



The asylum is no place for a werewolf
48 x 64.5cm, reduction linocut, 2005



Impressions on Paper Gallery
Unit 6, 7 Lonsdale Street, Braddon, ACT, 2612
Tel. 6161 3185. Hours 11am – 5pm Tuesday to Sunday
www.impressionsonpaper.com.au



Angela prefers the company of wolves
49.5 x 47cm, reduction linocut, 2005



Rima knows the curse of being born on Christmas Eve
70 x 56.5cm, reduction linocut, woodblock, 2006

The Girlie Werewolf Project:
Between the wolf and the dog
Jazmina Cininas

IMPRESSIONS ON PAPER 20 APRIL – 10 MAY 2006

The Girlie Werewolf Project: Between the Wolf and the Dog

The French saying *between the wolf and the dog* serves as a metaphor for dawn, that time between night's primal darkness and the 'civilising' light of day. It fits the werewolf - a changeling that embodies all that exists on the parameters of acceptable society¹ - equally well. Like the dog, werewolves co-exist in human society, but can never be fully domesticated, the periodic call of the wild compromising their manners and etiquette. The dingo - a wild dog capable of domestication or, as it's recently been argued, a domesticated dog with a feral disposition² - also floats between the wolf and the dog. Debates rage as to whether the animal should be classified as *Canis familiaris dingo* (domestic dog dingo) or *Canis lupus dingo* (wolf dingo), with fence sitters playing it safe with *Canis lupus familiaris dingo* (wolf domestic dog dingo).³ For some years now I have been using the werewolf, and more recently the dingo, to construct personal mythologies, with particular reference to my Lithuanian/Australian cultural heritage.

Women and canines share a curious relationship. The dog is 'man's best friend', unless the 'dog' in question (never mind 'bitch') is used to describe a woman. 'She-wolf' doesn't fare much better⁴. Although historically enjoying a lower profile than their male counterparts, female werewolves have been with us throughout the ages, and it might even be argued that members of the 'fairer sex' are, in fact, likelier candidates for lycanthropy than men. The wolf's history as a construct of the popular psyche more closely parallels the way women have been portrayed throughout the ages. Its classic identities, as either the selfless nurturing mother (as in the Jungle Book and Romulus and Remus stories), the diabolical werewolf, and as the ravaging man-eater respectively mirror the chaste wife, heretic witch and femme fatale archetypes traditionally reserved for representations of women.

As early as 1912, Elliot O'Donnell wrote:

*Apparently women are more desirous of becoming werewolves than men, more women than men having acquired the property of werwolfery [sic] through their own act... - in fact, they are far more cruel and daring, and much more to be dreaded, than male werewolves.*⁵

The ability to transform oneself into a wolf was considered proof of witchcraft, making witches and werewolves essentially interchangeable in the mediaeval mind. Bouget's notorious witch-hunt manual, *Discours des Sorciers* also identifies "the inability to cry"⁶ as a sure sign that a woman has sold herself to the Dark Side. Perhaps less has changed over the centuries than we might imagine. The media circus that hounded Lindy Chamberlain, with its extraordinary allegations of child sacrifice, 'heretical' religious beliefs⁷, and 'unwomanly' emotional restraint, bears all the hallmarks of a modern day werewolf trial.

Transitional moments such as the winter solstice-when day and night begin to swap places-were popular occasions for werewolf births and transformations in classic lore. Christianity saw this transmuted to Christmas Eve, supported by the argument that anyone who had the audacity to challenge Christ's birthright had to be a werewolf. When Angela Carter re-wrote *Little Red Riding Hood* as *The Company of Wolves*, she borrowed heavily from early versions of the story, re-introducing a number of archaic elements including a Christmas Eve setting.

Carter also drew conspicuous attention to the notion of the adolescent girl as liminal woman, a child on the cusp of adulthood. Her re-invented heroine eagerly embraces the wolf and her newly acquired sexual maturity, being more than happy to usurp her grandmother's place in the bed.⁸ The film version goes one step further and has Red, herself, ultimately change into a wolf, while a banquet scene draws on mediaeval urban legends of entire wedding parties turning into wolves. It is surely significant that the nuptial ceremony traditionally served to 'initiate' a maiden into womanhood; *to have seen the wolf* is French slang for loss of virginity.

In the 2001 Canadian cult hit, *Ginger Snaps*, the school nurse dismisses Ginger Fitzgerald's concerns about "hair that wasn't there before" as being "part of the territory" of becoming sexually mature⁹. Female body hair remains a contentious issue in contemporary society, often serving to undermine classic ideals of the 'civilized' lady.¹⁰ Whilst a number of younger women are no longer slaves to the razor, the persistent cultural resistance to post-adolescent female body hair is evidenced by the proliferation of hair removal products and Brazilian waxing salons. By curious coincidence, hair removal products often claim to last up to four weeks - the duration of the lunar cycle.

