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Saint Francis's Brother Wolf

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Abstract

The following article focuses on the story "How St. Francis Tamed the very Fierce Wolf of Gubbio" from the miracle collection "The Little Flowers of St. Francis," specifically on the cultural value of the wolf in the hagiographic tradition. While the wolf in general represents the social outcast and antagonist, the wolf of Gubbio expands on this role into a reflection of social grievances presented in the city of Gubbio. Saint Francis's biographical details, imminent in the "Legenda Aurea," set the stage for a psychoanalytical doubling between the wolf, the saint, and the people of Gubbio. This mutual reflection follows from their economically similar lifestyle with the wolf as a destitute outcast and Saint Francis as a mendicant monk. It is directly instigated in the significant instance when Saint Francis calls the ferocious wolf 'brother.' Their common parentage invokes the religious Gotteskindschaft and an equilibrium of social standing. Saint Francis identifies with the wolf, and, along this line of compassion and caritas, he creates a peace treaty between the wolf and the citizens of Gubbio. This article examines how this peace also depends on the maintenance of individual freedom.

Keywords:

Saint Francis – Wolf of Gubbio – Caritas – *Gotteskindschaft* – Doubling

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Saint Francis's Brother Wolf

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Introduction

The big, bad wolf carries the reputation of the evil antagonist. He ravages, murders, and eats his meek victims and being killed (shot, drowned, beaten) in the end of the tale is generally speaking well deserved. The psychoanalytical significance of the characters of the fairy and folk tale tradition is provided by Jack Zipes (2006) whose research identifies the wolf as a symbol or metaphor of predominantly negative meaning and connotation. The wolf signifies social grievances, and wolf stories express cases of rape, pedophilia, and misogyny. Zipes applies a biological analogy[1] to explain how stories like "Little Red Riding Hood" and interrelatedly the wolf and his harmful significance have stuck around over centuries as disseminating viruses which cannot altogether be cured but continue to be treated by understanding the underlying meanings of these tales as a hope that social transformation is possible (23). However, while hagiographies present wolves as common antagonists, the approach and outcome are remarkably different. The hagiography is a literary genre about the lives (*vitae*), martyrdoms (*passions*), or miracles (*miraculae*) of holy people. In the Christian tradition,[2] these are the biographical collections of saints' lives. One such hagiography is about Saint Francis and his encounter with a wolf. The documents rarely serve as clear historiographic biographies, yet they offer valuable insights into medieval perception because they were amongst the most widely circulating and widely known stories which served to inspire and awe their audience.[3] Unlike fairy tales, the mystical embellishment of the hagiographies held a more grounded affinity and tended toward applying the morals and deeds of the story into real-life. For this reason, hagiographies offer a suitable medium to observe the socio-political connotations of the wolf-motif in the Middle Ages.

While depictions of wolves in hagiographies are closely related to the predominantly negative Christian-biblical imagery, the literary significance of the wolf-motif is more ambivalent. The wolf is usually not killed at the end but is either transformed into a less violent animal (such as a lamb, or an ox), or maintains its wolfish nature while giving up its violent and predatory tendencies. For example, a wolf kills the blind Saint Herve's guide-dog, is scolded by the saint, then repents and makes amends by taking on the role of the dog (*Book of Saints*). More complexly, in the Latin *vita* of the fifth or early sixth century Irish saint from the fifth or early sixth century, Saint Ailbe is abandoned by his parents as a child and left to die in the wild. A wolf takes care of him along with her other cubs (*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 46). Eventually Ailbe is found by a prince going hunting and adopts the boy. Saint Ailbe grows up and even becomes a well-respected bishop. One day, a hunting party tries to catch his wolf-mother, but Ailbe protects her and is re-united with his wolf family who end up visiting Saint Ailbe for dinner often (*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 62). The result in both stories is a peace which is reminiscent of the Christian conception of paradise where the lamb may exist peacefully and safely beside the wolf (*King James Version Bible*, Isa. 11.6).

The stories provide an insight into how this heavenly peace is establishable on Earth and implicitly comment on the characteristics of wolfishness. Despite the similarity of a momentary state of heavenly peace with the wolf, the differences in establishing this peace in various hagiographies evoke a variety of opportunities for reading these stories and investigate them for particular meaning and significance in a cultural sense. Specifically, hagiographies allow us to understand what a wolf is, what it means to be a wolf in a society that hates wolves, and the terms of effectively being 'wolfed'—that is, turned into an outsider and hated creature.

