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DISEASES OF THE IMAGINATION AND
IMAGINARY DISEASE IN THE
EARLY MODERN PERIOD

edited by

Yasmin Haskell

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LYCANTHROPY IN
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND:
THE CASE OF JOHN WEBSTER'S
THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

Brett D. Hirsch

In *Of Englishe Dogges*, the physician John Caius suggests that the reason why the English 'shepherd dogge is not hnge, vaste, and bigge', and is 'of an indifferent stature and growth' when compared to sheepdogs found elsewhere in Europe, is because

[...] it hath not to deale with the bloudthyrsty wolf, sythence there be none in Englaud, which happy and fortunate benefite is to be ascribed to the puisaunt Prince Edgar, who to thintent [chat] the whole countrey myght be euacuated and quite elered from wolfes, charged & commaunded the welsheme[u] (who were pestered with these butcherly beastes aboue measure) to paye him yearly rribute which was (nore the wisdom of the King) three hundred Wolfes.¹

As a result of intense hunting, increased deforestation, and the sort of state-sponsored campaigns that Caius refers to, 'none of those noysome, and pestilent Beastes were left in the coastes of England and Wales' and the wolf was effectively extinct by the end of the fifteenth century.² There were, of course, exceptions, such as those reported by Edward Topsell as 'kepr in the Tower of London to be seene by the Prince and people brought out of other countries',³ and others Caius

¹ John Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges* (London, 1576; STC 4347), sig. D4. Presumably this is the 'tribute of wolues paid in England' referred to in John Webster's *The White Devil* (London, 1612; STC 25178), sig. G2.

² Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, sig. D4'.

³ Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London, 1607; STC 24123), p. 735.

writes of as 'brought ouer from beyonde the seas, for greedynesse of gaine and to make money, for gasing and gaping, staving, and standing to see them, being a srtounge beast, rare, and seldom seene in England'.⁴

The werewolf enjoyed even less of an appearance on English soil: despite growing popularity on the Continent there were no reported cases against lycanhtopes in early modern England. Given the general lack of wolves, real or transformed, in England, why did John Webster insert a lycanthropic character into *The Duchess of Malfi*? This chapter will explore the theological, philosophical, and medical backgrounds of the lycanthrope in early modern English thought in an effort to reconcile Webster's unique choice with the wider concerns of his time: the precarious boundaries between animal and human, male and female, body and soul, sanity and madness, good and evil. Exploration may shed some light on the reasons for Webster's construction of the first werewolf to appear on the early modern English stage.⁵

The term *lycanthropy* carried multiple meanings in the early modern mind, due to varied treatments of the subject in the discourses of theology, demonology, medicine, and folklore. For example, the term *lycanthropy* referred both to the perceived *reality* of the phenomenon of metamorphosis from human form to wolf, and to the *delusion* that one was capable of such transformations (whether this delusion was the result of madness, melancholy, hallucinogenic drugs, illness, or the diabolic exacerbation of any number of these causes). In our present age, these two divergent definitions have been distinguished between the terms *werewolf*, relegated entirely to the domain of fiction and folklore, and *lycanthrope*, which has been absorbed into the scientific discourses of medicine and psychology. However, this distinction was not current in the early modern period, and 'at

⁴ Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, sig. D4^r.

⁵ While Webster's werewolf was the first (and arguably the most memorable), there are a handful of analogous dramatic cases: a werewolf appears as part of the 'masque of melancholy' in John Ford's *The Lovers Melancholy* (London, 1629; STC 11163), sig. K1; and a soldier is attacked by 'a company of Hell-ears' that are later found to be metamorphosed witches in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (London, 1634; STC 13373), sig. K2^r. Other references are largely figurative, such as the description of Shakespearean characters with 'Woluish' desires (*The Merchant of Venice*, TLN 2047, 4.1.37) or a 'Woluish visage' (*King Lear*, TLN 827, 1.4.288). All quotations from Shakespeare are from the First Folio of 1623, and are cited parenthetically throughout with references to the Through Line Numbers from *The Norton Facsimile*, ed. by Charles Hinman, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1996), followed by corresponding act, scene, and line references from the Oxford *Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

this point in English linguistic history the words *werewolf* and *lycanthrope* seem to be interchangeable'.⁶

The Biblical Tradition

Biblical literature was seen to endow physical transformations (whether into animals or pillars of salt) as divine punishments for wickedness and disobedience. According to Dennis Kratz, while the controversial doctrine of transubstantiation recognized the miraculous transformation of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist, the Church, despite this scriptural and liturgical precedent, 'steadfastly refused to accept the physical reality of the werewolf and 'it became the doctrine of the Church that werewolves do not exist'.⁷ It was inconceivable that God would allow the transformation of man into wolf (and thereby replace his soul with that of an animal) because it conflicted with the doctrine of divine charity. Therefore, the theological dismissal of the reality of the werewolf was based on the distinction between illusory and actual change. This distinction was already articulated by St Augustine in Book XVIII of *The City of God*, arguing that reports of such transformations 'are false, or incredible, because vnusuall', adding that

[...] we must firmly hold Gods power to bee omnipotent in all things: but the deuills can doe nothing beyond the power of their nature (which is angelicall, although malenolent) vnlesse hee whose iudgements are euer secret, but neuer uniuert, permit them. Nor can the deuills create any thing (what euer shewes of theirs produce these doubts) but onely cast a changed shape ouer that which God hath made, altering onely in shew.⁸

For Augustine, the power to alter and transform Nature is the prerogative of God alone. Consequently, he dismisses the belief that 'the deuill can forme any soule or body into bestiall or brutish members, and essences', positing instead that 'they haue an vnspeakable way of transporting mans fantasie in a bodily shape', so that

⁶ Charlotte F. Otten, *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), Introduction, p. 8.

⁷ Dennis Kratz, 'Fictus Lupus: The Werewolf in Christian Thought', *Classical Folia*, 30 (1976), 57–80 (pp. 61–62). For a more detailed discussion of the rhetorical debates surrounding bodily transformations and the Eucharist, see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf', *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 987–1013.

⁸ St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. by John Healey (London, 1610; STC 916), XVIII, p. 694.

'while the bodies of the men thus affected lie in another place, being aliue, but yet in an extasie fatte more deepe then any sleepe', the demonic can *appear* to alter reality by affecting a sensory experience akin to dreaming, in that 'though it be not corporall, yet seemes to eary itselife in corporall formes'.⁹

Augustine's distinction between real and illusory change was affirmed by St Thomas Aquinas and incorporated into canon law with the *Canon Episcopi*, which denounced many popular beliefs including transformations other than those by God:

Whoever therefore believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed to better or to worse or be transformed into another kind of likeness, except by the Creator Himself who made everything and through whom all things were made, is beyond doubt an infidel.¹⁰

The notion that God could transform a man into an animal (or allow the Devil to do so) was certainly terrifying for medieval and early modern Christian thinkers, since it threatened not only the concept of a charitable, loving God, but also that of sin and salvation: indeed, if a man is transformed into a beast (and thereby divorced of his rational nature), he is not responsible for any sinful act he commits, since the rational consent of the sinner is lacking. This is not the case when relinquishing one's own sense of rational control, since any indulgence in carnal desire flows from the consent to abdicate restraint — a man who chooses to live like a beast is answerable for his sins. Thus, as Kratz observes, the Christian theological rejection of the reality of the werewolf is 'essentially a rejection of two frightening notions: that God or the Devil can divorce a living person from the possibility of Heaven' and 'that a man can commit a sinful act for which he is not responsible'.¹¹

By way of illustration, let us briefly consider two responses available to early Jacobean readers of the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel, where the King was 'driuen from men' for seven years as punishment for his pride, during which time he 'did eate grasse as oxen', living like a beast, with his body 'wet with the dew of heauen, till his haire were growen like Eagles feathers, and his nailes like birds clawes'.¹² In his *Hexapla in Danielem*, published in 1610, Andrew Willet

⁹ St Augustine, *The Citie of God*, XVIII, p. 694.

¹⁰ Quoted in Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, ed. by Arthur C. Howland, 3 vols (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), I, 180.

¹¹ Kratz, 'Fictus Lupus', p. 78.

¹² Daniel 4. 29–37. All biblical references are to the King James Version.

prefaces the question 'Of Nebuchadnezzars transmutation' by considering 'first in generall of the diuerse kinds of transmutation', of which he identifies five varieties.¹³ The first kind is characterized by Willet as 'a fabulous and poetical fiction, rather then any true alteration and change', citing the bestial transformations found in the myths of Homer, Apuleius, and Pliny.¹⁴ A 'kind of naturall and phisicall transmutation', such as 'how eertaine wormes become butter-flies', forms the basis of Willet's second category of transformation.¹⁵ The third kind includes 'phantasticall changes, such as are wrought by soerie and art Magicke', such as the Pharaoh's magicians turning rods into snakes (Exodus 7. 10–12), or reports of 'changes of men into the forme of wolues and other beasts' in other countries.¹⁶ God's turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19. 26) is cited as an instance of the fourth kind of transformation — 'those true changes, which haue beene made by the power of God' — which includes also the transformation of 'Moses[?] rodde into a serpent' and Christ's 'water into wine'.¹⁷ Willet's final category of transformation is the 'spirituall change', which is 'in the minde and vnderstanding', whether for the better, such as 'when men are renewed by grace, and from ignorance, infidelitie, carnall lusts, are turned', or for the worse, such as 'when the spirit of God left Saul' and an evil spirit possessed him in its place.¹⁸ For Willet, Nebuchadnezzar's change from 'a reasonable man, [who] became in his minde an vnreasonable beast' falls under this last category of transformation, since 'he had not lost his shape, but his minde'.¹⁹ To explain the biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar's physical deformities, Willet suggested that 'as his minde was become sottish and brnitch, so the constitution of his bodie was much changed'.²⁰

The second response to this biblical episode for our present consideration comes from William Perkins's *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, published posthumously in 1606. On the topic of melancholy, Perkins describes 'Beastiall or Beastlike *Melancholie*', a 'disease in the braine whereby a man thinkes himselfe to be a beast of this or that kind, and carries himselfe accordingly', such

¹³ Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem* (London, 1610; STC 25689), pp. 130–32 (pp. 130, 131).

¹⁴ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 130.

¹⁵ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 130.

¹⁶ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 131.

¹⁷ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 131.

¹⁸ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, pp. 131–32.

²⁰ Willet, *Hexapla in Danielem*, p. 132.

as those 'which haue thought themselves to be wolues, and haue practised woluish behaiour'.²¹ Turning to Nebuchadnezzar, Perkins acknowledges that 'some are of opinion that his humane shape was taken from him, and that he was transformed into a beast', and that 'at least he had the soule of a beast in stead of a humane soule for a time'. 'But they are deceiued', he continues, 'for there is no such transportation of soules into bodies, either of men or beasts.' Rather, 'others thinke, that Nebuchadnezzar was smitten in the braine with this disease of beastlike Melancholy', leaving him 'so bereft of his right minde, that he carried himselfe as a beasr'. While Perkins notes that 'this interpretation is not against the text', he is apparently uncomfortable reading the biblical account in wholly medical terms, conceding 'the like is true in historie, by diuerse examples, though it were not true in Nebuchadnezzar'.²²

Classical Metamorphoses

Animal transformations are frequently found in Classical literature, such as men 'turn'd to swine' by Circe in Book X of Homer's *Odyssey*,²³ or any of the vivid tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where men and women undergo metamorphoses into a diverse range of animal species.²⁴ Of particular interest for our present purposes is the first tale in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Calling a council to address mankind's increasing degradation through the ages, Jove describes his descent to the earth where Lycaon, King of the Arcadians, impiously doubts Jove's divinity and plots to kill him, and, as an added insult, serves Jove the flesh of a hostage:

In dead of Night, when all was whist and still,
Me, in my sleepe, he purposeth to kill.
Nor with so fonle an enterprize content,

²¹ William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge, 1606; STC 19669), p. 192. See also the chapter by Yasmin Haskell in this volume.

²² Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, p. 193. On the early English literary reception of the Nebuchadnezzar story, see: Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

²³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by George Chapman (London, 1614; STC 13636), p. 152.

²⁴ For a useful survey of the werewolf in classical antiquity, see: Jan R. Veensra, 'The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast: Cultural Change, Lycanthropy, and the Question of Substantial Transformation (from Petronius to Del Rio)', in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veensra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 133–66 (pp. 134–44).

An Hostage murders, from *Molossia* sent:
Part of his seuer'd scarce-dead limmes he boyles;
An other part on hissing Embers broyles;
This ser before me, I the horse ore-trn'd
With vengefull flames, which ronnd about him burn'd.
He, frighted, to the silent Desart flies;
There howles, and speech wirth lost indeavour tries.
His selfe-like jawes still grin: more then for food
He slanghrers beasts, and yet delights in blood.
His armes to thighs, his clothes to bristles chang'd;
A Wolfe; not much from his first forme estrang'd:
So horie hair'd; his lookes so full of rape;
So fiery ey'd; so terrible his shape.²⁵

In these myths, as Joyce Salisbury has insightfully observed, the metamorphoses 'usually occurred because people exhibited the characteristics of an animal to an extreme degree' and the physical change 'only made manifest the bestial nature that had been within'.²⁶ Thus, Lycaon's bloodlust and cannibalism results in his transformation into a wolf, 'not much from his first form estrang'd'.

As Raphael Lyne has noted, Ovid's work 'had a varied profile' in early modern England, 'serving as a school textbook and illicit pleasure, natural philosophy and racy narrative'.²⁷ While schoolboys were taught to translate passages of Ovid in Latin classes, and poets (including Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare) admired and imitated his style, humanists and religious commentators sought to reconcile the more unsavoury pagan aspects of Ovid's work with their own Christian theology. An excellent example of this interpretive strategy is to be found in George Sandys's translation of and commentary on the text, *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures*, completed in 1632. In his commentary on Lycaon's transformation, Sandys writes that

It is wonderfull saith Pliny, to consider how farre the Graecian credulity will extend: no by so impudens that wanteth a witness. But would he not retract his censre, were he now

²⁵ George Sandys, *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures* (London, 1632; STC 18966), sig. A3'. Earlier English readers were no doubt more familiar with Arthur Golding's translation (London, 1567; STC 18956), where Lycaon, 'thirsting still for blond as heretofore', has 'His garments trnde to shackie hair, his armes to rugged pawes: | So is he made a rauening Wolfe: whose shape expressly draws | To that the which he was before' (B4').

²⁶ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 159.

²⁷ Raphael Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses, 1567–1632* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

aliue, and saw what is so ordinarily said to be practised by the witches of *Germany*, who take and forsake the shapes of wolues at their pleasre, and for which they are daily executed?²⁸

Interestingly, Sandys goes on to suggest 'As wee to magicall deceptions; so he [Pliny], a Naturalist, perhaps would ascribe it to thar melancholy disease'. Who is this *we* to which Sandys is referring? His contemporaries? His countrymen? Did Sandys and his readers understand lycanthropy as a 'magicall deception' or a 'melancholy disease', a natural or supetnatural phenomenon? To address these questions, we turn now to a consideration of the intersection of demonological and medical discourses of lycanthropy.

Demonology and Witchcraft

Whilst the Church was concerned with distancing itself doctrinally from accepting the reality of physical transformations from man into wolf or other beasts, demonology picked up where orthodox theology left off, tackling the logistics of the illusory change as discussed by Augustine. Absorbing lycanthropy into the wider discussion of witchcraft, demonologists 'agreed that shape-shifting was achieved through demonic agencies and pacts with the Devil'; however, 'they disagreed among themselves over the precise mechanisms by which such a metamorphosis was accomplished'.²⁹

Common procedures included donning magic items obtained from the Devil, such as a belt or wolf pelt,³⁰ or the application of magic ointments or salves.³¹ In his *Discours des Sorciers*, Henri Boguet argued that these salves were used to deaden the senses and induce sleep, allowing the Devil to commit those acts 'which the witch has in mind to do, giving himself the appearance of a wolf' (que

²⁸ Sandys, *Ovids Metamorphosis*, sig. D3^r.

²⁹ H. Sidky, *Witchcraft, Lycanthropy, Drugs, and Disease: An Anthropological Study of the European Witch-Hunts* (New York: Lang, 1997), p. 218.

³⁰ Such as in the case of Peter Stumpf (1589), discussed in detail later in this chapter.

³¹ As Veenstra reports, 'in his *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius parodies this magical shapeshifting when he describes the comic fate of the magician Lucius who turned himself into an ass by using the wrong ointment', and that 'Apuleius himself had to face trial for his detailed descriptions of the ointments, which incurred a charge for sorcery' ('The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast', p. 143). The use of ointments also is described in the trial records of Pierre Bourgot (1521), Georges Gandillon (1598), and Jean Grenier (1603), the last discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Satan quelquefois endort le sorcier dertiere vn buisson, & qu'il va luy seul exccuter ce que le sorcier a en volonte, se faisant voir en apparence de loup). Upon completion of these acts Satan 'so confuses rhe witch's imagination that he believes he has really been a wolf and has run about and killed men and beasts' (ce pe[n]da[n]t il trouble telleme[n]t l'imaginatiue du sorcier, qu'il luy semble qu'il ait esté loup, & qu'il ait couru, & tué des personnes, & des bestes). This scenario also allowed Satan to inflict on the body of the witch whatever sympathetic wounds had been sustained whilst in wolf form. Boguet, however, did not excuse the witch from responsibility for these demonic acts, '[since] even if they were guilty in nothing but their damnable intention [those who harbour such intentions have] first renounced God and Heaven' (Et puis quand il n'y auroit autre chose, que la damnable intention qu'ils ont [...] qu'au preallable ils n'ayent renoncé à Dieu, & au Ciel).³² Nicholas Rémy, agreeing with Boguet, argued that although lycanthropic acts were instigated or carried out by demons, prosecution was justified on the grounds of moral violarion, that these criminals were 'so notoriously befouled and polluted by so many blasphemies, sotceries, prodigious lusts, and flagrant crimes [that they were] justly to be subjected to every torture and put to death in the flames' (videlicet tot impietatibus, veneficijs, portentosis libidinibus, flagitiosisq[ue]; facinoribus vitam illis aperte[m] esse inquinatam ac contaminata[m] [...] vt e[st] iure esse non dubite[m] omnibus tormentis exeruciatos igni interficere).³³

However, there were some authorities who insisted on the reality of lycanthropic shape-shifting, such as Jean Bodin, who maintained in *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* that actual physical transformation was 'an absolutely certain, true and undoubted thing' (pour chose tres certaine, veritable & indubitable),³⁴ since so many respectable witnesses — classical and contemporary historians, poets, doctors, and philosophers — firmly believed its reality. Bodin attacked sceptics

³² Quotations are taken from Henri Boguet, *Discours des Sorciers*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1603), sigs. I3, I6^r. The English translation is from *An Examen of Witches*, trans. by E. Allen Ashwin, ed. by Montague Summers (London: Rodker, 1929). The earliest extant edition is from Lyon, 1602, although an earlier original publication is likely. Summers speculates that the original was published in Lyons in 1590 (pp. xii–xiv).

³³ Nicholas Rémy, *Demonolatria* (Lyon, 1595), 3B4^r. The English translation is from *Demonolatriy*, trans. by E. Allen Ashwin (London: Rodker, 1930), p. 188.

³⁴ Jean Bodin, *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (Paris, 1580), sig. 2C1^r. The English translation is from *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. by Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), p. 127.

such as Johan Wier, who argued in his *De Praestigiis Daemonum* that lycanthropy was the result of the demonic exacerbation of mental illness.³⁵ As Stuart Clark has observed, authors like Bodin were in the minority, and most had trouble accepting that the phenomena of physical transformation were real, on the grounds that, as we have seen, 'it was philosophically and morally distasteful to suppose that the human *anima* could function in an animal body (and vice versa)', and equally impossible 'for the devil to either effect the transfer or transmute substantial forms'.³⁶ Instead, other Continental demonologists suggested that lycanthropy and other supposed transformations were wrought by demonic or hallucinatory illusions, or by melancholic delusions.³⁷

For the most part, English demonologists were similarly sceptical. Examination of the demonological tracts published in England during this period uncovers a trend from the representation of lycanthropy as a manifestation of the demonic exacerbation of illness, madness, or melancholy, through to an understanding of lycanthropy set out in wholly natural terms. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Reginald Scot dismissed lycanthropy and actual transformations as 'verie absurdities', holding that 'the transformations, which these witchmongets doo so rave and targe upou' is 'a disease proceeding pattlie from melancholie', denying outright the possibility of demonic intervention in such cases.³⁸ Henry Holland, in *A Treatise Against Witchcraft*, considered the 'transformation of men and women into wolves and cattes' to be 'clean contrarie against nature', and the product of 'Sathanicall

³⁵ For a more detailed examination of Wier's treatment of metamorphosis, see Guido Giglioli, 'Becoming Animal: Johann Weyer's Critique of the Imagination as an Agent of Metamorphosis', in *Metamorphosis in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. by Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, forthcoming.

³⁶ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 191–92.

³⁷ See, for example: Henriens Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum* (1486–87), ed. and trans. by Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59C–63C, 119A–121A; Claude Prieur, *Dialogue de la lycanthropie* (Louvain, 1596), fols 22'–55'; Jean Beauvois de Chauvincoirt, *Discours de la lycanthropie* (Paris, 1599); Philip Ludwig Elich, *Daemonomagia* (Frankfurt, 1607); Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum* (Milan, 1608), pp. 50–51; Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons* (Paris, 1612), pp. 243–45; and Francisco Torreblanca, *Daemonologia* (Mainz, 1623), pp. 240–44. In his *De la lycanthropie* (Paris, 1615), Jean de Nynauld provides an extensive list of the ingredients used by witches to prepare their ointments (pp. 27–63), concluding that their hallucinatory qualities explain all reports of transformation (pp. 67–81).

