MYTHOLOGIS

WEREWOLVES BOOK

The Wolf-Men, Skin-Changers and the History of Lycanthropy

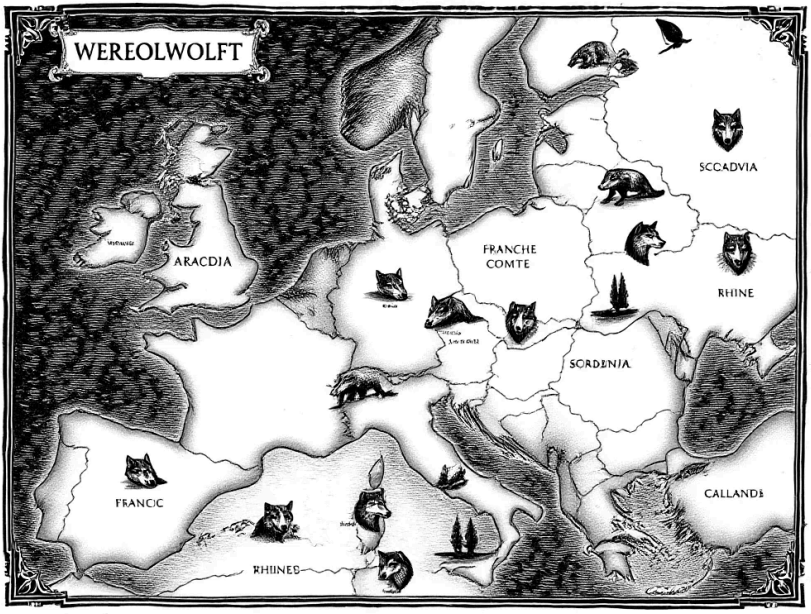
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WEREOLWOLFT
SCCADVIA
ARACDIA
FRANCHE
COMTE
RHINE
SORDENIA
CALLANDS
FRANCIC
RHIINES

For those who have worn the skin and come back human.

INTRODUCTION

I am standing in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, holding a sixteenth-century trial manuscript in which Pierre Burgot confesses to smearing himself with an ointment and becoming a wolf. The parchment smells of dust and iron. His words, copied by a court clerk in 1521, describe the taste of a child's flesh with the clinical precision that makes my hands cold. Burgot claims he killed a seven-year-old boy near Poligny, dragged the body into undergrowth, and ate from the thigh. He remembers the texture. The document sits in a cardboard folder, spine cracked, the ink faded to brown in places but still legible. This is not a folktale. This is a legal record. Pierre Burgot was burned alive in Besançon on the strength of this confession. His accomplice, Michel Verdun, died the same way on the same day. I came to Paris looking for werewolves in literature. I found them in courtrooms. That trip changed the shape of this book. I had intended to write about werewolf legends, the kind passed down in oral tradition and collected by nineteenth-century folklorists who made a career of cleaning them up. But the trial records demanded a different approach. They are messy, brutal, and far stranger than anything I had read in Grimm or in the folklore compilations I had skimmed in graduate seminars. The defendants describe not only the act of transformation but the sensation: cold spreading through the limbs, the world narrowing to scent and hunger, the return to human form marked by nausea and shame. Some confessed freely. Others only after torture. Many accounts contradict themselves within the same deposition. I found myself asking not whether the werewolf was real, but what reality meant to the people who believed they had become one, prosecuted one, or burned one alive. The werewolf is older than the trials. Far older. Ovid gives us Lycaon in the Metamorphoses,

