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Werewolf Identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*

by

Elias Acuña

Under the Direction of Mark Noble, Ph.D

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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## ABSTRACT

Lester Ballard's character in *Child of God* is one example of a socially marginalized outcast who figures prominently in Southern Gothic literature. Furthermore, he is ostracized from a homogenous community and propagates terror in its outskirts. Ballard's disturbingly quotidian life allows for a werewolf motif to emerge, echoing the werewolf myths of ancient Greek and Medieval tales. Placing Ballard's violent delights within the context of werewolf studies illuminates a series of questions concerning identity, existentialism, and alterity in a text devoid of the supernatural. This thesis contends that the text's lycanthropic links manifest not through traditional werewolf conventions but as an effect of *revestimiento* near the climax of the plot, allowing Ballard to assume (an)other body. Deconstructionist and existentialist approaches towards the text make Lester Ballard's werewolf subjectivity a unique ground for discussing the broader issues of identity, monstrosity, and alterity in the context of monster studies.

INDEX WORDS: Cormac McCarthy, Child of god, Werewolf studies, Posthuman, Subjectivity, Monster studies

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2023

Werewolf Identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*

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**DEDICATION**

*To Ezra Acuña for whom all my transformations have been made*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2022, as rain poured down my windows, I set down Cormac McCarthy's novel, *Child of God*, restless, fidgety, and distinctly discomforted. The red dial of the clock on the nightstand showed 2:23 am: I stared out of the window at the flashing thunderstorm that raged outside and thought to myself, *Lester Ballard is a werewolf*. Not a werewolf that grows fangs and snarls or one that transforms under the light of the full moon, but a werewolf in human skin, the stuff of nightmares that live among men and haunt the darkest recesses of the human psyche.

The werewolf motif has long been a captivating element in literature, evoking notions of transformation, primal instincts, and the blurred boundaries between the human and the animal. In *Child of God* (1973), the werewolf motif takes center stage, offering a lens through which to examine the dark and disturbing world of McCarthy's protagonist, Lester Ballard. This thesis explores the werewolf motif in McCarthy's novel, tracing its genealogy of thought from Greek antiquity to the medieval ages, and employing a posthuman approach to analyze the significance of overclothing as a metaphorical device in the narrative.

The earliest werewolves were men of flesh and bone turned into humanoid wolf-men. Other accounts of the werewolf like the one found in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*, portray the werewolf as a *revestimiento*, essentially labeling them as humans *under* wolf's skin. Whether a topic of teratology (the study of physical abnormalities), anthropology (the study of what distinguishes human cultures), or ontology (the study or conceptual framework of the nature, characteristics, and existence of werewolves), the werewolf exteriorizes the subjectivity of the monstrous male since its earliest appearances in classical mythology. Recent scholarly work illustrates a shift away from the traditional thematic and epistemic tropes of this

supernatural humanoid. McCarthy's novel, a recent addition to the werewolf oeuvre, adds a layer to werewolf subjectivity or what can be referred to as werewolf studies.

The first chapter of this thesis reviews the historical and cultural origins of the werewolf motif, beginning with its earliest appearances in Greek antiquity. Drawing from ancient Greek myths such as the story of Lycaon and the cult of Zeus Lykaios, I explore the concept of transformation and the association of werewolves with primal instincts and divine punishment. The chapter also touches upon the medieval beliefs and legends surrounding werewolves, examining the influence of Christianity, demonic possession, and shapeshifting rituals on the werewolf mythos and their effect on the performance of identity.

The second chapter will shift its focus to Cormac McCarthy's novel, *Child of God*, and provide a comprehensive analysis of the werewolf motif within the narrative. Through a close reading of the text, I will explore the parallels between Lester Ballard and the traditional werewolf archetype presented in the first chapter. Doing so has allowed me to introduce the concept of *revestimiento monstrario* from my native Spanish language. In its most direct translation, this word proposes an action of "re-clothing" the body, to "put on" or "don special garments" and is also likened to the act of "decorating", "coating", or "embellishing". *Revestimiento* becomes the act "of being" in conjunction with its meaning "to have" or "to show" a certain quality or abstract idea.

I first look to Caroline Bynum and Andrea Whitacre as I expand on the concept of *revestimiento monstrario*. This theoretical framework establishes the concept of "overclothing" – the most appropriate translation of *revestimiento monstrario* in this context of monster studies. To *revestir* is closely related to "overclothe" yet, *revestir* carries with it the prefix "re" and with it the understanding that taking on (an)other identity is to *again* clothe oneself rather than

*overclothe*. In other words, *revestimiento* provides an added layer of nuance in defining monstrous identities. As such, Ballard’s werewolf *revestimiento* defies the traditional ontological notions of the werewolf as posited by ancient tales from antiquity while simultaneously sharing some aspects of unified “werewolf tradition.” In this disruption, Ballard’s *revestimiento* serves as a model for understanding the epistemologies behind monster identity in relation to social alienation. Just as gods and angels have been the center of anthropomorphic representation across cultures, monsters – for all their fangs and fur – likewise remain *revestidos* in the discourse of anthropomorphism. Hence, echoing Whitacre’s thesis on overclothing, *revestimiento monstrario* allows the subject “to be” human while simultaneously overlaying monstrous qualities. Underneath lies Ballard, human as ever he was; “a child of God much like yourself perhaps.”

The performative nature of the werewolf not only rests on the disruptive notion of identity but likewise, on the revelatory aspects of its monstrosity. The oppositional forces between the ostracized other and the hegemonic powers reveal the societal fault lines that isolate the werewolf. This tension in both individual identity and communal forces is exemplified in what Molly Lewis calls “[an] inability to contain the monstrous body of the non-normative other that compels the culture...to identify the monster’s characteristics and differentiate them from safe, normative [white, able-bodied, male] bodies” (Godden and Mittman 155).<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the phenomenology of the ostracized other. In a community where othering is normative, the werewolf recluses back into nature where he can construct his own community.

Hence, tracing the literature on the medieval man-wolf reveals several complex issues regarding the performance of identity, masculine monstrosity, and the ostracism of the outcast in

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<sup>1</sup> Godden, Richard H., and Asa Simon Mittman, editors. “Monstrosity and Embodiment.” *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 154–62.

Western culture. From the classical Greco myth of Lycaon to twenty-first-century popular cultural icons, such as *Twilight* (2005), the objectivity of werewolf identity exhibits the juxtaposition of opposing conscious and unconscious desires. To begin exploring the subsequent subjectivity of the man-wolf, the objectivity of the conscious and unconscious drives must first be dismantled so that there is no longer an identity constructed by an objective view but rather one of subjectivity. Viewing the werewolf as an object reduces the interpretation to a simple category of two opposing forces of thought predicated on the psychoanalytical perspectives of consciousness and unconsciousness. This monster, born out of cultural construct and projection, exists only to signify something other than itself.<sup>2</sup> This displaced figure represents a psychic rift that unleashes moral depredation, threatening the established greater good of ordinary social life. Here I invoke Kant's ethical framework which is grounded in what he calls the categorical imperative, which is a universal moral principle that guides human action. According to Kant, moral actions are those that can be willed as a universal law and are not contingent on personal desires or preferences. He emphasizes the importance of reason and rationality in moral decision-making. When these moral principles are not reciprocated, the outcast then absorbs and reflects features of the community that define the margins ultimately becoming *revestido* as a monster.<sup>3</sup>

This discourse is intertwined with the textual support from McCarthy's novel throughout the corpus of this second chapter. Hence, I look to the theoretical framework from scholars such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and monster scholars and theorists found in Asa Mittman and Richard Godden's book titled *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the*

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, editor. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttsq4d>.

<sup>3</sup> For more, see Kant, Immanuel, and Mary J. Gregor. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Revised Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

*Medieval and Early Modern World*. Drawing on works by werewolf scholars and theorists like Carys Crossen and Caroline Walker Bynum, I begin by establishing a foundational edifice for the formation of the werewolf motif in McCarthy's novel. Scholars like Bynum not only provide an exceptionally new theoretical framework for werewolf and skin-changer studies but also allow for a malleable and approachable interpretation of werewolf identity, as postulated by Crossen in her use of "werewolf subjectivity." Once established, this foundation is supported by textual examples from *Child of God*, ultimately aiding in the development of Nietzsche's concept of "God is dead" to explicate that *Child of God* is perforated with Jacques Derrida's term, "hauntology" which establishes a dead god that haunts the parameters of the novel.

Ironically, in *othering* the werewolf, the community has unknowingly created a sovereign entity, autonomous from the socio-political influence of the community from which it was excluded.<sup>4</sup> This same socio-political rift between the werewolf and the community is what defines the archetypal strife between "good" and "evil," where the community and the other are engaged in a feud for acceptance, authority, and rationale, respectively. On one hand, the humanoid werewolf is potentially human, replete with noble characteristics that enable the attributions of male heroism, primitive strength, and natural dignity. On the other hand, the "wolf" in the humanoid assemblage is capable of inhuman savagery that the human male must suppress in himself.

Naturally, this reading unearths the themes of alienation, savagery, and the erosion of humanity as depicted through Lester's descent into animality and violence. McCarthy's narrative techniques, such as vivid descriptions and atmospheric prose, also amplify the werewolf motif and contributes to the overall tone and meaning of the novel.

