

Anthropophagy of the Werewolf: An Eco-Feminist Analysis of Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* (2009)

Leah Henderson

Griffith University, Australia

Correspondence: leah.henderson2@griffithuni.edu.au

Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process



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Abstract

Lycanthropic anthropophagy is the main concern for Justine Larbalestier's novel Liar (2009). The novel is about the mysterious killing of highschool teen, Zach, in contemporary New York City. Zach's girlfriend Micah, notorious for being a pathological liar and an outcast, is considered highly suspect as the murderer, particularly by her parents who know she is secretly a werewolf. The werewolf is both exceptional for its special abilities yet also cursed with uncontrollable, bloodthirsty urges at each full moon. This article argues that anthropophagy of the werewolf is metaphorically an act of social taboo when one lives and behaves in opposition to the socially prescribed. Through Micah's surreal and unstable narration Larbalestier explores contemporary issues such as authority over the individual, gender non-conformity, and mob mentality, in order to criticise popular opinions that ostracise people perceived as outsiders. This article will explore these themes in greater detail and prove the ways in which Larbalestier uses eco-feminist fiction to communicate these criticisms.

Keywords: werewolves; lycanthropy; Larbalestier; anthropophagy; gender; eco-feminism

Introduction

Justine Larbalestier's novel *Liar* (2009) is about the mysterious killing of highschool teen, Zach, in New York City. This sudden death causes the microcosmic world of highschool to self-implode as adults suspect teenagers and the teenagers suspect each other. Zach's girlfriend Micah, notorious for being a pathological liar and an outcast, is considered highly suspect as the murderer, particularly by her parents who know she is secretly a werewolf. The werewolf is both exceptional for its special abilities yet also cursed with uncontrollable, bloodthirsty urges at each full moon. This article argues that anthropophagy of the werewolf is metaphorically an act of social taboo when one lives and behaves in opposition to the socially prescribed. Larbalestier manipulates this situation by confusing the masculinised characteristic traits of a werewolf with that of a misfit and 'unfeminine' teenage girl. The novel constructs lycanthropic anthropophagy as a metaphor for the social stigma experienced by a seventeen-year-old girl who does not comply with feminine stereotypes. Because Micah is unique and non-conforming her werewolf metamorphosis means that she is judged as something inherently wrong and a danger to the culturally constructed order.

The article will explore concepts of reality and identity that reveal the extent of social conformity within the modern highschool setting as an homogenising method of control over individuals. This method of control is expressed in multiple ways: through adults' fears of allowing teenagers some freedom, the institutionalisation of education, and the biases of the city community that mould students into stereotypical feminine females and masculine males. The novel is a contemporaneous extension of latter twentieth-century eco-feminist literature which discusses female repression and posits a deep connection, both spiritually and socio-politically, between womanliness and nature, prominent authors including Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Like these authors, Larbalestier parallels lycanthropic anthropophagy with sexuality, the menstrual cycle, and with female masculinity. By linking this text to these earlier authors it becomes apparent how eco-feminist discussions of thirty years ago remain relevant in the present moment. Thus, this article will textually analyse these comparisons in greater detail.

Reality and Conformity

The setting of this novel surrounds a class of senior-year teenagers who live in New York City and attend a progressive, private highschool. The event of a highschooler's death acts as a catalyst to reveal the reactions of fellow school peers and their guardians—parents, teachers, principals, and detectives alike—when their microcosmic world is shattered by the tragic

death. Adults are fearful of losing control over the teenagers. Zach's murder is a horrifying confirmation of that worst fear being realised. Throughout the whole investigation suspicion is aimed at Zach's school peers but there is no mention that an adult could have possibly killed him. This absence of mention implies that the possibility has not even been considered.