³⁸ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584; STC 21864), pp. 89, 102.

delusions' in those who 'abound in melancholy'.³⁹ Later authors would expand on this theme, suggesting that the Devil preyed on those who suffered from abundant melancholy, and were therefore more susceptible to delusions of this sort: for example, in *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, George Gifford found that the Devil can 'make the witches in some places beleeve that they are turned into the likeness of wolves', since he 'can set a strong fantasie in the mind that is oppressed with melancholie'.⁴⁰ Likewise, William Perkins's *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* argued that lycanthropy was the result of 'brains possessed and distempered with melancholy', which the Devil exacerbated:

Agaïne, the devill knowing the constitutions of men, and the particuler diseases wherunto they are inclined, takes the vantage of some, and seconderth the nature of the disease by the co[n]currence of his owne delusion, thereby corrupting the imagination, and working in the minde a strong perswasion, that they are become, that which in truth they are not.⁴¹

Moving further away from the supernatural model, the then King James VI of Scotland wrote in his *Daemonologie* that lycanthropes, or 'men-woolfes', are the product 'of a naturall super-abundance of Melancholie', which had reportedly 'made some thinke themselves Pitchers, and some horses, and some one kinde of beast or other'.⁴² Similarly, John Deacon and John Walker rejected the diabolical aspects of lycanthropy in favour of a medical model, in a fictitious dialogue between the figure of a lycanthrope, *Lycanthropus*, and a physician, *Physiologus*:

Yon are called *Lycanthropus*: that is, a man transformed to a wolfe: which name is verie fitlie derived from the verie disease it selfe that disorders yonr braine, called *Lycanthropia*. Which word, some *Physitions* do translate *Daemonium Lupinum*, that is, a *woolwish Demoniacke*: others *Lupina melancholia*, and *Lupina insania*, that is a *woolwish melancholie*, or a *woolwish furie* and *madnes*. And it is norhing else in effect, but an infirmitie arising upon such phanrasticall imaginations, as do mighrily disorder and tronble the braine.⁴³

³⁹ Henry Holland, *A Treatise Against Witchcraft* (London, 1590; STC 13590), sig. F3.

⁴⁰ George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (London, 1593; STC 11850), sig. K3.

⁴¹ William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1608; STC 19697), sig. B4'.

⁴² James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597; STC 14364), sig. 13. James republished the volume in England upon his accession to the English throne (London, 1603; STC 14365), where the quote is found on sig. 12'.

⁴³ John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels* (London, 1601; STC 6439), sig. L8.

Other English authors on witchcraft were hesitant (or simply unable) to accommodate transformations within the discourse of medicine, and so clung to the familiar territory of supernatural causation. However, it must be noted that the majority of these writings barely mention lycanthropy, or transformations in general for that matter; and on those rare occasions mention is only in passing. For example, while Thomas Cooper's *The Mystery of Witchcraft* provides a voluminous examination of all aspects of witchcraft, his discussion of transformations, 'asa Witch into an Hare and Cat', is completed within a single paragraph — that Satan 'cannot change one creature into another', and that 'this is a meere delusion of the sense'.⁴⁴ These infrequent (and insubstantial) deviations aside, perhaps more the product of neglect than intention, the overall trend returned to its course: the physician John Webster's *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* argued that 'many persons, by reason of Melancholy in its several kinds' had been 'mentally and internally (as they thought, being deprived in their imaginations) changed into Wolves', emphasizing that 'the change was only in the qualities and conditions of the mind, and not otherwise'.⁴⁵

It is significant that lycanthropy was incorporated into discourses of demonology and witchcraft in England, since this reflects a broader popular concern with evil and *maleficia*, particularly from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards when witchcraft pamphlets, trial accounts, and demonological treatises were increasingly imported from the Continent.⁴⁶ Whether or not the increased dissemination and consumption of witchcraft publications, local and imported, points to an increase

⁴⁴ Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witch-Craft* (London, 1617; STC 5701), sig. F4. Another example is John Cotta's *The Triall of Witch-Craft* (London, 1616; STC 5836), which discusses the 'seeming transmutions by the Divell of the substances of Men into Cattes, and the like' only as part of a much larger effort to establish that the Devil cannot act contrary to Nature, and therefore 'cannot make a true transmutation of the substance of any one creature into another' (sig. F1').

⁴⁵ John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London, 1677; Wing W1230), p. 95.

⁴⁶ Representative examples include: *A True Discourse Declaring the Damnable Life and Death of One Stubbe Peeter*, trans. by George Bores (London, 1590; STC 23375), and *A Strange Report of Sixe Most Notorious Witches* (London, 1601; STC 20890), both translated from Dutch copies of German pamphlets; Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches*, trans. by Thomas Twyne (London, 1575; STC 6226), originally published in Latin in France; and *The Life and Death of Lewis Gaufrede* (London, 1612; STC 11687), Michel Marescot, *A True Discourse, Vpon the Matter of Martha Brossier*, trans. by Abraham Hartwell (London, 1599; STC 3841), and Simon Goulart, *Admirable and Memorable Histories of Our Time*, trans. by Edward Grimeston (London, 1607; STC 12135), all translated from the French.

in belief in witchcraft itself, English readers could afford to be more sceptical than their Continental counterparts when it came to werewolves, since the chances of being attacked by a wolf, let alone a werewolf, on English soil, were negligible. Both creatures were, at best, theoretical threats for the English: Edward Topsell felt that little 'benefit shal come to the knowledge of them by the English reader' simply because direct contact with wolves was so unlikely.⁴⁷ At any rate, no less an authority than the King insisted that if werewolves existed in England that they were to be found solely in the deluded minds of severe melancholics.

Medicine, Madness, and Melancholy

Attitudes towards lycanthropy were changing by the close of the sixteenth century, and this change was reflected in the approach adopted by the courts on the Continent. The last major werewolf trial of the century began in 1598, with the discovery of the body of a fifteen-year-old boy in Angers. A group of men stumbled upon the corpse being mutilated by a pair of wolves, which scampered into the undergrowth when the men gave chase. Following the trail of bloody paw prints, the men found a half-naked man crouching in the bushes — his teeth were chattering and his hands, described as claws with long nails, were marked with blood. The man was a poverty-stricken mendicant named Jacques Roulet, and at his trial Roulet testified that his lycanthropic ability was the result of a magic salve in his possession. The trial court sentenced Roulet to death, but an appeal was lodged. The court of appeal held that 'there was more folly in the poor idiot than malice and witchcraft', and his sentence was commuted to imprisonment in a madhouse, where he was to receive religious instruction.⁴⁸ Subsequent cases, such as that of the young werewolf Jean Grenier in 1603,⁴⁹ affirmed the new approach

⁴⁷ Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, p. 478. Topsell is specifically referring to knowledge of the 'magical inuentions about the parts of wolnes', but the statement is ambiguous: is this knowledge of little benefit because he doubts the efficacy of these 'magical inuentions', or because contact with wolves in England was so unlikely that such details were unnecessary?

⁴⁸ The Roulet case is reported in Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Book of Were-Wolves* (London: Smith, Elder, 1865), pp. 69–84. The judgment of the appeal appears at p. 84.

⁴⁹ As reported in Baring-Gould, *The Book of Were-Wolves*, pp. 85–98. In Grenier's case, the court determined that he was incapable of rational thought, stating that 'the change of shape existed only in the disorganized brain of the insane, consequently it was not a crime which could be punished' (p. 98), and so sentenced Grenier to spend the rest of his life in a monastery.

by the courts, which tended to view the werewolf as 'no longer the product of a fleshy, demonic transformation, but of an unstable mind'.⁵⁰

It is at this point that the discourses of demonology and medicine intersect: as we have seen, English demonological opinion on the werewolf and transformations in general tended towards ascribing lycanthropy to madness and melancholy, although a minority view continued to profess its supernatural origins. The opinions of the corporal physicians of the time elicit a similar trend: they move towards a wholly medical model based on natural infirmity, whilst at the same time severing any lingering earlier distinctions between spiritual and natural causes.⁵¹ As Carol Thomas Neely has shown, Thomas Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* attempts to draw careful distinctions 'between spiritual and physiological melancholy', but she points out that these 'repeatedly collapse', since 'both states are characterized by the same symptoms' and each predisposes the sufferer to the other.⁵² The publication of Edward Jorden's *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* continued the effort to distinguish the spiritual from the natural, bewitchment from insanity. Jorden argued that experienced physicians, like himself, were 'best able to discern what is naturall, what not naturall, what preternaturall, and what supernaturall' and so could give unique insight into the credulity of witchcraft victims at trial.⁵³ Appearing simultaneously was Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, which attacked the (then illegal) Catholic and Puritan practices of exorcism, on the grounds that both demonic possession and exorcism were fraudulent spectacles.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 54. It is unclear whether Fudge intended 'fleshy' or 'fleshy'.

⁵¹ Of course, as Jeremy Schmidt reminds us, the vigorous tradition of applying 'spiritual physick' to treat melancholy survived well into the eighteenth century, even as the language of consolation was overtaken by the language of pathology: *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), passim.

⁵² Carol Thomas Neely, "Documents in Madness": Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 315–38 (p. 319).

⁵³ Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London, 1603; STC 14790), sig. C1.

⁵⁴ Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1603; STC 12880). For an important and insightful discussion of Harsnett in relation to Shakespeare, see Stephen Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 163–87.

Although witchcraft prosecutions continued in England until the end of the seventeenth century, Neely has observed that the growing tendency 'to medicalize the behaviour of witches and the bewitched' evinced by these treatises and others functioned to question not only the authority of the trials, but the supernatural mentality that supported it; and in the areas of 'bewitchment, possession, witchcraft' and lycanthropy, the emerging medical model would provide 'a psychological alternative to conditions formerly defined as supernatural in origin and treatment'.⁵⁵

Perhaps the most representative contemporary English medical diagnosis of lycanthropy is to be found in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*,⁵⁶ which refers lycanthropy 'to Madness, as most do', although he reports that some authorities have considered it 'a kind of Melancholy'. Renaissance medical authorities treated the terms *melancholy* and *madness* promiscuously, or, as Burton puts it, the terms 'are confounded by many Writers', and consequently at times it is difficult to discern the distinction between them. Burton's own distinction between the two terms is based on the degree of violence involved:

Madnesse is therefore defined to be a vehement *Dotage*, or raving without a fever, farre more violent then *Melancholy*, full of anger and clamor, horrible lookes, actions, gestures; and troubles the Patient with farre greater vehemency both of Body and Minde, without all feare and sorrow, with such impetuous force, and boldnesse, that sometimes three or foure men cannot hold them.⁵⁷

The testament of the later physician Robert Bayfield affirms Burton's position in his account of lycanthropy: 'Wolf-madness, is a disease', writes Bayfield, who follows with the story of a patient of his, 'a certain young man' with 'a wild and strange look' who set about 'barking and howling'. In the course of his inspection, Bayfield 'opened a vein, and drew forth a very large quantity of blood' which was 'black like Soot'. The patient, having been provided with a potion and an emetic to remedy his abundance of black bile, 'became perfectly well'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Neely, "Documents in Madness", p. 321.

⁵⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621; STC 4159).

⁵⁷ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1.1.1.4, pp. 12–13.

⁵⁸ Robert Bayfield, *A Treatise De morborum capitis essentiis & prognosticis* (London, 1663; Wing B1467), pp. 49–51.

Webster's Werewolf

Having duly considered the theological, demonological, and medical backgrounds of the werewolf up to Webster's time, the discussion will now turn to the lycanthropic character of Ferdinand, with particular attention to the cause of his lycanthropy. The Duke's affliction is first reported by the doctor as a 'very pestilent disease' which 'In those that are possess'd with't there ore-floues | Such mellencholy humour, they imagine | Themselues to be transformed into Woolues' (L2, 5.2.5, 8–10).⁵⁹ The doctor proceeds to inform Pescara (and the audience) that lycanthropes not only imagine themselves wolves, but also act accordingly, running about 'Church-yards in the dead of night' to 'dig dead bodies vp' (L2, 5.2.11–12). As it turns out, Ferdinand has been seen at midnight behind a church, 'with the leg of a man | Vpon his shoulder' (L2, 5.2.14–15) and howling. When approached during this particular incident, Ferdinand claimed 'he was a Woolffe' and that while 'a Woolffes skinne was hairy on the out-side', his was hairy 'on the In-side' (L2, 5.2.16–18). This diagnosis reveals that Ferdinand's lycanthropia is a *natural* illness, since it is referred to as a 'very pestilent disease' and a 'madnesse' (L2, 5.2.26), and it is treated as such: although he is 'very well teouerred', this is 'nor without some feare | Of a telaps' (L2, 5.2.21–22).

