

LESSONS ON BEING MULTIPLE AND HETEROGENEOUS:
A STUDY OF REMUS LUPIN IN *HARRY POTTER*

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Nonhuman characters and figures are generally an important feature of young adult fantasy literature. In the world of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, nonhuman characters and creatures abound. Most scholars interpret the nonhuman characters of Harry's world as mere mirrors of human characters and focus on the functions they perform for humans. Yet the prevalence of these varied nonhuman characters suggests there is something important about precisely that nonhuman quality itself. These characters transgress the perceived boundary between human and animal and their existence thus challenges these types of binaries and identity categories. No figure challenges these binaries more than the werewolf archetype that often stalks the pages of young adult fantasy literature. In the *Harry Potter* series, the werewolf character Remus Lupin forces Harry and his readers to confront the other and teaches both how to accept difference and multiplicity.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Jacques Derrida questions both the human/animal binary and political sovereignty by considering the linguistic uses of animals. He is particularly interested in deconstructing the reoccurring figures of the wolf and wolf-man in language and literature. These wolf figures continue to appear, Derrida argues, because they "encounter, and pose for us, thorny frontier questions" (Derrida, 4). Werewolves can change shape, and "the question of change is, of course, the other side of the question of identity" (Bynum, 19). As beings who cross the perceived boundary between human and animal, werewolves threaten the very category of human itself. Metamorphosis, and the transformation creatures like werewolves undergo, "breaks down categories by breaching them" (Bynum, 31). Werewolves are especially threatening because they "spend the majority of their time in human form, creating a situation whereby they are 'really one

of us and can act out clearly human behavior” (Green, 100-101). This transgression of the boundary between human and animal reveals that the human-created concepts of “human” and “animal” are not in fact natural or stable. Nonhumans have the ability to break down boundaries and “step outside the human” (Derrida, 263), demonstrating that human and animal are not necessarily distinct and separate but are rather a “plurality of worlds” that intermingle and coexist (Derrida, 201).

The separation from nonhuman animals allows humans to establish the nonhuman as irrevocably “other” and inferior. This then allows humans to make similar divisions among themselves by dehumanizing others and declaring them inferior. Derrida argues that “the worst, the cruelest, the most human violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular, who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows” (Derrida, 108). Once one determines that a being is “other” and not a “fellow” it is possible to justify mistreatment of them, as evidenced by the treatment of “mudbloods,” “half-breeds,” giants, goblins, enslaved House Elves, and werewolves in Rowling’s world. For example, Dolores Umbridge, a Ministry of Magic official, often refers to the half-giant Rubeus Hagrid as a “great half-breed oaf” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 752) and centaurs as “filthy half-breeds” and “uncontrolled animals” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 255). Some wizards consider those with non-magic parents to be inferior to “pure-bloods”, or witches and wizards who claim they do not have any non-magic blood in their families. With the exception of the werewolves, these individuals are “guilty at birth... guilty for being born what [they] were born” (Derrida, 209). Voldemort and his followers disparage and dehumanize “mudbloods” (witches and wizards born to non-magic parents) and unleash some of the “most human violence” (Derrida, 108) against those with non-magic lineage.

Human/animal binary-defying characters like Lupin demonstrate that such dehumanization and mistreatment of others who are different ultimately has no justifiable grounds.

Most members of the wizarding world decide that werewolves must be ostracized to prevent further contamination of others and protect the identity of human. It is easier to “[deny] such poor souls their humanity” rather than the more difficult option of “trying to understand a human who ‘destabilizes reality, making boundaries fluid, categories and interpretations problematic’” (Green, 101). Thus within the “already marginal (if somewhat elite) community” of the wizarding world, werewolves “are further marginalized and pushed to the fringes by both popular fear and legal statutes” (Stypczynski, 57). As Sirius Black tells Harry, Dolores Umbridge, the aforementioned Ministry of Magic official, “drafted a bit of anti-werewolf legislation two years ago that makes it almost impossible for [Lupin] to get a job” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 302). These prejudices and legal statutes prevent werewolves like Lupin from finding gainful employment and living ordinary lives. Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, however, ensures Lupin receives an education at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and later offers the adult Lupin a teaching position at the school.