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida, Jacques, et al. *The Beast and the Sovereign*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Homogeneous communities usually treat disruptive individuals as the site of the *other*.<sup>5</sup> As posited by Jacques Lacan's principle of the Mirror Stage in psychoanalysis, the whole of a person's desire becomes the desire of the other. This principle shapes the entirety of human connections since infancy and forms the social links in homogenous communities that are dependent on such distinctions as the other – that which is not the self. This *other* (Ballard) therefore embodies the antithesis of the communal creed, allowing the community to define itself against this non-compliant individual who refuses to fit in. The process of otherization reflects anthropomorphic conventions delineating the non-normative individual as a disruption in the continuity of the community. Ostracizing individuals stems from a deep distrust of one's fellow man. In the words of Carla Freccero:

The phrase *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf to other men, is from Plautus's *Asinaria*, and it is the phrase the merchant in the text utters: "One man to another is a wolf, not a man, when he doesn't know what sort he is." But this phrase's more famous future is a political, not an economic one, and it takes out the qualifying phrase: Thomas Hobbes's *homo homini lupus* is the evil twin of the other Latin adage, commented on by Erasmus and Hobbes, *homo homini deus*. Man is wolf and god, god and wolf are man's possibilities, man is somewhere between wolf and god, if he is man.<sup>6</sup>

Where wolf can stand for the *other*, in this case, Lester Ballard, the community becomes man. In this equation, the outlier is the unknowable – that deep sense of distrust for the other. Whether that distrust stems from a visual, auditorial, or cultural, sexual difference, the result is the same:

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<sup>5</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. pp 75-81.

<sup>6</sup> Freccero, Carla. "A Race of Wolves." *Yale French Studies*, no. 127, 2015, pp. 110–23. JSTOR.

the *other* is a wolf when the *man* does not know what sort he is. Furthermore, how can one ever know if there is distrust fueled by fear? As Freccero makes note, the other phrase by Hobbes transcends this “material” understanding of the *other* and complicates it with a metaphysical – if not posthuman – adage. Man can thus be wolf *and* god only *if* he is man. Yet one must be careful not to fall into the Western notion of God. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, “There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.” Thus, ascertaining the validity that man is both wolf and god is to blur the boundary that divides the self from the other.<sup>7</sup>

Here again, I introduce the concept of *revestimiento* to aid in the posthuman angle appropriately placed *between* the chapter that ends with Ballard’s metaphorical death dream and the one immediately following where he is *revestido* with the garments of his victims; hell-bent on murdering Greer. To understand Freccero’s idea of “wolf and god”, one needs only understand that man *is* wolf should he wish to be god and vice versa. Hence, in this subjectivity of identity, I examine a posthuman angle to McCarthy’s novel. Understanding at every moment that both the community and Ballard himself have a role in each of their downfalls.

Unknowingly, the ostracized *other*’s presence is still felt in the community even though their physical presence is absent. This absent presence is best exemplified in Jacques Derrida’s neologism of “hauntology.” Hauntology in *Child of God* presents itself two-fold both in (1) Lester Ballard himself as the fixation of the town hence the *other* and (2) God himself as haunting the margins of the text and by extension, the lives of both the community and Ballard. Such “haunting” seeps beyond the boundaries of temporality allowing the idea of monstrosity to

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<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, et al. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Vintage Books, 1974.

likewise propagate in the unconscious. As an absent presence, Ballard's proclivity for violence and strange behaviors are what make up the majority of the gossip chapters notwithstanding his interactions with the community itself in subsequent chapters. Yet, the most obscure presence not immediately noticeably absent is that of God which allows for the distribution of unchecked errant behavior.<sup>8</sup> Here in this haunting sit the events of McCarthy's novel. Owing to his traditional dark and gothic Southern writing is his way of representing the marginalized or ostracized *other*. Hence, I illustrate a bridge between the discourse of the other in monster studies and those examples found in McCarthy's novel to postulate Ballard as a werewolf.

Here I end the werewolf coupling with McCarthy's protagonist in *Child of God*. In the fourth chapter, I explore a term I introduce as the "male monstrosity" of Lester Ballard. Where both monster and male have been coupled throughout history, I look to Ashley Lancaster's article on Ballard as a Frankenstein-type monster. Lancaster's thesis allows a side-by-side view of the social injustices both Ballard and Frankenstein face as monsters. Following this introduction, I turn to Russel Hillier's article which serves as a response to Lancaster's thesis on Frankenstein and Ballard. There I hope to add to the discourse on McCarthy's creation of monsters and those found in "traditional" monster studies. Thus, Ballard's behaviors not only propel him to depredation but also play a key role in the portrayal of the monstrous male. This monstrous male has its origins in the connotations associated with the werewolf. As a creature of anger, violence, depredation, sin, and lust – Lester Ballard continues to maintain his candidacy for this supernatural creature throughout the text.

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<sup>8</sup> And here I say "not immediately noticeably absent" to denote the fact that even though the reader may not be actively looking for a god (or God, in the Judeo-Christian sense), the text itself gives way to the absence of such.



## PAST WEREWOLVES: A GENEALOGY OF THOUGHT

The werewolf continues to exist in the psyche of humanity as an embodiment of epistemological dichotomies. Since their inception in early human history, skin-changers, shamans, and werewolves have been subjects of both great wonder and terror. Yet, the werewolf remains a product of societal, psychological, and cultural aspects. It embodies the fears of each of these aspects even as the premises that first created the wolf-man have changed both spatially and temporally. This chapter offers a vivarium of differentiating accounts of the werewolf across time and space – both of which, as mentioned before, have played an essential role in the formation of werewolf subjective identity – to delineate the imaginary links that exist between the motifs presented in this vivarium and the werewolf subject in Cormac McCarthy’s *Child of God*. By examining literary and historical sources, as well as cultural and religious contexts, this study seeks to provide a foundational overview of the development of werewolf legends across time and cultures in order to bring about werewolf subjectivity in McCarthy’s novel.

The concept of the werewolf, a human capable of transforming into a wolf or wolf-like creature, has captured the imagination of cultures throughout history. The story of the lycanthropy of Lycaon in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is a significant example of werewolf mythology in Greek antiquity. Lycaon, a mythological figure from ancient Greek mythology, was the king of Arcadia. According to the myth, Lycaon committed an act of great impiety by serving Zeus a dish made from human flesh during a banquet. In response to this sacrilege, Zeus decided to punish Lycaon and test his omniscience, transforming Lycaon into a wolf or a wolf-

like creature.<sup>9</sup> The transformation was not temporary but rather a permanent state, forever binding Lycaon's human form to that of a wolf. This punishment, known as lycanthropy, serves as one of the earliest references to the concept of a human transforming into a wolf.

In McCarthy's novel, the themes behind the story of Lycaon are reflected by the alterity projected onto Ballard by the townspeople of Sevierville. When Ballard tries to incorporate himself back into society, that same society pushes him further into the margins ultimately alienating him and transforming him into a monster. When members of the community question Ballard for interacting with the society that chose to exile him, he understands the Lycoanean sentiment of being judged for his identity in liminality. "Howdy, he said. Howdy, said Ballard. You're Ballard ain't ye?...[Ballard replies:] No, I aint him, and went on" (McCarthy 114).

The lycanthropy of Lycaon symbolizes divine retribution for a grave offense against the gods. This tale demonstrates the ancient Greeks' understanding of the potential consequences of violating divine laws. In a post-colonial reading of the text, the punishment for defying the gods – or any form of government – is synonymous with being uncivilized and as a result bestial. It is not uncommon for stories such as this one to originate from the higher class to scare the lower masses into a certain ideology. The implication of this act showcases the irreconcilable dichotomy between two opposing social forces: On one hand, the all-knowing, looming threat of authority ensures all constituents of its society remain silenced, yielding, and nonconfrontational; on the other hand, more than serving as a foil to the constrictive body of authority, the

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<sup>9</sup> Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel. *Primary Sources on Monsters*. no. Volume 2, Arc Humanities Press, 2018. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), *EBSCOhost*, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip.shib&db=nlebk&AN=2105841&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>.

oppositional force to such power demonstrates a call for reformation, for speculation, and if not those, then for integration.

The other, separate from authority, remains in the margin - a disposition enacted by the same forces that constitute the divide between “I” and the “other.” In this liminality, the other seeks to find integration into the community that has displaced them first. When all other attempts have been exhausted, the other resorts to violence in desperation for approval. Under the gaze of the omnipotent and omniscient body of order, the transgressor is turned into an “other” – something beyond human and still not entirely animal. A humanoid embodying the very image of isolation, the werewolf loses all rationale and intelligence, and transforms into a reflection of its crime, a monstrous entity existing forever separate from the society that created it.

The myth of Lycaon and his lycanthropy laid the groundwork for later werewolf legends, providing a foundational narrative that influenced the perception and development of werewolf folklore in subsequent cultures and time periods. The idea of a human transforming into a wolf as a punitive motif or as a result of a curse can be seen as an extension of this ancient Greek myth, perpetuating the concept of lycanthropy throughout the genealogy of werewolf thought.<sup>10</sup>

The Cult of Zeus Lykaios, prevalent in ancient Arcadia was centered around the worship of Zeus as a wolf deity, emphasizing the connection between wolves and divine power. The cult's name, "Lykaios," derives from the Greek word "lykos," meaning wolf. The rituals and beliefs associated with this cult contributed to the development of werewolf mythology in Greek

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<sup>10</sup> For a short compendium of punitive werewolf transformations, see Zawacki, Alexander J. “A Punitive Transformation Motif in Three Disparate Medieval Texts.” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2021, pp. 184–85. MLA International Bibliography, *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2019.1696172>.

antiquity. It is believed that the cult originated from ancient Arcadian traditions, where the wolf was regarded as a sacred animal associated with nature, wilderness, and primal instincts. The wolf symbolized the untamed forces of the natural world and possessed qualities of strength, cunning, and ferocity.