the Arcadian king who tests Zeus by serving him human flesh and is punished by transformation into a wolf. That story, written at the turn of the first century, draws on Greek traditions at least five centuries older. Plato mentions the Lycaean rites in the Republic, rituals in which participants ate meat mixed with human entrails and believed themselves at risk of becoming wolves for nine years. Pausanias, writing in the second century, records the story without endorsing it but notes that the Arcadians themselves took it seriously. The werewolf enters Western literature as divine punishment, the gods reminding mortals that the boundary between human and beast is thinner than pride allows. Norse tradition takes a different path. The berserkers and úlfhéðnar, the wolf-coats, appear in sagas as warriors who fought in animal skins and fell into a battle fury that made them, by all accounts, unstoppable and terrifying. Snorri Sturluson describes them in Ynglinga saga as men who went without mail, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or bulls. Modern scholars argue over whether this was ritual, psychosis, ingestion of psychoactive plants, or simply literary exaggeration. The sagas themselves do not explain. They show the wolf-warrior as both honored and feared, a figure whose transformation serves the community in war but makes him dangerous in peace. The werewolf here is not punishment. It is power. By the sixteenth century, that power has curdled into horror. The same decades that saw the height of the European witch trials, roughly 1580 to 1630, also saw the werewolf trials. Fewer of them, certainly. The scholarship on werewolves is a fraction of the scholarship on witches. But the trial records that survive are no less disturbing. Men, almost always men, confessed to pacts with the devil, to receiving ointments or wolf-pelts that allowed them to transform, to killing livestock and children. The confessions follow recognizable patterns, patterns that map closely onto demonological treatises published by learned men who had never seen a wolf. Jean Bodin, the French jurist, describes werewolves in his 1580 De la démonomanie des sorciers as a subset of witchcraft, Satan's agents in animal form. The trial of Peter Stumpp in Cologne in 1589 became a bestselling pamphlet, illustrated with woodcuts of a man tearing limbs from children. Stumpp was broken on the wheel, beheaded, and burned. His daughter and his mistress were strangled and burned alongside him. The pamphlet does not name the artist. I do not pretend to know what Pierre Burgot believed when he said he became a wolf. I do not know if he believed it at all, or whether the confession was shaped by leading

questions, by pain, or by a prosecutor who had read Bodin and knew what answers he wanted. What I do know is that the trial records preserve a moment when the werewolf moved from myth into law. The stories that had circulated in oral culture for centuries, stories about men who could take wolf form and return by dawn, became evidence in capital cases. The werewolf ceased to be a figure of wonder or of warrior pride and became a criminal category. That transformation, from divine punishment to honored ferocity to prosecutable heresy, is the spine of this book. The challenge in writing it has been methodological. How do you study something that exists in four registers at once: myth, folklore, courtroom testimony, and cultural projection? The ancient sources give us gods and heroes. The sagas give us warriors. The trial records give us confessions extracted under conditions we would now call torture. The early modern pamphlets give us propaganda. None of these sources is neutral. All of them tell us something true, but not always about werewolves. Sometimes they tell us about sovereignty, or about masculinity, or about what a society does when it needs a monster to prosecute. I have tried to hold these threads separately, to resist the urge to synthesize them into one clean narrative. The werewolf does not want to be clean. This book moves chronologically because the meaning of the werewolf changes with time. We begin in Greece with Lycaon, the first werewolf whose story survives in writing. We move north and forward to the Norse berserkers, whose wolf identity served a social function and carried no moral taint. We enter the late medieval and early modern period, where the werewolf becomes a creature of demonology and dies at the stake. And we glance, briefly, at the modern werewolf, the one who stalks through cinema and young adult fiction, stripped of most of his history and made safe for metaphor. I do not cover every werewolf story ever told. That would take ten books and bore both of us. I have tried to track the moments when the werewolf changes shape, when the culture around him decides he means something new. I have also tried to look beyond Europe. The skin-changer is not a European invention. The Americas have their naguals and their yee naaldlooshii, the Navajo skinwalkers. West Africa has the bultungin, the hyena-men. India has its were-tigers. The specific animal changes with the local predator, but the structure remains: a human who crosses into animal form, voluntarily or otherwise, and whose transformation marks him as powerful, cursed, or both. I do not claim expertise in all these traditions. Where I discuss them, I have relied on anthro-

pologists and on the written accounts of community members who have chosen to share their stories. The European werewolf is not the only werewolf. He is simply the one whose trial records I can read without a translator. One thing surprised me more than anything else in the research. The sheer violence of the trial confessions. I had expected strangeness. I had not expected the level of detail about the killing of children, the descriptions of taste and texture, the casual recounting of acts that would have appalled any reader then or now. Some of this is surely invention, the product of torture or of a defendant who knew what the court wanted to hear. But some of it, I think, reflects something deeper: a need to explain the inexplicable. If a child goes missing, if livestock is found torn apart, if a man is known to wander at night and act strangely by day, the werewolf offers an explanation that makes emotional sense even when it makes no logical sense. The monster is not random. The monster has a name. I wrote this book because the werewolf keeps changing and yet remains recognizable. Because he appears in Ovid and in Netflix and means something different each time but never loses his teeth. Because the trial records are still in archives, unread by most of the people who argue about whether werewolves are metaphors for puberty or repressed sexuality or the dangers of toxic masculinity. All of those readings have some truth. None of them is the whole truth. The werewolf is older and stranger than any single interpretation. He bites through theory. You are about to meet Lycaon, the first werewolf whose name we know. The water from Zeus's cup is still pooling on the floor of his throne room. His hands are already growing dark with fur.