In light of her werewolf abilities that are treated as a shameful condition rather than something exceptional, Micah's parents enforce strict rules upon her. This includes no boyfriends, no coffee, 'no sex, no drugs, no alcohol. No nothing' (Larbalestier, 2009: 248). While Micah's parents have no evidence that any of these things will turn Micah into an uncontrollable beast, there is still an anxious fervour to suppress her due to their own hysterical fears. When Micah insists to her father that she did not kill Zach because she 'loved him', her father accusingly retorts that she loved him 'so much that' she 'slept with him, changed, and killed him?' (Larbalestier, 2009: 288). One can read this accusation as a parents' fear of their hormonal teenager and the assumption that teenagers have an inability to maturely react to emotions such as love and anger. This aspect of the novel resembles the 1957 film *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, which is about a boy turned werewolf struggling with anger issues. This film exploits adults' irrational fears of uncontrollable adolescents whence the era of the teenage came into existence in the early twentieth-century. Larbalestier criticises this anxiety in a blog posted on 24 August 2016, in which she states that 'teens right now, especially in the USA, are the most surveilled generation ever' (Larbalestier, 2016). Yet she does not provide an explanation for this increased control. The reason behind these restrictions is perhaps explained when Micah states that 'grown-ups don't remember what it was like when they were teenagers. Not really. They remember something out of a Disney movie and that's where they want to keep us' (Larbalestier, 2009: 137). In referencing 'a Disney movie' Micah insinuates that her parents have a selective memory that causes them to enforce the same suffocating social system that plagued their own upbringing.

For the teenagers who grow up in a microcosm where adults do not trust them they learn to imbue the same behaviours and hurl accusations at their peers. As Micah narrates, 'At school the word "murder" has seeped into everything. We look at each other differently' (Ibid: 33). At the beginning of the novel Micah places emphasis on describing the type of highschool she attends as 'progressive' with students who are 'independent thinkers', who 'volunteer' and 'don't discriminate', who 'recycle and care and argue about politics' (Ibid: 29). Yet Micah makes the distinction that these practices only happen 'in class' and that 'out of class it's the same as any other school' (Ibid: 29). Therefore, the school's status

as being 'progressive' is a thin veil for the typical highschool environment that includes bullying, cruelty, and a strict social hierarchy. This social hierarchy includes the promotion of masculine and feminine stereotypes and the rejection of non-stereotypes as outsiders. Micah is at the bottom of this hierarchy and her highschool experience plays out accordingly. When the parents and students throw suspicions and accusations, most of these are directed at Micah and this reinforces her status as the social outcaste.

This promotion of gender stereotypes means that there is an implied violence to strictly conform. As the novel delves deeper into Micah's surreal narration, she overturns her initial description of the school rooms: 'Bars surround me. Prison guards bind my arms, bring me pills several times a day. They ask me—beg me—to tell them the truth' (*Ibid*: 232). The helplessness of this scene conjures the dread felt when Winston Smith is sent to room 101 in George Orwell's *1984* (1949), or the mental and physical incarceration of a drug induced stupor that the narrator describes in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Micah's description portrays a physically and chemically induced conformity. The insistence to 'tell them the truth' after being imprisoned and fed medication is not about truth at all but about verbally affirming her submission to them. As Micah states:

I am.

Every single word.

Truth.

They don't believe in my wolves (Larbalestier, 2009: 232).

Micah cryptically explains that her community refuses anything other than what they want to hear. This is again reiterated when Micah insists to her parents that she did not kill Zach because she 'loved him', but they do not listen to her, disbelieving that a werewolf is capable of feelings other than bloodthirst (*Ibid*: 288).

The suspicion of Micah's guilt is further exacerbated by her pathological lying, causing greater distrust from her peers and for the readers of the novel who are given an incredibly unreliable account of events. The reader is introduced to Micah through first-person narration, in which, from the beginning of the story, she promises to tell the truth:

I will tell you my story and I will tell it straight. No lies, no omissions.

That's my promise.

This time I truly mean it (Ibid: 3).

This implied instability is a precursor to the narrative flow of the rest of the novel. The reader is repeatedly forced to decide whether they trust Micah's recount of events, or if they decide that because of her distorted reality that automatically makes her a killer. While all circumstantial evidence logically points to her as Zach's murderer, Micah is continually insisting her innocence to a community that distrusts her. All Micah has to offer is her word which is repeatedly scrutinised due to her past and continued unreliability – 'I can't expect to be believed. I am the girl who cried wolf' (**Ibid: 302**). But the point of Micah's pathological lying is to reveal that one's reality is shaped by external pressures to conform to a doctrine. The werewolf is a rebellious symbol, testing what one believes and what one does not believe.

