

Update on Werewolves
By Margaret Atwood

So far, you have read a variety of werewolf and talking wolf articles and stories with three common features: 1) the wolf as a symbol of aggression and power; 2) the idea of lycanthropy as a curse or disease; and 3) the wolf as a symbol of untamed sexuality.

So far, all have treated these three things as bad things, as objects of concern or fear.

Margaret Atwood's "Update on Werewolves" has a different point of view, considering at least the possibility that these three dimensions of wolves and werewolves may be positive (from a certain point of view).

DIRECTIONS: Read Margaret Atwood's "Update on Werewolves" and answer the following question in paragraph form.

The poem suggests that women may have a different point of view about wolves and werewolves than men. Choose ONE of the three common features of talking wolf or werewolf stories (1) the wolf as a symbol of aggression and power; 2) the idea of lycanthropy as a curse or disease; and 3) the wolf as a symbol of untamed sexuality) and write a paragraph that explains how the poem argues that it is, in fact, a good thing. Use text evidence in support of claim (quotation), and make sure that your explanation addresses how the point of view that Atwood adopts is specific to women.

Example paragraph (using Angela Carter's "The Werewolf"):

This paragraph does the opposite of the task that you will be completing, arguing that one of the three werewolf story features is a bad thing.

The plot of Angela Carter's "The Werewolf" assumes that the wolf is a symbol of aggression and power. In the logic of the story, this is a bad thing. For example, the grandmother is set up as frail and "sick," suggesting a normal state that requires the care of the younger generation. This is why the mother sends the girl to take care of her. However, in wolf form the grandmother is "huge" with "running, grizzled chops"-- defined by the potential "fright" that she inspires (2). The transformation, then, is one from comparative weakness to comparative power-- an aggressive strength that compels her to attack even her own granddaughter. That this is unacceptable to the community is obvious, since the community ultimately judges the grandmother to be a witch and kills her, with the implication that part of this rejection is due to her gender. Just like the story sets up a suspicion of prosperous older women in the catalog of superstitions that Carter describes before the main plot of the story begins (the mountain people suspecting that they may have some dangerous powers over the natural world), the grandmother is symbolically shunned for displaying a power and aggression usually associated with the idea of maleness. In other words, the association of aggression and power (symbolized by the strength and terror of a wolf) with women is a suspicious one for this community, imagined there as a kind of evil magic that must be rejected. Read metaphorically, then, female power is subject to increased scrutiny in this setting, seen as an evil transformation that one must guard against.

claim: this is what you are going to prove; it should be one to two sentences

set-up and evidence: some of it is paraphrase and context; some of it is quotation; this should be one to three sentences

explanation: this explains why your evidence proves that your claim is right; this should be more than two sentences