

‘Her Princes within Her Are like Wolves’: The Werewolf as a Catholic Force in *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf*

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Abstract:

G. W. M. Reynolds’s 1850s Gothic serial, *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf*, reimagines the werewolf as a figure of religious hypocrisy. The serial follows the eponymous Wagner, who gains eternal youth, beauty and wealth through a satanic pact which curses him with lycanthropy; his rapid disenchantment with his immortal state propels him to find a cure amidst the religious upheaval of Inquisition-torn sixteenth-century Italy. Despite *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf*’s dubious literary status today, Reynolds’s rhetoric expresses a profound engagement with religious doctrine through his understanding of the Gothic morphology embedded in Victorian culture. As with the witch, the werewolf was once considered an enemy of the Church; despite this persecution, Reynolds hypothesises that both the institution and the creature are inherently congruent, their natures committed to generating guilt, violence and a schism from the Godly. His discourse uses the Church’s own rhetoric on and severe treatment of suspected werewolves against itself, theorising that the Church both creates and becomes the very beasts it tortures. Reynolds dissects both Church and creature from a Protestant Victorian perspective, reifying Gothic literature’s standard practice of associating Catholicism with a regrettable, historical Other and reducing the religion to a collection of terrifying superstitions—much like the myth of the werewolf itself.

Keywords: G. W. M. Reynolds; Gothic fiction; radical fiction; folklore; religion; Catholicism; werewolves; monsters; Victorian literature

G. W. M. Reynolds, the Victorian author and publisher of radical fiction, is best remembered today for his vaguely pornographic anti-aristocracy serials *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48) and the *Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848-56), as well as for editing and publishing a number of periodicals, including his *Reynolds's Miscellany* and *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*. However, the prolific Reynolds was also writing, simultaneously with these other projects, a Gothic serial called *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf* (1846-47). *Wagner* was extremely popular contemporarily – a popularity which E. F. Bleiler attributes at least in part to the subject's novelty (2015 [1975]: xiv) – but, much like many of Reynolds's other works, the text has largely been forgotten in academic circles and is the subject of almost no critical works. In part, *Wagner's* lack of attention by modern scholarship has to do with the perceived quality and style of the writing which, it must be owned, is gory, lewd, and often Gothic to the point of absurdity. Further, many critics read Reynolds's portrayal of the werewolf figure as unliterary, un-symbolic, and uninteresting in the greater scope of werewolf fiction, and give it correspondingly little attention. Beresford, for example, says only that 'Reynolds chose to present the traditional view of the man-beast that he knew would excite readers' (2013: 159), Bleiler considers Reynolds to have 'treated [the werewolf] simply as far as its manifestations go' (2015 [1975]: xiv), and Frost insists that the text is 'a crude, hastily written potboiler of negligible literary merit' (2013: 66;).

Werewolf fiction of the nineteenth century is largely overshadowed today by the more resonant vampire fiction. These two monster figures are closely linked not only in contemporary theory (Beresford 2013: 13, 83), but also through the Greek and Slavonic term for an undead creature that they share, *vrykolakas* (Beresford 2013: 118-19). However, at the time of Reynolds's writing, werewolf fiction was a fairly prevalent, if short-lived, genre.¹ One reason, perhaps, for the werewolf's lack of continuing popularity or full assimilation into modern British culture is that, unlike other monsters with which it is sometimes correlated (like the vampire or the witch) the idea of the werewolf is more firmly tied to location. Beresford notes that the 'last wolves eventually died out around 1684 in Britain, and by around 1770 in Ireland' (2013: 13), making the figure of the wolf a more distant, exotic threat. Indeed, the werewolf narrative was far more a product of Continental (and especially German and Eastern European) mythology. In his introduction to *Wagner*, E. F. Bleiler posits that:

Reynolds was using a concept alien to English literature, the werewolf. The word 'werewolf' is known from earlier English letters, but no early English werewolf story survives, and Reynolds offers the first significant use of the

motif in English. The werewolf stories that were written before Reynolds's novel can be counted on one's fingers. (2015: xiv)

The figure of the werewolf also has a great number of historical and dogmatic ties to the medieval Catholic Church, ties which assisted in distancing it from nineteenth-century Protestant Britain. The werewolf, though experiencing a minor popularity in mid-century British penny dreadfuls and Gothic fiction, was too much a Continental monster to ever fully embed in the British psyche.

