What we talk about when we talk about werewolves: Genre and Genus, Wer- and Wolf

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My epigraph is from Angela Carter's short story, "The company of wolves:

> Those slavering jaws; the lolling tongue; the rime of saliva on the grizzled chops—of all the teeming perils of the night and the forest, ghosts, hobgoblins, orgres that grill babies upon gridirons, witches that fatten their captives in cages for cannibal tables, the wolf is the worst, for he cannot listen to reason.

Introduction: why talk about werewolves?

It's weird to me to be talking about werewolves, because they terrify me. Or perhaps it's not so weird. Perhaps I am talking about them because they terrify me. In a short encyclopedia entry on the relationship between horror and science fiction, Leslie Fiedler writes:

> [I]f many of us tend to speak apologetically, defensively, self-mockingly about our fondness for horror fantasy, this is primarily because of a cognitive dissonance that lies at the heart of our response, a conflict deep in our psyches between what we, as heirs to the Age of Reason, think we know to be so and what we ambivalently wish or fear to be true. We are convinced that the universe we inhabit is fully explicable in terms of 'natural' cause and effect and that once we understand their 'laws' we will be the masters of our fate. But we also suspect that we are the playthings of occult forces that we can *never* understand and that, therefore, will always control our destinies.

Perhaps I am talking about werewolves *despite* the fact that my father let me watch *An American Werewolf in London* when I was far too young. Perhaps I am talking about them *despite* the fact that I still get a tiny bit creeped out by the full moon when I am walking my dog late at night. Perhaps I am talking to you about werewolves today *despite* the fact that doing so forces me, a grown man in theory,

to acknowledge my own fear of something I know for certain not to be real.

Or perhaps I am talking to you about werewolves *because* of all of these things, *because* such discussion is productive, *because* it reveals something important about who we are in 2014, about what we think, about what we are capable of. Perhaps, along with Fiedler, I am talking about werewolves because I believe that if I *understand* them, if I understand horror, I will become master of my fate. If knowledge of equates with control over, then perhaps I believe, along with humanity, that I can avoid horror altogether by knowing it. I take as one of my core assumptions that humans do precisely this: order the world for themselves so that they might escape or ignore horror, so that they might forever forget that existence is not their understanding of it.

But if this is my motivation, I am gravely mistaken. Horror is not so much what cannot be known as the revelation of unknowability as such, that what Eugene Thacker calls the planet, that which lies behind the world (which is the sphere of human knowledge), and underneath the earth (which is the object the human understands itself to know through science, art, and philosophy), is beyond all of our philosophy.

But motivation aside, and we shall come back to the questions that my motivation implies in due course, I still have not really outlined an object of discussion or a critical context in which it might take place. So I must ask two closely related questions: First, what are we talking about when we talk about werewolves? Second, how should we talk about werewolves? We can see that the second question very much depends on the first. We can't know how to discuss werewolves until we know what a werewolf is. And yet, the first question depends closely on an answer to the second: we can't define a werewolf simply, without first addressing the assumptions we make as critics for how we will go about constructing a definition. I will address these issues in due course.

For now let us note that both of these questions beg a perhaps more fundamental one: why discuss them at all? Why not the vampire? Why not the zombie? Why not the alien or the thing? I

confess that vampires do not frighten me, especially since they became sexy with Anne Rice and sparkly with Stephanie Meyer. Yes, there are somewhat recent frightening vampires, as in Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark* or perhaps even *From Dusk Til Dawn*, but mainly vampires have become so much aristocracy, a sort of upper class to which Americans might aspire. Vampires are sexy, sparkly, cool, powerful, etc.--like Paris Hilton or Spencer Pratt, but requiring less human sacrifice for their survival. By contrast, zombies are terrifying, but not in and of themselves. The individual zombie is rarely a problem, but more importantly the zombie horrifies us in its context, which is always the apocalyptic wasteland, the aftermath of society. This wasteland horrifies us, as do the things that the survivors do to one another as if they struggle to be less human than the undead who stalk them for such uncomplex reasons as society rarely produces. The lesson here, in contrast to those vampires we desire to be, that we are always already zombies. Of course this makes sense, since vampires and zombies seem to be inversions of one another: the one smart, sophisticated, and undead, the other lacking in brains, consumers in the most obvious sense, and also undead. We are zombies, but wish to be vampires, which is to say that we are consumers and that we wish to be capitalists, if we take Marx's analogy to heart. In any case, our status as zombies and our desires to be vampires are lamentable, but so banal as to render horror impossible. In any case, they do not reveal, to me at any rate, anything beyond humanity, the unknowability that is horror. They are what we already know. The alien or thing, in contrast to the vampire or the zombie, is what we cannot know. At all. It can terrify us, no doubt, and those who encounter them in, for example, Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy recoil at the sight of the Oankali, as alien a species as we are likely to encounter in literature or film (with the possible exception of the xenomorph in the *Alien* films). However, we do not, or perhaps should not, recognize ourselves in the truly alien, that which is radically and irreconcilably other than the human. If the vampires and zombies reflect our current being back at us, then the alien (ideally at any rate) cannot mirror us in any way. There is not enough of us in them to tell us anything about what we are.

