

Old Times in *Werewolf of London*

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"Nightmares of the Past"

—Entry, Universal Pictures employee contest
to name *Werewolf of London* (1935)

Other variations occur which relate to questions of time. The trait of inversion may either date back to the very beginning, as far back as the subject's memory reaches, or it may not have become noticeable till some particular time before or after puberty.

—Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the
Theory of Sexuality"

Introduction

FILMS ABOUT MEN WHO TURN INTO ravening wolves are ripe for an approach to the horror genre, pioneered by Robin Wood, that sees the films staging a return of the repressed, eruptions (in the case of werewolf films) of primal carnality that must be contained and eradicated before the societal status quo can be restored and reaffirmed (Wood 7–22). Werewolf films can be construed as dramas about men regressing, but also as ones about young men moving forward. Walter Evans sees films about individuals caught up by powerful urges they can neither understand nor control, and wracked by bodily transformations that include hair growing in unexpected places, telling stories about the traumas and discoveries of adolescence (54–55). This second interpretive template can be fitted to many entries in the subgenre, perhaps none more snugly than *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957). Evans focuses on *The Wolf Man* (1941), with its affable and pitiable protagonist, Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney

Jr.), writing that "the monsters are generally sympathetic, in large part because . . . they themselves suffer the change as unwilling victims" (55). Another unwilling victim of his own sexual awakening, I argue in this article, is the central character in *Werewolf of London* (1935). Universal's first attempt at a werewolf film has not been construed as a "coming of age" story for, perhaps, a couple of reasons: its protagonist has been widely regarded as unsympathetic, and the confusions and terrors of adolescence implicitly dramatized by the film are those, specifically, of a gay man.¹ This dawning is all the more convulsive because it is a *second* adolescence, and so this film depicts, simultaneously, a moving forward and a going back, with the latter sense calling to mind the genre's relationship to the repressed and its return.

That the film has a gay subtext seems to me, although very few have written about it, obvious.² Perhaps this overtness is one reason it is hard to find an extended queer reading of this film; it may seem that there is little work of interpretation to do when so much lies on the surface. An online reviewer of *Werewolf of London* (hereafter *WWL*) calls this subtext "almost impossible to ignore" (Erickson). One starts to get a sense of the film's obsessive thematic preoccupations from even a thumbnail sketch

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of the story, which opens with botanist Wilfred Glendon (Henry Hull) hiking in Tibet in search of a rare flower, the *Mariphasa lupino lumino*, and finding it just before he is attacked and bitten by a werewolf. Glendon returns home to England and meets another botanist, Doctor Yogami (Warner Oland), who, Glendon learns, is the one who bit him in wolf form back in Tibet. Yogami warns Glendon that both of them are now infected, and he implores Glendon to share his specimen of the rare plant, the flower of which contains the only known antidote to werewolfism. Glendon refuses, transforms, kills, and ultimately is shot dead. Along the way, he and Yogami, bound by their terrible secret, vie and tussle for possession of a flower that Harry Benshoff has called “the key signifier of the homoerotic male couple’s lycanthropy in *Werewolf of London*” (47).

Beyond its bare narrative outlines, the film supplies ample encouragement for viewers to construe the two men’s secret to be that they

are only superficially werewolves and actually lovers. There is Glendon’s relationship with his wife, Lisa (Valerie Hobson), which from the outset seems troubled and distant, nothing like the intense chemistry he and Yogami share from their first scene of dialogue together (Photo 1). One could also point to the suggestive staging of Glendon’s attack on Paul (Lester Matthews), Lisa’s childhood sweetheart (Photo 2), and to other moments in a film that in some ways may be obvious but in other ways is richly subtle and complex and deeply ambivalent.

I see *WWL* at the bottom of two “trickle down” processes that are only loosely historically parallel and, outside this film, not closely related. The first is a coalescing of ideas found in fictional and “nonfictional” accounts of werewolves that predate this first major cinematic treatment of the subject.³ The second is a coalescing of theoretical ideas concerning male homosexuality. Elaine Showalter writes that



Photo 1: *Werewolf of London* (1935).



Photo 2.

many historians of sexuality now argue that male homosexuality and the male homosexual role are “inventions” of the late nineteenth century. The concept of homosexuality began to take shape in the 1880s in the work of John Addington Symonds and Richard von Krafft-Ebing and in the work of Victorian sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. (14)

Importantly, some of these ideas, even after theorists no longer held them, continued to influence popular conceptions of homosexuality, including shaping how some gay men have thought about themselves. For example, some theories that were articulated in the period Showalter identifies claimed that homosexuals combined traits of the male and female genders (Sedgwick 171–72). Richard Dyer notes that decades after theorists stopped believing this, notions of “in-betweenism” continue to inform both how gays are characterized in popular culture texts, such as films, and how some gay men characterize themselves (Dyer with Pidduck 33–37; Dyer 30–37).

Discarded clinical views from another century can infiltrate self-perceptions and popular culture texts, including, I claim, *WWL*. Specifically, the film intertwines ideas concerning the *causes* of homosexuality and werewolfism. The film tinges with ambiguity and ambivalence its answer to the question of when Glendon becomes a werewolf, and this answer resonates with contrasting opinions that circulated in the decades prior to the film’s release concerning how one becomes a homosexual. Essential to understanding the film in this light is its screenplay by gay playwright and screenwriter John Colton, a text that goes further than the film does to grapple with the shame, misery, and desperation that can be experienced by a gay man living in a highly repressive society.⁴

Ancestral Memory

We cannot evade the conditions of atavism and heredity. Every family runs the risk of producing a boy or a girl whose life will be embittered by inverted sexuality.

—John Addington Symonds, *Studies in Sexual Inversion*

“And those eyebrows that meet,” Aymer pursued. “Yes, I’ve noticed that, but I took that for a sign of hereditary syphilis.”

—Guy Endore, *The Werewolf of Paris*

When does Glendon become a werewolf? The most straightforward answer is that he becomes one when Yogami-wolf bites him in Tibet. The film, however, gives us reason to suspect that Glendon brought his troubles along with him on this expedition. The film’s wavering and self-contradiction on this question echo writings by theorists of human sexuality who, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wondered whether a person was born a homosexual or became one over time.