This article provides a focused analysis of the 14th century Latin miracle story "How St. Francis Tamed the very Fierce Wolf of Gubbio" (*Little Flowers*). Here, the wolf of Gubbio has a double meaning for a sociological status which differentiates between the outcast sinner, the forgiven child of God by acts of *caritas*, and independent choice. In the article, it will be

examined how the outcast sinner in the medieval conception stood to lose eternal salvation as well as earthly privileges[4] and how *caritas*—"love directed toward a higher purpose than oneself" (Rebekah M. Fowler 43)—held existential significance. It will also be presented how the interaction between Saint Francis and the wolf of Gubbio sets up a contrast between a testament to God's power and a nuanced display of human independence by following the arguments of David Salter (2001) and Judith Klinger (2016).

"How St. Francis Tamed the Very Fierce Wolf of Gubbio" is part of a florilegium of short stories about Saint Francis and his miracles named "The Little Flowers of St. Francis." The collection comes from an oral tradition and is therefore difficult to date. The oldest known written version, commonly referred to as the *Actus*[5], was composed by the Franciscan Brother Ugolino di Monte Santa Maria in a Latin vernacular in the early 14th century (*Little Flowers* 20), approximately a century after Saint Francis's death. Later in that century, a Florentine translation, the *Fioretti*, was composed. Because Raphael Brown used both sources to provide accurate account of the stories, his 1958 edition and English translation will serve as the basis for this article. As mentioned, these stories are not considered to be valid documentations of Francis of Assisi's life, but the collection of anecdotes and miracles performed by the saint became a popular source for how audiences perceived him to be in the years after his death.

The Universality of Francis's Wolf

The perception of Saint Francis and the popularity of the *Fioretti* extended into global scale and significance. While the stories are widely accepted as originally Latin and Italian tales which focus on specific regions in Italy, like Gubbio,[6] they have travelled across Europe and the world, as the Franciscan Order has itself: "Wo aber die Sonne von Assisi hinschien, wo die ersten heiligen Brüder und Schwestern ihren Fuß hinsetzten, da sproßten die fioretti, die Blümlein, hervor" (1) writes Hanns Schönhöffer (1921) in the introduction of his German translation.[7] Furthermore, as Brown (32) mentions, the *Fioretti* have been added to the Great

Books Foundation in the United States and have become an international classic. Thereby, with its underlying message about loving and caring for one's neighbor beyond one's own borders, the story of the wolf of Gubbio provides an insight into Saint Francis's impact on society on a global scale and created an interrelation with a variety of cultures and languages.

Even in the Middle Ages these stories crossed borders and were referenced in additions to Henri d'Avranches's "Legenda Sancti Francisci Versificata" in France from the mid-13th century.[8] Scholars argue that the manuscript dates back to 1283 (Armstrong et al. 77) and the reference reads:

> A taming effect on wild beasts even in their savage state
> Had Francis's power. Indeed when, playing havoc with animals
> And humans, the hostile ferocity of wolves harassed
> Greccio's inhabitants, it died down, checked through his prayers.
> One wolf in particular through his agency, we are told,
> Became a mild creature and with a village was reconciled (d'Avranches 104).

Appearing several decades before the *Actus*, this passage suggests that the oral tradition had already established an association between Saint Francis and his taming of the wolf across the Roman Catholic Empire. Furthermore, the inconsistency of the text mentioning Greccio, rather than Gubbio, points to an irrelevance of the exact date and time and focusses attention on the miracle of accepting an outsider into one's community.

In the story about the wolf of Gubbio from the *Little Flowers*, the people of Gubbio are threatened by a dangerous and savage wolf who threatens and kills them and their livestock. Saint Francis decides to speak to the wolf. They come to an agreement that the animal will spare the lives of the humans, who in turn agree to provide the wolf with nourishment when he comes into their homes. This mutual agreement is constructed in a verbal peace pact and pledge which is made between the people of Gubbio and the wolf. Thereafter, the people of Gubbio live together in harmony with the wolf until he dies of old age.

This story emphasizes the role of Saint Francis as a mediator and diplomat between an excluded beast and a community: He opens a conversation between hated enemies and guides them toward a solution for co-existence. The trope of *enemy-turned-friend* common in the works on Saint Francis. It also appears in the saint's encounter with the leper, and with the sultan during the crusades, as Steven J. McMichael argues in his contribution "Francis and the Encounter with the Sultan (1219)" (133). I argue that just like the sick and non-believers (in a Christian sense) who are excluded, the wolf symbolizes multiple socio-political aspects of being an outsider. Herein lies the significance for Saint Francis in the context of a study focusing on wolves and being 'wolfed'.

