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WOLVES AND LIES: A WRITER'S PERSPECTIVE

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From the wolf in sheep's clothing to the boy who cried wolf, from anti-Semitic propaganda to lupine hoaxes of the Holocaust itself, there has always been a connection between the wolf and untruth. What is it about the wolf that lends itself to the concept of fraudulence, and is there something more positive we also take away from the nature of this particular beast? 'All stories are about wolves. All worth repeating, that is. Anything else is sentimental drivel.' So says Margaret Atwood, or at least, that's what she has her character Alex declare in *The Blind Assassin*.¹ Alex's point is that every story requires a metaphorical wolf – without a problem of some kind, a story is not a story in the truest sense. This exploration of wolves and lies is written from the point of view of a storyteller; my life is invested in stories. I have observed that we do not read books that contain only the positive: stories that recounted only a sequence of wonderful and fulfilling things happening would be, ironically, not at all fulfilling to the reader. From time to time, however, attempts have been made to cast fiction in this mode. We might consider a story such as Ernest Hemingway's 'Big Two-hearted River', in which the protagonist Nick Adams goes on a fishing trip and everything is more or less absolutely fine. If this story succeeds at all it's because of the reader's understanding of implicit jeopardy – themes of warfare and conflict lurk beneath the surface throughout the piece.

A more extreme attempt to write a story without dramatic incident appears *within* another novel. George Gissing's *New Grub Street* of 1891 describes the tribulations of a character called Harold Biffen who writes a novel depicting the everyday, utterly realistic life of *Mr Bailey, Grocer* with no dramatic incident whatsoever. The result is untenably dull and the attempt is a failure.²

Such experiments serve only to prove to us that story is not about the representation of human life – story is about the representation of the *conflicts* of human life. This is the sense in which Atwood's Alex declares that all stories worth repeating are about wolves, and yet, although he's speaking metaphorically, very often in the past our stories have been about real wolves.

Wolves are there from the start, and from the start are associated with deception. Of the fables associated with Aesop, around seventy-five of the 725 stories listed in the Perry Index feature wolves – no other animal features as often as the wolf does: eagles have twenty stories; donkeys, twelve; cats, twenty-one; dogs and lions each have fifty-six, for example.³ Only by combining stories about men, women and children does humankind itself merit more mentions than the wolf. The closest animal rival to the wolf is the fox, with sixty-six fables. A fox is of course a close relative of the wolf, both members of the Canidae family, and yet even in these fables, approximately two and a half thousand years old, there is a distinction. The fox is cunning and wily. The wolf shares these traits, but with a crucial addition – the wolf is often depicted as voracious, rapacious, merciless, even wantonly cruel, as in tales such as ‘The Wolf and the Lamb’.⁴

It’s interesting to note that in one of the most famous of Aesop’s fables, ‘The Shepherd Who Cried “Wolf!” in Jest’, deception is still part of the tale, even though the lies are now being told by the shepherd, and that, in many stories where the wolf is not depicted as extremely malicious, deceit is once again part of the mix – see ‘The Dog and the Sheep’, which features a wolf bearing false witness and winding up dead in a ditch for its trouble.⁵

Another very old story, ‘The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing’, was in the past falsely attributed to Aesop, and indeed bears Perry Index Number 451, though the story is now held to be of biblical origin. In one of his sermons, Jesus declares ‘Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves’ – now a universally popular adage in the English language, when referencing danger disguised as innocence.⁶