As with other aspects of its thematic underpinning, *WWL* establishes a basis for its equivocation on the moment of inception of Glendon’s condition by amplifying and extending traits that were already present in werewolf lore and literature. Before getting to *WWL*, I will briefly examine these traits and consider how, before Colton wrote his screenplay, werewolf stories and certain accounts of homosexuality’s causes echoed one another.

Montague Summers, in his book-length study *The Werewolf* (1934), noted that werewolfism could be hereditary or acquired (2).⁵ Inherited werewolfism was traceable to a number of possible sources. The curse could run in families, and it might be transmitted across generations through other means as well: Guy Endore’s 1933 novel *The Werewolf of Paris* depicts a woman who is raped by a priest and gives birth on Christmas day to Bertrand, who is a werewolf. This novel also suggests that the problem could reach much further back in time when its narrator notes that “the sources of moral diseases . . . often lie far back in the past” (17) and when a (disingenuous) doctor finds in Bertrand’s story the basis for “a remarkable new theory for all the inexplicable manifestations of morbid and abnormal psychology. The intrusion, even in partial degrees, of lower forms of life into the human form” (315). Notions of werewolfism as a regression to an earlier and more savage stage of humanity

are not uncommon in pre-cinematic accounts and legends of the curse.⁶

Another novel, *The Undying Monster* (1922) by Jessie Douglas Kerruish, envisions the curse as one of inherited trauma. A character explains,

Every experience and emotion makes a record of itself in the substance of the brain, records deeply or lightly impressed, according to their importance to the owner of the brain. They cause an alteration in the convolutions of its substance. Some of these alterations are soon obliterated, some last through the owner's lifetime, some will last for centuries—may last to the end of time. (124)

The transmitted “residues,” then, can be of a past traumatic event, archaic humanity, or bad family blood.⁷

In a modern consciousness, such an inheritance can induce conflicting urges and even give rise to a full-blown split personality. In *The Undying Monster*, a character who does not know he is a werewolf stands on a spot once occupied by his ancestors and tells his doctor,

I believe I'm living a double life, in the same place and same skin and at the same time! Simultaneously I'm thinking of myself and how glad I am to be alive here, and living over how glad my forbears were to be alive here. I suppose it's your doing, stirring up my ancestral memory. It must be affecting my sanity a bit—and it's very joyful madness! (Kerruish 162)

Such a portrait—of a man sensing he is leading a double life, with the inner life (in this case recessed in a past older than himself) giving rise to exhilarating but frightening sensations (“joyful madness”)—suggests that it may be possible to draw some lines of affinity between the self-perceptions of werewolves and some gay men.

Psychologists and others claimed that homosexuality could be inherited or acquired.⁸ In the former case, a “corruption” occurring somewhere in the bloodline yielded a homosexual

further down. Referring to homosexuality by a then-current name for it, John Addington Symonds, a nineteenth-century English critic, essayist, and poet who took a progressive view toward homosexuality, wrote, “That sexual inversion may be and actually is transmitted, like any other quality, appears to be proved by the history of well-known families both in England and in Germany. That it is not unfrequently exhibited by persons who have a bad ancestral record, may be taken for demonstrated” (134–35). Symonds notes that another writer, Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, “includes sexual inversion in his general survey of human crime, and connects it less with anomalies of the nervous centres than with atavistic reversion to the state of nature and savagery” (143). Sigmund Freud, who found sexual inversion “remarkably widespread among many savage and primitive races” (“Three Essays” 139), wrote that “in inverted types, a predominance of archaic constitutions and primitive psychological mechanisms is regularly to be found” (“Three Essays” 146 n. 1). Psychologist William Stekel, an associate of Freud, placed the homosexual “nearer the aboriginal bisexual predisposition of mankind than the normal person who is typical of the current age” (46). Homosexuals so construed become throwbacks, modern humans returned to an earlier stage of evolution.

Benshoff supplies a context for linking these claims to *WWL* when he writes that “Stekel associates homosexuality . . . with sadism, masochism, incestuous desires, jealousy, paranoia, criminality, and regression to baser animalistic instincts: all states or aspects of human existence that would more or less comprise the catalog of the classical Hollywood horror film's themes and obsessions” (32). That the botanist Glendon seems to revert to a primitive state would suggest that whatever gets expressed through his condition was always present within him, as it was in his ancestors stretching back to prehistory. Another possibility is that his condition was foisted on him from without when, traveling in a foreign land, he caught something by not being sufficiently careful.⁹ The second of these hypotheses is both ad-

vanced and undermined by the film and its screenplay.

During their climactic confrontation, Glendon accuses Yogami of turning him into a werewolf. In the screenplay only, Yogami fires back, “In Thibet [*sic*]*—in the dark . . . I brought this thing on you . . . You had gone to a place you had no right to . . . You meddled with Hell, Glendon . . . What happened was no fault of mine*” (Colton shot I-62).¹⁰ The film supports Yogami’s self-defense when it shows Glendon searching, at the outset, for the Mariphasa, a plant the film closely associates with werewolfism by having it bloom by moonlight and by inflicting the bite on Glendon at virtually the moment he finds the coveted plant. If Glendon did not catch something in Tibet but brought his troubles with him—if he was, in a sense, looking for trouble when he set off on his trip—when did he start looking? If the problem originated somewhere in the past, could it be one of “ancestral memory”?

Inviting us to think about the nature of Glendon’s problems in temporal terms is a pair of

shots joined by a dissolve. After the attack in Tibet, the wounded botanist reaches for the flower (Photo 3). In the shot following the dissolve, he is still reaching, only now he is back in his London laboratory, the bite has healed into a scar, and he is grasping the plant (Photo 4). This graphic match suggests, as Reynold Humphries notes (in his reading of what he views as the film’s incest subtext), that the Mariphasa constitutes a potent figure of desire (39–40). Reinforcing such an impression is the “frantic light of the collector’s mania” (A-26) in Glendon’s eye when, in Tibet, he searches for the plant and later when, as the Mariphasa starts to bloom, “Glendon and Yogami stare at the flower, fascinated” (I-64).

