The Animal Within
A Psychoanalytical Perspective on Shape-Shifting

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Abstract:

As seen from cultural history, shape-shifting is a very widespread literary motif, which suggests that it has high inspirational power and general appeal. Shape-shifting has not been critically examined in the detail it merits: it is mostly examined as a part of other theories. Examination of Freud’s psychological theories and modern literature such as Dracula, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban and The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains shows strong connections between the power of this motif and repressed animal instincts – an animal within. This connection usually manifests symbolically rather than as an actual representation of an unearthing of repressed material. There are connections to religious beliefs and a wish to be more than human which raises questions about what is implied by changing into an animal – less than human – shape. The relation between shape-shifting and repression causes an uncanny atmosphere about the motif, something which is used extensively in The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains and Dracula. There is also evidence suggesting the possibility that psychosis and neurosis might manifest as a sort of mental shape-shifting. In literature this can be seen in the were-wolf Lupin in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban and the Berserkers of the Norse. Examination of the Boggart and Lupin of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban and of the Norse berserkers show that the empowerment of shape-shifting mostly lies in control. All of this considered, and with the lack of critical examination in mind, shape-shifting seems severely underestimated and under-examined.
In recent times there has been a rise in fantastic fiction in literature, and uncountable works have sprung up to the audience. With these come a set of motifs and themes not often seen as prominently in other literature, and although many of them have been present since the earliest literature in myth and legend, they seem to be reaching for new heights in our modern society. Among these fantastic motifs shape-shifting is far from the least. How does one start to examine such an ancient motif? What is shape-shifting? What does it mean? Why do we write and read about it?

Since the dawn of literature this concept springs out of tales, myths and folklore as one of the most frequent motifs. We find shape-shifting everywhere: from the berserkers of the Norse to spiritual foxes in China, to Indian naga, to Japanese Oni, to totem animals in North America, to Mestaclocan in South America, to vampires and werewolves, to witches and warlocks and wizards and gods and goddesses all over the world. But why this fixation of changing our shape, and why is the change predominantly into the shape of an animal? The answer is manifold and elusive, but I believe it may be found in the recesses of our subconscious and in our intimate connection to animals.

Historically it is impossible to deny the appeal of shape-shifting. If the concept was not separately conceived of in all those places around the globe then we must assume it has an almost irresistible inspirational appeal, as it has, without a doubt, taken root in virtually every culture. Shape-shifting must therefore deal with something that touches us and inspires us to carry the idea on into new ideas and stories. It has an uncanny attraction that we ourselves perhaps cannot put our finger on. But why would it have this attraction, and what is it in us that it connects and attaches itself to?
No one seems to have addressed these issues in sufficient detail. There is a significant void in the critical understanding of shape-shifting, as can be seen from the fact that none of the works (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Dracula*, and *The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains*) which were picked for this essay precisely because of their significant and interesting shape-shifters have received detailed scrutiny of their shape-shifting. Shape-shifting seems to be viewed in passing, as simply a symbolic element that is used in relation to separate readings, but never standing on its own two feet as a powerful and significant motif.

To find the answer to our previous questions we look to the works of Sigmund Freud. In “Consciousness and What It Is” Freud reminds us that the “division of what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premise of psycho-analysis” (13), and and I will show its importance to the concept of shape-shifting as well.

In “Part Five Pschoanalysis & Psychology” Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan paraphrase Freud in a way which is of monumental importance to this essay:

> Repression is essential to civilization, the conversion of animal instinct into civil behavior, but such repression creates what might be called a second self, a stranger within, a place where all that cannot for one reason or another be expressed or realized in civil life takes up residence. (119, emphasis added)

Seeing that it is animal instincts which are repressed in this process, it is interesting to look at instances where this second self is not just a stranger within, but an *animal within*.

This animal within is something that can be found in many shape-shifters and if we take a look at the animagi in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (*Azk.*.) we see similarities in personality and appearance between the wizard and the animal he turns into. The animal they acquire the ability to change into reflects who they are, and assuming that any wizard of sufficient skill could become an animagus, anyone has such an animal within.

As previously mentioned, although the *Harry Potter* series has been endlessly criticized and studied, and the changing of shape is such a recurrent theme in the books, we find that the shape-shifting in *Azk.* has not been properly studied. Even in chapters dealing directly with *Harry Potter* and animals such as Peter Dendle’s “Monsters, Creatures, and Pets at Hogwarts: Animal Stewardship in the World of Harry Potter” the fact that there are wizards who turn into animals is only mentioned in passing (163). Furthermore, in Kate E. Behr’s article “‘Same-as-Difference’:
Narrative Transformation and Intersecting Cultures in Harry Potter” the transformations of shape-shifting are mentioned in connection to narrative transformations (6); something which seems rather misplaced since the magical transformations have little do with the transformations of the narrative. In fact, the transformations seem rather like the more static plot facts she mentions (3) than a part of the narrative transformation, although there may be a narrative transformation around these facts. As we can see, there is a significant void in the critical views of shape-shifting in *Harry Potter*.