Firstly, the religious connotation of the wolf as the essence of evil identifies sinful nature as a wolf. The soul of the wolfish outsider becomes jeopardized due to its acts and relate it to a question of *Gotteskindschaft* (being a child of God). *Gotteskindschaft* relates to the instance when the saint addresses the wolf as "brother" (*Little Flowers* 89) and thereby suggests that the wolf is a baptized member of the church (even a friar) who, because of his sins, has been excommunicated. Secondly, the legally binding language used by Saint Francis to establish peace between the wolf and the Gubbians implies a connection between the literary wolf-motif and the socio-political status of an outlawed individual. Perhaps a more famous medieval example—while not hagiography, but epic—is "The Saga of the Volsungs" where the criminal exile is labeled a wolf, or *morð-varg*. This concept will be extended by excommunication from the church.[9] Thirdly, when Saint Francis incorporates the wolf into the community, he sets a precedent for social solidarity that is explained with the medieval concept of *caritas*—which includes showing love and care (and charity) to God and one's neighbors in accordance with the letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13.13).

The wolf of Gubbio demonstrates a degree of independence and personal choice for agreeing to the terms of the peace negotiation. Such independence reflects on the potential of every citizen (or child of God—including the saint himself) to become a sinner, outsider, or a

wolf themselves. Considering this, the story about the wolf of Gubbio functions as a cautionary tale, as well as a message of hope: While anyone can sin and fall from grace, they can also be forgiven. Therefore, the wolf symbolizes a sinful nature within each individual and emphasizes the need to identify, accept, and help it in accordance with Franciscan principles.

By applying a psychoanalytical reading into these medieval themes, the wolf-motif does not merely relate to the evil outsider, but suggests a doubling and mirroring between the wolf, Saint Francis, and the people of Gubbio. *Double* means how the various characters in the narrative become reflections of different versions of each other. In the gothic novel tradition, the double represents the protagonist's underlying dark and repressed side. In relation to the wolf of Gubbio, this theory would suggest that the wolf is the evil double of Saint Francis, and the taming of the wolf represents the holy man overcoming his internal conflicts and desires. However, I want to move a little further to Gilles Deleuze's (1994) theory of *repetition*, which explicates a multiplication of every individual's self, meaning that every person makes conscious and unconscious choices to become who they are and that multiple versions of a single person are possible. The difference to the original double-conception is that the *evil* within everyone is relative to whichever moral-construction is applied to evaluate a person's actions, which often does not consider the social and economic factors which play a role in a person's development. In the story about the wolf of Gubbio, this concept would imply itself through medieval *Gotteskindschaft* (being God's child) and advertently belonging to the Christian community or being set apart from it because of one's sins.[10]

The social and economic factors orbiting around the story about the wolf of Gubbio need to be regarded in the context of Saint Francis's impact on the time: The Franciscan order has had an enormous impact on the European and specifically German culture since the early 13th century. Their mission in the German lands took place in the later years of Francis of Assisi's life (1180s until 1226). He played a key-role as a role-model to go out into the world and preach repentance and peace. Their mission followed the instructions of Jesus to His

disciples and was first heeded by Francis when he was repairing a church near the area of Gubbio (Leonhard Lehman 239). Biographically, this marked the beginning of Francis's break with society. This paper examines how this break aligns him with the literary wolf-character. He had already parted ways with his father and family beforehand, but his dedication to a mendicant lifestyle highlights a material and final discontinuity with society's conventions. A look at his hagiographical account in the "Golden Legend" by Jacobus de Voraigne (2012) will serve as lens to better understand the meaning of this break.

Saint Francis in the Legenda Aurea

Historically, Francis of Assisi founded his order on a quest to embrace a simple and humble life. This biographical detail is also represented in the "Golden Legend", a collection of over 182 hagiographies of various saints which was very widely read and known in the Middle Ages. This collection was compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the mid-13th century. There are more than a thousand medieval manuscripts of this text which emphasizes its popularity. In the introduction to his 2012 English translation, the church-historian Eamon Duffy points out that the stories were meant to both teach and entertain the general population.[11] It is interesting to note that Jacobus was a mendicant friar himself which explains why he wrote an exceptionally long entry of Saint Francis's *vita*. The popularity of the hagiographic texts shows that the story of Saint Francis in the "Golden Legend" was widely known. This in turn makes the story an ideal point of departure to investigate what the perception of the literary Saint Francis was and how this might influence later stories about him.

