

Violent, Ugly, and Unlovable: The Werewolf as a Trans Symbol

by
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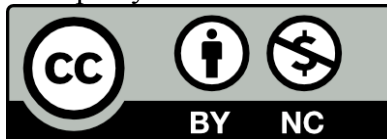
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Thesis Abstract

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Master of Science in Folklore and Public Culture

Title: Violent, Ugly, and Unlovable: The Werewolf as a Trans Symbol

This thesis explores the significance of the trans werewolf figure in the circulation of art on Tumblr in the “#trans werewolf” tag. Based on ethnographic research conducted over a period of fourteen months, it approaches this topic through the lens of the discipline of folklore, primarily queer folklore and digital folklore. Some of the questions the thesis asks are: who is the trans werewolf, and what does trans werewolf art say about its community of creators and those who circulate and consume this art? The first chapter explores the Tumblr social media environment as a site of an established folk group in order to discuss the meaning-making, interpretation, and proliferation of trans werewolf art. The second chapter examines the general trends in contemporary werewolf media with a primary focus on Western media, and situates the werewolf as a symbol of otherness and abjection. It then discusses ways in which the trans werewolf aligns with or rejects that perspective. Based on ethnographic interviews, the third chapter considers the perspectives of trans werewolf artists on Tumblr, which are defined as the active bearers of this folk expression. This thesis finds that the trans werewolf as a figure primarily resonates with young adult, white, transmasculine, neurodivergent people living in Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The figure’s function on Tumblr as it appears in #trans werewolf art seems to primarily represent community-building, self-representation, and protest of anti-trans rhetoric.

Keywords: digital folklore, queer folklore, werewolf, werewolf art, digital art, queer art, Tumblr, social media, trans, transgender, trans folklore

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Introduction

Opening Vignette

An individual — an older teenager or young adult, unaware of their surroundings and ultimately “innocent” — is out late at night. They are taking a walk or going for a jog, and they are doing so in the most “natural” area that they have access to, whether it is a secluded campsite hours from civilization, a forest at the edge of town, a grove of trees in a suburban park, or the lush grass of a school football field (with a convenient arrangement of obstacles nearby to obfuscate whatever may be lurking in the darkness). They are alone. The camera cuts away from the character for only a moment to show the full moon hanging low in the sky. The audience knows what is coming. The character, by the very nature of the story they are in, does not. Shafts of silver moonlight slice through the tree canopy or wash over the grass. A rising wind stirs the foliage. The eerie quiet is punctuated only by the rhythmic steps of the focus character, crushing leaves and twigs underfoot. And then there’s something else — a sound made just out of eyeshot. It doesn’t matter what — a branch that shouldn’t have snapped, a guttural growl, a laboured breath, the jarring of some abandoned equipment. Dread creeps in. The focus character pauses to assess, squinting into the darkness, gingerly calling, “Hello? Is someone there?” for good measure. They receive no answer. At once more confident in their safety and more determined to find the source of the noise, they press on. Their fate is sealed.

A shape explodes out of the darkness. The focus character screams. They stumble backwards, trip, and fall, or they flee and *then* they trip and fall, or they just flee. Their response doesn't matter, because they are no match for the monster that has been hunting them. It springs forward on digitigrade legs and pins our focus character beneath its weight. This is the moment that the audience gets its first proper glimpse of the werewolf. It is a silver-furred man-wolf hybrid, complete with chiseled abs, glinting fangs, and night-black claws that catch the light of the moon just before tearing into its new victim.

Then something happens — an interruption. Distant shouting, a blaring car horn, the howl of another werewolf, a saviour coming to the rescue. The werewolf is distracted. In short order, it is lured away or chased off or killed. Our focus character survives, but not uninjured. With the next full moon, they will find themselves transforming into the beast that they nearly lost their life to. They are a victim-turned-predator. They are a helpless passenger in their own suddenly-foreign body.

The Werewolf: An Introduction

With some degree of variation, this is the “basic” werewolf narrative. Maybe our character of focus is walking with a friend or relative (as is the case in *Ginger Snaps*, a film released in the year 2000), or the werewolf resembles a normal wolf instead of a wolfman (though often larger and with glowing eyes, as in Meyer's *Twilight* series), but nearly always, the story of the werewolf's first exposure is one which begins with victimhood and ends with monstrosity.

Definitions of “werewolf” can be infinitely problematized, but the most surface-level definitions hinge on the idea of human and wolf, with differing or nonexistent implications about exact transformation method, behaviour, or reason for being. For reasons which will be discussed in later chapters, much of werewolf folklore and definition is centered on western contexts, and thus this thesis’ examination of lycanthropy is, when not otherwise specified, rooted in western (largely British and American tradition, between which I have not found much variance). In *The Nature of the Beast: Transformations of the Werewolf from the 1970s to the Twenty-First Century*, Crossen draws upon the following:

Before I proceed any further, the question must be asked: what is a werewolf? This is at first glance a facetious enquiry: a werewolf is a man (or increasingly, a woman) who turns into a wolf. Bourgault Du Coudray in *The Curse of the Werewolf* uses almost this exact wording in defining the werewolf: ‘a werewolf is a human being who changes into a wolf.’ Charlotte F. Otten offers much the same definition, stating that a werewolf is a human being who has being [sic] transformed into a wolf (Crossen 2020).

Beresford, meanwhile, discusses the werewolf as “Someone who, in stories, changes into a wolf at the time of the full moon. In folklore a person who changes for periods of time into a wolf, typically when there is a full moon. In folklore and superstition a human being who has changed into a wolf, or is capable of assuming the form of a wolf, while retaining human intelligence” (Cambridge Dictionary Online via Beresford 2013, 9-10).

The werewolf as a figure is tethered to the idea of duality: humanity and wolfishness sharing one body. Its definition, most straightforwardly, rests upon the idea of this

transformation, and always it goes in the same direction — not wolf to man, but man to wolf. A person may change to a wolf and back again, but they never *start* as a wolf. Additionally, symbolically speaking (if we are to discuss the state of “wolfishness” as a loss of humanity, moral uprightness, or hegemonic belonging rather than a purely physical assumption of the form of a wolf), it is unclear whether a werewolf does ever turn *back* into a human.

In this thesis, “werewolf” will be used to discuss the idea of a human who has the ability to physically transform into a wolf, though the method of transformation may differ between sources. The symbolic emphasis of this transformation may also vary — the werewolf as a victim, the werewolf as a perpetrator, lycanthropy as tragedy and as gift — but this work will continue with the assumption that werewolf narratives involve a physical transformation from human into at least partial wolf by some means, and that the experience of being a werewolf is symbolic of *something*. I will be examining the werewolf figure using a historical basis where needed, but focusing primarily on contemporary media and popular culture interpretations of lycanthropy. This ensures that the modern public perception of werewolves can be thoroughly examined, while still allowing for an exploration of *how* and *why* this figure developed into what it is today.

Werewolves of Western popular culture can be examined aptly through the media landscape. I chose to use fan wikis to gather input on the behaviour of werewolves in popular media. A wiki is “a Web page that users can modify... the writing style is casual... think of it as a moderated list where everyone can be moderator and everything is archived” (Cummings 2008, 5). The website “Fandom” is a hub for wikis based on fictional universes. “For example, fans

who visited the Luke Skywalker page on Wikipedia would only learn about Mark Hamill. They wanted a place where they could learn more about Luke, the character, as if he were a real person (and dig into the rest of the Star Wars Universe while they were at it). If Wikipedia is the ‘encyclopedia,’ then Fandom is the rest of the library - a deep repository of information about every fictional universe.” Its stated goal is “to understand, inform, entertain, and celebrate fans by building the best entertainment and gaming communities, content, services, and experiences” (Fandom, accessed 2025). It is aimed at fans as well as moderated by them, and thus is an effective place to gather information about the topic at hand: the way that recent media has portrayed werewolves, and the way that fans have popularly *interpreted* those portrayals.

For definitions of the werewolf in popular media, I have examined the wiki pages for the film *Ginger Snaps* (2000), the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and the TV series *Teen Wolf*, a supernatural drama airing from 2011-2017 which was adapted from the original 1985 film of the same title. These sources are (by nature of being written, edited, and moderated by fans) at risk of unreliability and inaccuracy, but they are important to consider for many reasons. First, these sources often compile concrete, verifiable information rather than stating opinions. The public moderation allows for a degree of “peer review” which, while not necessarily reliable, allows for correction of most mistakes or purely subjective interpretations. Second, and more to the point: the accuracy of these statements is not a priority in examining the way that fans respond to media portrayals. Differing interpretations of werewolves, whether or not they are intentional and source-accurate, can reveal a general trend in expectations of the werewolf as it currently exists in media. These fan wikis provide a primary source of analysis of the werewolf’s motives and behaviours through the eyes of those consuming the media.

According to fans, werewolves “retain little qualities of the human self. They behave aggressively and do not appear to acknowledge humans they may know” (Ginger Snaps Wiki, accessed 2024). The werewolf “acts on pure instinct. No conscience, predatory and aggressive” (Buffyverse Wiki, accessed 2024). Even in charitable portrayals of the werewolf in contemporary popular culture — media in which the werewolf is either not exclusively antagonistic or in which a werewolf may even fill a protagonist role — “the full moon will cause their abilities and emotions to be so heightened that many lose control of themselves, which can cause death and destruction if not handled properly” (Teen Wolf Wiki, accessed 2024). The figure of the modern werewolf, as seen in these examples, is a force of nature. It represents a loss of control, a succumbing to one’s “primal nature,” and a temporary or permanent forfeiture of humanity. The *physical* shift from human to wolf or wolf-hybrid is fraught with the dangers of undergoing a *mental* and *moral* shift from human to monster. The werewolf is an Other on every level. The newly-turned werewolf character is isolated from other humans as they struggle to cope with this change. This character is also now quite literally “of two minds:” until this is later “balanced” by either controlling or succumbing to one’s monstrous nature, the “inner wolf” is divorced from the human whose body it shares. No being is more discordant than a werewolf which has not come to terms with itself.

To “come to terms” with one’s wolfish nature, in the majority of werewolf narratives both ancient and modern, means one of two things: to either control the wolf or to be controlled by it. What room is there for dialogue with a monster?

Queering the Werewolf

Against the backdrop of these more hegemonic werewolf narratives and depictions, this thesis looks at a significant marginalized werewolf figure today: the trans werewolf figure as depicted in art circulating on the social media platform Tumblr. In this thesis, I examine the trans werewolf — werewolf figures marked *explicitly* by their creators as trans, not simply werewolves *read* as trans by audiences or *implied* to be trans with no confirmation. Some of the questions I ask are: Who is the trans werewolf? What does trans werewolf art say about its community of creators and those who circulate and consume this art?

I define the trans werewolf as a folk art symbol. Wojcik defines folk art as “rooted in collective aesthetics and in the traditions of a particular community or subculture” (Wojcik 2016, 9). As I will explore in this thesis, the trans werewolf is a figure born of the unique cultural expressions, expectations, and experiences of life as trans and disabled/neurodivergent, and as such, its aesthetics hold great significance for this intersectional culture.

As introduced by Ana Julia Cooper (SON Council for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, accessed 2025) and later coined and defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality indicates “the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence” (Crenshaw 1991, 1244). While it was used in Crenshaw’s work to examine the discrimination faced by women of colour based on race and gender, Crenshaw further states that “While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color” (1245). Using Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality and her illustration of other important intersections to consider, I will ultimately use

“intersectionality” in this paper to mean: the various ways in which facets of one’s identity (used most often to discuss *marginalized* facets of identity) intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of one’s experience. My intention in replacing Crenshaw’s use of “violence” with “experience” is not to erase the inherent violence of discrimination and marginalization, but to posit that facets of one’s identity may also play into positive or neutral expressions of selfhood and community.

I have made these distinctions in my definition for multiple reasons. First, as mentioned previously, Crenshaw’s discussion of intersectionality focused on “Black women as the starting point,” and through this focus, “it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (Crenshaw 1989, 140). It is important to emphasize that this concept was used originally to voice the ways that Black women experienced marginalization and oppression. In discussing trans werewolves through this lens, I am bringing a dominantly white community into the conversation, though not without discussion of the ways that people of colour have been systemically excluded from the community I focus on. This is in line with more contemporary definitions of intersectionality which attempt to expand on Crenshaw’s discussions of the term to include further intersections of “some of the major identities that are involved in intersectional analysis while also acknowledging the levels of privilege people may hold” to provide “a more complex way of approaching intersectionality instead of oversimplifying people’s identities” (Bakum and Rufino, accessed 2025; Harris and McLure 2022). I have also broadened the way in which I am considering these factors; while Crenshaw focuses on the violence experienced by the individuals in her discussion, I will instead look at community members’ experiences, both

positive and negative, as a result of holding these identities. This will be greatly beneficial in discussion of the trans werewolf community for many reasons, chief among them the fact that this community's main demographic has not been defined or explored in any other works to my knowledge. As such, the only way to begin speaking about this community is to explore the ways in which its most common identities intersect. In exploring a community *through* the symbol of the trans werewolf, strong correlations can be found among the members of this group, revealing a culture around the symbol. As folklorist Elliot Oring emphasizes, "The study of folklore is at its core an investigation of how people in their everyday lives shape deeply felt values into meaningful forms" (Barbara Kirenblatt-Gimblett 1983 via Elliot Oring 1994, 211). Through the meaningful form of the trans werewolf, we may explore in greater depth the deeply-felt values associated with those surrounding this figure. This being, presented most commonly through art, is a werewolf which is declared transgender by the artists through both written labels and through in-group signals present in the art itself.

The transgender werewolf is a figure that I have seen frequently in spaces with a heavy concentration of individuals from marginalized communities. Those who are most drawn to this art seem to share a number of cultures: transmasculine, neurodivergent, white, and young adult. While these are not the *only* consumers of trans werewolf art, there is significance in this correlation. Those who connect with art of the transgender werewolf (through its creation, circulation, or "liking" on social media) are overwhelmingly not only transgender themselves, but are also commonly neurodivergent and/or otherwise disabled, giving them a unique experience in their intersectionality. The transgender werewolf seems to function not as a direct expression of being transgender, but instead suggests that those who derive meaning from it most

strongly are transgender *and* find themselves separated from hegemonic expectations by at least one additional “degree.” There is a tie which will be explored in later chapters between concepts of monstrosity or lack of humanity and trans (and specifically transmasculine), neurodivergent (with interlocutors having specified autism or anxiety) experiences in western and white-centric spaces such as the social media site Tumblr.

From my research, it seems that werewolves are most often used to represent times of personal turbulence. It can be hard for many to imagine finding comfort in a life where one feels detached from “normal people,” or even from humanity as a whole. Media made for the widest audiences, after all, is meant primarily to address those who exist within the “normal,” and thus the typical werewolf is featured to express how difficult it might be to suddenly become so fundamentally “abnormal.” However, for individuals who are already severed from hegemonic acceptance, the plight of the werewolf may feel less like a thought experiment or a caricature of a usually-symbolic problem, and may instead become a straightforward representation of the self.

In this thesis, I will draw mainly on the disciplines of folklore studies (especially digital folklore and folk art literatures), queer studies, women & gender studies, disability studies, and monster studies. Disability studies, women & gender studies, and queer studies will be utilized to provide background on the concepts of normalcy, othering, power structures, and narrative. It will also be used to explore how the attitudes and behaviours of some marginalized communities may be reflected in the less-studied trans and autistic communities. I will employ monster studies to examine the history and literalization of these struggles — that is, how the

creation of physical monsters has served as a way of expressing or processing internal and cultural factors in the past.

It is difficult to speak at length about the relevant literature involved in this pursuit since, to my knowledge, no literature currently exists specifically about the trans werewolf figure. I have also found a dearth of information about symbolic trans storytelling and narrative traditions. Because of this, I will be using the aforementioned multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to analyze and contextualize the trans werewolf as it appears on Tumblr. One example of this will be Teresa Milbrodt's book "Sexy Like Us: Disability, Humor, and Sexuality." While this work does not discuss the transgender community or werewolves in any capacity, it does provide critical insight on the way that the disabled community navigates power structures in daily life. This examination of ways that a marginalized community is treated, why it presents an issue, and how that community responds can both be used at face value and can be extrapolated to apply to the experiences of the trans community due to both the rate of intersection in identities between trans and disabled individuals and because of a similarity in treatment of different marginalized groups in a broader cultural context.

Another text which will be heavily cited is Minjie Su's "Werewolves in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature." To study the trans werewolf, I believe it will be vital that I know at least some of the history of werewolf studies, which this book compiles very effectively in the scope of at least one culture (Old Norse-Icelandic werewolves), with additional mention of Medieval/Franco-Latin werewolves. Upon familiarizing myself with these works, I will be able to break new ground with this project by drawing a direct connection between the strategies utilized by

marginalized groups (Milbrodt's disability research and the ways in which these navigations of life, storytelling, and social situations are also used by the "trans werewolf community") and by centering the community surrounding the trans werewolf figure as a unique combination of intersectional identities which leads to specific expressions of cultural values. I will define the trans werewolf in relation to the hegemonic werewolf (which I define as the werewolf as it appears in popular media and folklore over time, beginning with the origins of the werewolf and discussing at greater length the film-era portrayals of werewolves). Through this comparison, I will discuss norms and values within the trans community, including the ways in which being trans comes with its own beauty standards (ex. androgyny, certain forms of medical transition) which may not adhere to the same expectations as hegemonic beauty standards, but which can still include many similar values of whiteness, fatphobia, and traditional masculinity/femininity.

Contributions

The field of digital folklore studies is one that has grown as digital spaces have become more central to everyday life. "Whenever and wherever individuals and groups deploy and communicate with digital media, there will be circulations, reimaginings, magnifications, deletions, translations, revisionings, and remakings of a range of cultural representations, experiences, and identities" (Coleman 2020, 488). In an age of online interaction, it becomes vital to look towards digital spaces as sites of interaction. In this thesis, I will contribute to digital folklore research by beginning to catalogue the structures and social expectations of the Tumblr social media platform.

In my review of the literature, Tumblr is a site that has been examined far less frequently than other social media sites, and for good reason: not as many people know about it as a currently-active social site. As Minkel posits in American cultural magazine *Wired*, “the mainstream narrative has declared Tumblr dead for years... Every time I encounter a screenshot of a Tumblr post on another site with the caption ‘hey, remember Tumblr’” I prepare myself for the moment I stumble upon the post on Tumblr itself and learn it was written two weeks ago, not in 2014” (Minkel 2023). Even in a cursory internet search, it becomes apparent that tumblr is an understudied platform compared to sites like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Looking on JSTOR, a popular open source for scholastic journals, there are nearly 28 times more search results for Twitter (with 53,232 results) than Tumblr (with 1,972 results) as a keyword without filters applied. In an Advanced search on JSTOR with a filter applied to only display folkloric journals, only 7 entries included Tumblr, and of these works, none used Tumblr as a *primary* point of investigation, but rather as one of many social media sites or data points. I assert that this disparity in these rates of publication demonstrate that scholarly knowledge surrounding Tumblr’s use and etiquette is lacking.

This stark contrast between the scholarship on these sites makes Tumblr an arguably understudied site of folklore and cultural expression. In this thesis, I will be researching Tumblr through the lens of its contributions to queer folklore through folk art and digital culture. While the focus of my project is on the transgender werewolf figure, the artists, and the audience as they exist in that category, an overview of this site in pursuit of a foundation of understanding for my research will double as a primer for the exploration and explanation of Tumblr in future scholarship.

It may be noted that prior examinations of the queer and trans community seem to center largely on in-person contexts. One important work is David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender*, an ethnography of transgender individuals. Valentine (who identifies himself as a cisgender gay man) problematizes gender identity, sexuality, and community among trans people using the example of a transgender support group he had attended as part of his ethnographic research in New York City. Valentine emphasizes in his research that "FTMs and female-bodied masculine people are elided in the literature on transgender" (Valentine 2007, 24) and that he was unable to speak with many of these individuals or conduct participant observation on the community of people which, in this thesis, I refer to as "transmasculine." As such, this thesis will provide insight into a community that has been noted by prior research as distinctly lacking, as well as providing further exploration of specifically digital communities.

Imagining Transgender also explores trans *spaces*, focusing on in-person support groups and the conversations that happen in and around those groups, rather than delving into cultural meaning-making through media and artistic expression as I aim to do in this thesis. Examination of the folklore of queer American culture in the form of artistic expression more specifically can be found in Joseph Goodwin's *More Man Than You'll Ever Be!: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America*. While the book holds admittedly outdated perspectives (for example, asserting that being gay is "an important urban phenomenon"), it offers important insights on the act of creation in queer communities through creation — namely jokes and storytelling. Goodwin's presentation of queer culture focuses entirely on cisgender gay men using humour and telling either true or at least *plausible* stories. In the time at which this book was written, it is likely that Goodwin would not have had access to more specific niches of the queer community.

Whatever the reason, this literature revealed another gap in scholarly knowledge which I attempt to fill: that of *fantastical* queer storytelling, or storytelling which is not meant to be taken as truth. Through examining not only fictional but indeed *explicitly* fictional narratives, I hope to reveal the symbolic choices made by this facet of the queer community.

In my research, I have found no sources on trans folklore in digital realms. In the study of digital folklore more broadly, the primary topic of study at the moment is on digital interaction as performance. Anthony Buccitelli finds through study of social media sites Facebook, YouTube, forum site FreeRepublic.com, and instant messenger application GoogleTalk, that “while some digital performances show marked similarities to offline performances, they also include performative features either unique to digital environments or that generally occur offline in different generic modes. Thus, digital folklore performances must be studied on their own terms, with a full consideration of the unique contexts in which they are created” (2012, 81). As Andrew Peck writes:

In some respects, social media makes digital folklore look more familiar than ever. The affordances built into social media platforms encourage performances that look informal and everyday while offering significant space to obfuscate backstage behaviors through editing and retakes. The result is that expression online becomes increasingly reminiscent of traditional forms of face-to-face interaction while also hiding its fundamental differences (2020, 6).

This assertion by Peck (and the insights of the rest of the book on topics such as memes and conspiracy theories) provides an important perspective on the ways that social media

functions in settings where interaction "is highly visible not only to other users but also to a variety of institutions, including politicians, journalists, advertisers, and the corporate ownership of the platforms themselves" (2020, 5). However, I argue that my thesis' examination of Tumblr adds nuance to this by focusing on a social media folk group that considers itself largely "unmarketable."

Leah Lowthorp discusses digital folk groups, finding that X (formerly Twitter) "facilitates the creation and/or affirmation of a folk group online that assembles around a hashtag for a period of time and then disperses... While the hashtag-centered folk groups mentioned above form part of larger group identities that persist over time, folk groups are often created and united solely by a hashtag, as we see in the case of #CRISPRfacts" (2018, 483). Tumblr's hashtag functionality works similarly, contributing to a broader understanding of this trend across multiple social media sites. My study contributes to the field of digital folklore by both bringing a less-commonly-researched social media site (Tumblr) into the existing body of literature and by studying specifically the queer community in online spaces.

In the field of folklore, many authors have needed to argue for the legitimacy of their studies as folkloristically significant. Buccitelli does so in "Performance 2.0: Observations toward a Theory of the Digital Performance of Folklore," qualifying the utility of digital folklore as a means of self-expression and as ethnographically sound. In *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*, Trevor Blank calls into question the fact that folklorists had been resistant (at least in 2009, at the time of publication) to the idea of digital

folklore as a legitimate site of study. Contemporary folkloristic research, however, has expanded to include digital folklore as a key avenue for exploring community expression.

Queer folklore, too, has had to vie for legitimacy in the field's history. *More Man Than You'll Ever Be!: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America* acts as an early example of this, as the author qualifies his research into the gay community as “virtually (virtuously?) ignored by folklorists” and argues that “the neglect is no longer justifiable... we have also realized that folklore is found among all groups and all social classes, within every culture and subculture” (Goodwin 1989, xi). Of asexuality, Lisa Gilman asserts that “asexuality and asexual people are given scant attention in queer scholarship in folklore studies and other disciplines; their representations in folklore and the media tend to be either nonexistent or problematic because asexuality is often ridiculed, delegitimized, or pathologized” (2023, 197). Overall, Cory Thorne and Guillermo de los Reyes find that “past folklore practices, such as the ways in which we structure and code our histories and archives, the ways we construct and control knowledge that shapes our perceptions of reality, including the colonial lens that shaped our approaches to fieldwork and imagined objectivity, have contributed to queer erasure” (2023, 23).

This thesis connects digital and queer folklore, as two disciplines that have argued for legitimacy in the larger folkloristic environment, to lend further credence to both by demonstrating folkloristic significance. Broader digital folklore acts as an evolution of the previously-understood constraints of folkloric pursuits of substance. Queer folklore acts as an evolution of the previously-understood constraints of folk groups. In their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* titled “Queer Intersectionalities/Queer

Folkloristics”, Cory Thorne and Guillermo De Los Reyes write that “queer folkloristics is about seeing and revealing such narratives. It is about understanding where and how queerness exists within tradition, and about collecting, exposing, and translating such narratives in partnership with individuals and communities” (23).

In this thesis, I also intend to further problematize queer folklore’s understanding of trans bodies. In “One Percent on the Burn Chart: Gender, Genitals, and Hermaphrodites with Attitude,” Valentine (1997) explores the trans body through terms such as “hermaphrodite,” “intersex,” and “transsexual.” While I have no qualms with members of the trans and intersex communities claiming these terms, I find it important to indicate that intersexuality and transsexuality are gaining a modern understanding as entirely separate experiences. I would also like to posit that there remain contexts in which “transsexual” may be considered inaccurate or inappropriate. As such, I introduce the term exosexuality. I use this term to indicate those who have medically transitioned in a way that leads them to present as having genitalia that is not readable as either traditionally “masculine” or “feminine,” standing as a new sex modality in the “intersex-perisex” binary which currently does not appropriately capture an existence as neither intersex nor traditionally accepted as perisex (non-intersex).