Remus Lupin first appears in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* as the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Harry’s first class with him proves to be a lesson in transformation, confronting fears, and challenging binaries. Lupin has his students confront a creature called a “boggart.” Like a werewolf, a boggart is a shape shifter, but it takes “the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten [a person] the most” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 133). For this reason “nobody knows what a boggart looks like when he is alone” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 133). For Lupin, the boggart transforms into the full moon. The way to defeat a boggart, Lupin tells his students, is through laughter. The *Riddikulus* charm forces the boggart “to assume a shape that you find

amusing” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 134). The first lesson Lupin teaches Harry and his classmates, then, is how to confront one’s fears by transforming something frightening into something amusing.

When his lycanthropic “condition” is revealed later in the same book, Lupin must confront other characters’ open hostility and prejudice toward werewolves. Even individuals who are not prejudiced against Muggles and witches and wizards with non-magic blood express deeply ingrained prejudices toward werewolves and other nonhuman creatures. Ron Weasley, a “good” character and Harry’s best friend, displays his prejudices toward werewolves. When Ron learns that Lupin is a werewolf, his opinion of Lupin changes immediately. Ron is injured and Lupin moves to help him, but Ron shouts “*Get away from me, werewolf!*” causing Lupin to “[stop] dead” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 345). “Dumbledore hired you when he knew you were a werewolf?” Ron asks, “Is he mad?” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 346). Ron’s disgusted reaction demonstrates “the inadequacy of social binaries by showing the generally good character in a negative light” (Stypczynski, 59). Ron’s prejudice toward werewolves “is not isolated but of a piece with other cultural fears against non-wizard species” but just because this is an accepted prejudice “does not excuse it. Rather, being understandable only makes it worse because it becomes insidious” (Stypczynski, 60). Both Hermione and Harry did not grow up in the wizarding community and have not inherited the same prejudices as Ron. Hermione deduces that Lupin is a werewolf early on, but she does not tell anyone. Harry’s reaction to learning that Lupin is a werewolf is nothing like Ron’s response, and in a later book Harry insists “but you are normal... you’ve just a – a problem –” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 335). Unlike other witches and wizards, Hermione and Harry are “outsiders” to the community as well and as such are more willing to accept Lupin as a normal member of society.

As a being who is dual and occupies a socially marginal position, Lupin is better able to empathize with individuals when others cannot. Before they learn that Sirius Black is innocent, Lupin and Harry are discussing that Black may receive the “Dementor’s Kiss.” Dementors are creatures who feed off happiness, and this particular act entails sucking out a person’s soul. As Lupin tells Harry, this is much worse than death because “you can exist without your soul... but you’ll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no... anything. There’s no chance of recovery. You’ll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever... lost” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 247). Harry comments that Black deserves this fate, to which Lupin responds, “Do you really think anyone deserves that?” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 247). Lupin may be partly influenced by his childhood friendship with Black, but this remark more so reflects Lupin’s unwillingness to see such a horrific fate forced upon any living being, no matter what the justification may be. Lupin is able to place himself in the position of the other and he understands better than Harry that things are not always what they appear to be. This is another important lesson that he teaches to Harry and to readers alike.

Lupin again demonstrates his ability to resist passing judgment in his acceptance (or perhaps more appropriately, his tolerance) of Severus Snape, his childhood enemy. James Potter, Sirius Black, and Lupin were all childhood friends who bullied Snape (though Potter and Black were the ringleaders) and Snape remains bitter toward Lupin. Lupin adopts an ambiguous attitude when it comes to Snape, telling Harry “I neither like nor dislike Severus” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 332). Snape loathes Lupin and is the person who reveals Lupin’s lycanthropy to the Hogwarts community at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Despite their disdain for each other, Snape had been brewing the Wolfsbane Potion for Lupin all year. This potion permits Lupin to have more control and transform into a more “tame” wolf during the full moon. Lupin tells Harry that he has at least

some respect for Snape because he made the potion “every month, made it perfectly, so that I did not have to suffer as I usually do at the full moon” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 333). When Harry points out that it was Snape who revealed his secret at Hogwarts, Lupin shrugs and responds, “the news would have leaked out anyway... he could have wreaked much worse damage on me. He kept me healthy. I must be grateful” (*Half Blood Prince*, 333). Despite there being bad blood between the two, Lupin is seemingly able to overcome the bitterness in order to coexist and work with Snape. As someone who is often wrongfully judged and mistreated by other members of society for something he has no control over, Lupin is careful to resist passing judgment on others.