CHAPTER 1

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE WOLF-MAN

The shepherd crouches in the shadow of a limestone outcrop on Mount Lykaion, watching the procession climb toward the sanctuary of Zeus. The air smells of wild thyme and woodsmoke. It is late summer, and the heat has turned the high pastures to tinder. He knows what happens at the summit, though he has never seen it himself. Every year, the priests of Zeus Lykaios perform a sacrifice. Every year, the story returns: a man enters the sacred precinct and does not come out the same. The mountain rises from the heart of Arcadia, a knot of limestone ridges that the Greeks considered older than the moon. Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, records that the sacrifice on Mount Lykaion involved the slaughter of animals, but he stops short of describing what else was offered. He writes that men who ate from a particular victim became wolves, and that this transformation was not metaphorical. The man would live as a wolf for nine years. If he abstained from human flesh during that time, he would return to human form in the tenth year. If he tasted human meat, he remained a wolf forever. The shepherd does not read Pausanias. He does not need to. The knowledge is carved into the landscape itself. The sanctuary at the summit is a place of boundaries: between man and animal, between human law and something older. The wolves that hunt the high pastures are not simply predators. They are kin to the shepherds in a way that defies easy explanation. The line between them is drawn in blood and rit-

ual, and on this mountain, that line can be crossed. The procession disappears into the trees. The shepherd returns to his flock. The sun hangs low over the peaks, and the shadows lengthen. Somewhere above him, in the stone circle where Zeus receives his offerings, a man is about to become something else. The shepherd does not envy him. He knows what it costs to walk on four legs, to taste raw meat, to forget the sound of human speech. But he also knows that the transformation is never entirely voluntary. Arcadia demands it. The mountain demands it. And the man who climbs to the summit carries a hunger that Zeus himself will sanctify. --- Arcadia, in the geography of Greek myth, is not simply a region of the central Peloponnese. It is a conceptual space where pastoral life collides with the wilderness that precedes and surrounds it. Pausanias's Description of Greece, compiled around 160 CE, records the sanctuary of Zeus Lykaios on Mount Lykaion as the oldest cult site in the Greek world, predating even the oracle at Delphi. The ritual performed there, according to Pausanias, involved the sacrifice of animals on a secret altar, and the participation of men who, through that sacrifice, underwent a transformation. Pausanias is careful with his language: he does not confirm the werewolf story, but he does not dismiss it either. He writes that the people of Arcadia believed it, and that the evidence was visible in the behaviour of certain men who, after the ritual, avoided human contact and lived in the mountains for years. The Greek term for the transformed man is *lykanthropos*, wolf-man, and the condition is *lykanthropia*. The word appears first in medical and philosophical texts of the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, but the concept is older. Plato, in the Republic, references a tradition that those who taste human flesh at the sacrifice on Mount Lykaion become wolves. He uses the story as a metaphor for tyranny: the man who acquires a taste for absolute power cannot return to ordinary human life. But Plato's metaphor rests on a literal belief. The sacrifice was real. The transformation, to the people of Arcadia, was not symbolic. Ovid, writing in the early first century CE, provides the most detailed narrative of a Greek werewolf transformation in the Metamorphoses. His account of King Lycaon of Arcadia, struck down by Zeus and turned into a wolf as punishment for serving human flesh at a banquet, establishes the template for later European werewolf stories. Lycaon becomes a wolf but retains traces of his former identity: his eyes still gleam with the cruelty of a man, his howl carries the echo of a human voice. Ovid's Lycaon is not simply an animal. He is a man trapped inside