It is this view of the werewolf as a mythological Continental menace which, in part, informs Reynolds's otherwise un-nuanced portrayal of Wagner and sets it apart from the majority of werewolf texts. Where more conventional readings (both historical and literary) view the werewolf in relation to disability, here Reynolds reimagines the werewolf as a figure of religious hypocrisy and a regression to an older order.² Where many (and perhaps most) portrayals of werewolves are rooted in the body, Reynolds roots his in spirituality and society.³ And where once Reynolds was keen to destroy the aristocracy in his Chartist penny-fiction, here he seeks to castigate the institution of the Catholic Church.⁴

Set in the 1510s and 1520s, the serial follows the eponymous Fernand Wagner, who is the servant of Dr Faust in both Marlowe and Goethe's retelling of the legend. In Reynolds's version, Wagner is an elderly German peasant who gains eternal youth, beauty, and wealth through a Satanic pact which indentures him to Faust for a short time, but curses him with lycanthropy eternally. His rapid disenchantment with his perverted immortal state propels him to find a cure amidst the religious upheaval of Inquisition-torn Italy. The serial ends when Wagner, after divine instruction, manages to break his curse and die in his 'natural' nonagenarian form. In typical Reynolds fashion, the corrupt institution of the Church is dealt a few crippling (although not fatal) blows, its nefarious practices are exposed to the general populace of the narrative, and all those who upheld its evil values are dealt poetic justice.

Wagner: A Catholic Monster

The quotation in the title of this article references God's judgment of Jerusalem's sins:

Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and diving lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. (Ezekiel 22:27-28)

As God judged the hypocrisies of Jerusalem, so Reynolds portrays what he considers to be the hypocrisies of Rome. *Wagner* was not Reynolds's first foray into religious criticism; in fact, his very first work, published in 1832, was a forty-page Deist essay entitled *The Errors of the Christian Religion Exposed, by a Comparison of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Bleiler 2015: ix). Young Reynolds writes: 'I am now eighteen years old, and till within this year have been a firm believer in Christianity [...] About six months ago I perused the "Age of Reason;" and this entirely opened my eyes to the errors in which I had so lately trodden' [Bleiler 2015: xii-xiii]. Although Reynolds, later in life, preferred not to mention this early work (Bleiler 2015: ix), his cynicism about aspects of Christianity continued to be a preoccupation in his writing. In particular, the perspectives expressed in this juvenilia are echoed in *Wagner*, where the supernatural werewolf embodies not only the harmful superstitions of Catholicism, but also the failings of Man and the corruption of a man-made religious institution.

As with the witch, the werewolf was once considered an enemy of the Church (Beresford 2013: 87-88, 98, 109-12), with Beresford arguing that there is 'an inescapable link' between the two, with lycanthropy often thought to be derived from 'demonic possession and/or witchcraft' (88); despite this historical persecution, Reynolds hypothesises that both the institution and the creature are inherently congruent, their natures committed to generating guilt, violence, and a schism from the Godly. Reynolds's rhetoric surrounding the werewolf expresses not only a deep engagement with religious doctrine, but also an understanding of the Gothic morphology and supernatural structures embedded in Victorian culture. Reynolds marries the idea of the werewolf to the Catholic Church in three specific ways: firstly, he links the Gothic trope of the historical Catholic Other with the werewolf's status as a Continental monster. Secondly, he embeds Catholic dogma and practices into narrative structures surrounding the werewolf, depicting it to be a monster whose characteristics closely parallel the institution that Reynolds overtly denigrates. Finally, and simultaneously, Reynolds embeds the werewolf figure (which itself is already embedded with markers of Catholicism) as a player in the history of the Church, Inquisition, and Protestant Reformation; in doing so, he uses the Catholic Church's own rhetoric on, and severe treatment of, suspected werewolves against itself, theorising that the Church both creates and becomes the very beasts it tortures.

Reynolds illuminates the initial parallel between the werewolf and Catholicism immediately in the text: they are both Continental fixtures and, as such, are both within the domain of the Gothic. As has been illustrated, the werewolf is frequently read as a monster

imported, rather than organic, to Britain; as such, it has a greater capacity to be Othered than indigenous mythological creatures. The same process is true in many British Gothic representations of Catholicism, where the Church is portrayed not only to be monstrous, but also to be foreign.⁵ In his work on Victorian religious reformation, Dominic Janes goes so far as to say that Catholicism was considered by the mid-Victorians to be not just foreign, but ‘oriental’ (Janes 2009: 96). It is certain that the Church was Othered in many Gothic texts, and not purely through its connection to the Continent: with the centuries-long extinction of both the wolf and the Church’s hegemony in Britain at the time of Reynolds’s writing, both are seen as part of Britain’s perhaps shameful or regrettable history; this historical component binds both more closely together as it condemns them even further to the realms of the Gothic and removes them to the realm of the Other.⁶

Reynolds signals this Continental, Gothic connection immediately by setting the opening scene in Germany’s Black Forest in 1516 during the middle of a violent storm. Reynolds writes:

The night was dark and tempestuous; - the thunder growled around; - the lightning flashed at short intervals; - and the wind swept furiously along, in sudden and fitful gusts. The streams of the great Black Forest of Germany bubbled in playful melody no more, but rushed on with deafening din, mingling their torrent-roar with the wild creaking of the huge oaks, the rustling of the firs, the howling of the affrighted wolves, and the hollow voices of the storm [...] and when the vivid lightning gleamed forth with rapid and eccentric glare, it seemed as if the dark jaws of some hideous monster, floating high above, opened to vomit flame. (5)

