



*A review of*  
**The Werewolf  
Filmography:  
300+ Movies**

Willem de Blécourt

**A**nyone working on the history of werewolf films needs a list of all the titles that have ever appeared, and preferably some idea of their content, too. It is, of course, possible to consult the Advanced Search option in the IMDb, and type 'werewolf' in the box for the plot summary and check Feature Film and TV Movie in the Title Type, but it is more helpful to have an actual book with lavish illustrations, extended descriptions and illuminating quotes from the scripts, directors or actors, plus the necessary production details and a 'Full Moon Rating', ranging from one to five stars (that is to say: moons). This is especially a desideratum since Stephen Jones' *The Illustrated Werewolf Movie Guide* (Titan Books, 1996) is by now more than twenty years out of date. Bryan Senn's *The Werewolf Filmography* contains 160 entries (or reviews) of werewolf films, spanning eighty years from the 1935 *Werewolf of London* to the recent *Uncaged* of 2016. Sixty-one of those films have a rating of three stars or more. The book has the further advantage of much longer annotations and separate sections on 'Pseudowolves' (136 entries) and 'Other Were-Beasts' (42 entries) which Jones mixed in with the proper werewolf films. It discusses a total of 338 films. Two appendixes give the reader a 'Film Chronology' and 'Film Series and Subsets'. The author is to be admired for the sheer amount of work that has gone into identifying, locating and annotating the 160 werewolf films and describing the other 178.

Notwithstanding all its strengths, the *Filmography* is a compilation by a werewolf and horror enthusiast and not by an academic specialised in werewolf studies and thus it lacks any attempts to provide historical and literary context. This weakness appears especially in the introduction, which otherwise has some astute insights on cinematic werewolves. However, the moment the author ventures outside the frame of the film he has little to contribute. It is a relief to see it finally acknowledged that 'the notion of the full moon transformation sprang directly from a screenwriter's pen' (8), although there is a literary precursor, but a serious set-back when the rabies theory is resurrected (7). The mention of films' 'basic functions of

exploring notions of self-control, loss of identity, and alienation' (17) is very apt, yet the use of the adjective 'medieval' (14 and elsewhere) is simply wrong. A werewolf is a cultural concept and thus historically, culturally, and geographically specific. I fail to understand why the author applies this notion to films, but when he discusses werewolf 'mythology' or 'folklore' he resorts to copying from earlier 'countless tomes' and consequently to crude speculation. When it comes to understanding the present-day fascination with the werewolf, he quotes other authors or film directors (sometimes from his own interviews) who merely offer opinions rather than a proper analysis of audience reactions. That is to say: the existing research about this question is still insufficient, but instead of pointing this out, the author writes as if all the answers are readily available. Film theory, moreover, seems an alien territory for him.

Rather than discussing his selection (for instance in relation to the IMDb), Senn justifies it by stating that the metamorphosis from man to wolf and vice versa was his main criterium and that he did not want to venture beyond feature films. Films in foreign language were only considered if dubbed or subtitled, otherwise they were relegated to the 'Pseudowolves'. Amateur productions are not mentioned at all. This is justifiable enough and I also agree that the 'near countless' episodes of television series deserve another book. On the other hand, werewolf series (as opposed to series with an occasional werewolf in it) can develop certain themes much better than a single film. Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* even managed this in a couple of episodes; thus they deserved at least a separate if only brief mention. Similarly, although he did include the category of 'Pseudowolves', their separate discussion is sometimes questionable. Remus Lupin of the *Harry Potter* series, for instance, is not just a visual Golem clone (302) but also refers to ways to contain the werewolf within, and in that sense is more important than some of the lesser werewolf films. Or to take a completely different example, *The Curse of the Queerwolf* (285) may be the epitome of a 'spoof', but it contains vital clues for an understanding of its hairier colleagues. While I do subscribe to the value of the *Filmography*, on occasion the student of werewolf films has to venture outside its strictures.

Describing the individual films, Senn appears to have a clear preference for horror movies and transformation scenes, at least those not generated by computers (CGI). One would occasionally wish the reviews contained a more neutral vocabulary. He writes of *The Twilight Saga*, for instance: 'This movie is, like, totally awesome – if you're a 14-year-old girl. If, on the other hand, you have a Y chromosome, an ounce of testosterone in your system ... (this film) remains little more than a repetitive, tiresome, unbelievable ... journey through lovesick teendom' (209). I am sure, however, that many of his readers agree, whether they have seen the films or not. Or about *The Curse of the Werewolf*: 'impressive werewolf action comes too little and

too late to fully overcome a general air of overstuffed dullness' (64). *The Beast of Bray Road* harbours 'foolish actions of the cartoonish characters' and its script is 'silly' and 'simplistic' (38). *Teen Wolf* is portrayed as 'mere fluff without any real substance' (202). Yet, I have to admit that he is right about *An Erotic Werewolf in London* which is, indeed, boring (84).

Senn's review of *The Company of Wolves* illustrates some of the omissions in the *Filmography*. It is mentioned in the credits when a script has been based on an existing book, yet in the case of *Company* there is no indication of its literary precursors. Of course, a good case can be made for watching a film without knowledge of the book, but sometimes it can aid the viewer's understanding. A number of scenes in *Company* can be traced to stories by Angela Carter. The poem at the end, which according to Senn 'makes little narrative sense' (54), derives from the original writer of the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Charles Perrault. The question is thus why a film reviewer cannot understand it when readers had no problems with it for almost three centuries. The appendix on film series link *Company* to, among other films, *Red Riding Hood* (2011), but not to *Trick 'r Treat* (2007) which is listed under the 'Pseudowolves'. The classic *The Wolf Man* contained references to the fairy tale, but this seemed to have escaped Senn. The same can be said for *The Howling*. A case can thus be made for a much wider influence of LRRH than Senn is willing to acknowledge. Instead he quotes Robert Harris, the author of *Werewolf of London*, who suggested that he was inspired by 'the legends and folk tales of the people in the back countries of Europe' (238). Harris will have referred to O'Donnell's publication *Werewolves* of 1912, who was rather inventive in his representation of legends. Carter, on the other hand, inserted genuine legends into her stories which subsequently found a place in *Company*. And Siodmak, the writer of *The Wolf Man*, may have invented the silver-headed cane (257), but the silver bullet was one of the very few motifs that featured in German legends. There are thus numerous options to proceed beyond the *Filmography*. That does not mean that Senn's work is not a good place to start.

Author: Bryan Senn.  
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