The aforementioned popularity extends into the German language area of the time. The earliest written version in German dates to 1282 and it is likely that the stories were orally conveyed before that. In their introduction to the oldest manuscript of the "Golden Legend,"

Uta Williams-Krapp et al. discuss how the multiple German translations and manuscripts of the collection, which appeared throughout the late 13th, 14th and early 15th century, created a foundation to adopt the text as a part of the German literary history.[12]

Saint Francis in the "Golden Legend" manifests an "evangelical perfection" (de Voragine 607) in a state of poverty: Saint Francis "loved poverty in himself" (de Voragine 608).[13] This love is a jealous one: "when he saw someone poorer than himself, he envied him and was afraid he might be outdone by him" (de Voragine 608). This shows how well renowned Saint Francis was for his dedication to a mendicant lifestyle amongst contemporaries at least in the 13th and 14th centuries. This is further underlined by Bert Roest (2014)[14] who argues how even the abstract idea of *learning* was seen as "a 'possession'" to Francis of Assisi and was therefore "a source of personal pride and anathema" (16) which should therefore be discarded. Thus, the literary figure was clearly an icon of living on the economic periphery—the ideal position to cross borders and interact with other outsiders—meaning that he does not confine himself to the conventions set by the society but tries to implement his ideas by living apart from it.

Francis fraternizing and identifying himself with such outcasts of society was not considered honorable, or exemplary by many. While the church and the pope did not condemn these principals as heretical, they were considered drastic (Roest 10). The conventional view on leaving one's property behind to lead a mendicant life is represented in the Saint Francis's hagiography where he leaves his rich family to be homeless. He is openly humiliated by his blood brother and even brought to prison by his father (de Voragine 607). This indicates an overall negative perception of beggars, outsiders, and hermits amongst the higher classes.

It is necessary to note that the story about Saint Francis saving the people of Gubbio dates back at least a century after the "Golden Legend" was written. It is fascinating to see the same literary persona turning away from his blood ties in the widely known "Golden Legend" and embracing the stranger and enemy as a brother in another story which has also reached

international renown and had orally circulated beyond the region for a while. There lies a teleological development in the perception of Saint Francis that was built on the hagiography (where the saint shows his respect toward all of God's creations already) but emphasizes a message of tolerance toward a prominent force of evil. When Saint Francis expresses a mutual parentage with this evil, the wolf, the question of belonging to God's children is raised and requires closer investigation.

Children of God and the Franciscan Mission

The wolf of Gubbio, as part of the "Fioretti" and not of the "Golden Legend," takes on a special role in the sense of brotherhood. While Saint Francis "called all animals brothers and sisters" (de Voragine 611), specifically "brother ass" (de Voragine 609) and "sister locust" (de Voragine 611) in the "Golden Legend," these entities would and could not have been baptized. What the saint may have meant with the familiar address in the "Golden Legend" could be a "conferred intrinsic value on all other nonhuman beings and evoked a lifestyle of reverence and respect" (Viviers 8). In this sense, despite the lack of baptism, all creatures are children of God and therefore live together in harmony. However, animals were not believed to have souls in the Middle Ages. Souls remained a human characteristic (Viviers 7) and the status of being God's children would not have been attributed to animals which meant that they would not be saved and brought into heaven. Thereby, the friendly co-existence established by Saint Francis only demonstrates a glimpse of the peaceful state of Eden.[15]

Saint Francis's close and familiar relationship with nature's fauna moved Pope John Paul in 1979 to proclaim the saint the patron of ecology (Apostolic Letter *Inter Sanctos*: AAS 71).[16] It is very easy to see an environmental activist in the person who "lifted worms from the road for fear they might be trampled underfoot by passersby" (de Voragine 611). However, Salter argues that reading the wolf of Gubbio as a representation of humans' treatment of nature in an environmentally friendly and animal-rights focused manner misses the

contemporaneous medieval concept of "anthropomorphic assumption" (Salter 30). Animals were assumed to be subject to the same moral standards as humans and this idea was "firmly rooted in the culture of the time" (Salter 30). For this reason, it was argued that animals who were harmful from the point of view of humans should be persecuted under the same laws as man (Salter). This means that the harmful animal (the wolf) must give up its nature and become a human (or act like one) and the wolf in the story was less a representative of nature in general, than an appeal toward the people of Gubbio to feed the specific animal and not to nurture all of nature.