This dissolve transports Glendon back to England and forward in time. Though in narrative terms, the period involved is (at least) how long it takes for a wound to become a scar, viewing this time span metaphorically allows us to ask how long Glendon had been reaching for something without grasping it, how long he



Photo 3: Shot 1.



Photo 4: Shot 2.

endured the unsatisfied longings we see driving his actions from the first scene in the film.

If we take the pair of shots to suggest that Glendon's relationship to his past somehow bears crucially on his present, we next need to determine what we mean by "the past." Maybe Glendon's condition is one of heredity. The film implies this when Lisa, shrugging off her marital unhappiness, says, "I knew the risk I took when I met him, one of the black Glendons of Malvern." Is something askew in the Glendon bloodline? The film does not develop this possibility, although the screenplay suggests that Glendon's condition has roots in prehistory when Yogami says of werewolves that "these beliefs have been in the bowels of the human race since its dark beginnings in the abysses of antiquity . . . One may give them up—but that doesn't alter the fact that in workaday modern London at this very moment—there are two cases of werewolfery known to me" (B-61-B-62).¹¹

What better place to get in touch with the abysses of antiquity than the wilds of Tibet, where, Colton writes, Glendon encounters "indescribably mongrelized coolies" (A-2)? Further suggesting that werewolfism originates in human prehistory is a motif, stronger in the screenplay than in the film, involving dogs. These domesticated animals live among us today. We take them for granted and call them companions, just as polite London society accepts Glendon as another gentleman inhabiting their world. It has no inclination of the raging beast he secretly harbors. Discussing Glendon's first victim, a beggar woman on Goose Lane, Paul relates a story of a string of murders in the Yucatan, each "always preceded by the howling of a wolf," and ending when something caught "slinking through the hills" was shot. In just the screenplay, another character adds, "Yes—yes—I've seen the hairy dog men of the Baltic" (E-10). Colton, who has linked wolves and men, now links dogs and men when he refers to canine-human throwbacks roaming in remote, uncivilized places.

Lisa's aunt, Ettie Coombes (Spring Byington), has a dog who reacts violently whenever Glen-

don or Yogami comes near. In the screenplay, when the pet causes a character to spill her tea, she finds the animal anything but tame: "Your beast's a menace, Ettie Coombes—a horrid ratty menace" (C-22). The dog's owner relishes her home's location "in the midst of the sweetest slums. So individual—murderers' dens on one side, pubs on the other." After nearly becoming Glendon's next victim, she sobs hysterically, "My wicked worldliness has caught up with me at last!" What has Ettie to atone for? This middle-aged bachelorette (listed in the credits as "Miss Ettie Coombes") was played by Spring Byington, who was a lesbian.¹² Worth noting in this context is the name of Ettie's dog. Hard to make out in the film because the animal's barking nearly drowns out Ettie when she says it, the dog's name is Sappho (C-20, 22).

Another dog reacts enthusiastically when, toward the end of the film, Glendon arrives at Faldon Abbey, Lisa's family estate, and asks to be locked in a tower there called "The Monk's Rest." The servant, Timothy (Reginald Barlow), says of his wife, "She's always talking about the old days, when Miss Lisa's mother and father was alive and you come a-courtin' here." Watching the dog wag his tail at the sight of Glendon, Timothy says, "Beans remembers the old days too, sir." The dog's name in the screenplay is not Beans but Rags (I-10). This dog has had the wildness bred out of him. If only the ragged ends of something once fierce and magnificent remain, still, the dog remembers. Who knows what wolf dreams still haunt his sleep? Surely, aching, Glendon misses the old days, too.

Adolescent Sin

DR. GOGOL: Your case is one of arrested wish fulfillment.

ORLAC: But why should I wish to throw knives?

DR. GOGOL: Perhaps, as a little child, some playmate threw a knife cleverly. You wished you could do it like him. Now, that wish was not fulfilled. It festered deep in your subconscious. If you could bring that forgotten memory, whatever it is, into consciousness, you would be cured instantly.

—Mad Love (1935)

He, himself, was curious about those strange dreams in which he would yearn to race on all fours through a forest, up hill and down dale. His uncle quieted him: "It's nothing. Occasionally boys will have that. You'll get over it."

—Guy Endore, *The Werewolf of Paris*

If *WWL* depicts a man struggling to overcome, or reconcile himself with, a past that weighs crushingly on his present, how far back does this past go? It might run to prehistory. If so, then living successfully in the modern world demands taming, or repressing, the archaic beast within. Another possibility is that it reaches back only as far as the “black Glendons of Malvern.” Another is that it extends to a point somewhere within Glendon’s lifetime. In a sequence described in the screenplay (B-35-B-44), but only bits of which are glimpsed in the film, a boy at a garden party in Glendon’s conservatory strays too close to a botanical specimen—the giant, carnivorous Madagascar Carnalia (Photos 5–6)—and Glendon sticks the plant with a hat pin and returns the boy to his

mother (Photo 7; also see Glendon with the boy in the bottom right of Photo 5). This sequence provides a basis for locating the inception of Glendon’s “werewolfism” in his childhood.

The Madagascar bears a resemblance, noted by Alison Peirse, to a *vagina dentata* (157–58). Barbara Creed refers to another figuration of the same, the mythical head of the Medusa, and sees in this bloodied head an evocation of menstruating female genitals (65–66). Framing the terror the Medusa can arouse in terms of male fears of castration, Freud links this terror to a traumatic event in childhood: “When a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother” (“Medusa’s Head” 273). Such a sight, Freud speculated, could lead to a castration complex, with consequences for the afflicted individual’s sexual orientation: “Since the Greeks were in the main strongly homosexual, it was



Photo 5.



Photo 6.



Photo 7.

inevitable that we should find among them a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated” (“Medusa’s Head” 274).¹³

If we take the Madagascar to reflect castration anxiety, we can next ask whether the deleted sequence might restage an event in Glendon’s life, when he caught sight of his mother’s genitals and, deeply shaken, developed an aversion to women so strong that he grew over time to be attracted only to other men. (Glendon shows visible discomfort in scenes with not only his wife but other women as well.) If so, then the deleted sequence might enact a *fantasy* on Glendon’s part, in which the adult who wasn’t there to rescue him as a boy extracts, soothes, and returns him to a mother who represents not a monstrous threatening presence but a figure of maternal reassurance and comfort.

