WOLF MAN AND SHE-WOLF? AN ANALYSIS OF THE WOLF MAN CASE

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In psychoanalytic literature, the Wolf Man case is one of the key examples that opens a path not only into Freud's theoretical framework but also into thinking about the nature of dreams and representation. This case presents itself as a text that reveals how the structural traces of childhood experiences return, how repression is symbolised through various pathways, and how the subject unravels around their own axis. Freud names the case based on the animal imagery placed at the centre of the dream. The white wolves sitting in front of the window evoke a sense of terror in the child, trigger awakening, and carry the marks of a fall outside the symbolic order. However, the dream here is not a simple sequence of images; it revolves around a lack, and naming that void is not equivalent to possessing it. According to Freud, the wolf is not a figure with which the subject identifies in the dream, but one that the subject distances through fear and repression. The harsh and castrating aspect of the father figure is represented through the gaze of the wolf; that is, what is named is not the subject, but the gazes from which the subject flees.

In considering the figure of the Wolf Man, we must first question what function the very name serves. Although the name Wolf Man appears explanatory at first glance, it actually obscures many aspects of the core issue. This name functions as a stabiliser within Freud's discursive order; yet rather than anchoring the subject to their own symbolic chain, it positions them in relation to an external image, to a figure circling within the dream, to a reference. Thus, the name does not establish a direct relationship with the subject, but becomes the name of a fear orbiting around them, a mediation. The wolf figure here is not only the bearer of a symptom but perhaps also an index that perpetually delays the possibility of a resolution. Whether Freud's choice was truly to untie the knot of the unconscious, or to displace that knot into a new decentred plane, remains uncertain.

Before addressing these questions, it is necessary to reflect further on the case itself. The issue at hand is not merely the appearance of an animal figure in a dream; it is also a representational level reshaped by Freud's interpretations, carrying a certain cultural and historical significance. To consider it not as a symptom but as a naming strategy allows us to ask deeper questions about both Freud's method and the relationship psychoanalysis establishes with the subject.

One of the prominent discourses in Freud's reading of the Wolf Man case is that the tension between a child's anatomical sex and the gender position with which they identify can be observed from very early on. Gender discourses directed at the child through appearance, behavioral patterns, and societal expectations create distortions in their sense of self, and this produces symptomatic reflections aligned with the opposite sex. In the context of the case, the boy's feminine behaviors were constantly emphasised within the family, while the sister's dominant and masculine attitude positioned her more like a boy. In this way, the gender roles between the siblings appeared reversed, making it difficult for them to find a stable place within the symbolic order.

This ambiguity prevents the child from determining their place on both a bodily and subjective level. As long as the gender position remains unclear, the child is forced to regard their body and desires from an external point, which in turn leads to displacements in symbolic positioning.

Gender, incest, and symbolic ruptures

The child attempts to derive a gender position not from anatomical constitution but from the contradictory discourse of the family. As this attempt repeatedly fails, the symptom takes shape through fantasies, fears, or identifications related to the opposite sex. Thus, the symptom is not only the return of repressed desire but also the crisis of an unestablished gender position. The family reports that the child was initially gentle, obedient, and quiet—so much so that this silence was described as being 'like a girl', accompanied by statements suggesting that he should have been born a girl. However, following a summer holiday, a marked transformation was observed: the child became unhappy, fragile, irritable, and angry. He withdrew, sulked at everything, and, in Freud's own words, began to 'rage and scream like a wild animal'. What stands out in this picture is the absence of prohibition and the near-complete lack of a developed tolerance threshold. The child's tendency to respond with anger and resentment to even the smallest events indicate the absence of castrative figures within the domestic dynamics; this suggests that not only the father but none of the adults in the household assumed a limiting position (Freud 1955 [1914]: 18-22).

The patient also recounts that during childhood he was, for a period, intensely religious: he prayed at length before going to bed and regularly made the sign of the cross. Yet these practices were soon followed by obsessive thoughts that associated God with degrading and taboo images (for instance, 'God-pig" or 'God-excrement'). Freud interprets these incompatible attitudes as manifestations of a contradictory structure, suggesting that the earliest religious beliefs were fragmented within the symbolic order. In this sense, such thoughts are understood as a bifurcation characteristic of a classical obsessive–neurotic structure, although Freud himself acknowledged the difficulty of fully accounting for this contradiction (Freud 1955 [1914]: 25–7). While Freud's interpretation emphasises the defensive and repudiative dimension of the degrading representations, the simultaneous emergence of intense devotion and excessive prayer remains structurally less explicated. Considered together, these opposing movements may indicate not simply a conflict of belief, but the subject's attempt to relate to an organising principle that cannot be stably internalised. The idealisation of the God figure appears to function as an appeal to an external source of order, whereas the emergence of taboo and degrading images may serve to mitigate the overwhelming weight of that same figure. In this light, the coexistence of devotion and desecration can be understood less as a fluctuation between faith and rejection than as complementary strategies through which the psyche negotiates a regulatory structure that remains insufficiently integrated.