To explore the intersectional nature of a significant portion of the trans werewolf community, we must also examine narrative and storytelling through the lens of disability, as many consumers and creators of trans werewolf art consider themselves disabled and/or neurodivergent (with a majority of those who consider themselves neurodivergent identifying most closely with ADHD, autism, or anxiety). Terese Milbrodt’s (2022) *Sexy Like Us: Disability,*

Humor, and Sexuality is an example or a work of recent folklore which integrates Disability Studies models into the folkloristic perspective.

In the *Journal of American Folklore* quarterly publication from summer 2024, Anand Prahlad posits that “In the most recent period of disability and folklore studies, authors have begun producing works that are more substantially interdisciplinary... These works tend to be by authors who identify as disabled or as caretakers of disabled people; to weave together influences of DS and folklore study; and to challenge the conventional, academic discursive modes of writing...” (2024, 271). Prahlad critiques the separation of terms such as disability, illness, neurodiversity, trauma, and health as separate concepts. I separate disability and neurodivergence from one another only in the interest of utilizing the language of my interlocutors, some of whom would consider themselves neurodivergent but *not* disabled. In this thesis, I will be further engaging contemporary folkloristic and disability studies theories not to address the current issues of the disability studies and folklore field (as this thesis focuses more centrally on the trans experience, since transness and transmasculinity is shared and explicitly portrayed in the artwork while disability/neurodivergence seems to be present, but the specifics are far more dependent on the individual artists and audience members), but to provide an additional example of how disability and intersectionality can be discussed *socially* rather than *medically*. Discussion of disability’s role in the trans werewolf identity may not be as central to this thesis as other facets of identity such as queerness. This is due to a non-standardized understanding of what constitutes disability and how disability manifests differently in members of this community. However, even with less focus on disability than on queerness in this figure, it is important to remain conscious of the fact that the trans werewolf is largely intertwined with disability and neurodiversity.

In discussing storytelling in a folkloric context, we must, of course, turn to folk tales. The book *Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, and Drag* (2014) includes an essay by Pauline Greenhill and Emilie Anderson-Gregoire titled “‘If Thou Woman, Be Now Man!’ ‘The Shift of Sex’ as Transsexual Imagination.” This chapter, penned by Pauline Greenhill and Emilie Anderson-Gregoire, finds a limited number of representation of narratives which may be read as trans in fairy tales. The authors describe the idea of the “transsexual imagination — the textual representation of a bodily change of sex/gender” (2014, 57). They analyze representations of the transsexual imagination through fairy tales, but find few examples of this occurrence, finding it to be localized to ATU 363 (“The Corpse Eater”) and ATU 514 (“The Shift of Sex”), with even “The Corpse Eater” featuring a transformation that is “limited, entirely temporary, and contingent” (57). This leaves only ATU 514 as a site of examination for trans imagination. This tale type, according to Marilena Papachristophorou, “is always about a desire to transgress natural laws, to change the human condition; it is about a woman who, having become other, begins a new life cycle” (Papachristophorou via Greenhill and Anderson-Grégoire 64). This narrative structure strongly mirrors the scenes depicted in art of the trans werewolf, and thus mirror transness in itself: an individual becomes Other (that is to say, realizes they are transgender — represented in the trans werewolf narrative as becoming a werewolf) and begins a new life cycle (living as trans or, in the trans werewolf narrative, living as a werewolf). The trans werewolf figure, largely represented as roughly half-human and half-wolf, is an exemplification of what this “new life cycle” is. I aim to continue the conversation on narratives that may be read as trans through this thesis. While Greenhill and Anderson-Grégoire situate ATU 514 as the most arguably trans tale type due to the *literal* narrative of being trans, this tale type was not made

specifically by or for trans individuals as an expression of the trans experience. This thesis, then, will cover new ground in folklore by discussing a figure that can be identified as *explicitly* trans.

While scholars have discussed representations of the werewolf in contemporary Western cinema, I have found no record of a comprehensive compilation of werewolf representations — lycanthropy is only discussed as representing one feature at a time, or else is vaguely nodded to as “representing otherness.” The werewolf has been discussed as representing femininity (O’Leary-Davidson via Bro et al 2018), disability (Golding via Bro et al 2018), queerness (Phillip A. Bernhardt-House 2008), and “deviant identity” (Forceville 2014). However, while these discussions in the fields of cinema studies and queer studies provide a strong foundation for an understanding of the werewolf, folklorists have not examined the modern werewolf’s symbolic versatility to my knowledge. In this thesis, I aim to expand the folkloric body of knowledge on werewolf symbolism by exploring *why* and *how* the werewolf has been used to represent “deviant identity” in various ways.

Reflexivity

I am approaching this project as someone who is deeply embedded in the community involved. I have been an active user of Tumblr as a primary social media site since 2017. Demographically, I am aligned with the majority of the consumers of trans werewolf content — white, transmasculine, a young adult, and disabled. While I agree with Prahlad’s indication that terms such as “neurodivergent” and “disabled” may benefit from further integration with each other and with the broader concept of “health,” I find it important for the sake of clarity to specify that I am both neurodivergent and physically disabled, and define myself as disabled on

both accounts while a large portion of the larger Tumblr community prefers to define physical disability but *not* neurodivergence as warranting a personal identification with the Disabled community or label. I will be speaking in this thesis about these identities, the ways they intersect, and why they are so prevalent in trans werewolf creators and audiences.

I have also had a lifelong interest in werewolf narratives, and encountered my first trans werewolf art in 2015 on the website Pinterest. While I have never been an active follower of this art, I have been exposed to a considerable amount of it through my time on Tumblr, and have taken an interest in both the amount that I have found *without* actively seeking it and the resonance that it holds for myself and friends who are also white, transmasculine, disabled young adults.

I was familiar with the work of trans werewolf artist pansylair at the beginning of this project, and it was the popularity of this artist's work that drove me to consider the trans werewolf as a viable site of study on the trans Tumblr community. As I delved further into this topic, I found many other patterns shared between members of this culture, and have gained an understanding of the trans werewolf as a meaningful expression of a community that may have been previously considered "too small" to have shared folklore among community members. Through this process, I have also made connections in this community, and consider trans werewolf artist ruddykite in particular a dear friend.

The conclusions in this work are based on the research that I have done through ethnography and interdisciplinary readings and analysis of prior scholarship. As communities are multifaceted and ever-changing, perspectives on the trans werewolf, on Tumblr as a site, and on

the trans community will vary under different lenses, through different approaches, and when viewed by different people. This work is incomplete and contestable, and I would encourage further scholarship to pursue these topics for a more complete understanding of the importance of digital folklore and intersectional community culture.

Methodology

In this project, I have employed a combination of literature review (in order to give context on *how* and *why* the trans werewolf came to be) and digital ethnographic fieldwork.

My ethnographic fieldwork took place on the public social media website Tumblr from the spring of 2024 to the fall of 2025. As defined in *Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork*, this will be “encompassing those research strategies based on direct involvement with the individuals and communities studied. The goal of fieldwork is to try to understand how people experience the world from their perspective—doing and experiencing similar activities in similar spaces with them...” (Gilman and Fenn 2019, 8). I have engaged in this practice in multiple ways: scrolling through the “trans werewolf” category of Tumblr and engaging with the commenting and sharing systems has allowed me to observe the way audience members (non-artists who consume this art) interact with the art, with the artist, and with each other. I have also reached out to 3 trans werewolf artists to interview them in order to gain insight on the creators’ perspectives on the community.

When referring to “the trans werewolf community,” it is to address creators *and* consumers as unified through their mutual interest in and proliferation of the trans werewolf. When referring to “the trans werewolf” as a figure, symbol, or artifact, my definition of this is as

follows: art or discussion of werewolves who are explicitly defined and portrayed as trans. One of my major goals in this thesis is to interrogate the specific physical and symbolic features of the trans werewolf, so while the definition of “trans werewolf” may later reveal itself to occupy more specific niches or to embody certain community trends, the exact nature of this figure’s portrayal as trans, how, and by whom is left purposefully broad. For example, one community trend that I have noticed in my work was that the majority of art pieces featured double-incision mastectomy scars, reflecting the expectations of medical transition and the prevalence of that specific scarring pattern within parts of the trans community. The trans werewolf does not *always* have these scars, and my definition of the trans werewolf is not contingent on the presence of certain features which are hegemonic within the scope of the trans community. Rather, the trans werewolf was identified only by the artists’ identification of their art *as* being a trans werewolf, regardless of physical features or where they fell on the human-hybrid-wolf spectrum.

I chose this website due to its high concentration of openly queer and disabled users, and its resultant (relative) tolerance of these communities by the userbase as a whole. Using Tumblr’s “tagging” organization system, I have explored posts labelled by their creators as “trans werewolf” to ensure that the art I examine is being both presented and interpreted as explicitly featuring the trans werewolf, which will avoid any errant personal interpretation of non-trans or non-werewolf figures as such. I will focus on trans werewolf *art* rather than written posts due to differing intentions between the two (with trans werewolf art often symbolizing one’s own experience of being trans and neurodivergent, while text posts about trans werewolves frequently discuss the werewolf as an outside force and carry sexual connotations). I find that this choice of

platform elevates the potential contributions of my project — not only do I aim to use the symbol of the trans werewolf to illuminate certain features of trans and disabled culture, but I will also be completing this work using a social media website that is “non-standard” as compared to the more commonly-researched Facebook and Twitter. I hope that providing information about Tumblr and the way that it is navigated and approached may both give insight into the platform’s culture as well as *why* it isn’t as well-understood as others. Additionally, through an exploration of the trans werewolf *on* Tumblr, I hope to illuminate the extent to which the platform dynamics of Tumblr help facilitate the specific figure of the trans werewolf. While the trans werewolf exists on other social media sites, its niche on Tumblr becomes part of a larger discussion of Tumblr’s user makeup and community interactions.

Using the art that I find on Tumblr as a guideline, I have conducted interviews with three trans werewolf artists to gain a qualitative understanding of the trans werewolf community from the perspectives of the creators. These artists, profiled further in Chapter 3, are all white, transmasculine young adults (ages 20 - 29) living in Western countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada). All three also at least *suspect* that they are neurodivergent, and maintain active Tumblr accounts where they post art of trans werewolves, among other topics. In my interviews with these artists, I have analyzed responses in order to build a cohesive picture of the trans werewolf and the community that surrounds this symbol.

Chapter 1: Tumblr as a Site of Digital Folklore

In this chapter, I aim to explore the function of the social media site Tumblr in order to establish it as a site of folkloric significance and provide background for how the community functions and why this is the case. After determining broader demographics on Tumblr, I will discuss how it presents itself commercially in comparison to how it is regarded by users. In this discussion, I will utilize digital folklore theory in combination with primary sources from Tumblr users and staff.

What is Tumblr?

Tumblr is a social media application founded in 2007, boasting 613.3 million blogs (user account pages, although this number may be inflated due to the ability of users to manage multiple blogs under a single email address and password) and 8.9 million posts per day (Tumblr, “Press Information,” accessed 2025). While the method used to find this information is not stated, the Tumblr staff page reports that 48% of active users are Gen Z — born between the 1990’s and early 2010’s, and frequently but not conclusively specified as 1997-2012 (Eldridge 2022). Tumblr has cultivated an image as an “alternative” social media website, utilizing the

aesthetics of “outsider-ness” in its advertising. The top of the Tumblr staff page’s “About” section reads as follows:



Tumblr is a website.

Social network? No, it's a mycelial network.

It's wholesome chaos.

It's the gay people in your phone.

It's your angel. It's your devil.

Tumblr is whatever you want it to be.

Oh, and influencers? Don't even go here. This is your space. Every video you find, every quote you reblog, every tag you curate, every waterfall GIF you secretly gaze at in wonder—that's all you. You're the explorer. We're just a map you all keep on making. Welcome home. Welcome to weird. Make it yours.

Image #1: The description seen on Tumblr's "About" page, accessed 2024.

Aside from the explicit text, this message also makes use of demonstrated Tumblr in-jokes and community trends. Phrases like “Tumblr is a website,” “mycelial network,” “wholesome chaos,” “the gay people in your phone, and “your angel”/”devil” draw upon popular user and community text posts, decontextualizing these phrases but remaining recognizable to many Tumblr users and to those who have seen screenshots of Tumblr posts on other social media applications. Straightforward mention of queerness and the phrase “welcome to weird” also capitalize on the idea of Tumblr’s primary culture being divorced from the cultural hegemony as a general concept, but specifically from the patterns reinforced by other western social media apps such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube,

Instagram, or TikTok. This can be seen in the phrase, “Oh, and influencers? Don’t even go here. This is your space.”

As detailed by Influencer Marketing Hub, a Denmark-based advertising service, “An influencer is someone who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of his or her authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with his or her audience... Typically, each influencer is known for a specific niche—be it fashion, travel, gaming, beauty, cooking, fitness, or any other interest area” (Kasumovic 2025)). With this definition in mind, it can be posited that the Tumblr “About” page is suggesting to users that its use as a space comes from a lack of popular users influencing content and advertising products unless the user curates their blog specifically to show this content through “following.”

BigCommerce defines following as an act in which “a user... chooses to see all of another user's posts in their content feed... Twitter, Instagram and Facebook all have a form of news feed that delivers content to their user. The content of news feeds vary by platform, but they consist mainly of the posts, articles and images from other people whom the user has chosen to follow” (Bigcommerce Essentials, accessed 02/05/2025). On Tumblr, this “news feed” is known as a dashboard. On a user’s dashboard, they mainly see the content of the blogs that they follow — however, unlike other social media sites, Tumblr contains far fewer “suggested” (algorithm-based) posts.

Tumblr has introduced algorithmic features in recent years. One of these features presents blogs that are “in your orbit,” allowing users to see “friends of friends,” so to speak (Novak 2018). Another algorithmic feature present on Tumblr involves posts that are “liked by [someone that the user follows].” Third, the “For You page” is an alternate dashboard which “comes from a

mix of posts created or reblogged by blogs the user already follows, and posts from sources (either blogs or topics) the user might not know yet” (Tumblr, “How Tumblr Recommends Content,” accessed 2025). Finally, “based on your likes” provides posts which are judged as similar to those that a user has “liked.” This feature functions by surfacing “posts that are ‘similar’ to those recently liked by the user. Our definition of similarity is based on engagement: two posts are considered similar if they have been engaged with by the same users” (Tumblr, “How Tumblr Recommends Content,” accessed 2025). As one Tumblr user illustrates, the “in your orbit” feature is “hilariously bad because if you like a post for something you don’t normally like or follow (e.g., when I watched a new movie and liked one post about it), you’ll suddenly get a dozen posts about that thing and only that thing” (Phynali 2022). Many users are opposed to algorithmic dictation of their feed, and many guides circulate to show other users how to turn those features off. Given the distaste for algorithms, the “classic” method of curating one’s own experience seems to be generally preferred by a large body of Tumblr users.

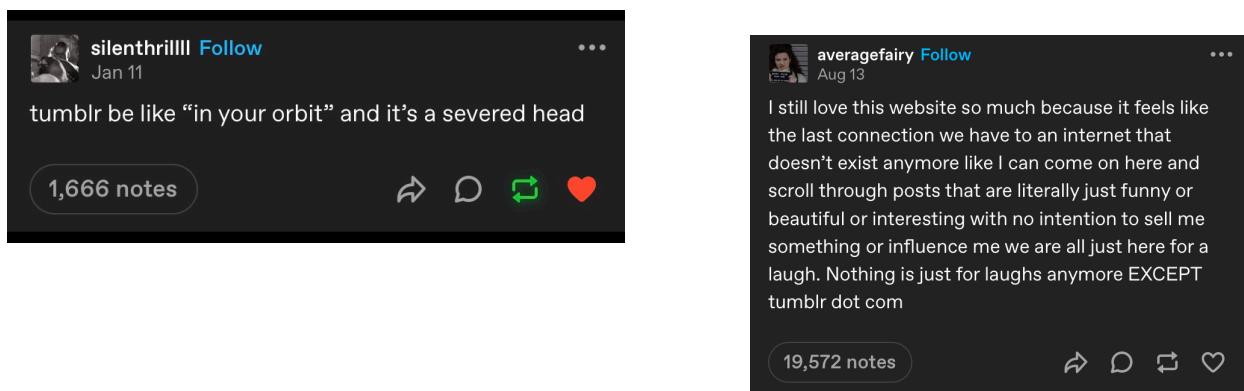


Image #2: Remarks made by Tumblr users concerning the curation of user experience.

Without an algorithm as the primary method of proliferating content, the popularization of posts on Tumblr happens through one of two methods. The first is through “Blaze,” a monetized function that essentially turns one’s post into an “ad” — it is guaranteed to reach a

certain number of blogs, including those that do not follow the user who made the post. This function is often rejected by long-time Tumblr users unless under certain circumstances, such as the post's popularization becoming a joke in itself or for donation-based causes and community support. The Blaze function is, of course, not without its limitations. To Blaze a post, staff must approve the request and process the payment.

The second and more central way that posts become popular on Tumblr is through “reblogging.” Through the reblog mechanism, another user's post becomes visible on one's own page, thereby exposing all of the latter's followers to this post. The followers who enjoy that post may, in turn, reblog it. This creates “webs” which can be visualized as shown below, with the gold node as the original creator of the post:

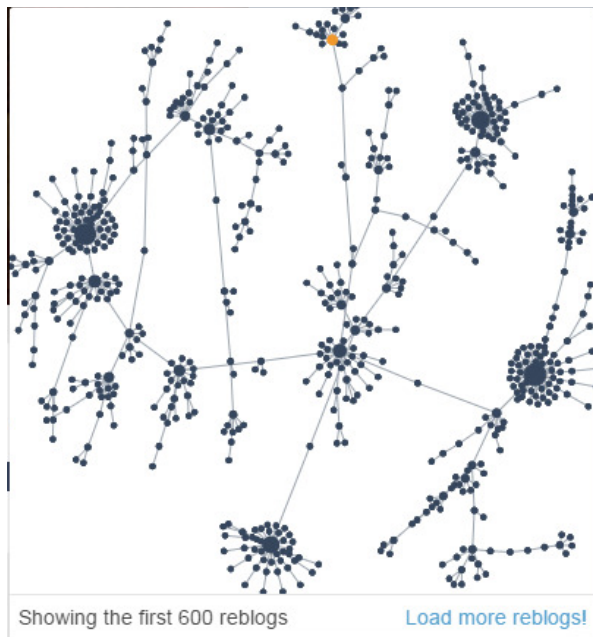


Image #3: Figure of a “reblog web” cataloguing the spread of the post among 600 people.

Through this system, it is fairly easy for posts to become common knowledge among the bulk of active Tumblr users with any overlap, with exceedingly popular posts boasting hundreds of thousands of notes and, on rare occasion, over one million notes. Gimmick blog “A Million

Notes” posts screenshots of posts that have reached or exceeded one million notes for the purpose of, as their bio states, dedicating itself to “that rare and beautiful thing we sometimes see on Tumblr — a post with a million notes” (A Million Notes, accessed 02/21/2025). Gimmick blog 1000000noteclub provides a further example of million-note posts (with the occasional deviation) with exact quantities, sometimes reaching upwards of 3 million notes. Though relatively small when compared to the total blog number of 613.3 million, one must factor in gimmick blogs (which may refuse to like or reblog content that does not fit with their chosen theme), inconsistent algorithm (many users elect to turn algorithmic features off, or simply ignore them in absence of an “off switch”), accounts that are no longer active but which have not been officially deactivated, and the amount of posts made on the site (Tumblr, “Press Information,” accessed 2025), which in combination lead to posts with tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of notes being safely considered “popular” in this context despite being relatively small in comparison to the total amount of Tumblr users.

The nature of reblogging posts and of any given post’s popularization is explained by user phynali in their post which has been optionally titled “Tumblr Tip Sheet for Twitter Refugees.” As an excerpt states:

- posts go around forever on this site and new memes crop up every day, retreat, and then resurge out of the blue randomly. this makes for tumblr-wide in-jokes that circulate for years, like “do you love the color of the sky” and the “color theory children’s hospital” post. if you don’t get these, you can ask and i’m sure tumblr will deliver, but you can also wait around and follow more people and these will turn up eventually.

- your dash is what you make it. your interaction is what you make it. you have control, you are not at the mercy of algorithms and advertisers if you don’t want to be. paying for ad-free browsing is an option. they even give you the option to toggle your ad settings *within* ad-free browsing. seriously - you. have. the. control.

Image #4: Excerpt of a post made by user phynali in 2022, titled “Tumblr Tip Sheet for Twitter Refugees”

This user's explanations reinforce both the idea of popular in-jokes as being considered "Tumblr-wide" as well as the nature of reblogging. Additionally, this explanation reinforces the idea of algorithm and advertising as a secondary force on Tumblr, with curation of one's own experience being a key "selling point." In this sense, Tumblr users as a whole may be considered a folk group with their own jokes and a certain distinctive "weird" identity. While I choose in this thesis to examine the trans werewolf community on Tumblr specifically, I would encourage future authors to consider Tumblr as a site for potential ethnographic research to examine both the folk group of Tumblr users more broadly and through smaller groups on Tumblr with their own narrower, distinct identities.

It is also important to discuss the structure of the "tip sheet" itself. In the idea of the "tip sheet," we can find indicators of the community values present on Tumblr. The first is the reference to "Twitter refugees." In this context, "refugees" are individuals who have fled one social media site for another one due to a widespread upset on their original platform. On Tumblr, there was an exodus of users following Tumblr's colloquially-named 2018 "porn ban," which removed content that was considered sexually explicit from the site in ways that many users would argue were ineffective and bigoted. Likewise, other sites have seen new waves of "refugees" creating new blogs, such as those fleeing the "Reddit Blackout" of 2023 (OOTLMods, 2023).

The existence of Tumblr as a "backup site" for these "social media refugees" despite having its own semi-recent mass departure has been expressed as follows:

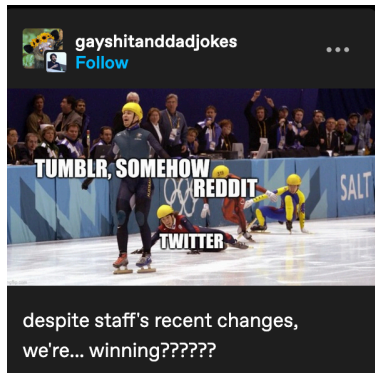


Image #5: A Tumblr post illustrating Tumblr's "victory" over other social media sites

This perspective illustrates the role of Tumblr by utilizing a semi-popular image format which is employed to communicate that one "contestant" (Tumblr) is succeeding seemingly only because all of the others have "fallen" (enacted more disagreeable policies), rather than because of any amount of skill or virtue. This idea has been expanded upon by other users, and another example of this sentiment is shown below:

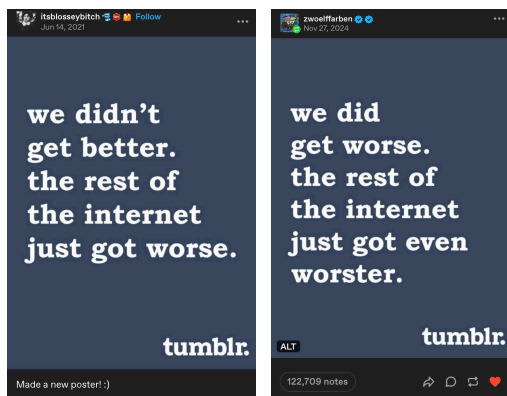
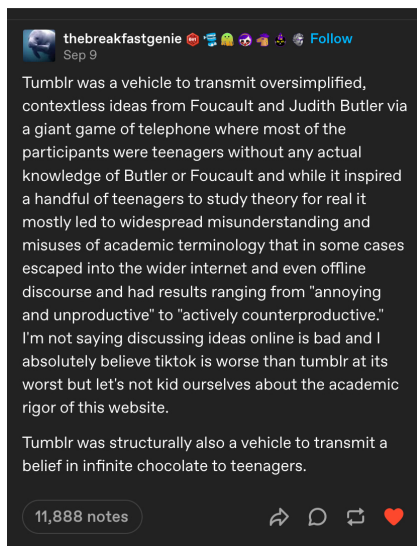


Image #6: A Tumblr post illustrating an opinion on Tumblr's standing as an only relatively favourable website

With a demonstrated awareness of "refugees" established, we can now begin to examine the etiquette of the existence of the "Tumblr tip sheet" genre of post. In keeping with what I perceive to be a popular awareness of the concepts of community care and solidarity on Tumblr, many users make guides to assist those who may feel unprepared to navigate a new social media site and the ways that it deviates from their "home site." In these tip sheets, many users provide

very thorough and honest explanations of different features for the benefit of new accounts, from general advice on how to use Tumblr as a curated experience to more specific unofficial “rules” such as profile pictures (icons), self-censoring practices, and the use of reblogging and tags. In this thesis, I refer to the demonstrated effort to accommodate for others’ needs and understand unfamiliar perspectives as “compassion culture.” This is not to imply that *all* Tumblr users make this effort, or that they always *succeed* in this endeavour (later, I will discuss the ways in which Tumblr users may intentionally and unintentionally uphold oppressive structures such as racism and transmisogyny), but it is important to recognize the ways in which Tumblr’s site and user dynamics are conducive to the behaviours that I deem compassion culture.



7. etiquette and interface

- **change your icon** so no one thinks you're a bot
- **reblog posts** so your account isn't empty. also, with algorithmic content turned *off* by most users, **YOU are the algorithm**, and interaction on this website is strongly encouraged. making or reblogging posts part of the experience and sort of the whole point
- **reblog tagging: individual preferences apply**. instead of adding a comment on a reblog, users will often add their thoughts in a tag, if they aren't specifically looking to engage in a dialogue or add on to the post itself. other users can then decide to copy their tags (often with "prev" for "previous" appended) or even copy/paste them into a comment on their reblog, which is your tags "passing peer review". people also tag to index posts so their blog is more searchable, and to include trigger warnings and content warnings related to a post. you can also choose to not tag anything. it's your blog, do what you want.
- **tags are how people find new content**. if you make a new post and want people to find it, they will be searching the tag related to that content, so tag it accordingly. people can also *follow* tags and get notifications when new posts are made into that tag.
- **do not censor words!** this isn't tiktok or twitter. we say 'fuck' and 'kill' here. if you write "unalive" or censor swears or triggers, people's content filters do not work, and you will have undermined their ability to curate their content, moderate their experience, and avoid triggers. don't do that. just spell out the whole goddamn word, please.