Supplying more encouragement to cast the net only as far back as Glendon’s childhood is a curious parallel noted by Humphries (30). Incredulous and dismissive, Glendon tells Yogami: “I’m afraid, sir, that I gave up my belief in goblins, witches, personal devils, and, uh, werewolves at the age of six.” Earlier in the film, Lisa tells Glendon that Paul proposed marriage to her when she was six. Glendon and Lisa are being pulled in opposite directions, Glendon by Yogami and Lisa by Paul. The moment of truth for Lisa, as in love now with Paul as ever, came when she was six. Was it that long ago for Glendon, too? Lisa moved on from Paul, or tried to at least. Glendon’s act of self-

denial was more violent and repressive. Now, everything he tried to bury has returned in the form of the insistent Yogami, who corners Glendon at parties and breaks into his lab to steal his flower. Lisa, no more successful in outrunning *her* past, meets Paul at the same party at which Glendon meets Yogami (following their encounter in Tibet). The film underscores the similarities between the two couples by making Lisa and Paul sound like the film’s second pair of tangling animals:

PAUL: Lee, I can’t bear to see you change like this. You, who used to rear at the drop of a hat.

LISA: A wild pair we were, weren’t we? High-headed, hard at the bit, quick with the heels. How we used to fight, remember?

PAUL: Yes. Where’s all that lovely fight gone?

LISA: There’s been no fight in me since the night we broke things off.

Lisa’s heartsickness is configured as the animal wildness she left behind when, long ago, she broke things off with Paul. This wildness and abandon clearly are what she needs to recover. The parallel to Glendon implies that his “disease” is also not his own inner animal but rather his lack of faithfulness to it.

If Colton hedges on the question of where in time to locate the source of Glendon’s troubles (and he certainly gives us reason to doubt Tibet as that source), he ultimately tips the balance, if perhaps not decisively, in support of an adolescence thesis. In this respect I find

the film more similar than most do to *The Wolf Man*, which Evans is not alone in viewing as a portrayal of the agitated and hormonal sexual awakening of its confused and distraught protagonist.¹⁴ In fact, I find *WWL*'s support of an adolescence thesis made *more* compelling than *Wolf Man*'s by its combination, into one film, of typically separate horror genre conventions. Considering scientific overreachers in horror films, Evans writes that "monster movies unconsciously exploit the fact that most adolescents already know the 'secret of life,' which is, indeed, the 'forbidden knowledge' of sex" (57). Like *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *WWL* depicts a scientist seeking forbidden knowledge, but also, like *Wolf Man*, it depicts hair sprouting copiously on the body of a man suddenly overcome with irrational and insatiable bloodlust. Merging into one story the scientist and the man-into-wolf tropes intensifies *WWL*'s evocation of pubescent transformation and experimentation.

The film and screenplay go further to depict Glendon's crisis as one of adolescent sexuality. For one thing, he conducts his experiments not only, like *Frankenstein* and *Jekyll*, in a locked and secret laboratory, but in one that houses *botanical life*. Colton describes Glendon-wolf leaping from a window and racing to his orchid house, whereupon he "reaches the door of his private experimental conservatory and fumbles with lock in desperate hurry, opens door and slams it behind him" (D-21). Glendon-wolf is in a desperate hurry to get back inside his own secret, humidly alive space of experimentation. Flushed with wolfish heat and blood, he rushes to be among his specimens, ones we have seen Glendon the man attending to closely and with great interest. More than other "mad scientist" films, *WWL* suggests that the object of this scientist's fascination is the moistly developing, privately interior world of his own sexuality. A character cut from the film, Doctor Phillips, examines Glendon's sudden hair growth and tells him, "I'm still convinced it's glandular" (D-14). This diagnosis suggests that Glendon's name supplies another clue about the onset and nature of his condition.

WWL and *Wolf Man* are more alike than critics have realized, and yet if both dramatize sexual awakenings, then this similarity makes important differences between the two films stand out more sharply. Considering James Twitchell's adolescent sexuality theory of horror films, Rick Worland writes that

children's increasing awareness of the mysteries of sex, surrounded by circumspection and taboo in most cultures, seems easily transposed into horror narratives, where, for example, King Kong, the Frankenstein Monster, and Dracula aim to carry off a virgin bride. This is not to say that experiences of this developmental stage are the same either psychologically or culturally for both boys and girls or for adolescents recognizing their homosexuality. (138)

To the extent that these experiences are not the same, differences between them can register as ones not only in kind but also in degree. Evans writes that "the Wolfman guiltily wakes to the mystery of horrible alterations in his body, his mind, and his physical desires—alterations which are completely at odds with the formal strictures of his society" (54). How much *more* at odds with the formal strictures of his society can an adolescent male's physical desires be when they are for another male?

WWL reflects this heightened societal censure through the ambivalence it shows toward its main character. *Wolf Man* features, Twitchell writes, "a big American chump, a nice enough guy who has spent a lot of time playing pinball, and chewing gum, and tinkering with radios and not much time thinking about girls" (225). This character can be *expected* to feel confused and to experiment a bit when his cozy world gets upended by new sensations. If Chaney's Talbot is nice enough, Hull's Glendon, by contrast, never fully wins our affections. Many critics find him unsympathetic.¹⁵ The film itself can be understood to express doubts about the character when, at the climax, the werewolf, shot in the back, tumbles down a flight of stairs, says his last words, and dies. The camera never frames him upright again, even after

he has transformed back into a man (Photo 8). The film hangs Glendon upside down and leaves him there, the way an executed criminal might be hanged in a medieval town square as a warning to anyone else who might be thinking about straying too far out of the cultural mainstream.¹⁶ Though both die, Glendon's punishment is more extreme than Talbot's, and what can be viewed as the most concentrated and vivid embodiment of his secret, the unmistakably vaginal Madagascar Carnalia, is more unsettling and grotesque than anything we see in *Wolf Man*. The Madagascar is only the central figure in an image system that marks another contrast with the later film. R. H. W. Dillard finds *Wolf Man* teeming with phallic symbols, including feet, a massive telescope, and a wolf's-head cane (44). With these we can contrast *WWL*'s images of Glendon's inner "feminine" difference: the convex valley where he finds the Mariphasa, the distinctly V-shaped gash left by the bite, and the furry-mawed Madagascar.¹⁷