According to Freud's interpretation of the family dynamics, it is striking that the father figure openly favoured the daughter, a preference that intensified the boy's sense of exclusion and contributed to the development of an ambivalent emotional attitude toward the father. From this point onward, Freud observed an increase in fear and anxiety directed at the father. Yet, a closer reading of the clinical material suggests that the predominant affect may not have been fear or anxiety per se, but rather anger arising from an experience of injustice and unequal recognition. The father's preferential bond with the daughter may be understood not only within the framework of oedipal rivalry, but also as indicative of difficulties in the father's capacity to tolerate certain

identificatory demands posed by the male child. Whereas the son confronts the father with a more direct mirroring of masculinity, rivalry, and boundary-setting, the daughter may offer a relational position that is less conflictual and less demanding in terms of paternal authority. In this sense, the father's preference appears less as an expression of affection than as a form of avoidance. The boy's resulting anger, however, finds no symbolic channel through which it can be articulated or negotiated, as the paternal figure fails to assume a mediating or law-giving function. This unprocessed affect contributes to a destabilisation of the psychic structure, such that, even at this early stage, the material begins to depart from a strictly neurotic organisation and point toward more fragile, potentially psychotic patterns (Freud 1955 [1914]: 28–30).

The symptoms that emerged during childhood suggest both the insufficiency of repression mechanisms and the failure of the symbolic order to be established. Indeed, in subsequent years, many psychoanalysts argued that this case should not be classified merely as a neurosis but rather as a structure situated on the borderline of psychosis. Although Freud initially addressed the Wolf Man case within the framework of obsessional neurosis, later theorists contended that the material exceeded neurotic boundaries and revealed a psychotic foundation. Lacan (2005: 13–17) argued that the symptoms stemmed from the failure of the paternal metaphor to be inscribed into the symbolic order, defining the structure in terms of *forclusion*. Roudinesco (2003: 17) similarly interpreted the case as 'a psychosis masked under a neurotic form.' In his analysis of the Wolf Man's dreams, Anzieu (2004: 80–7**)** highlighted the fragility of ego boundaries and linked this fragility to psychotic regression. Laplanche and Pontalis (1997: 112–18**)** emphasised the structural deficiency in the subject's relationship with the symbolic order, arguing that the case resists classical obsessive-neurotic formulations. Even earlier, Ferenczi (2002: 55–60**)** noted that the traumatic experience blurred the line between reality and fantasy to such a degree that Freud's diagnosis of neurosis became untenable. Moreover, the long-standing controversy surrounding the case intensified when the Wolf Man himself later rejected Freud's reconstruction of his childhood, further undermining the neurotic classification and reinforcing the alternative psychotic interpretations.

Following the fantasies shared with his sister, Freud reports that the patient deactivated his libidinal investment, desired to see his sister naked, and was rejected by her. This rejection, according to Freud, demonstrates that anger assumed a central position in the child's psychic life. The sister, two years older, had always been ahead of him. Yet, in her early twenties, she turned into an unhappy person, complained about not finding herself attractive, and eventually withdrew into herself. Upon returning from a journey with an elderly female companion—her confidante—she told strange and implausible stories of being mistreated by her companion. Nevertheless, she seemed to cling tightly to this abusive figure with a form of masochistic attachment. On a second trip, she eventually committed suicide. Freud explained this with a diagnosis of hereditary neuropathy. However, when her desire to travel with an older woman, the ambivalent relationship she developed with her, the claim of harm she voiced, and the dependent attachment she maintained despite this harm are all considered together, they point to a failed bond with the mother. What emerges here is a repetitive cycle of both wanting to be like her and of being constrained and suffering within her limits. This indicates a complex formation in which the mother is internalised as both an idealised and punitive object (Freud 1955 [1914]: 34-9).

Freud interpreted the patient's attraction to young female servants in childhood as a classical psychoanalytic instance of object choice. Yet the child's incestuous experiences with his sister, combined with her rejecting attitude, point to a structure more complex than a simple external object investment of libido. The possibility that this orientation was a displaced manifestation of a repressed intra-familial trauma was overlooked. Thus, to interpret his orientation toward the opposite sex merely as an idealised heterosexual object choice fails to adequately account for the specificity of the conflicts at play. In later parts of the case, the patient's recollections of his deceased sister reinforce this structural ambiguity. For example, when he recounts crying at the grave of the poet admired by his sister, it becomes evident that he was displacing his own emotional burden onto another symbolic plane (Freud 1955 [1914]: 41-2).