It has been argued that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is a supernatural phenomenon, more precisely, an episode of demonic possession.⁶⁰ Typically, this argument relies on the supernatural overtones of other events in the play and on a heavy-handed interpretation of the doctor's use of the word 'possess'd' (L2, 5.2.8). There is

⁵⁹ All references to the play are given as signature references from *The Tragedy of the Duchesse of Malfi* (London, 1623; STC 25176), followed by corresponding act, line, and scene numbers from the edition of the play in *The Works of John Webster*, ed. by David Gunby, David Carnegie, and Antony Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995–), 1.

⁶⁰ Albert H. Tricomi, 'Historicizing the Imagery of the Demonic in *The Duchesse of Malfi*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34 (2004), 345–72; and 'The Severed Hand in Webster's *Duchesse of Malfi*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 44 (2004), 347–58. Although Tricomi tries to distance himself from Gunby's analysis of the play, both critics argue that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is a case of demonic possession: see David Gunby, 'The Duchesse of Malfi: A Theological Approach', in *John Webster*, ed. by Brian Morris (London: Bann, 1970), pp. 179–204. Susan Wiseman, in her provocative discussion of the play, 'Hairy on the Inside: Metamorphosis and Civility in English Werewolf Texts', in *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*, ed. by Erica Fudge (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 50–69, argues that while Ferdinand is not possessed, 'the play's language toys with this possibility' (p. 61).

nothing in the text of the play to suggest that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is an instance of demonic possession — in fact, the only reference to any character being possessed with the 'diuell', or anything else for that matter, is to the Cardinal, who is 'able to possesse the greatest | Diuell, and make him worse' (B1, 1.1.44–46). Notwithstanding, an element of the demonic undoubtedly informs the play — in particular, the scenes featuring a dead man's hand, the parading of grotesque wax figures of the murdered Antonio and his children, and the ghostly graveyard echo — but this, coupled with the literal interpretation of a term intended to be taken figuratively, is not enough to maintain that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is 'an inadequately understood, rare but terrible spiritual disease that possesses his whole being'.⁶¹ On the contrary, Ferdinand's lycanthropy is clearly treated in medical, naturalized terms, as are other instances of disease in the play.

Aside from Ferdinand's lycanthropy, there are many cases of actual and supposed illness in *The Duchesse of Malfi*: Antonio diagnoses Bosola's 'Court-Gall' (B1, 1.1.23) as resulting from 'foule mellancholly', 'too immoderate sleepe', and 'want of action' (B2, 1.1.71, 72, 75); upon eating the apricots offered to her as a pregnancy test,⁶² the Duchess remarks that 'this greene fruit and my stomake are not friends' (D3, 2.1.149), and her subsequent swelling and sweating is passed off as a stomach ache or possible poisoning in order to safeguard her secret and hide her having gone into labour; and, before the masque of madmen begins, the servant explains each individual's madness in terms of emotional and occupational stress:

There's a mad Lawyer, and a secular Priest,
A Doctor that hath forfeited his wits
By icalousy: an Astrologian,
That in his workes, sayd such a day o'th'moneth,
Should be the day of doome; and fayling of t,
Ran mad: an English Taylor, crais'd i'th'braine,
With the studdy of new fashion: a gentleman vsher
Quite beside himself, with care to keepe in minde,
The number of his Ladies salutations;
Or how do you, she employ'd him in each morning:
A Farmer too, (an excellent knaue in graine)
Mad, 'cause he was hindred transportation.

(I4, 4.2.45–56)

⁶¹ Tricomi, 'Historicizing', p. 363.

⁶² On the use of the dung-ripened apricots as a pregnancy test, see Dale B. J. Randall, 'The Rank and Earthy Background of Certain Physical Symbols in *The Duchesse of Malfi*', *Renaissance Drama*, 18 (1987), 171–203.

In each of these instances, illness is treated in wholly natural, medical terms. So too is its cure. For example, to counter the effects of the apricots, Delio suggests that the Duchess 'vse some prepar'd Antidote' (D3^v, 2.1.171); and Ferdinand calls for rhubarb 'to purge this choller' (E4, 2.5.12–13), although he later suggests a more radical therapy:

Apply desperate physicke,
We must not now vse Balsamm, but fire,
The smatting copping-glasse, for that's the meane
To purge infected blood.

(E4^v, 2.5.23–26)

Noting the plentiful medical references in Webster's plays, Lawrence Babb concluded that Webster had 'considerable physiological, pharmaceutical, and psychiatric learning',⁶³ and his presentation of lycanthropy reflects this accumulated medical knowledge. Although the doctor is unable to cure Ferdinand, Maurice Hunt suggests that his failure is but one of a number of poignant instances of Webster's condemnation of 'corrupt physicians and bogus cures',⁶⁴ such as the Duchess's censure that 'Physitians thus, | With their hands full of money, vse to give ore | Their Patients' (H2^v, 3.5.7–9). In other words, the doctor's failure does not of itself establish that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is a supernatural affliction — this is not a case, like that of Lady Macbeth, of needing more 'the Diuine, then the Physitian' (*Macbeth*, TLN 2166, 5.1.64), but rather an indication that Ferdinand should seek a second opinion, and enlist the services of a more competent medical practitioner.⁶⁵

Having established that Ferdinand's illness is a natural phenomenon, we must now examine its cause. According to humoral theory, the body is comprised of four humours (blood, phlegm, cholera, melancholy) and pathological conditions

⁶³ Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951), pp. 70–71.

⁶⁴ Maurice Hunt, 'Webster and Jacobean Medicine: The Case of *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Essays in Literature*, 16 (1989), 33–49 (p. 39).

⁶⁵ The depiction of doctors as moneybags, frauds, or otherwise incompetent had become a common topos in literature and drama by the time of Webster's play. For a more detailed discussion, see Andrea Carlino, 'Petarch and the Early Modern Critics of Medicine', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35 (2005), 559–82. On early modern English representations, see Tanya Pollard, "No Faith in Physic": Masquerades of Medicine Onstage and Off, in *Disease, Diagnosis and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Stephanie Moss and Kaara Peterson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 29–41; and F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 54–59.

are the result of humoral imbalance or abnormality. These imbalances may be due to excess or deficiency of a particular humour, to improper concentration of a humour in parts of the body, or to the putrefaction and transformation of a humour into a kind of unnatural melancholy (usually the result of *adustion*, or unnatural heat, arising from excessively hot passions). The term *melancholy* carries multiple meanings, encompassing the cold, dry humour itself, as well as the various diseases brought on by its excess. Melancholic personalities are characteristically cold and distant, tending towards solitude, and plagued by fearfulness and sorrow. When in excess, the pathological condition only differs from the complexion in degree, and is occasioned by exaggerated sadness and fear, hallucinations, seclusion and lethargy, aloofness, and darkness.⁶⁶

Ferdinand is clearly not of a melancholic character. Rather, he is choleric in disposition: he is passionate, intemperate, and prone to rashness and anger. He is constructed as having 'a most perverse, and turbulent Nature' (B3^v, 1.1.157), and his passionate, furious eyes 'mocke the eager violence of fire' (H1, 3.3.48). During a particularly telling scene with the Cardinal, Ferdinand becomes 'so wild a Tempest' that he needs 'to purge [his] choller' (E4, 2.5.17, 13) with rhubarb. The Cardinal, so taken aback by this 'starke mad' (F1, 2.5.66) spectacle, compares his brother's belligerent shouting to 'violent whirle-windes', whose 'intemperate noyce' is likened to 'deafe-mens shrill discourse, | Who ralle aloud, thinking all other men | To haue their imperfection' (F1, 2.5.51–54).

Whether Ferdinand's intense fascination with his sister is the manifestation of latent incestuous desires or otherwise,⁶⁷ the result is the same: he is 'so

⁶⁶ On the intersection of medicine and early modern drama, see: Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare*; Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Todd H. J. Pettigrew, *Shakespeare and the Practice of Physic: Medical Narratives on the Early Modern English Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ Representative studies that canvas Ferdinand's possible sexual interest in his sister include: Elizabeth Brennan, 'The Relationship between Brother and Sister in the Plays of John Webster', *Modern Language Review*, 58 (1963), 488–94; Charles R. Forker, "A Little More than Kin, and Less than Kind": Incest, Intimacy, Narcissism and Identity in Elizabethan and Stuart Drama', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 4 (1989), 13–51; and Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama, and Nature's Law, 1500–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 251–52. Frank Whigham has argued that Ferdinand's incestuous actions are political manoeuvres geared towards the maintenance of class structure: 'Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Publications of the Modern Languages Association*, 100 (1985), 167–86.

deform'd, so beastly' by his 'intemperate anger' (F1, 2.5.57–58). His intemperate anger, according to the humoral model of the body, is the direct cause of his later lycanthropic affliction: Ferdinand's sustained and intemperate anger heats the choleric in his system to an excessive and unnatural level, which, according to a contemporary account, then 'becommeth blacke' and 'dries up and burnes'.⁶⁸ This burnt, unnatural substance that has been created is called *adust* melancholy, and it is the presence, and excess, of this unnatural form of melancholy that manifests itself in Ferdinand's lycanthropy.⁶⁹

While it is possible to diagnose the cause of Ferdinand's illness by turning to the prevailing medical knowledge of Webster's age, it does not answer what, to me, seems the more important question: out of all of the pathological conditions in the catalogue of Renaissance medical lore, why was lycanthropy Webster's affliction of choice? Why would Webster choose a malady that was unfamiliar enough to his English audience that he needed to outline its symptoms, in detail, onstage?

Ferdinand's lycanthropy was unquestionably an intentional addition to *The Duchess of Malfi*, since there is no mention of it in Webster's source for the plot, an Italian novella available in English translation in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*.⁷⁰ It is generally agreed that Simon Goulart's *Admirable and Memorable Histories* was a source (if not *the* source) for Webster's werewolf, in particular his report of a man

In the yeare 1541 who thought himselfe to bee a Wolfe, setting vpon diuers men in the fields, and slew some. In the end being with great difficultie taken, hee did constantlye affirme that hee was a Wolfe, and that there was no other difference, but that Wolues were commonlie hairy without, and hee was betwixt the skinne and the flesh. Some (too barbarous and cruell Wolues in effeect) desiring to trie the truth thereof, gaue him manie wounds vpon the armes and legges; but knowing their owne error, and the innocencie of the poore melancholic man, they committed him to the Surgions to cure, in whose hands hee dyed within fewe days after.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Phillippe de Mornay, *The True Knowledge of a Mans Owne Selfe*, trans. by Anthony Murray (London, 1602; STC 18163), p. 160.

⁶⁹ Alternatively, as Burton suggests, lycanthropy may be the result of madness, which differs from melancholy only in its degree of violence; as it stands, there is not enough evidence from the text to distinguish with any degree of certainty whether Webster's werewolf is the product of the one or the other. In either case the root cause of the affliction is Ferdinand's intemperate anger and its effect on his constitution.

⁷⁰ William Painter, *The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (London, 1567; STC 19124).

⁷¹ Goulart, *Admirable and Memorable Histories*, sig. 2C2.