WWL internalizes the attitudes of a society that criminalizes and condemns the urges that stir Glendon to action. A second way to understand why his punishment is so severe, and the figuration of his inner nature so extreme, is to see his transformation not as a first adolescence but as a delayed second one. This view changes Glendon's age from a narrative detail that needs to be set aside in order to make the interpretation fit into a detail that should be moved to the interpretation's center. After Glendon rescues the boy, Yogami says of the Madagascar that "evolution was in a strange

mood when that creation came along." Then, Colton writes, "Glendon stares at Yogami without replying. It is evident Yogami has awakened some memory—a disturbing one" (B-47). Again, what memory and how far back it goes are the crucial questions for us to answer.

Contrasts with *Wolf Man*, as Dillard sees the film, shore up a view of Glendon's case as one of, to recall *Mad Love*'s Doctor Gogol, "arrested wish fulfillment." Dillard argues that Talbot progresses from pure innocence to fraught sexual self-knowledge. When we first see the character, he seems carefree and innocent. This Welsh scion's years in America have rendered him eminently American in manner, accent, and attitude. Pragmatically minded, he likes to work with his hands (Dillard 37). The very British Glendon, by contrast, is hunting for the Mariphasa when we first see him, and his gruff manner and "collector's mania" suggest anything but initial freeness and innocence. Talbot does not know what he is looking for, possibly is not looking for anything, and does not know what he finds when he finds it. Dillard writes that Talbot's "American innocence causes him to be unable to see clearly in this European context . . . He sees a walking stick with a silver wolf's head as its handle, but he thinks the wolf is a dog" (38). Most critics prefer Talbot, even though Glendon's character is more complex. One notes, in a comparison of the two films, "Since Talbot is so close to a primitive from the outset, there is not the same level of conflict and duality present" (Hanke 29).



Photo 8.

Glendon's inner struggles drive him metaphorically back in time when, toward the climax, he flees to Faldon Abbey. This setting represents not only his past but also Lisa's and Paul's, for unbeknownst to him, they have driven out to the estate to reminisce. The couple's dialogue is laced with references to their shared past:

PAUL: Oh, Lee, I can't tell you how strange it seems, coming back here, after all these years.

LISA: This is where we used to hunt for birds' eggs. Remember?

PAUL: And this is where I proposed to you. Do you remember that?

LISA: And then a bumblebee stung you. Oh, how funny you looked.

PAUL: Oh, my dear, I can't tell you how good it is to hear you laugh again. Oh, Lee, I love you so much. Always have, always will.

As the two regress to earlier, truer versions of themselves, so, as the moon rises, does Glendon. Asleep, he transforms, while somewhere on the grounds below, Lisa says to Paul, "A penny I can still beat you to the Monk's Tower." Having retreated to separate pasts, this couple and Glendon are about to converge in space. When Lisa reaches the base of the tower, Glendon leaps. When the two come together, the core differences between the husband and wife will never be more clear.

Individuals Broken Down at the Centers of Their Lives

The victim of inherited neuropathy and onanism feels shy with women, and finds it convenient to frequent persons of his own sex. In other words, it is supposed to be easier for an individual thus broken down at the centres of his life to defy the law and demand sexual gratification from men than to consort with venal women in a brothel.

—John Addington Symonds (summarizing and criticizing Richard von Krafft-Ebing), *Studies in Sexual Inversion*

In Palermo they say that as the moon waxes to her round the werewolf begins to feel the craving.

—Montague Summers, *The Werewolf*

She experienced strong homosexual urges, almost irresistible zoophilic drives, and masturbatory compulsions—culminating in the delusion of a wolflike metamorphosis.

—Harvey A. Rosenstock and Kenneth R. Vincent, "A Case of Lycanthropy"

Lisa and Paul's increasingly heartfelt reminiscences take them back in time. Glendon, up in the Monk's Rest, has no one to talk to. How does the film establish that he too is making such a journey? Colton writes that Glendon locks himself in "a circular room," unfinished except for "a few old pieces long since out of commission. A hearth is in the centre of the room and one or two stone shelves or ledges along the walls . . . The aspect is stark and comfortless" (l-15, my ellipsis). Glendon goes to a nearly empty, circular room, at the center of which stands a hearth where, he tells Timothy, he will light a fire if he gets cold. This room's configuration plays into a motif in the film in which fortified exteriors house vital contents (Glendon's locked lab, the tentacle-ringed maw of the Madagascar). The circular shape also evokes the moon, the great life source for werewolf and Mariphasa alike—and herein lies our first hint that this room, Glendon's destination, simultaneously marks a return to his point of origin. Lisa and Paul become childhood sweethearts again; Glendon retreats to a lonelier place, although one no less shot through with a kind of *amorousness*, for Glendon's "origin" has a great deal to do with masturbation.

Many theorists linked masturbation with homosexuality. Excessive practice of the former could be read as a sign of the latter. Masturbation, it also was believed, could awaken hereditary inversion and even outright cause inversion (Ellis 161–63).¹⁸ A person must outgrow this habit or else face serious consequences, which, Stekel notes, could include becoming a homosexual, developing asocial tendencies (64)—such as Glendon mildly displays—and even acquiring a taste for necrophilia (131), which Bertrand in *Werewolf of Paris* practices. Unchecked masturbation also could lead a self-abuser to develop arguably wolflike char-

acteristics: Stekel writes, paraphrasing German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, that “the habit robs the nascent feeling of charm and beauty leaving behind only the husk of grossly animal craving for sexual gratification” (14).

That Glendon’s condition can be linked to masturbation does not make *WWL* unique among horror films. Evans writes that “many formulaic elements of the monster movies have affinities with two central features of adolescent sexuality: masturbation and menstruation” (56). What makes *WWL* more distinctive is its linking of Glendon’s curse with *both* these features of adolescent sexuality.¹⁹ The Medusa-like Madagascar—from which, in the deleted sequence, when Glendon pierces it, a “black looking juice spurts upward” (B-40)—can be understood to reference menstruation. What about masturbation?