So let us start by examining the animagus¹ Sirius Black. Sirius is the name of the main star in the dog’s constellation, and incidentally, he turns into “an enormous, pale-eyed, jet-black dog” (245). The similarities go further than name and appearance, however. Sirius is extremely loyal, as best shown in when he roars in rage at Peter Pettigrew “‘THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED! [...] DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!’” (275, original capitalized), and it is a common supposition that dogs are very loyal creatures. Sirius is also described as shaggy as a dog, and this is matched by his appearance as a human:

> A mass of filthy, matted hair hung to his elbows. If eyes hadn’t been shining out of the deep, dark sockets, he might have been a corpse. The waxy skin was stretched so tightly over the bones of his face, it looked like a skull. His yellow teeth were bared in a grin. (248)

This roughness is carried on into his way of talking: he is very direct and perhaps even a bit clumsy in his way of expressing himself, for example saying “there will be only one murder here tonight” (249) and causing a misunderstanding that could have been avoided with more delicate ways of communicating.

That Sirius Black is named just that can be seen as a simple analogy of turning into a black dog. However, at closer examination the name Black and the blackness of the dog he turns into have deeper meanings. Sirius’s past is dark precisely because he was born into the Black family; a family with much pretentions and muggle-directed racism, which because of his freer opinions and friendships forces him to run away from home as a youth (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* 103-106). Also, although Sirius is a good person he is not just virtuous, he is full of rage and vengeance, and would probably never “turn the other cheek”. Sin being often

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¹ An animagus in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series is a wizard who can freely transform into and out of a specific, personal animal shape.
connected to the colour black (the expression “black as sin” springs to mind), Sirius’s name and both of his shapes seem to reflect this inner darkness.

What we see from this example however, is that the shape-shifting in this example is not quite psychological in the way that it shows repressed psychological elements, and we might ask, “is this not proof against the thesis?” but what must be remembered is how fiction is a symbolic reflection of reality and that the narrative world does not always work the same way as the reality it reflects on. What a shape-shifter in literature turns into would rarely reflect on the character’s repressed subconscious, rather, the shape-shifting resembles real-life situations where people’s instinctual animal behaviour is brought to light. Because of this both the reader and the author can identify themselves with it, and therefore it “speaks” to them.

The question that must be asked is “what does the character turn into?” and this must be answered by examining the way we see the animal or object whose form is assumed. As Northrop Frye states in “Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols”, it is impossible to read the word “cat” without getting a “representational flash of the animal” (3). He states also that the inevitable outward centrifugal movement pulls on memories that are linked to the symbol “cat”. Herein are the things characters actually turn into if they turn into a cat, and that may be infinitely different depending on the reader. Therefore we must generalize, and look at attributes that are commonly linked to a certain animal. And since any specific animal belongs to the semantic category of symbols “animal” we must also take into consideration attributes commonly linked to the symbol “animal”. And aside from this there is also the symbol that is “the power to change shape”, containing magical and superhuman connotations.

However, the symbol “animal” is far from simple and Derrida’s exclamation “The animal, what a word!” (118, “The Animal that Therefore I Am”) springs to mind. One thing of many that can be found out about the “animal” from Derrida is that it would be “more asinine than any beast to think [that there is no discontinuity, or abyssal difference between animals and humans]” (122), illuminating the fact that any individual human is very different from any individual animal. What Derrida is getting at here is the fact that humans generalize too much, and put too much stock in words. Calling an individual animal simply “animal” does not do the animal justice, rather it pins on the animal a series of misconceptions that come with the symbolic unit “animal”. However, not all of the information included in “animal” is incorrect, and as he states, there is an abyssal difference between any individual human and any
individual animal, just as there are some similarities. It is also obvious from certain philosophers that even the greatest minds see animals as symbols: Nietzsche’s “eyes of an eagle”, and his Zarathustra’s wise serpent (6, “O My Animals”), Levinas’s Bobby’s “animal faith” (49). What is ultimately important is the fact that people have long seen “animal” as a symbolic unit, and that this symbolic unit has been seen as “without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives” (Levinas, 49), “a sickness ... downright infamous” (Nietzsche, 5), and sometimes even as incapable of thought, and of language. Being animal is being sub-human, at least in the realm of symbolism, which as previously established relies on memories; cultural memories as well as people’s memories, presented in long-lived pictures and texts etc. “Animal” therefore, is not just a symbol for creatures in the external world, but also for something within ourselves: our animal needs and instincts; something to be overcome by repression according to Freud.

Therefore we can see that the fact that Sirius turns into a black dog has more meanings than those explained previously. By changing shape from human to dog (an animal), Sirius regresses into an animal state, something which can be seen as an externalized symbol of falling back into uncivilized, repressed animal behaviour. This is supported in the text by the fact that Sirius’s emotions are “less human, less complex” (272) when he is a dog, especially by the repeated use the word “less”. However, we can also see that the regression is simultaneously something super-human, in that Sirius has the symbolic unit “the power to change his shape”.