The werewolf, however, is different. The werewolf—although I should note that speaking of "the" werewolf as if the history of the beast is simply or collapsible into a single term is facile in the extreme—is, at once, both human and animal, both intelligent and savage. In some versions, the wolf and the human remain distinct, the human forgetting or thinking a dream what it does as a wolf, the wolf being a pure wolf without the benefit or hindrance of any human intelligence or morality. In other, more recent examples, the werewolf retains its human identity (albeit often subject to savage hunger and the whims of the beast) even in its lupine form. In some cases, especially older ones, the human and the animal remain distinct in body but one in soul, with the soul occupying the human during the day and the wolf at night. In Whitley Strieber's *The Wild*, the human retains his capacity for thought as a wolf, but absolutely resists knowing he is a wolf even as he looks at his paws and sees himself in the mirror. Whatever the case, the relationship between the two, between human and animal, is always blurry, leaving us enough human to know the werewolf to some degree (and judge its human half for the transgressions of the animal its paired with), and enough animal, that which is not human, to produce horror, the unknowability that is horror. As Giorgio Agamben tells us, in passage to which I will return later, the human "must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human." The werewolf is necessary, and Agamben elsewhere discusses various outlaw figures from antiquity who serve to produce identity for the citizen through an exclusion of those who exist outside of the city and are thus closer to being animal. Yes, the werewolf is necessary, because it is in the werewolf that the human can still recognize a bit of itself and all the better understand its relationship to monstrosity.

We might note that all monsters, all marvels, all prodigies, blur boundaries, between what we take, after what Bruno Latour calls the modern constitution that implicitly governs how we know, as given and static categories: the artificial and the natural, the real and the imaginary, fact and value, for example. The werewolf, however, strikes directly at the stark lines that such categories claim as their boundaries by including a little of column A (the human) as well as column B (the animal) in such a

way that the two can neither be relegated back to their respective places (Sit Ubu sit! Good wolf!), nor synthesized into a larger term, a more meta category, that can encompass them both. The werewolf to me is thus exemplary of the modern fear of hybridity that it warrants a special place in a pantheon of horror. And this is not even to mention how frightening Taylor Lautner is.

I believe that for this reason, we should think about werewolves.

Nonetheless, as I hope this discussion has thus far made clear, there are other, perhaps larger or at least more meta, issues at stake here, namely whether we should spend any time thinking about horror at all when we could focus on its opposites, such as belief and joy, or even why we should spend time thinking about the paraliterary, the benighted genres we might call, after John Clute, fantastika, which include horror, science fiction, and fantasy. I will turn to these larger questions first in order to provide us with a critical foundation on which we might come to understand the werewolf.

So, for the remainder of this talk, this is what I propose to do. First, make more *Twilight* jokes if I can, especially at the expense of Robert Pattinson's eyebrows and/or with regard to Kristen Stewert's perma-frown. Well, that's not so much the first thing I will do as it is a running goal. In my FIRST section, Critical Background, I will discuss the place of horror in my current research, which should shed light on the meta-questions of "why werewolves" by way of the meta-question of "why horror." This discussion will not only involve horror, but the other genres of fantastika as well, fantasy as science fiction. It will briefly situate these genres in modernity and the particular form of belief that modernity engendered. In my second section, the werewolf, the human, and history, I will discuss the word "werewolf" itself in order to say something about the taxonomic nature of modern knowledge practices and how they are different than previous knowledge practices. Additionally I will connect this issue of knowledge practices to a distinction between premodern and modern sensibilities and finally briefly discuss Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris* as a means to understand what is at stake in this discussion. In my final section, I will turn my attention to two contemporary werewolf narratives: Glen