It’s hard to date fairy tales. It’s far from certain who Aesop was, or when he lived, but, if it is indeed the case that he lived between 620 and 564 BCE, we can be far less sure of when the original versions of common fairy tales were first told, and it remains impossible to know who first told them. Whilst it was long assumed that the fairy tales recounted by the likes of Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault or Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy were not vastly older than the period in which these famous fairy-tale narrators first wrote them down, recent research challenges this view. In a paper for the Royal Society, Sara Graça da Silva and Jamshid J. Tehrani argue that phylogenetic dating techniques provide robust evidence that stories like ‘Beauty and the Beast’ (ATU 425C, as per the Aarne-Thompson-Uther fairy-tale classification system) may be as much as four thousand years old, and other familiar fairy tales, such as the ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ family, could be even older.⁷ To return to wolves, Tehrani argued in earlier work that while ATU 333 – better known to us as ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ – may be ‘only’ eleventh century in origin, a closely related tale, ATU 123 (‘The Wolf and the Kids’) is possibly much older, being evolved from an ‘Aesopic’ fable and first recorded around 400 CE.⁸ What these two tales have

in common is the notion of the deceitful wolf: in the former story, the wolf disguises himself as the girl's grandmother; in the latter, as the mother goat to the kids.

It seems, therefore, that for as long as stories have been told and recorded the wolf has been penned not only as voracious but also as deceitful. What is the explanation for these connections? As to traits of supposed cruelty, certain opinions have long been held about the wolf's predation habits. One of the historical accusations made against the wolf has been its tendency to kill more than required for the provision of food. Though argument still occurs on the subject, 'surplus killing' by wolves (the predation of animals that are left uneaten at the time of the kill) beyond immediate need is well documented. The critical point, however, is the word 'immediate'. Wolves, like various other species, will sometimes kill more than they can eat *at one feed*, returning to a kill on several other occasions, or making a cache of the excess.⁹ Note also that the leading example of a species that uses 'surplus killing', to considerable benefit, is humankind.

What of the latter aspect: that of deceit? To understand this, we need to consider a little further the supposed ruthless nature of the wolf. It's hard to find anything different said about the animal at first; indeed, in the oldest surviving great story we still have, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, lies what must be the first mention of a wolf in all literature, and, as we might expect, it is not favourable. Tablet VI of the epic refers to Gilgamesh rejecting the Goddess Ishtar's advances, reminding her that she once turned a shepherd into a wolf, thus threatening the very flocks he should have been protected.¹⁰ From the outside, the threat of the wolf is so apparent it serves without the need for elucidation.

Moving to the Classical period, while both Greek and Roman myth saw the wolf as a predominantly evil creature – consider '*homo homini lupus est*' ('man is a wolf to man') – the Romans did also see better qualities in the wolf: the legend of the very founding of their city state tells the story of Romulus and Remus, suckled by a she-wolf.¹¹

If we turn to Norse mythology, we find Fenrir, the monstrous wolf destined to devour Odin himself during Ragnarök, and though we also find other, tamer wolves, such as Geri and Freki, Odin's pets, it should be noted that their names respectively mean 'greedy' and 'voracious'.¹² Many other negative portrayals of the wolf can be found in world mythologies, but this is not the whole story. Some cultures have represented better characteristics of the animal and have even revered them, one such being the First Nations of North America.

Native North American mythologies are notable for their predominantly positive depictions of the wolf, in stories, songs and personal names. In fact, the non-profit organisation Wolf Song of Alaska states 'American tribes have an overwhelming tendency to look upon the wolf in a much more favourable

light [than other cultures]; pointing to wolves' strength, courage and independence as favourable traits.¹³

It seems apparent that a culture's depiction of the wolf correlates to its relation to the animal through time and/or across place. Communities at risk of predation of livestock are likely to present the wolf in a different light from those where the wolf has become extinct, such as the bulk of Europe in most of the modern era. In the absence of the real creature, the wolf can attain a symbolic status that, perhaps, displays the 'better' side of its nature. (And, as we will see, the re-emergence of the wolf in such areas has led to a corresponding re-emergence of antipathy in certain locales.) However, this does not explain the more positive attitudes to the wolf in First Nations accounts, given that the wolf was at no time extinct on the continent. It took the coming of the white settlers to inaugurate massive wolf culls (peaking with around twenty-one thousand animals being killed annually in the 1920s) and First Nations' more positive attitudes speak more about a different relationship with wild animals than something cued by their total absence from the landscape.¹⁴ After all, whilst certain tribes revered wolves, they would on occasion hunt them too, for pelts, and for food, though often with a restraint, and infrequently.¹⁵