The fact that Sirius is super-human in a society of magic gives him a position of much respect even among wizards. At first he is portrayed as some kind of supernatural minion of the dark lord and is even compared to a vampire (34), but as soon as his loyalty and righteousness are confirmed, the image instead turns into that of an abused god, and he is almost instantly accepted by Harry as a father figure, as seen when Harry agrees to come live with him (278).

The other animagi are also placed in positions of power: Minerva McGonagall is head of Gryffindor and a much respected teacher of magic; James Potter is the invisible father, Harry’s god of creation, much revered and longed for. Obviously both of these are/were above the main character in both social and actual (magical) power, even though Harry is famous world-wide.

The animagus Peter Pettigrew however is a bit more complicated. As far as three books into the series he has been shown as his animal form: a pet rat of the
unprestigious character Ron, called Scabbers. This is certainly not a position of power or respect, but looking back to the event where he was believed to have died, and ahead to his position as Voldemort’s aide in later books, we can see that he is an extremely dangerous character, capable even of killing “all those people” (155) instantaneously. Even so, Peter was “[n]ever quite in [James’s and Sirius’s] league, talent-wise” (154) and “needed all the help he could get” (259) in order to become an animagus. The result is a sort of mockery of an animagus: while “James and Sirius transformed into such large animals, they were able to keep a werewolf in check” (260) Peter turns into “the smallest” (260), a rat, an animal symbolically seen as cowardly and ignoble; a carrier of disease. All this reflects his character in that he “always liked having big friends who’d look after [him]” (271), relying on others’ power rather than his own, and for that purpose and for fear he betrays his friends to Voldemort. When reading it in this light, we might wonder how Remus Lupin could possibly believe that it was the dog and not the rat who “ratted out” James and Lily to the dark lord.

Moving on, Sirius’s inner blackness and his name is mirrored in both his shapes and therefore it would not be right to call his shape-shift an unearthing of this blackness. However, his inner darkness is not as internal as we might expect inner darkness to be, and it is a fact that Sirius accepts many of his darker impulses. This is much reflected by the fact that both his shapes are very similar, bringing to light the more symbolic unearthing: the text shows the unearthing of something less internal than a repressed self in order for the text to make sense to the reader and the author both. If the shape shift had turned Sirius into something reflecting his repressed animal behaviour it would certainly not be anything similar to what his personality is like, and therefore it would make little to no sense to anyone who is not intensely regarding Sirius’s character from a psychoanalytical perspective.

Similar things can be seen in Peter Pettigrew. There is the simple analogy made by separating Pettigrew into “petty” and “grew” or “grown” to the animal shape he takes on, which is petty in size. However, as previously discussed, there are many traits in Peter’s personality that coincide with the symbol “rat”, as well as his name. He is cowardly and has parasitical tendencies, something which is internal but not so internal that it is unconscious, which is brought to light by the shape he assumes. The rat becomes a painting of his personality, and it shows his nature in an almost mocking way even before his actions prove him to be a betrayer.
Going back once more to the super-human of “the power to change shape”, people have a longing to be more than human that needs to be inspected. We long to escape our earthly needs, and all of the major religions of the world contain some sort of refusal to admit animal behaviour. We need simply to take one look at the seven sins and seven virtues of Christianity to see the repressed versus the social, the sins versus virtues. It also shows our great fear of turning animal by condemning the animal instinct as unholy mortal sin. We meditate, and pray, and fast, and we stoically refuse things we desperately want. At the same time, many gods and creatures from superstition which are exactly more than human – supernatural – have the power to take on animal shape and frequently do so. As Alphonso Lingis says in his essay “Nietzsche and Animals”: “The earliest gods of man were not the abstract forces of nature, but the lordly beasts and birds” (11), creating a paradox between the sub-human animal, and the super-human animal.

Perhaps this wish to become more than human comes from the same impulse that leads us to see God as a father figure as Freud explains in his case study “A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis”, chapter three: “The Devil as a Father-Substitute”:

It does indeed sound strange that the devil should be taken as a father substitute for a loved father. But this is only so at first sight, for we know a good many things which lessen our surprise. To begin with, we know that God is a father-substitute; or, more correctly, that he is an exalted father; or, yet again, that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood–by individuals in their own childhood and by mankind in its prehistory as the father of the primal horde. Later on in life the individual sees his father as something different and lesser. But the ideological image belonging to his childhood is preserved and becomes merged with the inherited memory-traces of the primal father to form the individual’s image of God. (85)

Further on Freud points to ambivalence in feeling towards the father, on one hand a fear and on the other a longing, which leads to a split in the super-human father figure resulting in God and the Devil. If then we see God – the ultimate super-human – as the ultimate positive image a child has of his father, and we also know from Freud that male children tend to want to become like their father in order to become the object of their mother’s love it comes as no surprise that this wish to become God – more than human – persists, nor would it be surprising if this wish, or part of it, is repressed in most of us. Obviously, non-Christian situations would spawn different
imagery, such as spirits or gods, for example the Norse fylgja that will be looked into later.

Taking a look at Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Count Dracula himself is obviously pictured as super-human. He has many powers such as immortality, great physical strength, and the power to change his own shape, all of which make him obviously super-natural and super-human. It is obvious, however, that Dracula is no God substitute, but rather might be said to contain the negative aspects of the super-human father figure, and it is clear to see that Dracula is in fact in league with the Devil – the negative side of the super-human father figure.