The novel uses the catastrophic event of Zach's death to reveal mob mentality in a contemporary, metropolitan society in which the weakest link is targeted. The importance of placing it in a contemporary, metropolitan society that is meant to be highly civilised and rational, and also within a school that considers itself to be 'progressive', reveals that despite all of the advancements of our contemporary living the irrationality of social prejudice is still extremely prevalent. In times of crisis people will still hysterically point their fingers and blame the first person so obviously not part of the majority.

Gender Stereotyping as a Form of Conformity

The novel reveals that multiple realities concurrently exist in the one place because a sense of reality is only in one's head, and thus, everyone's reality is different. But when one reality is so far from everyone else's it creates a problem within that microcosm, particularly one that is incredibly rigid in its social construction. As Micah later states to her readers, 'maybe I lie because the world is better the way I tell it' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 264**). This narrative tactic by Larbalestier posits a deep irony. While Micah is diagnosed as a pathological liar, the highschool culture in which she is immersed is also revealed to be a make-belief, a place where people falsely conform to social stereotypes. There are many ways that someone can be perceived as an outsider, but for Micah it is because she does not conform to the feminine stereotype in a community that strictly adheres to gender categories of masculine males and feminine females. She is ostracised first for not being feminine enough, and second for being a pathological liar. S. J. Miller has argued that 'were society more accepting of gender non-conformity, gender variance, and how gender norms are enacted, Micah might very well turn out to be a very "normal" person' (**Miller, 2014: 57**). While there are many people who are *naturally* cis-gender, the problem is when this becomes a regulation enforced upon people who are not cis-gender. When Sarah Washington, Zach's other

girlfriend, confronts Micah about her secret relationship with Zach and an argument ensues:

“Why won’t you tell the truth?” she asks, glaring at me.

“Why won’t you?” I ask, even though she is an incorrigible truth teller. I glare right back (Larbalestier, 2009: 60).

By Micah retorting in this way, the novel is highlighting Sarah’s narrow sense of reality and that of her school peers. It is this lack of knowing, an ignorance to an alternative way of being, that makes Sarah an ‘incorrigible truth teller’ because this prescribed reality is *her* truth, even though it is not Micah’s. Sarah becomes confused by the question because she cannot conceptualise a differing notion of reality other than the current existence that is presented to her, which she finds belonging by fitting into a category. As Judith Butler asserts, ‘the question of who or what is considered real or true is apparently a question of knowledge’ (Butler, 2004: 27). This inflicted confusion makes her angry and she lashes out at Micah by calling her ‘an ugly boy’ (Larbalestier, 2009: 61), self-righteously defending her sense of reality that has just been challenged, while simultaneously denouncing Micah for not conforming to it.

The desperate tone of Sarah’s insult recalls Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment* (1975). Arguably Sarah could be policing herself by fear of who would be watching were she to open her mind for other possibilities. Foucault’s theoretical analysis of the ‘Panopticon’ explains modern methods of exercising control over an individual in which ‘the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary’ because ‘he’ or she ‘knows himself’ or herself ‘to be observed’ to the point where the person ‘has no need’ to be totally watched any longer (Foucault, 1979: 201). This again conjures up images from *1984* with the enforcement of ‘Newspeak’ and the fear of always being watched (Orwell, 1983). In this way, Larbalestier begins a story about the pain inflicted on a non-conforming teenage girl and slowly turns it into a thrillingly surreal observation of the ramifications of authoritarian control over the individual; something that modern history has already seen too much of with the totalitarian dictatorships that arose in Europe and Asia in the twentieth-century.

These notions of truth and lie pose an important question: how can one know what normal is when normalcy of the individual is defined by continually changing conventions and dominant attitudes of the collective? Furthermore, while gender is completely individual, it creates the potential for multiple possibilities in the way people self-identify that contradicts this binary between what is constituted as normal and abnormal.