Image #7: Tumblr posts referring to ways in which the site is navigated

The points covered in this particular tip sheet as well as the many others that exist can help new users transition smoothly onto the platform as well as minimize social missteps. As X describes, "That culture is partly due to Tumblr's core functionality: With its chains of iterative reblogs, it's long been a sort of 'yes, and' improv space, with each addition building on what came before it" (Minkel, accessed 2025). In addition to increasing the "interactability" of the site (with more respect for Tumblr's social conventions leading to less breaches of etiquette overall), this guide is an apt demonstration of the principle of Tumblr's "compassion culture." While this principle is not universally present on Tumblr or wholly absent on other social media sites, Tumblr's relatively small size as a social media platform has been perceived by some users as a contributor to personable attitudes on the part of users. As one of my interlocutors, pansylair, stated:

“I also found the site to be more queer/trans friendly during that time frame [the early 2010’s] compared to others as it was much more of a niche site with generally less mainstream appeal so it was easier to connect with others and talk openly about things commonly stigmatized... With Tumblr also being a smaller site, I find you can also avoid aggressively bigoted happenings on other sites in this present day, like transphobic dogpiling on viral posts. With that being said, the communication system on Tumblr has led to many pleasant interactions...” (pansylair, 04/23/2025).

The “Tumblr tip sheet” genre often assumes basic familiarity with site-specific terms and contexts. In this post, the user references but does not define “bot,” meaning “robot,” to reference an account run by an automated program with the purpose of scamming users; “reblog,” to mean “sharing another user’s post to one’s own account;” and “tag,” to mean “hashtag.” As defined on the website Digital Marketing Institute, “A hashtag is a word or keyword phrase preceded by a hash symbol (#). It’s used within a post on social media to help those who may be interested in your topic to be able to find it when they search for a keyword or particular hashtag” (O’Brien 2023). Ultimately, hashtags (colloquially shortened to “tags”) are a categorization, filtering, and retrieval function.

Despite the lack of definition of these terms in the post, users seemed to find this information helpful overall, as demonstrated in the comments section and in the tags (which, as the original poster stated, are often used to share a user’s thoughts as if in a comment).

Many of Tumblr’s communities pride themselves on an advanced understanding of bias and intersectionality. Through self-selection of “followed” blogs based on similar interests and perspectives, many of Tumblr’s social circles end up sharing specific stances on a variety of

outlooks that inform their approaches to topics of identity and their interactions with other users through greater circulation of posts or through the generation of discourse when one disagrees on a seemingly fundamental matter. Many blogging circles — especially those with members who belong to marginalized communities — demonstrate similar forms of Tumblr’s compassion culture, in which there is an approach to accessibility and stigma that encourages considerable self-reflection and interrogation of personal, even unconscious, bias. This is significant because it means that the majority of Tumblr users will have similar site values and etiquette practices, even if there is little crossover in interest.

Tumblr users seem to have an awareness of their site of choice as a “less popular” or “alternative” social media site. It is considered relatively common knowledge among users that non-Tumblr-users consider Tumblr to be “dead,” which has become an in-joke in itself for those who continue to use Tumblr, especially as a primary social media site. Tumblr’s basic system of content consumption and proliferation is made up of reblogging the posts made by other people. This means that every Tumblr user’s page is, in some ways, a method of identifying with what they have shared. Comparisons are frequently made which allude to a curated and arranged space: “my Tumblr blog is like my house;” “my Tumblr blog is like a museum;” “my Tumblr blog is like a crow collecting shiny objects;” and so on. There is a delicate interplay, differing between each user but maintaining the same basic sentiment, of a blog being publicly accessible but ultimately curated for oneself.

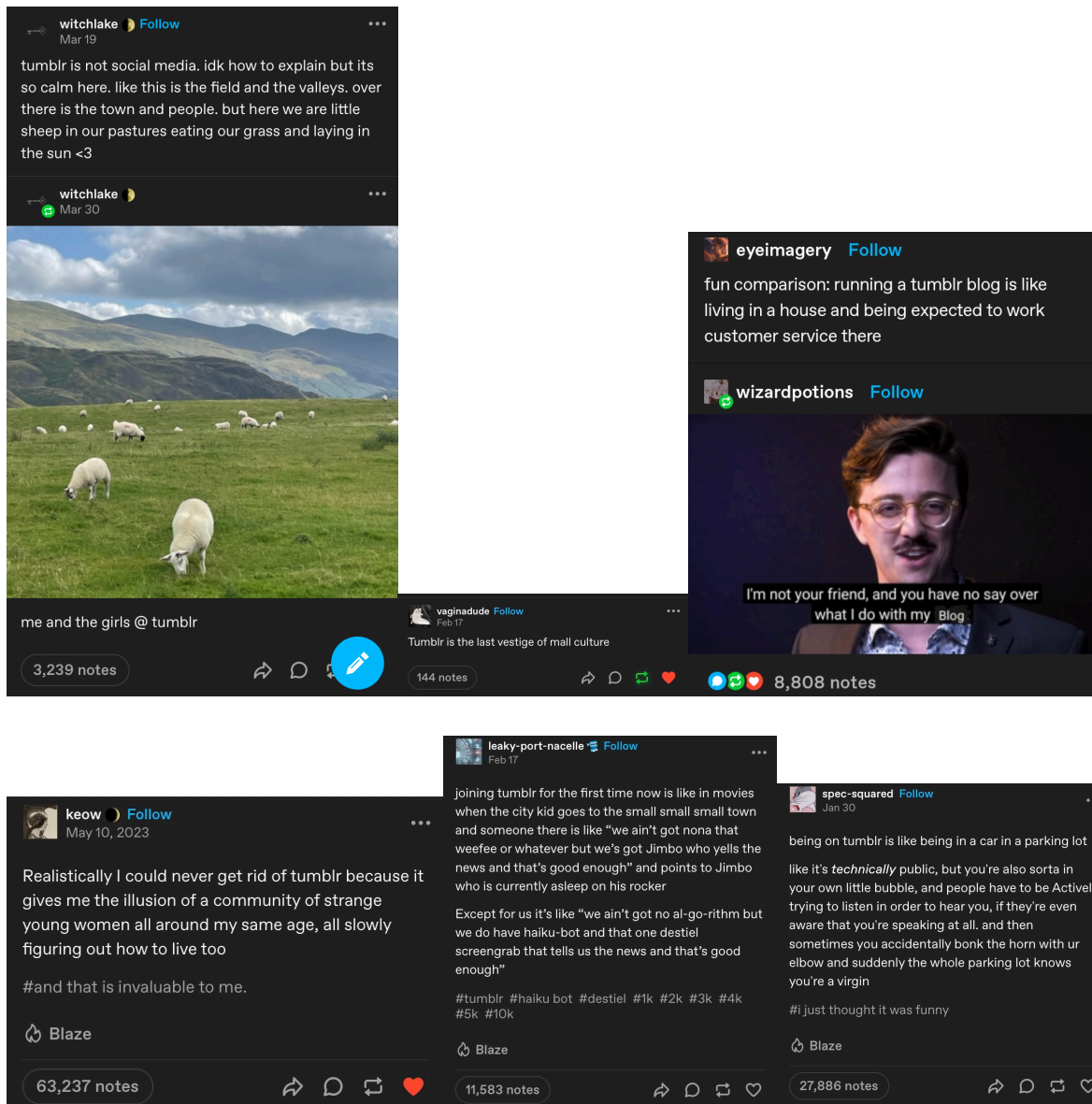


Image #8: Tumblr posts comparing Tumblr to various physical locations

The above images demonstrate this perspective, utilizing the comparison of a Tumblr blog to one’s own home, car, a small town, and other spaces. Different spaces are referenced in these examples, but all contain the suggestion of Tumblr as an almost physical space with certain “rules” for presentation, interaction, and selfhood.

Tumblr as a “car in a parking lot,” as “pastures,” and as a space where one might write their grocery list all imply a degree of designated space for oneself despite being viewable by

others. The reference to “mall culture” draws upon the perception of malls as “third places.”

According to Finlay et al, “third places are, specifically, physical locations outside of the home (first place) or workplace (second place) that facilitate social interaction, community building, and social support” (Finlay et al 2019, 2). According to American culture magazine Vox, the mall is (or was) regarded as a third place primarily in America until the early 2000’s (Waters 2018). With the disappearance of such a widespread physical third place, online spaces approximate the same function. To suggest that a social media site is a third place despite the fact that third places are markedly physical likely draws on the criteria of third places as follows:

1. **Neutral Ground.** There is no obligation, whether financial or political, to be present. One attends the place whenever they want.
2. **A Leveling Place.** There are no requirements regarding socio-economic status; anyone in that place is equal.
3. **Conversation as the Main Activity.** It’s not required per se; it could be drawing, playing an instrument, and more. However, it should unite occupants in the space.
4. **Accessibility and Accommodation.** It must be accessible for everyone, not expensive, with free entrance and departure.
5. **Regulars.** frequently occupy the space and create a welcoming atmosphere.
6. **Low Profile.** They are not fancy facilities that intimidate people; they are supposed to be cozy and accepting.
7. **Playful Mood.** It’s the place where conversation flows freely, with no restrictions on topics unless they promote hostile behavior.

8. **A Home Away from Home.** Attendees often experience a sense of comfort and belonging, like at home.

(Ray Oldenburg via Yeskhozina 2024).

As much as any social media site can be a third place, it seems that Tumblr fits the definition aptly in the opinions of its users. Performativity is certainly an extant force on Tumblr, but presents differently in that space as compared to other social media sites in ways that make it, as stated above: neutral, levelling, conversational, accessible, welcoming, cozy, accepting, playful, and home-like. Of course, not every subculture and space on Tumblr will feel this way, but the frequent comparisons made to Tumblr as a personal space indicate that it is not difficult for users to find themselves occupying Tumblr as a “digital third place.”

Research on the topic of the digital third place has been conducted by (among others) Thornton in “The Emergence of Digital Third Place & the Waning Role of Physical Third Place,” Pennington in “Social media as third spaces? Exploring Muslim identity and connection in Tumblr,” and Markiewicz in “Third Places in the Era of Virtual Communities.” This research has made significant contributions to collective understanding of social media’s potential as a third place and the catalyst for that shift. In examining Tumblr’s culture through another lens, I hope in part to add to and contextualize scholarly understanding of social media’s potential as a digital third space. Using a folkloric lens, it becomes possible to analyze the site layout, user interaction, and how these factors influence our understanding of a community.

Coleman, in exploring the utility of digital ethnography as a practice, objects that “the evidence remains unconvincing that digital media are the sole or even the most important grounds for producing a shared subjectivity or a wholly new sensorium, still less a life world that

might characterize a vast population, such as an entire generation of young people in North America — the very thing that the term ‘native’ connotes” (Coleman 2010, 490). This, I would argue, makes analysis of more specific digital cultural groups doubly important. Coleman critiques the broadness of the study of digital natives, or “those who have grown up in a digital world. They have grown up in a world where the use of information and communications technology is pervasive and ubiquitous and where information and communication technologies (ICT) are used in organizational and nonorganizational contexts” (Vodanovich, Sundaram, and Myers 2010, 711).

Digital ethnography becomes more achievable as the scope of the community narrows to instead explore the digital culture of specific groups — not “an entire generation of young people in North America,” but (as is the case in this project) the digital personas of trans Tumblr users who may lack the option to connect with other members of the trans community in person, or who may have access to those communities but desire a greater number of connections. Mary Gray’s *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (2009) examines the interactions of a queer identity with digital spaces in young people living in rural areas. She writes, “Performances of identities require tools. What tools are out there for rural youth to pick up if they seek to express a sense of self that doesn’t square up with the heteronormative expectations around them? What allows for an iteration of a sexual or gender identity that is constructed in popular culture as antithetical to their rural communities?” (Gray 2009, 14). In seeking the answers to these questions, Gray finds that “without question, then, new media operate as a critical node of queer realness in the lives of rural young people” (2009, 141). As is seen with queer youth in rural America, social media can provide an accessible site for queer

community-building to those who are unable to form community as effectively in offline formats. In the #trans werewolf tag on Tumblr, I explore a culture of primarily transmasculine, white, neurodivergent young adults. Through this lens, I will discuss the way that the symbols these individuals use to shape identity (with many members of this community having a lifelong interest in wolves and the idea of the non-human) become *community* symbols when social media environments expose them to others who share what may otherwise be considered a niche interest.

Another aspect of Tumblr's unique functionality is its non-chronological popularization of posts, which contributes to the creation of folklore and the identity of its users as a folk group. Referring back to the following section of the "Tumblr tip sheet" post shown earlier:

- posts go around forever on this site and new memes crop up every day, retreat, and then resurge out of the blue randomly. this makes for tumblr-wide in-jokes that circulate for years, like "do you love the color of the sky" and the "color theory children's hospital" post. if you don't get these, you can ask and i'm sure tumblr will deliver, but you can also wait around and follow more people and these will turn up eventually.

Image #9: Excerpt of a post made by user phynali in 2022, titled "Tumblr Tip Sheet for Twitter Refugees"

While Tumblr's content on a user's dashboard is shown chronologically by the time that it was *reblogged*, the post that was reblogged may be months or years old, and can gain or regain popularity through a repeated cycle of sending to friends, reblogging to and from one another, re-posting (posting a screenshot or copy-paste of a popular post, sometimes done on posts that no longer have the ability to be reblogged as a result of user settings), or scheduling a reblog for a later time (at the time of writing — April 29, 2025 — a post can be scheduled as far out as January 5th, 2039).

This form of media-sharing emulates forms of storytelling and knowledge-sharing also found in offline contexts by recalling and rehashing old information, stories, and jokes. It also builds off of this form of folklore by allowing users to schedule these posts for a later date, meaning that these posts will recirculate even after users have forgotten or stopped actively using the platform.

Tumblr is also rich with storytelling opportunities. “Someone tells a story; someone else appends it with art and the caption ‘I just had to draw this.’ Someone writes a paragraph with advice on a situation, and half a dozen others chime in with different perspectives in reblogs. Someone invents a fake movie and the entire site goes absolutely wild with it... the joke doesn’t work out of context. Tumblr isn’t about a screenshotted post that goes viral on other sites, but about the interchange within the space... just to be a part of the creative experiment” (Minkel 2023). This collaborative atmosphere has resulted in the development of what many users consider to be folktales and folk stories by name.

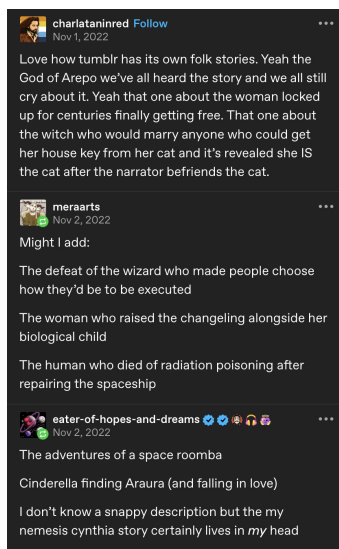


Image #10: A Tumblr post describing various “Tumblr folk tales”

Through its interactions as a cohesive community, with opportunities for collaboration, Tumblr practices folk storytelling, as defined in *The Storyteller in Context: Storyteller Identity and Storytelling Experience*:

Genuine storytellers learn by listening and interacting with all individuals in their immediate, native culture's surroundings, which should include far more non-storytellers than other tellers... communities of artists coalesce to become a social elite of professionals who inform, teach, inspire, and compete with each other. This social situation creates its own separate reality, distancing artists from their roots and true real communities, affecting the art form and artists in negative ways (Ryan 2008, 65).

While I would argue that this quote suggests an elitism or “ivory tower effect” within artist communities which requires far more nuance to discuss accurately, I maintain that storytelling which involves the contributions of non-storytellers is an important form of folk meaning-making. In the field of folkloristics, storytellers may be called “active bearers” — those who transmit stories and traditions to others — and “passive bearers,” who are exposed to these traditions and retain knowledge of them, but do not spread these traditions to others (Goldstein 1971, 63). In the trans werewolf community, separation of active and passive bearers is complicated by what I assert is a level of subjectivity in the meaning of “transmitting stories and traditions” for the trans werewolf community. To separate the trans werewolf community into active and passive bearers using Goldstein’s definitions would place both trans werewolf artists and those who reblog the art as “active bearers” and those who like or comment on the posts without reblogging as “passive bearers.” However, I believe that a more meaningful distinction to make in this culture is between artists and audience — those who develop and add onto the

lore of this community figure and those who receive and support it. Especially in the realm of digital folklore, the meaning of “active” and “passive” bearer may be difficult to place, as those who do not intentionally spread the tradition further (passive bearers) may also help circulate the story through media functionality. Algorithmic features such as “top posts” and “liked by people you follow” mean that *any* interaction with a post may contribute to its visibility.

Being digital, Tumblr’s method of folk storytelling occurs on a different timeframe as compared to traditional storytelling methods, and may thus be considered “asynchronous storytelling.” However, through the reblogging “web,” the ultimate effect is that a post is started, contributed to by a number of people, and the most popular versions are spread widely throughout certain communities (with different versions sometimes becoming “localized” to certain user groups) and occasionally built upon, making this a comparable digital equivalent to traditional storytelling contexts.

It has now been established that Tumblr acts as a site of unique folkloric expression, with storytelling, knowledge-sharing, and collective meaning-making. In order to examine how the trans werewolf figure fits into this culture, we will next discuss the history of the werewolf more broadly in folktale and contemporary media, then explore the ways in which the trans werewolf subverts or reinforces those portrayals both physically and symbolically.

Chapter 2: Symbolic Significance of the Werewolf

The history of the werewolf as it has been imagined more traditionally is one that has proliferated throughout many areas of the world where wolves are to be found. In locations where wolves are considered less of a nuisance, the concept of human-animal shapeshifter persists, but may instead utilize other predatory animals more commonly encountered by humans. This can include, according to an essay by Caroline Taylor Stewart: hyenas, leopards, and lions in Africa; tigers and snakes in India; bears in Russia and in some Indigenous American cultures; tigers, jaguars, snakes, and fish in South America (Stewart 1909, 3). It can be posited that, while werewolves are the most common of the “werebeasts” in western culture, the ultimate indicator of a culture’s werebeast is a combination of geographic proximity and degree of interaction.

To define “werebeast” more broadly would be a task that requires analysis of cultural and regional factors, folklores, and histories that may detract from the purpose of this paper, so while I encourage future researchers to look into the cross-cultural consistencies of werebeasts given the vastness of their transformation methods and other non-werebeast shapeshifters in the cultures in question, this thesis will be regarding only the werewolf figure without delving into its place as a part of the larger “werebeast” tapestry.

The werewolf is most broadly considered an individual that is both man and wolf, and the complexities of the werewolf as a figure only benefit from the broadness of this definition. It is “a creature in which the man and the wolf encounter and interact with each other... simultaneously a man *and* a wolf... *neither* man *nor* wolf... *from* man *to* wolf and then, if they are fortunate, from wolf to man... The werewolf is always something in between” (Su 2022, 15).

In Franco-Latin traditions of the werewolf, the existence of the wolf-self could come about in one of two methods, or models: the “overlay model” or the “fusion model” (Small 2013, 83). As Su summarizes, in “the ‘overlay model’ ‘...metamorphoses’ are merely a covering-over of identity.” (Su 2022, 35). Through this tradition, donning a wolf pelt is the extent of the process by which a human becomes a wolf. One example of the overlay model comes from the Old Norse Volsunga Saga, specifically in Chapter VIII. One translation of this tale titles the chapter “The Death of King Siggeir and of Signy,” and reads as follows:

Two men with great gold rings asleep therein: now these twain were spell-bound skin-changers, and wolf-skins were hanging up over them in the house; and every tenth day might they come out of those skins; and they were kings' sons: so Sigmund and Sinfjotli do the wolf-skins on them, and then might they nowise come out of them... when they were parted, Sigmund meets certain men, and gives forth a wolf's howl; and when Sinfjotli heard it, he went straightway thereto, and slew them all... Then Sigmund rushed at him [Sinfjotli] so hard that he staggered and fell, and Sigmund bit him in the throat. (Anonymous, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, 1888).

This story has also been translated by a former professor at the University of Pittsburgh. In Chapter VIII, titled “Magic Wolf Skins” in this translation:

One time Sigmund and Sinfjotli came to a house where two men were asleep under a spell. A wolf skin hung over each man which could be shed only every tenth day. Sigmund and Sinfjotli put on the skins, and they could not get them off. Now they howled like wolves and ran off into the forest, killing many men. One time they quarreled with each other, and Sigmund bit Sinfjotli in the windpipe, nearly killing him... When they were next able to remover [sic] the wolf skins, they burned them in a fire (Ashliman, revised 2012).

While the translations do not clarify whether the men have truly turned *into* wolves, “skin-changers” is said in a footnote in the former translation to hold the cultural connotation of “men possessing the power of becoming wolves at intervals” (Anonymous, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, 1888). This provides an apt example of the overlay model because it illustrates the process of transforming from human to wolf by donning a wolf pelt. The wolf’s aspect can be separated from the human simply by removing the skin. While there may be conditions to this removal (as seen in the Volsunga Saga, this condition is that the pelts can only be removed every tenth day), complete separation of human and wolf is possible. The wolf does not lurk *within* these individuals, but rather is donned and shed (almost) at will. Stories of the overlay model that I have found tend not to linger on the psychological effects of wolfishness. As wolves, Sigmund bites Sinfjotli, possibly overtaken by animalistic violence. Once the two are separated from the wolf skins, however, there is no mention of their apparent struggles with

identity; they do not feel that they have lost or gained anything at all, and once the wolf skins have been disposed of, so too do the ramifications of having been wolves fade altogether. This may be a matter of translation or the storytelling methods, but nevertheless, it represents another point of separation between the overlay and fusion models. Not only does the transformation method differ, but so too does the degree to which this transformation affects the shapeshifter mentally.

As Su continues, “In the ‘fusion model,’ however, there is always only one skin... when the metamorphosis happens, one side *turns* into the other.” Under the ‘fusion model,’ lycanthropy intertwines the self (human) with the other (wolf), which “enables a discussion about the werewolf experience’s impact on the psyche” (2022, 35).

While werewolf transformation narratives from across various cultures employ the overlay model, the contemporary western werewolf media that I primarily discuss in this thesis seems to favour the fusion model. This is reflected in portrayals of the trans werewolf as well; all instances of the trans werewolf figure that I have found in my research have either explicitly adhered to the fusion model, or the transformation method is unspecified, but in many cases still implied to adhere to the fusion model through lack of depiction of a wolfskin, through contextual clues (such as a caption framing werewolf transformation in terms that reflect the fusion model), and through portrayals of the werewolf which would be incompatible with the overlay method (such as a “hybrid form”).

The werewolf’s origins are uncertain, but one story regarded as among the first werewolf stories comes from the Mesopotamian epic, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As translated by

N.K. Sandars, the titular hero addresses the goddess Ishtar by saying, “You have loved the shepherd of the flock; he made meal-cake for you day after day, he killed kids for your sake. You struck and turned him into a wolf; now his own herd-boys chase him away, his own hounds worry his flanks” (Anonymous, trans. Sandars 14). This transformed shepherd represents an early example of the *fusion* model — the human and wolf as one. It cannot be ascertained (at least from this version of the literature) whether Ishtar inflicted lycanthropy on this shepherd because of the killing of the children mentioned by Gilgamesh, or if this was a detail meant to emphasize the shepherd’s devotion to Ishtar, with the transformation into a wolf being a separate matter. Whatever the case, the werewolf in this example is presented by Gilgamesh as a victim rather than a perpetrator.

Another figure popularly known as one of the “first werewolves” is King Lycaon, an Arcadian king depicted in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. As translated by Grant, “the sons of Lycaon wanted... to see whether he [Jupiter] was a god or not; they mixed human flesh with the other meat, and set it before him at a banquet. When he realized it, in anger he overturned the table, and slew the sons of Lycaon with a thunderbolt... But for Lycaon, their father, Jupiter [Zeus] changed into the form *lykon*, that is, the form of a wolf” (Atsma, accessed 2025). King Lycaon represents not only one of the earliest examples of the werewolf, but more specifically, he represents another example of fusion. His method of transformation, though most directly a curse from a god, is also a punishment for his actions. I assert that this reflects Su’s theory of lycanthropy as a means of reflecting the “dark self.” As Su puts it, “in medieval narratives about metamorphoses, however fluid appearance may seem... it always yearns to be aligned with essence...” (Su 2022, 37). I posit that, while Su’s discussion is on medieval and Old Norse-

Icelandic werewolf traditions, her arguments about lycanthropy can be applied to a broader context of the werewolf's symbolic utility. Following this model of appearance as reflective of one's true self, especially in older werewolf mythology, it is likely that Lycaon's transformation into a predatory animal was meant to externalize his barbaric behaviour in not only disrespecting a god, but in doing so through the death of another human (and, in the majority of translations, a child).

As these first two examples demonstrate, the contexts of lycanthropy have shifted over time. Even in the modern Western media I examine in this thesis, their portrayals oscillate between "victim" and "perpetrator," or include both at once. The werewolf's "wolf self" stands as a symbol of distance from human norms or acceptability. It follows, then, that one's transition *from human to wolf* represents the upset of a comfortable identity.

Chantal Bourgault du Coudray finds that "the prototype of the anguished and tragic Wolf Man torn between his human and lupine urges dominated representations of the werewolf in the twentieth century" (du Coudray 2003, 58). The most common depiction of the werewolf in Western media is further clarified in du Coudray's later publication, *The Curse of the Werewolf: Fantasy, Horror, and the Beast Within*. In it, du Coudray writes:

A 1987 film with notably low production value entitled *Curse of the Queerwolf* (1987, USA) utilized the werewolf's capacity to model ideas about male embodiment, to assert the importance of heterosexuality in the construction of masculinity... Rather than transforming into a hyper-masculine beast, the white, middle-class, heterosexual protagonist metamorphoses into an effeminate, cross-dressing homosexual when the

moon is full... The Queerwolf's contrast with the familiar lycanthrope positions the regular werewolf as a paragon of heterosexual masculinity, further underlining the extent to which lycanthropy has come to signify masculinity in the cinematic tradition (du Coudray 2006, 87).