Duncan's ongoing werewolf series—comprised of, to date, *The Last Werewolf*, *Talulla Rising*, and *By Blood We Live*—and Benjamin Percy's novel *Red Moon*. These werewolf texts, characteristic of postmodernity, suggest not only a very different status of the werewolf in the modern world, but a very different concepts of human knowledge and belief than we find in earlier periods. Whereas the premoderns might be understood (if in an overly simplistic manner) to *submit* to what we now call the supernatural, the moderns sought to name, know, and control it. This attempt at control produces the liberal human subject and the relationship that subject has to horror that Fiedler defines as simultaneously one of disbelief and pleasure. I suspect that most if not all people still understand themselves to be modern, and still relate to horror in such a manner (if they are fans that is). Hence the fact that horror constantly ups the ante. *The Wolf Man* gives way to *the Exorcist*, which gives way to *Friday the 13th* and other slasher fiction, and eventually to *Hostel*, *Human Centipede*, and other torture porn. Under postmodernity, even if we do not understand ourselves to live there, we find it increasingly difficult to be horrified, because unlike the premoderns who believed in the supernatural, and the moderns who believed in science, we believe in nothing. We are living in the aftermath, not of history, but of belief. Without a future to look forward to, or a past to long for, we have nothing but present, no difference that might provoke in us for a moment something called dread.

Section 1: critical background

My research at this moment involves a book project entitled *Here at the end of all things: An Archaeology of the Generic*. It considers the three genres of the fantastic—fantasy, science fiction, and horror—and the nature of belief under postmodernity and late capitalism. I start from the premise that the modernity that followed from the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment, inaugurated a secular form of belief that superseded religious belief, even if the latter of course never entirely disappeared. This secular belief took, as its object, for example, the state, the family, the and

university. Note that I am using the term modernity not to refer simply to the present but to the period that begins with the revolutions of the late eighteenth century, a period that witnessed the origins of liberal democracy and industrial capitalism. With the collapse of this religious belief at this time, which afforded humans a narrative that ended with their salvation in paradise, what Foucault calls modern institutions of enclosure (again, the state, the school, the military) began to provide a basis for individual subjectivities and relations amongst such subjectivities and between such subjectivities and various communities that made up the larger world. At this same time, German philosopher GWF Hegel argued that history had ended, namely with the Battle of Jena in 1806. Hegel did not mean that events would no longer occur, but rather that the project of humanity, the establishment of the best form of government, had come to its conclusion, at least in its broad strokes (there would be a period of refinement while the rest of the world caught up with Europe). Whereas the Judeo-Christian tradition held that the world with conclude with Rapture, Hegel argued for a secular completion of humanity that would see an end to the wars and conflicts that had to that point provided the basis for human meaning and its art.

Of course, by the early twentieth century, if not earlier, the Great War proved that the end of history had not yet come, although this failure did not stop people who followed in Hegel's footsteps in one manner or another (such as Marx, Alexandre Kojeve, and Francis Fukuyama to name three prominent examples) from speculating about other such ends. And this is precisely what I am interested in, namely the fact that modernity seems to promise the end of the story, the fulfillment of human destiny, but always in the end withholds that conclusion. Again, modernity replaces religious faith in the end with secular faith in a different sort of end only to deny that conclusion—whether in 1806, 1918 (at the conclusion of the war to end all wars), or 1989 (with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War).

Critic and novelist John Clute notes that the collective genre he calls fantastika (fantasy, science

fiction, and horror) gets its modern start with *Frankenstein*, in 1818—in short, at roughly the same that Hegel is telling us for the first time about this end of history. Clute furthers argues that each of the genres of the fantastic has as its primary structure a series of steps that move narratives to ends that can never be achieved. Most obviously, fantasy begins in wrongness (a character suddenly knows something is no longer right in the world), proceeds to thinning (when the story of the world goes awry), and then to recognition (when the characters understand that they are taking part in a story and proceed to write the end), and concludes with return or healing (when the characters set the world aright). Of course, the return or healing never actually happens. In *Lord of the Rings*, for example, Frodo believes that the end has come as he and Sam lie on Mt. Doom. I take the title of my book from this moment, when Frodo says: "For the Quest is achieved and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam." Despite Frodo's belief in not only his own doom, but that of all things, they are saved, and eventually go back to scour the Shire, an event that many critics believe concludes the trilogy in a thematic sense. At this point the story is *still* not finished. Frodo is too hurt to be healed, too scarred to find a place in the world. So he goes to the Grey Havens and crosses the sea; before he goes he leaves the Red Book, started by Bilbo and worked on by Frodo, with Sam to complete. And even *then* the story is not finish, as the appendix tells us that eventually Sam departs Middle-earth and leaves the Red Book for his daughter to complete. The *book* ends here, perhaps because Tolkien ran out of paper, but the reader is left with the knowledge that the story never ends.

Robert Pattinson's eyebrows. Just throwing that out there to see if you're paying attention.