the body of a predator, unable to fully relinquish his humanity and unable to reclaim it. The connection between Arcadia and the wolf runs deeper than any single myth. The region was home to semi-nomadic shepherds who lived at the edge of the polis, the Greek city-state. They were necessary to the economy but marginal to the culture. The wolf, *lykos*, was their constant adversary and their symbolic double. Greek pastoralism depended on the control of predators, and the wolf was the apex threat. At the same time, the shepherd and the wolf occupied the same liminal space: the high pastures, the forests, the zones where human order faded into wilderness. The transformation from shepherd to wolf, in this context, is not a grotesque violation of nature. It is a recognition that the boundary between the two was always provisional. Greek religion acknowledged this ambiguity. Zeus Lykaios, Zeus of the wolves, was not simply a protector of shepherds. He was a god of the boundary itself, the force that mediated between human and animal, between the domestic and the wild. Scholars have noted that the sacrifice on Mount Lykaion resembles initiation rituals documented in other Indo-European cultures, where young men underwent trials that required them to live as warriors outside the community, adopting the behaviour and appearance of predators. Walter Burkert, in Homo Necans, argues that the Greek werewolf myth preserves a memory of such initiations, though the ritual had lost its original social function by the time Pausanias recorded it. The wolf-man is not unique to Greece. The same figure appears across the Indo-European world, wherever the wolf and the warrior intersect. In the Norse sagas, the boundary between man and wolf is crossed by the berserker and the ulfhednar, the wolf-warriors who fought in animal skins and were said to take on the strength and fury of the animals they wore. The Volsunga Saga, composed in Iceland in the thirteenth century, includes the story of Sigmund and Sinfjotli, who discover wolfskins in a forest and put them on. The skins cannot be removed for ten days. While wearing them, the two men become wolves, capable of understanding wolf speech and hunting as wolves hunt. They kill men without hesitation, and when Sinfjotli is wounded, Sigmund licks the wound as a wolf would. The transformation is temporary, but it is total. The distribution of these stories follows the distribution of *Canis lupus*, the grey wolf, across the temperate and subarctic zones of Eurasia. The wolf was the dominant large predator in the forests and steppes of Europe, and the primary competitor for the same prey that early human hunters relied upon. It was

also a pack animal, capable of cooperation and strategy in ways that made it both a model and a threat to human societies. The Indo-European warrior cultures that emerged from the steppes in the third and second millennia BCE carried with them a symbolic vocabulary in which the wolf represented the warrior outside the law, the killer who operates at the edge of human order. This vocabulary survived in the myths and legal codes of their descendants: the Greeks, the Romans, the Germanic tribes, the Norse. By the early modern period, the wolf was still a physical presence in much of Europe. The forests of eastern France, the German Rhineland, and the Alpine regions of Switzerland and Austria supported stable wolf populations into the eighteenth century. The human communities in these regions lived in close proximity to wolves, and their folklore reflected that proximity. But the nature of the werewolf belief had changed. The Greek werewolf was a figure of ambiguous sanctity, a man transformed by ritual or divine punishment. The early modern werewolf was a figure of criminal horror, a man who chose to become a wolf through pact with the devil or the application of a cursed ointment. The boundary between man and wolf, in the Greek imagination, was part of the natural and religious order. In the early modern imagination, it was a boundary that should never be crossed, and the man who crossed it was an abomination. --- The wolf-warrior stands at the edge of the forest, his breath visible in the cold air. He wears the skin of a wolf, the head pulled over his own like a hood, the forepaws lashed to his arms. The pelt still carries the scent of the animal: musk and blood and wet fur. He is not alone. A dozen others stand with him, identically dressed, their faces hidden in shadow. They do not speak. Speech is not permitted once the skins are on. This is Norway, sometime in the tenth century. The men are preparing for a raid. They are not berserkers, the bear-warriors who fight in trance states and feel no pain. They are ulfhednar, wolf-warriors, and their transformation is more calculated. They have fasted for three days. They have chewed the bark of a certain tree, whose name the sagas do not record, and drunk a mixture that makes their vision sharpen and their hearts race. The wolf-skins are not costumes. They are thresholds. When the raid begins, they do not fight like men. They move on all fours when speed is needed. They bite when their weapons are lost. They howl, and the sound is not human. The enemy, a neighbouring clan, breaks and runs. The ulfhednar pursue, and the killing is efficient and without mercy. Later, back in the hall, the wolf-skins are hung on the walls. The men return to