In accordance with du Coudray's findings as well as my own, I will be defining the hegemonic werewolf as a werewolf which, in its transformed state, represents the traditional values of the werewolf as a muscular, thin, heterosexual being. In human form, I define the hegemonic werewolf (in accordance with most popular representations in contemporary Western media) as male, white, thin, muscular, cisgender and non-intersex, heterosexual, and middle-class. I will also discuss werewolves as being more or less *proximate* to the "hegemonic" werewolf. For example, a werewolf who may be described as all of the above *except* male is still more proximate to the idea of the hegemonic werewolf than a werewolf whose identity differs from the above in *multiple* ways.

To become a werewolf is to become Other — to become one who dwells outside of what is "normal" (de Beauvoir 1953, 16) — both to broader society and, critically, to oneself. For this reason, many contemporary Western werewolf stories centre around the idea of a human (embedded in, if not hegemonic culture, then at least a comfortable alternative to that hegemony) suddenly finding themselves an outsider to their prior identity, usually by surprise. The following analysis will focus on werewolves who are *central* characters in their respective media (protagonists, main antagonists, or deuteragonists; I am excluding secondary characters due to the limited perspective that audiences are able to glean on the motivations and emotional states

of non-central characters). In this investigation, I focus on Euro-American werewolf stories in popular culture rather than older folk tales because these depictions of the werewolf seem to have had the greatest influence on the cultural group that I am studying.

The Hegemonic Werewolf

Werewolf of London (1935) is widely regarded as the earliest werewolf film (Landis 2011, 62). In this film, protagonist Wilfred is a famous botanist who is transformed into a werewolf while visiting Tibet. Upon his return to London, he is warned that werewolves must kill someone for every night that they are transformed (during four nights surrounding the full moon), and that failing at this will render them unable to become human again. He is also cautioned that a werewolf, when transformed, will try to kill whatever it loves the most. Wilfred acts accordingly in his transformed state. He attempts to first kill his wife Lisa, and when he is unable to do so, he instead kills other women on both the first and second nights of his transformation. On the third night, Wilfred once again attempts to kill Lisa, and is instead fatally shot. As he dies, he thanks his killer and apologizes to Lisa.

In this film, we see the establishment of many popular tropes in contemporary Western werewolf media, as well as the continuation of previously-discussed werewolf lore. The werewolf, in this film, is understood as a human who transforms into a wolf-like being. Rather than (as explored in previous tales) a man transforming into a wolf, this werewolf is a man turning into a hybrid *between* man and wolf. Continuing traditions seen previously, the werewolf in *Werewolf of London* is both a victim and a perpetrator. He became a werewolf as the result of an attack. He knew nothing of the existence of werewolves prior to this attack and did nothing to

invite his fate aside from wander outside at night. His attacks on others in his werewolf form are involuntary; it isn't *Wilfred* attacking Lisa or killing these other women, but the wolf that has overtaken his body. Upon his death, he thanks the man who shot him for stopping his rampage.

At the same time as he is a victim, he is also a perpetrator. Wilfred, though he is an involuntary werewolf, *is* a werewolf. He attempts to stop himself from committing these murders, but ultimately, the horror of this film is that the protagonist is also an antagonist (if not *the* antagonist).

Following soon after *Werewolf of London* (1935) in the release of werewolf films was *The Wolf Man* (1941). In this film, a similar order of events transpires: an unsuspecting man is turned into a werewolf after being attacked by one (though in this case the protagonist, Larry, was not merely walking at night, but was in fact protecting someone, further solidifying his role as a “moral” character); this man transforms and kills those around him; he is horrified by his actions in his transformed state; he attempts to control himself and fails; ultimately, he is killed. Again, the werewolf in this example is both a victim (having become a werewolf involuntarily and harboring a deep regret over his uncontrollable bloodlust) and a perpetrator (ultimately still being the same person — or at least the same *body* — that commits these gruesome acts).

Later films portraying the werewolf have built on this lore. *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) is another example of the classic werewolf narrative. Once again, a man is attacked by a werewolf and becomes one himself as a result. Once again, he transforms and kills multiple people against his (human) will; once again, he attempts to stop himself and fails; once again, he is killed at the end.

All of these werewolves are white, middle-class or upper-class, thin or average-weight, cisgender, and explicitly heterosexual men. The werewolf has developed into a figure with diverse narrative arcs, symbolic representations, and artistic choices. However, the *starting point* of the werewolf in contemporary Western media — the “default” werewolf, the “base” werewolf, the “hegemonic” werewolf — started here: male, white, non-lower-class, thin, cisgender, heterosexual, and dead by the end of the film.

The Othered Werewolf

Having established the hegemonic werewolf and provided examples of foundational media that uses this figure, I will now discuss deviations from it which do not fulfill the same cultural role as the trans werewolf, but which lay the groundwork for it in their existence as stories about werewolves which do not adhere to the previously-established presentation of the hegemonic werewolf.

In Canadian cult classic *Ginger Snaps* (2000), central character (and eventual antagonist) Ginger is a social outcast. While she is, on her own, invited into hegemonic society, Ginger’s tireless solidarity with her unpopular sister Brigitte (the film’s protagonist) prevents her from joining her peers and causes both sisters to be mercilessly bullied. When Ginger is attacked by a werewolf, she begins a slow transformation. She begins to act uncharacteristically, accepting invitations to participate in the hegemonic society she had previously shunned. She chooses to embrace her monstrous compulsions, to disastrous and violent effect. Ginger’s lycanthropy makes her bold and powerful. She is propelled from being an unpopular, quietly rebellious girl to a loud and lethal “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” both visually and behaviourally

overtaken by her wolfishness. Her protest against a cure for her lycanthropy is, “You think I want to go back to being nobody?” (Ginger Snaps Official Trailer, 2014, 1:38).

In this justification, it is clear that Ginger has succumbed to her predatory nature because she has transitioned from “nobody” to “somebody” through her acceptance of animal impulse and subsequent abandonment of Brigitte (while simultaneously sabotaging any friendships that Brigitte does develop). No longer caring for her sister’s needs, Ginger feels that she cannot return to a life of marginalization. No fate, it seems, is worse than being an outsider.

Yet, hegemonic participation was never within Ginger’s reach. She began as a comfortable “nobody.” Upon being attacked by a werewolf, she is a victim by all accounts. Then, as her transformation begins over the course of the lunar cycle, Brigitte continues to regard her as a victim while Ginger herself ceases to care for human connection. Ginger reaches a sense of empowerment through acting on impulse and allowing herself to be lawless — killing her bully’s dog, initiating sex with a fellow student who had harassed her (and consequently turning him into a werewolf as well), and finally murdering a janitor who had been one of the only characters to show the oft-bullied Brigitte sympathy.

The portrayal of lycanthropy in *Ginger Snaps* is unique in its positioning of the werewolf. Whereas werewolves are generally portrayed in Western media as male, here the werewolf is female, and the werewolf serves as a representation of menstruation, which is traditionally regarded as feminine. As Miller discusses:

Ginger Snaps and *Unleashed* use the werewolf as a metaphor not just for the horrors of puberty but also for the limits placed on female sexual subjectivity. They also construct a radical model for menstruation education... These films, in effect, demystify both werewolf mythology and menstruation biology by constructing composite notions of lycanthropy and menstruation that allow for radical forms of female sexual consciousness (Miller 2005, 281).

Ginger moves from social outsider to (relative) social insider through her lycanthropy, until progressing further in her transformation by becoming an outsider to both social normalcy and her previous “comfortable” outsider identity. In this, too, she differs from the hegemonic werewolf. While the protagonists of previously-discussed films began as social insiders and lost that privilege through lycanthropy, Ginger briefly *gained* social privilege as a werewolf until going “too far.” Ginger is at once a victim and a perpetrator, and is similar in this way to the hegemonic werewolf seen previously. However, while the hegemonic werewolf shows remorse for their behaviour and seems to be morally separate from the instincts of their wolf-hybrid form, Ginger seems to have *integrated* with her lycanthropy, and in this she has become not half-human and half-wolf, but instead has become a monster in her entirety, regardless of the form that she is taking.

Another example of the werewolf as a symbol of upset in identity is the character of Robyn in the 2020 film *Wolfwalkers*, nominated for an Academy Award for best animated feature film. The characters in this film are not technically werewolves by name and do not *physically* transform, but I include them as an example for several reasons. First, the common tropes of the

werewolf as a shift in identity are reflected in Robyn's experience. Second, the setting makes it likely that they were inspired by the folklore of the Werewolves of Ossory, a group of suspected wolf shapeshifters in Ireland who arguably *were* (as the name implies) considered to be werewolves. Third, the technical difference between the Wolfwalkers and werewolves is that there is no *bodily transformation* in the former. Instead, Wolfwalkers' spirits come out of them in the form of a wolf while the Wolfwalker's human body sleeps. However, injuring or killing the Wolfwalker's wolf form will inflict the same injury on the human form, so the lack of bodily transformation is replaced by the bodily *reflection* of certain experiences, and thus a similar gravity and implication to that of the werewolf. While more accurate language would be that these characters "project their wolf forms," the terms "transform" and "shift" will still be used for congruence given the Wolfwalkers' close proximity to werewolves.

In *Wolfwalkers*, set in 1650's Ireland, the character of Robyn Goodfellowe longs to help her father exterminate wolves preying upon the livestock in human villages, seemingly to earn his approval. Robyn is new to the city of Kilkenny, and thus finds her sense of social identity already precarious. While in the forest, she is bitten by an apparent wolf (who is in truth a Wolfwalker). Through this bite, Robyn becomes a Wolfwalker herself, and shifts into her wolf form the next time she falls asleep. Already facing external rejection through the bullying of other children in Kilkenny and through her father's dismissal of her competence, Robyn now finds these social violences replaced by the threat of *physical* violence as the city rushes to exterminate the "invading wolf." She escapes to the forest, connects with Mebh, the Wolfwalker that (accidentally) bit her initially, and the two grow close. Robyn eventually accepts her identity as a wolfwalker and develops a newfound appreciation for the wolves that her father and the rest

of Kilkenny continues to hunt. She was once an outcast because of her position as a newcomer to the city and, as assumed by her and her father's accents, as an English girl in an Irish locale, which further divorces her from the culture she is now living in. She is then threatened with further distance from her peers when she becomes a Wolfwalker, and that fear is realized near the film's conclusion when she embraces her abilities as a Wolfwalker to rescue her friend at the cost of the acceptance of her peers and at the risk of losing her father's love. In the end, Robyn's father has also been turned into a Wolfwalker, and he, Robyn, Mebh, and Mebh's mother form a "pack" of their own. The narrative at play in *Wolfwalkers* concerns the ways that otherness can be misunderstood and demonized, with the moral of self-acceptance and truth to one's identity (especially when that identity shifts) as the ultimate "happy ending."

I position the narratives of *Ginger Snaps* and *Wolfwalkers* in this way because both represent girls who become werewolves through a sudden bite or scratch, with no prior knowledge of the existence of werewolves. Both are social outsiders initially, and both grow to accept their lycanthropy, though they do so in vastly different ways. In *Ginger Snaps*, Ginger is controlled by her instincts. On the night that she is attacked by a werewolf, she gets her first menstrual cycle — a milestone which, in Ginger's mind, separates her from her sister and therefore from the comfort of her (very small) social group. She tries to embrace her new "maturity" by preying on others, isolating herself emotionally even as she seems more well-connected than ever. She begins to fear, for the first time, "being a nobody." Ginger not only forsakes her sister, but actively works against her, and is ultimately corrupted by the power of her lycanthropy. In the end, as with hegemonic werewolves, she is killed.

In *Wolfwalkers*, on the other hand, Robyn finds greater acceptance through her existence as a Wolfwalker than she had ever gotten as a human. In her new identity, despite her initial fears, she gains community and purpose with other Wolfwalkers, and it is through this acceptance of the Other that she eventually reconciles with her father, whose withheld affection had previously acted as her sole motivator.

In comparing these examples, I assert that lycanthropy and monstrosity act as separate forces. While Ginger used her identity as a werewolf to enact cruelty, Robyn found a balance between her human and wolf forms which allowed her to, for the first time, feel secure in her relationships and community. Werewolf characters may weaponize their abilities for harm, but it is not the wolf that *causes* the harm; it is the human's inability to reckon with their position in the community.

There is another werewolf trope that has become increasingly popular in recent media: the “born this way” werewolf. In this definition, I am including both individuals who were born with the ability to shift between human and wolf form and those who were born functionally human, but with the *known potential* to be werewolves, even if it is only expressed once they reach a certain milestone or level of maturity. Some examples of the “born this way” werewolf are those seen in the book/film series *Twilight* (2005 - 2012) and the book *Mongrels* (2016), both of which employ the fusion model of transformation, and both of which concern werewolves who are already secure in their lycanthropic identity.

In the wildly popular *Twilight* series, a young adult supernatural romance-drama book and film series following a human's relationship with local vampires and

werewolves, lycanthropy is innate and non-transferrable. It is a feature solely belonging to Indigenous characters, with the main werewolf pack being the members of the Quileute tribe. The series' most central werewolf character is Jacob Black, a friend and love interest of protagonist Bella Swan (human) and rival/foil of love interest Edward Cullen (vampire). In *Twilight*, lycanthropy is a form of "coming of age;" Quileute children cannot transform into werewolves, but it is known that they *will* possess this ability in their late teenage or early adult years. This passage into "expressed lycanthropy" is marked by several changes in presentation. "As soon as each Quileute becomes a werewolf they cut their hair, remove their shirt, and display the same tattoo on their shoulder. They are also burdened by sharing the thoughts of every other werewolf, becoming almost a singular entity—a hive mind" (Reimer 2015). Despite moments of what Reimer describes as "sympathetic... albeit fictional" portrayals of the Quileute in the *Twilight* series, the overall effect of the film is that these characters are othered in both intentional and unintentional ways throughout.

Ultimately, as Reimer notes, "the historic representations of Native Americans in Hollywood, construction and reinterpretation of vampire and werewolf lore, the hybridization of the romance and horror genre in the films, [and] the role of Bella's point of view... reduce Native Americans to regressive stereotypes and promote white supremacy" (Reimer 2015). Further, I argue that the werewolves in this series are positioned as tangential — a third option in a film that is largely about humans and vampires, despite the story's presentation as a love triangle (especially in the second and third book/film). Bella's relationship with the vampires is not only close, but in flux; there is possibility for *growth* in vampirism (if she were to become a vampire herself), while lycanthropy is isolated to members of the Quileute, and thus a relationship with

Jacob would be existentially stagnant for her in comparison to the allure of vampirism. The antagonists, too, are vampires, and through learning about their politics, the vampires are allowed to hold complexities that do not exist for the Quileute werewolf characters. Instead, the werewolves keep to themselves with the exception of Jacob's relationship with Bella, occasional territory disputes with vampires, and aid in battle against, again, vampires. As Reimer explores, Jacob is arguably situated through narrative choices (despite the "Team Edward vs. Team Jacob" fan culture) as the "second choice" in this apparent love triangle.

Bella's interest in Jacob comes later in the series, and only begins in (again arguable) earnest once Edward has left town. It is not until the second film that other members of Jacob's family are given much thought, while Edward's family as a whole features largely in the first film. As Reimer writes, "Bella's attraction to Jacob is based on his physical form and his otherness—both work to reduce him racially and convey negative values." Through the complexities of vampirism and the film's focus on Bella's position as a human in this secretly supernatural world, a binary of humanity and vampirism is created, and werewolves exist outside of that binary — present but unachievable, just out of the story's main focus.

Stephen Graham Jones' 2016 novel *Mongrels* is a coming-of-age story which portrays the figure of the Indigenous werewolf in a far different way. The protagonist, who remains unnamed, is an adolescent boy living with his aunt and uncle. Lycanthropy is heritable in this setting, but it is not guaranteed. The novel follows the experiences of this boy exploring various facets of his own identity as he ages into young adulthood. As Baudemann writes for the Los Angeles Review of Books:

Mongrels tells the story of a boy attempting to piece himself together through continuous reinvention: with every new chapter, we see a different facet of his identity as he explores the roles of a delinquent, a superhero, a Halloween enthusiast, a star-crossed lover, a nephew, and a son. We follow this unnamed narrator from the age of seven to the age of 17, and he's constantly changing and maturing. Like many of Jones's characters, the boy is driven by the desperate wish to belong... The narrator of *Mongrels* keeps wondering just how much it will take for him to really become *one of them*... a werewolf, like his aunt, uncle, and grandfather (Baudemann 2017).

In both *Twilight* and *Mongrels*, we see Indigenous werewolf characters. Based on sources such as Reimer's analysis, it is worth considering that the portrayal of the werewolves in *Twilight* was done with little thought for the problematic comparison between Indigenous groups and animals. As one Tumblr user states in response to art of an Indigenous werewolf (who was later clarified to be Oneida, and who was made in tandem with an Indigenous creator):

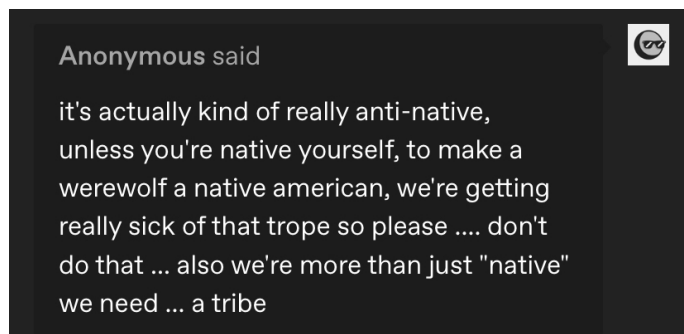


Image #11: A complaint made by an anonymous Tumblr user concerning the portrayal of Indigenous characters

Likely unintentionally, *Twilight* author Stephenie Meyer demonstrated the othering of werewolves by assigning lycanthropy to a group that was presented as separate from the rest of

the community; while vampires integrated into daily life, Indigenous characters were always on the boundary, “exotic” and othered. *Mongrels*, conversely, presented a similar theme with, I posit, a great deal of intention. In *Mongrels*, written by Indigenous Blackfeet author Stephen Graham Jones, draws parallels between the themes of lycanthropy and Indigenous identity. Baudemann continues that “*Mongrels* does not stray from Jones’s earlier engagement with explicit Native American topics; common themes of belonging, coming of age, hereditary trauma, survivance (active survival through creative resistance), colonialism, and the import of history continue to appear throughout his narrative fabric” (Baudemann 2017).

While the awareness and intentions between Meyer’s *Twilight* series and Jones’ *Mongrels* may differ, both draw attention to an important facet of the werewolf: lycanthropy is commonly used to represent otherness, and specifically “betweenness.”

Why A Werewolf? Explorations of Shared Themes Across Sources

The matter of transformation in werewolf narratives is, unsurprisingly, a central theme. This is not only a transformation from *man* to *wolf*, but from one social state to another. In films like *Ginger Snaps* and *Wolfwalkers*, this is apparent in the way that the werewolf characters receive their lycanthropy — both are initially horrified, and both find themselves suddenly distant from their once-familiar (though unwelcoming) communities. The “born this way” werewolf trope introduces a new perspective on this possibility: *inbuilt* security in one’s identity as a werewolf. The ability to prepare for lycanthropy comes with its own hurdles, and can be tailored to fit specific situations within a narrative (for example, one’s identity as a werewolf may still be *insecure* if there is uncertainty around whether or not they have inherited

lycanthropy, as in *Mongrels*), but ultimately it removes the barrier of *unfamiliarity* or *lack of acceptance* that usually comes along with existence as a werewolf. Instead, the source of their social otherness is, as with their lycanthropy itself, determined by their birth. Werewolves of this sort seem to be used as a metaphor for structural oppression, most commonly racism (if these two examples may be treated as representative of the sub-genre).

As contemporary werewolf narratives, the sources discussed here impact the wider popular imagination of werewolves in the Western world, and thus affect the continuing narrative and artistic portrayals of lycanthropy. This is reflected in the trans werewolf art created on Tumblr.

In summary, I assert that these narratives can be analyzed to reveal one truth of the werewolf as a figure: **the werewolf is abjection realized**. Julia Kristeva defines the concept of the abject as follows:

“I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me... I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*... The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being” (Kristeva 1982, 2-5).

In short, abjection is the process of recognition of parts of oneself that are initially rejected as “not oneself.”

Why do so many werewolves come from states of marked uncertain identity or social rejection even before they have become werewolves? Why did Ginger need to be not just a werewolf, but a werewolf who was initially socially outcast? Why did Robyn need to be not just a Wolfwalker, but a Wolfwalker who was bullied by her peers and doubted by her father? Despite the difference in the writers’ perspectives, as discussed previously, why were both the boy in *Mongrels* and the Quileute in *Twilight* not just born werewolves, but also Indigenous, and how did they understand the institutions they came into contact with? In contemporary Western media, the existence of the werewolf, seems to be not merely a *cause* of Othering; it is the *exaggeration* or *physicalization* of an already-present sense of social rejection. “The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (Kristeva 1982, 8). The path that a werewolf follows in these narratives (to acceptance or to ruin) is largely dictated by their response to abjection and otherness.

And yet, the form that a werewolf takes in this media is always normative. Even as a representation of the abject and the Other, a werewolf is highly palatable to audiences. In their worlds, werewolves fear their own urges, their own abilities. They fear the glint of their fangs, their lack of control, and their hunger. They fear the *capabilities* of their bodies and the *unfamiliarity* of their bodies. A werewolf, for all of their anxiety around identity, does not concern themselves with intersectionality.

What would an intersectional werewolf look like? To answer this, we must first explore the normative werewolf, or the “hegemonic” werewolf, defined earlier as a werewolf which, in its transformed state, represents the traditional values of the werewolf as a muscular, thin, perisex, heterosexual being. In human form, I define the hegemonic werewolf (in accordance with most popular representations in contemporary Western media) as male, white, thin, muscular, cisgender and non-intersex, heterosexual, and middle-class. I will also discuss werewolves as being more or less *proximate* to the “hegemonic” werewolf. For example, a werewolf who may be described as all of the above *except* male is still more proximate to the idea of the hegemonic werewolf than a werewolf whose identity differs from the above in *multiple* ways.

In exploring the idea of an intersectional werewolf, I aim to highlight the ways in which the trans werewolf is a form of self-recognition through symbolism. The trans werewolf community broadly does not demonstrate a desire to be cisgender, thin, or able-bodied. Thus, in using the werewolf to reflect concepts of otherness, a shifting identity, and a change in physical expression, the werewolf itself also takes on the other traits of this community, displaying explicit markers of a trans identity through contextual indicators such as medical transition, trans flags or colour palettes in the artwork, and/or captions and tags stating that the figure is trans. As viewers or readers, the werewolf is (arguably) not particularly frightening. At its most animalistic, a werewolf in their shifted form is nothing more than a wolf of normal size (Wolfwalkers, Mongrels) or of large size (Twilight). In other Western popular culture portrayals, werewolves’ fully shifted forms are not wolves, but wolf-human hybrids — often humanoid bodies partially covered in fur, with clawed hands or pseudo-paws which retain longer, finger-

like digits. Their resemblance to humans varies (with many of the more humanlike examples found in earlier media), but these hybrid werewolves also often have tails, pointed or wolflike ears, fangs, nonhuman eyes, and a hunched posture which can transition smoothly between bipedalism and quadrupedalism. Examples of this portrayal of the werewolf can be found in media such as *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 - 2003), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Dog Soldiers* (2002), and *Skyrim* (2011).

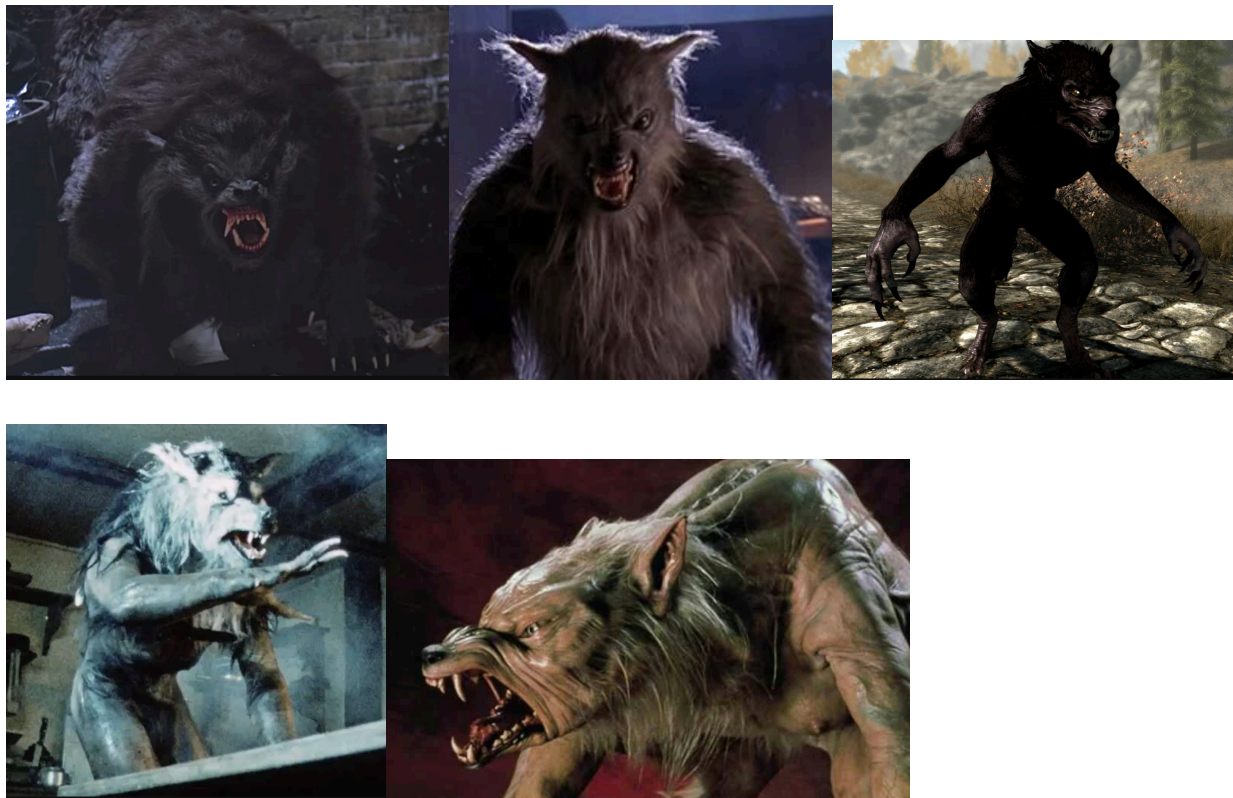


Image #12: Top: An American Werewolf in London (1981), Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997 - 2003), Skyrim (2011)
Bottom: Dog Soldiers (2002), Ginger Snaps (2000)

In the former (“mostly-normal wolf”) appearance, it may be difficult to meaningfully map intersectionality. In the latter appearance, however, the body becomes a site of negotiations

between normal and abnormal. It is in this hybrid body that we can most effectively explore how shockingly *average* the hegemonic werewolf is.