I argue, through a consideration of fantasy, science fiction, and horror, that the genres of the fantastic demonstrate or dramatize the problem of belief under modernity, namely that what we believe in, the end, is forever withheld from us. As a result, we have entered into postmodernity characterized by an extreme jadedness, a disbelief that forecloses on our capacities to invest in the state, in family, in education, etc. We no longer have the capacity to believe and, as a result, the stories the fantasy, science

fiction, and horror tell become increasingly dark.

A better way to put this would be to say that what was always latent in fantasy and science fiction, namely horror, manifests much more clearly, much more often, and to much greater effect than ever before under postmodernity. What we call the New Weird, as practiced by for example China Mieville and Jeff Vandermeer, most clearly demonstrates this manifestation, which is really the invasion of one genre by another, through its self-conscious blurring of magic, technology, and existential dread. A novel such as Octavia Butler's *Kindred* might in this context be understood as horror. The main character, a black woman living in 1970s LA, time travels to the past to discover that she has a white, slave-owning ancestor. Moreover, she discovers that she must help him rape her great-great-great-grandmother so that she might someday be born. Time travel is a classic device of science fiction, but the revelation to the protagonist of this truth, a truth that she can in no way reconcile with her sense of self without destroying that self altogether, is horror.

In brief, fantasy is, strangely, the genre of the future. The plot of the quest fantasy, which is what we tend to understand most clearly as fantasy, involves working towards a future that is like the past, a return to an unfallen, Edenic state. I call these stories narratives of regressive futures. Science fiction is the genre of the past. That is, science fiction, in its classic form and set in the future, always presupposes and attempts to move beyond the past from which that future sprang. I call these stories narratives of the progressive past. Horror, finally, is the story of the radical present, in which no past matters and no future is possible. Horror is, according to Clute, the literature of aftermath, a literature that takes us to a point at which no more story, no more progress, no more regress, no more anything is possible. At the end of horror we are left with nothing, all potentiality in the world expended. I call horror stories narratives of the egressive present.

It is worth noting here that the root "gress" in regress, progress, and egress contains echoes of "step" or "walk"--thus referring these terms to walking or stepping forward, backward, or out of—but

also of ground or position. The regressive futures of fantasy involve a returning to a firm position; the progressive pasts of science fiction seek a firm ground from which they might have commenced. The egressive present of horror is a slice of time, one without beginning or end, without reference to past or future. Guy Endore's 1933 novel *The Werewolf of Paris* begins thusly:

> Where shall I begin my tale?
>
> This one has neither beginning nor end, but only a perpetual unfolding, a multi-petaled blossom of strange botany.

Likewise, its last chapter begins as follows:

> Where shall I end my tale?
>
> This has neither beginning nor end, but only a perpetual unfolding. A multi-petaled blossom of strange botany.

Almost nothing has changed, but the loss of a single word and a slight shift in punctuation. The "one" that refers to the tale in the first lines of the novel is lost to the second passage, a comma becomes a period—but meaning remains largely the same, which is to say irrelevant because meaning only comes from a past and only serves a future. A perpetual present, in the aftermath, which achieves the perfection of post-history or of paradise without any of the benefits of these ends (or perhaps reveals that there are no benefits), renders meaning always already impossible. The "e" in "egressive", from "ex", means "out of." Horror forces us to step out of time even as it *is* a "story" that takes place in a time out of step with itself, a present to which all things are not present, which cannot be reduced to a singular notion or the point of view of any subjectivity, no matter how well-positioned. Parallel and invisible to the subject of horror is another truth, incommensurate with the truth of the subject, something out of step with that subject which will end that subject through its revelation.

By the term "conclusion" I do not mean to suggest that the planet must explode or that all of the people must die at the end of the book or movie. The moment of horror is the moment when someone

understands that she has NEVER understood. That all of our knowledge, all of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, where we are going, where we are from, have been false. They have been false in a radical manner, not so much "wrong now" as "always already impossible." The paradigmatic horror story is HP Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, in which scientists discover that everything they have understood in their lives about geology, biology, and history is wrong. There is far more to the universe than they had ever suspected and not only can their epistemology, beholden to past assumptions and in the service of a new future, not accommodate it, but neither will any other epistemology operating according to the logic of story or history, in which the present is the meeting point of past and future. There is something unknowable, something inhuman and beyond facing that these scientists can never grasp, namely the impossibility of turning this aftermath, this endless present, into a story of either a stepping past the past to a future that will be better or a stepping back to a past in which the problems of the future have not yet happened. Of his expedition to the Antarctic during which his horror is revealed, the narrator writes: "It marked my loss, at the age of fifty-four, of all that peace and balance which normal mind possesses through its accustomed conception of external Nature and Nature's laws. Thenceforth the ten of us […] were to face a hideously amplified world of lurking horrors which nothing can erase from our emotions, and which we would refrain from sharing with mankind of we could." This amplification is analogous to what John Clute calls "thickening", the second phase of the horror tale in which the world is revealed to be far *more* complex, to contain far more than we have known or ever will know. Thickening destroys faith in one's knowledge, in one's systems and technologies of thought, and thus prevents all belief. It produces an end for the human, the being that alone understands and classifies itself.