What is perhaps most curious with this view of Dracula as such is perhaps the fact that female characters fall prey to him. Lucy is even lured out of her home in the night, and ultimately turned super-human like Dracula. Even virtuous Mina is at peril of being seduced. Seeing Dracula as the super-human negative – part of the father figure – it would only be natural to see women wanting to be the object of his love. Seen from the male perspective, it would be a reiteration of the Freudian concept of the father stealing the mother’s love to see Dracula irreversibly steal Lucy. The reversed roles might be seen in the scene where Jonathan Harker barely escapes seduction at the hands of the brides.

The importance of this comes into light when we see the fact that *the wish to become super-human is not limited to becoming the “good”, but also can also extend to the “bad” parts of the super-human*. This information eradicates the previous paradox, and shows us that we can become what we perceive as super-human by adopting attributes that may have been repressed. This means that becoming an animal does not in fact *reduce* the elevation from humanity, but rather *enforces* it on different points. However, instead of a paradox we find an ambiguity in the will to be above human: becoming the whole of the god-like father figure would mean to a varying degree to become what we fear. It is also true that some attributes of most fathers are disallowed in a child – such things as ignoring vegetables, drinking much alcoholic beverages, being violent, or staying out late at night; the examples are endless – making for a disallowed and therefore probably repressed wish to be as the father. The similarity of turning into a disallowed father-figure and magically turning into an animal is striking, with this in mind.

There have been many previous discussions on this subject, and to establish whether a Freudian interpretation is of any value it would be of particular interest to
examine an opposition to views of *Dracula* such as the one I have presented. In John Allen Stevenson’s “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*” Stevenson points to such views as ours, that Dracula’s actions are “fundamentally incestuous” (139), and states his belief that these views seem “to be more of a tribute to the authority psychoanalysis enjoys among literary critics than it is an illuminating description of Stoker’s narrative” (139). It comes as no surprise that our thesis, as a fundamentally Freudian one, should oppose Stevenson’s, and ultimately, the question seems to revolve around the debate of Freud’s theories on sexuality and incestuous desires, theories which cannot be proven or disproven in this essay. It is curious, however, that the quote used to support Stevenson’s view is rather ambivalently put: “human beings [do] not want to commit incest all that much” (139, as stated). On the one hand, “do not want” is reinforced by italics, but on the other, the line is finished with the meagre way of putting it “all that much”, as if there is such a thing, but it is disregarded as not so big a deal. This hesitantly forceful rejection is particularly interesting, and indeed almost humorous when having read Freud’s prediction in “The Uncanny” that some people would probably find his theories as uncanny since they deal with things that are repressed by the very nature of his theories (14), and it would seem inevitable that such theories be strongly rejected. No matter how fiercely rejected Freudian views of *Dracula* are, it is obvious that they consistently make sense with the narrative and can be used to illuminate different fields of literature, as I have done. This said, there is much to support Stevenson’s anthropological view of *Dracula*, and we would be foolish to simply reject it. Instead it might be proposed that both viewings of the matter may bring their own piece of understanding, and that it is merely Stevenson’s denunciation of the worth of the Freudian approach that is misguided.

Just like the repressed parts of wishing to be as the father, many of our animal instincts are as previously discussed disallowed in their raw shape, resulting in repressed behaviours, which give us an *uncanny* relation to the animal within. We humans seem to always try to distance ourselves from what is animal but no one can deny the existence of our animal needs and instincts. We cannot help but feel them, but at the same time we go to great lengths to conceal their animal nature. We eat with cutlery, on porcelain plates, we shower and make love in privacy, we laugh at being afraid of the dark, but somehow, we have all of that in common, and if someone breaks these cultural habits used to cover these animal needs, it would be a great
shock to us. If we are struck by animality in something as similar to us as another person, then we are forced to realize our own animal nature, something which pokes at deeply buried instincts and threatens to shed light on our own animal within.

In his essay on precisely this subject, “The Uncanny”, Freud points to the connection between uncanny experiences and testing of beliefs that we have surmounted, and repressed “infantile complexes” (17), and we can certainly see how this would apply to the animal within. Shape-shifting is both superstition that can be surmounted and put in doubt again, and it features resurfacing of wishes and needs that have been repressed. For example, it would be uncanny to see a wolf disappear behind a tree, and then see a person emerge from the same tree, the wolf gone, and it would be uncanny to feel your own psyche behave in repressed animal ways, as will be discussed later in connection to neurosis and psychosis. The existence of a shape-shifter in a supposedly realistic fictional world would also open paths to the given up wish to be super-human.

Turning our critical eye to The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains (Hartz), we find similar gaps as previously met in Harry Potter. There is little said about the work at all, let alone about the uncanny shape-shifting we find in it. It should be said that as the story is only part of the larger work The Flying Dutchman, it is unsurprising to find that this iconic piece of shape-shifting has been neglected. There is much to be found about shape-shifting in Hartz, and it therefore without a doubt merits a closer inspection.