their names and their families. But the memory of the transformation lingers. For a few hours, they were not men. They were wolves. The sagas preserve this memory, but they do it carefully. The wolf-warrior is both hero and monster. He serves his king and his people, but he is also dangerous to them. The boundary he crosses is necessary for the survival of the group, but it is a boundary that must be controlled. The man who cannot remove the wolf-skin, who cannot return to human form, is an outlaw. He is killed, or he is driven into the wilderness, where he becomes the wolf he pretended to be. --- The distribution of werewolf beliefs in early modern Europe follows a pattern that is not arbitrary. The heaviest concentration of trials and confessions occurs in the upland regions of the Franco-German borderlands: Franche-Comté, Lorraine, the Rhineland, the Black Forest, the Vosges. These are regions of mixed forest and pasture, where villages are small and isolated, and where the wolf is still a physical threat to livestock and, occasionally, to children. The archives of the Parlement de Dole, the regional court for Franche-Comté, contain records of werewolf trials dating from the early sixteenth century. The most famous case, that of Gilles Garnier in 1573, describes a man who confessed to killing children while in the form of a wolf, using an ointment given to him by a stranger in the forest. Garnier was convicted and burned alive. The ointment is a recurring element in these confessions. Pierre Burgot, tried in 1521 in Besançon, claimed that a man on horseback gave him a salve that allowed him to transform into a wolf. The salve, according to Burgot, smelled of rancid fat and herbs. When he rubbed it on his skin, he felt a burning sensation, and his body changed. He grew hair, his hands became paws, and his mind emptied of human thought. He killed a child and ate from the body, and he remembered the taste. The confession is detailed, specific, and horrifying. It is also, by modern forensic standards, almost certainly fabricated under torture. But the details matter. The ointment, the burning, the loss of human consciousness: these are not random inventions. They are consistent across dozens of confessions from different regions and different decades. Jean de Nynauld, a French physician writing in 1615, offers an explanation for the werewolf phenomenon that attempts to reconcile popular belief with medical knowledge. In his treatise On Lycanthropy, Transformation, and Ecstasy of Sorcerers, he argues that the ointments used by supposed werewolves contain substances that induce hallucinations and violent behaviour. He lists ingredients: belladonna, henbane, opium, and animal fats. These

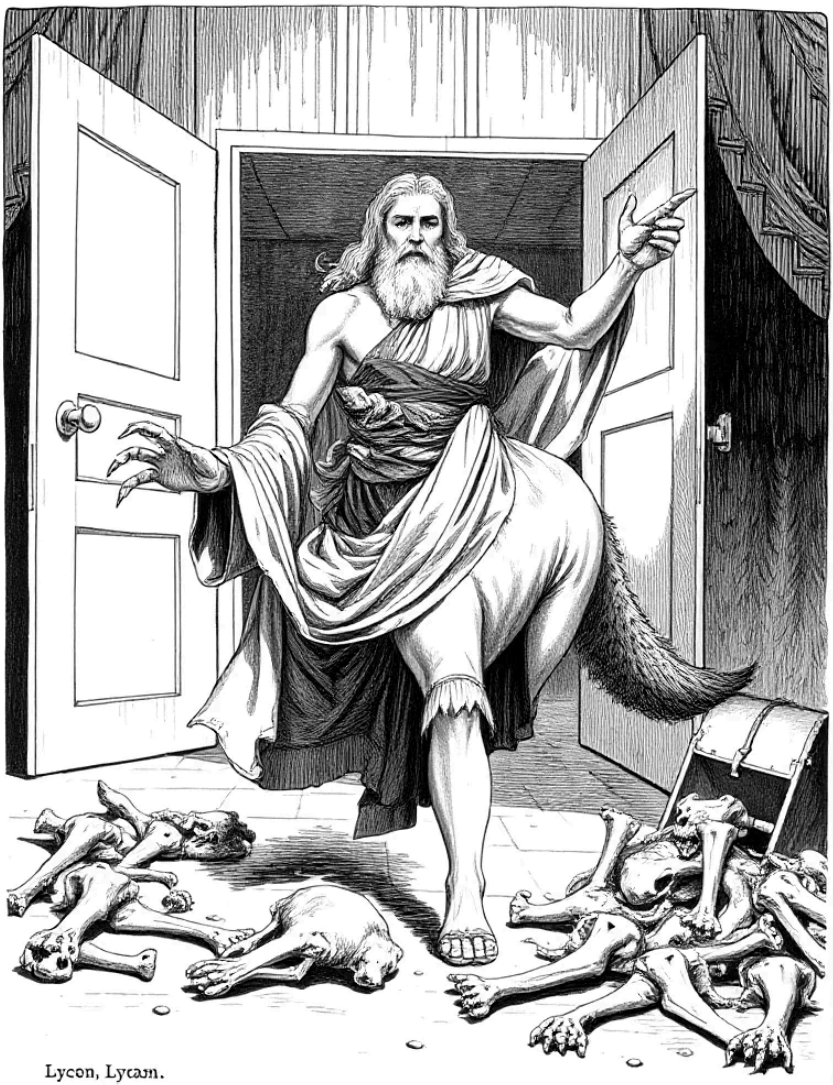
substances, applied to the skin, can cause delirium, numbness, and a distortion of the senses. The man who believes himself to be a wolf is not lying, according to Nynauld. He is experiencing a chemically induced psychosis. The murders are real, but the transformation is not. Nynauld's explanation is not fully accepted by his contemporaries. The Church maintains that the devil can grant real transformations, and that the werewolf is not simply a madman but a servant of Satan. The debate is not resolved in the sixteenth century, nor in the seventeenth. It persists through the age of the trials, and it shapes the legal treatment of accused werewolves. Some courts treat them as witches, others as lunatics, still others as ordinary murderers whose confessions of transformation are irrelevant to their guilt. The European werewolf is specific to regions where *Canis lupus* was both ecologically present and symbolically central to the culture. But the phenomenon of the skin-changer is not unique to Europe. The term "lycanthropy" is derived from the Greek, but the concept it describes appears in cultures with no historical connection to Greece. In India and Southeast Asia, the were-tiger occupies the same narrative and psychological space as the European werewolf. The tiger, not the wolf, is the apex predator in the forests of Bengal, Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula, and the stories of men who become tigers follow the same structure as European werewolf tales. The transformation is voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent, a curse or a gift. The man who becomes a tiger kills livestock and sometimes humans. He is hunted by the community, and if he is caught, he is executed. In Mesoamerica, the jaguar takes the place of the wolf and the tiger. The were-jaguar appears in the mythology of the Olmec, the Maya, and the Aztec. The *nagual*, the animal double or spirit companion, is often depicted as a jaguar, and the transformation into jaguar form is associated with shamanic power and ritual violence. The jaguar-man is both priest and predator, mediator between the human world and the world of the gods. The transformation is not criminal, as it becomes in early modern Europe. It is a form of access, a way of moving between ontological categories that ordinary humans cannot cross. In West Africa, the leopard-men of the secret societies of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria occupy a similar position. The leopard-man wears the skin of a leopard and uses iron claws to kill his victims. The murders are ritual, not random, and they serve the purposes of the society to which the leopard-man belongs. The transformation, in this context, is a form of power that is socially sanctioned within the secret society but illegal under