A similar pattern is observed during the analytic process: rather than recalling his sister's death directly, the patient attempts to redirect the emotional charge by identifying with another figure, namely a poet. This displacement may be understood not only as a defensive manoeuvre, but also as reflecting a mode of association characteristic of psychotic organisation—specifically, the tendency to establish connections that lack a clear causal or symbolic grounding. In this context, the images mobilised in dream analysis fail to coalesce into a coherent symbolic structure, leading to significant distortions in interpretation. A closer examination of the patient's accounts of the father figure further reinforces this impression. The father consistently appears in a passive and soothing role rather than as a dominant or authoritative presence. The patient reports that during moments of conflict, the father would refrain from physical intervention and instead attempt to calm him through playful gestures, such as playing with pillows in bed. Moreover, the father's prolonged absences from the household and his silence in the face of repeated boundary violations indicate a persistent failure to assume a mediating or law-giving function. Freud, however, interprets these same scenes as evidence of a paternal figure who compelled the child to repress his sadistic-phase desires. Within this framework, the impossibility of adopting an active sexual position becomes the basis for repression and neurosis. Such a reading, however, accords greater weight to a theoretically postulated paternal function than to the ambivalent and attenuated paternal presence documented in the clinical material (Freud 1955 [1914]: 50–7).

The patient recounted many events in his own words; however, among these accounts, no organising structure in terms of chronology or narrative coherence can be discerned. This fragmented and discontinuous nature of the narrative indicates that psychic organisation struggled to sustain a continuous relationship with the object. This corresponds to what Bion described as thoughts that exist in a dispersed form in the mind 'thoughts waiting to be thought' which have not yet been transformed into a coherent capacity for thinking (Bion 1962: 116). The subject fails to establish an internal linkage that would secure consistency in the symbolic order, and this lack of cohesion manifests in the discontinuity of the narrative and the inconsistency of associations.
The child rejected his sister's initial sexual advances, yet according to Freud, what was refused was not the event but rather the sister herself. Considering the incestuous desire, the child turned down the stimulation coming from his older sister. Nevertheless, following this event, he began to masturbate in the presence of Nanja (the maid responsible for the child's daily care**)** Freud interpreted as an attempted seduction. After this masturbatory act, Nanja threatened him, saying that 'children who do this will have a wound there'. This reveals yet another false piece of information in which action and discourse failed to align. Later, the child had the opportunity to observe several other children urinating. Freud assumed that, with his sharp intellect, the child

could form a reasonable idea about what he saw. However, the child's description went beyond this expectation: under the influence of Nanja's threatening remarks, he named what he imagined to be a 'wound' as the 'front bottom'. This account reveals how inadequate and distorted the sexual education within the household was. What is most striking here is the splitting evident in the child's use of language: the symbol does not correspond to physical reality, and language fails to provide an adequate representational capacity regarding reality (Freud 1955 [1914]: 45–8).

Children observe their environment in order to construct logical inferences; they then incorporate these observations into their internal representations in an effort to build a meaningful whole. Among boys in particular, this process unfolds as a mental sequence extending from observation to inference and then to representational construction (Piaget 1952: 93–121). For example, the common belief among young boys that their mother possesses a penis demonstrates the logical consistency of this process: if the child possesses something, then it must also be present in the mother or in everyone. Aligning linguistic structure with physical reality depends not only on the provision of correct information but also on fostering the child's sense of trust in the symbolic order.

This process can also be observed in simple everyday situations. For instance, a young child carefully observes the actions of a parent attempting to repair a broken television—checking the cables or wiping its surface—and encodes these actions into a meaningful sequence. When confronted with a similar situation the following day, the child reproduces the same behaviours, not on the basis of verified causal reasoning, but through an internally coherent sequence derived from prior observation. If this sequence is incorrectly formulated—such as assuming that wiping the screen will restore the television when it turns off—the resulting framework may be internally consistent yet functionally ineffective. What is at stake here is not logical accuracy in the strict sense, but a form of internal semantic coherence through which the child seeks to organise experience into a meaningful whole. Such examples illustrate the child's mode of relating to the symbolic order: an effort to align external events with emerging linguistic and representational structures. Crucially, in the absence of timely adult intervention capable of clarifying causal relations and naming limits, these internally coherent but erroneous meaning-structures may stabilise and persist, shaping the child's subsequent interpretations of bodily experience, language, and reality. As Freud repeatedly emphasised, even the fairy tales and stories with which the child came into contact were often transmitted in distorted or incomplete forms. These distortions led the child to shape his interpretations according to his own inner world, ultimately constructing a system of meaning detached from reality. The child reprocessed the images and narratives he encountered through his own libidinal and cognitive codes, producing inconsistencies and ruptures within the symbolic order. Thus, the problem at stake involves not only the mechanisms of repression but also the incompatibility between the representational capacity of language and reality itself—an issue of significant importance on the psychoanalytic level (Freud 1955 [1914]: 43-4).