The wolf is simply a tool to convey an underlying message: "Francis would seem to have regarded the wolf as a symbolic object, seeing in the creature's ferocity and destructiveness a divine admonition, warning sinners of the urgent need to repent for their misdeeds" (Salter 32). This suggests that the wolf has no other purpose in the story than to demonstrate Saint Francis's God-given power. The wolf of Gubbio is a dangerous agent from hell and must in that way be a warning to the people of Gubbio. He is not an autonomous entity who has anything to say in the peace contract he and Saint Francis create together. Rather, the story shows that even such a devilish agent must concede to the will of Francis and thereby his miracle creates a temporary Eden on Earth. This state becomes apparent when the wolf approaches Saint Francis "with its mouth open" (*Little Flowers* 89) and is evidently ready to attack and commit yet another atrocity. However, a miracle occurs and the wolf stops, closes its maw and becomes as gentle "as though it had become a lamb" (*Little Flowers* 89). This image connects to the prophesy by Isiah where the Messiah's coming will create a state of peace as in Eden and "[t]he wolf will live with the lamb." (Isa. 11.6). Thus, the power of Saint Francis is messianic.

The wolf of Gubbio should be separated from the other creatures Saint Francis refers to as his siblings and should be seen as a human. However, in contrast to Salter's argument, it is important to emphasize that the story also signifies more than merely the power of Saint

Francis. By observing the context and the peritexts of "The Wolf of Gubbio" in "The Little Flowers", the repeated term *brother* from the Latin "frater" (*Actus*) is used to describe Francis's fellow clergymen, or friars.[17] The term suggests that the wolf is a friar rather than just an expression of esoterism.[18] The significance of the term *wolf* should, therefore, be seen as a symbolization of a sinful person, and the wolf of Gubbio should be seen as a friar who was baptized but strayed from the good and just path and became a wolfish character.

Baptism signifies belonging to God who may save the soul of His so marked children. In the Middle Ages, this belonging held important socio-political connotations in a community. For example, Christoph H.F. Meyer (2013) argues how the sign of baptism, "character indelebilis" was a forerunner of a modern conception of citizenship: "Durch die Taufe wird ein Mensch zunächst Glied der *Ecclesia Christi*, und daraus ergibt sich, dass er in einem rechtlichen Sinne Person in dieser Kirche ist" (93-94). Saint Francis calling the wolf "brother" suggests that they share the same father, God, which implies that the sacrament of baptism is not required to be God's child, or the wolf was already baptized.

The latter possibility departs from reading the wolf of Gubbio as a real animal and Saint Francis's role as a precursor of ecological thought yet puts his role as a social reformer into limelight. For such a reading, it is important to understand the biblical symbolic value of the wolf-motif as an agent of evil, the anti-Christ, the ravaging beast which hides under sheep's clothing (Matt. 7.15) and, most importantly, the sinner who can still be saved and realize the vision of the wolf who peacefully exists alongside the sheep (Isa. 11.6).

Terms of Brotherhood

Based on the reading where the wolf is a former member of the Christian Church and his crimes of murder and thievery have been the cause for his excommunication, like Cain after he killed Abel (Gen. 4.8), the wolf-motif expands into a medieval social state of exile. This state is described more explicitly in the old Norse epic "The Saga of the Volsungs" where

Sigi kills a thrall and is therefore declared an exile and a morð-vargr (a murder wolf). Lawfully terming a criminal and outlaw *wolf* is not only an Old Icelandic trait, but *wolf* in the Middle Ages is also frequently synonymous with *outlaw* and *exiled member of society* (Walter Kofler 9). In this context, *wolfing* is not a new concept at all, and it is noteworthy that the literary perceptions of the wolf in these unconventionally connected genres are on par with each other and can lead to a deeper understanding of the story about the wolf of Gubbio. For example, if the wolf of Gubbio represents the criminal man, Saint Francis is preaching for acceptance of men of all social backgrounds as children of God—even the sinners and criminals. Here, the significance of Saint Francis identifying with the wolf and the connotations of evil surrounding the wolf need to be investigated more closely regarding the saint's family values.

Saint Francis' family values are curious because of his explicit and open conflict with his biological family in the "Golden Legend" which starkly contrasts his relationship with his "brother," the wolf, from "The Little Flowers" (*Little Flowers* 89). Having turned his back on his well-to-do family in the "Golden Legend," Saint Francis does not see earthly blood-relations as enough for a just and righteous life and would rather choose exile. He leaves his home and becomes a beggar and an economic outcast of society, thus wolfing himself. In this context, Saint Francis calling the wolf of Gubbio "brother" (89) in "The Little Flowers" is exceptional because the wolf represents a symbolic value of what was hated and needed to be excluded from society. Saint Francis's radical prioritization of this outsider-family proves his character's disdain for materialism while simultaneously expressing an abstract bond with social outcasts in a particularly high degree when considering the evil of the wolf.

In the wolf of Gubbio story, Saint Francis points out that the wolf is guilty of being "just like the worst robber and murderer" (*Little Flowers* 89).

