

This work depicts the animalistic tendencies of human nature. I looked at literary and cultural instances where animals were personifications of concepts or psychological theories, such as Freud's "id" or Jung's "Shadow Self." In my attempt to consider what separates us from animals and the driving forces behind our selfish and instinctually driven tendencies, I began to examine man's violent nature. More specifically, I considered this violent nature through the lens of whimsical fables.

I chose to paint with watercolor to create an image that is both delicate and macabre; the medium itself expresses the duality of my topic. I am not interested in whether the violent selfishness of human nature is "evil" or "good." Humans, like animals, commit acts of violence that is inherent to our existence. Morality is often posed by the naturalist fallacy which questions whether something is good simply because it is in our nature. As someone who believes that morality is subjective, I want to show the complexities of this topic—to make the viewer question the inherent violence of humans.

My hope is that the viewer will recognize the beauty of the work while simultaneously feeling disturbed.

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Once upon a time there was a vast dark forest that seemed. In the forest, there were two villages. On the east side of the forest was the village of Skoll¹, and on the west side of the forest was the village of Mondesser.

In the village of Skoll they spent their nights singing songs of fallen heroes and drinking sweet mead. They lit bright fires to fend away the darkness because they never saw the sun with human eyes, for when the dawn broke and the sky was streaked with clouds the color of spring strawberries, their bodies were transformed into wolves, and the joy of music and finery turned into the joy of blood. In the village of Mondesser the people stitched colorful threads into their clothing and danced in their village, scattered with golden beams of sun, but when the moon rose in the sky the villagers of Mondesser shed their human skin in favor of a wolf's soft fur. In the day, the wolves of Skoll stalked the villagers of Mondesser and feast on their flesh, and when the moon shone in the sky, the wolves of Mondesser would hunt the villagers of Skoll. So it was in the dark forest.

The sun rose one morning as it did every morning and the people of Skoll rose with it, wearing new skins of fur and new teeth that were bared in hungry grimaces. Through the forest they went, black claws digging into the rich earth as their delicate noses took in the vibrant green smell of the morning dew and sun soaked leaves. They ran throughout the day until they smelled the metal tang of blood, and they followed the smell until their ears picked up the warbling sound of a child's voice. Breath sped in hungry throats as the pack flew towards their prey—the anticipation of the soft taste of flesh making their tongues loll and mouths water. Suddenly through the trees they saw a child playing in the cold clear stream—a child of Mondesser that strayed too far from the village. The pack fell on it quickly, the child hardly had time to scream before it was being devoured, entrails and blood staining thick fur and white fangs.²

After eating, the wolves rested, licking blood from their fur and bathing in patches of sun. A young male who was known as Sylvester in a human skin, started walking up the stream, passed where the water was clouded with blood. Sylvester had not been old enough to hunt for long, and though he reveled in his wolf body, he had a restlessness and curiosity that the other villagers were wary of. The pack had to be unified to survive.³

Sylvester followed the stream as it turned into the undergrowth, darker towards the heart of the forest, but still it ran bright and clear over Sylvester's paws. Suddenly through the undergrowth he heard a beautiful voice. It was unlike the wild free song that he and his family sang when the bloodlust was satiated—this song was high and light and made by a human voice. Sylvester immersed into a clearing, purple with foxglove, and sitting among the wildflowers by the stream was a beautiful girl.

The girl had long fair hair and eyes the color of the emerald moss. Her dress was embroidered with birds and trees in the style of the people of Mondesser. Her voice lilted through the green air and wove through beams of sunlight spilling onto the flowers and stream and girl. Transfixed by the sight of her beauty, Sylvester's bloodlust became a different type of yearning. For the first time you wished that he was human so that he could feel her soft skin with his hands instead of sharp canines. Slowly, Sylvester crept towards the girl, keeping to the

¹ The name "Skoll" is referencing one of the two wolves that chase the sun and moon in Norse mythology

² Robin Fox outlines the sequence of violence in a predator prey relationship in a paper titled "The Human Nature of Violence." In the predator prey scenario the sequence is: 1. Arousal, 2. Stalk, 3. Attack, and 4. Kill.