In all these accounts of wolf predation, it's not just the viciousness of the wolf that defines it, but its stealth, too. The wolf, a primarily nocturnal animal, will commit its 'atrocities' in the night. Humanity's essential, deep-seated fear of the dark and the creatures that operate within it no doubt contributes to the feeling that the wolf is a creature of deception. It arrives, kills and disappears in the night, all with little trace but the carcasses of its victims to show it was there, and the fact that a wolf can run dozens of miles in a single night can only enhance this sort of belief.

When we turn to literature of the modern era, it becomes easier to find more positive portrayals of the wolf, alongside plenty that persist with the wolf-as-beast motif. So while J.R.R. Tolkien had frequent recourse to the bestial nature of the wolf (deriving from the influence of Germanic myth on his work), and C.S. Lewis gave us Maugrim, the chief of the White Witch's secret police in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, others have brought us a very different animal, even a kind and noble one: the prime examples being Rudyard Kipling's Akela (the leader of the wolf-pack), Raksha (the mother of the pack) and Father Wolf in *The Jungle Books*. Here, far from being at risk of becoming the wolves' next meal, little Mowgli is raised in safety as one of the pack.

Other more or less benign wolves in fiction include 'Two Socks' in *Dances with Wolves*; 'White Fang', three-quarters wolf, one-quarter dog, in the novel of the same name by Jack London; and the nameless she-wolf in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*.¹⁶ In children's fiction, Melvin Burgess's *The Cry of the Wolf* and my own *The Dark Horse* also depict wolves primarily as animals, but ones with the capacity to 'behave' themselves in the right circumstances.¹⁷

All five examples given here attempt to depict wolves that have not been overtly anthropomorphised, retaining their animal natures, and yet which still come to terms of peace with their human contacts. The question of how realistic these attempts to make stories with apparently more realistic wolves actually are is not for consideration here; instead we merely note the presence of beasts capable of more than the instinct to rip throats and devour all.

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

Can wolves ever be trusted? Disney's 1933 animation *The Three Little Pigs* gives a definite answer, and in doing so launched one of the studio's most popular songs.¹⁸ The refrain 'Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?' captures perfectly the mood of the film's three porcine heroes. Full of bluster before they actually see the wolf, two of the pigs dance and sing their defiant song, while the third (Practical Pig) builds a house of bricks. Until the villain of the piece actually appears – at which point all three rush in to the safety of Practical Pig's solid house. We should *all* be afraid of the big, bad wolf, the film suggests, for he comes knocking on our door protesting innocence, while all he wants to do in reality is burst into our most treasured safe space (our home) and consume us.

Viewers of the film in 1933 were left in no doubt of this – the wolf is bad through and through. Above and beyond the film itself, the song became a best-selling single, an ear-worm of national proportions, as well as something of an anthem against the troubles posed by economic turmoil of the era.¹⁹ Critics immediately recognised that 'it bored into the national consciousness, both reflecting and somehow ameliorating anxiety over the Depression.'²⁰ Such anxiety concerned not just the economic turmoil of the 1930s but the political threats too. The film was released in 1933; events in Europe were taking sinister shape. While the horrors of the prewar period are easily seen in hindsight, they were not obvious to everyone at the time even on the continent, never mind far away across the ocean in the United States. The two complacent pigs, happily singing and dancing while the third prepares for attack, became a perfect metaphorical rallying cry for the need to resist the rise of Hitler's Nazis. That Walt Disney himself was trying to warn anyone about the Nazis or comment on the Depression is disputed; Louise Krasniewicz recounts that the man himself dismissed the latter idea.²¹ As is well known, Disney has long been accused of having been an anti-Semite, about which argument rumbles on, long after his death.²²

