

*Phases of the Moon: A Cultural History of the Werewolf Film*

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The werewolf, that monstrous hybrid of human and beast, remains a powerful cultural figure rooted in thousands of years of myth and folklore. Bound up with themes of transformation, transgression, and concealed power, these shapeshifters are beings of liminality, ‘divided between the forest and the city,’ civilization and the wild, politics and nature (Agamben 1998: 105). The lore varies widely (unlike other classic monsters, werewolves lack a trope codifier à la Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*): lycanthropy is a curse, a disease, an inheritance, even an achievement; it may or may not be tied to the lunar cycle; the transformation may be fully into a wolf, some monstrous hybrid form, or merely a psychological turn; cyclical or permanent; and werewolves may or may not be vulnerable to silver. The monsters themselves have been similarly ambiguous – villains and victims, savage assailants or noble heroes – and this multivalency has made the werewolf a resonant mainstay of horror fiction to this day.

In *Phases of the Moon: A Cultural History of the Werewolf Film*, Dr. Craig Ian Mann builds on his doctoral dissertation and previous writings to construct a history of the werewolf in cinema, from its origins in silent film to its proliferation since the turn of the millennium. Mann’s first book, *Phases of the Moon* fits well within a burgeoning interdisciplinary field of monster studies (Cohen 1996; Asma 2009; Mittman & Dendle 2012; Koenig-Woodyard, et al. 2018), and presents us with an in-depth cultural history of the beast in the vein of Auerbach (1995), Abbott (2007), Hitchcock (2008), Bishop (2010), and Luckhurst (2012; 2015).

As noted in the foreword by Stacey Abbott, the history of the cinematic werewolf has received relatively little attention until now. Among werewolf scholarship, accounts of film and television are ‘few and far between’ (Mann 2020: 9), while in film studies the trend has been

toward a shallow read using a psychoanalytical framework. Collapsing the meaning of the werewolf into themes from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the werewolf is considered 'little more than a Freudian allegory for the dark side of man' (Mann 2019). The 'beast within' framing, Mann argues, has 'worked to narrow perceptions of the monster's metaphorical potential' (8), resulting in a popular view of werewolves as 'passé' (Anderson 2014), and a sort of analytical stasis that has impoverished our engagement with a figure potentially as rich and versatile as any of our other movie monsters.

*Phases of the Moon* presents a comprehensive and cohesive history of werewolf cinema from the early twentieth century to the beginnings of the twenty-first, using what Mann terms a 'cultural approach' (10) to bring a much-needed analytical nuance to the werewolf as complex and evolving metaphor. Across nine roughly chronological chapters, it traces a century's worth of films, grouping them into thematic cycles that Mann reads in dialogue with the historical context of their production and consumption. The author deftly triangulates between reviews and marketing materials of the time, archival records on the development and production of these films – including earlier drafts and unproduced scripts – along with the views and biographies of filmmakers, broader artistic developments – such as the rise of New Horror since the 1960s – and the social transformations and anxieties of each era. It is abundantly clear that Mann spent the time to view each of these films himself, authoritatively challenging earlier analyses through his well-researched approach (and, notably, doing a service to the reader, who can thereby avoid some of the more atrocious-sounding films of the bunch!).

Mann convincingly demonstrates the inadequacy of the 'beast within' as the sole lens for considering the werewolf, showing how the ever-evolving beast has been used to speak social concerns from youth, to gender, to militarism. The films discussed cover a range of territory and politics, from the conservative to the countercultural, and the author emphasizes malleability and the at times contradictory meanings and messaging of the films as they grapple with the vagaries and tensions of cultural change. At times Mann's narration of plot feels too detailed, and the social theory and historical overviews – introduced in a way that will be approachable to a generalist reader – can come off a bit clunky. Yet this is also valuable signposting, and the structure of the book lends itself well to usage as a teaching text (although the text would benefit from an appendix listing the films reviewed – perhaps in a second edition).

The author admits this history is ‘comprehensive but not exhaustive’ (213): the films are limited to North American and European productions, and his overview excludes television – understandable choices for an already wide-ranging analysis. Yet some decisions seem to undercut the general aims of the book. Mann includes youth-oriented comedies like *Teen Wolf* on the basis that such films ‘have drawn on narrative and aesthetic elements traditionally associated with horror cinema,’ yet excludes ‘fantasy, romance and action-adventure films’ in a way that feels arbitrary and even counterproductive (214). One way that shifts in the cultural meaning of werewolves have occurred is no doubt through genre. Readers may be surprised to not see reference to Oz from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Remus Lupin from *Harry Potter*, or to ‘Team Jacob’ and the *Twilight Saga*. The last in particular feels like a missed opportunity, through which Mann might have extended themes of sexuality and romance while bookending his history with a critical evaluation of the problematic portrayal of indigenous peoples – something seen in both *Twilight* and the very first silent films he discusses.

Overall, Mann accomplishes what he sets out to do: filling a gap in the academic literature on monsters and providing a valuable historical overview, an excellent reference for anyone interested in werewolves in popular media or horror cinema more broadly. If anything, we are left wanting more. Where does this history leave us? What does the future hold for the werewolf? Through its transgression of binaries – mind/body, civilized/savage, love/lust, masculine/feminine, human/animal – might the werewolf provide inspiration for navigating the complex hybridities of a more-than-human world? Might it speak to timely questions of disease, paranoia, inequality, non/belonging, and collective power? Can the fusion of human and beast help shift practices toward the nonhuman in the shadows of the Anthropocene? *Phases of the Moon* gives us a nuanced and critical read that expands our analytical vocabulary and shows us the diverse ways the werewolf has served as cultural metaphor in the films of the past. The werewolves of the future will build on this history while no doubt continuing to evolve, rewilding our imaginations while howling and tearing through the social tensions of our times.

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