³ It is common for young males in a wolf pack to break off and start a pack of their own pack. However, if food is scarce or the conditions are dangerous, much larger packs will form and the young wolves will tend to stay. This can be seen in more northern areas where wolf packs are significantly larger than in moderate climates.

shadows of the underbrush. He settled himself down under a thick blackberry bush, and let the girl's song wash over him. The shadows grew longer and the sun sank below the trees, but still the girl sat, singing to herself and braiding necklaces of foxglove.

After the sky turned from blue, to orange to pink, Sylvester felt himself change as the first stars could be seen in the darkening sky. His long black claws receded into his fingers, his teeth became blunt and square again, his fur fell off leaving pale pink skin and the hair on his head. In the clearing, the girl was also changing. She arched her back as white fur covered her flesh and she crawled out of her dress. Her bones and muscle changed to become wolf, her face—once like delicate porcelain, elongated into a wolf snout with sharp strong teeth and a lolling pink tongue.

Suddenly, Sylvester's senses were dampened. His wolf nose was gone, and his ears were round and useless. The white wolf in the clearing however raised her snout to sniff the air. She stared right at Sylvester's exposed human body and licked her lips. In her green eyes Sylvester saw the hunger that he himself had felt only moments ago when he wore his fur and sharp teeth. How quickly did this creature change! Only seconds before she was a beautiful human girl and now she was a beast thirsting for his blood. How could something so pure be a creature made of animalistic hunger and claws and teeth?⁴

The wolf started towards him, slowly at first, ears trained forward and eyes locked on his own. Sylvester ran. The sharp rocks of the stream bit into his bare feet as he splashes through it, up the bank, and onto the soft pine needles. He heard the white wolf behind him, her four strong legs faster than his soft human ones. She would catch him and he would die be her jaws.

Without warning, a hand grabbed Sylvester and pulled him behind a tree. "Climb!" shrieked a voice in his ear. He recognized the voice as he realized that the tree had low branches that he could quickly hoist himself up. The white wolf snapped at his heels as he scrambled upwards, he could feel her hot hungry breath on his bare skin. When she saw that he was out of range of her teeth she looked at him one more time, and turned away into the shadows of the night.

Sylvester caught his breath and turned towards his savior sitting next to him in the tree. It was his friend from his village, a girl named Ruby with dark red hair and eyes that were always the amber yellow of her wolf form.

"What were you thinking!?" Ruby exclaimed, "Why didn't you run back east with the rest of the village? I went looking for you when they left. You know what happens in the forest at night." He knew she was right. When the sun went down the forest became a dangerous place where the wolves of Mondesser hid in the shadows—waiting to sink their teeth into any human that walked beneath the tree branches that blotted out the stars.

"I saw this girl." Sylvester told her, "She was beautiful, and she was singing a lovely song. But then she changed."

"Of course she changed." Red said, eyes narrowing, "And when she changed she was hungry. What were you expecting?"

"I don't know... But she was so perfect as a human. I wish she would stay that way forever."

⁴ In fairy tales beauty is often equated with virtue and "womanly qualities" that are desirable for a marriage like industriousness, passivity, etc. (Nanda). I gave the girl these qualities to show the dualities of human nature. That these "womanly qualities" are a façade, and that humanity can appear pure and good, but the drive under that façade is animalistic and savage.

“She is wolf as much as she is human. It is her nature.” Ruby said.⁵

They stayed in the tree until the sun rose again and their fur returned. Then they ran back through the forest with the leaves whispering around them and the honey colored afternoon sweetening the forest air. But even as Sylvester reveled in the strength of his muscles and the feeling of the earth against his paws, his mind wandered back to the beautiful girl by the stream.

Later that night when Sylvester and Ruby were sitting by the fire safely in Skoll he turned to his friend. “I wish that no one would turn into a wolf.⁶ It makes us do heinous acts—we are really no different from each other and yet we kill our sister village for meat. That is *evil* and we should be civilized and work together!”