Lupin defies typical werewolf stereotypes and stands out as unique in his attempt to live a normal life amongst other witches and wizards. Because werewolves have been persecuted and ostracized, it has caused many of them to become bitter and hateful toward their oppressors. As Lupin tells Harry, while he may “bear the unmistakable signs of having tried to live among wizards... [other werewolves] have shunned normal society and live on the margins, stealing – and sometimes killing – to eat” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 334). One werewolf who chose this lifestyle, is Fenrir Greyback. According to Lupin, Fenrir Greyback is “the most savage werewolf alive today” and was the werewolf who bit Lupin when he was a child. Greyback “regards it as his mission in life to bite and contaminate as many people as possible; he wants to create enough werewolves to overcome the wizards” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 334). Greyback also “specializes in children” because that way he can “raise them away from their parents, raise them to hate normal wizards” (*Half Blood Prince*, 334-335). Lupin takes steps to protect others during his monthly transformations, but “at the full moon, [Greyback] positions himself close to victims, ensuring that he is near enough to strike” (*Half Blood Prince*, 335). After Voldemort brings Greyback into his service to recruit more werewolves, Dumbledore sends Lupin to spy on his “fellows.” Lupin finds

it difficult to persuade the other werewolves not to adopt Greyback's philosophy and support Voldemort because his own "particular brand of reasoned argument is [not] making much headway against Greyback's insistence that we werewolves deserve blood, that we ought to revenge ourselves on normal people" (*Half Blood Prince*, 335). Greyback's mission and attitude merely perpetuates the dangerous werewolf stereotype and a cycle of violence, whereas Lupin chooses to live differently and challenge these stereotypes by not succumbing to hate and violence.

Lupin ultimately ends up marrying and having a child with Nymphadora Tonks, who is a "Metamorphagus" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 52). As a Metamorphogus, Tonks is able to "change [her] appearance at will." "Metamorphogi are really rare," she tells Harry, "they're born, not made" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 52). Remus may be better able to establish a relationship with Tonks due to her shared status as a member of the wizarding community with an ambiguous and shifting identity. Unlike Lupin, however, Tonks was born with her transformative abilities and this does not make her an ostracized member of society. In fact, Harry and other characters admire and are amused by her abilities. Lupin later attempts to abandon his pregnant wife and join Harry on his mission because he thinks that Tonks and the child would be better off without him. Lupin believes that by marrying Tonks he "made her an outcast" and claims "even her own family is disgusted by our marriage" (*Deathly Hallows*, 213). Harry becomes angry at Lupin and rejects his offer, asking him "so you're just going to dump her and the kid and run off with us?" (*Deathly Hallows*, 213). This provokes such a strong reaction out of Lupin that Harry sees "for the first time ever, the shadow of the wolf upon his human face" (*Deathly Hallows*, 213). Lupin's tirade in response to Harry displays a "multiplicity that is heterogeneous, conflictual" (Derrida, 101). "My kind don't usually breed!" he exclaims. "It will be like me, I am convinced of it – how can I forgive myself, when I knowingly risked passing my own condition to an innocent child? And if, by some miracle,

it is not like me, then it will be better off, a hundred times so, without a father of whom it must always be ashamed!” (*Deathly Hallows*, 213). The typically reasonable and collected Lupin is shown in a drastically different light here. Though Lupin returns to Tonks, this passage demonstrates his ability to be fluid and heterogeneous with respect to his emotions and demeanor. Rowling again shows readers that even “good” people have flaws and are waging their own turbulent inner battles. Lupin serves as a “model for Harry” on how to “recognize, acknowledge and control the darker elements within himself” (Behr, 116). Lupin’s emotional complexity defies binaries, and things are proven to be much more complicated than reductive binaries would make them appear to be.

Ultimately Remus Lupin’s most important quality is his ability to be multiple and occupy the space of the other. It is by means of this heterogeneity that Lupin effectively encourages readers “no longer to rely on commonly accredited oppositional limits (Derrida, 15). Lupin defies the typical dangerous werewolf stereotype and demonstrates that even within the werewolf community there is no single “type” of werewolf and each is a complex individual, just like humans. Rowling’s incorporation of the nonhuman werewolf figure not only adds another fantastic creature to her story, but also pushes readers to consider the experience of and ethics toward those deemed ‘other’. By challenging the human/animal divide and defying werewolf stereotypes deeply ingrained in his society, Lupin demonstrates that identity categories, reductive binaries, and derived stereotypes are not stable and can and should be challenged. These are important lessons about accepting and “being-at-home-with-the-other” (Derrida, 205) that readers can learn and transfer from the books to the real world.

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