> All the people in the town considered it such a great scourge and terror—because it often came near the town—that they took weapons with them when they went into the country, as if they were going to war. But even with their weapons they were not able

> to escape the sharp teeth and raging hunger of the wolf when they were so unfortunate as to meet it. Consequently, everyone in the town was so terrified that hardly anyone dared go outside the city gate (*Little Flowers* 88).

This murderer who, through his terror, brings the entire city to its knees. Terrorized, the citizens do not dare to leave the city limits anymore and need to be constantly armed. The term "People" was translated from "cives" (*Actus*) which stresses the social structure as divided between the civilized world and the outside wilderness. The wolf's impact is more than just being a stranger and an outsider of the community. Rather, the wolf is an active threat and enemy to society and the people are arming themselves as if for "war" against it (*Little Flowers* 88). As "such a great scourge" (*Little Flowers* 88), he is a terrible force which spreads fear and anxiety as well as threatens to break the peace and harmony of the civilized world. This is whom Saint Francis names *brother*. Such an affiliation reveals to what lengths Saint Francis goes to break down social conventions.

In the Christian understanding, the wolf became the symbol of the essence of what evil is (Lee).[19] The biblical tradition[20] represents the wolf as the anti-Christ who would hide amongst the sheep (the metaphorical Christian congregation and community) and kill them or prevent their souls from being saved. In a theological sense, this meant that the wolf would turn the Christians away from God and lead them to the eternal sufferings of hell. Simultaneously this made them ideal focus-points to relate paradise to the contemporary audience. How the Bible emphasizes a state of peace when the wolf acts docile is explained by Joshua Van Ee (2018). For such a peace to be appreciated, however, the wolf must function as a force of fear which is described by Emil Göggel (2014). He explicates how fear played a much bigger role during the Middle Ages because of the belief in a very real hell, illness, epidemics, wars, hunger, poverty, lack of helpful technology, and no social safety-net. All of this created an extremely high degree of trepidation toward the afterlife, which would either be blissful (in heaven), or a thousand times worse (in hell). If one considers this emphatic fear

during the Middle Ages alongside the myth surrounding the wolf, as Lee emphasizes, the wolf in literature functions as a signifier of a very real fear of losing one's own life in this world and one's soul in the abstract sense of Christian *Gotteskindschaft*. Therefore, the story about the wolf of Gubbio becomes a cautionary tale with very strong implications of being *wolfed*—ostracized, condemned—and an incentive to become more self-conscious of one's own sinful nature.

Based on this tradition, the animal's symbolic value lost any positive connotations in medieval Europe: Wolf-hunts became "common throughout Europe and, by the ninth century, killing wolves had come to be seen almost as a religious obligation" writes Lee. The story about the wolf of Gubbio argues against the grain and advocates for a higher respect toward all of God's creations—even the evilest of them. The saintly, Christian protagonist fights against the widely held belief of condemning wolves and even promotes embracing them as brothers. This reflects on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount when he states: "love your enemies […] do good to those who hate you […] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5.44-45). His words show the underlying philosophy on which Saint Francis grounds himself. Saint Francis's utopian combination of poverty, humility, and devotion are based on the example of Jesus and his own humble life without worldly possessions (Roest 11). Further, there are foundational similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and Saint Francis's writing, specifically the *Rule* which underlines the importance of caring for one another, building community, and rejecting violence (McMichael 133).

These principles—dealing with non-believers and strangers in accordance with Jesus's example—underscore the wider symbolic value of the literary wolf. Saint Francis preaches both brotherly love toward one's enemy, the wolf, and he demonstrates it by inviting the wolf into the community of Gubbio. Saint Francis's deeds express the meaning of loving one's enemy beyond mere kind words. Not only does he show compassion and forgiveness to the beast, which is killing fellow Christians, but he also further creates a mutually beneficial peace contract with it. The wolf, therefore, needs to learn to love his own enemies as well and thereby

also becomes a child of God, as per Christ's instructions in his mountain sermon. This suggests that the wolf should be seen as a child of God in the Christian sense.

Creating this peace and harmony is not done by killing the wolf in turn, or by waging wars with other nations, but by opening a conversation with people who have differing worldviews.[21] Thus, Saint Francis becomes a diplomat for the villagers. For when Saint Francis commands the wolf to do no evil: "In the name of Christ, I order you not to hurt me or anyone" (*Little Flowers* 89), the wolf uncharacteristically obeys. He imposes peaceful doctrines which force the wolf to accept his peace. If the wolf was truly a being of evil or a complete anti-Christ, it would never heed such a command. The wolf needed to have first accepted the underlying principles of the religion Saint Francis was preaching, and have been a child of God initially, which again supports the idea of the wolf being a friar. This is because, without the wish to also love one's enemy, there is no incentive to accept the peace at all. Thereby, the underlying message is that even within the sinners there is also good and room for forgiveness, and every human's soul can be saved by God.

