*"You love life because life's all there is:"*

Love and Horror in *The Last Werewolf*

Somewhere in the middle of Nebraska, in hiding and on the run, Jake and Tallula, the last werewolves on Earth, are discussing the existence of God. Neither really believes He exists, but neither can shake the moral framework within which they grew up. "It's not belief," says Tallula Demetriou, a recently-"Turned" young werewolf of nine months to the veteran Jake Marlowe. "The educated me knows hell's nothing, a fiction I happened to inherit. The other me knows I'm going there. There must be a dozen *me*s [sic] these days, taking turns looking the other way" (Duncan 241). Jake and Tallula struggle to sort through all the different aspects of themselves discordantly clambering for space within them, with Tallula trying to make room for the little girl she used to be and the monster she is now. Jake, 167 years after being Turned into a werewolf, is ready to give himself up for extermination rather than continue to kill every full moon -- until he meets Tallula. Meeting one another allows them to accept the horrors they must commit to survive and to bear the monstrosities within themselves. Loving another like creature allows them to capitulate to their primal needs, achieving a unity of self by eschewing morality as irrelevant, and allows them to choose Life.

*The Last Werewolf*, a 2011 novel by British author Glen Duncan, is about trying to contain our contradictions and make peace with them, the way our knowledge of narratives and genre tropes frames our understanding of our lives, Romantic-era poetry, morality, but most importantly, why we choose to live, no matter the costs. Written in the style of a memoir, the book reads at turns as spy-novel, philosophical treatise, grisly horror and paranormal romance depending upon the protagonist's mood and circumstance. The protagonist himself, Jake, is an exception among werewolves, not

just the last but possibly the only one who "still can't fucking shut up" (Duncan 144). He and Jacqueline Delon, a woman with a vested interest in the Occult, discuss whether it's this quality above all others that tortures him so. She believes his memoir is confession, testimony, bearing witness to himself. "Without language there's no morality," she tells him, as "what is the compulsion to tell the truth if not a moral compulsion?" (Duncan 144-45). Other werewolves become more or less mute over the years, even while human, giving way completely to the *wulf* within them. Jake cannot help but cling to civilization, writing at length about every hotel suite he stays in, every bottle of liquor he drinks. At one point he notes that "The point of civilization is so that one can check into a quality hotel" (Duncan 26). Jake hates being a monster and wants desperately to be good, trying abstinence, trying philanthropy, keeping himself for 167 years from loving anyone ever again in order to protect them from himself. He fiercely holds onto the human aspects of himself, which reject the *wulf* in its bloodthirsty primal need.

Jake holds onto civilization as a way to hold onto his humanity, but the paragon of civilization in *The Last Werewolf* is not human at all, but werewolves' sworn supernatural enemy, vampires. Vampires pride themselves on having literature, culture, even a governing body that bankrolls the Catholic Church and to the World Organisation for the Control of Occult Phenomena (WOCOP), the very organization hunting werewolves to extinction. They look down on werewolves because, as Jake notes, "*Werewolves get to have sex and [vampires] don't"* (Duncan 29). Vampires, no matter how civilized and lofty, are dead (or more specifically, undead), lacking motivation and desire, whereas werewolves are very much alive, controlled by extreme urges towards life, like having as much sex as possible, the most base and primal of desires; to Hunt as a predator must; and to eat live humans, taking their souls inside of

them in an ad hoc cacophony of an afterlife within themselves, thereby literally obtaining more life. Vampires, too, kill to survive, which aligns civilization not with morality, as Jake seems to believe, but with language, structure, and above all, self-control. Vampires represent complete self-control, whereas werewolves exemplify our most primal urges -- the messiness of being alive, in all its mistakes and daily devastations but also in its delicious sensuous delights and triumphs.

It is this loss of control that Jake and Tallula struggle with upon their Turning. The Hunger for a live human victim that accompanies the Curse -- always capitalized in the old-fashioned sense of awe -- is likened to addiction, and abstaining to severe withdrawal. Worse still than the loss of control for the werewolves is their ability to accept what they need to do: “The first horror is there’s horror. The second is you accommodate it” (Duncan 191). Jake, confronted every full moon by the pleasure he feels in killing and eating, cannot reconcile it with the romantic, thoughtful person he knows himself to be. Famed horror novelist Stephen King discusses this duality in his short essay “Why We Crave Horror Movies,” writing that we go see horror movies in order to relieve the inherent insanity in all of us, to indulge in these dark urges in a safe and contained way, likening it to “lifting a trap door in the civilized forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath” (King 3). We cannot deny the depravity we each have within us, no matter how hard we try. Repression always winds up spilling out what we hoped to keep under wraps, like, as King illustrates, the alligators that we must feed in order to keep them relegated to the basement (King 4).

The last werewolf is ready to give up finding more room inside of himself for horrors when he meets his first she-wolf, Tallula. Jake intellectualizes that existence is

meaningless, that there is no God, but cannot help but speak in religious terms upon meeting her. Jake rhapsodically writes of their first night together: “There was no performance, no pornography, just complete conversion to the religion of each other, that erotic equalisation that mocks distinction between the sacred and the profane, that at a stroke anarchises the body’s moral world” (Duncan 210). Their connection is immediate and concrete for both of them. He writes that the “courtesy of shared specieshood” had made it so “It wasn’t a choice. I was for her, she for me. *Wulf* married us, blessed us, wrapped his arms around us like a stinky whisky-priest” (Duncan 218). Being mated in this way that places the *wulf* at the forefront of their relationship allows both Jake and Tallula to stop moralizing and judging themselves so harshly. Jake calls himself a werewolf but firmly holds the distinction between *wulf* and *wer*, thinking of himself as human for all but the full moon. Being with Tallula lets him embrace fully his *wulf* and let go a little of his *wer*. He even embraces the taboo nature of being mated to a monster, referencing *Lolita* and writing: “I never had a sister but I imagine if I had fucking her would have felt something like fucking Tallula, sometime in our early twenties, coming to it with relished capitulation after years of dirty adolescent telepathy” (Duncan 208). The references are joyous and full of bright-eyed wonder, not judgment and self-loathing. They understand and see each other, even enjoying real telepathy during the Change, in a way that is unprecedented for both of them. Loving Tallula as *wulf* allows him to love and forgive himself, too, and to experience a wholeness and integrity of personality that has escaped him since his Turning.

This love is an embrace of primal need over civilization, a rejection of society and civilization in favor of the personal. The novel is a manifesto of love over intellect as giving meaning to life. “Falling in love makes the unknown known,” Jake writes about

his first wife, Arabella (Duncan 63). It is this function of love that is the most healing and the most frightening. If one can bear it, Jake writes at last, one should continue to live as long as one can for the possibility of love (Duncan 325). Even though it doesn't last, the vulnerability and understanding Jake experiences with Tallula wipes clean his 167 years of purgatory -- self-inflicted punishment -- without love. It clears the distinctions between *wulf* and *wer,* monster and man, and allows him to exist as he is. For a different sort of horror novel, the symbolic significance of romantic love might seem out of place. For a novel as interested in ambivalence and what it means to be alive and what it takes to continue living as *The Last Werewolf,* the import makes perfect sense, even in a meaningless world. Because the world isn't experienced on a universal level -- it's the mundane, the "local and particular" (Duncan 324) that induce us to bear it, to continue to bear it, no matter the cost.

# Works Cited

Duncan, Glen. *The Last Werewolf*. Vintage, 2011.

King, Stephen. "Why We Crave Horror Movies." *UMASS Lowell*, faculty.uml.edu/bmarshall, PDF. Accessed 5 Nov. 2019.