colonial and post-colonial law. The leopard-man is not insane. He is performing a role that his culture recognizes, even as it fears him. The pattern is consistent: wherever a large predator coexists with pastoral or agricultural human societies, the figure of the skin-changer emerges. The predator is both enemy and double, the animal that humans must kill to survive but also the animal that represents the qualities humans need to survive: strength, stealth, ruthlessness. The transformation from human to predator is a crossing of that boundary, and it is experienced by the culture as simultaneously necessary and transgressive. The skin-changer is useful, but he is also dangerous. He must be controlled, and if he cannot be controlled, he must be destroyed. The European werewolf is not an anomaly. It is a local expression of a pattern that appears across the world, shaped by the specific ecology and history of the regions where the wolf was the dominant predator. The trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent a moment when that pattern intersected with the legal and theological apparatus of the Christian Church, and the skin-changer was redefined as a criminal and a heretic. But the belief itself, the conviction that a human can become an animal, is older than Christianity and older than the state. It emerges from the relationship between humans and predators, and it persists wherever that relationship is still immediate and dangerous. --- The forest outside Poligny is quiet. It is early spring, and the snow has melted in patches, revealing the dark earth beneath. The trees are bare, their branches black against the grey sky. A group of men walks through the undergrowth, their boots crunching on the frozen ground. They are searching for a body. They find it at the base of an oak tree. The child is a boy, seven or eight years old, partially clothed, his body torn open from chest to groin. The wounds are not clean. They are ragged, as if made by teeth rather than a blade. The men stand in a circle around the body, silent. One of them crosses himself. Another turns away and vomits. They have seen death before, but not like this. The year is 1521. Within days, two men will be arrested: Pierre Burgot and Michel Verdun. They will confess to killing the boy while in the form of wolves. They will describe the ointment, the transformation, the taste of the flesh. They will be tried, convicted, and burned alive in the town square of Besançon. The trial records will survive, copied into the archives of the Parlement de Dole, and they will become the first documented werewolf trial in France. But here, in the forest, the men do not yet know the names of the killers. They know only that some-