In this passage wolf imagery, Germanic landscape, and Gothic cliché are woven tightly and overtly together to create a heavily Othered, monstrous space, and Reynolds wastes little time in introducing Catholicism as a natural extension, or even a vital component, of his Continental monster narrative. The first action and interaction in the serial is the visitation of a mysterious stranger – revealed to be Faust – upon the elderly peasant Fernand Wagner in the middle of the storm. Faust convinces Wagner to make a Satanic pact: in exchange for granting Wagner eternal youth, beauty, intelligence, and wealth, Wagner agrees to become a werewolf and to ‘prey upon the human race, whom I [Faust] hate’ (6). While this scene introduces Christianity in general at the forefront of the narrative, it establishes many footholds in Reynolds’s specific argument about Catholicism that become apparent as the Church is encountered in the narrative. The first scene involving any religious institution or

ceremony is a funeral in a Florentine church, troubled by a violent storm identical to the storm which opened the serial:

[T]he weather without was stormy and tempestuous. The wind moaned through the long aisles, raising strange and ominous echoes, and making the vast folds of sable drapery wave slowly backwards and forwards, as if agitated by unseen hands [...] From time to time the shrill wail of the shrieking owl, and the flapping of its wings against the diamond-paned windows of the church, added to the awful gloom of this [sic] funeral scene. (12)

Both Faust – the purveyor and champion of lycanthropy – and Catholicism are heralded into the story through the same language and with the same otherworldly Gothic violence and bombast, while also being connected to Continental landscape.

Although Reynolds only makes explicit reference to the Protestant Reformation once, early in the narrative, it serves to colour the rest of the serial in conjunction with his own Victorian Protestant perspective, and especially informs the Gothic topography of the serial. Reynolds writes

Luther had already begun to make a noise on [sic] Germany; and the thunders of his eloquence had reverberated across the Alps to the Italian States. The priesthood were alarmed, and the conduct of the Reformer was an excuse for rendering the discipline of monastic institutions more rigid than ever. (28)

Not only is Luther presented in Godlike terms as the creator of the thunder seen in the opening scenes, but his oration sends Gothic atmosphere specifically to Italy: the Italian States are now Gothicised and Othered in relation to Germany, which is breaking away from Catholicism. The alignment of the werewolf and the Church within this historical context can therefore be seen through Wagner's geographical location. As a rustic peasant, he lives in Germany (the site of burgeoning Protestantism) where his life is grim but honest. He relocates to the Italian States (the centre for Church affairs) post-Satanic pact, where both he and the environment are more powerful, seductive, glamorous, and deceptive.

Having generally signalled the link between the werewolf and the Church through landscape and genre, Reynolds then spends significantly more time using the werewolf to attack specific Church dogma. The beliefs and practices of Catholicism with which Reynolds takes particular umbrage are expressed primarily through the figure of the werewolf or through the direct actions of the Church. The dozens of other characters and plot lines not directly involved with Wagner or with the Church contain little to no commentary upon

Catholicism. Reynolds represents through Wagner several doctrinal issues he has with Catholicism, including: the Church's reliance upon superstition and punishment as method of control; the juxtaposition of rebirth and heavenly reward with temporal, earthly suffering; the perceived hypocrisies of both guilt and confession; and the cannibalistic nature of transubstantiation and Eucharist.

The issue of brutal punishment is at the forefront of the plot and of Reynolds's commentary. The most overt connection between the Church and Wagner is that they are both portrayed as grisly, violent predators preying upon an innocent and unsuspecting populace. Their mutual severity is linked through Reynolds's rather heavy-handed iron imagery: in Wagner's first transformation scene viewed by the reader, the unforgiving power of Wagner's werewolf jaws is depicted through his 'iron tongue' (23). The image of iron is repeated *ad nauseam* shortly thereafter to classify the horrific, gory punishments enacted in a convent and by the Inquisition, both of which had become a major set-piece for Gothic novels with anti-Catholic leanings (Purves 2009: 7): inmates are restrained in chains, tortured on hideous machinery, imprisoned behind iron bars and doors, and interrogated under iron lamps.

The unyielding onslaught of both werewolf and Church is reinforced by the comparative softness and vulnerability of those whom they punish. In the text, both the Church and the werewolf focus on powerless people isolated from the rest of the community, such as Flora the servant, Isaachar the Jew, Guilia the adulteress, Orsini the disillusioned Catholic whistle-blower, or nearly all of Wagner's victims, who are easy, unsuspecting prey caught in secluded spots. Even Wagner himself is brought before the Inquisition on wrongful charges of murder, an accusation which is coloured by Wagner's background as a mysterious, foreign newcomer to the city. During the course of his trial, the further charge of lycanthropy is added to the allegations, which serves to isolate Wagner even further from the community and therefore make him a more vulnerable, punishable target. In particular, the Church and Wagner favour young female victims – the Church takes the 'donation' of daughters from aristocratic families, whom it then abuses in convents, while Wagner terrorises rural peasant women and children, and anxiously tries to avoid killing his fiancée and granddaughter during his uncontrollable rampages. Reynolds here makes a potential commentary regarding how the Church systematically exploits class and gender, but his argument is heavily undermined by the sexualised nature of the violence. Neither the Church nor Wagner are seen to target criminals, dangers to the community, or transgressive individuals more conventionally 'deserving' of punishment, as dictated by the general broad-spectrum morality seen in nineteenth-century literature.⁷