In Hartz, the white wolf that gives the story its name appears in a way much similar to an example given by Freud in his essay, which bases itself upon repetition. The wolf appears and disappears repeatedly in odd places, such as appearing at first just beneath the window of the hut and disappearing in an open field where it would be extremely difficult for it to escape, raising eerie suspicion about it. There are repeated, if blatant, connections made to Christina in how she and the wolf appear and disappear around each other, and in their respective appearance. The wolf is only described as large and white, but that description is enough for most people to imagine what it would look like: a large white-furred predator with dangerous teeth and claws. Christina as first introduced is described as follows:

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2 The example of finding himself again and again unwillingly in the same street, continued by the recurrance of numbers, pages 10-11
She was young, and apparently twenty years of age. She was dressed in a travelling dress, deeply bordered with white fur, and wore a cap of white ermine on her head. Her features were beautiful ... Her hair was flaxen, glossy, and shining, and bright as a mirror; and her mouth, although somewhat large when it was open, showed the most brilliant teeth I have ever beheld. But there was something about her eyes, bright as they were, that made us children afraid; they were so restless, so furtive; ... I felt as though there was a cruelty in her eye (5)

Similarities that are impossible to ignore are her bright hair and that she wears a fur lined dress and a fur hat, just like the white wolf is covered in white fur. Also the brightness of her eyes can be compared to the way eyes of certain night-time animals glow in the dark if met by light, and the attention drawn to her teeth and large mouth bring to mind the tale of little red riding-hood and the wolf disguised as the grandmother. Another, perhaps less obvious connection is that of their attractiveness: the white wolf is “very rare” (3) and therefore the fur would no doubt be valuable, and shooting such an animal is – as the story shows through the father’s anxiousness to shoot the wolf – very attractive, and just the same, Christina is beautiful and therefore attractive.

These connections set force the characters to make a choice about how to see the situation; either Christina is a were-wolf, the same individual as the white wolf (confirming a supposedly surmounted superstition), or these are a whole lot of coincidences. If they choose to take Christina for a were-wolf, the characters are faced with the fact that a were-wolf is in the house and it should be driven away. The conflict this decision creates, though, lies in uncertainty: if they are wrong, and Christina is in fact just a person, an innocent human being would have to be driven away or killed. If they on the other hand assume that all of this is a big coincidence, they are left with another uncertainty: if Christina is in fact a were-wolf, something more dangerous than a wolf is allowed to sleep in the house, and look after the children. The choice is decidedly uncomfortable, if not uncanny.

There is also uncanniness in the way Christina proves to be what Herrman fears. To begin with, the children are much cautious of Christina and “when she beckoned us to come to her, we approached her with fear and trembling” and Marcella “hid herself in the bed” (5). They perceive something perhaps of the wolfishness in the woman, and are therefore afraid of whom or what she might be. They are forced to get used to the woman, though, and therefore these fears are surmounted. Later on, the woman proves to be the same as the white wolf, kills
Caesar and Marcella, and in human form digs up Marcella’s corpse and sets to devouring it. This much coincides with Freud’s definition of one set of circumstances which provokes uncanny feelings: the reality of surmounted beliefs. The uncanniness of the last mentioned scene is indisputable; something as familiar as one’s wife devouring one’s daughter in a wolf-like way.

The fact that the wolf is white is perhaps the first sign of the uncanny which is about to come. As symbols, the words “white” and “wolf” are much contradictory: “white” is usually connected to virtue, innocence and purity, while “wolf” is usually connected to cruelty, evil, and greed. It is therefore like a preview of the later scenario of woman/wolf and the dubiously pretended innocence of Christina.

The repeated apperance of an animal that draws special notice to itself appears not only in *Hartz*, but also in *Azk*, where Sirius shows himself repeatedly, acting oddly unlike the presumed personality of a black dog which he looks like. Harry notices this repetition and feels, just like Freud repeatedly ending up in the same alleyway, or noticing the number 62, an uncanny feeling towards it and “he [is] tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number, taking it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allotted to him” (11), in this case pulling on the seemingly superstitious practice of divination in the shape of the grimm.

The uncanny in connection to shape-shifting is by no means exclusive to *Hartz*; in fact it seems as though there is something uncanny about shape-shifting. All three of the works extensively examined in this essay exhibit uncanny feelings in connection to shape-shifting.

This is likely so because of the plentiful different ways in which shape-shifting can be uncanny. In the previous example, we see two different kinds of uncanny: firstly we have the situation of surmounted belief which is put to doubt again, and secondly the situation similar to Freud’s madness and epilepsy where “[t]he ordinary person sees in [someone] the workings of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow man but which at the same time he is dimly aware of in a remote corner of his own being” (“The Uncanny”, 14), in the scene where Christina eats the corpse of Marcella. It may be argued that what Hermann’s father saw in Christina then was only another instance of the previous situation of surmounted beliefs, but we could then argue that almost anyone can connect Christina’s wolfish devouring to a concealed animal hunger and some might imagine a situation of starvation where we would be willing to eat almost any meat. Support for this can be found in the effect
produced by the Donner party (66) in Stephen King’s *The Shining*, who are stranded in the mountains and begin to eat one another when they run out of food.

