Supernatural entities have been the topic of fiction since the dawn of literature. These entities brazenly manipulate the societal, environmental, and physical norms which dictate much of the living world. Perhaps one of the most renowned literary characters of supernatural fiction is the werewolf. Historically, this literary concept of a wolf-human hybrid is rooted in evil. They are graphically described as “bestial, blood-drinking, human-flesh-eating creatures, endowed with more than human agility and strength” (Rudin 115). Werewolves served as popular antagonists throughout media, including television and cinema; yet, in recent years, the media’s perception of werewolves has taken a noticeable shift in the opposite direction. Stephenie Meyer, the critically acclaimed author of the Young Adult series The Twilight Saga, embodies this shift to the “new” werewolf. Meyer made a drastic change to the very nature of what was once a ferocious beast by characterizing werewolves as more gentle and protective. People wonder, though, what caused this sudden switch of characteristics? Through texts such as Rick Bass’ The Ninemile Wolf, Barry Holstun Lopez’s Of Wolves and Men, Valerie Fogleman’s piece “American Attitudes Towards Wolves: a History of Misperception,” Stephenie Meyer’s The Twilight Saga, and more, this paper will argue that the “original” werewolf belief was founded on America’s misperception of wolves and that, through revelations in animal studies, particularly the Endangered Species Act of 1973, modern American culture has transitioned into a more animal sympathetic society, creating literary changes in the behavior of werewolves to occur with acceptance.

There is a definitive transition between the “original” werewolf and the “new” werewolf. The question, though, is where does this supernatural character originate? Elizabeth Lawrence points out that “[n]o single classic gave rise to the werewolf image
Coastlines

in the way that Mary Shelley's work established Frankenstein and Bram Stoker's novel created Dracula" (Lawrence 103); some trace the character of werewolves to early Greek legends in 300 BC (Wiley 48). These legends state that the king of Arcadia, Lycaon, secretly fed human flesh to the god, Zeus. Once Zeus discovered this appalling act, he punished Lycaon by turning him into a wolf (Wiley 48). This mythological legend spearheaded the concept of a man transforming into a wolf, creating a folkloric phenomenon known as lycanthropy. The next "appearance" of people converting into wolves was in Europe during the Middle Ages in the 15th century. People began attacking villages and cities seemingly at random. These outbreaks were believed to involve "innocent people" that were "turned into wolves by an evil power, or who had practiced witchcraft and sorcery" (Fogleman 76). In retaliation for these gruesome killings, villages held trials to eliminate this threat. Thousands were executed during these trials on the assumption that satanic powers were causing an outbreak of these wolf-like people (Fogleman 76). The fear and paranoia during this period led to the coined word "werewolf," which is derived "from the Anglo-Saxon wer, meaning man and wulf meaning wolf" (Lawrence 103). It was not until later, however, that the reasons behind these peculiar outbreaks were exposed. Researchers now believe that the reason these people began attacking towns was due to their suffering a particular mental illness. This illness enabled people to have "delusional experiences" about becoming a wolf and "behave[ing] accordingly" (Durante 22); thus, these people truly acted like wolves. Given the context of the mental disorder, it soon became a second definition of the word, lycanthropy (Durante 22).

The lore of the werewolf terrorized Europe for centuries. Trials and executions of suspected lycanthropic people continued for many years. The concept of a man-turned-wolf was prevalent in any and all of European society; hence, when the colonials inhabited America, the legend of the werewolf followed it. When
the colonials settled in America, the legend of the werewolf became more violent and gruesome. The more violent behavior of the werewolf was strongly affected by the colonials’ experience with North American wolf packs. Wolves in Europe had been eradicated by “the early 1500s” (Fogleman 64). So, when the colonials moved over with the lore of werewolves vividly in mind and physically interacted with wolves for the first time, they projected these appalling characteristics of the man-made legend to the real animals.