As Gunnar Boklund has noted, the resemblance between the doctor's description of Ferdinand's lycanthropy and Goulart's passage 'is so striking as to settle the question of Webster's source immediately'.⁷² However, identifying Goulart's passage as a source hardly provides a satisfactory answer to the question of *why* Webster incorporated lycanthropy into his play, and for this we must look elsewhere. Albert H. Tricomi has argued that the following case, reported in Henri Boguet's *Discours des Sorciers*, is a 'pertinent source' for the werewolf as well as the 'dead-mans hand' (II^v, 4.1.42–52) episode in the play:

One evening a gentleman, standing at the window of his chateau, saw a huntsman whom he knew passing by, and asked him to bring him some of his bag on his return. As the huntsman went his way along a valley, he was attacked by a large wolf and discharged his arquebuses at it without hurting it. He was therefore compelled to grapple with the wolf, and caught it by the ears; but at length, growing weary, he let go of the wolf, drew back and took his big hunting knife, and with it cut off one of the wolf's paws, which he put in his pouch after the wolf had run away. He then returned to the gentleman's chateau, in sight of which he had fought the wolf. The gentleman asked him to give him part of his bag; and the huntsman, wishing to do so and intending to take the paw from his pouch, drew from it a hand wearing a gold ring on one of the fingers, which the gentleman recognized as belonging to his wife. This caused him to entertain an evil suspicion of her; and going into the kitchen, he found his wife nursing her arm in her apron, which he took away, and found that her hand had been cut off. Thereupon the gentleman seized hold of her; but immediately, and as soon as she had been confronted with her hand, she confessed that it was no other than she who, in the form of a wolf, had attacked the hunter; and she was afterwards burned at Ryon.⁷³

While *The Duchess of Malfi* and Boguet's narrative share the common elements of a werewolf and a severed hand (complete with wedding ring), the suggestion that Boguet is the ultimate source for this episode in the play is not convincing. There is no evidence that Webster read in French, and Boguet's treatise — popular as it was on the Continent — was only available in the original French. Tricomi is certainly aware of this, since he admits that the 'defect in designating Boguet as a source is that despite Webster's strong attraction to Continental sources, he usually resorted to them in translation',⁷⁴ but nonetheless maintains his case for Boguet.

⁷² Gunnar Boklund, *The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 32.

⁷³ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, pp. 140–41.

⁷⁴ Tricomi, 'The Severed Hand', p. 351.

Even if we entertain the possibility that Webster read in French and had access to Boguet's tale, the narratives are barely analogous to one another: the hand in question in *The Duchess of Malfi* is not severed from the lycanthropic character Ferdinand — whose hands remain intact throughout the play — but rather it is intended to be mistaken by the Duchess as belonging to her husband, Antonio. Whereas the audience knows that her husband is still alive, the Duchess is momentarily shocked by the possibility that the severed hand does in fact belong to her husband. However, as soon as the lights return she recognizes that the hand is not Antonio's, but is instead 'a dead-mans hand' (11^v, 4.1.54). We never learn the actual origin of the severed hand in Webster's play, unlike the origin of the severed hand in Boguet's tale, which is unequivocally certain. Thus, even in the unlikely event that Boguet was the source for this scene, Webster is only faithful to Boguet's narrative insofar as he retains the three separate elements of a severed hand, a werewolf, and a wedding ring. What is noticeably lacking in Webster's version is the precise link between the three found in Boguet. In light of these doubts, Boklund's earlier assertion that Goulart's *Admirable and Memorable Histories* is Webster's ultimate source for the lycanthropy motif remains persuasive, since textual traces are clearly identifiable in Webster's play, and the material was readily available in English translation.

As we have seen, an increased interest in witchcraft and demonology during this period saw a number of texts imported from the Continent and translated for consumption by English readers. One of these is a pamphlet of 1590 detailing 'the damnable life and death of one Stubbe Peeter [Peter Stumpf]', described as 'a most wicked Sorceror' that 'in the likeness of a Woolfe, committed many murders' and continued in 'this diuelish practise 25 yeeres, killing and deuouring Men, Women, and Children'.⁷⁵ Although Webster clearly would have enjoyed reading such a provocative, blood-curdling pamphlet, it does not appear to be a source for his play. While both works feature a werewolf and incestuous desires,⁷⁶ the incest motif in Webster's play remains debatable, and differs from the *Stubbe*

⁷⁵ *A True Discourse Declaring the Damnable Life and Death of One Stubbe Peeter*, trans. by George Bores (London, 1590; STC 23375), title page. In *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (Antwerp, 1605; STC 21361), Richard Verstegan refers to the trial and grisly execution of 'One Peeter Stump for beeing a were-wolf, and hauing killed thirteen children, two women, and one man' (sig. 2G3^v) as part of his discussion of the origin and use of the term *werewolf*.

⁷⁶ The implications of the *Stubbe Peeter* pamphlet in relation to *The Duchess of Malfi* are discussed by Wiseman, who argues that the play 'foregrounds the social and psychic dimensions of wolf transformation that are implicit in the *Stubbe Peeter* narratives' ('Hairy on the Inside', p. 59). See also: Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*, pp. 51–52.

Peeter pamphlet in that Ferdinand's alleged desires are directed towards his sister (as opposed to his sister and daughter) and are nonetheless, to our knowledge, never fulfilled. Whatever his sources may be, Webster's motivation must surely have rested upon the consequences, dramatic and moral, of constructing a villain afflicted with lycanthropy.

While he is a werewolf, is Ferdinand still morally responsible for his actions? In theological terms, the responsibility for sinful acts rests upon the rational consent to commit such acts, and there is surely adequate evidence in the final act of the play to contend that Ferdinand lacks this ability. But if Ferdinand is not a werewolf for the entire play, when does the Duke *actually* become a werewolf? Certainly his rational ability (and therefore moral culpability) is not lacking in the earlier parts of the play. If we accept that arranging for the masque of madmen in Act Four is a projection of Ferdinand's own degenerating mental state, then it may be argued that he was 'distracted of [his] wits' (K3^v, 4.2.266) during the Duchess's murder, as he attests. Bosola later reflects that Ferdinand is 'much distracted' (K3^v, 4.2.323) at this time. As further evidence of his impending affliction, Ferdinand frequently mentions wolves, calling the Duchess's children 'Cubbs' (11^v, 4.1.33) whose death as 'young Wolfes, is neuer to be pittied' (K3, 4.2.246), foreshadowing his own bestial demise. We can suppose with some certainty that Ferdinand is known to be 'Sicke (as they giue out) of an Appoplexie' or, as 'some say [...] a frenzie' upon his arrival in Milan (L1^v, 5.1.57–58). If we concede that moral culpability requires rational consent, and that by his arrival in Milan Ferdinand is known to be 'Sicke' and suffering from lycanthropy, it follows that he is not morally responsible for the deaths of Bosola and the Cardinal. On the other hand, Ferdinand's complicity in the death of his sister's children and the Duchess herself is less obvious: although his illness is clearly beginning to take hold, Ferdinand still has the presence of mind to act in a calculated fashion, as he does in the chilling episode with the dead man's hand. Indeed, lycanthropy poses important questions of moral responsibility, but other mental infirmities would have had the same effect. Even if Ferdinand's affliction is the result of demonic possession or divine punishment, this is accompanied by a moral ambiguity in respect of his subsequent actions. Webster, then, must have chosen lycanthropy on other criteria. Any effort to identify these criteria surely must rest upon one essential question: what is it about being a werewolf that sets its condition apart from all other conditions?

The Borders of the Human

The significance of the werewolf is that it is a liminal creature. By virtue of its precarious position between the human and bestial, the werewolf 'constantly threatens the ontological status of being human',⁷⁷ and as such engages in a range of anxieties about identity. The phenomenon of the lycanthrope blurs the line between man and beast, a distinction that was under increased scrutiny during the early modern period, and raises an unsettling question: are we indeed *that* far removed from the animal? For Webster's generation, the possession of a human body itself was no longer sufficient to distance the human from the animal, since

Theology taught that human form was no guarantee of humanity when angels or devils might take that shape; when, under certain circumstances — as in the case of children, the mad, the colonized other — creatures that appeared human might also be understood to be closely associated with the animal.⁷⁸

If, then, the only intrinsic difference between man and beast is our capacity for reason,⁷⁹ is our humanity forfeit upon our loss of that capacity? It is on this basis alone that animals, unlike man, are not capable of sin.⁸⁰ The werewolf therefore

⁷⁷ Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre, 'Such an Impure, Cruel, and Savage Beast: Images of the Werewolf in Demonological Works', in *Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits: Traditional Belief and Folklore in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kathryn A. Edwards (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2002), pp. 181–97 (p. 195).

⁷⁸ Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan J. Wiseman, 'Introduction: The Dislocation of the Human', in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan J. Wiseman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1–8 (p. 3).

⁷⁹ For a brilliant and comprehensive examination of this question, as it was asked and variously answered in the early modern period, see Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ However, this did not excuse animals from criminal prosecution. On the history of this (seemingly) bizarre practice, see E. P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906); Esther Cohen, 'Law, Folklore, and Animal Lore', *Past and Present*, 110 (1986), 6–37, and 'Animals in Medieval Perceptions: The Image of the Ubiquitous Other', in *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*, ed. by Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 59–80; Peter Dinzelsbacher, 'Animal Trials: A Multidisciplinary Approach', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32 (2002), 405–21; Anila Srivastava, "'Mean, Dangerous, and Uncontrollable Beasts": Mediaeval Animal Trials', *Mosaic*, 40 (2007), 127–43; and Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 40–55.

threatens the identity of being human and straddles the precarious boundary between man and beast, as well as undermining the theological framework of sin and salvation. The werewolf may seem to partake of the human, but, insofar as it is an animal (or non-human), it is excluded from divine judgement and the possibility of salvation that proceeds therefrom.

The werewolf is not only dangerous because it is capable of committing such depraved acts, but because it is a *hidden* threat: unlike the wolf, which is 'hairy on the out-side' and clearly identifiable, the werewolf is hairy 'on the In-side' (L2, 5.2.17–18). Identifying evil within early modern society was particularly problematic for this reason, and was not limited to the case of the werewolf alone. In 1612, while Webster was writing *The Duchess of Malfi*, ten of the nineteen persons accused of being witches were sentenced to death at the assizes in Lancashire.⁸¹ Witches, werewolves, and seerer Jews all threatened a Christian society concerned with identifying and purging a perceived evil that was no different in appearance from itself. Cannibalism was one method of establishing otherness in early modern representations of all three groups.⁸² According to Charles Zika, this anxiety about the hidden *other*, the ever-present cannibalistic enemies within the society it threatened, stemmed from a 'growing fear for the disintegration and loss of Christian community and identity', of which the figure of the werewolf is but one articulation.⁸³

⁸¹ As reported by the assizes clerk, Thomas Potts, in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the County of Lancaster* (London, 1613; STC 20138).

⁸² For a discussion on the uses of cannibalism in late medieval and early modern literature and culture, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, trans. by Rosemary Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Ted Motohashi, 'The Discourse of Cannibalism in Early Modern Travel Writing', in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. by Steve Clark (London: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 83–99; and Merrill L. Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁸³ Charles Zika, 'Cannibalism and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Reading the Visual Images', *History Workshop Journal*, 44 (1997), 77–105 (p. 101).