In the two remaining works featuring uncanny shape-shifting we meet more instances of unsuspected forces in the fellow man, and of surmounted beliefs in *Dracula*, as well as a very interesting situation of repressed material resurfacing in oneself in *Azk*. Let us for the sake of later arguments start off with *Dracula*.

In the mysterious count Dracula there is much uncanny to be found. His mind is set to corrupt the virtuous to sin: as we have already seen, this features the repressed sins overtaking the socially acceptable virtues, and thus resurfacing of the repressed. He also features the ambiguous possibility of becoming a vampire; becoming what you fear in order to become super-human; i.e. a disallowed wish. These, however, are of little importance to our thesis; what we are after is uncanny shape-shifting.

Dracula changes his shape a great deal, however it is with a less obvious example I would like to start. Harker tells us of how Dracula scales the wall of his castle “face down” and “just like a lizard”. He tells us that his feelings when he sees this were of “repulsion and terror”, and later asks himself “[w]hat manner of man is this, or what creature is this in the semblance of a man?” (34) This example, although not shape-shifting in the strictest sense of the term, shows us an instance of adopting abilities seemingly belonging to a different shape, producing a result much similar to actual shape-shifting. What makes Harker so afraid of this is precisely the two types of uncanny situations mentioned earlier.

Dracula is also seen as having grown radically younger. This draws to light once again the surmounted belief put to the test (can Harker possibly come up with a rational explanation for all this?), and the attractive super-human concept of immortality, coinciding with the wish to be more than human in a possible but disallowed way. (51)

There is perhaps something uncanny also shown in *Dracula* which Freud did not account for; an animal behaving in strangely human ways, such as *Dracula*’s bat shape: “bats usually wheel and flit about, but this one seemed to go straight on as if it knew where it was bound for or had some intention of its own” (108). The reason for this may lie in the previously explained distancing of oneself from what is animal, and therefore seeing almost human intellect, goals and personality in animals shatters our put up barriers of “lacks reason” or “cannot think” and forces us to re-examine what
we are, and what the animal in front of us is. A classic example of this in real life is Derrida’s cat, staring at him in the nude, no doubt causing an uncanny feeling in him which ended up inspiring his essay *The Animal that Therefore I Am*.

The last example to given of uncanny shape-shifting is Professor Remus Lupin from *Azk*. Remus features a kind of shape-shifting not yet examined in this essay; involuntary shape-shifting. This kind of shape-shifting along with the compulsions of being a werewolf features the kind of uncanny based on repressed material coming to light, and the kind based on unsuspected forces at work not just in “our fellow man”, but in ourselves. It shows remarkable similarities with neurosis and psychosis, which we will be forced to interrogate before moving on to interpretation.

As we see from Freud’s essays “Neurosis and Psychosis” and “The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis”, neurosis is a possibly temporary state of “insanity” which “originate[s] from the ego’s refusing to accept a powerful instinctual impulse in the id or to help it find a motor outlet, or from the ego’s forbidding that impulse the object at which it is aiming” (*Neurosis and Psychosis*, 150) and a psychosis “the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relations between the ego and the external world” (149). The result is that “in neurosis a piece of reality is avoided by a sort of flight, whereas in psychosis it is remodelled” (*The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis*, 185). The most basic explanation that can be given is that the damage caused to the psyche by an internally unsolvable conflict is compensated for by ignoring or remodelling reality to satisfy the needs.

With this perspective we can move on to interpreting the were-wolf, Lupin. What can be seen of Lupin is that when he changes into his wolf’s shape under the influence of a full moon, his mental shape is also changed. He is no longer in control, he becomes a “fully fledged monster once a month” (258), and would be a danger to any humans around. It is interesting that “a werewolf is only a danger to people” (260), and we could argue that it is mostly because only humans can become werewolves, and threfore other creatures would not be subject to the curse. However, it seems as if he has a need to be violent, however, seeing that when “[he] was separated from humans to bite ... [he] bit and scratched [himself] instead” (259). This also indicates that it is specifically towards humans his violence is directed, perhaps his violence to himself is also because he is – at least partly – human himself.

If we assume that the mental metamorphosis changes Lupin into something that is still him, but more like an animal, then the result would be similar to psychosis
or neurosis as will be detailed later, except Lupin still seems to have a grasp of reality. If this is the case, then we can see the violence of his changed mentality in a different light; as a forceful outlet for repressed needs. The violence to humans specifically is easy to pinpoint a reason for; violence towards humans is unacceptable in human society (with some exceptions), and therefore it is often repressed. This is especially so since humans in today’s society (even in the wizard world of *Harry Potter*) are forced to stay in contact even with people they hate. This repression, if turned loose, would likely manifest as just that; a violence specifically towards humans.

In the idea of it, Lupin’s involuntary violence towards humans is uncanny to say the least; it doubtlessly exhibits an unearthing of repressed material in *himself*. He would lose control to something (the animal) within and without volition act violently towards others or himself.

