



# The White Devil: The Werewolf in European Culture

*Matthew Beresford*

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From Ovid's Lycaon to Professor Lupin, from *Teen Wolf* to *An American Werewolf in Paris*, the lycanthrope, or werewolf, comes to us frequently on the page and the silver screen. These interpretations often display lycanthropy as a curse, with the afflicted person becoming an uncontrollable, feral beast during every full moon. But this is just one version of the werewolf—its origins can be traced back thousands of years to early prehistory, and everything from Iron Age bog bodies and Roman gods to people such as Joan of Arc, Adolf Hitler, and Sigmund Freud feature in its story. Exploring the role of this odd assortment of ideas and people in the myth, *The White Devil* tracks the development of the werewolf from its birth to the present day, seeking to understand why the wolf curse continues to hold a firm grip on the modern imagination.

Combining early death and burial rites, mythology, folklore, archaeological evidence, and local superstitions, Matthew Beresford explains that the werewolf has long been present in the beliefs and mythology of the many cultures of Europe. He examines prehistoric wolf cults, the use of the wolf as a symbol of ancient Rome, medieval werewolf executions, and the eradication of wolves by authorities in England during the Anglo-Saxon period. He also surveys werewolf trials, medical explanations, and alleged sightings, as well as the instances in which lycanthropes appear in literature and film. With sixty illustrations of these often terrifying—but sometimes noble—beasts, *The White Devil* offers a new understanding of the survival of the werewolf in European culture.

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