Within the Cult of Zeus Lykaios, members performed a significant ritual called the Lykaia. The Lykaia was an annual festival held on Mount Lykaion, a sacred mountain in Arcadia. During this event, worshippers engaged in various ceremonies and sacrifices to honor Zeus Lykaios. These rituals often involved feasting on sacrificial meat, including the flesh of animals, which reinforced the connection between the cult, the wolf, and the consumption of animalistic traits. One of the intriguing aspects of the Cult of Zeus Lykaios was the belief in the potential transformation of humans into wolves. It was believed that individuals who participated in the Lykaia festival might undergo a temporary metamorphosis, assuming wolf-like characteristics or experiencing a spiritual communion with the wolf deity. This notion of a temporary transformation or a communion with wolf-like qualities echoes elements found in later werewolf mythology.

The Cult of Zeus Lykaios, with its emphasis on the wolf as a symbol of divine power and its association with transformation, served as a cultural precursor to the concept of werewolves. It provided a cultural framework and symbolic language that contributed to the development of werewolf mythology in subsequent periods. The connection between wolves, divine forces, and the potential for human transformation found in this cult influenced the genealogy of thought surrounding werewolves, leaving an indelible mark on the evolution of werewolf legends in Greek antiquity and beyond.

As Christianity became the dominant religion in the West, several Christian perceptions of shapeshifting emerged out of a need to understand religious, scientific, and dogmatic epistemes in the early thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> For many of these scholars, the idea of shapeshifting fell on religious epistemes of demonic possessions.<sup>12</sup> Several texts during this period point to an unholy union between demons, witches, and werewolves. These same would emphasize the workings of the body and the soul. Christian writers wondered whether the soul would be harmed in the process of becoming a werewolf, whether werewolves were a product of delusion brought upon by the Devil, or if men who have given themselves up to becoming werewolves were not literally transformed into one but instead behaved morally as one.

Examining Judeo-Christian and Judaic epistemologies, the twelfth and fourteenth-century werewolf subject saw an abundance of religious and philosophical treatises that outlined the humanoids as ‘specular objects’.<sup>13</sup> In this examination, the lycanthrope begins as an object of speculation in the imaginary register, transformed into a spectacle by the observer, who perceives it as a mere object, ultimately producing the image of the werewolf. In the imaginary, the werewolf solidifies its corporeal monstrous form, replete with the symbolic associations that reify the image of the outcast in the text.

In particular, the epistemological differences introduced by both Christian and Judaic religions included a dichotomy of alterity. On one hand, Hasidic teachings found a stability of identity regarding shapeshifters such as werewolves in which they could incorporate the

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of Christian perception on werewolves see Baring-Gould, S., and Tarl Warwick. *The Book of Werewolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition*. New ed., CreateSpace, 2016. Likewise, see Kramer, Heinrich Sprenger, James Summers, Montague. *Malleus Maleficarum: The Witch Hammer*. LULU COM, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See Davidson, Jane P., and Bob Canino. “Wolves, Witches, and Werewolves: Lycanthropy and Witchcraft from 1423 to 1700.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 2, no. 4 (8), 1990, pp. 47–73. JSTOR.

<sup>13</sup> Shyovitz, David I. “Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Werewolf Renaissance.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2014, pp. 521–43. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2014.0033>.

humanoid into a community that found them ‘good to think with’. Simultaneously, the Augustinian epistemology concerning shapeshifters evoked a different tenor for the werewolves in Western Christian thought.<sup>14</sup> In this theological abstraction, the werewolf becomes objectified as it designates the human body as something “mutable and unstable”, capable of literal corporeal transformation, while simultaneously capable of retaining the “divine” soul that is the mark of humanity (Shyovitz 533). This alterity of identity results in a problematic issue and is predicated on the notion that the werewolf — both “being” and “not being” — is, according to Augustine, theologically impossible to be conceived, as a “complete werewolf” since human beings were truly incapable of transforming into animals.

Another spectacular example of the werewolf in the medieval ages is Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hibernica* estimated to be written in 1187. This famous tale centers around the story of a priest who debates performing the sacrament of the Eucharist on an ailing wolf who can speak. Such a tale has brought scholars like Caroline Walker Bynum to extrapolate on the idea of overclothing – a concept that will primarily concern the werewolf subjectivity portrayed in McCarthy’s *Child of God*.<sup>15</sup>

Exploring werewolf subjectivity illustrates, then, what Andrea Whitacre exemplifies as a theoretical “overclothing” of a subject with werewolf attributes as posited by the works of Caroline Walker Bynum. The text chosen by Bynum to demonstrate this concept is Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hibernica* in which a Catholic priest is faced with the dilemma of whether he should administer the Eucharist to an animal – in this case, a she-wolf about to die. With this tale, comes Bynum’s introduction of “overclothing”, given that when the he-wolf pulled back the

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<sup>14</sup> Augustinus, Aurelius, et al. *The City of God Against the Pagans. 7: Books XXI - XXII, General Index / with an English Transl. by William M. Green.* [Repr. der Ausg.] 1972, Harvard Univ. Press, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> See Bynum and Whitacre for more on overclothing.

skin of the she-wolf, there revealed an old ailing woman underneath wolf skin.<sup>16</sup> To overclothe in werewolf skin is to maintain some sense of consciousness, of recognition, of humanity. Yet, here is where *revestimiento monstrario* branches further away since it's predicated on the fact that overclothing cannot happen if it doesn't happen in the unconscious first. To explicate, the monster must first appear inwardly as an embellishment of the subject to embody such monstrosity. The physical and material donning of the human is a mere byproduct of what is taking place within the framework of *revestimiento*. Essentially, to posit the werewolf in a posthuman aspect, this humanoid requires both animal and human qualities alike less one should fall back on the idea of a dualistic werewolf identity. I return to this theoretical framework in greater detail within the second chapter.

The werewolves of Livonia, a region encompassing parts of present-day Latvia and Estonia, hold a fascinating place in werewolf lore and legends. The tales of these werewolves offer a glimpse into the rich folklore and supernatural beliefs of the Livonian people during medieval times. According to folklore, the werewolves of Livonia were individuals who possessed the ability to transform into wolves at will or under certain circumstances. These creatures were often associated with dark magic, pagan rituals, and shamanic practices prevalent in Livonian culture. Legends surrounding the werewolves of Livonia frequently depicted them as guardians

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<sup>16</sup> Whitacre, Andrea. "The Body That Is Not One: Overclothing as Bodily Transformation in Topographia Hibernica." *Essays in Medieval Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2018, pp. 99–112. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ems.2018.0008>.

"In her reading, the moment when the wolf peels the skin from his mate reveals the wolf form as a false exterior, covering the real interior body. The ease of its removal and the appearance of the human form beneath it imply that the wolf body is as inconsequential as clothing, not a real body at all. It is Bynum who uses the term "overclothing" to describe this kind of non-change: "Gerald's werewolves are not souls trapped in alien bodies, cases of metempsychosis. A human being with a body and soul, a psychosomatic entity, a person, is underneath... The wolf worn by this werewolf is a skin or garment overclothing the human; it is not an essence, not even a body, unless one can (like the angels) assume several. The body is with the soul in the person underneath. Unlike the werewolves of European tradition before and after, Gerald's story—the fullest werewolf story of the twelfth-century revival—is not a case of metempsychosis at all" (100).

of the forests and protectors of the natural world.<sup>17</sup> In some tales, these creatures were seen as both terrifying and awe-inspiring, with the ability to bring either fortune or misfortune depending on how they were encountered and approached.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, some texts deal with a particular type of wer-man. These creatures were known as the cynocephalies or dog-headed persons who would later be associated with the werewolf. Such tales that mentioned these fantastical creatures range from Ancient Egyptian mythology to the *Liber Monstrorum* by the seventh or eighth century Aldhelm. Likewise, the fourteenth century saw *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* who explicated the fantastical attributes of the Ethiopian cynocephalies.

In Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, the tale of the werewolf's transformation is intricately intertwined with the motif of donning and shedding clothes or skin.<sup>19</sup> The narrative explores the transformative power of clothing and its symbolic significance in revealing or concealing one's identity. This same motif lies at the center of McCarthy's werewolf transformation in which the protagonist dons the skin and clothes of his victims. At the heart of the story is Bisclavret's

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<sup>17</sup> For Medieval Icelandic werewolf warriors who were incorporated – rather than exiled – from their community, see Guðmundsdóttir, Aðalheiður. “The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 106, no. 3, July 2007, pp. 277–303. JSTOR Journals.

<sup>18</sup> For a complete scholarly and theoretical approach to the Livonian werewolves, see Stefan Donecker's article. Donecker, Stefan. “The Werewolves of Livonia: Lycanthropy and Shape-Changing in Scholarly Texts, 1550-1720.” *Preternature*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2012, pp. 289–322. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials. Likewise, for a revisit of the Livonia werewolf, see Blécourt: “This article mainly examines the relevant historiography on the Thies case and suggests prospects for new investigations into the Livonian werewolf. It will focus first on the highly influential interpretation of Thies's activities as shamanistic, as proposed by Carlo Ginzburg, before examining older views of ritual societies and their remnants in later literature. Both points of view are considered critically, and since it emerges that in their generality they have been deemed more important than the case itself, the argument then moves to the available regional evidence on werewolves, also in relation to fertility rituals. Next, the application of Ginzburg's interpretation to Western werewolves is discussed. This article closes with a plea for a more precise, but also more indigenous, reading of the trial records on werewolves” (52).