It's worth noting, however, that the version of *The Three Little Pigs* seen today is not exactly the one seen in 1933. In the original, when the wolf comes to the door, he's depicted in a disguise that would have been widely recognised to refer to Jewish pedlars, and which we now clearly interpret as anti-Semitic. In 1948 the sequence was reanimated to change the disguise to that of a 'Fuller

Brush man.' In the original version, too, the wolf imitates a Yiddish accent in this scene, something that was also changed in subsequent versions. In whichever version we consider, the wolf is a dissembler, a cunning figure of evil, but the disturbing overtones of the 1933 portrayal remind us of dark territory – namely the relationship between wolves, lies and the Holocaust.

In his book about the psychogeography of Stanley Kubrick's films, *The Wolf at the Door*, Geoffrey Cocks elaborates on the connection between the Disney song and anti-Semitism.²³ Speaking of *The Shining* (1980), Cocks notes how Jack Torrance, having trapped his wife Wendy and son Danny in the bathroom, prepares to axe the door down. But not before he's recited the lines from the rhyme that gave Disney the story for his 1933 animation:

Little pigs, little pigs, let me come in.
Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin.
Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in.

One of many differences between Stephen King's book and Kubrick's movie, Cocks cites this as no mere coincidence, but as an example of material planted by Kubrick to give a deeper meaning to his version of the story. The argument of Cocks, a contributing narrator in the documentary *Room 237*, is that, unable to complete his Holocaust project *Aryan Papers*, Kubrick instead used King's novel as a vehicle to tell an allegory of the Holocaust.²⁴ Cocks claims that:

any mention of the wolf in *The Shining* is a(n) (in)direct expression of a growing preoccupation in the 1970s on Kubrick's (and the culture's) part with the subject of Nazis, the Second World War, and the Holocaust.²⁵

His views, and those of other *Room 237* contributors, have been scoffed at by people connected to Kubrick: for example, the actor Leon Vitali, who worked as Kubrick's personal assistant during the shooting of *The Shining*, and who noted 'I'm certain that [Kubrick] wouldn't have wanted to listen to about 70, or maybe 80 percent [of] *Room 237* ... Because it's pure gibberish.'²⁶

While it is hard to see some of the theories expounded in *Room 237* as anything other than very far-fetched, the supposed evidence of Holocaust references in Kubrick's *The Shining* is striking. The number 42 appears in the film more than chance occurrence would explain: it is the number of cars in the parking lot in the establishing shot of the hotel, it is on Danny's sweatshirt, it is the six trays of 7Up caught in shot on more than one occasion, it is the movie *Summer of '42* that Wendy and Danny watch on television one day, it is the result of multiplying $2 \times 3 \times 7$. This last number might seem like a conspiracy theorist's idle fancy, until we learn that in King's novel the haunted room is room 217, and that on Kubrick's own copy of the book he played around with the number 217, and then for the film switched to room 237 – the Holocaust link being that the 'Final Solution' was implemented in 1942.²⁷ Add this to

shots of piles of suitcases, a classic Holocaust image, and frequent shots of Jack's 'Adler' (German for Eagle, a Nazi symbol) typewriter. And add all this to the fact that Kubrick had had to forgo his chance to make the Holocaust film he had been working on for years, and the theory at least deserves consideration. At the very least, Jack becomes 'the wolf at the door', and in doing so becomes the arch dissembler. His attempt to murder Wendy and Danny, the only other people in the hotel, is thus an attempt to murder not only everyone in his family but everyone in his world, and can therefore be considered an act of genocide, just as the Holocaust was.