“This is so you can be with that girl you saw in the forest isn’t it.” Ruby looked up, the dancing flames reflecting in her golden wolf eyes. It made her human face look wild and strange. “How is our life evil if it is our nature? We have hunger and we satisfy our hunger. That girl in the forest—you don’t even know her, Sylvester. Chances are you’ll be staining your fur with her blood or her yours.”

“But what if I can change it all? I’ve heard talk about a witch deep in the forest—”

“Don’t go into the forest, Sylvester.” Ruby held his gaze firmly, “Nothing good can come of this.”

But Sylvester’s mind could get no rest, and throughout the night he stayed awake thinking about the beautiful girl weaving crowns of foxglove. He was haunted by her delicate innocence, her soft clear voice, but what kept him awake was her transformation. She went from the most pure and holy creature, to one that thirsted for blood. This seemed wrong—an abomination. He wanted to free her from her own bloodlust.

By the light of the day Sylvester followed the stream again into the heart of the forest. He went deeper than he had ever gone before, where the trees grew so densely and close together that although it was day, under their branches it was almost like nighttime. Then the stream turned the color of blood and his nose began to smell a strange scent, sweet and rotten. Then he saw the Witch of the Forest.⁷

⁵ I want to dwell on the question of whether something is moral because it is inherent by nature—the naturalistic fallacy. Ruby is of the opinion that the urges that come with being wolf is right because she feels those urges. Sylvester is of the opinion that there is a right and a wrong that is universal and separate from his own desires. There is no right answer to this fallacy, as it is my belief that morality is not universal and therefore subjective.

⁶The state of being wolf is of course not only about being wolf. In Joseph Campbell’s “the Hero’s Journey” he outlines the seven archetypes. Number 5 is the Shapeshifter who’s mask “misleads the Hero by hiding a character’s intentions and loyalties.” The mask of the wolf prevents Sylvester from seeing these violent and animalistic qualities in human nature. Basically the wolf personifies something that is not only inherently natural to wolves, but is inherent to humans as well. This personification is used in many fables and stories. For example the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood can represent sexuality, predatory men, and the risk of strangers (Starling). The wolf form of a werewolf symbolizes a hidden violence and evil that is hidden and/or repressed. Furthermore, the fact that the transformation takes place at night is a symbolic darkness and separation from the light of the sun which represents clarity and spiritual warmth. The people in my story, however, do not all turn into wolves at night, because I wanted to highlight the fact that the violence/evil is not a product of dark spirituality, but instead a natural occurrence.

⁷ Historically, witches are often women who practice magic. Usually they are demonized, and physically are made to look undesirable, this can be seen in many fairy tales, like for example, the hag in Hansel and Gretel. Sometimes they are falsely beautiful like the witch step-mother in Snow White. Witches can also be prophetic, like the weird sisters in Macbeth, and like the witch in this story (Bergman). However the Witch of the Forest

The Witch was neither wolf or human. She was green leaves and dark shadow, he thought he recognized her but the second he thought it, he couldn't remember her face. The Witch turned to him and said in a voice that was the voice of all the creatures of the forest, "Why did you seek me out, child?"

Sylvester found his snout became human lips and he knelt before the Witch on bare knees. "I want the bloodshed to stop. I want us to live in harmony. You are the only one powerful enough to change the way of the forest and stop the evil. Make us live in peace as humans."

The Witch let out a sigh like the wind in the branches. "You seek change, but the forest is a circle and you will come back to every point eventually. Wolf and humans are one side of the same stone, and if the stone sits with the human face towards the sun, the nature of it is still unchanged."⁸

"Whatever," Sylvester said, getting to his feet, "Can you stop us from turning into wolves?"

"Very well human child," said the Forest Witch, "But there is a beast in you whether or not you wear fur. Be sure that you want this."

"I do." Sylvester said. And with that, the darkness of the Forest Witch enveloped him and he fell into a deep sleep.