Section 2: the werewolf, the human, and history

And here we can begin to turn our attention to Kristen Stewart and her utter inability to emote

anything more profound than "sulk." I mean, back to the *werewolf*, as an instance of horror, if for me a significant one, by way of my subtitle: "Genre and Genus: Wer- and Wolf."

The terms "genre" and "genus" are related to one another; both refer to categories and, in a simple sense, both can mean something like "type." In the present discussion "genre" refers to a type of fiction, a paraliterary type of fiction often considered lowbrow. I refer, of course, to fantasy, science fiction, and horror. We might also mention westerns, detective fiction, and romance (of the late-twentieth century variety rather than the Arthurian or Quixotic sorts). "Genus" refers to part of the Linnaean classification system by which we fit life into boxes through which we relate one type of life to another: kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species. The earliest terms on this list refer to the broadest groupings, the last terms to the narrowest.

So we categorize fiction into genres and subgenres and life into genera (the plural of genus), in addition to orders, families, etc. Further, we fit werewolves into genres—called horror or werewolf fiction, for example—and into genera, by dividing the wer from the wolf, the man from the beast. We will com to this in a moment, but for now you may note, without surprise I think, that genre and genus, in the sense I refer to here, have their roots in the same Enlightenment thought that gave us the end of history and replaced belief in the divine with the belief in the human and its institutions. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a rather Romantic work and in many ways a reaction to the Enlightenment and its great belief in materialism and science, was published near or just after the end of what we call the Enlightenment, in 1818. Linnaeus first described his taxonomy somewhat earlier, during the Enlightenment proper, in 1735. As Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes, with regard to the manner in which human being requires the concept "animal" so as to understand and produce itself:

> *Homo sapiens* […] is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. […] It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his

> own image always deformed in the features of an ape. *Homo* is a constitutively "anthopomorphous" animal (that is, 'resembling man', according to the term that Linnaeus constantly uses until the tenth edition of the *Systema*), who must recognize himself in non-man in order to be human.

While it would be too much to say that our contemporary understanding of either fantastika or life simply follows from *Frankenstein* or Linnaeus, I think we have here more than simple coincidence. Michel Foucault, in his book *The Order of Things*, describes the period under question as producing numerous taxonomic systems, systems the intent of which was to make sense of the world by placing each thing in that world into a box through which it could be related to each and every other thing. The final product of such a taxonomy, the final thing it GENerates, is the human itself. You will not be surprised that, in addition to "type" or "kind," the root "gen" in "genre" and "genus" can also mean "birth" or "beginning," as in "generation" or "genesis." Genres and genera generate. Again, the thing they finally generate is the human, which is to say the wer in werewolf.

Yes, the root "wer", W-E-R, refers to man (although I will hereafter use the term human, however anachronistically). The term can also be found, for example, in *wergild*, the gold (gild) that one would pay to a family for having killed one of its men (wer). We see *wergild* in, for example, *Beowulf* (who name, bee-wolf, is a kenning for bear—so many animals!). So "werewolf" means "man-wolf." The French term doubles up on wolves with *loup-garou*, which means "wolf-man-wolf", for what it's worth.

To be clear, human being of the modern sort (again, not of the contemporary sort but of the sort that comes about *as an idea* in the Enlightenment and its immediate aftermath), can be characterized by a practice of sorting the world into various schema, the largest of which include nature and culture, male and female, black and white. Of course such classifications existed prior to modernity, but modernity was the period that not only developed the technologies for making such distinctions (such

as the Linnaean and other scientific systems), but was that period that valued such classification in a manner that previous epochs had not. It was further during this period that the project of the nation-state began in earnest, with its center not in the sovereign whose body, Hobbes among others tells us, was the state itself, but in the people, who are now discrete individuals held together by a common belief in the larger concept called, for example, the United States of America. Each citizen occupied a unique position, but a position equal to all others (ideally anyway—in practice things were of course quite quite different). The power of the nation state derived from the collective power of the individuals harnessed through their belief and participation in the collectivity.