The ultimate architect of the Final Solution, Adolf Hitler, had his own associations with the wolf. The name of the Nazis' military HQ on the Eastern Front was the *Wolfsschanze*, or Wolf's Lair. Peter Arnds has argued in strong Freudian fashion that Hitler identified deeply with the animal – the name Adolf derives from the Germanic *Adalwolf*, meaning 'noble wolf' – and even that he was familiar with Disney's cartoon and was heard to whistle 'Who's afraid of the big, bad wolf?' to himself frequently.²⁸ Arnds also refers to one supposed source for Hitler's obsession with wolves. As in Freud's famous case of Sergei Pankejeff, 'The Wolf-Man', the young Hitler is believed to have witnessed his parents in the sexual act at a very early age.²⁹ Here lies another possible source of the wolf's connection to lies. The wolf has long been a metaphor for the human sexual predator – the insatiable philanderer – and so signifies another form of deceit, in the shape of the Casanova who professes love but who is only really interested in lust.

How much, if any of this, was in Kubrick's mind when he included that fairy-tale element in his movie, we can only conjecture. We can be sure at the very least that Kubrick, the most meticulous of filmmakers, did not put things into his movies without thought. Even if all he wanted was to make Jack Torrance that little bit more menacing, the lines from *The Three Little Pigs* were an unexpected yet powerful way of achieving that.

'The wolf at the door' or 'that will keep the wolf from the door' are of course expressions used to describe life when times are hard, bringing to mind the notion that in a hard winter even the wolves will be forced to enter human communities in their desperate search for sustenance.³⁰ The privations of the Second World War were one such period in recent human history. Whether or not Kubrick overtly connected wolves to Hitler is open to discussion, yet that very connection had already been made for him thirty-eight years earlier, by MGM Studios.

Blitz Wolf of 1942 is another retelling of *The Three Little Pigs*, but is one that leaves nothing to the imagination in casting the wolf as no less than Hitler himself, in the role of 'Adolf Wolf'.³¹ At this point in the war, American cartoons had become explicit in their use of propaganda, and, as Geoffrey Cocks argues, since Kubrick eschewed school for the movie house from an early age, and

was faithful in his attendance at this alternative place of education, ‘we may therefore assume with great confidence that if a movie played at either the RKO Fordham or Loew’s Paradise, in particular between roughly 1936 and 1946, Kubrick most likely saw it.’³²

It would seem that the only useful depiction of the wolf in a period of warfare such as the Second World War is in its bestial guise, and yet, out of the war in general, and the Holocaust in particular, purportedly true stories later began to emerge of the wolf as friend, not foe. Perhaps the most (in) famous example of such a story is the internationally best-selling book *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years*.³³ The author, Misha Defonseca (born Monique de Wael), claimed that the book, published in 1997, was a true account of her survival in Nazi Europe, following the deportation of her parents in 1941. Making her way across the continent at the age of nine, she recounts various adventures escaping the Warsaw ghetto, killing a German soldier in self-defence, and being befriended and protected by a pack of wolves. Even before the book was published its validity had been called into question. After various exposés and pressure from the media, Defonseca later admitted she had made it up.³⁴ In defence, Defonseca conceded, ‘The book is a story, it’s my story. It’s not the true reality, but it is my reality. There are times when I find it difficult to differentiate between reality and my inner world.’³⁵

The Holocaust is an episode of history that has spawned numerous false accounts and outright hoaxes: *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski; *Fragments* by Binjamin Wilkomirski; *Hannah: From Dachau to the Olympics and Beyond* by Jean Goodwin Messenger; and *Angel at the Fence: The True Story of a Love that Survived* by Herman Rosenblat are just four examples of this dubious literary phenomenon.³⁶ Whether there remains any literary or cultural merit in a work that has been shown to be ‘false’ is a hotly debated question. Even Elie Wiesel, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 for his indisputably genuine account of surviving the Holocaust, *Night*, noted, ‘Things are not that simple ... Some events do take place but are not true; others are – although they never occurred.’³⁷ The book, though acclaimed, has always suffered from debate over whether it is an eyewitness account, a fictionalised autobiography, semi-fictional memoir and so on.