It is significant that Micah's first big lie is her claim that she is a boy. This lie is not a transgender desire but an attempt to fit in because of her apparently failed status as a girl. She states: 'Why not be a boy? A quiet sullen boy is hardly weird at all. A boy who runs, doesn't shop, isn't interested in clothes or shows on TV. A boy like that is normal... I would be a better boy than I'd ever been a girl' (Larbalestier, 2009: 7-8). In an essay titled 'Introducing Myself' Ursula K. Le Guin satirises the static artificiality of masculine and feminine stereotypes, stating that 'women have been invented several times in widely varying localities' (Le Guin, 1992: 3). Le Guin further states that because women do not technically exist that makes her 'a man', but even so she states that she is 'a very poor substitute or imitation man' because she is 'just not manly' enough (Ibid: 3). Furthermore, Micah claims to be a boy only *after* her teachers and peers initially assume that she is male based on her appearance, because she wears her hair 'natural and short, cut close to' the 'scalp' and she doesn't 'wear makeup or jewelry' (Larbalestier, 2009: 7). The novel aligns with Le Guin's argument in which male and female stereotypes are as artificial and superficial as each other. Failure to meet the standards of one gender puts you in an in-between category that confuses and upsets people. After her lie is exposed, Micah is then repeatedly scrutinised by her peers for lying and her unfeminine appearance, and this is accepted by the teachers who punish or denounce Micah for her differences to the rest of the student body.

Micah's identification as a werewolf becomes a metaphor for the social ostracism of a gender diverse individual that does not conform to the stereotype. In light of this theory the danger of the lone wolf can metaphorically be communicated as the perceived danger of those who are different. June Pulliam asserts that the werewolf is symbolic to literature that counters mainstream culture, because 'the werewolf is not so much an animal as it is *an animal in drag in a human skin*, a position that calls into question the parts of ourselves that we designate as animal Others' (Pulliam, 2014: 277). Pulliam supports this concept by referring to Judith Butler's highly regarded performativity theory. Butler reveals that the 'sex/gender link is constructed rather than natural' (Ibid: 77). In this sense, the werewolf is the natural being while the human is the constructed. Indeed, in Butler's highly-acclaimed text *Gender Trouble* (1990), she states that 'the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity' of gender can cause 'splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of "the natural" that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status' (Butler, 1990: 147). Micah is not naturally split into two selves. Her identity is a fluid amalgamation of wolf and human, of feminine and masculine, but due to the rigid stereotype structure one half of her is forced into a state of

repression. This wolf-half then becomes the Other that must manifest out of herself in some spectacular way. This is a trope of nineteenth-century gothic and horror fiction, such as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where the repressed self is an Othered identity struggling to break free. Marina Warner describes this Othered identity as created to inhabit 'your innermost, secret self, and act epiphanically to unveil you to the world—and to yourself' (Warner, 2002). But while gothic horror fiction has traditionally denounced this Othered identity, in eco-feminist literature the reader sympathises with Micah's struggles.

The Social Taboo of Lycanthropic Anthropophagy

Lycanthropes are half-werewolf, half-human, thus an act of eating a human is an act of anthropophagy. Marina Warner credits the first werewolf story to ancient Greek mythology. This is a 'cautionary' tale about Lycaon, King of Arcadia, who was transformed into a werewolf as punishment for serving Zeus a 'cannibal meal' of human flesh (Warner, 2002: 6). Since this 'original sin'-type of story, werewolves have been inexplicably linked to the crime of cannibalism. In Medieval Europe belief in lycanthropy was real. Many people were arrested, tortured, and executed under accusations of lycanthropic cannibalism, closely resembling the Witch trials (Copper, 1981: 106). Centuries later, in a modernised world where growing urbanity means most people do not have to worry about getting mauled by a wolf pack in the woods, belief in lycanthropy has faded. Yet its narrative ability in modern fiction is significant because the stigma of the werewolf can metaphorically be used to imagine a scenario in which society's worst fears are actualised. The original sin story of Lycaon represents the fact that cannibalism has been a social taboo in Western society since ancient times. Therefore, the most direct way to stigmatise an identity that is out of the culturally constructed order is to link that identity with the taboo of cannibalism. One of the ways in which this taboo of cannibalism is directly linked with Micah's unfemininity is through the subtle, silent rejection by her father, as she engorges on a plate of meat in the family's kitchen:

I get up, open the fridge, and pull out the remains of their dinner: half a chicken. I slip back down to the floor and finish it off, not bothering with knife and fork or napkin or ketchup, eating with my fingers, shoveling the food in so fast I don't even taste it.