But at the end of the day, they had to remain discrete, separated into their respective positions. Such syntheses (through which unlike things were brought together) and analyses (through which the distinctions between them were reaffirmed) were common: the military, the school, the family, and again the state itself relied upon this process. (And we might note that different things walking in step together, walking as one, is know as congress, one of the cornerstones of modern governance.)

The werewolf violates this demand for separation, the demand that nature be *there* and its human opposite be *here*, a demand whose fulfillment founds the way we *know* as modern human beings. The werewolf is neither human nor animal, neither subject nor object. The werewolf lives outside of human law and natural law (the latter simply the human law that the human projects onto the earth to transform it into world). The werewolf reveals in fact a lack of law, or a law so deeply buried in the planet (what the humans cannot ever know) and so remote from human being that we can only become horrified to intuit its reality, in this present, right beside our own.

Such was not always the case. Werewolves are not new to modernity, and in fact stories of such transformation extend back to antiquity, at least to Ovid in the *Metamorphosis*. In the middle ages, werewolves were more likely to be the object of pity than of dread. Werewolf stories at this time often involved a theft of a man's clothes by an unfaithful wife. This theft prevented the man from taking on

human form and returning home. In the end, he would be restored and she would be punished. Whatever the gender politics of such a story, far from apposite our modern sensibilities, the werewolf is the sympathetic center of the story.

The premodern sensibility, which itself should not be taken as singular or coherent however much I simplify it here, could deal with and accept such hybridity in a manner that the modern sensibility could not. In fact, to call the werewolf a hybrid under the conditions of premodernity is problematic, as hybrids arise only *after* such taxonomies as that of Linnaeus and the separations they construct come into being. That is, you can only hybridize distinct things, things that are understood as separate from one another. Such separation was not the rule for premodern thought, as any study of magic, alchemy, and the marvelous from that period will attest. Werewolves, as such, were not abominations, or were less likely to be abominations, objects of horror, than they would be under modernity for the very fact that they were not so much beyond nature (ie "supernatural") as part of a greater and more complex continuum of nature than modernity could understand given its alacrity for taxonomy and analysis.

After the Enlightenment, which is to say after the advent of my periodization of modernity, in the nineteenth century, werewolf fiction in its modern form gets under way, as if problems of misceGENation, that is the mixing of things of different genera could be solved through a recourse to genre, which seeks to define rules and types of stories to be rigidly followed. To tell a generic tale, which the werewolf story would develop into, is to make sense of something, to give something a beginning, a middle, and an end. Such a tale destroys the horror that is the perpetual present, the simultaneity of irreconcilable truths, the egress one experience as she is cast from one reality into another.

In the modern werewolf tales, the werewolf far more often than not takes on the form of threat —to the city or nation, to woman, to racial purity. Such is the case in perhaps the most significant of

these stories, one that comes near the end of modernity and just before the advent of postmodernity, Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris*, in which an editor compiles, reads, summarizes, and comments on a series of documents produced in mid-nineteenth-century France. The subject of these documents, Bertrand Caillet, is the werewolf of the title, born to a young woman who is raped by a priest on Christmas day, which in Eastern European folklore is sometimes known as the "birthday of the werewolf." Bertrand grows up under the care of his uncle, who compiled the manuscript that provides the novel's overall narrator with the content of the story, and is victim to sexual and physical appetites expressed through his dreams of being a wolf. It turns out that these are more than just dreams, and eventually the uncle discovers the truth and attempts to subdue Bertrand through various means. Bertrand eventually flees to Paris where he joins the national guard during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and 1871. His uncle eventually tracks him down there by following a trail of corpses that could only have been the work of a werewolf. Bertrand, who did not always know of the reality of his affliction, has by now understood what he is, even if he is unable to come to terms with his it. When his uncle confronts him with taunts of "beast" and "loup-garou," Bertrand replies: "'Not that!' […] 'Isn't it bad enough to know oneself a werewolf, without having it thrown at one as a reproach?'" Here, again, we discover modern horror: the knowledge of being out of step with the present, the knowledge that the present, which is all that there is in this novel if you recall the previous discussion of its opening and conclusion, is never a single or simple thing.

Bertrand is eventually tried for his crimes, with his uncle providing written testimony to Bertrand's crimes he believes will finally condemn Bertrand to death. Instead, much to the uncle's dismay, the court declares Bertrand insane, which is to say not literally a werewolf but suffering from lycanthropy which in the past has been an actual, aberrant mental condition. The court declares that it is born of the age of reason, that it is in other words modern, and as such does not believe in the supernatural. It must reduce horror to science, to known and knowable causes. The reader is struck by

the court's lack of understanding, having just learned about the violence of history through descriptions of the war and the Paris Commune of 1871, as well as the predations of the church and society as a whole. There is horror everywhere, but it is reduced always to something safe, the present simply part of an overall story of progress in which the world becomes better than it was, the present merely a way station on the way to humanity's completion.