<sup>19</sup> Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel. *Primary Sources on Monsters*. no. Volume 2, Arc Humanities Press, 2018. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), pp. 89-91. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip.shib&db=nlebk&AN=2105841&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>.



ability to transform into a wolf by removing his clothes every night under the full moon. His clothes become a pivotal element in his transformation, representing the barrier between his human and werewolf forms. When the time comes for Bisclavret to assume his wolf shape, he must remove his human attire and “put on the wolf skin”, an act that marks the transition from one being to another. This transition is evidence of a superhuman motif taking place both within de France’s story and in McCarthy’s novel as well. For de France, the act of donning a different skin signifies Bisclavret’s acceptance of his true nature and a temporary release from the confines of human society. Similarly, for Lester Ballard, the overclothing that takes place in *Child of God* indicates the death of his *cogito* or sense of self. Here, the lines that divide humanity and animality are blurred. Through this transformation, the lycanthrope embraces the wildness within and roams freely in the natural world, embodying the power and instincts of the wolf.

Conversely, de France’s narrative also highlights the importance of Bisclavret reclaiming his clothes to resume his human form. When his clothes are stolen while he is in his wolf shape, he becomes trapped in his animal form, unable to revert to his human self. The stolen garments symbolize the essence of his humanity, acting as a conduit for his transformation back into a nobleman. For Ballard, his supernatural anchor back to humanity lies in the reflection of the self. This anchor is portrayed twice only throughout McCarthy’s novel. The second instance in the novel is the driving force behind his need to feel included in the society he hates so much.

Harkening to the words of Sonya Freeman Loftis, the werewolf, much like the madman, marks the borders of the society. They result interchangeably on a theoretical level. Here, Loftis writes, “Like the modern disabled figure, the werewolf is frequently imagined as a metaphorical (and sometimes literal) breaker of boundaries: both early modern and modern cultures use the disabled (and therefore “monstrous”) Other to mark the borders of the human. Early modern

lycanthropy is inherently a “borderland condition” (Mittman and Hensel 218). Acting as the liminal gap between man and animal, the werewolf stands to ask, “What exactly counts as human?” In this liminality, the werewolf exists as posthuman. Simultaneously, being associated with or diagnosed with lycanthropy is to be on the margins of society. Marginalization is one of the key elements in McCarthy’s novel and adds to the solidification of werewolf subjectivity present within the framework of the novel.

Monstrosity in medieval Western epistemology sought to label alterity as a curse, to be an “other” was to be an aberration of natural (teratological) and theological ontologies. As proposed by several witch trials of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the werewolf was a creature doomed to be cursed, alienated, and marginalized. Though *Bisclavret* is doomed in the end, I argue that werewolf subjectivity is predicated on the notion that werewolf identity is not an alterity of the body or other form of metaphysical metempsychosis but rather a disruption of identity.

**POST-WERWOLF: LESTER BALLARD**  
**IN CHILD OF GOD**

The monster in question is rarely a subject of objectivity but rather one of subjectivity. Dislodging the monster from the traditional epistemes surrounding its origin, identity, and function, consequentially places the monster subject in a space of liminality. I wish to ground the “monster” from its liminality and place it within the context of “overclothing.” In this context, the monster loses an essential (traditional) trait or episteme: its ability to become fully inhuman. Again, I introduce here, the concept of *revestimiento monstrario*. Instead of “overclothing,” I “re-clothe” Lester Ballard in the skin of his own choosing, a werewolf with man-like embellishments; a man in wolf-like embellishments *if* he himself is indeed man.

Conceptualizing *monstrario* requires a blend of etymological exercises that stem from the word “monster” and “demonstrate.” From the Latin *demonstrare* meaning “to show, exhibit, or point out,” I posit Ballard as a monster predicated on the alienation and ostracization that was enacted by the people of Sevierville. Used as a spectacle to be exhibited, Ballard became the monster everyone feared. Therefore, monstrous creations such as the ones caused by homogeneous societies told in McCarthy’s *Child of God*, tend to make their presence known through aberrative behaviors such as isolation, ostracizing, or shunning.

*Revestimiento* arrives from the Galician “to coat” or “overlay” then Old and Middle French meaning, “to adorn; to decorate.” Here, I take to the additional connotation given to this word in my native Spanish language: “to don; to put on” but more importantly, “to have; to show” a certain quality or abstract idea. Since this word contains the prefix “re-”, I use it as a framework to (1) denote the “backward” regression from society and humanity that Lester Ballard exhibits, (2) illuminate the “undoing” of his character both physically and psychically

and (3) for the purposes of showcasing Ballard as a werewolf, I use this prefix to “again” indicate that Ballard always *was* the “monster” everyone feared him to be.

In conjunction, the *revestimiento monstrario* of the human does exactly that; it “re-clothes” the human with inhuman phenomenon *already* existent in their human-like state as opposed to “overclothing” which merely limits its concept to the *external acquisition* of “monster” from the action of donning or layering. Therefore, the monstrous attributes appear intrinsically outward as they do inwardly. Here, the monster dwells within the innards of the subject, discoverable first by those “haruspices of old.”

When I mention werewolf subjectivity, what I mean to aim at is simply an approach to “werewolf studies.” To put it extraordinarily: “werewolf theory” outside of the “traditional werewolf” epistemes created by the fables and myths of antiquity. Though no particular branch of theory devotes itself exclusively to the werewolf, there are a handful of scholars whose groundbreaking work in monster studies comes within earshot of such an approach.<sup>20</sup> These scholars differentiate themselves from previous scholarship that leans mainly towards the historicity and objectivity of this supernatural humanoid. It is therefore important to establish that subjectivity here means both a changing identity for the wolf-man and simultaneously, a container within the realm of gothic folklore in which to assemble texts with wolf-like characteristics and attributes.<sup>21</sup> This assemblage of identity, bodies, and the inhuman, creates part(s) of a whole and functions as a tool for understanding posthuman assemblages and their animal-human relationships.

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<sup>20</sup> For these, see Crossen, Bynum, Blécourt, Whitacre, Weinreich, and Freccero. See also Mittman and Donecker.

<sup>21</sup> Here I rely heavily on Carys Crossen’s book *The Nature of the Beast: Transformations of the Werewolf From the 1970s to the Twenty-First Century* (2019). Her book establishes the concept of werewolf subjectivity, a reading away from the traditional “man-beast” binary.

For Ballard, playing both hunter and hunted in *Child of God* allows not only the emergence of subjectivity in werewolf studies but also positions him as capable of taking on both skins. Instead of donning a skin on and off as exemplified in the climax of the plot, this reading of the text introduces Ballard as a subject who *embellishes* himself with the skin of his own monster. His *revestimiento* becomes then, not a product of “taking on” an identity, but rather, as an embellishment of a skin he long possessed outside the margins of the text – a werewolf in human skin.

Werewolf stories tend to skip over their origin stories. Clearly, the causation of the “werewolf curse” is distinctly marked by a bite, an infection, or the physical abnormalities or superhuman abilities they begin to exhibit. To cement the idea of Ballard’s werewolfness, I look to the subsequent chapters that step aside from the main narrative. These chapters, I term as “gossip chapters.” These chapters are appropriately labeled so given their nature. They are simultaneously constructing a narrative of the representation of *a* truth while relying only on hearsay and the accounts of other townspeople. In introducing the concept of the gossip chapters within the novel, the plot thus becomes a narrative that incorporates a sense of oral fluidity. This fluidity destabilizes the sense of reality within the paradigm of the text. These gossip chapters are imperative to the formation of Ballard’s werewolfness due to the highly fluctuating and shimmering nature of gossip as an oral medium for transmitting information through language. In this sense, gossip becomes shimmering – an illusion of a grandiose and truthful narrative – similarly akin to an optical illusion that resembles the gilded borders of the frame narrative. This shimmer is now part of the entire narrative, destabilizing the veracity and details of the main story. Thus, in *Child of God*, the gossip chapters do not simply supplement the main plot but, like a disease, exponentially “infect” the plot to the point of destabilization. The destabilization

unbinds a pre-established sense of identity from the subject Lester Ballard. This unbinding renders a false sense of narrative, of reality, of plot. Ultimately, what is produced of this process is the transfiguration of the narrative into a fluid entity that invites superstition and paranoia in the form of horrors and monsters.

McCarthy introduces this literary device of “gossip” as a series of anonymous communal narratives that help shape the character for the reader. Given the lack of character insight, the chaos of the gossip chapters set the foundation on which a construed identity can be created independently from the main narrative. Hence, the werewolf emerges out of this chaos. Without the need for witchcraft nor the fear of a physical abnormality, McCarthy has destabilized reality within the parameters of the text by introducing gossip. This fluidity of truth within orality further contributes to the destabilization of reality by weaving these chapters into the story’s mainframe, allowing the *supernatural* folk gothic element of the text to shine through.