Dad Looks at me. I can see the disgust. My daughter eats like an animal, he's thinking (Larbalestier, 2009: 290-91).

The scene metaphorically uses the social conventions of food etiquette that causes her father disgust to portray the shame Micah is forced to feel in her lycanthropic abilities. The guilty gluttony insinuated in Micah's animalistic, uncivilised performance of eating, happens during the same time that her parents begin to accuse openly her of killing Zach, of gluttonously engorging on his flesh.

Werewolves first began appearing in fiction in the 'early 19th century through the medium of the penny dreadfuls of the day' (Copper, 1987: 111). Penny dreadfuls were very affordable magazines aimed at a growing literate class and usually depicted sensationalised stories of crime, horror, and adventure. The werewolves in these nineteenth-century stories were configured around medieval beliefs in the werewolf who, at each full moon, went on a cannibalistic rampage, mauling innocent townsfolk. By the horror genre nature is conveyed as evil and something that humans should steer away from in the name of human-made progress, a notion that fantasy werewolf literature blatantly rejects. This genre also went on to produce novels and films; some famous titles of werewolf horror fiction include films such as the *Werewolf of London* (1935), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). These movies encompass moral concerns of the human reverting back to primal savagery in a post-Industrial, modern world. Darryl Jones argues that 'classic Hollywood horror movies offered werewolves of both the Darwinist (external invasion) and Freudian (internal neurosis) types' (Jones, 2002: 171). The former type refers to a fear of racial outsiders and the latter refers to the fear of the repressed inner-self, encapsulating societal anxieties about those perceived as social or geographical Others threatening the mainstream, homogenised body.

Eco-Feminist Werewolf Fiction

Retaliating against an Othering of identities deemed outside the mainstream, the genre of eco-feminist fantasy fiction was borne out of the need for a counter narrative against this Othering. As Karen Ya-Chu Yang states, 'ecofeminism's core agenda is to break down exclusive and static categorizations of binary thinking in favor of diversity, complexity, and infinite becomings' (Yang, 2016: 502). Eco-feminist tales that include the werewolf figure generally portray the protagonist struggling to balance the needs of human and that of the wolf sharing one body. While the horror tales still continue to be produced in the contemporary, it has gained a very popular competitor in stories that portray the werewolf as a misunderstood protagonist rather than a monstrosity. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, an academic who specialises in fairy tales and genre fiction, argues that 'It is the sanctioning of an ecological perspective that largely differentiates representations of the werewolf in fantasy from its cousins

in the genre of horror' (**Bourgault du Coudray, 2003: 60**). The ecological perspective 'develops a far more positive and accepting relationship with the inner wolf', whereas the 'horror' genre depicts 'nature' as 'an alien presence (the wolf within) that destroys the tragic werewolf hero by forcing him to behave like an animal' (**Ibid: 60**).

But while fantasy literature favours the ecological, it is important to note a key difference between fantasy werewolf literature and its sub-genre of eco-feminist literature. Many fantasy werewolf fictions still promote a strict conformity to heteronormativity¹. Whereas eco-feminist werewolf literature is a sub-genre of fantasy that seeks to redeem the figure of the female outsider who does not conform to the feminine stereotype. As Patrick D. Murphy argues, 'ecofeminism from its inception has insisted on the link between nature and culture, between the forms of exploitation of nature and the forms of the oppression of women' (**Murphy, 1998: 23**). The literary genre of this political movement is no exception. The literature focuses on gender politics, female sexuality, and women's connection to nature – spiritually and socio-politically. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray claims that 'women writers have frequently used lycanthropy as a means of exploring a specifically feminine process of individuation' (**Bourgault du Coudray, 2003: 60**). *Liar* can be defined as eco-feminist werewolf literature because Micah describes her individual womanhood through the figure of the werewolf. The novel concerns itself with the feminine process of individuation by discussing issues of adjusting to the menstrual cycle, growing pains, and sexual politics governed by the social conventions introduced to girls at puberty. Furthermore, Micah identifying herself through the figure of the wolf is connecting her to nature, stating that her identity is all natural and in opposition to the culturally constructed order of stereotypes.