The Borders of the Wo/Man

Among other things, Webster's werewolf also engages in contemporary anxieties about sexual identity, as Ferdinand's lycanthropy not only threatens his human identity, but his masculine identity as well. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, female sexuality is represented as being essentially aggressive, and as presenting a challenge to the normative construction of gender roles: the Duchess initiates the controversial relationship with Antonio; and Julia is at once Castruchio's wife, mistress to the Cardinal, and the initiator (at pistol-point, no less) of the short-lived affair between Bosola and herself. Male sexuality, on the other hand, is for the most part represented as passive, or otherwise asserted defensively. For example, although the Duchess laments that she is 'forc'd to woe, because none date woe vs' (C4, 1.1.428) Antonio recognizes her usurpation of his role when he admits that 'these words should be mine' (C4, 1.1.457). Similarly, Julia usurps Bosola's role in initiating their short-lived relationship, and is apparently frustrated by his failure to perform his manly roles, ordering him to 'put your selfe to the charge of courting me, | Whereas now I woe you' (L4, 5.2.174–75). Further, Bosola feels he has to distance himself from the feminine act of crying, resolved that his tears are 'manly sorrow' and 'neuer grew | In [his] Mothers Milke' (K4, 4.2.349–50). The Cardinal appears to be the only assertive masculine figure, although he too seems under Julia's control, with her 'tongue about his heart' (M1, 5.2.214). Ferdinand, at the other end of the spectrum of masculine sexual behaviour, is incapacitated sexually by his melancholy and seems able only to engage his 'poyniard' (C2, 1.1.317) vicariously through his sister. As Lynn Enterline has insightfully argued, it is in this way that melancholy is figured as 'a disruption in the symbolic order', a social contagion. Whereas lycanthropy disrupts the corporeal order, melancholy disturbs the 'functional order of the body' and its representation, and it 'profoundly unsettles' the 'recognizable difference between male and female subjects'.⁸⁴ While the boundary between masculine and feminine is already distorted by the aggressiveness of female sexuality in the play, Webster's representation of masculine sexuality, whittled away by melancholy, blurs these distinctions further.

Melancholy is not the only vehicle through which the traditional boundaries between male and female are examined by the play. The opposition between Ferdinand and the Duchess further highlights the contested site of masculinity:

⁸⁴ Lynn Enterline, "'Hairy on the In-Side': *The Duchess of Malfi* and the Body of Lycanthropy", *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7 (1994), 85–129 (p. 91).

she is the 'Excellent *Hyenna*' (E4, 2.5.39) set against his lycanthropic wolf. Edward Topsell reports that, since Pliny, the hyena was thought to be a hermaphrodite, where both male and female 'have under their tails a double note or passage'. That is, in the male 'there is a scissure like the secrets of a femal' and 'in the femal a bunch like the stones of the male'.⁸⁵ This ambiguity is reinforced visually with the inclusion of a woodcut (see Fig. 3), derived from the original in the second volume of Konrad Gesner's earlier *Historiae animalium* (Zürich, 1554), of the rear-end of the hyena. Aside from matching the Duchess, the 'Excellent *Hyenna*', with Antonio, himself described as 'an hermaphrodite' (G2, 3.2.219), in constructing oppositions of wolf and hyena, male and hermaphrodite, Webster frames an anxious masculine identity whose ontological status is severely undermined, since it can only be defined in terms of opposition from its other.⁸⁶ In other words, how different can the male be when the female is described as possessing 'a bunch like the stones of the male'? It seems that Ferdinand's lycanthropy figures not only the precarious boundary between man and beast, but between man and woman.

The Babylonical Circe

The werewolf is, among other things, a site of contention between civility and wildness, and, as Karen Edwards has argued, 'lycanthropy (like any other cultural form) may be seen as having a political dimension'. Lycanthropy was used as a literary motif expressing un-Englishness: Milton and Marvell, in charging their 'Protestant opponents with lycanthropy' imply that 'Salmasius and [Samuel] Parker are types of the deeply perverse, darkly superstitious, un-English intellect', who are 'guilty of intellectual, if not theological, Catholicism'.⁸⁷ Webster's characterization of Ferdinand clearly has similar motivations — by presenting an Italian character as a werewolf, Webster endorses the popular association between Italians and depravity. For Webster's audience, Italy was perceived as a site of political intrigue, economic power, decadence, and moral decay, as Lara Bovilsky eloquently summarizes:

⁸⁵ Topsell, *The Historie of Four-footed Beastes*, p. 435.

⁸⁶ Enterline discusses these oppositions and their implications in detail at pp. 111–13.

⁸⁷ Karen Edwards, 'Lycanthropy, or the Un-English Disease', paper presented at the *Seventh International Milton Symposium*, University of South Carolina, Beaufort, 2002. See also Edwards's 'Milton's Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary: T–Z', *Milton Quarterly*, 43 (2009), 241–300 (pp. 277–87).

Italy represented a nation among whose famous identity effects were Popery, atheism, sodomy, murder and poison, deceit, 'practice', erotic obsession and sexual promiscuity, and a preternatural propensity for revenge, any and all of which were available for the playwright's use in plot devices that both shocked and titillated.⁸⁸

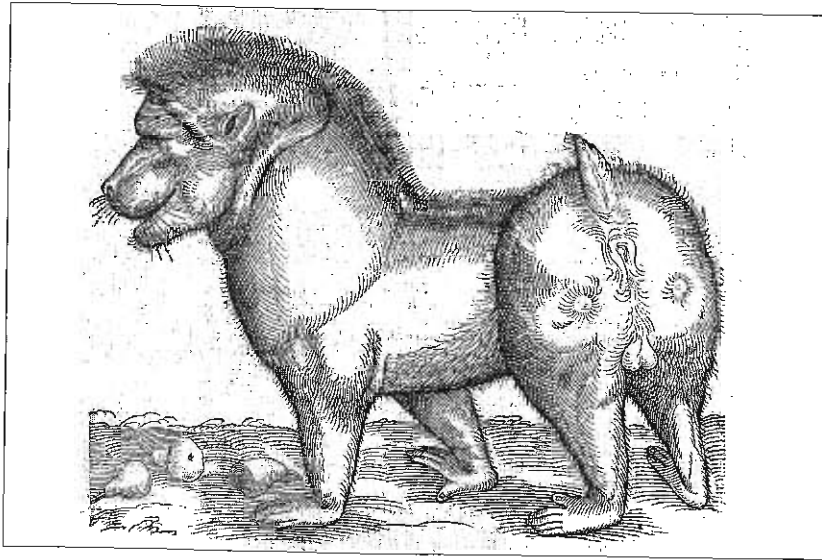


Figure 3. Edward Topsell, 'Hyena',
The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents (London, 1658).
Image courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Even the mythical city-state of Venice was tainted by its Italianate excesses: for example, in *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare depicts Venice as a mercantile state whose economic openness, the very reason for its financial success, literally threatens the lives of its (Christian) citizens.⁸⁹ Jonson's vision of Italy in *Volpone* is one of such moral decay that men of wealth and power use their position only

⁸⁸ Lara Bovilsky, 'Black Beauties, White Devils: The English Italian in Milton and Webster', *English Literary History*, 70 (2003), 625–51 (p. 627).

⁸⁹ For an important and detailed study of the varied English perceptions of Venice, see David C. McPherson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990).

for decadence and deceit, whilst others disinherit their sons and sacrifice their wives in the pursuit of monetary gain. Amidst these contemporaneous examples, Webster's corrupt and unbridled Machiavellian, a duke whose depravity is literally inhuman, is hardly out of place or without precedent.

In *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham expressed the fear of the corrupting influence of Italian depravity in terms of physical transformation, warning young travellers 'Some *Circes* shall make him, of a plaine English man, a right *Italian*'.⁹⁰ Ascham refers to Circe eleven times in order to drive his point home, namely that even those 'partying out of England fervent in the loue of Christes doctrine, and well furnished with the feare of God', nevertheless 'returned out of Italic worse transformed, than euer was any in *Circes* Court', with 'some into Swine, som[e] into Asses, some into Foxes, and some into Wolues'.⁹¹ Although he stresses the transformative power of Italy on impressionable young Englishmen, Ascham recognizes that some travellers were Italians *ab initio*, 'beyng Mules and Horses before they went, returned verie Swyne and Asses home agayne', or 'verie Foxes with subtlie and busie heades' and 'verie wolues, with cruell malicious hartes',⁹² hestial before they arrived on the island of Circe. Had Ascham survived to attend a performance of *The Duchess of Malfi*, he would not have been surprised to witness Ferdinand's bestial transformation at one of the Circean courts of Italy.

As Gareth Roberts has noted, the figure of Circe was conflated 'by some Protestant exegetes' with that of the Whore of Babylon, and so 'became a figure for the Church of Rome'.⁹³ For example, William Fulke's sermon at Hampton Court in November 1570, in which he protested against 'the *Babylonical Circe* the church of Rome' and 'proued Babylon to be Rome, both by Scriptures and doctors', was evidently so popular that it required reprinting in 1571, 1572, 1574,

⁹⁰ Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1570; STC 832), sig. H4.

⁹¹ Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, sigs H4', 11.

⁹² Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, sig. 12.

⁹³ Gareth Roberts, 'Three Notes on Uses of Circe by Spenser, Marlowe, and Milton', *Notes & Queries*, n.s., 25 (1978), 433–35 (p. 433). See also Roberts's entry on Circe in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 165–67, and his chapter, 'The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions', in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. by Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 183–206. On the cultural and literary reception of Circe, see Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), pp. 262–300.

and 1579.⁹⁴ Fulke's apt anti-Catholic phrasing was apparently popular with clergymen as well as lay readers, since we find the same pronouncement against 'the Babylonical Circe the Church of Rome' in a sermon preached by William Perkins at Cambridge in 1595.⁹⁵ Dramatists, too, found the association seductive, exemplified by Thomas Dekker, whose *The Whore of Babylon* allegorically casts Queen Elizabeth as the Fairy Queen Titania against the failed plots of Romish Babylon.⁹⁶ As a final example, in *The Historie of the Defendors of the Catholique Faith*, Christopher Lever sets out to compare 'Queene Mary of England' and the 'Queene-Mother of France, Katherine de Medices', mitigating a harsher assessment on the grounds of 'the frailty of their Sexe, which hauing but weake iudgement, is the lesse able to make resistance against strong temptations', a weakness that resulted in

their ill hap, to sucke the milke of so venimous a breast as the Church of Rome; which is indeed the Circe of the world, transforming men by her enchanted potions into beasts, and metamorphosing enen the innocent disposition of gentle Ladies, and Princesses into a Leonine and Tigerlike sauagenesse.⁹⁷

Fed 'with the like milke' from 'the teats of a shee-Woolfe' that 'first fostered Romulus', these 'gentle Ladies, and Princesses' were, 'by guise of piety', unwittingly drawn in to 'the bloud sucking tyranny of that Romish strumpet'.⁹⁸ As the use of the figure of Circe suggests, English xenophobic fears and fantasies of Italians and Italy were often conflated and compounded with anti-Catholic sentiment.⁹⁹ Following the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, English Protestants were even more suspicious of Catholics than they had been under Elizabeth: Catholics abroad and at home — recusants and the fugitive Jesuit priests that ministered to them in secret — were perceived as a threat to both Faith and State.

⁹⁴ William Fulke, *A Sermon Preached at Hampton Court* (London, 1570; STC 11449.5), sig. G4, and titlepage.

⁹⁵ William Perkins, *Lectures Vpon the Three First Chapters of the Reuelation* (London, 1604; STC 19731), 3B1.

⁹⁶ Thomas Dekker, *The Whore of Babylon* (London, 1607; STC 6532).

⁹⁷ Christopher Lever, *The Historie of the Defendors of the Catholique Faith* (London, 1627; STC 15537), pp. 246–47.