thing has crossed a boundary that should not be crossed. The child's body is evidence of that crossing. The wounds speak a language that is older than law, older than the Church, older than the town of Poligny itself. The men lift the body and carry it back toward the village. The forest closes behind them, silent and indifferent. --- The geographical distribution of werewolf belief in Europe reflects the historical range of the wolf and the economic structures that brought humans and wolves into competition. The wolf, *Canis lupus*, was present across Europe until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when systematic extermination campaigns reduced or eliminated populations in most regions. Before that, the wolf was a constant feature of the rural landscape. It preyed on livestock, particularly sheep and goats, and it occasionally attacked humans, especially children. The shepherds and farmers of early modern Europe knew the wolf not as a distant symbol but as a physical presence, dangerous and immediate. The concentration of werewolf trials in the Franco-German uplands reflects the density of wolf populations in those regions. The forests of the Vosges, the Black Forest, and the Jura Mountains provided ideal habitat for wolves: mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, rugged terrain, and abundant prey in the form of deer, wild boar, and domestic animals. The human communities in these regions were small, dispersed, and economically marginal. They lived at the boundary between the cultivated lowlands and the wild uplands, and their folklore reflected that position. The wolf was not simply a threat to livestock. It was a symbolic figure that condensed a cluster of anxieties about the boundary between human and animal, between order and chaos, between the domestic space of the village and the uncontrolled space of the forest. The werewolf, in this context, is the human who crosses that boundary voluntarily or involuntarily, who becomes the predator that the community fears. The transformation is not metaphorical. It is a literal change in ontological status, a movement from one category of being to another. This is not unique to Europe. The were-tiger of India and the were-jaguar of Mesoamerica perform the same symbolic function in their respective cultures. What is unique to Europe is the legal and theological response to the skin-changer. The trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent an attempt to domesticate the werewolf, to bring it under the control of the Church and the state. The werewolf is redefined as a witch, a heretic, a servant of the devil. The transformation is no longer a crossing of a natural boundary. It is a crime, a sin, a violation of divine law. The archives of the

Parlement de Dole contain dozens of werewolf cases, most of them resulting in execution. The confessions follow a pattern: the accused describes an encounter with a stranger, usually in a forest, who offers an ointment or a girdle that enables the transformation. The accused rubs the ointment on his skin or fastens the girdle around his waist, and his body changes. He grows hair, his hands become paws, his teeth sharpen. He hunts as a wolf hunts, killing livestock or, in the most extreme cases, children. He eats the flesh, and he remembers the taste. When the transformation ends, he returns to human form and hides the evidence of his crimes. The pattern is so consistent that it suggests either a shared cultural script or a shared experience. Jean de Nynauld, writing in 1615, argues for the latter. The ointment, he claims, contains psychoactive substances that induce hallucinations and violent behaviour. The accused genuinely believes he has transformed into a wolf, and his actions are shaped by that belief. The murders are real, but the transformation is a chemically induced delusion. Nynauld's explanation is not implausible. Belladonna, henbane, and other plants used in early modern witchcraft contain alkaloids that affect the central nervous system, producing sensations of flight, transformation, and dissociation. Applied to the skin, these substances can be absorbed into the bloodstream, particularly if the skin is abraded or if the ointment is mixed with animal fats that penetrate the epidermis. The experience of transformation, from this perspective, is real in the sense that the person experiences it, but it is not real in the sense that the body physically changes. But the chemical explanation does not fully account for the phenomenon. The werewolf confessions describe not only the sensation of transformation but also specific acts of violence that are confirmed by physical evidence: bodies, wounds, witnesses. The accused is not simply hallucinating. He is killing, and the manner of killing is consistent with the behaviour of a large predator. The question is not whether the transformation is real but how the belief in transformation shapes the actions of the person who holds it. The wolf, in the European imagination, is not simply an animal. It is a figure that carries a dense symbolic weight, inherited from Indo-European warrior culture and reinforced by centuries of pastoral conflict. The wolf is the outlaw, the killer who operates outside human law. To become a wolf is to step outside the social order, to become ungovernable, to claim the freedom and the ferocity of the predator. The werewolf confession, in this sense, is not simply a description of events. It is a declaration of identity. The accused is claiming, or is being

forced to claim, that he has crossed a boundary that separates the human from the inhuman, and that he cannot or will not return. --- The trial record lies open on the table in front of me, the pages yellow and brittle. The ink has faded to sepia, but the words are still legible. Pierre Burgot describes the ointment, the burning sensation, the loss of self. He remembers the child's face, the smell of blood, the texture of the meat. He does not ask for mercy. He confesses everything, in detail, as if the act of speaking it makes it more real. The court burns him in June 1521. His accomplice, Michel Verdun, is burned on the same day. The bodies are reduced to ash and scattered. The trial record survives, copied into the archives, preserved as evidence that such things happened, that men became wolves, that the boundary between human and animal was not, in the end, secure. I close the folder and return it to the librarian. Outside, the streets of Paris are bright and loud, full of people who do not think about werewolves. But the forest is still there, at the edge of the city, and the wolf is still there, at the edge of the human. The boundary is thinner than we like to believe. The shepherd on Mount Lykaion knew this. The ulfhednar in the Norwegian forest knew this. Pierre Burgot, standing in the town square of Besançon with the flames rising around him, knew this. The wolf-man is not a monster from the past. He is the edge of the map, the place where the human ends and something else begins. He stands at that edge, waiting, and the forest stretches out behind him, dark and silent and infinite.