The traditional hybrid werewolf is noticeably uncomplicated, by werewolf standards. As humans, they are cisgender; they are often (though not always, as seen in prior analysis) white; they are, again, muscular and thin (as men) or just thin (as women); they are nondisabled. “In Teen Wolf the TV show, we see a few cases where disabled characters lose their disabilities upon becoming a werewolf. First and foremost, Scott has a serious asthma condition which is gone as well as his need for glasses. The character, Erica, chooses to become a werewolf in order to stop having (grand mal) seizures. The only case where disability is not erased by lycanthropy is that Deucalion, the villain of season 2 is blind (but has some vision if he switches to his Alpha red eyes)...” (Liang 2019).

In my interview with trans werewolf artist pansylair, they critique the choice to erase characters’ disabilities through lycanthropy. “I myself am able bodied (so my perspectives are limited and prefer to reach out to others for their words or have them speak) but I find a common theme in movies, writing, and other pop culture is to have a character perfectly cured of their disability and never have it brought up again, and in werewolf media I see people completely cured after their first shift. Werewolves aside, it isn't realistic to fully cure disability and snuffs out disabled representation or narratives created by disabled people” (pansylair 11/04/2024). As he points out, the erasure of disability especially in the werewolf media of western popular culture (or, in Deucalion’s case in the Teen Wolf TV show, the presence of disability in a way

that may be considered clumsy) impacts not only the narrative, but the people who originate and consume those narratives.

In werewolves' hybrid forms, few risks are taken to Other them beyond the experience of being a werewolf. They are hybrid beings, but still, they are gendered (to varying degrees, depending on the media); they are either thin *and* muscular or they are bulky in a distinctly muscular *way*; they do not have disabilities, even if they once did as humans. To return to the question: what would an "intersectional werewolf" look like? What could be done differently in a werewolf's design? How much room is there for self-expression in a transformed body? How might a werewolf negotiate its appearance as a "monster" *and* its function as an individual? In order to explore this, we will turn back to Tumblr, and more specifically to one community on Tumblr: those who populate, as creators or as audience members, the "#trans werewolf" tag.

The landscape of #trans werewolf as a category is primarily picture-based, with captioned pictures being more plentiful than text-only posts or videos. For this thesis, only one type of image will be examined: art of the trans werewolf. This form of post is prioritized because it allows for an examination of the werewolf's physical representations and proximity to hegemonic werewolves, as well as to real trans people. This will make it possible to explore how occupying certain marginalized communities while responding to or building off of hegemonic influences can affect art, narrative, and aesthetic. The trans and neurodivergent community exists within a larger society that is in many ways not built to accommodate this community's experiences of the world. Through the werewolf, this community takes inspiration from a figure that has always been widely depicted in Western popular culture as cisgender and nondisabled. In

making the werewolf explicitly *trans*, this community claims the figure as its own. I intend to examine which features persist between the hegemonic and trans werewolf, which features are changed, and why. As one of my interlocutors puts it, “digital spaces often create a paradox for marginalised artists: empowerment through visibility comes at the cost of commodification, surveillance, and algorithmic distortion. Platforms reward legibility — identities and narratives that are easily parsed, branded, and engaged with. But queerness, especially when messy or angry or grief-ridden, resists simplification... to be legible is to be reduced” (Dunn, accessed 2025).

In pursuit of this analysis, I will be excluding several forms of post in the tag. First, this analysis excludes any videos. While videos may prove a worthwhile examination in some capacity, my research has found that no videos are applicable to the idea of a “true” trans werewolf, because no media has been made that has featured a canonically trans werewolf and I have not found any record in #trans werewolf of user-made content that deviates from this pattern. Second, this analysis excludes any content that is irrelevant because it is spam (for example, trans users tagging a photo of themselves with numerous variations of “#trans [insert word here]” simply for visibility). Third, this analysis excludes text posts. While text posts could lead to a more complete view of the trans imagination surrounding the figure of the werewolf, the majority of the text posts centre specific and highly situational *behaviours* rather than describing their *forms*. It would be ideal to analyze both the physical appearances and actions of trans werewolves, but as these descriptions are highly dependent on context, it will not be possible to measure meaningfully in this investigation. Text posts that do mention physical appearances are often highly explicit in nature. It is important not to discount potential

connections between the #trans werewolf space and kink communities (many Tumblr users claim a link between being trans and/or being neurodivergent and interest in kink subcultures).

However, while I do encourage later research in this area, the specificity of the discussed situations puts text posts outside the scope of this initial exploration. Fourth, I will exclude image posts *about* trans werewolves which do not *depict* werewolves designed as trans. For example, a stock image or decal of a werewolf, edited to show the colours of the trans flag, does not depict a werewolf created initially with the intention of being trans, and thus cannot be used to examine the choices that artists make when depicting trans werewolves. Finally, while art that also uses the #furry tag will be included where applicable, I will not be focusing on art that is made *primarily* as furry art which also happens to depict trans wolf characters.

With these guidelines in place, what remains to examine is a collection of image posts, often with captions, which contain art depicting werewolves that were created as explicitly trans characters. This is always made clear in the the original poster's tags, as well as in the caption of the post, the visual content, or both.

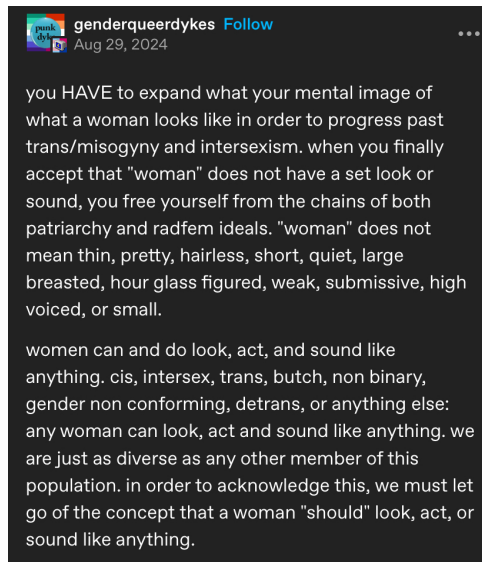
The Hegemonic Trans Werewolf

Variations will be addressed shortly, but to begin with, I will describe the “standard” trans werewolf as depicted in the #trans werewolf Tumblr tag, using the filters “top,” “all time” (not within a specified time frame), and “all types” (no specifications on whether the post type is a photo, video, text post, hyperlink, etc.). The trans werewolf primarily exists in its shifted state — not fully human or fully wolf, but in a hybrid form. This hybrid state is overwhelmingly depicted as bipedal, furred, with a primarily wolflike head. While it may make some stylistic

deviations from an anatomically-accurate wolf, the only non-canine trait in the typical trans werewolf's head is in the eyes. The trans werewolf's eyes vary from "classically wolfish" to humanlike, with white sclera and an iris colour that is similarly human (brown, blue, green, hazel, or grey). The eyes can also exist in an "in between" state, most often represented by white sclera and yellow or amber irises, or can depart from the human-wolf binary entirely through their depiction as blank/single-colour (no pupil or iris; white, red, and yellow are common colours in this form). In some cases, exact hue can also be impossible to determine due to the art being black and white, but basic details such as light vs. dark eyes and the presence of iris, pupil, or sclera can be interpreted through shading.

While there are very few exceptions to the wolflike head, the body of the trans werewolf is subject to much greater variation. The torso of the trans werewolf may be fully furred, humanlike, or partially furred. What remains present in the bulk of werewolf art, however, is a torso that is humanlike enough to show pectoral muscles. In trans symbolism, the chest becomes a site of great importance. The value of the chest as a symbolic mechanism lies in its context in the broader trans community. As trans werewolf artist pansylair explains, "I find the majority of transmascs (transmasculine people) aim for HRT [hormone replacement therapy] and top surgery [for transmasculine people, double mastectomy] as the only medical transitioning they need, so you don't often see breasts [depicted in transmasculine werewolves]" (pansylair 11/04/2024). While the desire for or achievement of medical transition does not define "transness," it is — as pansylair observes — seen by many in the trans community as desirable. In transfeminine people, breast growth or augmentation can be milestones of, respectively,

hormone replacement therapy or gender-affirming surgery. In transmasculine people, breast



removal is similarly considered a milestone for those who want to medically transition.

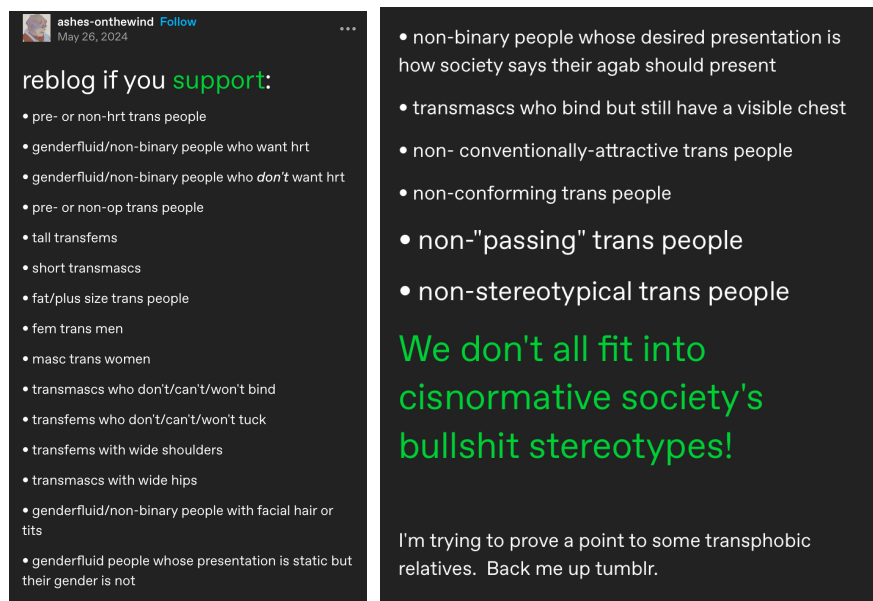
As hormone replacement therapy and top surgery are so prevalent in the trans community, the chest becomes symbolically critical for many trans werewolf art pieces by extension. Reflecting broader trans community values, the standard trans werewolf has top surgery scars, usually double-incision specifically.

The nature of the chest brings up another important feature of the standard trans werewolf: most are *transmasculine*. While transfeminine werewolves do exist, they are not nearly as commonly represented. One interlocutor, wingedtrumpet, speculates that “I don’t think I’ve seen too many trans femme wolves, besides what I’ve drawn and a few doodles from [pansylair]? I think it has something to do with the ‘wolf kid’ phase of being a child, are more AFAB people into wolves than AMAB people?” (wingedtrumpet 2024).

In depictions of transfeminine werewolves, there is also a notable dominance of



human or mostly-human form, as opposed to the hybrid or mostly-wolf form seen in transmasculine werewolves. While it would be better explored at length in a thesis which focuses more completely on the dynamics of transfemininity and transmisogyny, I posit that this interpretation of trans werewolves is related to discourses surrounding “palatable” gender expression. The following posts, tagged #transfem, were created to address Tumblr’s perceived general perspective on trans women and transfeminine people:



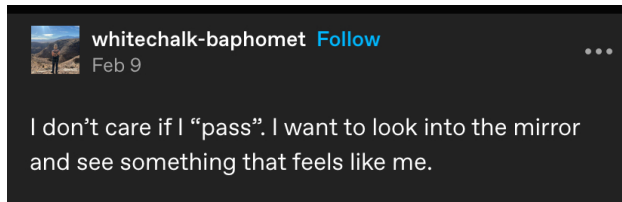
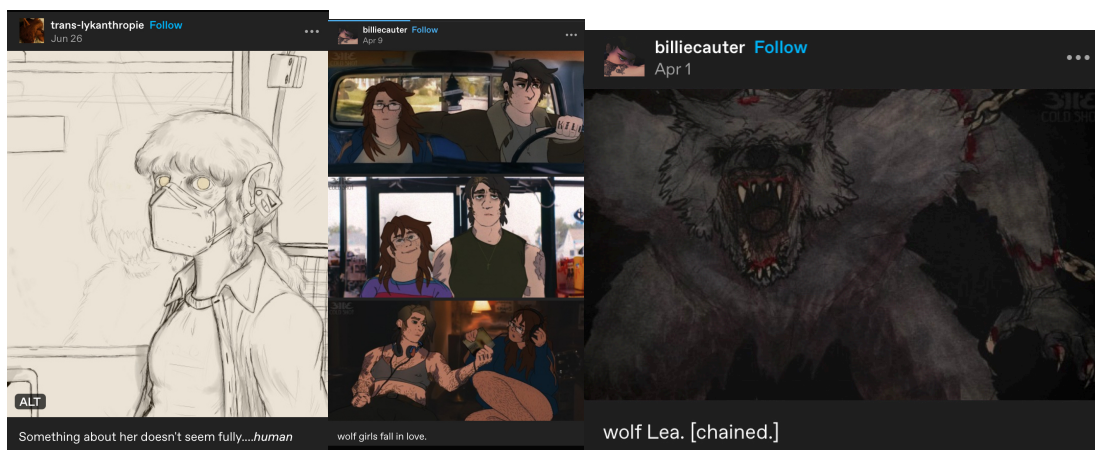


Image #13: Tumblr posts about facets of the transfeminine experience and transmisogyny

In summary, there seems to be a perception of transfeminine people as needing to be more “manicured” or “feminine” in order to be accepted, which the above posts argue against. If these posts can be taken as indicators of a typical perception of the transfeminine body as palatable only as long as it exhibits traditional (cisnormative) femininity, then the transfeminine werewolf appearing popularly as mostly human and as feminine may also be an expression of this belief. “Actualization,” in transfeminine werewolves, aligns with traditional feminine beauty standards and a more humanlike, “put-together” appearance.



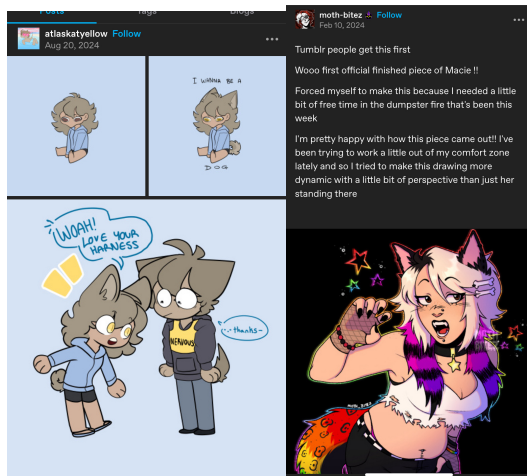


Image #14: Transfeminine werewolves

Like its hegemonic counterpart, the standard trans werewolf is often white, though there is a higher percentage of people of colour in trans werewolf art than in hegemonic werewolf media. When nonwhite trans werewolves are shown, they are usually Black or Latine, with few Indigenous or Asian trans werewolves of record. This can be seen in design choices such as only partially-furred bodies or the inclusion of the werewolf's human form. Art of trans werewolves of colour is also usually not standalone, with white trans werewolves included either in the same post or in other posts on the account.

The trans werewolf, also similar to the hegemonic werewolf, is most frequently nondisabled. As pansylair states:

“I have seen disability depicted, although rare! I've seen art depicting mobility aids, such as having two wheelchairs; one for both forms, amputees, and written statements regarding one's wishes to see more depictions of chronic pain/illness and disability...

With that being said, werewolves work so well for many metaphors as it explores such a

human side of existence, and disability is another I've seen people drawn towards. Pain, your body changing, being othered by your community, but finding a community to emotionally and physically support you and this change to your life... Overall, exploring lycanthropy and disability as a dialogue can have many instances, for example, shifting as illness/pain flare ups, or shifting as a way to feel normal and pain free for a night, or even greatly improving one's health to where they feel normal in the werewolf form, but it's important to go about the topic of werewolves and disability with nuance, understanding, and prioritizing the voices of the disabled community”(pansylair 11/04/2024).

While still not common, disability and aid usage is shown at a higher concentration in trans than cis werewolves. Some trans werewolves use canes; others have stoma bags; still others use wheelchairs. In all cases, they are *present*; the disabilities represented in trans werewolves are generally reflective of the lived experiences of disability rather than an erasure or “optimization” of one’s body.



Image #15: Disabled werewolves

Another point of departure from the hegemonic werewolf is the way that trans werewolf artists approach body fat and fatness. Bodies in trans lycanthropy are in line with more realistic, less caricatured examples of classical thinness.. Trans werewolves rarely have defined abs or “movie star” bodies. While there are plenty of thin trans werewolves, these individuals still have body fat and/or lack muscle. There are fat trans werewolves, both muscular (as discussed in the hegemonic werewolf’s “bulky” body type) and nonmuscular. There are many trans werewolves that are closer to the hegemonic werewolf, but these individuals do not dominate the tag.

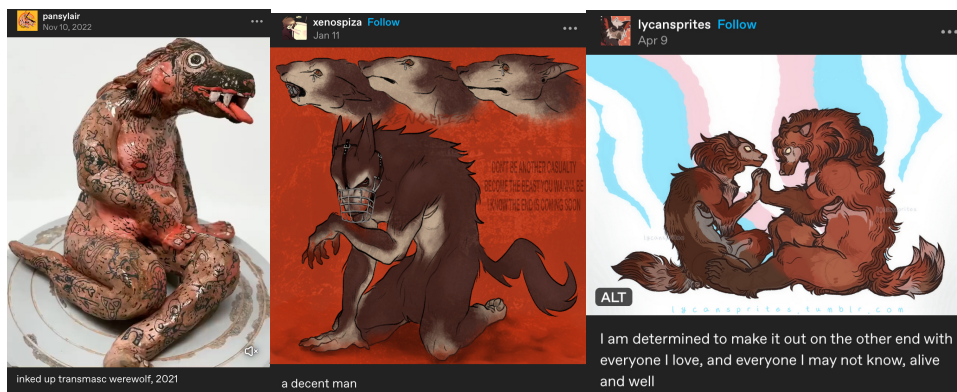
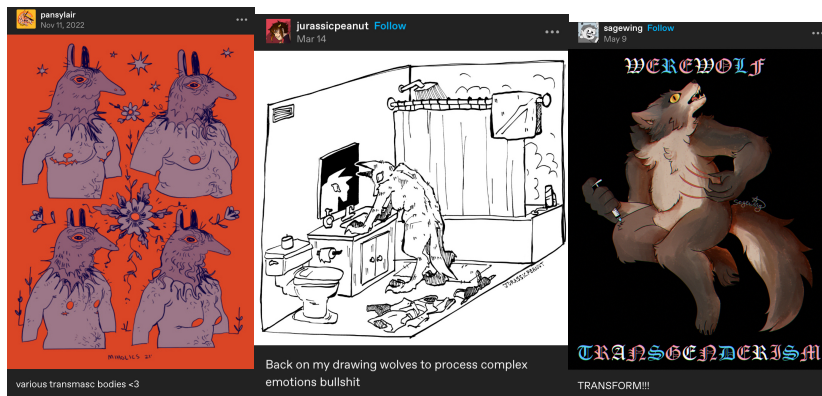


Image #16: Transgender werewolves of varying body types

Marginalization on Tumblr: Antiblackness, Transmisogyny, and Other Blind Spots

The trans werewolf does adhere to hegemonic standards in many of the same ways that their cisgender and cis-created counterparts do. They are often white; they are often thin; they are often nondisabled. Members of the trans community are, after all, subject to the same cultural norms as non-trans people, especially but not exclusively *before* realizing that they are trans. The experience of “becoming marginalized” — not to imply that this is a choice, but rather to point to a lack of “priming” for deviating from what is considered normal — enables people to address related cultural expectations. A thin, white, nondisabled transmasculine person, for example, may

address their assumptions about gender and presentation, scarring, muscularity, and fat *distribution*, but may not realize that their ideas of “breaking the norm” still do not include fatness, Blackness, disability, or even some less normalized gender presentations. The embracing of identity and body can still be limited to embracing one’s *own* identity and body without leaving room for any body that is “further” from the mythical norm.

In their book *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness* (2021), author and theorist Da’Shaun L. Harrison introduces the concept of the Ugly.

“When I capitalize the P in Pretty and the B in Beauty, or the U in Ugly, it is to name who does and does not have access to Desire Capital — that is to say who owns and embodies more or less of the identities that grant one access, power, and resources... Pretty, Beauty, and Ugly... are determined by the structures through which people are marginalized for their Blackness, their gender(lessness), and their bodies... people who are Black, fat, disabled, and/or trans more generally do not have access to Beauty” (Harrison 2021,)

Applied to the concept of the trans werewolf, Ugliness becomes situationally acceptable. For the aforementioned theoretical thin, white, nondisabled transmasculine individual, Ugliness associated with the idea of being trans becomes acceptable because it is *their* personal Ugliness, while fatness, Blackness, and disability still require effort to engage with. As Harrison writes, “beauty standards, especially in the United States, are predicated on anti-Blackness, anti-fatness, anti-disfiguredness, cisheterosexism, and ableism” (2021, 12), and thus these beauty standards remain in place and may be recreated through art.

This is not to imply that the majority of the trans community only engages with what is, figuratively speaking, directly in front of them. In fact, much of the trans community and much of Tumblr's body of users, as reinforced by compassion culture, continues to expand upon their viewpoints over time. Biases are sought out and addressed, to varying effect, by the self, by groups of friends, or by other unfamiliar Tumblr users. As artist pansylair writes:

Thankfully I find a lot of people on Tumblr and other social media create a positive ripple effect by posting their artwork and inspiring others to get out of a comfort comfort zone they didn't realize they were in and find and share resources and make more art regarding things such as darker skin tones, drawing fat people, depicting mobility aids properly, etc. Overall I think Tumblr is doing a good job, especially if you know where to look (Pansylair 2025).

It is, however, important to understand that addressing bias in one area of life does not lessen the extent to which one upholds hegemonic pressures in other ways. For this reason, while the art in the #trans werewolf tag demonstrates awareness and acceptance of transness and fatness, there are some trans-specific beauty standards that are upheld in the majority of the #trans werewolf tag. For one, as indicated before, there are fewer transfeminine werewolves. As one Tumblr user asserts, Tumblr's reputation as an "SJW site" (what I have previously discussed as a site exhibiting or aspiring to uphold "compassion culture") often falls short when trans women are the subject of the conversation:



Image #17: A critique of Tumblr's transmisogyny

Trans art displays a popular understanding of trans normalcy and involved features: scarring patterns associated with medical transition, fat distribution, and exosexuality (a term that I use to indicate those who have medically transitioned in a way that leads them to present as having genitalia that is not readable as either traditionally “masculine” or “feminine,” standing as a new sex modality in the “intersex-perisex” binary). However, there is also a notable adherence to hegemonic perspectives that are not tied to transness. In #trans art, transmasculinity remains overwhelmingly popular while transfeminine art must be specifically sought out if one hopes to view it consistently. White individuals are most commonly portrayed. While body diversity is *fairly* common, the majority of the popular posts feature figures who are not fat and who are not disabled. Religious symbolism commonly aligns with Christianity, the predominant religion in America (which makes up an uncertain percentage of Tumblr users, but enough that there are frequent discussions of the America-centrism present on the social media site), Canada, and much of western Europe (Straughn and Feld 2010).

There are also unique ways in which *trans-specific* beauty standards are portrayed in art. This is primarily seen in the depictions of medical transition. As this is a discussion of the

hegemonic art in the trans community, and as transmasculinity has been previously defined as the hegemonic form of transness, I will only be discussing transmasculine medical transition in this example. First, the pursuit of medical transition at all seems to be a norm in the trans community, as shown in the above art pieces from the #trans art tag. There is art depicting non-medically-transitioned people (as with barkboi's art above), but this is far less common than art featuring characters who have medically transitioned. Second, the *forms* of medical transition share many common factors. Hormone replacement therapy (testosterone, specifically) is shown in some art pieces, while others feature characters with patterns of hair growth and density that align with expectations of having taken testosterone. As seen in the previous art, the people depicted most commonly have double-incision mastectomy scars, with one artist (impmakesart) specifying that their depiction of periareolar incision scars was "different" from what was typically shown. Third, art with visible genitals seems to most frequently depict *no* surgical alterations. Pansylair says:

I find the majority of transmascs aim for HRT and top surgery as the only medical transitioning they need, so you don't often see breasts and very much less phalloplasty or other bottom surgery ie. metoidioplasty... Unfortunately I find through lack of education, some trans people may think bottom surgery is gross or falsely think it doesn't look good post op, or it reinforces cisnormativity. There is often indifference at best, which is incredibly unfortunate as it's important to acknowledge and celebrate the members of our community who have gotten bottom surgery or are pursuing it" (pansylair 11/04/2024).

There is a degree of potential error in this exploration of trans hegemonic culture. As pansylair points out, “Online censorship certainly plays a factor with the risk of artwork being taken down, and the possibility of your account being removed after too many strikes which would be devastating to people who rely on social media for their career or source of income” (pansylair 11/04/2024). This possible censorship can take many different forms, and on Tumblr specifically, conversation about all of the ways that it may appear is fairly well-documented. Going forward, I will illustrate user opinions about platform-enforced censorship. Principal among these concerns are racism and transmisogyny.