This suggests that interpretation had ceased to serve the clinical material and instead began to serve a pre-established theoretical framework. This concern has also been raised in historical discussions of Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory, where attention has been drawn to the possibility that clinical material may at times be reshaped in accordance with theoretical priorities (Masson 1984). Despite the lack of evidence that the child distorted his own experience, Freud reconstructed

the reported reality in the name of theoretical coherence. Consequently, a clear disjunction emerged between the father figure observed in the case narrative and the father figure theoretically postulated.

I will now present the dream text that gave the case its name and remained central throughout the analysis, followed by my commentary:

I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees.) I knew that it was winter. Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and their ears were pricked like dogs when they are attending to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. My nurse hurried to the bed to see what had happened. So real was the occurrence that for some time after waking I was still convinced that the wolves were really there (Freud 1955 [1914]: 29-30).

In this section, I will address the dream that gave the case its name and was treated as central throughout the analysis. Freud interpreted this dream as a castration dream and as a primal scene. Yet the question arises: does it truly represent a castration threat derived from the primal scene? If the dream were indeed an expression of classical castration anxiety, how could one account for the patient's subsequent psychotic disintegration, fixation on incestuous themes, and persistent boundary violations?

The primal scene, forbidden knowledge, and cultural codes

In the Wolf Man case, Freud interpreted the dream as the representation of a primal scene. According to him, when the child was around eighteen months old, he had witnessed his parents' sexual intercourse, though the scene was later repressed. Unable to be consciously recalled, the scene returned symbolically through the dream. For Freud, the wolves in the dream represented the father, and their fixed and piercing gaze—combined with intense fear—signified the repression of the child's desire for the father and the castration anxiety produced by that repression.

Freud's conceptualisation of the primal scene (*Urszene*) bears the traces of a symbolic framework in which sexuality is interpreted through pre-established prohibitions and moral tensions; this circumstance may also have influenced the manner in which the concept itself has been interpreted. As the prohibition against incest gradually took on a rigid cultural form, a deep gap emerged between its formal proclamation and its practical application. The term prohibition against incest is used here rather than incest taboo, as the latter designates an unspeakable secret, while the former implies a rule meant to be internalised; its loss of function may, in part, result from its reduction to a taboo.

In many societies, the prohibition against incest was presented to the general population as an absolute and punitive norm, while among ruling elites it functioned differently, allowing for selective suspension and legitimation. Marriages that violated the same prohibition were rendered acceptable through sacralisation, framed as necessary for the preservation of lineage, divine continuity, or political stability. In this sense, what operated as a negotiable rule for elites was

transformed into a taboo for the wider population—an unspeakable and unrepresentable domain rather than an internalised symbolic law. The sanctification of royal consanguineous marriages in certain periods of ancient Persian tradition, as well as the embedding of dynastic endogamy within myths of divine origin in Sumerian and Mesopotamian kingdoms, provides early examples of this structural double standard, in which the functional application of the prohibition diverged sharply along social lines.

Such structures recoded their own violations as sacred duties while positioning the same acts as grave crimes for the general populace. As a result, the distinction between good and evil became externalised, preventing the development of a superego capable of self-reflection. The law ceased to operate as an ethical boundary and instead became an untouchable sacred object; everything associated with sexuality became obscured, and this unrepresentable domain persisted across generations as a dim, split, and inconsistent cultural formation. Because no coherent logical relation could be formed between these contradictory positions, the subject relied on psychic splitting: the same content was experienced as either absolutely sacred or absolutely criminal. These two judgments could not coexist or be synthesised in consciousness, for such a confrontation would collapse both the law and the subject's sense of self. Thus, the contradiction was not resolved but merely rendered invisible.

In this sense, the primal scene becomes not an original cause but a late-arriving signifier of the cultural division into which the child is already born. The child's confusion or guilt does not arise simply from witnessing a scene; it emerges because the cultural order has long since positioned sexuality as the locus of sin, secrecy, and darkness.

In hierarchical chiefdom structures that evolved into feudal orders, distinctions such as purity–impurity, obedience–transgression, and sacred–profane were sharply delineated. The preservation of lineage, the transmission of inheritance, and the maintenance of social order were all tied to the strict regulation of sexuality. One possible historical trajectory through which this symbolic configuration was intensified can be traced to Augustine's reinterpretation of the Adam and Eve narrative. In this reinterpretation, sexuality is no longer framed as a neutral aspect of human life, but as a domain requiring regulation due to its association with disobedience and loss of bodily control (Aug. *de civ*. *Dei* XIV.15–16, 23). What in the Torah signified the awakening of consciousness through the differentiation of good and evil (Gen. iii; Meyers 2014), and what in the Qur'an referred to the recognition of bodily vulnerability and the emergence of modesty and privacy (A'rāf 7:22–26), was gradually transformed into the doctrine of original sin. Sexual desire came to be regarded as a corruption of human nature (Brown 1988), widening the gap between truth and representation. As a result, desire in the cultural unconscious became deeply split: purity and chastity were idealised, while sexuality became associated with guilt, shame, and darkness. Even before witnessing any event, the child thus positions sexuality as dangerous, forbidden, and morally compromised.