Eco-feminist literature gained popularity with the rewriting of gothic and Disney fairy tales in the 1970s and '80s by authors such as Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Their aim was to reconstruct these fairy tales to discuss issues with gender politics. As Marina Warner explains there is a 'misogyny present in many fairy stories – the wicked stepmothers, bad fairies, ogresses, spoiled princesses, ugly sisters and so forth' (**Warner, 1995: 417**). Similarly, Anne Cranny-Francis rejects the traditional tales of 'Little Red Riding Hood' on the basis of them being 'the training afforded girls' for the purpose of 'their accumulation into a patriarchal society' (**Cranny-Francis, 1992: 124**). The relevance of discussing eco-feminist issues in the present moment is more obvious when one compares *Liar* to past eco-feminist literature, such as Angela Carter's short story *The Company of Wolves* (1979), and Tanith Lee's *Wolfland* (1983). These two stories are but few examples in a larger movement in eco-feminist literature in the latter twentieth-century. Basic and obvious signifiers that relate this novel to this

fictional precedence is Larbalestier's use of a matriarchal leader of the family wolf pack, Micah's grandmother. Additionally, the relationship between girl, male intrigue, and grandmother, that make up the main characters in the archetypal 'Little Red Riding Hood' story are again re-signified in the novel. However, instead of the male character imbuing the werewolf figure it is Micah.

By comparing Larbalestier's 2009 novel to iconic texts of the late twentieth-century, that were memorable for their ground-breaking contribution to gender politics, one can surmise as to how much has really progressed within the thirty year difference. Carter and Lee contextualise their stories in medieval, magical worlds, that seek to reconfigure misogynistic fairy tales. Larbalestier's novel is set in the contemporary urbanity for the purpose of directly portraying what eco-feminist issues remain unresolved in our present existence. The novel discusses different kinds of violence within the present that are not so obvious as the brutality of the medieval world. Carter and Lee posit their female heroines in medieval settings where women are faced with violence and therefore retaliate with violence as a method of self-empowerment. In *Wolfland*, Anna the Matriarch evokes the wolf magic within her so she can defend herself against her tyrannical, physically abusive husband. Anna's empowerment is a bloodthirsty revenge:

the final thing he sees through the haze of his own blood, which has splashed up into his eyes, and the tears of agony and the inclosing of a most atrocious death, are the eyes of the wolf, gleaming coolly back at him. He knows they are the eyes of Anna. And that it is Anna who then tears out his throat (Lee, 2014: 128-129).

In *The Company of Wolves* the handsome wolf figure has already killed and eaten grandma before the unnamed Red Riding Hood figure has arrived. When she arrives they consummate their love in grandma's house while 'the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering' (Carter, 2006: 138). The girl does not seem bothered that grandma is dead because by choosing the bloodthirsty life of the wolf the girl frees herself from the instilled restrictions upon her human body.

Larbalestier's novel reveals that instances of violence still exist in the contemporary, teenage world even though it is incredibly surveilled and governed by adults. These forms of violence happen within the misogynistic gender politics because those women who defy feminine stereotypes are responded to with violence. For instance, Micah is targeted when her secret relationship with Zach is exposed because Zach already has a girlfriend. Another girl named Erin is targeted after she attempted to run away from home with her older boyfriend and was caught by police. Both girls are subject to taunts, bullying, and labelled a

'slut' (Larbalestier, 2009: 91, 237). But this kind of derogatory treatment is only the beginning. Micah exercises her physically masculine abilities when she protects Erin from being sexually harassed by a boy in their school. Her peers stare at her suspiciously: 'Any doubts they might have had about my ability to kill Zach are gone now' (Larbalestier, 2009: 239). While Brandon, after committing the sexual harassment, is not publicly scrutinised like Micah, it reveals the dominant assumption that a woman who can physically protect herself and others, must be a physical danger to the patriarchal order that instils these gender stereotypes. The actions of this boy, Brandon, are juxtaposed against Micah, because while Micah may be the werewolf, he is the one that is preying on others. As Angela Carter states in 'The Company of Wolves', the 'worst wolves are hairy on the inside' (Carter, 2006: 137).