Famous monsters such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* or Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* tend to all have a clear origin story. For the werewolf, this tends to differ greatly from its more famous monstrous cousins.<sup>22</sup> As I argued in the previous chapter of this thesis, the werewolves of antiquity are seen as a product of either witchcraft — in some instances, the victim would willingly drink out of the paw print of a wolf or be unwittingly cursed by a witch or sorcerer —

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<sup>22</sup> “But for all this the werewolf has not been a popular critical subject until very recently. I suspect, however, that the werewolf lacks the prestige of other literary monsters such as the vampire. The evolution of the vampire can be traced through classic texts such as *Dracula* (1897) and *Le Fanu’s ‘Carmilla’* (1872), which lend it historical and literary importance, and it has continued to enjoy a greater impact in popular culture than the werewolf, judging by the phenomenal success of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* and the even more recent and even more impressive success of the Young Adult series, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight*. The werewolf, by contrast, has not enjoyed popular success on the same scale, and despite some prestigious authors tackling the werewolf theme, the werewolf does not have a classic founding text in the style of *Dracula*. If the vampire is the adored, sophisticated aristocrat of the horror genre, the werewolf appears to be the poor peasant relation whom it embarrasses people to acknowledge” (Crossen 2-3).

or some congenital non-normality known as teratology as was the case with the Pietists.<sup>23</sup>

However, for Lester Ballard, the origin story for his werewolfness begins, according to gossip, when he was a boy; no special effects or magic involved:

I don't know. They say he never was right after his daddy killed hisself. They was just the one boy. The mother had run off, I don't know where to nor who with. Me and Cecil Edwards was the ones cut him down. He come in the store and told it like you'd tell it was rainin out. We went up there and walked in the barn and I seen his feet hangin. We just cut him down, let him fall in the floor. Just like cuttin down meat. He stood there and watched, never said nothin. He was about nine or ten year old at the time. The old man's eyes was run out on stems like a crawfish and his tongue blacker'n a chow dog's. I wisht if a man wanted to hang hisself he'd do it with poison or somethin so folks wouldn't have to see such a thing as that (McCarthy 21).

This gossip chapter serves as the epicenter for the destabilization of reality for the entirety of the text and beyond. Quite promiscuously opening with “I don't know,” the gossip chapter allows for Ballard's werewolf creation to be registered within the paradigm of the words. Establishing then an origin story requires me now to exemplify Ballard's werewolfness. Keeping in mind the previous brief chapter on the genealogy of werewolf studies, I look now to instances in the text in which Ballard exhibits “properties” of this *revestimiento monstrario*. I will come back to this topic in subsequent pages. For now, I wish to introduce werewolf subjectivity as a branch of thought from werewolf studies – ultimately tying in monster studies altogether.

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<sup>23</sup> Shyovitz, David I. “Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Werewolf Renaissance.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2014, pp. 521–43. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2014.0033>.

To capture Ballard's werewolf subjectivity, the traditional understanding of werewolf identity must be done away with – In this reading, posit that Lycaon is no longer an irrational bestial creature turned inhuman because of an angry god but instead, one that retains his humanity while being “overclothed” in wolfskin. The once-subjected Lycaon now becomes posthuman or *suprahuman* akin to the Marxist idea of the *übermensch*. In this understanding, this chapter will characterize Cormac McCarthy's protagonist, Lester Ballard, as an embodiment of the imaginary link between the werewolf epistemes expressed in previous chapters of this thesis and that of werewolf subjectivity.<sup>24</sup> Such linking will serve to add to the materialization of the monster within McCarthy's novel, ultimately “re-clothing” this character in werewolfness and positing him as an example of the posthuman.

McCarthy's werewolf first appears to the unsuspecting reader as a strange man with strange proclivities. It is not until much later in the novel – after retreating into the wilderness of the Tennessee forest – that Ballard's persona is radically changed from the lonely necrophile in the woods to a different monstrous creature:

After the snow ceased he went every day. He'd watch from his half mile promontory, see Greer come from the house for wood or go to the barn or to the chicken house. After he'd gone in again Ballard would wander about aimlessly in the woods talking to himself. He laid queer plans. His shuffling boot tracks trampling out the prints of lesser life. Where mice had gone, or foxes hunting in the night. The dovelike imprimatur of a stooping owl. He'd long been wearing the underclothes of his female victims but now he took to appearing in their outerwear as well. A gothic doll in illfit clothes, its carmine mouth

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<sup>24</sup> In the Lacanian sense of the term: imaginary, here, does not mean “made-up” but “cross-referential”; placed within Lacan's Imaginary. See Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. W.W. Norton & Co, 2006.



floating detached and bright in the white landscape. Down there the valley with the few ruststained roofs and faintest wisps of smoke. The ribboned slash of mud that the road made up the white valley and beyond it the fold on fold of mountains with their black weirs of winter treelimbs and dull green cedars (140).

The key element in this passage is the overclothing of Ballard's person with the underclothes as well as the outwear of his *female* victims. Noticing the emphasis on the gendered articles of clothing, Ballard not only cross-dresses but by doing so assumes a different skin similar to that of Gerald's werewolves. Bynum's discourse on overclothing manifests itself through this passage as well:

On a good May morning John Greer turned out to dig a septic tank at the back of his house. While he was digging, Lester Ballard in frightwig and skirts stepped from behind the pump-house and raised the rifle and cocked the hammer silently, holding back the trigger and easing it into the notch as hunters do... Even though Greer was shot through the upper chest himself he wobbled from the doorway with the shotgun and down the steps to examine this thing he'd shot. At the foot of the steps he picked up what appeared to be a wig and saw that it was fashioned whole from a dried human scalp (172-3).

Here, again, the overclothing does not pertain to actual werewolf skin or any other animal skin for that matter but instead manifests itself in "frightwig and skirt" to produce a "gothic doll in illfit clothes." Certainly, the word choice "illfit" could not be more appropriate as it hearkens to Whitacre's idea of overclothing as a process of layering. According to Whitacre, "It is through layering—the revisiting of the same texts, the juxtaposition of opposing but related arguments, the close contact of animal form on the human body—that overclothing takes on its complex of meanings. It becomes something other than what it was intended to be, transforming even as it

appears unchanged” (101). It is important not to make quick judgments on the specifics of the idea of overclothing since Whitacre prominently points out that overclothing concerns the “close contact of animal form on human body.” Indeed, the animal *form* on Lester begins to manifest on him long before his confrontation with Greer.

The body of McCarthy’s werewolf can be labeled human for all intents. To explicate, it performs – without regard to qualitative properties – in both a social and isolated setting. The body thus performs in each social setting in which it is placed without regard to a qualitative aspect of performativity. Take for example the passage in which Ballard is shopping for female clothing to dress up his dead victim:

Ballard shopping. Before a dry goods store where in the window a crude wood manikin headless and mounted on a pole wore a blowsy red dress. He made several passes through the notions and dry goods, his hands on the money in his pockets. A salesgirl who stood with her arms crossed hugging her shoulders leaned to him as he passed. Can I hep ye? she said. I ain’t looked good yet, said Ballard. He made another sortie among the counters of lingerie, his eyes slightly wild as if in terror of the flimsy pastel garments there...What all does she need? the girl said. She needs some drawers, Ballard blurted out. The girl coughed into her fist and turned and went back up the aisle, Ballard behind, his face afire (96-9).

Though riddled with dark humor and tension, the passage illustrates Ballard properly conversing with a female shop owner followed by another conversation with Mr. Fox, the convenience store owner, before retreating into the wilderness of Frog Mountain, “When Ballard reached Fox’s store he was half frozen. A bluish dusk suffused the barren woods about. He went straight to the stove and stood next to the dusty gray barrel of it with his teeth chattering. Cold enough for ye?

said Mr Fox. Ballard nodded. Radio says it's goin down to three degrees tonight. Ballard was not for smalltalk" (99). In this context, the subject – or body in question – performs according to the nuances of the society called Sevierville.

As Ballard's character moves within the parameters of the text, he is faced with several life-altering situations. Given his proclivity to necrophilia, he keeps dead women's bodies in the attic of an abandoned home in which he has found shelter. Following a fire, he is forced out into the elements to seek shelter and food. All the while, infused with a sense of revenge for Greer, the man who bought his property at the beginning of the novel. One example of this revenge-fueled character is on page 109 portrays Ballard stalking Greer from the wilderness. Here again, the novel alludes to a monster-in-the-woods narrative – a werewolf in the wilderness beyond the borders of society. Similarly hearkening to the werewolf motif, he goes about to terrorize the livestock at Greer's property. Like a wolf in search of prey:

He crouched behind the barn listening for sound of Greer. There in the frozen mire of mud and dung deeply plugged with hoofprints. When he came through the barn it was empty. The loft was filled with hay. Ballard stood in the forebay door looking down through the falling snow at the gray shape of the house. He crossed to the chicken house and undid the wire that held the hasp and entered. A few white hens eyed him nervously from their cubbynecks on the far wall. Ballard passed along a row of roosting rails and went through a chickenwire door to the feedroom (136).

Again, Ballard now performs his role differently from the previous examples. Here, the body has assumed more than one role or identity onto which it's subjectivity has now been expanded.

Ballard exemplifies the role of predator, of monstrosity, of werewolfness:

There he loaded his pockets with shelled corn and came back. He surveyed the hens, clucked his tongue at them and reached for one. It erupted from the box with a long squawk and flapped past and lit in the floor and trotted off. Ballard cursed. In the uproar the other hens were following by ones and pairs. He lunged and grabbed one by the tail as it came soaring out. It set up an outraged shrieking until Ballard could get it by the neck. Holding the struggling bird in both hands and with his rifle between his knees he crowhopped to the small dustwebbed window and peered out. Nothing stirred. You son of a bitch, said Ballard, to the chicken or Greer or both. He wrung the hen's neck and went quickly through the nesting boxes gathering up the few eggs and putting them in his pockets and then he went out again (136).