Once sexuality becomes taboo, not only specific behaviours but the entire chain of meanings associated with sexuality becomes unspeakable. The child cannot symbolically learn desire, limits, or moderation; cannot understand when to ask questions, how to behave, or how intimacy becomes possible. Knowledge of boundaries is outsourced to external authority; its absence or inconsistency produces two polarised relational styles. On one side emerges an excessively restrained, withdrawn

life marked by ideals of purification; on the other, a boundaryless, overflowing behaviour that presents itself as freedom or modernity. The problem is not the presence or absence of sexuality but the failure to symbolically establish intimacy. Thus, the total repression of sexuality and the unrestricted display of sexuality are two expressions of the same structural deficiency. Family bonds become ambiguous, relational boundaries uncertain, fantasy proliferates, and the child begins to generate internally what has never been symbolically represented. This suggests that what is interpreted as a primal scene in the Wolf Man case may in fact be a psychotic response produced by the absence of representation, not by repression. Hence the coexistence of boundary violations, extreme inhibition, or excessive sexual behaviour within the same family becomes understandable.

One of the central contradictions of the case lies in Freud's attempt to explain the child's desires toward his sister as the result of a primal scene fantasy grounded in repressed sexuality. Yet details of the family show that sexuality was not repressed in the classical sense; rather, the home environment was characterised by blurred boundaries. The scenes Wolf Man experienced with his sister—pulling away her blanket after a bath, watching her while she dressed, and even the sister's direct sexual contact toward him at a young age—did not evoke a sense of prohibition or neurotic guilt.

As the centuries-long taboo surrounding sexuality was denied during processes of modernisation, some families maintained an outward appearance of moral order, yet provided no symbolic structure through which the child could internalise this order. For the prohibition against incest to become functional, sexuality must not be fully exhibited but must instead be symbolically named, narratively organised, and meaningfully situated within a system of boundaries that the child can understand.

From this perspective, the primal scene should be understood not as the origin of repression but as the consequence of repression's impossibility under conditions of structural ambiguity. The Wolf Man's dream is not the return of an early repressed sexual scene, as Freud claimed, but the late and traumatic arrival of a law that was never internalised. When early relational experiences lack a clear boundary structure or symbolic framework, encounters are not experienced as forbidden but as part of an unbounded and raw relational field. This produces not guilt but confusion and directionless arousal.

It is precisely at this point that the white wolves appear. The wolves represent not repressed desire but an archaic form of law: figures that enforce the incest taboo at a biological, pre-human level. The dream is thus not evidence of repression but the psyche's belated attempt to construct order in the face of unrepresentability. The primal scene becomes less a memory than an imaginal effort to compensate for a missing law.

The meaning of the dream: archetypes, wolves, and the silent law

The dream has been interpreted by Freud in a manner that seemingly confirms the primal scene theory, where the wolf figure is identified solely with the father, aiming to resolve this symbol through the primal scene while overlooking its cultural and mythological depth. I will attempt to reinterpret the dream in light of archetypal and ancient knowledge.

The wolf, particularly in an archetypal context, is not merely a threatening entity; it is also associated with nature, nourishment, and guidance. In this framework, one must recall the narrative of Romulus and Remus in Roman mythology. Romulus and Remus were born to a Vestal Virgin without a father, placed in a basket, and set afloat on a river, only to be suckled by a she-wolf. These children, unable to establish a bond with their mother and excluded from the legal order, were abandoned. The she-wolf, in this instance, represents not only a protective figure but also the pre-legal Mother Nature—an archaic nurturing source outside the symbolic order. Romulus, one of Rome's founding figures, derived from this nourishment the power to establish law. Similarly, in Turkish mythology, the she-wolf motif appears in the context of war, where surviving males marry to continue the lineage, thereby assuming roles as founders and lawgivers. Hence, the she-wolf represents an unlimited yet law-establishing, nature-bound, nurturing, and transformative archaic mother. In some Turkish legends, she is not merely a life-sustainer but also a lineage-bearer and restarter. In the Romulus and Remus narrative, the bond unestablished with the mother is completed and transformed through the she-wolf myth; children left without care are nurtured by Lupa (a mother embodying these qualities), ultimately enabling the foundation of an empire (Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 4, Loeb 46: 114–17).

Thus, the direct identification of the wolf with a single parental authority can be considered a unilateral reading, neglecting the mythological, cultural, and archetypal layers inherent in the dream symbols. In the interpretation of the dream, the absence of a boundary-setting mother is displaced onto the father through the threat of castration. But every child requires the guidance of a mother, a feminine and encompassing figure. Notably, the patient reports that the wolves in the dream resemble not only wolves but also shepherd dogs. Figures such as shepherd dogs possess mythological and cultural qualities of guidance, warning, and passage-opening. Therefore, the patient's selection of these images in the dream may reflect an intrinsic search for direction and an emotional need for guidance.