Benshoff identifies a familiar horror trope, “obsessive organ playing, a pun on male masturbation which has circulated for decades” (46). *WWL*, though it refrains from making this

pun, finds other ways to develop the same theme. One is through another horror convention, although a relatively rare one in the werewolf subgenre: the scientist seeking after things “men were not meant to know.” As Evans notes, “scientists are generally secretive recluses whose private experiments on the human body have driven them mad” (56).²⁰ We glimpse a masturbatory gesture in *WWL*, after Yogami has stroked Glendon’s arm on the spot where he bit him in Tibet (see Photo 1). Yogami exits; Lisa remarks, “What a strange man”; and Glendon, looking lost in thought, says, “Yes,” as he touches himself in the same place (Photo 9).

Further suggesting that Glendon’s experiments and transformations mirror those of adolescence are visible influences of the Jekyll and Hyde story on the film. Jarring to viewers today, but familiar in 1935, is the humanlike appearance, dress, and behavior of this werewolf figure (Photo 10). He looks more like Mr. Hyde than most cinematic werewolves that were to follow. Equally clear are the resemblances



| Photo 9.



| Photo 10.

between Glendon and Jekyll, especially as the latter is portrayed in Rouben Mamoulian's 1931 adaptation. *WWL*'s first reviewers were quick to compare the two films.²¹

Similarities to Mamoulian's film reinforce a view of Glendon as a bottled-up man who seeks, and finds, a means to release an aggressive inner self with a distinctly sexual agenda. But understanding *WWL* in this light benefits from comparisons not only to Mamoulian's film but also, directly, to Stevenson's novella. Film adaptations, in which the same actor typically plays both roles, ignore a detail in Stevenson's work, which is that Hyde is physically smaller than Jekyll. This matters to Twitchell, who writes that "Hyde is almost Jekyll as a teenager, the 'Jekyll' that Dr. Jekyll has had to repress in order to become . . . a man of property, a man of means" (237). For Twitchell, "Hyde is part of us all and reminds us what we have repressed or grown out of, namely, early adolescence. Far more than the vampire or the Frankenstein monster, Hyde is the monster of latency" (233).

No less a monster of latency is the Werewolf of London. The film arguably surpasses Stevenson's novella in this regard by combining elements from his story with ones from the werewolf legend (just as it creates a more robustly symbolic representation of adolescence than *Wolf Man* by combining aspects of werewolfism with Stevenson's story). One sign (though not one seen in *WWL*) that a man might be a werewolf is hair growing on the palms of his hands, a giveaway also, Evan reminds us, of a habitual masturbator (56).²²

Some indications that Glendon is in the midst of a (second) adolescence border on the overt. In the screenplay, the innkeeper, Mrs. Moncaster (Zeffie Tilbury), complains that her mysterious boarder "leaves me rooms smelling like a kennel" (H-3).²³ We are invited to imagine this character's rangy scent—and also the feel of his hair. In the screenplay, he tells his doctor, "I can actually seem to feel it grow. There's something damned uncanny about it . . . somehow it doesn't feel like hair" (D-14). This figure, stinking up his sleeping quarters with body

odor, fixes on minute details of his altered self, including new hair that, like a wispy mustache or pubic hair, doesn't quite feel like any of the hair he already has.

Glendon's obsessions include intense interest in his own genitalia. Here we return to the Mariphasa, which Colton makes redolent with anatomical suggestiveness. Glendon puts the plant under a strong light and peers at it through-different sized magnifying lenses. Like the Madagascar, located not in Glendon's inner sanctum but just outside it, the Mariphasa—sensitive beyond measure and delicate—can lie in exposed places, where it might be touched, including by unwelcome fingers. When a housekeeper handles and sniffs Yogami's Mariphasa blossom, he springs up and shouts, "Let that flower alone!" She replies, "I meant no harm, sir. It's only that I'm so fond of flowers. My fingers always want to touch them." He gives her money and tells her to buy herself "a pot of primroses or something." Yogami cannot bear the thought of this housekeeper, this woman, touching his plant.

Yogami's alarm is understandable given the Mariphasa's extreme sensitivity. The flower is made to seem at once anatomically sexual and highly reactive. Here is what happens, in the film and screenplay, when Glendon's hand passes under the moon-lamp:

CLOSE UP OF MARAPHASA [sic]
AND GLENDON'S HAND

There is a slow swelling of the bud; it trembles as if about to open.

But now the hand begins to show thick hair on it, to become distorted and paw-like. (C-6)

Man and plant are at this moment both "turned on" by the same stimulus.

What one *does* with the plant makes its underlying meaning still more clear. Glendon reads in a book in his study that "the essence of the Mariphasa blossom squeezed into the wrist through the thorn at the base of the stem is the only preventive known to man." This liquid extraction can keep a pent-up man from doing something rash—say, with another

man—for another night. We might wonder if it is less the infusion of this plant's essence (into the man) than its release (from the plant) that brings the relief. If the latter, then it is because this "essence" always builds back up again that the results are temporary and the antidote must be continually readministered.

This sense of the Mariphasa comes across more fully in the screenplay than in the film. After Yogami informs Glendon that the werewolf always seeks to kill the thing it loves best, Glendon asks how an afflicted person can use the blossom to ensure "normalcy." Yogami answers, "There is but one sure way—the flesh must be punctured by the thorn of the flower—and the essence injected by the little bulb at the stamen's base" (C-25). Here the specific appearance and utility of the Mariphasa comes into crisp focus. The phallic shaft has a scrotal "little bulb at the stamen's base." That the essence issuing therefrom is "injected" into the person strengthens the sense of the plant's anatomy mimicking a male ejaculation. In the deleted sequence, the rescuing pin makes a similar impression when the explosion of black fluid—menstrual, but also possibly something else, something that is more of a release for the Madagascar than a wounding—results in the instant relaxation of its tentacles and the freeing of the boy from its clutches.