Even though wolves were widely perceived as the symbol of evil, there were also alternative instances, such as described above, where they became the subjects who needed help and be to be accepted into society. This follows a principle of the Franciscan order, who made it their mission to go out into the world, to preach the word of God and proclaim a message of peace (Lehman 238). However, this raises the question of whether such a mission can or may be imposed, peacefully or not. In other words, does the wolf, this sinner, enter peace talks of his own volition, or is he pressured into accepting the contract?

A Question of Independence

The wolf's performance in the peace-contract with Saint Francis suggests more significance in the acts of the wolf. He is the cause of fear, violence, and death, which is why he holds an especially proactive role in the story. The overly complex, multifaceted, and wide-

ranging appearance of the wolf-motif in medieval literature is provided by Judith Klinger. Her direct reference to the wolf of Gubbio (Klinger 148) amongst other stories about wolves and holy men, indicates a remarkable difference from the norm: Hagiographies such as St. Kentigern see the wolf as developing from a savage beast to a helper: "Verwandlung des gefährlichen Raubtiers in einen domestizierten Helfer [… zur] (Wieder-)Herstellung einer gottgewollten Herrschaftsordnung" (Klinger 147). Based on the manuscript of St. Kentigern's *vita* by Jocelyn of Furness (1180) and translated into English by Cynthia W. Green (1998), the Scottish saint orders a wolf who killed a stag to pay penance for his sin. The animal willingly obeys by putting on a yoke and plowing the field in place of the stag, thus demonstrating a quid pro quo—paying for what was taken (*Jocelyn, a monk of Furness: A Life of St. Kentigern*).

The wolf of Gubbio, on the other hand, exceeds these tropes by performing his own language. He gesticulates: "The wolf showed by moving its body and tail and ears and by nodding its head that it willingly accepted what the saint had said and would observe it" (*Little Flowers* 89). Here, the wolf is not just a savage beast, but through gestures reveal an independent nature and with its own thoughts. As argued before, the wolf is a person, a friar, who was banned and exiled, or a sinner whose soul is in danger of being condemned to hell. For this reason, the acts of the wolf are of particular interest to identify the degree of independence of the sinner on his path to redemption.

The wolf is the centerpiece of the conflict which the protagonist Saint Francis wishes to resolve with the literary wolf functioning as a projection of social conflict. This is commonly accepted in the fable tradition as Julia Weitbrecht (2015) demonstrates. She writes about the ubiquitous nature of the literary wolf and how he evokes a cultural construction where he is the antagonist of man, the essence of the wild beyond civilization and a cause of fear in an ecological sense of threatening the herds (Weitbrecht 25). The wolf with human characteristics is a projection of his characteristics in the context of the culture (Weitbrecht 28). The use of

a poetological wolf, in other words, suggests a social doubling: The wolf of Gubbio represents the sinful nature within the wolf, the friar, but also in every citizen of Gubbio.

While the main emphasis of the story might lie on the holiness of the saint, there are, nonetheless, several explicit descriptions which distinguish the wolf of Gubbio from other medieval wolf-stories. He maintains more independence than other literary wolves in the hagiographic tradition because he uses his own mode of sign-language, its wolfish bearing, gesticulations, and body to demonstrate its understanding and acceptance of the terms. More specifically, in the story, "[t]he wolf knelt down and bowed its head, and by twisting its body and wagging its tail and ears it clearly showed to everyone that it would keep the pact as it had promised" (*Little Flowers* 91). With this, the wolf proves its good-will and later even shakes on the agreement of the contract. These independent actions, which were not ordered by the saint, are repeated in front of the people of Gubbio as witnesses.

In the fables, Weitbrecht discusses, the wolf is given a human voice. The wolf of Gubbio, however, maintains a more naturalistic description which emphasizes the language barrier between the insiders and outsiders of the community. By being given the attention of Saint Francis and applying his body to communicate, the wolf can nonetheless overcome these barriers. The physical actions to provide assurance of the "pact" and "pledge" (*Little Flowers* 90, 91) which "schließen an gängige rechtlich-politische Handlungsmuster an" (Klinger 148) signify lawful acts of penance by the wolf to re-incorporate himself into the society from which his own sins have exiled him. Therefore, the wolf of Gubbio does indeed indicate a significant amount of independence: His own will and deeds in the future are the penance for being accepted back into the community. This acceptance by the people of Gubbio is related to *caritas*—helping their neighbor. The interaction between the wolf's independence and the community's charity[22] plays into the hands of a psychoanalytical doubling between the wolf, the people of Gubbio, and Saint Francis himself. The possibility to be forgiven as well as

having one's status as child of God restored, expresses a flexibility between the social status of outlawed wolf (sinner) and citizen (child of God).