Lycon, Lycam.

CHAPTER 2

LYCAON AND THE FIRST WEREWOLF

Zeus comes to Arcadia on foot, disguised as a wanderer, his face darkened by sun and dust. He wears a rough wool cloak, carries a staff of ash wood, and speaks the dialect of the northern hill country. The disguise is perfect. No one in the palace of Lycaon recognizes him. The king receives him at dusk, in the great hall where the fire burns low and the shadows climb the stone walls. The smell of roasting meat fills the air. Lycaon sits on a carved wooden throne, his hands heavy with rings, his face unreadable. He watches the stranger with the stillness of a man who has learned to conceal his thoughts. Zeus stands before him and asks for hospitality. Lycaon nods. A servant brings bread, olives, wine. The stranger eats. The king does not. He is watching. Something in the stranger's bearing unsettles him. The way he moves, the way his eyes rest on things, the way the firelight catches his face. Lycaon has ruled Arcadia for thirty years. He knows how to read men. This one is not what he seems. The king excuses himself and walks to the kitchens. He speaks to the cooks in a low voice. They look at him, then at each other. One of them begins to shake his head, but Lycaon silences him with a gesture. The orders are given. The meat is prepared. When the dish is brought to the table, it is still steaming. The stranger lifts a piece to his mouth, then stops. He sets it down. He looks at Lycaon. The king smiles. Zeus stands. The table overturns, the dishes shatter, the wine runs across the stone floor like blood. The fire in the

hearth leaps upward, and the hall fills with light that is not the light of any earthly flame. Lycaon stumbles backward, his face suddenly pale. He turns and runs. The palace doors burst open. He runs into the fields, into the dark, his breath ragged, his legs unsteady. Behind him, the palace burns. The roof collapses, the timbers crack and fall, the walls glow red. Lycaon does not look back. He runs until his legs give way, and then he falls. His hands press into the earth, and the earth is cold and wet. He tries to stand, but his body will not obey. His fingers are curling, the nails thickening, darkening. Hair erupts from his skin, coarse and grey. His mouth stretches, the jaw elongating, the teeth sharpening. He tries to scream, but the sound that comes out is not a scream. It is a howl, raw and wild, the sound of an animal that knows it has been cast out. His clothes tear and fall away. He stands on four legs. The fields stretch out before him, empty and silver under the moon. He runs again, but this time he runs as a wolf. The human part of him, the part that remembers the palace and the throne and the taste of power, is still there, trapped inside the body of the predator. He can feel it, like a stone in his chest. But he cannot speak. He cannot plead. He can only run, and howl, and hunt. --- Ovid's account of Lycaon in the Metamorphoses, written in the early years of the first century CE, is the most complete and literarily polished version of the myth that survives. The story appears in Book 1, lines 209 to 239, as part of a larger narrative in which Zeus describes the corruption of humanity to the assembled gods and justifies the flood that will destroy the Bronze Age. Lycaon is presented as the exemplary case, the man whose crime is so monstrous that it seals the fate of his entire generation. Zeus, in Ovid's telling, descends to earth to test the piety of mortals. He arrives in Arcadia and reveals his divinity through subtle signs. The common people recognize him and offer prayers. Lycaon, their king, does not. Instead, Lycaon decides to test whether the stranger is truly a god. He plans to murder him in his sleep, but first he prepares a meal. He takes a hostage, a man sent by the Molossians as a pledge of peace, kills him, and has the body dismembered. Some of the flesh is boiled, some roasted. The dish is served to Zeus. The god does not eat. He strikes the palace with lightning, and Lycaon flees into the countryside. There, his body transforms. Ovid writes: "He tries to speak, but his voice becomes a howl. His rage turns against the flocks. He still thirsts for blood. His clothing becomes fur, his arms become legs. He is a wolf, but he keeps traces of his former shape. The greyness is the same, the face still shows the same vi-