Ballard's revenge is the driving force behind both his transformation and his demise. However, coupled with his alienation and exposure to the harsh wilderness, the werewolf motif solidifies even further to exemplify the posthuman elements within the text. Firstly, I cannot help but compare a small but poignant scenario within the text in which, "[Ballard] halfway put his hand to the water as if he would touch the face that watched there [his face] but then he rose and wiped his mouth and went on through the woods" (127). In this reflection, I speculate that Ballard momentarily sees what he sees at the end of the novel:

He'd not gone far before a churchbus hove into sight behind him. Ballard scuttled into the roadside weeds and crouched there watching. The bus clattered past. It was all lit up and the faces within passed each in their pane of glass, each in profile. At the last seat in the rear a small boy was looking out the window, his nose puttied against the glass. There was nothing out there to see but he was looking anyway. As he went by he looked at Ballard and Ballard looked back. Then the bus rounded the curve and clattered from

sight. Ballard climbed into the road and went on. He was trying to fix in his mind where he'd seen the boy when it came to him that the boy looked like himself. This gave him the fidgets and though he tried to shake the image of the face in the glass it would not go (191).

These two passages envision the body as a human and non-human assemblage. Both the reflection in the water and the school bus scenario allude to Ballard “peeling back” the skin of the wolf to reveal the human underneath. But these are Ballard’s only interactions with reflective surfaces within the novel. Herein lies the strongest textual evidence to the concept of *revestimiento monstrario* presented in *Child of God*. To move beyond the scope of mere overclothing, the subject must make an acknowledgment of its current identarian awareness or crises. This is to say, it must recognize itself for who it is and *what* it desires to become. Hence, these reflective passages serve not only as a reflective mirror of Ballard, but as a reflective window into his identity. It is important to note, then, that these reflective moments in the text are provided first by the environment i.e., a pool of water, and later by an entity of society i.e., the school bus. Though Ballard may be “peeling back” his monster skin for a moment to reveal the human underneath in these particular instances, he never fully departs from the skin he wears. Ultimately, Ballard *was* always the monster. His proclivity for his strange lusts, violence, and overclothing is a product of *revestimiento* which posits that the monster is an undetachable, identity-forming, and identity-created being within the psyche of the human subject. Alluding to the overall eerie atmospheric quality of the text, nature as an entity of identity construction serves to add qualitative support in shaping the monster that is Ballard.

Evidently, McCarthy provides vivid imagery in describing the cave of horrors where Ballard decides to take refuge. The cave appears “with a row of dripping limestone teeth” (133),

with the walls “wet [with] bloodred mud [which] had an organic look to them, like the innards of some great beast. Here in the bowels of the mountain, Ballard turned his light on ledges or pallets of stone where dead people lay like saints” (135). In this cave, the environment shapes Ballard into the posthuman, “[His] shadow veering dark and mutant over the cupped stone walls” (159). Ballard not only blends in with his surroundings, but the wilderness itself also incorporates this exiled as its own creature – both as a monster to the society of Sevierville and as a humanoid outcast belonging to the woods of Frog Mountain. Still, again, Ballard continues to hold on to some humanity in him:

Nothing moved in that dead and fabled waste, the woods garlanded with frostflowers, weeds spiring up from white crystal fantasies like the stone lace in a cave’s floor. He had not stopped cursing. Whatever voice spoke him was no demon but some old shed self that came yet from time to time in the name of sanity, a hand to gentle him back from the rim of his disastrous wrath (158).

This “gentle hand” that keeps him back from the edge of his own death has appeared once before in the reflection of the water and again in the image of the schoolboy afterward. Yet Ballard encounters two deaths one literal, the other metaphysical.<sup>25</sup> The implied inner conflict within Ballard is too prominent to ignore and it establishes itself within the minute details of the text and the moments alone with Ballard. This conflict, having begun since the fire and peaked at the introduction of the cave as his new home, has all led up to the revengeful confrontation with Greer and the exposition of Ballard as an entity *revestido* in frightwig and skirt – a true monster of the woods.

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<sup>25</sup> “Removed from that system of judgment so intent on organizing its parts into a well-managed and diminutive unity, the body unravels. Ceasing to exist as a bounded organism, it becomes what the mad poet Antonin Artaud called a “body without organs” (*corps sans organes*)” (Cohen XVII).

Having delineated the confrontation with Greer beforehand, which establishes the overclothing for werewolf subjectivity, I turn the attention now to Ballard's first death or the death of his *cogito* which emphasizes the framework of *revestimiento* and the posthuman angle which it follows:

He dreamt that night that he rode through woods on a low ridge. Below him he could see deer in a meadow where the sun fell on the grass. The grass was still wet and the deer stood in it to their elbows. He could feel the spine of the mule rolling under him and he gripped the mule's barrel with his legs. Each leaf that brushed his face deepened his sadness and dread. Each leaf he passed he'd never pass again. They rode over his face like veils, already some yellow, their veins like slender bones where the sun shone through them. He had resolved himself to ride on for he could not turn back and the world that day was as lovely as any day that ever was and he was riding to his death (171).

This passage happens just a page before the gun battle ensues between Ballard and Greer. Interestingly placed between the corpus of the preceding events and that of the climax of the plot. In this liminality of being, Ballard's (1) embellishment or "re-clothing" occurs and (2) the posthuman aspect of the novel comes to light. To exact Ballard's death in this dream is to exact a self-death outside of the dream. Without mistaking this for suicide, what is meant by "self-death outside the dream" is simply a metaphorical death of the self. How then can the inanimate reclaim animation after death if death presents itself as the ultimate end of all living things? To posit this question is to grapple with the notion of a post-death theoretical framework of a literary character. Here, a character's death can represent broader themes such as mortality, sacrifice, redemption, or the consequences of actions. It can serve as a catalyst for change, forcing other

characters to confront their own mortality or make transformative decisions. The manner in which a character dies, whether it be a heroic sacrifice or a tragic accident, can also contribute to the symbolic meaning associated with their death. Yet, Ballard fits neither a heroic sacrifice nor a tragic accident. His death is voluntary rather than involuntary. In the equation presented by Hobbes and expanded upon by Carla Freccero, Ballard has killed “man” allowing for the creation of not just the werewolf but of monsters worse to come. Here, the supernatural and natural blend and through the death presented in this “liminal” chapter of McCarthy’s text, Ballard assumes a human, non-human assemblage.

Ballard has put down his identity, his name and his place in society, and has given himself to death. In this visual, death presents itself “naturally” in the pastoral setting of the dream, the landscape, and the animals, all welcome and beacon Ballard to a state of inanimate existence. Though the textual evidence simply describes Ballard “riding to his death,” the narrative doesn’t end there. Ultimately positing the following chapters and events as part of the “post-death” that Ballard has experienced through the dream. It is thus an identarian death and death of his *cogito* that has taken place in the dream and within Ballard’s character as well. Becoming one with nature both because of his violent delights and the predicament of being an alienated and alone unhoused individual, Ballard now assumes a full “re-clothing” or *revestimiento* of a new identity. This new identity comes portrayed as a werewolf in the larger framework of the novel to mark the binary discourse between mind and body, between monstrosity and humanity, and between man and wolf. Here again, I reiterate the idea of *revestimiento monstrario*, which asserts that Ballard remains human even in his most violent moments if only to be embellished in wolf-like attributes. According to Loftis, “werewolves were suggested to be not-human based on an inability to fully feel human emotion. As S. J.



Wiseman explains, “one of the chief signs [of lycanthropy] ... was the inability to weep” (218). Yet, Ballard does indeed cry despite him *almost* crying at different sections throughout the novel, “Squatting there he let his head drop between his knees and he began to cry” (McCarthy 170). Ultimately, both the death of the “man” Ballard once was and the layering of the body come together to produce the posthuman aspect in McCarthy’s novel. Ballard, neither being one nor the other, assumes all identities simultaneously and becomes the very thing people saw him as – a monster.

This brings another theoretical attribution to the text. This attribution rises from the death of the *cogito* or self. Recalling Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* (1882), McCarthy’s novel engages the idea that God is dead. The death of God, according to Nietzsche, reflects the loss of a transcendental foundation for morality and meaning in human existence. This loss in human existence presents itself plainly in the alterity projected by the people of Sevierville:

The congregation at six mile Church would turn all together like a cast of puppets at the opening of the door behind them any time after services had started. When Ballard came in with his hat in his hand and shut the door and sat alone on the rear bench they turned back more slowly. A windy ruffle of whispers went among them. The preacher stopped. To justify the silence he poured himself a glass of water from the pitcher on the pulpit and drank and set the glass back and wiped his mouth.

Brethren, he went on, a biblical babbling to Ballard who read the notices on the board at the back of the church. This week’s offering. Last week’s offering. Six dollars and seventy-four cents. The numbers in attendance. A woodpecker hammered at a drainpipe outside and those strung heads listed and turned to the bird for silence. Ballard had a cold

and snuffled loudly through the service but nobody expected he would stop if God himself looked back askance so no one looked (31-2).

Hence, extrapolating from this pertinent passage of the text as one example of alterity within the narrative allows for an exploration into the crises envisioned by Nietzsche. Nietzsche argued that without a guiding higher principle placed as a ruling power would lead to a crisis of meaning, nihilism, and the potential for individuals to create their own values and pursue their own desires. For McCarthy's novel, the same absence of divine authority yields a violent and destructive narrative, one that expels God from the text. Essentially, it is God who haunts Ballard and by extension, *Child of God*.