Transmisogyny can be defined as “the intersecting oppressions and discriminations of transphobia and misogyny” (Sojka 2017 via UC Santa Barbara Resource Center for Sexual & Gender Diversity), and can be seen in many avenues of everyday life. While the trans community on Tumblr mentions transmisogyny and transmasculine-centrism as its own issue, it is also important to mention that there is a somewhat common perception that trans women have been pushed off of the platform, mainly by the staff of Tumblr itself, as an act of *systematized* transmisogyny.

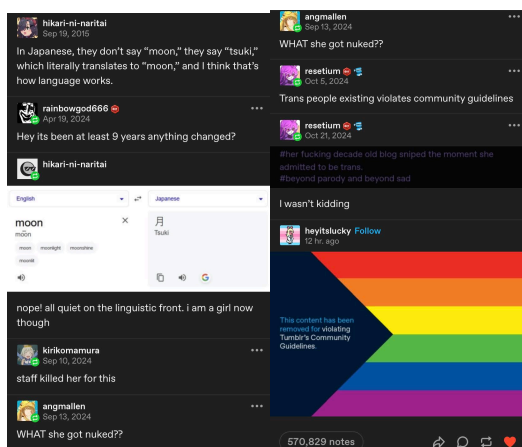


Image #18: An instance of a transfeminine Tumblr user's account being deleted

In 2023-2024 especially, trans women were disproportionately found to be “violating community guidelines” on Tumblr for reasons that many users grew suspicious of. Safe-for-work photos of themselves, mentions of being transfeminine, and even unrelated posts on blogs run by transfeminine users were restricted or removed. The bigoted nature of this behaviour came to light soon after, with the Tumblr CEO, Matt Mullenweg, stating in social media posts that one moderator (and those that they had apparently sold moderation to) had been flagging posts with explicitly transphobic intentions.



Image #19: A Tumblr user's response to a statement made by Tumblr CEO Matt Mullenweg

Despite the firing of this moderator, the general population of Tumblr remains hostile towards Mullenweg due to not only the previous situation, but also his ongoing altercations across multiple social media platforms with former trans Tumblr user and current “Tumblr fugitive” predstrogen. While unconfirmed, many users believe that Mullenweg and the administration of Tumblr in general has taken an increasingly transmisogynistic turn in recent years. The following post makes reference to a sentiment (Sanjeevkumar 2024) spread on Tumblr which was originated by predstrogen, allegedly leading to her being banned.



Image #20: A Tumblr user's critique of Tumblr CEO Matt Mullenweg and the systemic nature of transmisogyny

This discourse is helpful in exploring the general state of trans culture on Tumblr and the degrees of support and safety that exist on Tumblr. Despite being, as shown in the introduction, an (allegedly) explicitly “queer space,” safety for queer users is still subject to abuses by and distrust of individuals in positions of power. While I cannot speak conclusively on the reality of Tumblr’s support (or lack thereof) of trans women, I can posit that the general *perception* of this lack of safety caused many trans women to “jump ship,” leading to a lower number of transfeminine Tumblr users.

If this is the case, then it seems that the exclusion of transfeminine figures in the majority of trans art may be not only because there is a particularly *high* concentration of transmasculine artists on the site making art of only or mostly other transmasculine people; it may also be in part because there is a particularly *low* concentration of transfeminine artists and users remaining on the site. A similar situation has been alleged of people of colour on Tumblr and specifically Black users:

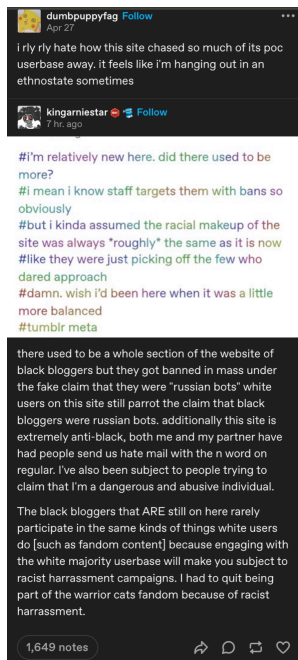


Image #21: A public discussion between Tumblr users of discrimination against people of colour on Tumblr

A recent (2025) poll made by a Tumblr user helps illustrate Tumblr’s demographic makeup. This poll allows each user to vote only once, which may prevent an inflation of any particular demographic through repeat votes by a single user but which may also eliminate nuance.



Image #22: A Tumblr poll on the racial demographic information of Tumblr users

As with claims of transmisogyny, these sentiments may not be taken as official evidence in any capacity, but the utility of these discussions of racism and transmisogyny in this thesis is not solely based on their truth. Whether true or not, these posts provide insight into the opinions of some of Tumblr's users, and thus become evidence not of what has truly occurred, but of the community's interpretation of the situation. Whether or not Tumblr is transmisogynistic, in this circumstance, is of less consequence than whether Tumblr's *users* believe it is transmisogynistic. Whether or not Tumblr is racist, in this circumstance, is of less consequence than whether Tumblr's *users* believe it is racist.

These critiques of Tumblr's broader community makeup indicate that there is another facet of hegemonic influence. While it has been explored that Tumblr's demographic makeup may itself be a reflection of western values, this additional avenue allows us to explore not only the institutional marginalization of non-hegemonic cultures more broadly, but also a degree of self-exclusion that comes from a history of Tumblr's administrative power being misused and user fear of this pattern continuing in the future. Overall, these factors contribute to potential censorship of certain art pieces depicting transfeminine people and people of colour, or of certain blogs run by transfeminine people or people of colour. This is in addition to self-censorship by people of colour and transfeminine individuals out of fear of being flagged, harassed, or banned.

The many potential factors at play on Tumblr can be summarized by the conclusion that, for a multitude of reasons, art by white transmasculine people is favoured in the #trans art tag on a structural level. As we discuss trans art and specifically trans werewolf art as expressions of culture and community in a marginalized group, it must be kept in mind that this culture still has

norms with myriad influences. These norms are dominant in the #trans art tag as well as in the #trans werewolf tag.

The prevalence of sources which fall closer to the hegemonic norm, even in exploration of a marginalized community, is not unique to this thesis or this setting. In Adams and Kimmel's article "Exploring the Lives of Older African American Gay Men," the authors noted that "there have been several studies of older gay men and lesbians reported in recent years... but essentially all of the respondents in those studies have been white. Likewise, only anecdotal information about middle-aged or older African American lesbians exists... There is some information about African American gay men in the research literature, but no empirical studies specifically of older men have been published" (Adams and Kimmel 1997, 132). This article explores an intersectional community and, in doing so, addresses a prior lack of interaction with members of that community. In this thesis, I explore the werewolf as a representation of the trans experience, and in prioritizing an examination of this figure as it appears most *commonly* in a seemingly white-centric, transmisogynistic space, I make only passing mention of the people of colour and trans women as they exist in this space. I would encourage future studies of trans creativity, storytelling, social media usage, and community-building to build on this work by incorporating the expressions of those who have been excluded from the trans community's hegemon as it has been defined in this thesis.

To this point on whiteness, I believe that another factor in the prevalence of the white trans werewolf is tied to Tumblr's compassion culture and general awareness of the misuse of characters of colour in media. As seen with Jacob Black from Stephenie Meyers' *Twilight* series

and the critiques made by Reimer, choosing to represent a person of colour as animalistic can both originate from and further perpetuate racist messaging, whether intentional or not.

Awareness of this concept may lead to a tension between the desire in white artists to represent trans werewolves as people of colour for the sake of de-centering whiteness while also hesitating to establish a link between people of colour and a traditionally violent, animalistic figure. For this reason, the majority of werewolves of colour appear in pieces where *multiple* werewolves have been drawn, or on their own when an account has a history of *also* creating art of white werewolf characters.

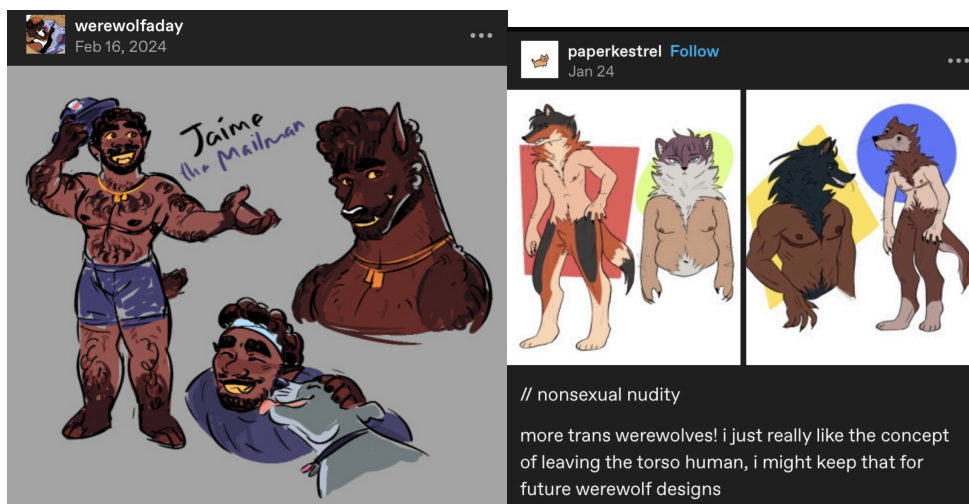


Image #23: Trans werewolf art involving people of colour

The trans werewolf exists most commonly in a “vacuum,” with the space around the figure either uncoloured or vaguely coloured. When trans werewolves are placed in specific settings, those settings are a blend between “wild” locales such as the forest and more populated areas like one’s home or the gym.

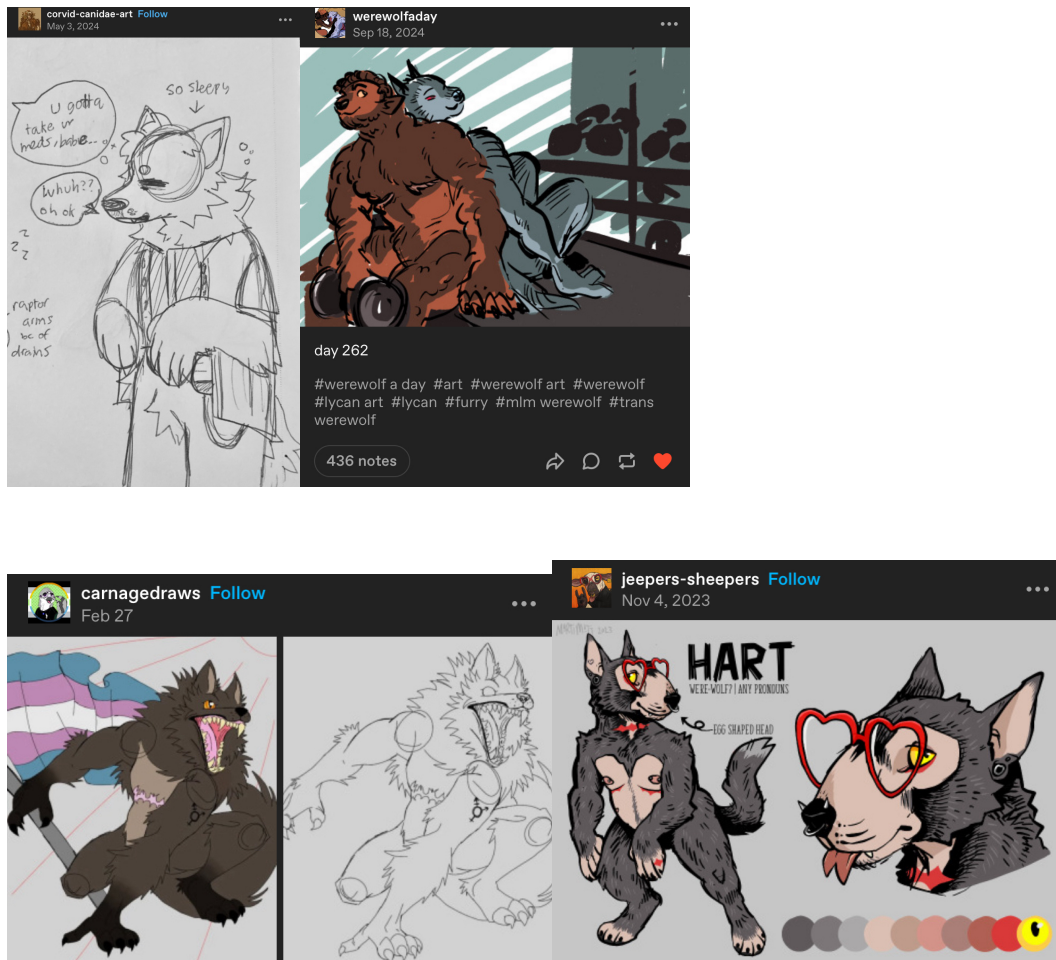


Image #24: Tumblr posts of trans werewolves in a variety of settings, both with and without props

Most commonly, the trans werewolf is standing or sitting — ultimately, they are at rest. The exceptions to this will be discussed later, and these exceptions often demand context, but I posit that one of the most important differences between the trans and cis werewolf lies in this inaction. Through the common portrayal of a werewolf *at rest*, or performing actions in very specific circumstances, the trans werewolf is painted as a reasoning being — not a human *taken over* by monstrosity, but an individual which interacts with the world in both human and “hybrid” form.

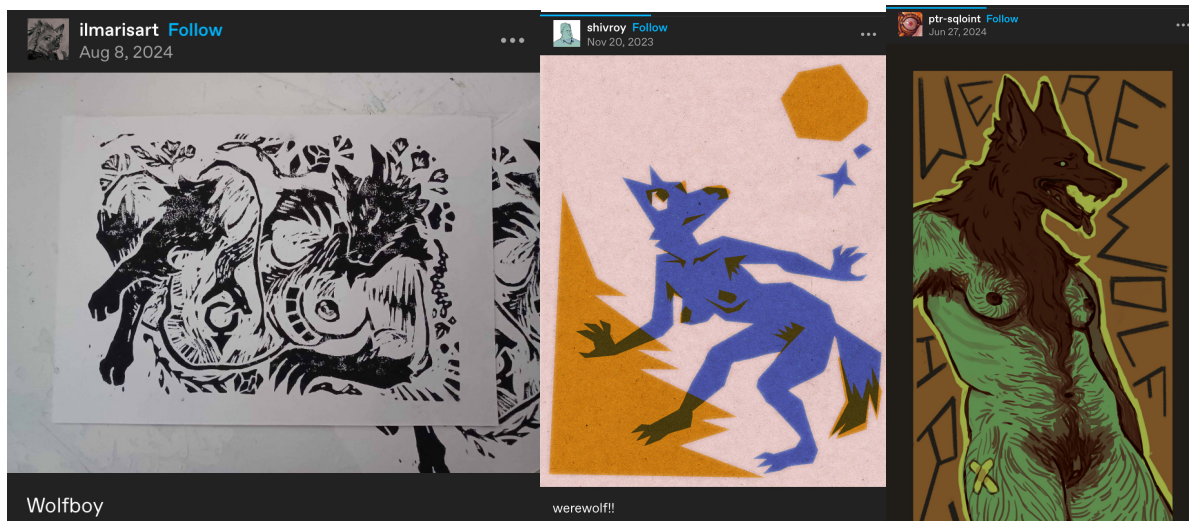


Image #25: Tumblr art of trans werewolves in a variety of stances

There are, of course, exceptions to these features. As has been previously shown, most trans werewolves are white, but not *all* of them are white. Most trans werewolves are transmasculine, but not *all* of them are transmasculine. Most trans werewolves have undergone top surgery, but not *all* of them have undergone top surgery, and not all have undergone *just* top surgery. Race, skin colour and tone, fatness, scarring, gender and sex, gender presentation, and exosexuality exist along spectrums in the trans werewolf community which indicate a different cultural interpretation of the werewolf than what is seen in the hegemonic werewolf of history and popular culture.

The trans werewolf takes inspiration from the hegemonic werewolf in its basic form and in its roots — it is a once-human who has since gained the ability to shapeshifter into a wolf or wolf-human hybrid. Culturally, the majority of both varieties of werewolf are white, thin, and nondisabled. As has been explored in the previous chapter, however, the trans werewolf's body is

far more likely to be exosex, to be presented primarily or entirely in its hybrid form, and to exhibit positive or neutral behaviours and attitudes.

We may turn back to popular culture to explore how hegemonic werewolves traditionally conduct themselves. As with *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), and *The Wolf Man* (1941), the werewolf is a vicious hunter whose actions are dictated by an instinct to hunt. Lycanthropy is a corrupting influence on the infected human, which may change their human behaviour (as seen with the hypersexual behaviours of Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* and David in *An American Werewolf in London*, for example) or may affect them only in wolf form. Whether the human's behaviour is impacted or not, the situation remains that the human is *overtaken* by monstrosity. There is no room for a werewolf with personality in its monstrous form.

Trans werewolves do not seem to be subject to the whims of the beast living within them. There is occasional mention of instinct, or of canine-specific behaviour (especially in the Tumblr text posts about trans werewolves, which will not be analyzed here due to the great difference in function as a community expression), but in the overwhelming majority of cases, this drive can be ignored or redirected, and is not necessarily negative. Trans werewolves wear clothes, use canes, go to the gym, and interact with humans as equals. Trans werewolves maintain their *humanity*, even without maintaining their human forms.

It becomes vital, given these distinctions between trans and cis werewolf portrayals, to mention *Twilight* and *Wolfwalkers* once again. In both cases, we see a cis werewolf who *does* retain their human mind. Why, then, do I still indicate *humanity* as a major difference between trans and cis werewolves?

In both cases, these werewolves maintain an internal humanity, but find themselves rejected by society, limiting their ability to interact with the world in their transformed states. In *Twilight*, the culture that the werewolves find themselves in is largely intolerant of werewolves, with vampires being aggressive toward werewolves due to generations-old grudges and with non-Quileute humans being oblivious to the existence of the supernatural. In *Wolfwalkers*, wolves are being exterminated, and the werewolves in this setting look no different from ordinary wolves, making them a target.

Twilight, however, does not show us Jacob's perspective, and thus we cannot know how he felt about his transition from human to werewolf. It is likely for this reason that there are (to my knowledge) no trans readings of the werewolves in *Twilight*.

In *Wolfwalkers* in particular, the characters involved are not trans, but it is not unprecedented for fans to interpret this as a trans story. In Little White Lies, a film review and opinion magazine, one author writes the following:

The arc of said [wolfwalker] awakening in particular mirrors the struggles of wrestling with sexual and gender dysphoria for many queer teens growing up. Robyn experiences an initial overwhelming mess of confusion... in the forests with Mebh and the wolves... Robyn and Mebh discover the joy of their wolfwalker forms together... the unbound freedom of a safe queer space. The thrill and exhalation in the ability to be your full true self with somebody who truly sees you... In terms of further trans undercurrents, the scene where Robyn reveals her wolfwalker side to her father has unmistakable parallels to a child coming out to their parent (Petch 2022).

Adding a second voice to this opinion, a writer for the media enthusiast magazine Den of Geek writes:

The bite is a literal ‘taste’ of new queer experiences and wonder that isn’t papered over or quickly ignored. The taste festers, and it hurts—in the sense that it’s deeply uncomfortable in its new-ness. But the wolfwalker heals it in a show of welcoming solidarity, and then Mebh acts as a queer guide for Robyn in her new lupine body. Robyn takes to it immediately, and loves it (Johnson 2021).

As these interpretations of *Wolfwalkers* indicate, the emotional journey of the new werewolf — the *becoming*, the *processing*, the *accepting* — is seen as a queer act. The hegemonic werewolf is denied self-actualization, agency as a cohesive being (human *as* wolf, rather than human *with* wolf), and narrative beyond the tragedy of becoming a mindless beast. With this knowledge, we can further narrow our definition of the werewolf as a trans metaphor: the trans werewolf is a werewolf undergoing a journey of self-acceptance *through* lycanthropy — something that, as seen earlier in this chapter, characters such as Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* were not afforded despite their own claims to the contrary. The trans werewolf, while it might take on some wolfish instincts, also does not seem to be any more driven towards destruction or violence than an average wolf would be, and is in many cases less so. It is evidenced that the trans werewolf symbolizes the joining of the “palatable self” and the “unacceptable self” — a version of oneself that is not chained to social norms, but which still acts within the guidelines of one’s own moral code.

The lycanthropic journey of the hegemonic werewolf is seen as overwhelmingly negative. They must fight against their instincts, and these instincts are almost always destructive

and violent. They must keep secrets. At best, they must be “the good ones” in a world filled with other werewolves who use their abilities to cause harm. Lycanthropy is a curse which can be accommodated, but never integrated with. The trans werewolf, then, may be a natural extension of this line of thought. What life experience is invisible or seemingly not present from birth, which can be misunderstood by others and demonized at times, and which must sometimes be hidden to gain acceptance or safety? What life experience may involve a revelation to trusted loved ones without knowledge of how they will react? What life experience can be repressed and denied, but always *felt*, always recognized as oneself *by* oneself?

I speak of the experience of queerness. Though there are certainly others that may apply — such as disability — the link between queerness and alleged predatory behaviour (seen in the Gay Panic legal defense) make this one of the most apt metaphors (DeRosa 2025). Both lycanthropy and demonized queerness involve a figure who has likely undergone the experiences named in the previous paragraph, with the added assumption by non-community-members (non-werewolves and non-queer people, respectively) that this figure is a danger to those around them. I posit that there exist many parallels between common werewolf imagery and the trans experience, especially the transmasculine experience of medical transition. Via Planned Parenthood’s webpage “Effects of Testosterone-Based Hormone Therapy,” some of the effects of testosterone include facial and body hair growth, increased muscle mass and strength, and increased sex drive — all of which are paralleled in portrayals of lycanthropy, as described in the previous chapter (Planned Parenthood of Central and Western New York, accessed 2025).

While the reliability of the above statement has been challenged and the guidelines have since been updated to Edition 8, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health

(WPATH) Standards of Care Edition 7 (SOC7) asserted that testosterone-based hormone replacement therapy included a side effect of heightened anger. Despite the since-disproven nature of this statement, the trans community perception of hormone replacement therapy has previously included the notion that testosterone will increase aggression and violence. Tumblr users address this rhetoric as follows:

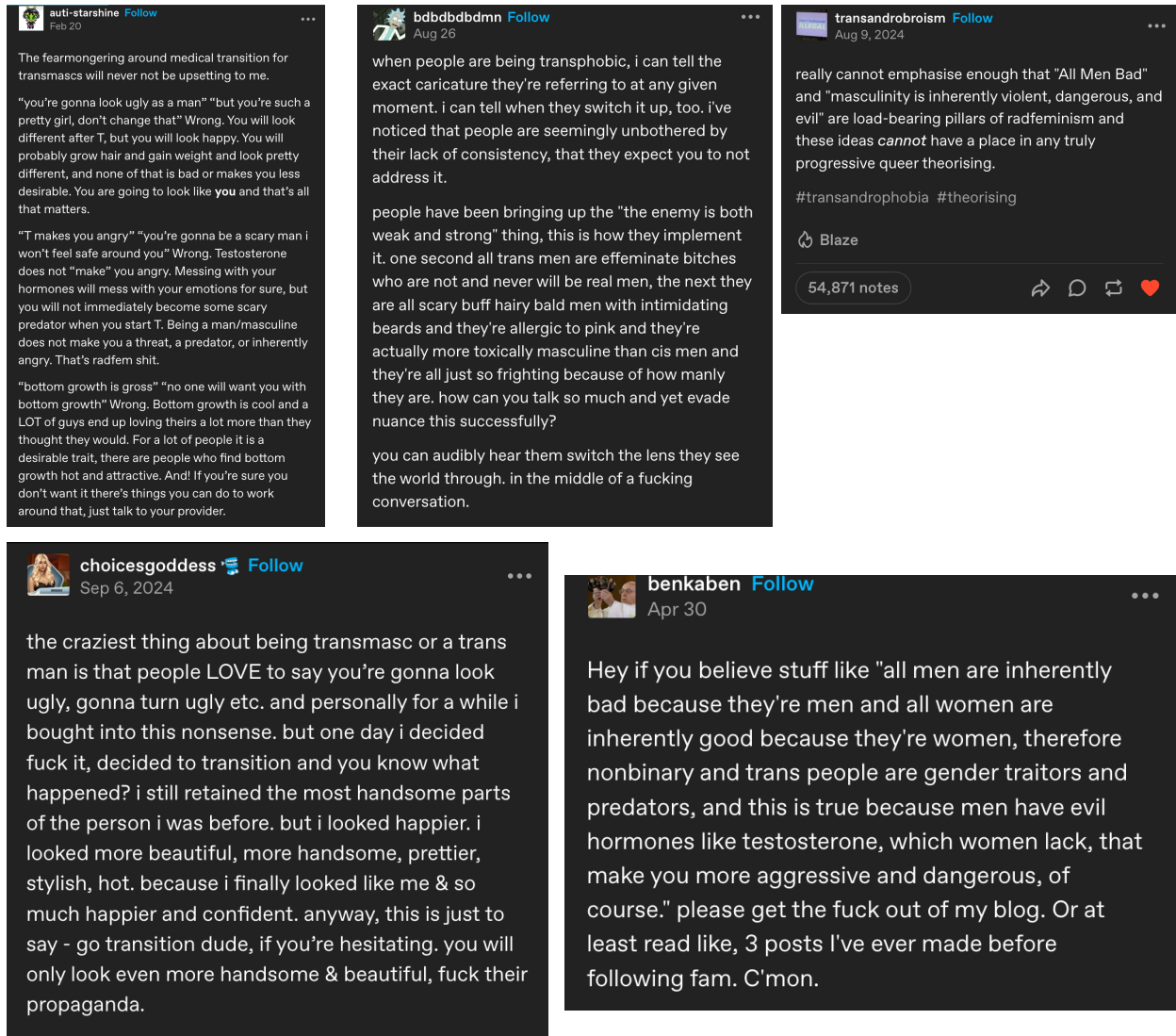


Image #26: Tumblr posts critiquing transandrophobia (prejudice against transmasculine individuals)

This perception of transition parallels the experience of traditional lycanthropy: both medical transition and the narrative transition from human to werewolf are (as demonstrated through contemporary Western werewolf media, through medical sources such as WPATH Soc 7, and through the sentiments that the above posts seem to respond to) traditionally said to be marked by a heightened tendency towards violence, danger, evil, and ugliness. The parallels between the demonization of queerness and transness (and specifically the ways in which transmasculinity is demonized), with the addition of a *physical* change (with the strongest parallels being hair growth and increased muscle mass), makes lycanthropy highly readable as a strong parallel to the transmasculine experience. The werewolf, being recognized as explicitly trans and most commonly transmasculine, is positioned in #trans werewolf art as a sympathetic figure, likely because of its parallels to a similarly demonized community. To further explore why it occupies these specific niches, we must identify *how* the trans community on Tumblr approaches the ideas of selfhood.