We accept that writers make things up. When they’re writing novels, that’s their job. When they’re writing their autobiographies, it’s charming at best, disingenuous at worst. When they’re writing accounts of the Holocaust, it’s offensive to many people, and results in acrimonious disputes – in Misha Defonseca’s case resulting in a multi-million-dollar court case. Defonseca’s account of being taken in by six adult wolves and four pups raises a wider issue – there have been numerous reports of feral children from across recorded history, from Romulus and Remus on. Put simply, are any of these stories real?

In France, one of Defonseca's denouncers was the surgeon turned self-made expert on feral children, Serge Aroles. Following his revelations about the story of Misha, Aroles investigated accounts of feral children between the years 1304 and 1954.³⁸ His conclusion was that the vast majority of them were false.³⁹ Speaking specifically of cases of wolves rearing children, he allowed that in cases of phantom pregnancy (when the production of milk sometimes occurs) there were a handful of genuine cases of she-wolves suckling human infants, but denies that any human child has ever lived in a pack of wolves. Famous cases such as the Indian twins, Amala and Kamala, were no more than scams; these children, and others like them, being victims of brutality, having been beaten with sticks since early childhood and forced into their animal-like behaviour.⁴⁰ With regard to feral children in general, Aroles was similarly dismissive, but did allow the veracity of the eighteenth-century case of Marie-Angélique Le Blanc, known as the Wild Girl of Champagne, having studied contemporaneous American and French records.⁴¹

There are more recent examples of so-called feral children – Ivan Mishukov, a boy of five years, living with wild dogs on the streets of Moscow, or Andrei Tolstyk, a seven-year-old from Siberia who was raised by a dog, though these are just the kind of cases that Aroles disputes the truth of, and equally it must be said that the papers that report them have usually taken the Russia news media's accounts at face value.⁴² In the United States, recent examples of something akin to feral children have tended to come in the form of children suffering from extreme neglect and imprisonment – cases such as that of the girl known as 'Genie', an authentic and very disturbing case of a girl kept in isolation from the age of twenty months until the age of thirteen.⁴³

Perhaps there are too many accounts of hoax feral children to fully let that idea drop but we are left with that nagging question: are any accounts of feral children real? Whether or not we can ever find the answer to that, however, is irrelevant to the final question I want to consider: genuine or not, why do so many people want such accounts to be true, easily believing them upon uncorroborated hearing?

Wolves and wildness

That night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another.

His mother called him 'WILD THING!' and Max said 'I'LL EAT YOU UP!'⁴⁴

Today, there are many parties 'crying wolf' in various parts of the world – from Europe to the USA, there is conflict between people who would preserve and protect the wolf, and those who want them killed. As one example, we might browse the Facebook page 'Save Western Wildlife', based in Idaho, which posts about the supposed threat to human life from wolves in the area, and the

corresponding Facebook page ‘Save Western Wildlife Is a Terrorist Organisation’ which seeks to expose ‘Save Western Wildlife as a group that uses scare tactics, acts of intimidation, and outright threats in an attempt to destroy any remaining wildlife and wilderness.’⁴⁵

The Haute Savoie, France, sees similar tensions. A resident of Petit-Bornand-les-Glières, Franck Michel, was prosecuted in 2009 for killing a wolf that he claimed had been threatening the hamlet. Freely admitting that he had killed the wolf, he stated ‘I did not think I was doing wrong by killing a wolf. For me, I did a good thing ... For everyone.’⁴⁶ Michel also stated that he knew that an official request was being considered for a permit to shoot wolves in the area, but felt it was taking too long.