The effect this concept may have on readers is also easy to pinpoint; most of us must have once or twice found ourselves in a situation where, in anger or frustration, we did or wanted to exercise violence on other people, perhaps close people that we would regret it dearly if we did hurt. It comes with an inherent conflict of instinct versus reason, something which we all feel, more often perhaps than we realize. Connecting such an experience to the situation of a were-wolf would likely lead to some sort of identification with the were-wolf. This more so since the change is involuntary, and the curse and ability itself comes involuntarily as well, like some sort of disease.

Interestingly, it is not hard to see a mentally damaged person compensating his damaged id or ego by changing his/her internal reality so that he sees himself as a were-wolf. Perhaps a repressed impulse for violence, manifesting itself as a belief of being turned into a wolf, tearing at oneself and hurting others. In fact a connection between shape-shifting and psychosis can be seen in an entry on Chinese shape-shifting foxes in the journal *Man* (vol. 33), which brings up psychosis in connection to demoniac possession:

Demoniacal Possession is a psychopathic condition not infrequent amongst those who have opinions on shape-shifting foxes. At times possession shows characteristic paranoid symptoms, but more frequently it appears to be a milder psychosis. (50)

This shows us a connection between superstition and religion – or supernatural phenomena as believers might see it – and psychological abnormalities. It also brings up an interesting religious psychological phenomenon where the subconscious needs
manifest as the devil or demons: the entity those people believe to be behind temptation, as thoroughly detailed in Freud’s previously mentioned case study “A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis”. The importance of this connection is that it shows us how our subconscious can manifest itself through our conscious beliefs, effectively establishing belief-based psychotic reactions as a real life phenomenon.

The involuntary violence of Lupin is seen also in Norse sagas of berserkers, as shown by Stephan Grundy in his essay “Shapeshifting and Berserkergang”, for example in Egils saga where Skalla-Grimr “becoming unduly excited in the course of a ball-game that has lasted past sundown, kills one young man and then turns to attack his son” (19), and then kills the intervening nursemaid, all in a fit of berserker rage. Another similarity is the exhaustion that comes after the change. Just as Lupin is exhausted, and looks ragged and pale after the full moon is over, the berserkers after a berserkergang was over “then they were very weak and in difficulty” (“Shapeshifting and Berserkergang”, 15). Striking is also Grundy’s observation that “[b]erserkergang, in fact, appears as an involuntary or semi-voluntary response to stress, occasionally happening at undesired times” (19), and that “the Icelandic berserk was able to draw [the hammer] into himself (or susceptible to be overcome by it) so as to enter the spiritually transformed state of berserkergang” (20-21). These two classifications are highly striking if viewed with the vision of the animal within in mind, as it quite literally means that the berserk assumed (voluntarily or not) the mental shape of his animal within, thus releasing its wildness and staggering power. It is an instance of the id taking over the ego, or repressed material forcing itself upon the conscious mind, manifesting as a fit of bestial rage.

The popularity and endurance of these stories may perhaps be found in this similarity to human dilemmas and trials of will. The stories nudge us dangerously close to home, at something we would perhaps rather forget. Just like all great tragedies, they are close enough to engage us, but far enough to be comfortable. Stories that come too close might be uncomfortably engaging, like Stephen King’s The Shining, where unfortunate Jack Torrence is pushed over the edge and tries to murder his wife and child.

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3 A hammer is according to Stephan Grundy the “skin of the fylgja” (20), fylgja being a spiritual animal companion (10-11).
It is intriguing, also, to see the change in views towards wolf shape-shifters from earlier literature such as Dracula (1897) and Hartz. (1839), to newer such as Azk. (1999) and Twilight (2005). As the Dictionary of Literary Symbols states, a good wolf is very rare in early literature (240) and the same is apparently true of people who change their shape to that of a wolf. Both shape-shifters in Dracula and Hartz. are very malicious beings, while the ones found in Azk. and Twilight are some sort of tormented heroes. This may be due to a changing view towards wolves in general, moving from antipathy, towards some sort of almost spiritual respect for a species close to extinction. These days most of us live safely away from wolves, and neither our lives nor food is threatened by them. It is only natural that our situations colour our literary attitudes to certain animals, and what they symbolize to us.

It is also highly interesting to note Sirius’s mental state while he is in the shape of a dog. As mentioned, his emotions are simpler and less human when he is in a dog’s shape. Essentially, it means that his dog-psyche is “less than human”, which is curiously supported in the same paragraph by likening the dementors’ perception of his dog’s psyche to their perception of insanity: “they could tell that my feelings were less – less human, less complex when I was a dog ... but they thought, of course, that I was losing my mind like everyone else” (272). This ties together with the animal within emerging, which in a real person would indeed be like madness; like psychosis or neurosis.

Although Sirius’s emotions become simpler when he shifts into the dog shape, there is no sign of the same wildness as in the werewolf, Lupin. He remains in complete control of his animal self. This brings to mind the fact that animals also have some sort of restraint, and ability to learn. So, whereas Lupin turns into some kind of wild, perhaps human mental shape, Sirius turns into some kind of socialized dog’s shape. However, Sirius is still himself in the dog’s mental shape, with his own memories and personality, so you could not entirely equal his mental shape to that of a trained dog’s. Perhaps you could equal it to a human experiencing a socialized dog’s mentality.

