compendiosa doctrina* 25,1 cf. Kleberg 1957, 83-4.

<sup>46</sup> Quintus Cicero *Commentariolum petitionis* 2.

<sup>47</sup> Aesop *Fable* 419 Perry = 196 Halm. Rogge 1927:1021-1022 argued that the 'robbed innkeeper' of Petronius was a specific reference to the Aesopic tale, the innkeeper running in terror from the supposed werewolf that had robbed him. Lefèvre 2003 argues that Niceros' tale and Trimalchio's responding one (§63) have a common conception, with both of them making significant reference to Aesopic fables (Trimalchio's witch-tale, referring, with its 'ass on the roof-tiles', to Babrius 125 Perry).

First, in *On Divination* Cicero has a wonderful story of an Arcadian visitor to Megara who was murdered by his innkeeper. Somehow or other his ghost proleptically contrived to warn a friend that the murder was about to happen whilst the man himself yet lived. Unfortunately the friend dismissed the dream, but took notice of a second one in which the ghost of the now dead man told him where to find the body. This he was able to do, bringing the innkeeper to justice.<sup>48</sup> Secondly Meroe, the most dreadful witch of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, who ensnares Socrates with erotic magic and reduces him to abject penury before jugulating and temporarily reanimating him as he tries to escape, is also an innkeeper by trade.<sup>49</sup> Apuleius may also imply that innkeepers had a more general reputation for stealing from their guests too.<sup>50</sup> These texts also imply that innkeepers were perceived as sinister and dangerous threats. In this connection, we have cause to recall also Augustine's Italian innkeeping women who drug their guests with pieces of cheese.<sup>51</sup> We may also note that Artemidorus tells that dreams of innkeepers presage death for the sick, because innkeepers and death alike welcome all.<sup>52</sup>

If the motif of Terentius the innkeeper and his adulterous wife Melissa are indeed borrowed from a proto-Bisclavret tale, then this would put Terentius the innkeeper precisely into the role of the werewolf, and the werewolf whose plight is determined precisely by the fact that he is the victim of a robbery, that of his clothes. Might the innkeeper, in wolf form, have run off precisely to forestall the theft of his clothes? Here a Flemish story published by Lansens in 1855 is of some comparative interest. I quote it verbatim from Smith's English rendering:<sup>53</sup>

A Flemish shepherd received a wolfskin from the devil on condition that he would put it on nights and go about to frighten people. At last he grew weary of it; but there was only one way to escape the skin and its consequences, which was to burn it; but, until it was completely burned to ashes, the shepherd would feel as much agony as though the skin were actually upon him. One day his master sent him off to Ypres and when he judged that the shepherd had reached the city he took the skin out of the hollow tree where it had been hidden and threw it into the fire. Instantly, the shepherd, though far off in Ypres, began to feel all the pains of being burned alive and *rushed for home at the top of his speed* [my emphasis]. Just as he reached the house the skin was completely consumed and his torture at once ceased. He thanked his master dozens of times, delighted because he was at last free of the devil and could now sleep in peace.

Smith 1894, 29

The parallel is not exact: here the werewolf is not running home to retrieve his threatened human clothes, but his rather his threatened wolf clothes. But for all that, it remains suggestive.

That Niceros should be implicitly and indirectly comparing himself, via the imagery of the robbed innkeeper, to a werewolf as he runs off to escape a werewolf might be a nice ironic touch for Petronius. (And indeed we have already noted that he compares himself to a ghost.) Let us return once again to the slight awkwardness of Aesop's story, the focus of

<sup>48</sup> Cicero *On Divination* 1,57 (44 BC).

<sup>49</sup> Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 1,5-19, esp. 7 for the innkeeping.

<sup>50</sup> Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 1,17.

<sup>51</sup> Augustine *City of God* 18,18.

<sup>52</sup> Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 3,57; cf. Fedeli 1992, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Lansens 1855, 170-171.

which switches rather oddly from the pretend werewolf's anxiety about the potential theft of his clothes, to his actual theft of the innkeeper's clothes. Perhaps here too we are dealing with a tale in which traditional motifs have become kaleidoscoped: the innkeeper must not, at any cost, have his cloak stolen, for he, again, is the actual werewolf, and depends upon his clothing for his human form.

To conclude. It is probable that there was already a sometime association between werewolfism and soul-flying in antiquity. It is possible too that antiquity already knew a werewolf story of the Bisclavret type in which the werewolf-hero's clothes were stolen by or with the aid of his perfidious wife, and perhaps too the werewolf kept an inn.

### Abbreviations

*BNJ* Brill's New Jacoby (internet resource)  
*FGrH* Jacoby 1923-

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