Glendon knows what ails this horny plant, but like an adolescent succumbing to new and powerful sensations, he does not yet know exactly how to treat this "ailment." Here is Colton's description of Glendon's behavior when he feels his first full transformation coming on:

Glendon is shaken at the realization that something mysterious has happened to him. The Werewolf! He approaches the Mariphasa [sic]. The one bud has burst and is aglow with life. Uncertain of the outcome of the experiment, Glendon tears the bloom from the plant, rubs it on his wrist. It must be evident he has some idea that it may help him but has no idea how to proceed. He presses his fingernail into wrist, bruising flesh. Rubs flower on again. (C-8)

As Glendon feels the heat of imminent transformation, a "bud has burst open and is aglow with life." He is unsure what to do next but feels compelled to act; unambiguously, the moment to carry his "experiment" to the next stage has arrived. Uncertain rubbing, pressing, bruising, and more rubbing ensues. This description captures with a bold near-explicitness the frantic self-fumbling of a young man feverish with desire.

Glendon reads in the book in his study that "unless this rare flower is used the werewolf must kill at least one human being each night of the full moon or become permanently afflicted." The Mariphasa and the kill, then, each possesses a preventative power. Perhaps we can distinguish the two. If the kill represents acting on a sexual impulse with another person (a man, I submit, regardless of the gender of Glendon's victim), then fiddling with the blossom represents acting on this impulse alone and rendering unnecessary, for another night at least, the hunt and kill (cruise and score) of the wolf.

Glendon, who has long repressed his inner difference, now finds himself in the throes of a full-blown and much delayed self-discovery. Wishing to delay this awakening still longer, he flees to the Monk's Rest. He goes to a spare, fortified room to protect Lisa and himself from himself. When, in the screenplay, Timothy asks, "Are you sure I can't bring you some supper?" Glendon replies, "Not a thing" (I-17). Glendon means to deny himself every creature comfort and bodily satisfaction. He seeks salvation through abstinence. Lisa, by contrast, in the screenplay bets Paul that she can beat him in a race not to the "Monk's Tower" but to "the refectory" (I-35). (Their dash still sends them into the wolf's clutches.) Whereas Glendon wants no food, Lisa and Paul hasten to a place of nourishment and refreshment.

The deeper nature of Glendon's self-denial is implied when, in the film, to Timothy's protest that "there ain't even a bed, sir," Glendon replies, "I shan't need a bed." A bed, that privileged site of many an adolescent experiment and discovery, is the last thing Glendon

needs right now. Following this exchange, Paul, in the screenplay, asks Lisa, "Can't you care for me again?" A moment later he muses, "I suppose it's something about having made a bed and having to lie in it! Why not tear up old beds—make new ones—that's the only clean way—in this brave new world" (l-31-32). Lisa and Paul, like Glendon, are desperate to tear up old beds. That this couple can envision, and are on the verge of making, a "new bed" points to the happy ending awaiting them both. (They fly off to California together at the film's end.) Meanwhile, Glendon, whose happiest ending imaginable is no bed at all, stands on the brink of catastrophe and death.

Glendon has sought sanctuary in the worst possible place he could look for it, his point of origin, for it is here that his truest essence will find its purest expression. Aficionados of werewolf lore might catch a hint of Glendon's mistake in the room's circular shape and in the hearth at its center. Elliott O'Donnell, in his 1912 book about werewolves, describes a means to turn oneself into a werewolf:

He must then choose a perfectly level piece of ground, and on it, at midnight, he must mark, either with chalk or string—it really does not matter which—a circle of not less than seven feet in radius, and within this, and from the same centre, another circle of three feet in radius. Then, in the centre of this inner circle he must kindle a fire. (56)

Circles with fires at their centers feature in other accounts of self-made werewolves.²⁴ (Many stories also feature strange flowers that, unlike the Mariphasa, do not relieve but cause the werewolf curse.²⁵) Glendon's abstinence treatment proves ineffective, for in the Monk's Rest,

Glendon is asleep in a chair—his head thrown back.

A small ray of moonlight creeps through the window as if the clouds had gone.

The ray slowly nears Glendon. It is now on his face and before our eyes we see the sleeper transixed into a werewolf. (l-29)

And so, though he forgoes a bed, Glendon sleeps, and when he does, the wolf, like a dreaming self or a nocturnal emission, escapes the moment his guard is let down.

Conclusion

"Never look back, Lawrence, never look back. The past is a wilderness of horrors."

—Sir John Talbot, *The Wolfman* (2010)

Is Glendon's case, finally, one of acquired homosexuality, acquired not in Tibet but in the bedroom of his adolescence, or is his sexual orientation inborn and natural—as natural as one of his botanical specimens—and therefore completely undeserving of moral condemnation? If the film offers no conclusive answer to this question, neither did some theorists of homosexuality. Some argued that an inborn homosexual predisposition could be awakened by an inciting childhood event, which could include a terrifying glimpse of one's mother's genitals, a sexual initiation at the hands of an older male, or excessive masturbating.²⁶ Homosexuality, then, could be *both* inborn and acquired.

Colton lets us take our pick in determining Glendon's inciting incident. Perhaps it was the terrifying glimpse, as the sequence with the Madagascar suggests, or too much masturbating. Or maybe the traumatic event, when Glendon was six, was not seeing his mother's genitals but his initiation by an older male. This event, too, the film arguably restages for us, in the form of the attack in Tibet, in which Yogami plays a role that has been referred to as a "wolf."²⁷ This interpretation the film encourages, too, through another parallel: a bite marks the moment of initiation both in Tibet and at Faldon Abbey, when Paul proposed to Lisa and when, at that moment, he was stung by a bumblebee.

The werewolf legend is richly suited to represent the ambiguities of a condition that can be inborn, incited, or both. Is werewolfism natural or unnatural? Let us recast the question by asking whether it is natural or supernatural. Summers suggests that making such a distinction

cleanly is not always possible when he writes that “the Devil works on natural causes to produce disease” (30). A character in *Curse of the Werewolf*, a 1961 film adaptation of Endore’s novel, says:

Sometimes it so happens that the spirit of one of these beasts finds entrance into a body while it yet lives, usually at the moment of birth. Then the soul and the spirit war with each other to gain mastery of the body. But if the soul of the man is strong and clean, it will generally exorcize the spirit of the beast before it is many years old. But if for some reason the soul is weak, an inherited weakness, an accident of birth, then . . .