As I turn now to the last section of this talk in order to discuss in greater depth two contemporary werewolf stories, let us note well thing following from this very brief mention of differences between premodern and modern werewolf stories. They speak of a radical violence, one that cannot be put right simply through knowing, understanding, control. We return here to Fiedler, who tells us that perhaps our attraction to horror has something to do with becoming the masters of our destinies. Instead, it appears that horror reveals to us that not only can we never master our destinies, but that there never was a destiny to master.

Section 3: two contemporary werewolf stories

Without such a story, the human is left to itself, without foundation for its knowledge or its morality. Whereas the premoderns had religion to provide a basis for belief, the moderns had science and other modern institutions. (And note that I do not mean to suggest that the respective natures of these two objects of belief are simply the same.) However, in modernity the human constantly faced challenges to its belief, and began to tell stories to itself: about a future that return it to its past, about a past that would provide a basis for the future, and about a present that cannot be understood or controlled. We call these stories fantasy, science fiction, and horror, respectively.

For the remainder of this talk I will discuss Glen Duncan's ongoing series of werewolf novels as well as Benjamin Percy's recent novel *Red Moon*, all of which give us a very different werewolf than what we are perhaps used to, which unfortunately these days has more to do with Taylor Lautner's abs

than with existential horror.

First, consider Glen Duncan's series of novels: *The Last Werewolf*, *Talulla Rising*, and *By Blood We Live*. *The Last Werewolf* begins with Jake Marlowe—whose very name evokes another paradigmatic story of modern horror, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—finding out that he, in fact, the last werewolf. Having grown tired of life over the course of his two-hundred year existence, feeling something like guilt for having killed and eaten roughly one human per month in that time, feeling as if there is nothing left for him in the world (despite the fact that he really did not know any other werewolves or involve himself in anything like a werewolf community that he might mourn), he decides to kill himself in a sort of werewolf suicide by cop (or WOCOP—the World Organization for Control of Occult Phenomena). Jake narrates to us the worst things that he has ever done (which includes killing his wife and unborn child shortly after acquiring the Curse), all while setting his considerable affairs in order. His plans change radically, however, when he discovers Talulla, a female werewolf. This She, as female werewolves are apparently called, provides Jake with a reason to live, namely for the sake of what they call together fuckkilleat, the perfect joy, the completion of self, that comes with killing and eating a human being with a werewolf of the opposite sex while having sex as a werewolf. Jake writes,

> Bliss.
>
> Bliss defies description, obviously, since it annihilates you, since you're not there to experience it. You get the lead-up and the comedown, never the zenith. We went to the place. We came back—spoiled, made ruined addicts at a stroke. From now on nothing less would do. I thought: Two hundred years of ignorance; now this. And only two hundred years to repeat it in.

Note that this bliss is not simple, nor does it derive form something that we, as humans, would recognize as morally upstanding. As Jake is want to say, and Talulla will often repeat, it's the best for

werewolves when it's the worst for humans. That is, the werewolf enjoys its slaughter and feast more and more as the human its slaughters and feasts upon grows increasingly terrified.

Shortly after meeting Talulla, Jake writes perhaps the most significant line in *The Last Werewolf*: "Becoming a werewolf had nearly destroyed her, but hadn't. Thus she discovered the Conradian truth: The first horror is there's horror. The second is you accommodate it." Being a werewolf involves recognizing, or Sighting in Clute's language, the horror already present in the world, that the present, in my argument, is out of step with itself. But becoming a werewolf involves moving beyond the human in a certain sense, insofar as one learns to accommodate that horror (or at least this is what Jake states; whether this remains true in the subsequent novels remains an open question). However, such accommodation, which is a sort of ordering, remains impossible for the simple animal, except for that animal known as *homo sapiens* for whom such ordering is an essential, perhaps *the* essential, characteristic.

Jake's story ends with *The Last Werewolf*, the title here either becoming ironic or referring to the fact that no subsequent werewolf in the ongoing saga will be quite what Jake, namely a modernist, for whom horror involves this out-of-stepness, this recognition that things are not as they seem, and for whom, perhaps, horror can be eliminated or at the very least sanitized by putting it in its proper place. In the second novel Talulla will discover, whatever Jake said to the contrary, that she has not accommodated horror. She becomes a mother and is haunted by what she is and the fact that her monthly needs make her unfit to care for new life, even if her children are themselves werewolves. By the third novel, in which Talulla and a 20,000 year old vampire named Remshi seek a strange sort of completion in one another—Remshi will find it, *maybe*, Talulla will not—we know that nothing can be put right, that there can be no completion that is more than transitory.