This focus on punishment is, for Reynolds, a particular failing and hypocrisy of Catholicism, which he portrays as more a mechanism for control than for justice. Faust unleashes Wagner upon the world as an extreme, eternal punishment for an unspecified slight, just as the Church unleashes its own agents to bring to heel those whom they view as insubordinate. During the trial of Isaachar the Jew, Isaachar gives voice to Reynolds's views, which fall upon the deaf ears of the Inquisition:

I have never injured a fellow-creature. [I]t is sufficient that I am a Jew to ensure my condemnation; - and yet strange indeed is that Christian faith – or rather should I say most inconsistent is the conduct of those who profess it – in so far as this ruthless persecution of my race is concerned. For where, my lord, is your charity – where is your tolerance – where is your mercy? (127, original emphasis)

In both instances of the Church and the werewolf, there is no inkling of forgiveness, proportion, or fairness. In the case of the Inquisition, the trials are shams, while in the case of Faust, the human race does not even realise it has been tried and sentenced, let alone have the chance to make a rebuttal or restitution. To reinforce the perceived hypocrisy of Church justice through a comparison to the werewolf, Reynolds illustrates that both the institution and the mythical creature utilise fear-tactics to maintain power, in place of impartial procedures to uphold fair laws. By instilling the populace with the idea that the Church and the werewolf are omniscient, omnipresent beings, the reader comes to fear that any transgressive behaviour, even in private, will result in violent retribution. For humanity, at risk of Faust and Wagner's retaliation, the transgressive behaviour on trial seems to be the natural course of human life in itself. Wagner kills people in various stages of a common experience: at play, at work, expressing love, and grieving over death. The randomness of his violence and the speed with which he moves signals to the reader that he is, or could be, anywhere, and that all of humanity is at risk. Wagner directly parallels the risks of Church hegemony: the Carmelite nuns excel at stealthy, sudden kidnapping, while officers of the Inquisition appear immediately on-scene at the hint of the slightest violation of Church protocol or social mores. Of course, the absurd knowledge possessed by Church officials, the extent of their reach, and the speed with which they operate is very likely in part Reynolds's literary shorthand to expedite the narrative, but it also serves to illustrate how the Church and the werewolf create environments of inscrutability and random violence that cannot be anticipated or defended against, allowing both to control the populace through a cult of fear.

An element of this cult of fear is the indoctrination of superstition. The Carmelite nuns commit torture which, in turn, creates fearful local legends that keep the populace at bay:

Rumour was often busy with the affairs of the Carmelite Convent [that] strange deeds [were] committed within the walls of that sacred institution, - how from time to time some young and beautiful nun had suddenly disappeared [...] how piercing shrieks had been heard [...] how the inmates themselves were often aroused from their slumbers by strange noises [...] how spirits were seen to glide around the convent walls at night [...] and unearthly forms were often encountered. (28)

As these supernatural events are perceived by the public to be tied to the convent's general location or atmosphere (instead of to their true cause, the convent's secret disreputable practices), the convent is able to maintain its status as a feared and respected institution, with little public investigation into the causes of these seemingly supernatural occurrences.⁶⁸ The Inquisition, as well, validates its unjust persecutions to the populace by promoting superstitious beliefs about those they persecute, including the knowingly false accusation that the Jews on trial use the blood of gentile infants in their ceremonial bread and, most significantly, the superstition that werewolves exist. The Chief Judge of the Inquisition, who publicly charges Wagner with lycanthropy to ensure his death, later counter-intuitively declares his desire to disprove the charge:

'The moment is now at hand,' said the Chief Judge, 'when a monstrous and ridiculous superstition – imported into our country from that cradle and nurse of preposterous legends, Germany – shall be annihilated for ever [sic]. This knave who is about to suffer, has doubtless propagated the report of his lupine destiny in order to inspire terror and thus prosecute his career of crime and infamy with the greater security from chances of molestation'. (67)

In actuality, Wagner had not admitted his lycanthropy to anyone, including the Inquisition. Rather, this is an example the Chief Judge's projection of his own practices on to Wagner: that the Church propagates superstitious beliefs in order to inspire terror and proceed with security from molestation. The Chief Judge's contradictory attitudes surrounding werewolves illustrate that the Church is in control of all superstition: they create it when necessary to achieve a desired result, and subsequently declare it false once it has served its purpose. It is, of course, unbeknownst to the Chief Judge that Satanic intervention has rendered this Church superstition a reality. Superstition was one of the major criticisms of the Catholic Church in England and in other Protestant-leaning countries during the Reformation, a criticism that was still particularly resonant with both Reynolds specifically and the Gothic genre as a

whole, making the werewolf an apt trope in his novel.⁹ It is significant to note, therefore, that although lycanthropy was largely discredited and disbelieved by the medieval Catholic Church with many tracts arguing that lycanthropy was the result of self-delusion or mental illness (Salisbury 1994: 161; Wiseman 2004: 58; Frost 2013: 12), the persecution of werewolves was far heavier in Catholic regions than in Protestant ones (Blécourt 2009: 202-03). This is a fact of which Reynolds may have been aware, and potentially paralleled in his narrative.