In 2015 Larbalestier published a short story titled 'Little Red Suit', which thematically and narratively holds more direct links to the eco-feminist literary movement in reappropriating the Red Riding Hood story. The short story is about a girl in a red suit who hikes across a dystopic wasteland to visit her grandmother. During the walk she is being stalked by an unknown predator that howls like a wolf. But as the wolf 'grabbed her from behind. She slashed with her knife. Twisting to get away' and realised that it was 'not a wolf' but 'a man in a suit' (Larbalestier, 2015: 35). The story defends the misunderstood wolf character while indicating that humans, more so than werewolves, are capable of dangerous predatory behaviour. While *Liar* does not follow this storyline, Micah's narration argues this same point that humans are more of a danger to themselves than werewolves, and that the sinister one is among the faceless majority rather than a rogue individual. But due to her status as a social outcaste Micah experiences the stigmatisation of always being a suspect over those who stereotypically fit into the mainstream, and therefore the story mourns a lacking freedom for the individual.

This argument leads to another comparative analysis between the texts on sexuality and female appetite. The female werewolf is controversially more open about her libido to the equivalent of her male counterparts because there is no gender construction to instil double standards. As June Pulliam argues, 'while the male werewolf typically exhibits behaviours that are well within the parameters of normative masculinity, the female werewolf represents' an anxiety of the social sexed hierarchy being upended, of 'patriarchy's worst fears about women's relationship to nature' (Pulliam, 2014: 73). Pulliam further explains that 'the female werewolf' becomes 'monstrous because her lupine body puts her outside of conventional femininity' (Ibid: 76). Part of narrating an eco-feminist werewolf story is embracing one's own female sexuality because it is typically deemed a very unfeminine trait. When Micah admits that her

relationship with Zach was physical she repeatedly insists to her readers that she did not kill Zach, because the reader fails to see the difference between being sexually active and being a murderer (Larbalestier, 2009: 274). The cultural assumption of an unrepressed female sexuality equating to murder is the method in which women are repressed. Indeed, some werewolf narratives that do not concern themselves with an eco-feminist perspective have directly expressed this link between female sexuality and murderⁱⁱ.

In opposition, Carter shockingly mocks this trope within the social establishment that deems a woman's appetite as taboo. Lucie Armitt argues that Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) 'is driven by an active interest in women's sexual appetites' and that 'the Gothic allowed her and many twentieth-century writers the opportunity to extend the limits of social acceptability through extending the physiological and physical limitations of the human form' (Armitt, 2016: 70). Without delving into the question of how much of eco-feminist werewolf literature can be considered gothic, one can see that these stories are a means for women writers to fantastically express a sexuality not socially acceptable during the place and time they were writing. Ultimately Larbalestier is metaphorically communicating to readers that a woman's sexuality is still prevalently taboo in the contemporary Western mainstream.

The expression of appetites in eco-feminist werewolf literature also varies. Linden Peach explains that the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* 'are not only an exploration of women's sexuality but of the ways in which men have sought to control that sexuality, of how both men and women need to reconfigure their sexualities, and of the commodification of women as 'flesh' ' (Peach, 1998: 33). Likewise, Abigail Dennis argues that this is also a concern in one of Carter's later novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984), in which 'the power to satisfy one's own appetites and those of others are seen in the novel to be central to the workings of gender relations' (Dennis, 2008: 117). She points out that although sexual hunger can be good, it can also be problematic when 'appetite plays a part in the process of objectification, particularly of women' (Dennis, 2008: 117). Larbalestier has reiterated this loaded meaning in *Liar*. Micah's lycanthropic hunger for meat and her relationship with Zach is juxtaposed against Brandon's objectification of his female school peers. The girls he chooses are perceived as easy targets because of their social status as outsiders. Brandon preys upon them as something he has a right to sexually dominate, humiliate, and taunt.

