

Notes on Wolves and Ruin, by Christine Hamm

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Notes on Wolves and Ruin is the newest upcoming chapbook from author Christine Hamm, whose manuscript, *Children Having Trouble with Meat*, won the MiPoesias First Annual Chapbook Competition in 2007. Hamm is a PhD candidate in English Literature at Drew University, New Jersey, and currently teaches English and poetry writing at Rutgers University.

Notes on Wolves and Ruin masters the complexity of fragmented writing through a connection of themed ponderings and excerpts about wolves, werewolves and the fraught relationship of human sexuality and violence. In it, Hamm weaves together a story using evocative quotes from screenplays, film as well as famous and obscure literature, all intertwined with half-remembered scenes as a narrator struggles to account her childhood through dream-like sequences.

Werewolves and wolves are interchangeable as modern predators, and they serve as the catalyst for Hamm's confrontation of sexuality and violence as the reader follows a first person protagonist. The use of footnotes and blank space gives the narrative a pleasing and dramatic aesthetic that is not only pleasing to the eye but also effective for the deliverance of the chapbook's content. For example, below is the format for what a single page (9) in Hamm's chapbook looks like, although it allows for more white space between the top and bottom paragraphs.

“Predestination to become a werewolf is thought to be indicated by certain peculiarities in a person's appearance. Such signs include bushy eyebrows that meet together above the nose; long, curved fingernails; small ears set low on the head...⁶

Brian Frost, *The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature*, (2003)”

6“Once, when my mother was busy changing my brother's diapers in the their bedroom, my father got curious about what was inside me, tried to poke to see what was in there. He was rinsing me off in the tub, the water lukewarm, the bathroom dim and blue. Washcloth, then finger. I winced and crouched down.”

Notes on Wolves and Rain displays clear, intentional themes mentioned above, as well as a strong and clearly structured format that presents the piece in a creative and functional way. The use of narrative at the bottom of each page as a dream-like sequence helps bring the quotes a little bit more to life, while also, with each progressing in a new, somewhat unsettling discourse, keep the story's tension continuous to the very end. The example below shows how Hamm's use of formatting and theme help to drive the piece's tension. On page 20, Hamm uses a quote about the perceptions of werewolves in film, making sure to connect the creature with humanity.

“A werewolf, one who has literally been transformed from a human being into a wolf, can best be shown on film, where fake brutal attacks, multiple murders, rape, torture, and cannibalism are cinematic tricks to horrify and mesmerize an audience that enjoys vicarious participation in fantasy violence and imaginary savagery.¹⁷

Charlotte Otten, *A Lycanthropy Reader*, (1995)”

“We mount the flight together, raising puffs of ash. The metal stairs are twisted into elaborate roses, sagging, fading to black space. A wolf near the top scrabbles: carpet bits, rust flakes and moldy leaves shower us. The wolf breaks through the tread and moans, pushing harder as she dangles.”

Notes on Wolves and Ruin is an excellent read for anyone who appreciates a refreshing format adhered to fantasy, mythical beast lore and dark concepts driven by imaginative details.