Reynolds's portrayal of the Church and the werewolf's shared reliance on fear, retribution, and hatred of humanity and beauty is most overtly expressed through one of the novel's victims, Flora – a virtuous servant held captive in the Carmelite convent. Reynolds singles out the Carmelite order specifically in *Wagner*, perhaps because of the disdain he expresses for religious guilt, self-denial, and the shunning of earthy beauty, for which the Carmelites were infamous. Carmelites began as a mendicant hermit order dedicated to solitary prayer and contemplation, and they expanded hugely in response to the Protestant Reformation (Andrews 2006: 3, 12). Reynolds seems to be aware of their history, as he discusses the increasing rigidity of their order in the wake of Luther (28), as well as their nominal mendicant status, receiving donations of money and daughters from the aristocracy. Further, Reynolds depicts with disgust the Carmelite practice of extreme asceticism and mortifications, which 'involve physical discomforts (such as praying on the edge of steps, kneeling for long hours, sleeping on a board), self-flagellation, or wearing a chain, fasting or eating unpalatable food [or] extreme obedience to the letter of the command' (Hallett 2007: 21). Flora, who speaks strongly against these practices, says to one of the nuns wrongfully imprisoning her, 'God has not formed the earth so fair that mortals should close their eyes upon its beauties. The flowers – the green trees – the smiling pastures – the cypress groves were not intended to be gazed upon from the barred windows of a prison house' (52). Flora's landscape of divine beauty is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it continues Reynolds's long reaffirmation of the Continent through her reference to cypress groves and Continental topography, always connecting the reader back to the Otherness of the Church. Secondly, the Continental landscape creates a specific association with the werewolf, and connects the werewolf back to the Church, as the reader becomes aware that the scenery Flora describes is the exact same terrain that Wagner terrorises during his transformations. Reynolds specifically creates environments of beauty and peace among the flowers, trees, pastures, and groves, through which Wagner rampages, with eyes too preoccupied with bloodlust to appreciate its beauty (23, 68, 94-95, 100). Of Wagner's first rampage, Reynolds writes, 'On –

on fled the Wehr-Wolf – over mead and hill, through valley and dale. The very winds seemed to make way: he clove the air – the appeared to skim the ground – to fly. Through the romantic glades and rural scenes of Etruria the monster sped . . . his red eyes glaring in the dusk of the evening like ominous meteors’ (23). Thirdly, Flora’s quotation sets the werewolf and the Church at odds with God, and even elevates Reynolds’s characterisation of the Church from merely a misguided institution to an evil one: shortly after Flora’s lecture to the nun, Satan visits Wagner and exults over Wagner’s lycanthropy, ‘I am he whose delight is to spread desolation over a fertile and beautiful earth’ (59), demonstrating that the convent’s practices are the same as the werewolf’s practices, and both are directly in line with Satan’s wishes. And, indeed, not only are the nuns described as ‘demons in mortal shape’ (52), but one of the convent’s sympathetic inmates says: ‘were all of Florence to rise up against this accursed institution – pillage it – sack it – and raze it to the ground [...] heaven itself could not frown upon the deed’ (52). This is precisely what happens shortly thereafter when the convent’s secret tortures are discovered by a band of brigands who, in revulsion, decide to free the inmates, kill the nuns, and burn down the building. None are punished for the sacrilege.

Reynolds’s critique of the Church’s inability to recognise temporal beauty ties in with his second major dogmatic complaint: the promise of rebirth and heavenly reward for earthly suffering. In fact, the notion of self-denial and bodily suffering was one of Martin Luther’s chief complaints with Catholicism, and a major basis for the formation of Protestantism, and these ideas continued well into the Victorian era (Maynard 1993: 239). Reynolds’s portrayal of this dogma, which he represents as fallacy, is mocked by the dynamics of Wagner’s pact with Faust: left alone, feeble, and miserable, Wagner is specifically targeted by Faust, as Wagner’s suffering makes him vulnerable to the seductive promise of an eternal and blissful existence at the end of his natural life (6). Wagner agrees to Faust’s terms and is reborn in a caricature of divine reward: he is young, handsome, wealthy, intelligent, and cannot age or die. However, his heaven-on-earth is quickly perverted into an inescapable hellscape as Wagner realises the emotional, physical, and moral costs of his monthly transformations, in addition to the isolation of such an existence. His post-human life, much like the Church’s promise of Heaven, is something that has to be achieved (and may have to be endured) on one’s own. Wagner, unable to share his experience as a werewolf with another person, is forced to watch his only living relative die young, and can only anticipate the eventual ageing and death of his fiancée while he remains unchanged. In a clear parallel to the Church’s structures surrounding salvation, with which Reynolds so heavily overlays his texts, Wagner

is denied the implied compensation he was due in exchange for his obedience to and faith in Faust.