⁹⁸ Lever, *Defendors of the Catholique Faith*, p. 247.

⁹⁹ On this conflation in travel literature, see also Steven J. Masello, 'Thomas Hoby: A Protestant Traveler to Circe's Court', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 27 (1985), 67–81.

The Romish Wolfe

In this atmosphere of suspicion and fear, Webster's inclusion of a lecherous, murdering Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* is hardly unexpected, since it belongs to a tradition of anti-Catholic rhetoric and *ad hominem* attacks that already spanned a century since the Reformation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned his followers to 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheepes clothing, but inwardly they are rauening wolues' (Matthew 7. 15), and medieval anti-clerical satires frequently depicted the clergy as dissembling foxes and ravenous wolves.¹⁰⁰ This trope continued after the Reformation, and Protestant polemics used 'the fox to indicate a member of the Church of England who harboured secret Romish beliefs' and the wolf to represent 'a committed and outwardly professed member of the Catholic Church'.¹⁰¹ For example, consider the series of Protestant pamphlets by William Turner and his collaborators: *The Huntyng & Fyndyng Out of the Romishe Fox* (1543) bemoans the failure of the Henrician Reformation to completely rid the English church of popery, laying no small portion of the blame at the feet of the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, 'master steward of the stewes';¹⁰² and *The Rescuyng of the Romishe Fox* (1545), opening with 'the bannished fox of rome' lamenting that while 'My son steuen gardiner with wepyng teares | Hath cut away the toppes of myn eares', that 'the rest of my body abyde hole still' and that even 'myn eares shal grow agayn | When all the gospellers ar ones slayn'.¹⁰³ In *The Huntyng of the Romyshe Wolfe* (1555), the 'Romyshe Foxe latelye returned into Englande' with the death of Edward VI and accession of Mary, announcing that his ears 'are growen and healed agayne'.¹⁰⁴

The Huntyng of the Romyshe Wolfe also included a folded engraved print entitled *The Lamb Speaketh* (Fig. 4) that simultaneously circulated as a

¹⁰⁰ Representative studies include: Sacvan Bercovitch, 'Clerical Satire in *The Fox and the Wolf*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65 (1966), 287–94; Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 62–71; and Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 56–74.

¹⁰¹ Michael G. Brennan, 'Foxes and Wolves in Elizabethan Episcopal Propaganda', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 29 (1986), 83–86 (p. 84). See also John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 446; and Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon, 1994), p. 214.

¹⁰² *The Huntyng & Fyndyng Out of the Romishe Fox* (Bonn, 1543; STC 24353), sig. f1.

¹⁰³ *The Rescuyng of the Romishe Fox* (Bonn, 1545; STC 24355), sig. A1.

¹⁰⁴ *The Huntyng of the Romyshe Wolfe* (Emden, 1555; STC 24356), sig. A3.

broadsheet in Latin, German, and English versions, depicting Stephen Gardiner as a bishop with a wolf's head biting the neck of the Christ-lamb while other Catholic bishops and clerics — all wolf-headed — catch the lamb's blood in their chalices.¹⁰⁵ Applauding the carnage from above is a winged devil with a head curiously shaped like a papal crown, and below the altar bound at Gardiner's feet are six more lambs awaiting slaughter, identified as the Protestant reformers John Bradford, Thomas Cranmer, John Hooper, Nicholas Ridley, and John Rogers.



Figure 4. *The Lambe Speakeeth*, London, British Museum. Engraved print dated 1555. Reproduced with permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Poetry of the period also relied on the tradition of the fox and the wolf as anticlerical figures, such as in Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, where the main theme of the *Maye*, *Julye*, and *September* eclogues is 'the inadequacy of the

¹⁰⁵ On the history of the print and its various editions, see: R. J. Smith, 'The Lambe Speakeeth ... An English Protestant Satire', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 61 (1998), 261–67; and Malcolm Jones, 'The Lambe Speakeeth ... An Addendum', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 63 (2000), 287–94.

ministry', the 'worldliness of some pastors, the self-aggrandizement of certain bishops', and 'the threat from Catholics (wolves) and the presence of covert Catholics (foxes)'.¹⁰⁶ For instance, in the *September* eclogue, Hobbinoll tells Diggon:

Well is knowne that sith the Saxon king,
Neuer was Woolfe seene many nor some,
Nor in all Kent, nor in Christendome:
But the fewer Woolues (the soth to sayne,)
The more bene the Foxes that here remaine.¹⁰⁷

To which Diggon replies, 'Yes, but they gang in more secrete wise, | And with sheepes clothing doen hem disguise'.¹⁰⁸

John Milton also engaged with the tradition, not least as a result of his reading of Spenser.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the 'grim Woolf with privy paw' in Milton's *Lycidas*¹¹⁰ is glossed by Roy Flannagan in *The Riverside Milton* as a reference to 'the agents of the Roman Catholic Church, seeking converts', noting that 'the Jesuits, whose coat of arms included two wolves, were especially liable to be accused of such secret proselytizing'.¹¹¹ Since the coat of arms of its founder Ignatius Loyola includes two grey wolves about an argent cauldron and sable chain (Fig. 5),¹¹² the wolf became emblematic of the Jesuits, whose popish plots and conspiracies (both real and imagined) constantly threatened the English state and faith.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Sinfield, 'Puritanism', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 573–74 (p. 573). On Spenser's use of the Tindor polemical distinction between the fox and the wolf, see Harold Stein, 'Spenser and William Turner', *Modern Language Notes*, 56 (1936), 345–51; and Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 13–41.

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Shepherdes Calender* (London, 1579; STC 23089), sig. K1^v (September, ll. 151–55).

¹⁰⁸ Spenser, *The Shepherdes Calender*, sig. K1^v, ll. 156–57.

¹⁰⁹ John N. King, 'Milton Reads Spenser's May Eclogue', in *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23–68 (p. 33).

¹¹⁰ John Milton, *Poems of Mr John Milton* (London, 1645; Wing M2160), p. 62.

¹¹¹ *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 105, n. 54.

¹¹² The traditional explanation for the Jesuit coat of arms comes from the etymology of the name *Loyola* as a contraction of *lobo y olla* (wolf and pot), supposedly referring to the reputation of the House of Loyola being so generous to its armed retainers that even the wolves could feast on the leftovers.

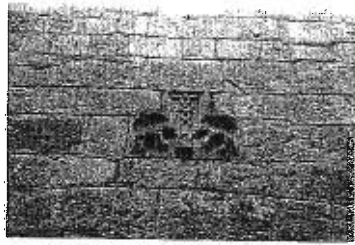


Figure 5. 'Loyola Coat of Arms on the Wall of the Santuario de Loyola, Azpeita, Spain'. Photograph by Professor Elizabeth Liebert, San Francisco Theological Seminary. Used with kind permission.

English drama also relied on these fox/wolf allusions, as Alison Brunning has recently argued in the case of Jonson's *Volpone*.¹¹³ Compounding these anti-Catholic associations in *The Duchess of Malfi* is Ferdinand's inverted wolfskin, hairy 'on the In-side' (L2^v, 5.2.18), which, as a number of scholars have noted, calls to mind the hair shirt worn by penitents and ascetics,¹¹⁴ a practice frequently mocked by English Protestants in polemics, poetry, and performance.¹¹⁵ Is it not then plausible that Ferdinand, as a werewolf and corrupted member of Circe's Italian court, is simply another manifestation of this traditional

fear of Catholic deception and pollution of the state? For a Jacobean audience, the werewolf and the Catholic were similar beasts. Both were essentially wolves dressed as men; otherwise indistinguishable from the rest of society, but still a threat to church and state, and both as depraved, bloody, and ruthless as each other.

¹¹³ Alison Brunning, 'Jonson's Romish Foxe: Anti-Catholic Discourse in *Volpone*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 6 (2000), 4.1–32. See also Don Beecher, 'The Progress of Trickster in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 27 (1985), 43–51.

¹¹⁴ Susan C. Baker, 'The Static Protagonist in *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 22 (1980), 343–57 (p. 350); Whigham, 'Sexual and Social Mobility', p. 171; and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 345.

¹¹⁵ A few representative examples will suffice. Debating the sacrament of penance, William Fulke reminds readers of *A Reioynder to Bristows Replie* (London, 1581; STC 11448) that 'God requireth not the burthen of shirts of haire, nor to be shutte vp in the streightes of a litle cell' (sig. Q8). In the 'Ashwednesday' verse of his *Seauen Satyres* (London, 1598; STC 20700), William Rankins confesses that 'though I weare no shirt of Cammels haire, | A boasting shew the flesh to macerate', his heart is nonetheless 'prickt with irne faiths desire' (sig. C6'). In *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* (London, 1633; STC 17412), Christopher Marlowe has Barabas mockingly dismiss Christian penance, 'to fast, to pray, and weare a shiirt of haire, | And on my knees ereepe to Ierusalem' (sig. G3).

Irish Wolves

When considering the question 'How the English Colonies' in Ireland 'became degenerate', John Davies drew on the same motif of Circean transformation that Roger Ascham had previously used in relation to Italy: English colonists made the perilous mistake of embracing Irish customs

after they had reiected the Ciuill and Honorable Lawes and Customes of *England*, whereby they became degenerate and metamorphosed like *Nabuchadnezzar*: who although he had the face of a man, had the heart of a Beast; or like those who had drunke of *Circes* Cuppe, and were turned into very Beasts.¹¹⁶

Other commentators made the same association between the degeneration of English colonists in Ireland, old and new, and the myth of Circe. For instance, Richard Stanyhurst's description and history of Ireland, absorbed into Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, related how even 'the verie English of birth, conuersant with the sauage sort of that people' had 'become degenerate' and 'quite altered', as 'though they had tasted of Circes poisoned cup'.¹¹⁷

As with the myth of Circe, the figure of the wolf in early modern England was emblematic not only of Italians and Catholics, but of the Irish as well. According to medieval authorities, the Irish shared a special bond with wolves: in his *Topography of Ireland*, Gerald of Wales includes the tale of a 'wolf that talked with a priest' in that country, describing how his fellow 'natives of Ossory' are 'compelled every seven years to put off the human form' and to 'assume that of wolves'.¹¹⁸ Gerald's relation of a 'creature [...] in the shape of a beast utter[ing] human words',¹¹⁹ for Caroline Walker Bynum, reflects his anxiety about 'human-

¹¹⁶ John Davies, *A Discoverie of the True Causes why Ireland was Neuer Entirely Subdued* (London, 1612; STC 6348), sig. 2A2'.