When Sylvester awoke he was surprised to find a thick covering of leaves on him. He stood up and started down the stream. To his surprise, the rusty color of the water only darkened as he walked towards his village. He walked into Skoll and looked around. Sure enough it was daylight and the villagers were human. However something was wrong... there was a haunted look in his peoples' eyes and they were dirty and unkempt. The houses were dilapidated and some of them were burnt down altogether.

"Sylvester!" Ruby grabbed his arm. Her hair was tangled and there was a wild look in her golden eyes. "Where have you been?! It's been a year! Did you do this to us?!"

"It's been a year?" Sylvester looked around at the wild faces, at his friend angry and although human, still animal. "What happened?"

Ruby's eyes narrowed. "You left us a year ago and that night no wolves from Mondesser tried to hunt us. We celebrated, but the next day we didn't become wolves either." She paused and her eyes darkened, "But we were still hungry, Sylvester, and even when everything changes, nothing changes at all. The same fights are fought and we still needed to feed our hunger—"

"What are you saying!? I was asleep for a year? What hunger do you mean?" Sylvester tried to calm the fluttering of his panicked heart. Then he remembered the girl in the forest. The girl who became a white wolf with green eyes. She was no longer a beast; they could be humans together! "I need to go!" Sylvester turned and ran into the forest. "Wait!" Ruby called behind him, "It's not safe!"

is more a representation of nature itself. Man can think that nature is doing his bidding but the same cycles repeat themselves over and over again.

⁸ The idea of an unknown/hidden self can be seen in many literary and psychological cases. Jung wrote about the "shadow self" which is the unknown aspect of someone's personality. This is often darker, more based in desire and not connected to anything moral. The Tarot card "The Moon" can be a representation of this, and on the face of the card there is a wolf and a dog howling at the moon. Freud talks about the "Id" which is the raw human selfishness and gratification which is kept in check by the "Ego," our more rational side, and the "Super Ego," which is our higher morality. The darker "shadowed" side of human nature is often concealed, and yet it drives our actions which are filtered through our human rationalization and theoretically our higher morality.

But Sylvester ran east towards Mondesser. He was surprised by how dull the day was. Where the air had once been alive with smells and sounds it was heavy and unresponsive—a world closed off. But now I can be with the girl who was a white wolf, and Ruby will see that love can satisfy all hungers.

Sylvester came to the stream and stepped over it. It was still as red as blood. Suddenly he heard singing, a voice he recognized. He followed the stream of blood to the clearing and there she was. The beautiful girl with pale hair and green eyes. She sat among the foxgloves and as Sylvester stepped out from the stream, his bare feet dripping crimson, she stood, staring him in the eyes. He remembered that gaze. Green as the forest.

She stepped towards him, letting the flower crown slip from her fingers. His breath caught in his throat at her beauty. When she was only a few feet away, he saw something move in the trees behind her. There were people there, the people of Mondesser, and yet their colorfully embroidered clothing were streaked with grime and blood. The girl's green eyes were still trained on him. Something was wrong. This felt like a hunt.

But before Sylvester could run, she was on him. In a flash, her blunt human teeth ripped into his throat. He finally felt her soft skin with his human hands, but others from her village were there too, tearing at his body with crude tools and teeth, and he was choking on his own blood. But when he looked into her green eyes, there was no wolf there, just hunger—as pure and beautiful as her human form.⁹

⁹ My personal opinion is that humans are not inherently evil. Again, I think that evil is subjective, and because it is constructed by society, society is not “evil.” That being said, man is in essence an animal and is driven by the same primal forces. Animals hunt, kill, and eat other animals. They will even hunt and cannibalize their own species sometimes, observation of chimps showed that they would behave in a predatory way towards other chimps of a different community and would even eat the other chimps (Fox). However, cannibalism isn't the point. Predatory behavior among humans can often come in the form of stalking and rape, and in a larger sense, capitalism has allowed to create predatory corporations and monopolies. It is human nature to take advantage of what we can, and to create superficial divides between our societies so that we don't have to humanize the people we are taking advantage of.

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