The patient lacks a mother who could bear the guilt arising from the desire directed toward the father and regulate this desire. In this internal realm, Where the prohibition against incest has not been established, the child encounters no symbolic boundary. The issue is not the absence of prohibition, but the failure of its symbolic internalisation. This situation directs the child toward external symbols and figures. Accordingly, the wolves should be understood not merely as threatening entities, but also as expressions of a quest, reflections of the longing for a nurturing mother, and representations of the need for a center as an external regulating mechanism.
In the dream, the sudden opening of the window symbolises the dramatic dissolution of boundaries between the internal world and the external world. This scene represents both the overflow of internal desire and the intrusion of external symbols. The wolves the child sees are the manifestation of the child's solitary effort to find direction in relation to their own desire. However, this disorientation is experienced alongside piercing gazes, freezing silence, and an intense sense of dread. The guilt resulting from the repression of desire and the inability to regulate it generates anxiety and disintegration in the child's psychic structure. In this context, the wolf figure should not be interpreted as a mere symbol of repressed fear of the father; rather, it represents a primal call accompanying the child's search for direction in a traumatic void, a feminine guidance rooted in nature, and a quest for a pre-symbolic centre.

Freud relates the wolf figure to a childhood scene in which the patient witnessed wolves attacking sheep; however, he expands this connection within his own psychoanalytic framework. However, this explanation overlooks the symbolic depth of the dream and the cultural and geographical contexts carried by the image of whiteness. For a child growing up in a region like Russia, characterised by long winters and white snow cover, the image of a white wolf may represent not only an animal or visual memory but also an inherent natural lawgiver, a silent authority, and a pure yet firm centre. Fear manifests as the frozen, terrifying silence produced by the sense of guilt.

When attempting to analyse the image of six or seven wolves in the Wolf Man's dream, Freud questions whether these numbers indicate a specific unconscious source. He particularly notes his prolonged difficulty in answering the question, 'Why six or seven wolves?' While seeking the meaning of this numerical symbol, Freud turns to childhood fairy tales, recalling both *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats***.** In the latter tale, the wolf devours six goatlings while the seventh survives by hiding. Freud suggests that the number may originate from such stories and that fairy tales encountered during the patient's childhood may have influenced the dream content. However, Freud's method at this point is notable. His approach, which accepts every association as data and progresses through a labyrinth of interpretations, takes on an intuitive yet speculative character, sometimes diverging from rational lines. The structural meaning of the number itself—that is, the factual reality based on the biological and social organisation of wolves—does not appear in Freud's interpretation. Biological patterns offer a pre-symbolic analogue that culture later translates into symbolic law.
This, therefore, suggests that the number may be more directly related to the actual biological characteristics of the animals appearing in the dream (Freud 1955 [1914]: 40–1).

In reality, wolves in nature typically live in packs of six to ten individuals. This pack structure involves not only cooperative hunting but also a complex social organisation and sexual hierarchy. Incestuous mating is instinctively avoided among wolves; only the alpha male and alpha female have the right to reproduce, while the reproductive capacity of other individuals is either genetically suppressed or socially inhibited. When this order is disrupted, the resulting offspring tend to be weak, prone to disease, and have a reduced chance of survival due to limited genetic diversity. This structure cannot be described as a moral principle, yet it functions unmistakably as a biological law.

The transition from the biological to the cultural level emerges precisely here: an instinctive pattern of incest avoidance observed in nature is gradually transformed, within human societies, into a symbolic law through language, morality, and legal systems. In this process, a biological tendency is not simply transferred into culture; rather, it is reinterpreted, named, organised, and normatively codified. For this reason, the prohibition against incest in humans rests on a biological substrate while simultaneously taking shape as a cultural and symbolic regulation that diverges from its natural origins. Consequently, reducing the prohibition against incest solely to a cultural mechanism of sexual repression produces a one-sided interpretation, as such a view overlooks both the widespread biological patterns observable in nature and the continuity between these patterns and the formation of human cultural codes (Mech & McIntyre 2023: 232–4). While in Freud's theory the subject is primarily shaped by cultural law, in this dream the child confronts a form of law emerging from nature itself. Here, 'law' does not refer to a juridical or linguistic structure, but to a biological regularity that precedes symbolic organisation. Unlike the threat of castration, this

law is not articulated through symbolic prohibition but is encountered at the level of instinctive limits. Within this framework, the white wolves in the Wolf Man's dream signify not only fear, but also the presence of an archaic natural order: figures that embody a pre-symbolic, pre-moral form of regulation encountered at the threshold of humanisation.

Freud frequently returned to this dream throughout the analysis but noted that by the final months of 1913 the patient had begun to interpret it through his own spontaneous efforts.