Reynolds satirises the idea of Heaven twice in Wagner's narrative, both times through his unexpected reunion with a loved one whom Wagner considered irrevocably lost. His granddaughter, Agnes, who had abandoned the elderly Wagner in Germany without a word or trace, is fortuitously rediscovered in Italy. In a flurry of forgiveness and affection, they resume their life together in a paradise of wealth and splendour, only for Agnes to be brutally murdered shortly after their reconciliation. The second instance is when Nisida, Wagner's fiancée, is kidnapped, shipwrecked, and stranded on an uncharted island. Soon thereafter, Wagner also survives a shipwreck and miraculously washes up on the same island. He and Nisida live for six months in their private paradise before a division occurs: Wagner must escape to the other side of island once per month so he does not endanger Nisida during his transformations, nor reveal his lycanthropy to her. That Wagner still suffers regularly in an otherwise perfect paradise undermines all of the Church's and Faust's promises for eternal reward devoid of the physical hardships experienced on earth. Further, in an allusion to the Garden of Eden, Satan appears to Nisida on the island and preys upon her curiosity for forbidden knowledge, driving an emotional wedge between her and Wagner. Eventually Satan encourages Nisida to escape the island without Wagner, who himself eventually escapes under the protection of an angel. With spiritual allegiances thus drawn and with Nisida clearly unsuitable for heavenly reward, their paradise and relationship crumble and Wagner is left without friend or relation for the remainder of the text.

Nisida's quest for knowledge – a quest which breeds unhappiness and is encouraged by Satan – supports Reynolds's third complaint about Catholic practice: the hypocrisies of both guilt and confession. The long-standing Protestant issue with guilt and confession was not only one of the root causes for the Protestantism's development, but also a continuing Victorian criticism of the Church, in which 'the secrecy of the confessional was [...] regarded with suspicion, and some Protestant writers indulged in lurid fantasies' due to the airing of secrets outside the domestic space (Melnik 2008: 25), and the perceived prying interests that priests took in their congregants' sins (Janes 2009: 155). Knight and Mason argue that confession 'threatened Victorian sensibility because it forced one to broadcast sin outside of the family space to a priest portrayed as perversely eager to listen' (2006: 97). Reynolds writes of Wagner's transformation: 'Oh! if he could die – if he could die that moment, how gladly would he release himself from an existence fraught with so much misery: - but death was not yet within the reach of him who bore the doom of a Wehr-Wolf! [...] "Oh! wretch –

miserable wretch that I am!’” (104). Wagner’s crippling post-transformation guilt embodies, as Reynolds sees it, the specifically Catholic brand of guilt that results from the belief in an acrimonious and finicky God. Wagner, as a werewolf, causes significant harm to others, but does so unintentionally and inescapably, and the text portrays him as too victimised by his lycanthropy to be held fully responsible for it. This guilt over a mental and physical condition, of course, lends itself to an extended disability reading of *Wagner*; however, Reynolds’s correlating focus on the alleviation of guilt through confession link Wagner’s shame more firmly in the religious sphere.

While Wagner, in his supernatural werewolf form, is in many ways a weapon or embodiment of the Church, Wagner in his human form holds a deep antipathy for the Catholic practice of confession. This antipathy is borne out by Reynolds as every confession depicted in the text is proven to be either useless or harmful. Firstly, that the Inquisition demands Wagner confess his status as a werewolf and submit to punishment is a counterintuitive practice: the werewolf, as already has been established, is largely aligned with Church practices and beliefs, making the Church’s demand for Wagner’s confession seem superfluous, contradictory, and event an act of betrayal. Further, Wagner’s divulgence of his supernatural form to other characters in the text leads only to harm, while those who attempt to extract confessions from him are portrayed to be just as intrusive and prurient as the nature of Catholic aural confession. This is especially true of Nisida, whose curiosity about Wagner’s monthly disappearances on their deserted island leads to meddlesome, jealous, and trivial demands in order to exert control over her fiancé, which she supplements with sexual manipulation. It is this need for control that Satan exploits in his visits to Nisida on the island, tying the Catholic practice of confession not only to petty tyranny, but also to outright ungodliness. Nisida manages to extract Wagner’s confession in exchange for one of her own: she, in a fit of jealousy, killed Wagner’s granddaughter Agnes, assuming that Agnes was Wagner’s mistress. Her confession horrifies him as much as his horrifies her; they part, never to be reconciled. Neither receives forgiveness or salvation, and both confessions lead them back to the land of the Inquisition and to their eventual deaths.