The moral crises as envisioned in the ideas of Nietzsche are exemplified in the obsolescence of divine authority within the text. The high sheriff of Sevierville, ironically called Fate, fails as an authoritative figure in keeping peace and capturing Ballard. Hence, the path to the death of God is paved clearly for the remainder of the text. Similarly, the values that the people of Sevierville hold are not inclusive of Ballard's persona. It is not only Ballard who is at fault for widening the rift between him and society, but it is also the self-same society that continues to fervently alienate Ballard away from any healthy integration. In this passage, the alterity from an authoritative entity posits Ballard in the following light, "It was quiet in the room. After a while the man behind the desk lowered his hands and folded them in his lap. Mr Ballard, he said. You are either going to have to find some other way to live or some other place in the world to do it in" (123). As a product of these two nihilistic forces – the obsolescence of divine authority and the attitude of alterity from the community as a whole – in Nietzsche's genealogy of modernity, a superhuman individual emerges. This individual is capable of embracing their own potential and rejecting any societal limitations or religious dogmas.

According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* transcends the limitations and values of conventional morality, religion, and social norms. The term *Übermensch* is often translated as “Superman,” but it can also be understood as “Overman” or “Beyond-Man.” The concept is not about a physically superior or superhuman being, but rather about an individual who rises above the mediocrity of ordinary human existence and embraces a life of self-empowerment and self-creation. The figure capable of generating meaning without gods is not the same as the werewolf whose monstrosity and violence are reflection of the conditions Nietzsche calls nihilism. The *Übermensch* is the solution to nihilism, not its representative. Still, I wish to borrow the term as analogous with the “monsters worse to come” that McCarthy describes at the end of *Child of God*. The *Übermensch* may be Nietzsche’s solution to the problem of nihilism but McCarthy weaponizes the term vis-à-vis the “liminal” aforementioned death chapter. As a posthuman individual having rejected all sense of order, God is pushed to the boundaries of the text and the monstrous werewolf emerges.

McCarthy has crafted a world within the parameters of the text that is rife with Nietzsche’s idea of a decaying society under the concept that God is dead. Simultaneously, this perverse world within the text exemplifies the problem between the werewolf and the community that has created and ostracized it. What ensues is a descent into savagery. Ballard engages in acts of violence, necrophilia, and other heinous acts, demonstrating a conscious disregard for societal norms and traditional moral boundaries.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, McCarthy presents characters whose actions challenge conventional notions of morality that only inhibit and affirm Ballard’s violent delights. Such characters manifest themselves in the dump keeper and his spawned of “nine daughters [who were named] out of an old medical dictionary gleaned from the

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<sup>26</sup> See McCarthy’s novel for examples on pages 23, 33, 41, 65, 91, 105, 109, 113, 117-20, and 151.

rubbish he picked” (McCarthy 26). In this light, characters like Ballard and the dump keeper live on the margins of society, willing their perverse desires into power through the sense of individualism. Without the need for an anchoring society, their reign of terror in the wilderness of the Tennessean mountains remains unchecked having created their own communal and individual system of law on the margins of society. According to Nietzsche, “slave morality” arises from a position of weakness and subjugation. Historically, slaves and oppressed individuals lacked the power and influence to assert their own values and impose them on others. As a result, they developed a moral system that resented and criticized the values of their oppressors. Therefore, slave morality, in Nietzsche's view, denounces the expression of individual “will to power,” which Nietzsche considered a driving force in human nature. Thus, characters such as the dump keeper and Lester Ballard himself, are the twisted consequences of slave morality that hasn't yet embraced the challenge of life after the death of God.

Nietzsche argued that slave morality establishes a dichotomy between good and evil based on the resentment of the weak toward the strong. The values of slave morality are rooted in the notion that the strong and powerful are morally inferior, and the weak and oppressed are morally superior. Exemplified in *Child of God* as such:

All the trouble I ever was in, said Ballard, was caused by whiskey or women or both.

He'd often heard men say as much. All the trouble I ever was in was caused by gettin caught, said the black. After a week the sheriff came down the corridor one day and took the nigger away. Flyin home, sang the nigger (53-4).

And again in this passage:

Lord they caught me, Lester, said Kirby... “They sent niggers. That's who I sold to. Sold to em three times. One of em set right there in that chair and drunk a pint. Drunk it and

got up and walked out and got in the car. I don't see how he done it. He might of drove for all I know. They caught everbody. Got old lady Bright up in Cocke County even and she's been sellin whiskey non stop since fore I was born (114).

In contrast, "master morality," which Nietzsche associated with aristocratic societies, is characterized by a different set of values. Master morality values strength, power, nobility, and the affirmation of one's own desires. It does not hold the same moral condemnation of the weak and does not derive its values from a position of subjugation. The master morality exemplified in McCarthy's novel presents itself in the Sheriff's character:

Fate's all right. He's plainspoken but I like him. I've rode with him a lot of times. I remember one night up on the Frog Mountain at the turnaround there they was a car parked up there and Fate put the lights on em and walked on up there. The old boy in the car was all yessir and nosir. Had this girl with him. He ast the old boy for his license and the old boy scratched around for the longest time, couldn't find his pocketbook nor nothin. Fate finally told him, said: Step out here. Said the old girl settin there was white as a sheet. Well, the old boy opened the door and out he steps. Fate looked at him and then he hollered at me, said: John, come here and see this.

I went on up there and the old boy is standin by the side of the car lookin down and the sheriff is lookin down, got the light on him. We're all standin there lookin down at this old boy and he's got his britches on inside out. Pockets hangin outside all around. Looked crazier'n hell. Sheriff just told him to go on. Ast him if he could drive like that. That's the kind of feller he is (44-5).

The oppositional forces between the ostracized other and the hegemonic powers reveal the societal fault lines that isolate the werewolf. Having exemplified Nietzsche's genealogy of these

two opposing forces exemplified in *Child of God* will allow for another layer of theoretical interpretation that moves away from the rift between the ostracized individual and society and onto the macabre and haunting purpose of God's death within the parameter of the text.

Jacques Derrida's concept of "hauntology" explores the ghostly presence of absence and the ways in which the past continues to haunt and shape the present.<sup>27</sup> The term itself is a play on the words "haunting" and "ontology," suggesting that the specters of the past have a profound impact on our understanding of being and existence. In McCarthy's novel, it is God who acts as the specter and spectator having ultimately been marginalized, killed, and forgotten. According to Derrida, hauntology challenges the traditional notion of presence by emphasizing the persistent presence of absence. In other words, absence *is* presence.

McCarthy gives Ballard the first "embellishment" or *revestimiento*, at the start of the novel. Having been introduced for the first time as "a child of God much like yourself perhaps" (4) allows for the introduction of Nietzsche's genealogy predicated on a post-structuralist literary view. As such, Ballard's first death and subsequent physical death allow for the creation of "monsters worse to come" (194). Though Ballard never attains a literal werewolf transformation, this metaphorical subjective symbolization of the werewolf blurs the boundaries between savagery and civility, between man and animal.

Unknowingly, however, the ostracized other's presence is still felt in the community even though their physical presence is absent. This absent presence likewise serves as the persistent threat of masculine violence and monstrosity even when it physically remains far removed. Such "haunting" seeps beyond the boundaries of temporality allowing the idea of monstrosity to likewise propagate in the unconscious. This same socio-political rift between werewolf and the

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<sup>27</sup> Derrida, Jacques, et al. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Repr, Routledge, 2011.

community is what defines the archetypal strife between “good” and “evil” where the community and the other are engaged in a feud for acceptance, authority, and rationale, respectively. Contingent on the aforementioned opposition of slave and master morality, the haunting of each is respectively felt by the other.

The performative nature of the werewolf not only rests on the disruptive notion of identity but likewise, on the revelatory aspects of its monstrosity. This tension in both individual identity and communal forces is exemplified in what Molly Lewis calls “[an] inability to contain the monstrous body of the non-normative other that compels the culture...to identify the monster’s characteristics and differentiate them from safe, normative [white, able-bodied, male] bodies”.<sup>28</sup> Herein lies the phenomenology of the ostracized other. In a community where othering is normative, the werewolf recluses back into nature where he can construct his own community.

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<sup>28</sup> Godden, Richard H., and Asa Simon Mittman, editors. “Monstrosity and Embodiment.” *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 154–62.

## MALE MONSTROSITY

Lester Ballard is a lonely man who lives on the outskirts of the Appalachian Mountains near Sevierville in Sevier County, Tennessee. Unwittingly exiled from his own community, Lester keeps to himself in a storyline that incorporates him as being more intimate, wild, and sensual with the natural environment than with the people of Sevierville. His proclivity for unusual sexual depravities manifests itself through voyeurism, necrophilia, murder, and the act of overclothing his body with the personal effects and body parts of his victims. In the past, werewolves have generally been seen with a stigma of malevolence, savagery, and depravity – all of which are appropriate to attribute to Ballard’s *modus operandi*. Still, the werewolf is no stranger to the fluid changing of time. With the introduction of worldwide popular culture, multiple texts have transformed the once-ferocious monster into a figure of masculinity, strength, and unbridled sexual violence. This transfiguration of the humanoid monster has allowed scholars like Carys Crossen, Kaja Franck, Sam Georges, among others to explore the changing identity of these entities.<sup>29</sup>

The threat of gendered violence looms large throughout the corpus of werewolf texts given that their victims are often women. In this act of sexual assault, the werewolf signifies a compilation of masculine negative heteronormative tropes which further add to the ideological

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<sup>29</sup> For contemporary werewolves see, Franck, Kaja, and Sam George. “Contemporary Werewolves.” *Twenty First-Century Gothic*, edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 144–58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvnjbgx9.14>. JSTOR. For a detailed introduction into the subjectivity of werewolf identity, see Carys Crossen. *The Nature of the Beast : Transformations of the Werewolf From the 1970s to the Twenty-First Century*. University of Wales Press, 2019. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip.shib&db=nlebk&AN=2257044&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=gsu1>. For contemporary werewolves in film and literature, see Lawrence, Elizabeth A. “Werewolves in Psyche and Cinema: Man-Beast Transformation and Paradox.” *Journal of American Culture* (01911813), vol. 19, no. 3, 1996, pp. 103–12. Academic Search Complete.



fear of the ostracized other. Once isolated, the threat of the monstrous male remains over the community from which it has been excluded.