> The patient constantly said that there were two things in the dream that affected him the most. One was the complete silence dominating the dream and the immobility of the wolves; the other was that the wolves were watching him attentively. The ongoing sense of reality left behind by the dream was very important to the patient
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> Freud 1955 [1914]: 58

When the child's incestuous desire meets the profound silence of external reality, an intense sense of fear emerges. The patient experienced this dream between the ages of three and five, and Freud argues that such a powerful affect at such an early age cannot arise solely from fantasy, but must indicate the trace of a 'real event.' Yet what is real here is not, as Freud supposes, a sexual scene, but the internal void produced by the absence of a boundary between desire and law. At this stage of development, the child has not yet internalised the prohibition against incest; there is no symbolic framework capable of regulating the impulse. For this reason, the unconscious attempts to stabilise itself by calling upon an external figure the archetypal image of the wolves. In the dream, the wolves are not merely threatening creatures; they function as the externalised representation of a law that has not yet formed within the child. They embody the primordial prohibition against incest inscribed in nature, providing a symbolic structure that the child's psyche is not yet capable of generating on its own. Thus, the appearance of the wolves marks the child's first encounter with the tension between desire and the natural order. In this moment, the unconscious projects an organising symbol to compensate for the absence of an internalised prohibition, and it is precisely this confrontation that produces the powerful affective charge of the dream.

While analysing the Wolf Man case, Freud suggests that the first anxiety experience emerging in the dream indicates a lifelong fear of the father in the child. However, as Freud himself notes, this conclusion is not fully binding within his own framework, since he is not entirely certain of the connections between associations and elements of the dream. Nevertheless, he arranges the existing elements in the following sequence: 'A real event—early period—looking—immobility—sexual problems—castration—father—a terrifying event'. In Freud's mental map, this sequence translates into a linear causal relationship: If there is a castration threat, it must necessarily originate from the father figure (Freud 1955 [1914]: 59-60).

However, throughout the case, the father figure exhibited a gentle, passive stance, considerably distant from symbolic lawgiving. The father is neither authoritative nor punitive. Therefore, in the patient's accounts, no direct impression can be formed that the father functions as the masculine lawgiver in the sense described by Freud. In this context, the source of the child's experience of terror in the dream is not the symbolic presence of the father; rather, it is the depth of the masculine law within a feminine energy opposing the child's incestuous desires. Here, the term 'masculine' refers, independently of biological sex, to a principle that establishes boundaries, regulates,

transforms, and permits. In the dream, the wolves serve as carriers of this knowledge. The law they represent is not merely that of paternal authority, but of a more ancient and symbolic order, and it cannot be established solely through male figures.

Language, representation, guilt, and mental disintegration

The clearest memory the patient has regarding his sexual life consists of periodic and short-lived episodes of passion emerging from adolescence onwards. That large, prominent buttocks became for him the strongest marker of feminine allure can be understood as the return, in adulthood, of an emotional mirroring that failed to develop with the mother in childhood. In this sense, sexuality ceases to be a meeting between two subjects and instead unfolds on a more performative and primitive level.

The patient also failed to establish adequate identification with either parent. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, being male is not merely a biological fact: it is a process sustained by the mother's boundary-setting gaze, her guiding presence, and her emotional investment. The mother functions not only as an object of desire but also as the mirror through which the child begins to construct a sense of gender identity. The absence or emotional distance of the mother leaves a structural void in the ego, preventing the formation of a stable social or symbolic masculinity. Unable to carry an internal law, the subject must then seek external confirmation of his manhood, which leads him toward primitive displays of masculinity and a performative sexual identity that is ultimately inauthentic (Freud 1955 [1914]: 90-104).

At this point, Lacan interprets the Wolf Man case differently from Freud, seeing it not merely as the return of a repressed desire but as the inability of desire to find a place within the symbolic order. According to Lacan, the issue is not the father's castrative power, but rather the absence of a father carrying symbolic law. In this context, the wolves in the dream serve as linguistic indicators of unbounded desire, not of repression. The child is a subject wandering aimlessly within a scene devoid of law. For Lacan, the dream represents the struggle of desire in an incomplete symbolic order; here, the source of fear is not the father but the absence of a boundary to curb desire (Roudinesco 2003: 250–60).

The dream acquires another significance. Setting aside Freud's structural depiction of dreams as the gratification of desire, I propose that the dream also functions as a form in which guilt is processed within the symbolic order. This claim becomes clearer when multiple dreams are analysed: the dream takes affective tensions that create conflict in the unconscious, represents them in the symbolic plane, and ultimately directs them toward a choice. The mind is not structured to sustain contradictory emotions simultaneously; therefore, one of two opposing affects must either be resolved or repressed and removed from the mental field. When two opposing affects coexist, the presence of one logically precludes the other. In such cases, when an individual becomes aware of the second affect, a sense of guilt emerges. This guilt allows the subject to commit to a single form of relationship or thought, providing the mind with temporary relief. Contemporary neuroscientific research shows that mental contradictions lead to high levels of energy consumption, increasing cognitive tension (Carter & van Veen 2007: 367–79).