American colonists carried a negative perception of wolves due to their ignorance of the species. When the colonists settled into the land and witnessed creatures similar to those of their nightmarish legends, they immediately felt threatened. This caused an irrational fear of wolves that transferred over to folklore. In the colonists’ eyes, wolves terrorized their towns, destroyed their livestock, and depleted the supply of game mammals (Fogleman 65). They assumed the wolves were purposefully eating their livestock as an attack to the colonists themselves. The reality of the situation shows that the wolves were forced to eat livestock because most of the live game animals were being eaten by the colonists. Upon their arrival to America, the colonists began to participate in “year-round hunting” of “elk, moose, and deer” (Fogleman 65). Their continual hunting of the animals greatly affected the balance of the living world. It forced wolves to eat whatever they could find to eat, namely livestock such as sheep and cattle (Fogleman 64). The wolves did not truly understand the difference between livestock and wild game. They noticed a lack of wild game and did the next best thing to stay alive. The colonists, however, felt the wolves were being “treacherous, deceitful, cruel, cowardly, and ravenous” (Fogleman 70). The colonists did not recognize that the reasons for the wolves’ actions were in response to the colonists’ hunting practices. The colonists attributed characteristics to the wolves with adjectives that normally describe humans; they gave the wolves more judgment of the situation than what they really had. Because they see the wolves as “deceitful” or “treacherous” they
are implying that wolves have a humanly intelligence about them that can recognize these actions. Thus, the reputation of the big, bad wolf became a real concern within the colonies. This concern lasted for “nearly three hundred years” with wolves having “similar descriptions” as those mentioned above (Fogleman 70). Soon, the “removal [of wolves] was deemed essential to a civilized society... because they were destroy[ing]...part of civilization’s fabric” (Fogleman 67).

The relationship between man and wolves is founded on man’s misperception. These misperceptions quickly turned into a hatred for the wild canine breed that led to their decline within America. Environmental essayist, Barry Hulston Lopez, believes that it was man’s perception “to clear wilderness” that destroyed the wolves (144); upon their arrival to the America’s, the colonials’ mission was to spread out and inhabit as much of the country as possible, by any means necessary. Their unfamiliarity with wilderness and the wild caused fear—this fear was then transferred to the predators that presented the largest threat: wolves. Lopez describes this fear as “theriophobia” or “fear of the beast” (Lopez 140). He believes that theriophobia is “the fear of one’s own nature” (Lopez 140). There was an obvious divide between man and the living world. People did not recognize that they were actively involved with their surroundings. They failed to comprehend the interconnections plant, animal, and human life has with each other. This is where that root of theriophobia exists.

With “hostil[ity]” “toward[s] wilderness” in mind, men began to prepare for the execution of the living world: Manifest Destiny (Lopez 138-143). They began an attempt to “tame” the unfamiliar wilderness: “the wagon-master of the 1840s ‘opened the road west’; he was followed by the farmer, who cleared the fields, and the logger, who ‘let daylight into the swamp’” (Lopez 142). This deforestation and creation of civilization harmed the wolves deeply. Man viewed wolves as a threat to their existence.
Wolves would continually eat their livestock and hunt wild game, leaving the men with less food than they were comfortable with. To manage the wildness from seeping into the society, men decided to implement ways to rid themselves of their number one “enemy.” Extermination campaigns soon became popularized within America. By the “early 19th century wolves had been exterminated” from portions of the United States (Fogleman 67). These extermination campaigns continued to develop the more the country as a whole developed. Alongside the deforestation of the wolves’ habitat, extermination campaigns began to propose and encourage wolf hunts (Fogleman 66). True to its name, people would organize wolf hunts to track packs of wolves and kill them ruthlessly. However, the main method for removing the wolves was a bounty system (Fogleman 67). Bounty systems were a payment process that encouraged the destruction of wolves; “for every dead wolf turned in to the bounty officials,” a money reward would be given (Fogleman 67). These bounties originally started as a way to protect private property and safety. Soon, however, this “hunting (read: killing—people don’t eat wolves)” became a popular sport within the communities (Bass 6). The money received from the bounties paid for “end-of-the-season parties” (Lopez 158). The sport soon became a showmanship of “money and respectability” (Lopez 186). They began hunting wolves from the air with aerial hunting. With aerial hunting, “wolves [were] caught out in the open...with highly maneuverable aircraft and blasted with automatic shotguns. The plane lands and the trophy hunter picks up his price” (Lopez 159). This practice of sporting became uniquely popular among society; men felt authority and power to eliminate their prey with no physical contact and heavy machinery.

Not only did people see “nothing wrong with killing wolves, [some] felt it was basically a good thing to be doing” (Lopez 137). People viewed wolves in such a negative fashion that it became a popular decision to mercilessly, and “with a trace of vengeance,” murder them with little to no repercussions (Lopez 138).
of why killing wolves would be an acceptable task. To them, wolves were destroying their livestock and wild game; thus, killing the wolves would solve their problem. It also helped that the people killing the wolves received nothing but profit: bounty hunters received money for their kills, trappers received money for pelts, scientists killed them for data, and big game hunters killed for trophies (Lopez 139). However, the extreme amount of killings they committed and how they killed them is where the real issue lies. The accounts of the murder of wolves are gruesome:

[T]hey torture them. They set wolves on fire and tore their jaws out and cut their Achilles tendons and turned dogs loose on them. They poisoned them with strychnine, arsenic, and cyanide, on such a scale that millions of other animals—raccoons, black-footed ferrets, red foxes, ravens, red-tailed hawks, eagles, ground squirrels, wolverines—were killed incidentally in the process (Lopez 139).