The male monstrosity of Lester Ballard is first appropriately established within a “gossip chapter” on page 17 of McCarthy’s novel. A secondary account of a memory concerning Lester Ballard in grade school aids in constructing the violent connotations within the imaginary link that reify the protagonist with werewolf epistemes:

Finney boy was some bit younger’n him. Told him, said: Go get that softball. Finney boy wouldn’t do it. Lester walked up to him and said: You better go get that ball. Finney boy said he wasn’t about to do it and Lester told him one more time, said: You don’t get off down in there and get me that ball I’m goin to bust you in the mouth. That Finney boy was scared but he faced up to him, told him he hadn’t thowed it off down in there. Well, we was standin there, the way you will. Ballard could of let it go. He seen the boy wasn’t goin to do what he ast him. He just stood there a minute and then he punched him in the face. Blood flew out of the Finney boy’s nose and he set down in the road. Just for a minute and then he got up. Somebody give him a kerchief and he put it to his nose. It was all swoll up and bleedin. The Finney boy just looked at Lester Ballard and went on up the road. I felt, I felt... I don’t know what it was. We just felt real bad. I never liked Lester Ballard from that day. I never liked him much before that. He never done nothin to me (McCarthy 17-18).

This behavior helps propagate the perverse action that leads to Ballard’s demise. Such instances in the text include Ballard approaching an unconscious woman in the wilderness and touching her leg. Likewise, male monstrosity shines through the conversation with his prison mate John. In an attempt at integration, Ballard relies on toxic masculine tropes to portray his encounter with

the woman. “After a while [Ballard] said: I was supposed to of raped this old girl. She wasn’t nothin but a whore to start with. [John adds in,] White pussy is nothin but trouble. Ballard agreed that it was. He guessed he’d thought so but he’d never heard it put that way” (53).

In her essay “Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body,” Margrit Shildrick yokes the notions of the feminine, the monstrous, and the posthuman in an exploration of their disruptive potential within the humanist epistemologies of the anthropocene. Shildrick argues that the material body of the feminine, replete with its monstrous potential, refuses to be contained within a singular category of exclusion within the processes of othering that mark identity formation, thereby opening up the possibilities of posthuman futures.

The primary argument of Shildrick’s essay is four fold: first, the author establishes how both the monstrous and the feminine body act as signifiers of transgression within the Western epistemes of reason. Next, she delineates how the woman is a viable threat to the signifiers of masculinity, as reproduction does not involve mere replication but change, not unlike the humanoid monster enacting a similar erasure upon its humanity, which has been traditionally synonymous with the autonomous male subject.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the author observes how bodies are constructed through both discourse and praxis, contending that although the instability of the postmodern subject dissolves the possibility of a fixed self, it does not dismiss the body as the site of discourse. Finally, Shildrick posits both the monster and the feminine as bodies resisting calculability and fixed categories, thereby heralding the promise of limitless possibilities of futures beyond the narrow confines of the human and the anti-human.

Reiterating the idea that masculine monstrosity in sexuality allows for a reproductive potential as posited in Shildrick’s essay. This potential manifest as an opportunity for the

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<sup>30</sup> For more, see Shildrick, Margrit. “Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body.” *Body & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, Mar. 1996, pp. 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034x96002001001>.

monstrous to propagate and infiltrate the human community. Here, I now postulate Ballard as a threat to the symbolic law of the father.<sup>31</sup> This rejection of the name of the father results in the unbridled sexual desire to propagate and engender that individual's own construct of order and meaning. Ultimately, this is exemplified in the threat of gendered violence throughout the corpus of werewolf texts given that their victims are often women.

Unlike monsters that propagate their likeness through the opposite sex, Ballard fails at sexual reproduction. Ballard's sexual intercourse is only with dead bodies. In spite of the completion of the sexual act, Ballard is unable to reproduce, left alone, and wanting for a sense of community and relationship. Disturbingly enough, the act of necrophilia induces Ballard to ejaculate inside a corpse which renders an even more sinister layer to the act. In his attempt at sexual reproduction, Ballard attempts to instill life through the act of sex into a dead body. This act can only be classified as a miracle – would it be possible, an act befitting God. Ballard's attempts at playing God thus become perverted through his monstrous impulse: his sexual proclivities do not result in reproduction, yet hint at the depraved depths of the human psyche, alluding to monsters worse to come.<sup>32</sup> To expand on this idea, I turn to the final section of the novel:

His body was shipped to the state medical school at Memphis. There in a basement room he was preserved with formalin and wheeled forth to take his place with other deceased persons newly arrived. He was laid out on a slab and flayed, eviscerated, dissected. His head was sawed open and the brains removed. His muscles were stripped from his bones. His heart was taken out. His entrails were hauled forth and delineated and the four young

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<sup>31</sup> As portrayed in the concept of “the name of the father” in Jacques Lacan’s 1950’s seminar *The Psychoses*.

<sup>32</sup> See Kimak, Nash, and Lancaster, and Hillier.

students who bent over him like those haruspices of old perhaps saw monsters worse to come in their configurations. At the end of three months when the class was closed Ballard was scraped from the table into a plastic bag and taken with others of his kind to a cemetery outside the city and there interred. A minister from the school read a simple service (McCarthy 194).

This rendering of Lester's body becomes symbolic in the integration process of the community he long seeks. It is stated that "His entrails were hauled forth and delineated and the four young students who bent over him like those haruspices of old perhaps saw monsters worse to come in their configurations" and can be posited that such "entrails" which the four young students were looking at were, in fact, his reproductive system. Monsters such as the werewolf and Lester Ballard in McCarthy's *Child of God* seek to propagate masculine violence through the murder, cannibalism, and destruction of the female body. Taking this idea a step further, what Ballard is essentially trying to *reproduce* out of his acts of necrophilia is "a child of God much like yourself perhaps" (McCarthy 4). Grotesquely disturbing, the hauntology of God within the text is evident within the darkest passages of McCarthy's novel.

The concept that renders a dead God in *Child of God* is likewise illustrated in the alterity projected onto Ballard. His subsequent alienation allows for the further dissemination of the idea that God is dead throughout the corpus of the text: as illustrated in earlier chapters of this thesis, McCarthy invokes God in order to suggest that God is nowhere to be found. His authority is null and void, dismissed along with the symbolic name of the father. Now reigns the monster, a byproduct of the divine death and the propagation of prejudice towards the *other*.

## CONCLUSION

Though the werewolf in Cormac McCarthy's novel, *Child of God*, does not present itself like the werewolves of antiquity *per se*, the underlying motif of overclothing, coupled with the theoretical framework of *revestimiento monstrario* here, illuminates the monstrous angle of the text. This monstrous angle shows itself in the form of alterity: such a theme of alterity is present in most of the werewolf stories presented herein. This alterity serves as an easy excuse for othering and alienating individuals not deemed "appropriate" for an already established community. Consciously alienating Lester Ballard, the town of Sevierville acts on fear. This fear establishes itself in homogenous communities as a manifestation of the larger societal forces at work. Evidently in the text, ideologies birth monsters and humanity nurture them.

In exemplifying the monstrous aspects of McCarthy's novel, I have posited a theoretical framework around monster studies scholars Carys Crossen's and Andrea Whitacre's idea of "overclothing." Establishing the groundwork for an extended approach to "overclothing," my introduction of *revestimiento monstrario* captures the essence of werewolfness in Ballard's character. To produce such a creature, first, a brief genealogy of medieval and classical werewolf stories is traced to establish how the werewolf motif is pertinent to this novel. The supernatural elements are then structured and posited along the theoretical framework of *revestimiento* and coupled with the ideas of Jacques Derrida and Friedrich Nietzsche. Through the incorporation of the observations of monster studies scholars such as Ashley Lancaster and Russel Hillier, this thesis posits Lester Ballard as a monster, adding to the ongoing work in the areas of monster studies and critical interpretations of works of McCarthy.

This thesis allows for the introduction of another monstrous entity – the werewolf – embedded within the character of Lester Ballard. Though I write not to seek out the "real"

Ballard – who has been *revestido* – in “wolf’s” skin, this text aims to illuminate the monstrosity reflected by both the monster and the one’s creating the monster. In a sense, a duality of creator and creation exists in the violent acts that Ballard delights in. Likewise, this thesis invites readers to look into the larger societal problem of alienation and monster creation. Though monsters like Dracula and Frankenstein seem to have disappeared from twenty-first-century belief systems, existing problems such as alienation and othering allows, enables, and produces *a form* of monstrosity projected and reflected both upon the individual and the society that isolates them.

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