Nisida’s desperate need to discover Wagner’s lycanthropy is Reynolds’s most overt example of the intrusive and harmful nature confession; however, the negative effects of confession can be seen littered throughout the rest of the text. Nisida’s own confessions serve only to tear families and communities apart: her murder of Agnes shatters her marriage to Wagner, which was formerly sanctified ‘in the sight of heaven’ (76), and her confession regarding family secrets comes a decade too late to stop family strife. Nisida’s own father

leaves a written confession of a murder he committed, to be opened posthumously, and ensures that it is discovered on the wedding day of the son he so vehemently dislikes. No punishment or forgiveness can be given to Nisida's late father, who only wants this knowledge to ruin the happiness of those he hates. In the Carmelite convent, a group of inmates called the Penitents confess their sins in a regular flagellation ceremony, with seemingly no relief or benefit to anyone. Reynolds writes: 'The spectacle of these unfortunate creatures, – with their naked forms writhing and bleeding beneath the self-inflicted stripes [...] was so appalling to the contemplation of Flora, that she seldom quitted her own cell to set foot in the Chamber of Penitence' (52). The public nature of guilt and contrition exercised by the Penitents is so repugnant and barbaric to Flora that, instead of setting a good and virtuous example to her, it causes her to retreat into the privacy of her own space and commune with God individually; in short, Catholic guilt and confession drives Flora to Protestantism. Finally, Wagner's only willing confession made in the text is his admission of lycanthropy to the Rosicrucian mystics who can cure him; while this confession *does* lead him to a cure, what is undisclosed to him is that the cure is his death. It is important to note that the Rosicrucians were an anti-Catholic sect, which A. E. Waite described as 'rabidly and extravagantly Protestant' (242), and that Wagner's confession is made freely and not as a part of a greater religious structure or practice. But even this sole successful confession, which leads to forgiveness and the eradication of sin, has significant unforeseen costs. Those who avoid confession entirely (namely Isaachar the Jew and Orsini the disillusioned Catholic, who refuse to be bent by Inquisitorial demands) get to leave the main narrative alive, if not necessarily unscathed.

Finally, Reynolds portrays the Catholic belief in transubstantiation and the consumption of the Eucharist as a savage and superstitious practice. Of course, the symbolic connection between the Eucharist and the werewolf is clear: both bread and man transform, through holy or unholy blessing, from humble, corporeal material to an embodiment of the divine or supernatural. Further, there is a cannibalistic element to both: in the process of transubstantiation, the holy wine and holy bread are believed to transform literally into the blood and flesh of the half-human, half-divine Christ, for the purposes of consumption by the Catholic community. The werewolf inverts transubstantiation, in that the half-human, half-supernatural figure consumes those in his community.

Although Reynolds never depicts a scene in *Wagner* in which the Eucharist is taken, the issue is all but explicitly stated. During an inquisitorial trial, when Isaachar the Jew is put on trial, the charge is '[t]hat they [the Jews] kill Christian children to mix the blood in the

dough with which they make the bread used at their religious ceremonies' (48). The charge is ludicrous and deliberately specious, as the Inquisition has the sworn testimony of two Christian men that the blood spatter found in Isaachar's home was the result of a duel between the two of them. More significantly, and due to the Church's connection to the werewolf, the charge is portrayed as hypocritical. Firstly, the consumption of human flesh and blood occurs in Catholic ceremonies, by the Church's own admission through its belief in the literal nature of transubstantiation. Secondly, the only character who actually partakes of young Gentile flesh is Wagner, whose werewolf form, as has been evidenced, directly parallels and connects him to the Catholic Church. Reynolds writes:

A little child is in his path [...] 'My child! my child!' screams the affrighted mother; and simultaneously the shrill cry of an infant in the sudden agony of death [...] for the child – the blooming, violet-eyed, flaxen-haired boy – the darling of his poor but tender parents, is weltering in his blood! (23)

Reynolds draws attention to this particular werewolf attack, for though the description of the child's death is not any longer than any of Wagner's other victims, it is bloodier, showing the aftermath and suffering of the child's death, and juxtaposing the violence with repeated reference to the victim's beauty and innocence. Thus, to Reynolds, the consumption of human flesh becomes not only a major component of Catholic mass, but also the chief activity in Faust and Satan's curse upon humanity. The involvement of Isaachar only serves to highlight this hypocrisy, as the Church passes off its own cannibalistic practices onto a man known to be innocent of them. Wagner and Isaachar are on trial at the same time, but Wagner is too closely related to the Church to be brought up on a charge that Reynolds wishes to use as an example of the Church's cognitive dissonance from its own morality.