Having concluded the similarities of involuntary shape-shifting and insanity, and the fact that controlled shape-shifting is a means by which to become “more than human”, through the power of choice to be more or less animal, we can see the important fact that empowerment lies in control.
Let us give the stage to a magical creature of Azk.: the boggart. This creature is a master of the human subconscious, and no one can escape its terrifying idea. The boggart is “‘a shape shifter’ [Hermione] said. ‘It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us the most’” (101). This means that aside from the scary (indeed sometimes uncanny) idea that is shape-shifting, it can shape-shift into virtually anything, and to top the cake, it also knows, by some means, what we fear the absolute most.

Although not quite presented as such in the book, this notion is incredibly unsettling. The ability to change into any shape poses a theoretical threat that no one can fully ignore. We cannot know its true shape, meaning that we cannot know its physical possibilities. It could be hidden anywhere, ready to pop up and show us our darkest nightmares. It makes for a very powerfully paranoia-like situation, where we can see the thing we fear the most in any safe haven we think we might have.

However, the shape-shifting is hardly this boogie-man’s most terrifying aspect; it is the ability to see into the depths of us, pull our most primal fear into the open and assume its shape. This ability leaves us completely vulnerable to it; even we cannot control our subconscious, but this creature can, and it can abuse this power to dig so close to home that we may not even know what it will turn into before it hits us. It is uncanny, because it can pull on fears that we have buried away, deep inside ourselves. And no sane person is free from fears.

Without the ability to show us these fears, however, it would not be half as frightening, and that is where the shape-shifting steps in. It could be achieved through many different means, for example by illusions, dreams, or visions, but the advantage that shape-shifting has over all of them is that the creature takes the physical form of our fear, and therefore we cannot ignore it. When it bears down upon us, it is not enough to close our eyes and convince ourselves it is not there – that would only allow it to advance on us unhindered. The true horror in this creature is the physical threat in combination with using our deepest fears against us. In the idea of it, it is a real, physical threat that can possibly harm or kill us.

In the book, however, the creature is faced by wizardry students, armed with the Riddikulus charm; the power to force a shape on the boggart, as detailed on pages 101 to 102. As soon as the power of shape is in the hands of the students, instead of a horror-scene, we get a highly amusing lesson with mean teachers forced to wear ridiculous clothing, and mummies stumbling on their own bandages. This scene
shows how empowering the control of shape is; by a simple matter of changing the
holder of that power, the tables are turned completely. It does not matter that the
shape-shifter knows our worst fears if we have the power over its shape. How scary
can a fluffy-cute white rabbit be, even if it knows our worst fears?

If we take a look at Freud’s article “Creative Writers and Daydreaming”, we
see fiction as a refined work of fantasy, which engages the readers in an induced day-
dream by being pulled into the fictional world. Freud says that fantasies “are either
ambitious wishes, which serve to elevate the subject’s personality; or they are erotic
ones” and that “[t]he motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every
single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality” (3).
With this established it is very clear how shape-shifting is a fit tool as outlet for
forbidden fantasies. In all of what we have examined there is the repressed animal
within, and as we know repressed material always needs to be compensated for. This
means that a fantasy related to what is repressed would relieve a repressed need. Thus
it is not hard to see why someone would dream up shape-shifting, either mental or
physical: while in the shape of an animal it would not be frowned upon to eat without
cutlery, or walk around unclothed (indeed it would be strange to see a dog in a coat),
and with the excuse of a spiritually transformed state (berserkergang) it would be
acceptable, if still reproachable, to kill a fellow human. Shape-shifting as a fantasy
allows for all the seven sins in an indirect way, possibly serving as a tunnel for
whatever repressed material needs relief.

Now we arrive at a point where we can clearly see the power of the literary
motif that is shape-shifting, and it seems best to discuss this separately after all this
deliberating. We can see that shape-shifting touches us in a myriad of different ways:
it can symbolize resurfacing of the animal within or a character’s personality,
effectively becoming a symbol (Totem animal? Fylgja?) of that character’s
personality and status. It can empower characters (and therefore the readers in their
induced day-dream) to become super-human or disempower them to become sub-
human, effectively becoming a fantastical path to spiritual accomplishment, or at least
a symbol of it. It can rattle us in its uncanny closeness to our repressed nature, and
drag our sympathy to such violent creatures as were-wolves, finding redemption for
dishonourable actions we may have committed in service of our id. It can even take a
hold of us in situations in real life through psychological dissonance and belief, and
historically manifested itself as the phenomenon (or excuse?) that is berserkers. It
dances the border of an age-long philosophical debate of what is human and what is animal. It touches us, either symbolically or through personal identification, and that is why it has such irresistible inspirational appeal, and probably why it has its variations spread across the globe. It is a motif not to be underestimated, and remains to be explored in full.
Works Cited


<http://www.vb-tech.co.za/ebooks/Marryatt%20HB%20-%20The%20White%20Wolf%20of%20the%20Hartz%20Mountains%20-%20HO.pdf>