A character in *The Undying Monster* explains that “hereditary memories, as a rule, lie dormant unless they happen to be awakened by some outer circumstance similar to that in which the original impression was received” (Kerruish 124). And Mike Nichols’s 1994 film *Wolf* includes this exchange between Dr. Alezias (Om Puri) and Randall (Jack Nicholson), who is beginning to suspect that he is a werewolf:

ALEZIAS: But, of course, not all who are bitten change. There must be something wild within. An analogue of the wolf.

RANDALL: Well, that lets me out. Among my people, I’m known as the guy least likely to have an analogue of the wolf.

ALEZIAS: Your people are wrong, Mr. Randall. Sometimes one doesn’t even need to be bitten. Only the passion of the wolf is enough.

And so the wolf can body forth with or without benefit of a precipitating event. The curse can be acquired, inherited, or both. Glendon’s is inflicted on him when he is attacked in Tibet, and Yogami is right when he insists that he is not to blame for Glendon’s problems.

Although the adolescence thesis is perhaps the most compelling one he advances, Colton ultimately leaves us unsure about the source of Glendon’s problems. The film maintains an ambivalence toward its protagonist and the part he plays in his doom. The character seems

tortured and ashamed throughout much of the film, and yet in the end, as harshly as the film puts him down, he might be guilty of nothing. Stekel declares, “That there are preeminent physicians who earnestly look upon masturbation as the cause of homosexuality seems hardly believable” (11). Even more progressively, Symonds writes that “common experience shows beyond all doubt, that young men between 16 and 20 give themselves up to daily self-abuse without weakening their appetite for women. They love boys and practice mutual self-abuse with persons of their own sex; yet they crave all the while for women” (135). *Werewolf of London* offers, in the end, too many answers to the questions it raises. Perhaps what the film and screenplay ultimately give testimony to is the questions themselves, and they give voice to the pain and self-loathing that can arise from living in a society that asks them in the first place.

NOTES

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1. The latest in a line of commentators who call the protagonist of *Werewolf of London* unsympathetic writes that actor Henry Hull lacks “Chaney’s ability to elicit sympathy” (Mallory 90; he refers to Lon Chaney Sr.). For an essay that explores in detail aspects of the gay subtext of *Werewolf of London* that are only touched on here, see Spadoni 49–71.

2. One who writes about it is Alison Peirse, whose dissertation contains a chapter titled “Homosocial Desire and the Male Body in Pieces: Masochistic Looking Relations in *Werewolf of London*” (148–88).

3. An earlier short film, *The Werewolf* (1913), about a Navajo shapeshifter, is believed lost.

4. Colton’s homosexuality is mentioned in Mann 207; Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver 125; Vieira 79; Madson 12 and 52; and Hanke 30.

5. This point is also made in O’Donnell 55.

6. See, for example, chapters 1 and 4 of Bourgault Du Coudray; Frost 28; Eisler; and Noll 92–97.

7. *Cat People* (1942), not a werewolf film but related to the subgenre, opens with this quote: “Even as fog continues to lie in the valleys, so does ancient sin

cling to the low places, the depressions in the world consciousness." The film attributes this quote to a book, written by a character in the film, titled *The Anatomy of Atavism*.

8. See for example Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays" 139–40.

9. On Glendon's contraction of werewolfism in Tibet as a sign of the film's xenophobia, see Williams 33.

10. In the film, when Glendon says, "You brought this on me," Yogami, stuffing Glendon's Mariphasa blossom in his sleeve, replies only, "Sorry I can't share this with you." From this point in the article forward, in-text references to the screenplay will be abbreviated to just the shot number. Also, throughout, descriptions and quoted dialogue refer to the film unless I indicate that it comes from the screenplay. Last, because Colton's written dialogue is full of ellipsis marks, all ellipses within screenplay quotations are original to the document unless otherwise indicated.

11. Ellipsis mine. I have deleted Colton's instruction to cut to a close-up of Glendon during Yogami's speech.

12. References to Byington as a lesbian are in Hadleigh 20; Porter 130; and Madsen 149.

13. The question of whether the Medusa frightens because she is castrated or because she castrates is raised by Creed in *The Monstrous-Feminine* (110–11). On how some critics have associated the Medusa with homosexuality, see Dellamora 136. For a consideration of the Madagascar, the *vagina dentata*, and the head of the Medusa in connection with homosexuality implicitly construed, in *WWL*, as a form of gender inversion, see Spadoni 60–65.

14. See, for example, Evans 54–56 and Twitchell 221–25.

15. See, for example, Gifford 117; Everson 214; Hardy 64; Senn 292; and Soister 230.

16. For more on the upside-down framing of Glendon's death, see Spadoni 66–67.

17. See Spadoni for more on these aspects of the film.

18. On Krafft-Ebing's view that inherited homosexuality could be awakened by masturbation, see Stekel 13.

19. For a criticism of Krafft-Ebing's claim that masturbation could cause homosexuality, see Symonds 135.

20. Another horror film that does so, Aviva Briefel notes (21–22), is *Carrie* (1976).

21. For Benshoff, in horror films, the science these characters pursue is "sometimes used to suggest that 'normality' needs to update its thinking on queer matters" (39, and see 1).

22. Examples include "Werewolf of London," *Variety* 19; F. S. N. 25; Scheuer 25; "On a Swan Song" 3; and "The Werewolf of London," *Time* 32.

23. On werewolves having hair on their palms, see Baring-Gould 107 and Jones 137. Bertrand in *The Werewolf of Paris* has hairy palms (68, 104).

24. Yogami's room smells the same way (1–54).

24. See, for example, O'Donnell 56–58, 239, 273–74.

25. See for example, O'Donnell 174, 175, and Frost 112–13.

26. The claim that a young person predisposed to homosexuality can be initiated by an older male is made in Ellis 190–91.

27. On the sense of a "wolf" as a pederast, and on the term in general, see Chauncey 87–96.

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