Other cases documented where people were “feeding them ground-up glass” (Bass 5). America’s misperception of wolves led to people using extremely inhumane procedures to eliminate their threat. Each and every way listed required planning and action that brutally destroyed not only wolves, but the living world as well. It is truly a deep, dark seeded hatred to cause such destruction to take place. Some associated this perception of wolves deserving such treatment to religious reasoning.

The religious roots that gave meaning to the massacre of wolves in North America were based on the concept that “the wolf was the Devil in disguise” (Lopez 140). The Bible discusses how the term wilderness is described as the place without God (Lopez 141). People took this definition of wilderness and twisted it to fit their situation. Men believed that creating settlements and development in America was God’s wish. The Devil constantly attempted to uproot man and destroy righteous progress. When
man began clearing the land to create room for societies to prosper, the one reoccurring factor that stood in their way was wolves. Thus, men began to affiliate these diabolic methods to the literal source. Thus, men associated wolves with the Devil.

Evidence shows that North America suffered from a false viewpoint on wolves. This caused the relationship between man and wolf to drastically suffer to the point of near extinction for an entire species. The main source of this raging battle was the lack of knowledge people had on wolves as a whole. Rick Bass traces this ignorance on the fact that “the wolves were all killed so quickly...that we never had time to learn about them, and about their place on the land” (4). Barry Holstun Lopez echoes this belief by stating “we do not know very much at all about animals. We cannot understand them except in terms of our own needs and experiences. And to approach them solely in terms of the Western imagination is, really, to deny the animal” (86). The ignorance of our society in its treatment of wolves has hindered the entirety of the living world; however, attempts to standstill the destruction of our surroundings occurred with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 “recognized that our rich natural heritage is of ‘esthetic, ecological, and scientific value to our nation and its people’...[and] expressed concern that many of our nation’s native plants and animals were in danger of becoming extinct” (U.S. Fish and Wildlife). Within this act, imperiled species are protected against “harass, harm, pursu[it], hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, [or] capture” of any form (U.S. Fish and Wildlife). The ESA triggered an awareness in animals that was previously not seen, particularly in wolves. This means that the inhumane treatment of wolves that lasted for hundreds of years was finally outlawed. It is after the Endangered Species Act of 1973 that there is a noticeable change in the relationship between man and wolf. Before the act, “men select[ed] only those (few) things the wolf does that interest them to pay attention to” (Lopez 79). Once the ESA was in place, biologists began to study the true behavior of wolves. Biologists quickly discovered that “wolves are the most social mammals in this part of the world,
except (maybe) for humans” (Bass 31). Scientists also discovered that “a wolf that has never been ‘taught’ by its elders to hunt or eat livestock probably never will” (Bass 16). This realization of the true behavior of wolves shows that they are not inherently evil or destructive, completely changing the perspective the country has had for over three hundred years. Now, given the laws surrounding the protection of imperiled animals, there are no other reasons “needed to kill a wolf [other] than the fact that someone feels like doing it” (Lopez 152).

The legend of a man-turned-wolf wreaking havoc on innocent civilians has been a reoccurring topic for fiction and cinema for decades. People from all over the world share a generalized concept of this anomaly. In today’s society, however, this concept has become one of protection. No longer are werewolves creatures of destruction and malice; now they are seen as protagonists and heroes within their element. The onset of the shift was first witnessed in the early 1980s with Joe Dante’s movie *The Howling*. In the film, lead character Karen White goes to a rural retreat to recover from a traumatic encounter with an obsessive serial killer. Over the course of the movie, it is shown that the retreat location, The Colony, consists of werewolves that attempt to kill Karen as well as her companions. These werewolves located at The Colony embody the feral and ruthless characteristics associated with the “original” werewolf. In her attempt to escape The Colony to announce the existence of werewolves to the public, Karen is bit by her husband-turned-werewolf. Upon returning to her job as a news anchor, Karen shows the public on live TV that werewolves exist by shifting into one, where she is promptly shot with a silver bullet (*The Howling*). Karen’s determination to announce the presence of werewolves, despite being one herself, shows the internal battle she fought to protect the human population. In the past, a werewolf giving himself up was unheard of because, for this to happen, a werewolf
would have to show compassion and guilt for their existence, an idea that did not currently exist.