If contradictory or ambivalent attitudes are stored in different 'compartments' of the mind, this indicates the activation of defense mechanisms. The mind cannot accommodate two opposing

thoughts within the same structural position; while thinking one, the other must be suspended. Therefore, conflict is resolved through repression, splitting, or projection, transferring mental energy into a more orderly structure. Confrontation with opposing thoughts triggers guilt; however, this guilt directs the mind toward organisation, facilitating the subject's movement toward the completion of human wholeness.

Conclusion

Freud maintains a cautious stance regarding the veracity of memories throughout the case. Contradictions arise between the patient's accounts and the information provided by the parents in terms of timing and content. Freud situates these narratives in the summer months based on information from the family, thereby constructing a primal scene. However, whether this scene actually occurred or existed only in the patient's fantasies remains uncertain. Freud has constructed a primal scene. The near absence of sexual taboo at home, the inability of the governess and caretaker to impose rules through external authority, and experiences such as sexual fantasies among siblings, seeing the father naked, and observing the mother and father partially unclothed in bed, failed to establish a sense of boundaries in the child's mind; on the contrary, they reinforced erotic desire. Throughout the case, the mother is almost absent; in a context with such an absence of the mother, how could a father exist? Therefore, Freud created a father in the mother's absence and interpreted this father as terrifyingly dominant. Since the case does not provide evidence of the father's authoritative or castrative behavior, is it the patient or Freud himself who constructs this father negatively and idealises him?

The idealisation mechanism distances individuals from reality while hypnotising unconscious desires through its fictional structure. In societies in which the prohibition against incest has not been fully established as a symbolic structure, while sexuality is nonetheless regulated through external authority, moral pressure, or religious prohibitions, these prohibitions offer only a temporary form of satisfaction. In such cases, the prohibition does not operate as an internalised law or as a clearly symbolised framework formed early in life; rather, it functions as an external constraint whose application is often inconsistent. As Freud himself noted, culturally imposed prohibitions tend to function less as a transformative internal law and more as mechanisms of surface-level repression. Consequently, under these conditions, the prohibition against incest does not constitute a stable symbolic order; it merely regulates behaviour from the outside, providing only a provisional sense of control over desire. In an environment lacking clear boundaries, the child attempts to preserve ego integrity not through law but through an ideal. This striving for perfection emerges from an inability to tolerate lack and limitation; satisfaction is thus sought not through engagement with reality, but through the denial of unresolved and repressed conflicts.

By contrast, primitive communities, living in groups of one hundred to one hundred fifty individuals, learned to establish boundaries through mutual mirroring. Within this structure, the subject is constituted through the language, limits, and form of the other. Meaning-making is a process in which all elements of the mind are active: it occurs through the human activity of observing another, attempting to shape them, drawing inferences, and striving to construct a logical sequence from observations. While shaping another, the individual simultaneously determines their place in the world passively through observation and the language of the other. Humans have achieved 'being human' both as active regulators and boundary-setters and as structures shaped and observed by others, thanks to the balance of nature. What makes a human being become human is this fundamental early interaction with others. In families and societies where this interaction

remains weak, or where it is assumed that the child can develop entirely on their own, a rupture in psychic organisation emerges over time. For a person cannot establish an inner sense of coherence without the mirroring and boundary-setting presence of the Other.

The most crucial elements are the mother, who enables the subject to be an active agent; the father, who limits the mother's resources and protects against the evils of the external world; and the presence of an effective chain of communication, which serves to help the subject achieve sufficient humanity and locate themselves meaningfully in the world. The first of these structures, the mother, will open all her resources to the child, transmitting herself with adequate balance and in the presence of the prohibition against incest.

Freud, in his texts, primarily addresses the paternal function through its castrating effect and the pressure by which it represents the founding law; he emphasises that the mechanism of repression produced by this force within the child's psychic apparatus gradually transforms into a lasting neurotic structure. By contrast, can a life shaped on a ground where the mother's emotional disconnection, psychological withdrawal, and symbolic absence prevent the establishment of the very first boundaries develop a psychic equipment sufficient to confront reality at all?

Translated by Eren Karahan

ABBREVIATIONS

Aug. *de civ*. *Dei*	Augustinus. *De civitate dei*. *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* Vols 47 & 48. (Ed) B. Dombart, A. Kalb. Turnhout: Brepols, 1955. [*The city of God* (Eng. trans) H. Bettenson. London: Penguin Classics].
Plut. *Vit*. *Rom*.	Plutarch. *Lives* Volume I: *Romulus* (trans) B. Perrin. Loeb Classical Library 46. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.

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