Chapter 3: The Trans Werewolf

Community

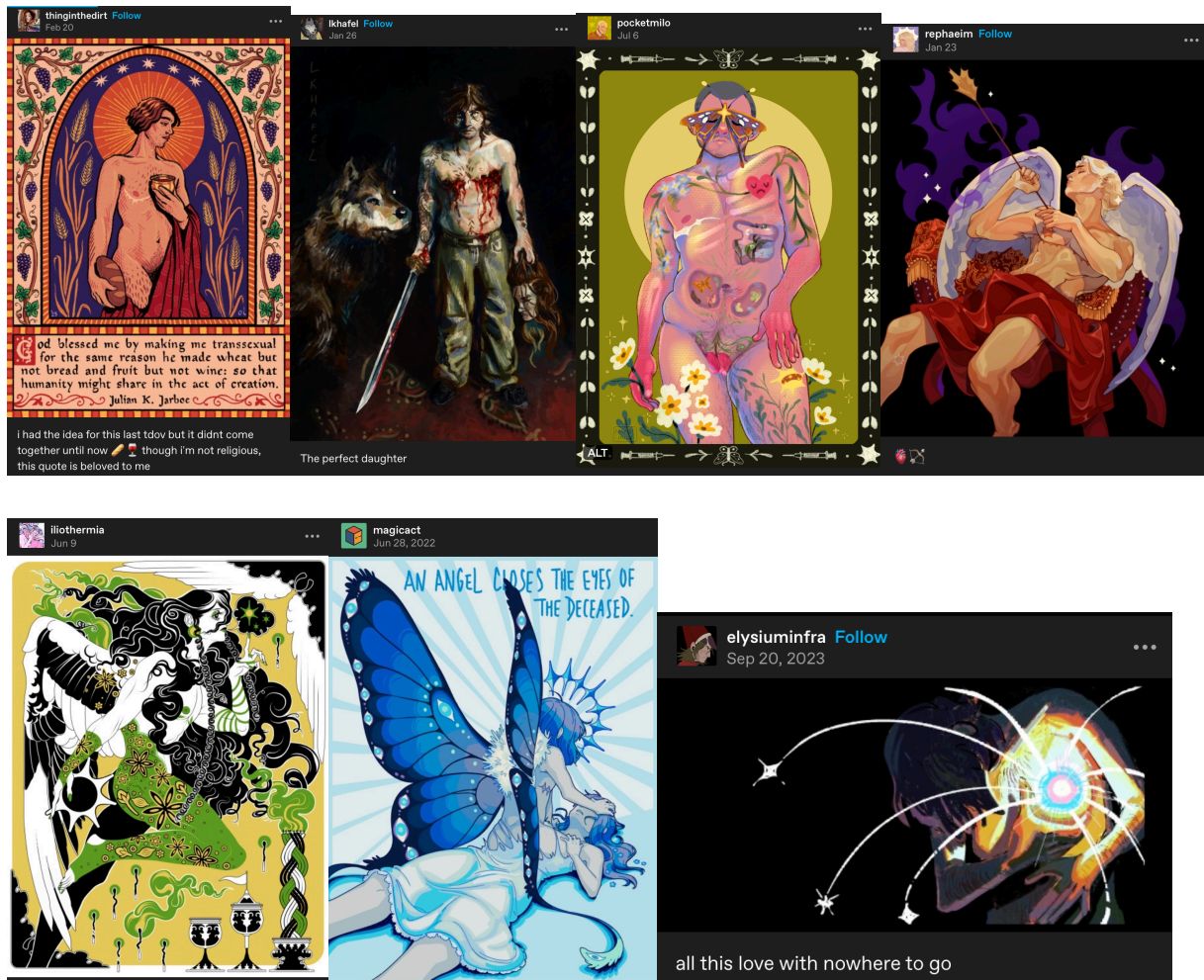
To address the lack of research into trans art and meaning-making, I will devote sections of this chapter to an examination of trans art on Tumblr more broadly. In doing so, I hope to provide a foundation of knowledge on this topic for the sake of future exploration. Further, I hope that by establishing common expressions, symbols, and topics in trans art on Tumblr, I will be able to better qualify the ways in which trans werewolf art is positioned in relation to these topics. Once this is established, I discuss trans werewolf art and the trans werewolf community on Tumblr in greater detail, with a special focus on the artists.

Trans Art on Tumblr

As explored in the previous chapter, the trans werewolf is most often nondisabled, white or unspecified, thin, exosex, and transmasculine. Most commonly, a trans werewolf is in hybrid form, placed at the junction of human and wolf. The trans werewolf most commonly performs humanlike activities or none at all. In trans art on Tumblr more generally, many features are expressed in similar ways: most commonly, they are nondisabled, white, thin, exosex, and transmasculine. To further explore these connections, I looked into the “#trans art” hashtag on Tumblr, using the sorting filters “top,” “all time,” and “all types” — the same filters used to examine #trans werewolf. With the #trans werewolf tag being small enough (and with “trans

werewolf art” as a full sentence being used so rarely in the art that is posted), I did not need to append “art” to my search. With #trans art, however, adding “art” to the search helped to eliminate the much larger body of non-art content which primarily populates the tag: photos of users at different stages of social or medical transition, text posts focused on various aspects of the queer or specifically trans experience (positivity, venting, current events), and other non-art posts which filtering “#trans” by “photos only” would not have removed.

The top posts in the #trans art tag are, as preceded by #trans werewolf, nondisabled, most often white, exosex, and transmasculine. While most are still thin, fatness and fat distribution are portrayed on a spectrum.



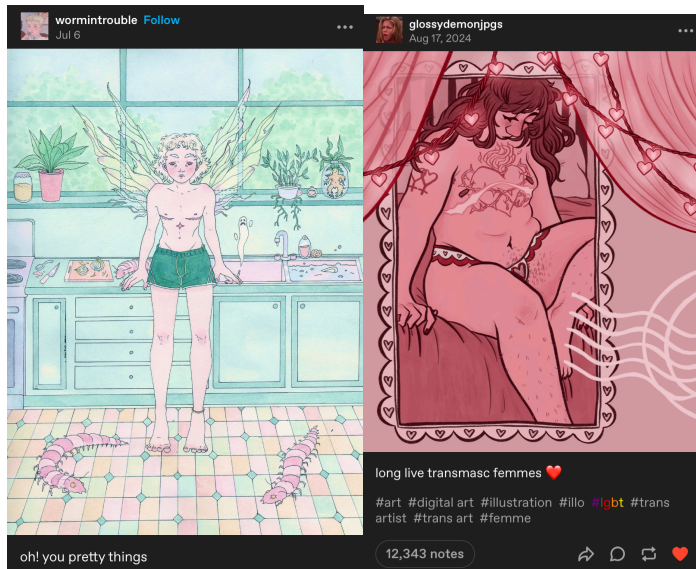


Image #27: Tumblr art of transmasculine individuals

One feature of note in #trans art is the degree to which these figures are made fantastical. They bear wings, stars, spectres, insects, and plants, as parts of their physical or symbolic body. Some mirror religious figures. Others occupy worldly spaces or indistinct backgrounds.

A major area of focus is, as with trans werewolf art, the chest. Top surgery scars are nearly ubiquitous. In the exceptions, the chest is still a central part of the piece, and is in many cases more heavily emphasized than even the face.

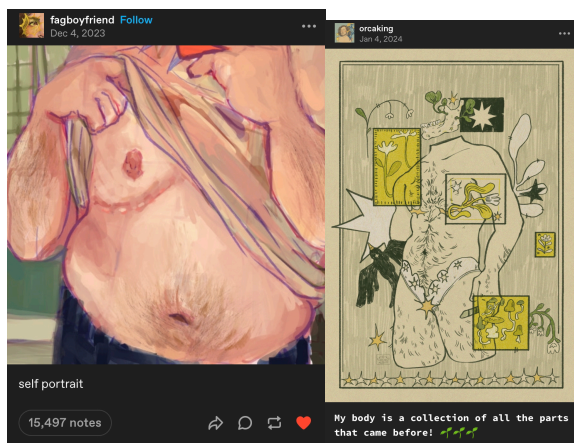
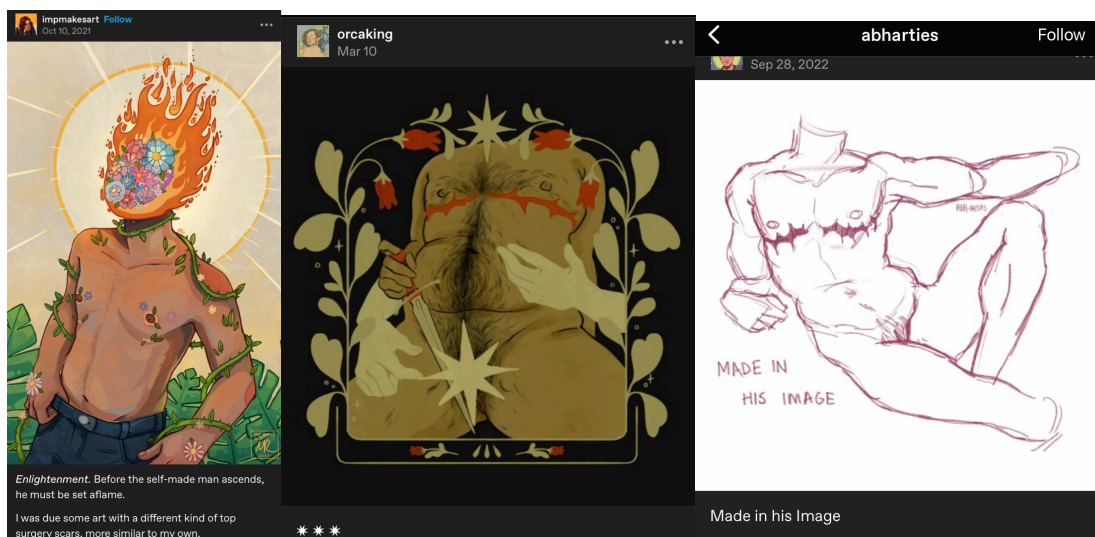
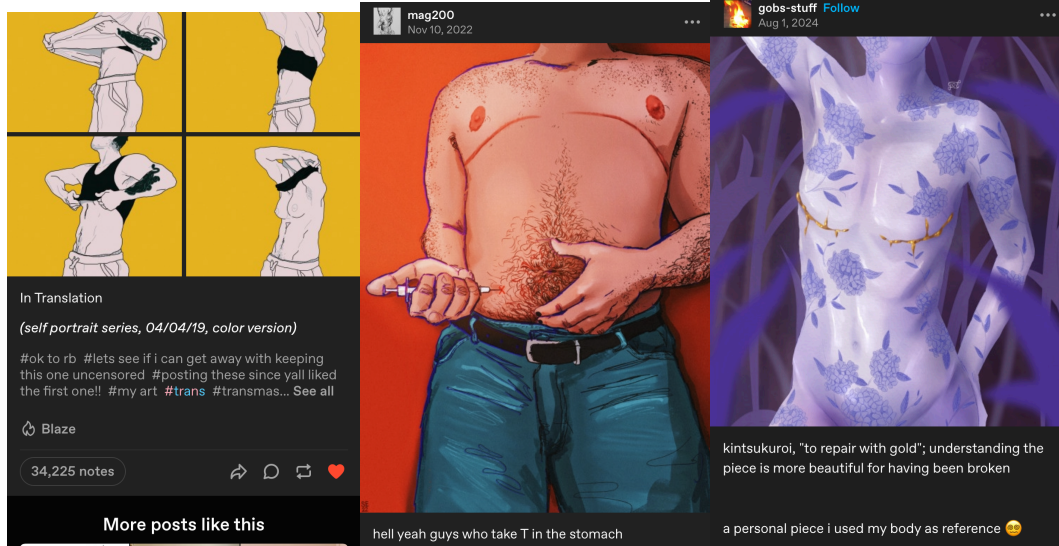


Image #28: Tumblr art of transmasculine individuals in which no face is shown

This is not to suggest that non-trans art lacks these features. Certainly, it is not uncommon to see art of cis bodies given fantastical elements and sporting a range of body types and foci. In trans art, however, these portrayals are *central* to the community. Abstracted forms of meaning are more common than straightforward ones. Even self portraits forego the head with regularity to instead focus on the body and specifically the chest.

In an interview with trans werewolf artist ruddykite, they said of the experience of creating trans werewolf art: “Mostly, it’s a celebration. By turning my trans experience into something mythical, silly, and that resonates with me aesthetically, it allows me to celebrate my identity. It’s a way of saying that even though transness can be complex, difficult, and sometimes heavy, it doesn’t always have to feel that way” (Ruddykite 2024). This sentiment can be extrapolated out to the wider trans community’s readiness to create fantastical and religiously symbolic (especially but not exclusively Christian) art of trans characters.

From this trend, it can be understood that the trans community on Tumblr has an appreciation for the trans body. As Miceli suggests in OutWrite, a queer college news magazine established at the University of California, some feel that the roles assumed by trans central characters in fiction have been limited to stories that focus on the apparent misery of existing as trans. While there are books that have worked to remedy that (as mentioned by Miceli: Seanan McGuire’s *Every Heart a Doorway*, Cassandra Clare’s *Lord of Shadows*, and David Levithan’s *Every Day*), most of these stories either still do not feature a trans character as the protagonist or do not construct a world in which these trans characters are able to be unapologetic in their identities; they are still subject to misgendering and misfortune on the basis of their existence as trans, and often find their trans identities to be an impediment.

It is plausible that the circulation of art which is by, for, and about transgender people (hereby referred to as “trans art”) has become another way of voicing discontent with this theme of trans misery. In speaking to members of the trans community, a sentiment has arisen which suggests a way of living as trans which isn’t as often depicted in media. As artist pansylair says, “My transness is very important to me. I couldn’t imagine being a cis man nor would I want to be” (Pansylair 2025). As artist ruddykite puts it, “Even though transness can be complex, difficult, and sometimes heavy, it doesn’t always have to feel that way” (Ruddykite 2024).

On Tumblr, trans art has become its own ecosystem. #trans art features a variety of works that contradict the aforementioned attitudes of trans people as either only belonging in mundane settings or, in fantastical works, only being given mundane and “realistic” problems (such as misgendering or dysphoria). This is not to say that those problems need to be entirely erased in fiction, but as suggested by Miceli, queerness and transness are communicated in very limiting ways that center the state of being trans as an “othered” state. Even in Tumblr’s trans art, this desire for representation of trans characters who are not “just trans,” but “trans *people*,” has been expressed:

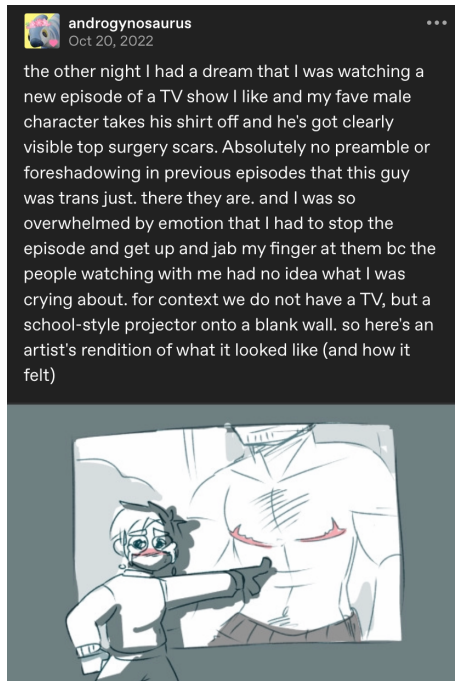


Image #29: A Tumblr user detailing and illustrating their desire for trans-normativity in media

The centrality of trans art which features *abstracted* and *fantastical* trans bodies is, I believe, one of multiple indications of the culture of the trans community on Tumblr. Not only does trans art largely express an appreciation for transness that is often lacking in hegemonic media and art, but it also delves further into the way that trans lives do not begin and end at simply *being* trans. The figures represented in art are not “special” by virtue of their transness, but rather, they are “special” because they are fantastical, or because they are performing certain symbolic acts, or because the composition is unique; they are trans because being trans is, in this context, normalized. In their queer student newsletter post “Trans Characters in Fiction,” Miceli writes:

In my experience as a reader on the lookout for transgender characters in works of fiction, the quintessential novel features a gloomy high school protagonist, who leads a

pained existence and is often verbally and/or sexually assaulted by the end of the story.

As per usual, this sort of novel is classified as a work of realistic-fiction, the only plausible way for a trans person to exist in the world. And while that certainly is an experience shared by some people, what I personally want to read in books is not the trans character struggling in a hostile environment and constantly being reminded of their other-ness at every turn. I am more interested in novels that take transgender characters and throw them into a universe that exists independently of their gender identity and treats them as though they were any other character (Miceli).

The trans art discussed in this thesis seems to corroborate this opinion as a common concern in the trans community. The art answers this concern by representing characters who are free to experience the world *beyond* marginalization. Characters have varying experiences, many of which make no mention of the social realities of many trans experiences. Even in art where negative experiences are portrayed — commonly representations of dysphoria, misgendering, social expectations, anxiety, or depression — they are abstracted. At other times, the moment captured in the art piece is one of taking revenge or breaking free rather than being forced to tolerate the situation. This narrative seems to resonate with Tumblr users, especially trans Tumblr users.



Image #30: Tumblr art of a trans werewolf by mulchmouth

The above art piece by mulchmouth, for example, has 951 notes (the sum of all likes, reblogs, and comments) as of August 1, 2025. It has 1 comment, 346 reblogs, and 604 likes. Of the 79 reblogs that include tags, the demographic breakdown is as follows:

- 21 people did not include information about their pronouns
- 13 people included the word “trans” or a form of it (ex. “transmasc,” “transfem”) in their bio, **or** the trans flag was included in their bio or profile picture
- 1 person included the word “cis” in their bio
- 3 people used “any pronouns”
- 1 person used he, she, and they pronouns

- 10 people used they/them pronouns
- 12 people used both he and they pronouns (some in combination with “it”)
- 16 people used he/him pronouns (some in combination with “it”)
- 4 people used both she and they pronouns (some in combination with “it”)
- 2 people used she/her pronouns (some in combination with “it”)
- Overall, 9 people used it/its pronouns, sometimes but not always in combination with other pronouns
- 1 person used ze/zir pronouns
- 7 people used terms not classified above, such as “womanish,” “guything,” agender, “was a weird girl, now a weird guy,” and the Mars symbol which may be taken to mean “male”
- 3 users’ reblogs were not counted due to being repeat reblogs; a user whose data was already recorded was not recorded a second time

The creator of the art piece, mulchmouth, also uses he/they pronouns and defines himself as “trans masc” in his bio. He is far from the only trans werewolf artist to hold these experiences of identity.

Artist Profiles

In my explorations of the trans werewolf, I have engaged with a number of artists in the community, and have conducted interviews with three of these artists over the course of my research to pursue a qualitative understanding of the development of the trans werewolf and the community around it. By speaking to those that I observed to be active bearers of the trans werewolf tradition (those who create and expand upon the meaning and visibility of the figure), I

have gained perspectives on the meaning of the trans werewolf as a figure as well as the broader environment in which it is circulated.

My first interlocutor, pansylair, is a 29-year-old Canadian artist who primarily works in ceramics and traditional art. His website's About page describes him as:

A gay, trans illustrator and ceramicist born and raised in London, Ontario. After graduating from the H.B. BealArt program, he immediately began freelancing and exhibiting his work within the city. Julian's practice focuses on themes of biology and naturalism in dialogue with LGBT+ identity and the broader human experience. His work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions within Ontario, including solo exhibitions at the Dust Evans Gallery of the Gloucester Pottery School, the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, as well as group exhibitions in the USA and UK, including the "Beacon" exhibition curated by Martina Lantin for the 2025 NCECA conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is currently represented by the Jonathon Bancroft-Snell Gallery (julianmiholics.com, accessed 2025).

Pansylair maintains an active presence on Tumblr, commonly posting multiple times a week. His content involves a blend of art, website and shop updates, advertisements for markets that he plans to vend at, activism and mutual aid fundraisers, and direct interaction with other Tumblr users in which he gives advice to aspiring artists or answers customer questions. He considers himself neurodivergent, but not disabled. Aside from trans werewolf art, he frequently uses animals as subject matter. Products sold in his shop include shirts, dishware, and charms.

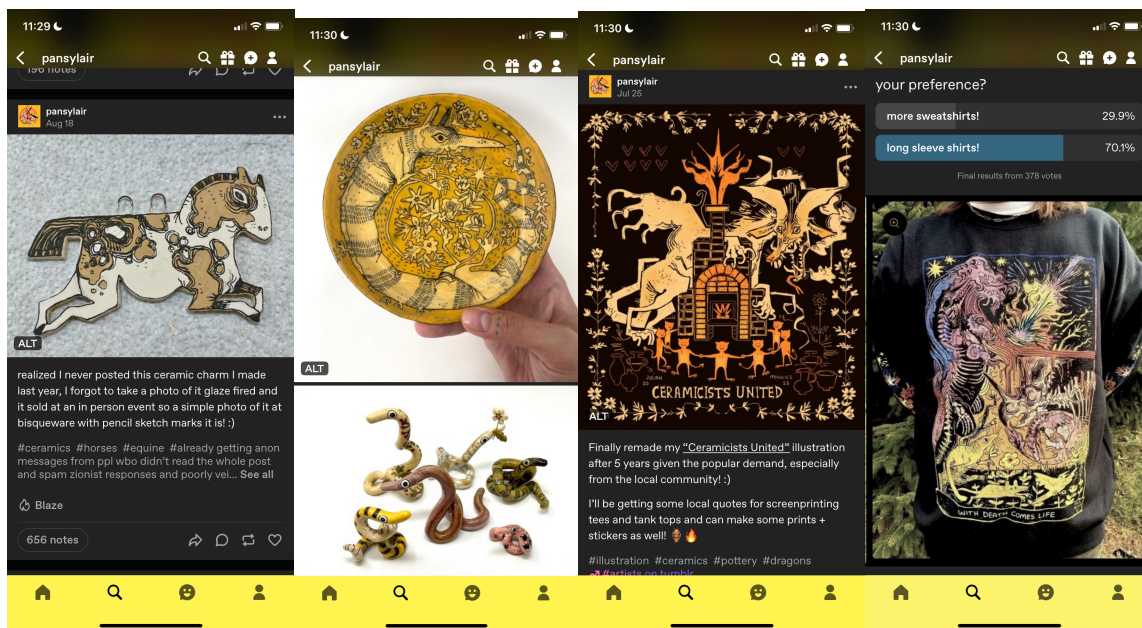
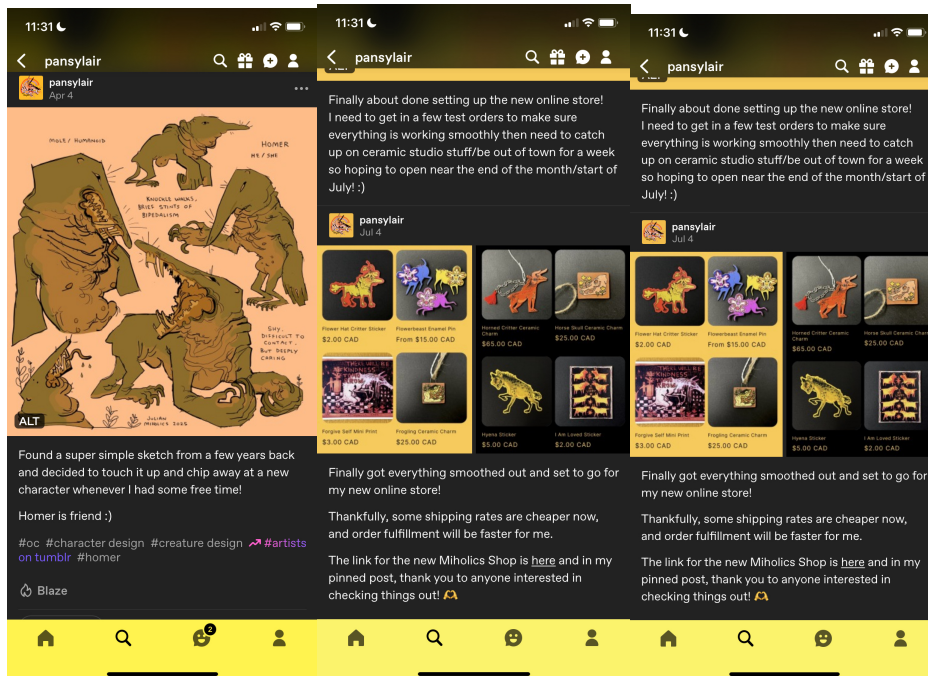


Image #31: Posts on pansylair's account which do not feature trans werewolves

Pansylair's werewolf art is made through the mediums of ceramic and illustration.

out on day to day life... I guess I do fit some definition of disabled? Chronic pain haver?”

(Wingedtrumpet 2025).

Wingedtrumpet works in the mediums of ceramics and illustration. They maintain an active Tumblr presence, posting between once a week and once a month. Their content consists largely of their art through the form of updates to their online shop (atomicgothic.com), interactions with other artists, and guided audience participation. Their art blends human figures, animal figures, mythological figures, and symbols.