It is hard for the layperson looking on to know how to sort the truth from the lies in many of these instances. It is apparent that self-interest will often guide one’s view of the wolf – the French farmer who believes his livestock is being preyed on by wolves will have a very different view of the wolf from the city dweller with a possibly idealised view of wildlife and its protection – just it comes as no great surprise that the hunting fraternity in the United States is keen to disseminate the opinion that wolves are a threat to human life. As Ed Bangs, the wolf recovery co-ordinator for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, notes,

If you live in an urban area where your only exposure to wolves is watching them on TV and seeing them running in a national park, it is very easy to be supportive of wolves. The debate right now isn’t about the biology. People think it is morally wrong to kill wolves because it reminds them of pet dogs or people because wolves live in packs like families.⁴⁷

As noted, the view that wolves are noble beasts, with admirable qualities such as freedom and courage, is in the main a more modern one, aside from a few notable exceptions. Wolves therefore hold the somewhat unusual position of being symbolic of very different, even opposite characteristics, depending on your point of view. They are noble to some, but they are the most savage of beasts to others. They are callous, killing without measure, and represent voracious instincts, and yet, in the (possibly never proven) image of the pack rearing a feral child, they represent maternity and/or fraternity. It is this last image, of the child like Mowgli, which persists in fascinating us, something even more remarkable if it is indeed untrue. What is its power, why do we find this idea so appealing?

That is the question lying underneath the character of Mouse in my book *The Dark Horse*, who is found living with wolves on a mountainside and ‘rescued’ to live with a human community where, despite her and everyone else’s efforts, she is never entirely happy. Mouse communicates with animals, in a way no one understands – and is regarded with awe and suspicion as a result. It is also the question underlying the feral child, Amara, in Jill Paton

Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels*.⁴⁸ Amara, it is believed, can prove (or disprove) the existence of God by seeing whether, once she develops language, she has innate knowledge of the divine.

What both these books are asking is this: what have we lost? What did we once know that we no longer know? Who were we once, that we can no longer be? In the opening lines of *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud put it well:

It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement – that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life.⁴⁹

Freud's argument in this famous book concerns the feeling of unease we find at being in the world – always seeking something, something largely unspoken and never found. Freud puts his finger on the source of this longing, arguing that in infancy, before the separation of the ego from the surrounding world, we are bathed in a sense of oneness that we will never be able to restore:

originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.⁵⁰

Is this what the wolf represents to us? The 'world-as-ego'? Not directly, perhaps, but through what we perceive that it has which we do not. We look at the apparently easy way in which animals operate in the wild, and it serves only to make us wonder why life is so complex to us. The wolf 'knows how' to be a wolf, while we humans all too frequently find life a struggle. As Freud argues, we are consequently motivated to fill what has been lost in us, but, without knowing what that thing is, blindly seek to fill it with money, success, fame and so on.

We consider animals in general and the wolf in particular, with stories of poor children being protected by beasts that are apparently savage and wild, and it reminds us of our lost state, of some Rousseauvian noble savage (who may never have existed), and deep down we never sense that what we have lost is simply this: a sense of complete belonging.⁵¹ It was this that Rudyard Kipling caught exactly in the poem that appears in *The Second Jungle Book*, 'The Law of the Jungle', which begins:

Now this is the Law of the Jungle – as old and as true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it
must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back –
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the
Pack.⁵²

There seems to be a close relation between wolves and lies. This may be due to their stealth and skill in predation, a trait intensified over time through our telling of fairy tales and horror stories of all kinds. It may have been reinforced by connotations of sexual predation, and accompanying deceit. Yet ultimately, perhaps the most significant lie we tell about wolves is this one – that they have a secret which can connect us to a truer version of ourselves – and this lie is a powerful one, very easily swallowed, simply because we want it to be true.