¹¹⁷ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles* (London, 1586–87; STC 13569), II, sig. D5. Representative studies of early modern English perceptions of the Irish and the concomitant fear of physical, cultural, and linguistic degeneration include: Michael Neill, 'Broken English and Broken Irish: Nation, Language, and the Optic of Power in Shakespeare's Histories', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 1–32; Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Andrew Murphy, *But the Irish Sea Betwixt Us: Ireland, Colonialism, and Renaissance Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999); and Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁸ References are taken from *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Forester and Thomas Wright, rev. edn (London: Bell, 1905), 2.19, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ *Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. by Forester and Wright, 2.19, p. 80.

animal hybrids that result from human-animal sex, a practice he thinks “barbarous” and particularly Irish.¹²⁰ Although sceptical of such ‘meere fable[s]’, William Camden nevertheless reports in his *Britannia* that the Irish ‘are yeerely turned into Wolves’, supposing that the inhabitants, ‘through that malicious humour of predominant unkind Melancholie’ are ‘possessed with the malady’ of ‘lycanthropia’, which ‘raiseth and engendreth such like phantasies, as that they imagine themselves to be transformed into Wolves’.¹²¹ Edmund Spenser confirms these representations of the Irish in *A View of the State of Ireland*, concluding, ‘the Irish are descended from the Scythians’, since both are wild and bloody pagans who are reportedly ‘once a yeare turned into Wolves’.¹²²

References to the association between the Irish and wolves are also found in literary and dramatic texts of the period. In *The Newe Metamorphosis* (c. 1615), an unpublished epic satire based on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Gervase Markham relates how Jove descended to ‘Bernia Lande’ (Ireland), and, upon finding ‘the kerns practicing all kinds of unnatural vice’, transforms ‘the inhabitants into wolves which can take man’s shape’.¹²³ Andrew Hadfield has also suggested that Rosalind’s description of the interplay between the would-be lovers in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* as ‘like the howling of Irish Wolues against the Moone’ (TLN 2516–17, 5.3.92–93) is ‘possibly a reference to Hugh O’Neill’s rebellion’ against Queen Elizabeth, ‘since Elizabeth was invariably associated with the moon’.¹²⁴ There are even surviving official communications from Elizabeth’s reign instructing deputies in Ireland ‘to refuse none that proffer submission, nor to credit any [of] their promises, but to think of them as wolves or foxes’.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Bynnm, ‘Metamorphosis’, p. 1000.

¹²¹ William Camden, *Britannia*, trans. by Philemon Holland (London, 1610; STC 4509), sig. 4G6.

¹²² Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland* (1596), in *Two Histories of Ireland*, ed. by James Ware (Dublin, 1633; STC 25067), sig. D3.

¹²³ Gervase Markham, *The Newe Metamorphosis*, London, British Library, MSS Additional 14824–26. The manuscript is described in J. H. Lyon, *A Study of the Newe Metamorphosis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), and I have quoted his description of the episode (xvi), which is found in MS Additional 14824, fols 19^v–21^r.

¹²⁴ Andrew Hadfield, “‘Hitherto She Ne’re Conld Fancy Him’”: Shakespeare’s “British” Plays and the Exclusion of Ireland’, in *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 47–67 (p. 48).

¹²⁵ Reported in K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 195.

The association between wolves and the Irish are also reinforced in visual representations: as Richard McCabe has noted, the title-page woodcut (Fig. 6) of John Bale’s *The Vocacyon of Ioha[n] Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irela[n]de*¹²⁶ displays ‘two contrasting figures, “The English Christrian” and “The Irishe Papist”’, the former ‘meek and civil, like the sheep that shelters by his legs’, and ‘the other violent and savage, like the wolf that accompanies him’.¹²⁷



Figure 6. Title page woodcut depicting ‘The English Christrian’ and ‘The Irishe Papist’.
From John Bale, *The Vocacyon of Ioha[n] Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irela[n]de* (Wesel: J. Lambrecht for H. Singleton, 1553).
By permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

As Joan Fitzpatrick has insightfully observed, ‘like the wolf with whom they are associated, the Irish have not yet been controlled but rather lurk on the periphery of civilized society ever ready to attack’.¹²⁸ Thus the emblem of the wolf cemented

¹²⁶ John Bale, *The Vocacyon of Ioha[n] Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irela[n]de* (Wesel, 1553; STC 1307).

¹²⁷ Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser’s Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 106.

¹²⁸ Joan Fitzpatrick, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Contours of Britain: Reshaping the Atlantic Archipelago* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004), p. 32.

iconographically the danger of the bloody Papist, whether this threat was from over the waters on the Continent, beyond the Pale in Ireland, or hidden away in secret on English soil. Webster was certainly aware of this popular conception of the Irish when he penned his earlier play, *The White Devil*, which is replete with derogatory references to the 'wild Irish' and the 'howling' at 'Irish funeralls' (G4). Although *The Duchess of Malfi* lacks direct references to Ireland and the Irish, it is not implausible to suppose that Webster and his original audiences may have noted the similarities between the Italian lycanthrope and the howling, wild Irish closer to home.

Degenerating Dukes and Diminishing Returns

In the same way that Jacobean audiences perceived Italians or the Irish (or any Catholic foreigners for that matter) as a threat to notions of Englishness, the spectacle of the werewolf presents a challenge to notions of acceptable, civilized behaviour. Ferdinand's lycanthropy is symptomatic of the political turmoil, 'the corruption of the times' (B1, 1.1.18), that occupies the court: in the words of Susan Wiseman, it is both 'specifically a mania generated by the court' and an 'index of its moral crisis'.¹²⁹ Consider Ferdinand's behaviour at the beginning of the play:

- {Ferd.} How doe you like my Spauish Gennit?
 Rod. He is all fire.
 Ferd. I am of *Plincy's* opinion, I thinke he was begot by the wind.
 He runs, as if he were ballass'd with Quick-siluer.
 Sil. True (my Lord) he reeles from the Tilt often.
 Rod. Gris. Ha, ha, ha.
 Ferd. Why do you laugh? Me thinks you that are Conrtiers
 Should be my touch-wood, take fire, when I giue fire;
 That is, lanch when I laugh, were the subiect neuer so wiry.
 (B2^v-B3, 1.1.111-19)

Upon entering the stage, Ferdinand is established as 'the great *Calabrian Duke*' (B2^v, 1.1.82), and the description is fitting. Ferdinand immediately dominates the scene and its participants: he cuts Castruchio off mid-sentence, makes bawdy jokes and *doubles entendres* — for example, 'drawne their weapons, } And were ready ro goe to it' (B2^v, 1.1.107-08) — and, as we have seen, asserts control over the actions of his courtiers, even their laughter.

¹²⁹ Wiseman, 'Hairy on the Inside', p. 61.

Although Ferdinand begins as a towering figure in the opening scenes, by the final act he is reduced to a cowering, confused madman attacking his own shadow:

- Ferd. Leauc me.
 Mal. Why doth your Lordship loue this solitarines?
 Ferd. Eagles co[m]monly fly alone: They are Crowes, Dawes, and Sterlings that flocke together: Looke, what's that, Followes me?
 Mal. Nothing (my Lord)
 Ferd. Yes:
 Mal. 'Tis your shadow.
 Ferd. Stay it, let it nor haunt me.
 Mal. Impossible; if you moue, and the Sun shiue:
 Ferd. I will throtle it. [*Throws himself on the ground.*]
 Mal. Oh, my Lord: you are augry with nothing.
 Ferd. You are a foole:
 How is't possible I should catch my shadow
 Vnlesse I fall vpon't?

(L2^v, 5.2.28-40)

We have witnessed the transformation of an assertive, socially dominating stage presence to a solitary, paranoid, cowering figure of abjection. What has happened between the opening scenes of the play and the final act to bring about such a radical change in character? Ferdinand's steady decline into madness parallels the rising intrigue and erosion of justice at court, as both stray further away from their civilized, ideal forms. Thus, Ferdinand's lycanthropy represents not only the degeneracy of the individual from the human, but also the degeneracy of society from the civil.

What is the essential cause of this degenerarion? Perhaps it is, as Alfred North Whitehead has suggested, that evil 'promotes its own elimination by destruction, or delegation' since it is by its very nature unstable.¹³⁰ Whitehead's analysis seems pertinent to *The Duchess of Malfi*, since both Ferdinand and the society in which he resides are clearly diminished by their involvement with evil: whether in the guise of intemperate anger, incestuous desires, cruelty, or corruption and injustice, each is degenerated from the human to the bestial, and from the civil to the chaotic.

Conclusion

As Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre has observed, the werewolf 'inherits all of the attitudes underlying the real wolf' as well as 'the tradition which metaphorically situates the

¹³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 95.

relations between man and animal in terms of individual or social morality',¹³¹ and, as such, is a rich and complex figure. The wolf had been employed as an emblem of Catholic deception and savagery by poets and pamphleteers alike, as well as symbolically encapsulating the perceived wild and uncivil nature of the rebellious Irish and the depravity of the Italians and their Circean courts. Similarly, medieval chronicles noted the propensity of the Irish to turn into wolves, and contemporary pamphlets and trial transcripts told of the havoc wreaked by lycanthropes on the Continent. Whilst earlier and contemporary authorities on the Continent turned to witchcraft and the supernatural to explain these accounts of butchery, the English (for the most part) cultivated a growing scepticism that looked to medicine and natural causes to understand such episodes.

Webster was no doubt aware of all this when he incorporated Ferdinand's lycanthropy into *The Duchess of Malfi*. Webster was familiar with and critical of Jacobean medical knowledge and practice, and his scepticism is reflected in his treatment of illness and those that fail to minister to it in his plays. Webster was certainly also aware of the cultural stereotypes and suspicions surrounding Italians and the Irish, and he was not above deploying these in his drama: *The Duchess of Malfi* can boast some of the most striking examples of Italianate depravity and Catholic savagery on the Jacobean stage. Against this cultural and intellectual background, it is hard to accept the suggestion that Ferdinand's lycanthropy is simply a case of demonic possession. This is simply inconsistent with Webster's construction of the play primarily as a medical universe with eschatological overtones. The evidence is there in Webster's treatment of illness throughout the play as a natural phenomenon. There is no reason to extrapolate from the doctor's use of the term 'possess'd' (L2, 5.2.8) an entire world of demonic possession and diabolic intervention. This is not to say that Webster's world is one completely free of supernatural intervention, since the graveyard echo clearly has ghostly connotations; but Ferdinand's lycanthropy is not one of them. The horror in *The Duchess of Malfi* comes, for the most part, from the knowledge that *real* people are capable of committing depraved acts, that intemperate anger and Machiavellian ambition can push a man past the limits of civility, and perhaps even past the border of the human.¹³²

¹³¹ Jacques-Lefèvre, 'Such an Impure, Cruel, and Savage Beast', p. 195.

¹³² Although the current essay is much revised, an earlier version was published as 'An Italian Werewolf in London: Lycanthropy and *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 11 (2005), 1–34. I wish to thank Matthew Steggle for permission to republish those earlier portions here. I also wish to thank Chris Wortham, Gabriel Egan, and Yasmin Haskell for their useful comments and suggestions in revising this essay.

VAMPIRES AS CREATURES OF THE IMAGINATION: THEORIES OF BODY, SOUL, AND IMAGINATION IN EARLY MODERN VAMPIRE TRACTS (1659–1755)

Koen Vermeir

Introduction

In the summer of 2006, Matteo Borrini, a forensic anthropologist from the University of Florence, found the remains of a female 'vampire'. The skeleton was found in a mass grave from the plague of 1576, on Lazzaretto Nuovo, a sanatorium for plague sufferers north-east of Venice. The woman could be identified as a vampire because she had been buried with a brick jammed between her teeth, to prevent her from preying on the survivors.¹ 'Vampires' from the late sixteenth century did not suck blood, but they were hungry. It was believed that some corpses masticated in their graves, that they ate their shroud, and sometimes even their own limbs. The effects of this mastication were not confined to the tomb, however. These 'masticating bodies' were believed to be the origin of

¹ The main facts of the discovery were presented by Matteo Borrini at the reunion of the Italian Anthropological and Ethnological Society, 22 May 2008 as 'La scoperta di una sepoltra di "vampiro": archeologia e antropologia forense analizzano la genesi di una leggenda'. A summary of this presentation is published as part of 'Rendiconti della Società Italiana di Antropologia ed Etnologia', *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, 138 (2008), 215–17.