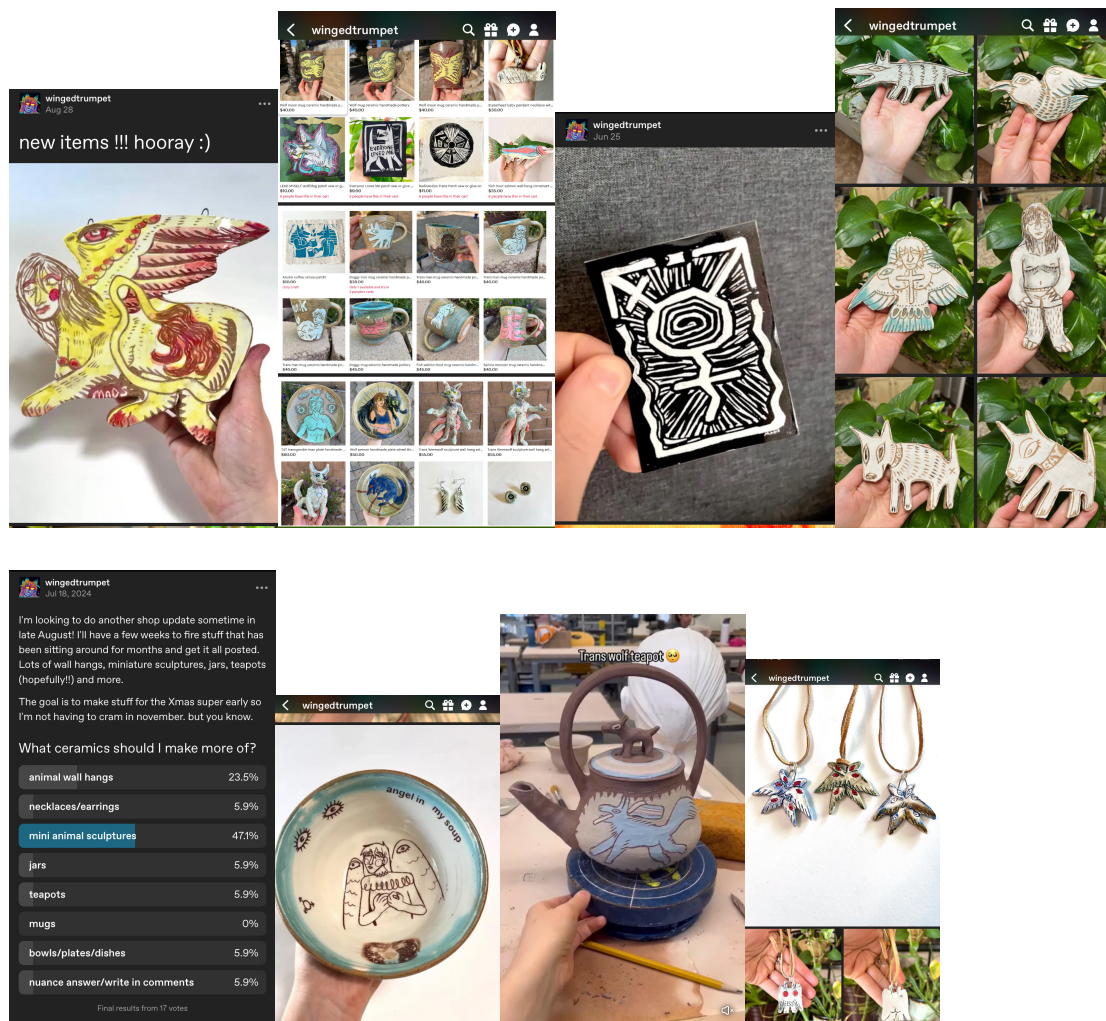


Image #33: Posts on wingedtrumpet's account which do not feature trans werewolves

Wingedtrumpet has had an interest in wolves since childhood; this seems to be somewhat common in the trans werewolf community among both active and passive bearers. They explain, “I’ve always been fascinated by wolves/canines and I was definitely the kind of kid to roleplay being wolves during recess in elementary school...” (wingedtrumpet 2024). Wingedtrumpet’s trans werewolf art is created mostly, though not entirely, in ceramic. As they write:

I think I’ve been leaning into trans werewolf ceramics more because it’s an easier subject matter for me to sculpt... I’m wondering if there’s also a connection to mud-clay-earth as well as transness and werewolfness. Or, if clay is inherently a queer medium. Another thing I’ve observed... I think the way queer people, genderqueer and trans people in particular, depict werewolves/wolves in their art can be incredibly diverse, just as diverse as their identities themselves. I’ve seen so many different artistic styles using the mediums of clay and the subject of the Werewolf, it’s really cool to see how ceramicists play with the subject matter! (wingedtrumpet 2024).



Image #34: Posts on wingedtrumpet’s account which feature trans werewolves

My final interlocutor, ruddykite, is a 22-year-old artist who was, at the time of our communications, pursuing an art degree at the University of Reading in England and who has since graduated. Ruddykite does consider themselves disabled. Of their studies, they say, “My

practice this year has centred on the aesthetics and politics of visibility — on who is seen, how, and under what terms. I’ve explored how both digital and physical spaces mediate the legibility of marginalised identities” (Dunn, accessed 2025).

Ruddykite works in the medium of digital art, and posts on their Tumblr account multiple times a week. Outside of his work with the figure of the trans werewolf, ruddykite mainly makes art of human, fantastical, and furry (anthropomorphic animal) characters, while also making art-related personal updates and advertisements on occasion, demonstrated here through posts on the topics of completing their art degree program and selling an art book.

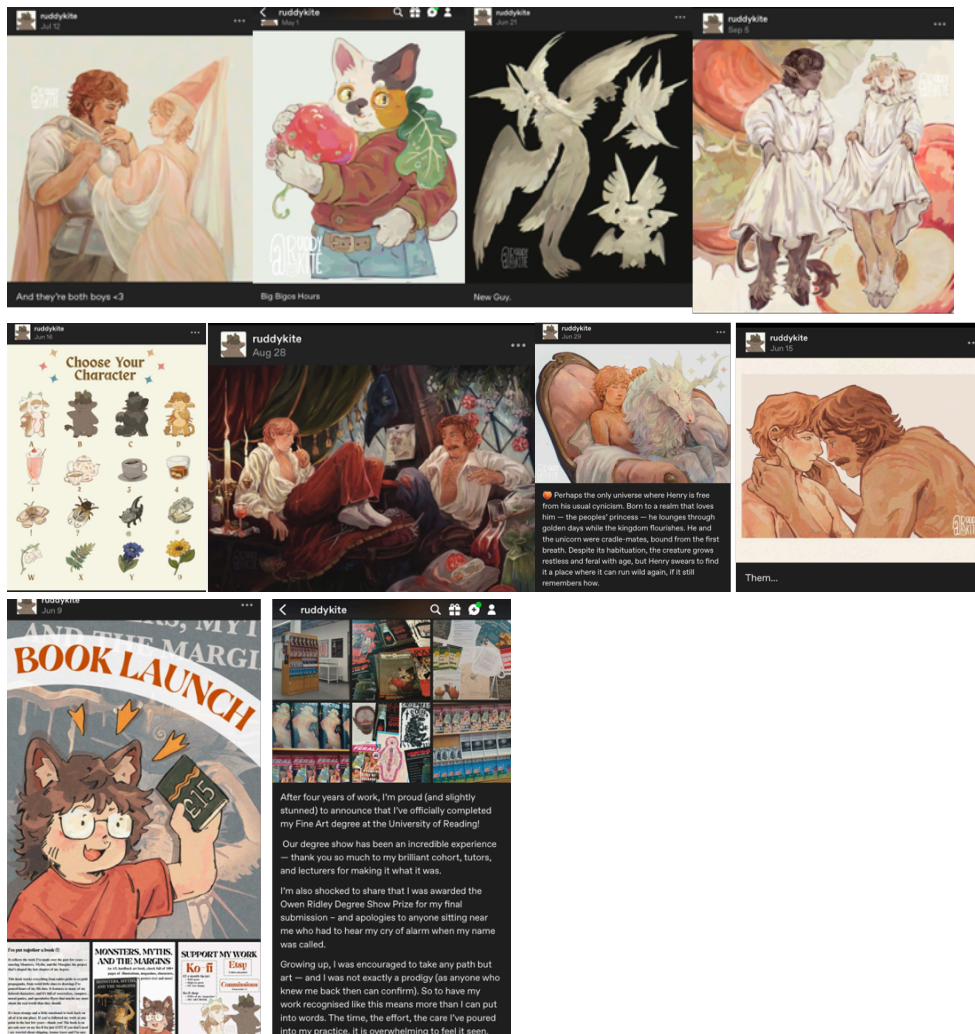


Image #35: Posts on ruddykite’s account which do not feature trans werewolves

Ruddykite's trans werewolf art often depicts original characters (fictional characters made by the artist or by others — not connected to existing media) or the artist's representations of himself in werewolf form. He writes that “my engagement with monstrosity is inspired by creative works that treat the monstrous with compassion and nuance” (Dunn, accessed 2025).

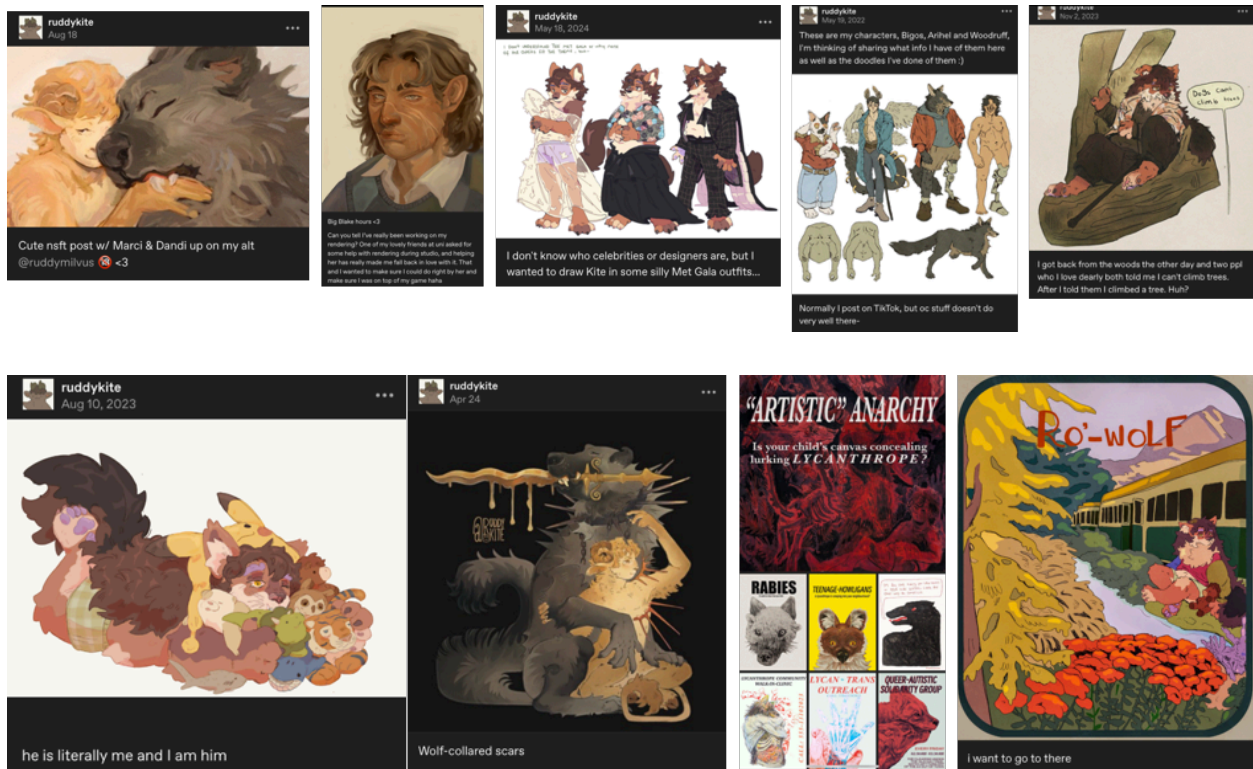


Image #36: Posts on ruddykite's account which feature trans werewolves

These three artists stand within the #trans werewolf community as active bearers through their proliferation of trans werewolf subject matter. They are all young adults (ages 22-29) who are transmasculine, white, neurodivergent, and living in Western countries. Both wingedtrumpet and ruddykite cited pansylair as one of many inspirations for their art.

Portrayals of Trans Lycanthropy: The Artist Perspective

Over the course of our interviews, I spoke with the artists about many facets of the trans werewolf. These included discussions about why the trans werewolf may appear in the form that it does, why it might be so common on Tumblr specifically, how the artists navigated their trans werewolf art in relation to their other art, and limitations of trans werewolf art on Tumblr.

Regarding their medium of choice, ruddykite says, “I tend to draw digitally because I’m colourblind, and I like to be able to see my values written out to make sure the final piece is exactly how I want it, but I actually tend to reach into more traditional medium when drawing my werewolves. I really enjoy the messier, more tangible feel of making them on paper and pencil and Lino, especially as I usually make them as sorta vent / self expression art” (Ruddykite 2024). Overall, through this quote, digital art’s utility can be examined as an accessibility tool for both artists and viewers. The fact that this accessibility has been noted as secondary to a desire for “tangibility” and “messiness” when engaging with the topic of the trans werewolf, however, cannot be understated.

On the same topic, wingedtrumpet writes that, “I think I’ve been leaning into trans werewolf ceramics more because it’s an easier subject matter for me to sculpt, compared to something like my neon-bright radioactive humans I’ve drawn for the past 4 years (bright colors are difficult to get in certain ceramic firings)... it usually comes down to: can I carve or sculpt a subject without heavy reference material or any preliminary sketches?” (wingedtrumpet, 2024).

Trans art on Tumblr commonly represents an *appreciation* of trans selfhood which is often erased in hegemonic culture. The desire for tangibility and the proposal of clay as a queer medium may speak to a concept which was also expressed through a previously-shown art piece

by thinginthedirt which included the quote, “God blessed me by making me transsexual for the same reason he made wheat but not bread and fruit but not wine: so that humanity might share in the act of creation” (Julian K. Jarboe via thinginthedirt, 2025). A common refrain in trans art is of molding oneself. Seeking out a more tangible, malleable medium to create trans werewolves may play into the concept of actualization through “messy” creation.

The presence of messiness and physical media in a digital environment may seem to decrease the impact of the medium, but the effect does not seem to be lost on audience members. When asked about their opinion on Tumblr’s utility from an artist’s perspective, pansylair stated:

I think one of my other favourite things regarding Tumblr and having a platform is just how much feedback and socialization you can receive and give on that platform... a less intimidating method of communication... I also found the site to be more queer/trans friendly... so it was easier to connect with others and talk openly about things commonly stigmatized... The communication system on Tumblr has led to many pleasant interactions/reading of replies/reblog tags which is very motivating and kind to read as an artist. It's easily the most feedback I receive from all my social media pages and I'm sure others agree. It's also a great way to spread knowledge and tips on techniques and resources as I can commonly get ceramic and illustration related questions” (pansylair 2025).

Ruddykite also spoke of the cultural norms of the social media site, and mentioned interaction with audiences as a key point.

“I actually do crosspost on three different social media (bluesky, instagram and Tumblr) but Tumblr is by far my favourite. The interaction here feels far more genuine and

organic, and I feel as if my strangeness and all my oddities are far better understood here than they are anywhere else... I think I'm sort of habituated here — I've been posting here since I was (probably far too) young, and the language and aesthetics of the site are sort of built into who I am and my practice" (interview with ruddykite 2024).

The resonance with audiences was also noted by wingedtrumpet:

Mostly, I enjoy drawing them [trans werewolves] as a way to connect back to my younger self and because other queer people online really seem to relate to those pieces... I think for trans, gnc, or queer people in general, animals are easier to relate to than humans... being an animal means not having to obey human social cues or navigate complicated emotions with people I have difficulty communicating with... Maybe it's a way for me to simplify emotions to their base level, something easy to understand and vent out...?" (wingedtrumpet 2024).

Wingedtrumpet's discussion of animal representations as an "opting-out" of social cues and as a way to better process emotions may also be read through a neurodivergent lens. I hypothesize that the figure of the werewolf appeals to neurodivergent people precisely *because* it is adjacent to, but not *quite*, human or animal. Artist ruddykite explains the following:

I think autism itself lends to a more interesting relationship to gender, and a less strict adherence to performing society's idea of gender. I personally find it hard to connect to any strict ideas of anything, and I feel like I sit outside-but-adjacent-to most boxes. I barely relate to the idea of feeling strictly human, let alone strictly male or female... I just feel very distinctly positioned as me... To me, trans werewolf art is a blend of things. On

one hand, it's a form of playful escapism, like channelling that childhood sense of playing pretend through a character. As an autistic person, I find that expressing my experiences and emotions through a character helps me process and understand them in a way that can be difficult to do internally. It offers a layer of abstraction that makes navigating my own feelings easier. It's also a way to connect with others, to engage with a broader community where I can see others exploring their transness through similar lenses. I don't feel the need to make it more palatable or overt, like I often feel pressure to when creating work for cis-het audiences to understand. There's something quite cool in seeing my experiences reflected back at me through a mutual understanding of what this 'monster' really means. But mostly, it's a celebration. By turning my trans experience into something mythical, silly, and that resonated [sic] with me aesthetically, it allows me to celebrate my identity. It's a way of saying that even though transness can be complex, difficult, and sometimes heavy, it doesn't always have to feel that way (interview with ruddykite 2024).

Ruddykite speaks of the value of monstrosity in trans werewolf art. The lack of palatability — the lack of understanding on the part of cisgender, heterosexual audiences — becomes a *central point* of the art. He continues:

It's like a shared symbol/language that doesn't revolve around explaining to those out-of-the-know. It is by and for trans people. It feels very natural and organic, and very odd at the same time. I actually had to explain to a lecturer at my university... he had a lot of questions about whether it's because trans people feel ostracised or monstrous, whether it was negative or positive, and I couldn't really answer him in any way other than it just *is*.

It's all those things and it's natural and wild silly and sinister, it's just not for him...

sometimes it's their [cisgender, neurotypical people's] turn to be confused and that's okay
(interview with ruddykite 2024).

There is value, in the trans, neurodivergent experience, in being inhuman. Wingedtrumpet asserts that there is appeal in representations of the self as "Something that can't talk or communicate beyond growls, but still possesses all the intelligence of a human... I think this just stems from the desire to be taken care of, even if I'm this big scary beast thing that can't talk" (interview with wingedtrumpet, 2024).

Pansylair adds:

My most direct inspiration for making trans werewolf art is providing something kind to my trans community; that one can apply themselves or see themselves in a creature with a story and body similar to theirs, and importantly, celebrated. I can often find myself depicting them with a head that is largely animal - little or no connection to human facial features. I find it, in a way, leaving a part of the canvas blank for one to fill in themselves. It's wonderful to see myself and other artists celebrate trans bodies with the inclusion of such things as sexuality, scars, fatness, and disability - and showcasing them in a magical, mythical form that has historically demanded awe from the viewer" (interview with pansylair 2024).

As demonstrated previously, one popular representation in trans art is a headless figure; the focus is, as discussed before, largely on the chest. Pansylair's comment helps to define at least one of the reasons for this trend: ability of audiences to relate. Ultimately, the representation of trans werewolves seems to come down to accessibility for artists (use of mediums),

accessibility for like-minded audiences (ability to relate to subjects), and inaccessibility for unfamiliar audiences (lack of explanation for those who do not already feel drawn to the trans werewolf figure; the allowance of the art to simply “be”). As ruddykite says, “the monster is never just a metaphor — it is also a strategy for survival, a site of projection, a reclamation. My archive does not explain the monster. It asks why we need it — and who gets to decide what it means” (Dunn, accessed 2025).

Art of the trans werewolf is many things: it is, at times, art expressing discontent with the state of the world or one’s own body; it is an invitation for the viewer to see themselves in the piece; it is an escape for the artist into a fantasy. Above all, though, trans werewolf art *just is*. It exists as an expression of selfhood and as a celebration of a body that hegemonic media represents as undesirable, invisible, and incomplete. Among medically-transitioning transmasculine people, many of whom have been exposed from early points in their transition to the idea that testosterone will make them violent, ugly, unable to control themselves, and incapable of being understood or cared for, the trans werewolf offers a new possibility: that they, like the more sympathetic werewolf figure portrayed in trans werewolf art and in more recent contemporary Western media, are being misinterpreted. That these descriptions are either entirely false or are negatively interpreting features that are in reality subjective and often viewed neutrally or positively. The trans werewolf, like the trans body, is made not for an outside audience, but for those who can properly appreciate it. It is “natural and wild silly and sinister;” it is “a magical, mythical form.” And it is not *for* anyone else.

Conclusion

One might expect me to say that the trans werewolf stands as a representation of betweenness: between human and animal; between readability as one sex and another. The trans werewolf, however, is the product of a culture that embraces an experience of the world not as “in between,” but as *separately whole*. The werewolf, being physically half-human and half-wolf, becomes socially *neither*; it is its own being. The most commonly depicted medically-transitioned trans body on Tumblr is exosex — not *between* sexes, but *fully* and *conclusively* a trans body. The neurodivergent fantasy depicted in trans werewolves is not to succeed at neurotypical communication, but to be embraced in the absence of this communication. The trans werewolf does not perform for others; it is unapologetically itself.

As I have explored with my interlocutors in this project, the trans werewolf is explicitly trans, but does not seem to be explicitly neurodivergent. This may be due in part to a limited ability to represent neurodivergence visually. It may also be due to varied experiences. Each interlocutor has navigated their neurodivergent identity differently, whether this is due to differing categories (among my interlocutors: anxiety, autism and ADHD, unspecified), age, intersection with other identities, personal definitions of disability, or other factors. Whatever the reason, I have discussed the trans werewolf in this thesis most centrally in terms of its *explicit* identity — a trans werewolf, as is made clear through the captions, tags, and visuals of each post — and have interpreted it as a symbol largely reflective of a more specific intersection of experiences through interactions with the community surrounding this art.

The parallels between lycanthropy and transness have not escaped notice in recent years in other fields, particularly among young-adult trans scholars and artists who live in Western countries. While ruddykite's work does not focus entirely on werewolves, themes of lycanthropy are largely present in their art exhibition "Exploring Identity Through Myth, Monsters, and the Margins" and their art book *Monsters, Myths, and the Margins*.



Image #37: Ruddykite's book and pamphlets from his art exhibition

Pansylair's work has been featured in exhibits in Canada, lending public attention to the weight that trans folk art carries both within and outside of the trans community. Of his exhibit, *Shifting Bodies*, guest curator Riley Knowles writes:

Shifting Bodies by Julian Miholics represents one answer to this tangle of questions.

Transgender experience is interpreted here in an ancient vernacular of monstrous gods and tragic heroes, of forming from and returning to the clay. In this body of work,

transgender subjects are not held to the sidelines of traditions of life, death, and myth-making, but richly intertwined with them... Together, these works represent a love letter to transgender people and to the broader Queer community. *Shifting Bodies* enfold playful, multi-layered images around the often difficult and often joyful experience of accepting who you truly are and working to embody that truth. Queer identity is complicated, and informed by both historical and contemporary persecution, but it is the artist's thoughtful dialogue with this messiness that has made these sculptures both beautiful and profound (Knowles 2023).





Image #38: A photo and brochure for pansylair's art exhibition

While in the process of writing this thesis, 22-year-old London, UK-based Instagram artist gr3nd3l_ compiled art of trans werewolves made by 24 artists who were also active on Instagram.



Image #39: An Instagram post advertising Instagram user gr3nd3l_'s zine on trans werewolf art

It becomes clear from this increase in art featuring trans werewolves that the werewolf has gained popularity as a symbol of transness. While Tumblr users interact with this figure in unique ways, it is not exclusive to Tumblr, and while I have spoken here of the ways in which the trans werewolf is notably popular with those who are neurodivergent, the fields of queer folklore and digital folklore would benefit from applying a more focused lens to the werewolf as a neurodivergent or explicitly intersectional figure across multiple sites of folkloric meaning-making. In the first chapter of this thesis, I explored Tumblr as an under-explored site of unique folk interactions. In my second chapter, I qualified the werewolf as a representation of abjection and outsidersness, and detailed how the trans werewolf relates to those themes. In this thesis' third chapter, I examined the trans werewolf figure's interactions with the community around it in the broader context of Tumblr's trans community and in the more specific context of its active and passive bearers — the artists and audience members involved in this community. Using this

thesis as a foundation in how and why fantastical and supernatural trans representation emerges and the ways in which certain themes (such as lycanthropy and the associated trans-specific beauty standards) proliferate, I encourage future studies to more deeply examine whether further marginalized groups (for example, neurodivergent trans people of colour or neurodivergent trans women specifically) interact with this figure, if there are other symbolic figures that resonate more closely with these communities, and why.

Closing Vignette

An individual — an older teenager or young adult, if they align with the #trans werewolf tag's typical demographics — is awake late at night. They are scrolling through social media on their phone, and they are doing so in their own home, whether in bed or on the couch. They are alone, or perhaps they *feel* alone in a media environment that never reflects their own experiences. They know that their experience of selfhood is different from those around them. They are trans and neurodivergent, and they don't know anyone else who connects to ideas of identity, humanity, and socialization the way that they do.

They stumble upon an art post tagged #trans werewolf. The figure in the drawing is like nothing they have ever seen before. It has a humanlike body, but it looks like *them* — not cisgender, not movie-star skinny. It has the head of a wolf, but its actions and expression betray sapience (though not at the cost of their comfort; a wolf that knows the *implications* of baring its teeth will nonetheless bare its teeth if the situation calls for it). It stands proudly in its environment, knowing it is *meant* to be there, wearing a contented expression or flashing a playful smile or letting its jaws hang open in a cathartic snarl.

Studying this image on their phone, this person finds a kinship they didn't know was *for* people like them — people outside of hegemonic Western gendered and aesthetic body standards. In the figure of the trans werewolf, they see what they have never had words for: a balance between who they are and what they desire. The werewolf is capable of defending itself, but not unduly violent; detached from the “normal” human experience, but not dehumanized; alone, but not lonely. Most importantly, the werewolf is unapologetically *itself*, and it is magnificent.

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