Much of *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf* keeps in line with the fanciful, social wish-fulfilment that often accompanies the wrapping up of narrative threads in Reynolds's texts. However, *Wagner* is more than a mere expression of Reynolds's capricious fantasies: the serial serves as a direct engagement with serious doctrinal issues, as well as astute understanding of the evolving Gothic tropes embedded in Victorian culture. Reynolds pays homage to the Gothic critiques of Catholicism that came before him, while also evolving it to create a new discourse surrounding the werewolf figure and its mythos. In *Wagner*, the werewolf is more than a mere embodiment of Catholicism. Rather, the werewolf and Catholicism serve as symbiotic leitmotifs of each other, with something perpetually Catholic portrayed about the werewolf, and something perpetually wolf-like in all representations of the Church.

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¹ Some of this fiction includes, among just a few, Charles Robert Maturin's *The Albigensis* (1824), Richard Thomson's 'The Wehr-Wolf: A Legend of the Limousin' (1828), Captain Frederick Marryat's 'The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains' (1839), Sutherland Menzies's 'Hughes, the Wer-Wolf [sic]' (1838), and Leitch Ritche's 'The Man-Wolf' (1831).

² For further analysis on reading the werewolf in relation to disability, see Carroll 2012: 26; de Blécourt 2009: 191; Salisbury 1994: 161; Wiseman 2004: 51; Frost 2013: xii. In fact, Sabine Baring-Gould's 1865 folkloric opus, *The Book of Were-Wolves*, largely discusses lycanthropy in relation to historical cases of violence and murder committed by those who were likely mentally unwell. Reynolds, along with the authors of many other werewolf narratives, aligns the transformation into wolf with physical illness or impairment and Wagner spends much of the narrative searching for a cure. The disability reading is compounded when we consider Wagner's proud, irate love interest (and one of the villains of the story), Nisida. Nisida is introduced as a deaf-mute whose disability resulted from a childhood shock; far into the narrative, it is revealed that Nisida has faked her deafness for more than a decade in order to mislead others into underestimating her so she might achieve her own often unsavoury goals.

³ Another major reading of the werewolf deals with body theory, since the physical and aesthetic transformation is a crucial component of the mythos (see Shildrick 2002; Cohen 2012: 16-17; Cavallaro 2002: 171). A particular extension of this body theory in recent years is the werewolf as a metaphor for puberty (Carroll 2012: 26; Miller 2005: 281; Pulliam 2012: 239). The focus on bodies is worth mentioning, as Reynolds's narrative style concentrates very heavily on describing physical forms in his fiction, sometimes employing a pseudo-

scientific or bio-medical gaze to comment upon the mechanics or capabilities of the body (see Boucher 2013). In the case of *Wagner*, however, his bodily portrayals deal more with gruesome violence and light pornography than with any sort of commentary about or treatment of the werewolf; it is for this reason that a more conventional bodily reading is not as feasible an approach to *Wagner* as it may be to other werewolf fiction.

⁴ It must be noted that Catholicism is by no means the only religion extensively discussed or unfairly portrayed in *Wagner*. Roughly a quarter of the serial deals with a subplot at a Turkish court, in which a secondary character is persuaded to convert to Islam. Islam is portrayed by Reynolds in very ambiguous terms: on the one hand, it is a corrupting Oriental influence which transforms good Christian men into selfish sexual degenerates, while on the other hand it is the religion of sympathetic, relatable characters who are proud of their virtue and faith. Reynolds is less vague about Judaism, with which he explicitly sympathises and decrees as an ‘undeservedly persecuted race – the Jews – a race endowed with many virtues and generous qualities, but whose characters have been blackened by a host of writers [with] narrow minds and illiberal prejudices’ (35). As neither the Jewish nor Muslim characters or structures in *Wagner* interact with lycanthropy in any significant way (these story lines being parallel or tertiary to Wagner’s arc), this article will only make passing reference to them in relation to the presentation of Catholicism in the text.

⁵ See Cavallaro 2002: 7; Burstein 2014: 143, 200; Knight and Mason 2006: 194.

⁶ See Mulvey-Roberts 2016: 14, 16; Burstein 2014: 185, 200; Janes 2009: 94.

⁷ For further information on the conventions of morality and punishment in nineteenth-century literature, see Eberle 2002: 2; Smith 2011: 23; Gilbert and Gubar 1984 [1979]: 78.

⁸ Historically, Carmelite nuns recorded a wide history of supernatural encounters, be they ‘favours (visions or inner knowledges of saints, angels, divine revelation, miraculous cures) [or] troubles (ghosts, apparitions, hauntings, demonic visitation)’ (Hallett 2007: 21-22).

These reports are directly paralleled in the supernatural reputation of the convent in *Wagner*, which the nuns enhance to scare the populace and maintain privacy for their nefarious deeds.

Whatever the status of the paranormal activity reported by historical Carmelites, Reynolds here reimagines it as part of his ongoing discourse about Church fear tactics, much in the way that he reimagines the werewolf as at least partially a Church construction.

⁹ For a more complete analysis of superstition as a nineteenth-century Protestant criticism of Catholicism, see Mulvey-Roberts 2016: 14; Knight and Mason 2006: 27, 193; Janes 2009: 70.