Yet while the female werewolf is metaphorically used to portray a misunderstood and persecuted identity, these stories should not be misconstrued as stories of victimhood. Tanith Lee's Anna the Matriarch, and Angela Carter's protagonist in *The Company of Wolves* are obviously stories of self-empowerment for the way in which they break free from the socially constructed restrictions on their human bodies. By using her lycanthropic abilities to protect another girl from unwanted advances by Brandon, Micah is expressing woman's inner-strength and reigniting the empowering symbolism of the female werewolf within eco-feminist literature. The female werewolf figure symbolises a freedom that is only attainable through nature when it is because of culture that one is being oppressed. But this again raises the question as to why Larbalestier would create a character with such an unstable recount of events when she could have written a more celebratory fantastical piece. By being narratively unreliable Micah implicates herself as the problem. Sara Martin observes that some feminist writers such as Carter, Fay Weldon and Jeanette Winterson have used the monstrous body to discuss female identities that are considered 'monstrous' because of their 'grotesque' looks (Martin, 1999: 194). But Martin argues that these stories prove that true 'monstrosity is not a matter of extraordinary physical appearance but of whether one sides with the abusers or the abused in the universal contest for power' (Ibid). This precedence gives some insight into the unstable narration of Micah. Like Anna the Matriarch in *Wolfland* who enraptures readers with her sublime qualities, Micah's unstable narration toys with readers who sympathise with her struggles but ultimately distrust and fear her capabilities, because she retains a power that no one understands. Based on Martin's argument, Micah's narration is a desperate plea for her reader to believe her against a majority that would have the reader assume otherwise.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have argued that Justine Larbalestier's novel *Liar* metaphorically uses lycanthropic anthropophagy to represent the marginalised identity of Micah, who is socially ostracised for being different. In this instance lycanthropic cannibalism is metaphorical for the taboo of acting out of non-normative stereotypes. The symbolism through this werewolf image is most evident at the conclusion of the novel when Micah confesses on the very last page: 'You can read between the lines, pull away the werewolf bullshit, and see what's left' (Larbalestier, 2009: 370).

Accusations of murder against Micah reveal much about the dominant cultural mindset of contemporary Western society. Micah never narrates that she ate a human, but due to the unreliability of her narration readers

are forced to decide whether the mere presence of a lycanthrope is enough to throw an accusation of murder. The novel is a psychological thriller that remains open-ended and forces the reader to surmise a conclusion via their own socio-politically-conditioned assumptions; thus making the reader either complicit in or advocate against Micah's ostracism. By connecting circumstantial evidence of a bloodied dead body with Micah's lycanthropic abilities, Larbalestier questions how much of popular accusation is credible and to what extent it reveals our own inner-fears about perceived outsiders. Micah could have killed and eaten Zach. More likely, though, she is innocent, and the accusers are victims merely of their own self-cannibalistic fear-mongering.

Leah Henderson is a PhD candidate at Griffith University in Australia. Her thesis analyses three cases studies of serialisation in Western popular culture, exploring questions about time theory and everyday living. She has an article published in *Forum: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & Arts*, an artwork published in the *Pop-Up Poster Paddington* June-August 2019 exhibition by Woollahra Municipal Council (Sydney, Australia), and she has also presented conference papers at University of the Sunshine Coast and the University of Warwick. She also posts new artwork on @blueroart6041 and has had paintings published in *The Raw Art Review: A Journal of Storm and Urge*.



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To cite this article:

Henderson, L., 2020. Anthropophagy of the Werewolf: An Eco-Feminist Analysis of Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* (2009). *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 7(2), 58-75. Available At: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v7i2.402>.

Endnotes

ⁱ For a greater understanding into these promoted gender stereotypes watch films such as *Teen Wolf* (1985), *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012), and television episodes such as *Wild at Heart* in season four episode six of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

ⁱⁱ Consult *Wild at Heart*, episode six of season four in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).