The werewolf's internal struggle to protect others occurred once again in the 1981 film *An American Werewolf in London*. After being bitten by a werewolf, David, the main character, begins to “see” his deceased friend, Jack. In these visions, Jack warns David that he is a werewolf and of the danger that he is putting people in. In an attempt to do what is right, David tries to get himself arrested to avoid contact with the public. In the end, Jack convinces David to commit suicide in order to prevent the spread of the werewolf line as well as protecting the public (*An American Werewolf*). David, similarly to Karen from *The Howling*, recognizes the danger his new transformation holds to society. He exhibits emotions of compassion and anguish, showing that his human form dictates that of his werewolf form. He struggles with his identity and duty, fighting the urges of the werewolf. Ultimately, with the help of Jack, David is able to sacrifice his well being for those surrounding him, becoming a martyr rather than a monster.

The change from destructive entity to a remorseful figure was gradual. Movies incorporated the mental paradigm shift of werewolves as climactic plots, which add depth and diversity within their characters. The complete transformation from a predatory being into a protector role was not exhibited until the 2005 release of Meyer’s Native American werewolves in *The Twilight Saga*. Unlike the colonial perspective, many Native American cultures surround themselves with a deep spiritual connection to wolves. Wolves in Native American societies represent “courage, strength, [and] loyalty” (native-languages.org). These traits are reflected in the Quileute werewolves of *The Twilight Saga*. In *The Twilight Saga*, Meyer introduces her representation of werewolves as being Quileute Native Americans that were “descended from wolves” (*Twilight* 124). Jacob, a member of the Quileute Tribe, explains the legend that “wolves are” “brothers” to the Tribe because his “ancestors”
Coastlines were “wolves that turn[ed] into men” (*Twilight* 124). This concept is common among Native American folklore. In many instances, the wolf acts as a “brother and true best friend to the hero” creating a bond among the tribesmen that translates to the werewolves (native-languages.org). Unlike the “original” werewolf, the “new” werewolves take pride in their supernatural status. This is strongly due to the role of Meyer’s werewolves. Their duty is as “[p]rotectors” (*New Moon* 309). They “exist” to “protect” the human race that surrounds their reservation from their supernatural enemies: vampires. This company of werewolves takes honor in their “land” and “tribe pride,” creating a deep connection to the living world, whereas the preceding werewolves damaged the living world by forming a violent rift between animals and humans (*New Moon* 173). This passionate connection between the living world and werewolves comes from the Native American belief that the “earth and everything in it was a huge, living web sharing one common spirit” (Running Deer). Meyer’s return to the Native American relationship with wolves greatly differs from the foundation that America was raised to believe, creating a more primitive and rural interpretation of a modernized supernatural being.

Another contrast between the “new” werewolf and the “original” werewolf is their physical description. Cinema in the past has described werewolves as “hybrids, part man and part animal with...supernormal powers and strength” (Wiley 49). Meyer differs from this depiction by describing her werewolves as literal representations of wolves, only disproportionately larger. The first viewing of the werewolves had the description of being “as tall as a horse, but thicker, much more muscular” (*New Moon* 242). They were “quiet as a shadow” and “stalked deliberately” with “dagger-like incisors” (*New Moon* 242). The “original” werewolf typically transforms into its monstrous form “during a full moon” (Lawrence 103). In *The Twilight Saga*, the tribe members control when they transform or not, the exception being
when danger is near or when they experience extreme emotions such as anger; the tribe members “shudder” and “vibrate violently” until they “exploded” to get into their “wolf” shape (New Moon 324-325). In this form, the tribe members become “more than five-times his [original] size” (New Moon 325). The transformation between the “original” werewolves and the “new” contrast greatly; the “original” werewolves were victims of their shift—the moon cycle decided when they became a werewolf rather than free will. The “new” werewolves, however, exhibit self-control and awareness of their condition. They dictate their own circumstances for when they want to change forms. They then use their forms as guardians for the people versus predators that destroy entire towns.

Following the Endangered Species Act of 1973, there was a definitive shift in the way werewolves were perceived in literature and cinema. Movies that contributed to the gradual change of the character of the werewolf, such as The Howling and An American Werewolf in London, occurred shortly after the major animal awareness in 1973. Since the change began, the media has received numerous accounts of werewolf centered fiction that act as a protector of people rather than a destroyer. Stephenie Meyer’s interpretation within her novel is the epitome of how animal studies within our society have drastically changed the concept of the werewolf figures. Since the creation of the Quileute Tribe werewolves in Meyer’s work, several hit series such as The Vampire Diaries and Teen Wolf have created characters that reflect the gentle, non aggressive wolf common within the living world. All in all, the behavior of werewolves has coursed throughout history in several dimensions; these dimensions, despite being based on lore, have impacted America’s culture more than most other supernatural entities. And, given the continual progression in animal studies, the literary werewolf figure is completely capable of morphing, yet again, to something completely unknown.
Coastlines

Works Cited