By Blood We Live, the third novel in question, reveals to us aftermath, the impossibility of a coherent story, or, in the thematics of the novel, the completion of a quest. As Talulla tells us, with

reference to her new werewolf lover Walker:

> I remembered the way he told me. In a tone that conceded that his horror story—any horror story—was only ever one among many. Especially to me, multiple murderer, eater of human beings, werewolf. [The story] *can't be anything other than minor to you*, he'd said. It wasn't minor. Nor was it his only horror story. It was the told one. There was also the untold one.

There is always more than one horror story, and even monsters know horror and flee from it. Even as we learn this we also learn that werewolves and vampires are no longer hunted by the World Organization for Control of Occult Phenomena, precisely because they are no longer occult. They are now know by the world and hunted by governments and the Catholic Church. Just as the werewolf discovers the horror of its own existence, humanity discovers its own. Or perhaps the aftermath this is horror only exists in relation to another form of existence whose existence is part and parcel of that horror.

Duncan's modern werewolf, Jake, desires his own destruction because he remains capable of belief, even if his belief is constantly thwarted. He tells Talulla that there are no answers, even as he desperately hopes for them. Suicide speaks to an adherence to the way things used to be, a longing for past knowledge and past morality that no longer applies, as if there ever was a law or a morality, as if it had ever applied. The werewolves of the subsequent novels, especially Talulla, as postmodern werewolves, incapable not of belief per se, but of even feeling nostalgia for belief. Talulla's life is nothing but aftermath, nothing but a continuous present not subject to the rules of the past and without hope for a better future.

Benjamin Percy's *Red Moon* begins with a man preparing to board an airplane. Percy writes, "He looks like hundreds of other men in the airport this morning. His face could be anyone's face." The man is nervous about going through security even though the reader knows that his briefcase is empty

and that he is not carrying any weapons. After the plane takes off, the man goes to the bathroom, transforms, and proceeds to murder everyone on the plane but one. Similar attacks happen at the same time, the result of a coordinated effort by a lycan terrorist organization. Lycans, who suffer from infection via prions, the sort of disease that Mad Cow is, can transform at will, retain some of their human intelligence and control while transformed, and are strictly monitored and drugged in the US. They are, as it seems, responsible for something like 9/11. They are not only terrorists—and therefore dramatize our fear of the unknown agent who might destroy us without warning, but also Jews, as they live in a state similar to Israel (established in 1948), but this one in Scandinavia and valuable to the US not for its strategic position but for its Uranium deposits (nuclear being a primary source of electricity in this world). As Jews they dramatize racist claims about eugenics and threats to racial purity. Various groups in the US seek a cure for lycanthropy so as to stop the spread of literal infection and cleanse humanity of its animality, even as lycans attend their own schools and develop their own racial culture, their own genus as it were. Some lycans even go so far as to protest the idea of a cure, citing that they do not have a disease, but a specific form of identity. They are demonized on the news, pursued by vigilantes who call themselves the Americans, campaigned against by presidential candidates, and live for the most part in a state of abjection.

The terrorist lycans reject the US occupation of the Lycan Republic and the treatment of lycans in the US. Percy takes no sides in this debate, but makes clear that the terrorists may in fact have a point, no matter what we think of their tactics. Nonetheless, lycans are marginalized. One character recalls having “heard his science teacher say that animals didn’t feel pain the same way that humans did.” What the teacher’s claim ignores, of course, is that the distinction between human and animal is not at all clear, that the history of the human, as we have seen, has involved its own production as that which is not animal. The history of the modern human, whether revealed in genre or in genus, involves the separation of what *should* be discrete elements into discrete entities. As Percy writes,

"Transformation is forbidden," literally to the lycans whom the humans do not trust, but likewise to the humans who must remain pure. By the end of the novel the Pacific northwest has itself been transformed into a wasteland, and the terrorists have enacted plans to introduce prions, the cause of lycanthropy, into the US corn stock. The horror that the human has fought so long to prevent, its confrontation with itself, with the fact that its present is always characterized by both its humanity and its animality, shall come to pass. As such the human will be able to look forward to neither Paradise, which would strip away animality, nor to the end of history, which would see the end of humanity as such. Rather it shall only ever be able to live in the present, a present that knows no story, no meaning, no hope. In this aftermath there is no norm, no abomination. Every norm is impossible, every abomination rendered normal. There is no genre, and no genus. There are no wers, and no wolves. There simply is. Thank you.