The full moon has not only come to be synonymous with werewolf transformations, it has

also long been regarded as a specifically feminine entity. Kathryn Edwards observes that in early 18th century France:

*The moon... was seen as controlling women physically and psychologically; the state of mind which the moon enhanced, lunacy, was gendered female, and the characteristics which the lunatic exhibited were exaggerations of perceptions about women....*¹¹

Female lycanthropes can be found among the pages of psychiatric literature,¹² while Alice White, the periodically lupine heroine of *Wilderness*, seeks psychiatric help to control her transformations.¹³

The notable shift that has occurred in recent werewolf lore is the specific linking of lycanthropy to that other monthly phenomenon, the female menstrual cycle. Ginger is bitten by a werewolf on the night she first gets her period. Inspired by a 1980's court case, the normally sweet Frida, becomes a werewolf whenever she experiences PMS in *The Curse*.¹⁴ Sadie Craddock made British tabloid headlines when her charge was reduced from murder to manslaughter, pleading diminished responsibility due to severe PMS.¹⁵

Pam Keesey clearly pays tribute to Clarissa Pinkola-Estes' eco-feminist manifesto¹⁶ in her 1996 anthology, *Women who run with the werewolves*.¹⁷ Even more prevalent than the lesbianism is the depiction of the wolf as the preferred state, and the werewolf as superior to - certainly more environmentally responsible than - non shape-shifting humans; indeed, in five of the stories the human state is seen to be the aberration.

Lopez wrote: "We create wolves...in the wolf we have not so much an animal that we have always known as one that we have consistently imagined."¹⁸ A new breed of werewolf is being imagined as a feisty, sexy, loyal, hairy, premenstrual Canadian¹⁹, at one with the wilderness, sexually adventurous and damn attractive to either sex. She is also likely to owe an increasing debt to early werewolf lore, and to view lycanthropy as the embodiment of femininity rather than its aberration. For the record, I am not a werewolf.

Jazmina Cininas
March 2006

Endnotes

1. See Jazmina Cininas, *The Girlie Werewolf Project*, RMIT Project Space, 2002.
2. "As palaeontologists we have long been convinced that dingoes were introduced by people as a domesticated animal...however, these domesticated dogs escaped into the wild, becoming dingoes." Professor Mike Archer, quoted in Stephen Cauchi, *The sly dog: study says our dingo came from Indonesia*, *The Age*, Tuesday 3 August 2004, p.7
3. BBC, *Wildfacts*, www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/149.shtml, retrieved 05/08/02.
4. Indeed, *lupa*, or 'she-wolf', was French slang for 'prostitute'. Calling a woman a 'fox', however, is a different story altogether. According to one joke, the difference between a dog and a fox is six beers. It can hardly be insignificant that foxes are hunted for sport - with the help of dogs, as it happens.
5. Elliot O'Donnell, *Werewolves*, Hertfordshire, Oracle, 1996, p.p. 277-278 (originally published in 1912 by Methuen, London)
6. Articles 35-42 of Bouget's, *Discours des Sorciers*, quoted in Kathryn A. Edwards in *Female Sociability, Physicality, and Authority in an Early Modern Haunting*, *Journal of Social History*, 3/22/2000
7. The Chamberlains were (and quite probably still are) Seventh Day Adventists.
8. See Angela Carter, *The Company of Wolves*, *The Bloody Chamber*, London, Vintage, 1979, p.117-118
9. John Fawcett, *Ginger Snaps* (film), Canada, 2000. The film was such a cult hit that it spawned two sequels, *Ginger Snaps II: Unleashed* (2002) and *Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning* (2004).
10. Artists such as Meret Oppenheim and Julie Rrap use hair and fur as a subversive motif in their practice.
11. Op.cit. Edwards.
12. In one American case study, a 46-year-old woman saw a wolf's face looking back at her in the mirror, and began displaying uncharacteristic sexual behaviour offering herself to her mother-in-law at the dinner table. See Richard Noll, *Vampires, Werewolves and Demons: twentieth century reports in the psychiatric literature*, Brunner/Mazel, New York, 1992
13. Ben Bolt, *Wilderness* (film), UK, 1996
14. Jacqueline Garry, *The Curse* (film), Not Another Hollywood Film, USA, 2002
15. See Patricia Weiser Eastel, *Women and Crime: Premenstrual Issues, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology, No. 31, April 1991.
16. Clarissa Pinkola-Estes, *Women who run with the wolves*, Ballantine, NY, 1992
17. See Ursula le Guinn's *The Wife's Story*, Steve Eller's *The Final Truth*, Judy Brewer's *Moon Running*, Marie Hersh-Tudor's *The Wilder Truth* and Jeremy E. Johnson's *Euphorbia Helioscopia* in Pam Keesey, (ed.), *Women Who Run With the Werewolves: Tales of Blood, Lust and Metamorphosis*, Pittsburgh, Cleis Press, 1996
18. Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, New York, Touchstone, 1995, p.p. 203-204
19. Canada is proving a hotbed of female werewolf activity. Not only does the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy hail from its shores, so too does Tanya Huff's *Blood Trail* (Daw Books, 1992), and the original publication of Sparkle Hayter's *The Naked Brunch* (Mc Clelland & Stewart Ltd, 2002). The Canadian werewolf is a particularly interesting breed as it offers a hybrid of colonial French, Amerindian, and Hollywood werewolf bloodlines.