Notes

- 1 Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*, p. 344.
- 2 As related by Jonathan Gottschall, in *The Storytelling Animal*, p. 51.
- 3 Perry, *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop*. Perry's is the accepted categorisation system for the stories known as Aesop's fables. Numbers given are approximate, as stories and versions of stories overlap and their separation is debatable at times.
- 4 Perry Index 155.
- 5 Perry Index 210; Perry Index 478.
- 6 Matthew 7:15, King James Version. See Garry Marvin, Chapter 2 below.
- 7 Silva and Tehrani, 'Comparative Phylogenetic Analyses'. Devised by Antti Aarne, and with successive revisions by Stith Thompson and Hans-Jörg Uther, the ATU index classifies folktales by grouping together those with shared formal properties; for a broad account, see Cara Giaimo, 'The ATU Fable Index'.
- 8 Tehrani, 'The Phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood'.
- 9 Howell, 'Wolves Do Not Kill For Sport'; 'Why Don't Wolves Eat All That They Kill?'.
- 10 *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. by Kovacs, p. 53.
- 11 'lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom qualis sit non novit' (Plautus, *Asinaria*, trans. by Henderson, p. 52, line 495).
- 12 Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, pp. 120, 139.
- 13 Wollert, 'Wolves in Native American Culture'.
- 14 Mech and Boitani, *Wolves*, p. 448.
- 15 Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, p. 320.
- 16 Blake, *Dances with Wolves* (1988); London, *White Fang* (1906); McCarthy, *The Crossing* (1994).
- 17 Burgess, *The Cry of the Wolf* (1990); Sedgwick, *The Dark Horse* (2002).
- 18 The song 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' (by Frank Churchill and Ann Ronell) appears in Disney's *The Three Little Pigs* (1933).
- 19 'It bursts out you in almost every film theatre; the radio hurls it in your direction; try to escape from it by adjourning to a speakeasy and some unfortunate alcoholic will begin to sing it at you' (Richard Watts Jr, New York Herald Tribune film critic, quoted in Gabler, *Walt Disney*, p. 183).

- 20 Gabler, p. 185.
- 21 Krasniewicz, *Walt Disney*, p. 63.
- 22 See, for example, Medoff, 'Was Walt Disney Antisemitic?'
- 23 Cocks, *The Wolf at the Door*, pp. 33–9.
- 24 'Room 237'.
- 25 Cocks, p. 38.
- 26 Segal, 'It's Back'.
- 27 'This Is Uncanny'.
- 28 Arnds, *Lycanthropy in German Literature*, pp. 122–50.
- 29 Waite, *Hitler*, pp. 163–5. See Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis'.
- 30 The original saying is thought to have been 'keep the wolf from the gate' and dates from at least 1470, appearing in Hardyng, *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, ed. by Ellis, p. 181.
- 31 *Blitz Wolf* (1942).
- 32 Cocks, p. 40.
- 33 Defonseca, *Misha*.
- 34 Bhattacharjee, 'A Pack of ...?'
- 35 Shields, 'Adopted by Wolves?'
- 36 Kosinski, *The Painted Bird*; Wilkomirski, *Fragments*; Messenger, *Hannah*; Rosenblat, *Angel at the Fence*.
- 37 Wiesel, *Night*; Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time*, p. viii.
- 38 'Misha Defonseca: tricher avec les loups'.
- 39 Aroles, 'L'énigme des enfants loups', *Loup.org*.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 Aroles, *Marie-Angélique*.
- 42 Neary, "'Dog Boy'"; Osborn, 'Siberian Boy'.
- 43 See Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys*.
- 44 Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*.
- 45 'Save Western Wildlife'; 'Save Western Wildlife Is a Terrorist Organization'.
- 46 Le Dauphiné Libéré, 'Franck Michel explique pourquoi il a tué le loup'.
- 47 Goldenberg, 'Montana and Idaho'.
- 48 Walsh, *Knowledge of Angels*.
- 49 Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, p. 23.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 51 Sam George grapples with the concept of the 'state of nature' and its relationship to wolf children and fictionalised accounts such as Kipling's in Chapter 3 below.
- 52 Kipling, 'The Law of the Jungle', in *The Second Jungle Book*, in *The Jungle Books*, ed. by Robson, lines 1–4.