A Doubling

The psychoanalytical *difference* between the wolf, the saint, and the citizen (in the sense of Deleuze) lies in their choices to lead different lives, but also in their socio-economic situation, and inadvertently in the degree of control they have over whichever side of the social constellation they are on. The citizen is a normal state. However, this state can be disrupted due to desperation, or hunger and can lead to sinful acts such as murder and thievery. The result of these acts would make a social wolf—a citizen who was exiled, or 'wolfed'. On the other hand, the saint has an intermediary role in this constellation, since he can identify with the economic hardship of the wolf, while maintaining a good standing with the citizens. *Repetition* then unifies these three states as a single entity which can be one or the other. The degree of one's sinfulness and of one's *caritas* (taking care of the other) becomes the qualifying factor to identify whether one is a wolf, who is harmful to the community, but needs their help to change. Another position on the spectrum is a citizen, who may help the community, or be harmful to it. A third position is a saint, who is helpful. These degrees orbit as potential characteristics within each individual as repetitions of similar conditions and manifest themselves in the examples of characters in the story.

Giving the sinner a hospitable niche in the community is an act of *caritas*. The virtue of showing love by giving charity was a means of existence for mendicant friars living on alms. Their commitment and servitude toward God made the gifts given to them a tribute to their Lord. Saint Francis played a vital role in setting an example for the theological virtues, especially *caritas* (Valentina Živković 104). The Franciscan concept of *caritas*, as Robert Freyhan (1948) points out, expanded on the virtue of *caritas* by not only giving and caring for the Church and its servants, but by including any neighbor in need, "Caritas-Misericordias" (69).

Further, the Franciscans' focus on identifying the needs of one's neighbor and helping them in order to reflect their love for Jesus (Matt. 25.35-40) is more closely explained by Živković.[23] Giving love and charity to the wolf—the sinner, the criminal, the outcast—demonstrates the wide extent of this charity which forgives the sins of the murderer and basically re-instates him in the society, and re-invites him into the community of God's children. This social progressiveness[24] of such care is multiplied further when the wolf is read as a symbol of sinful nature because helping someone who commits such crimes and falls from grace extends into a higher purpose of helping others. For example, it could be a provision of having your neighbor care for you in kind if the situation arises. Such a thought process would suggest a literary doubling between the characters of the story.

Observing Saint Francis, the wolf, and the people of Gubbio as symbolic entities, it becomes evident how the story expresses a reform of social barriers. The wolf is a theological sign that was sent by God as a warning for the people to lead humble and pious lives to save their immortal souls. This is expressed in the sermon given by Saint Francis after the villagers have accepted the wolf into their lives.

> St. Francis gave them a wonderful sermon, saying among other things that such calamities were permitted by God because of their sins, and how the consuming fire of hell by which the damned have to be devoured for all eternity is much more dangerous than the raging of a wolf which can kill nothing but the body, and how much more they should fear to be plunged into hell, since one little animal could keep so great a crowd in such a state of terror and trembling.
>
> "So, dear people," he said, "come back to the Lord, and do fitting penance, and God will free you from the wolf in this world and from the devouring fire of hell in the next world" (*Little Flowers* 90).

This passage throws into sharp relief that the people of Gubbio themselves had not been completely innocent in the conflict with the wolf. Saint Francis tells the people to heed the

warning from God and to turn back to him. "[C]ome back" (*Little Flowers* 90), or "[r]evertimini igitur" (*Actus*) seems suggestive of the possibility that the people of Gubbio had initially turned away from God and had therefore needed a reminder as to why they should fear God. Their reminder came in the form of the wolf who savagely terrorized them which is justified by the saint because of the people's sins. This again stresses that the people of Gubbio deserved to be punished for committing a sin that is not directly named. While this punishment reflects eternal damnation in hell and the wolf's "raging" (*Little Flowers* 90) is likened to the embrace of hell, it is only such a "little animal" (*Little Flowers* 90) in light of a much bigger threat. Nonetheless, the initial fear of the story had been emphasized to be big enough to quarantine the people of Gubbio. This minification of the terror again suggests that their sins can still be forgiven.

Beyond their religious kinship, Saint Francis and the wolf also share a social standing with each other: both are peripheral members of society (as mendicant monks). While poverty is the iconographic virtue of the saint, it is the cause of desperation for the wolf, as Saint Francis tells him, "I know that whatever evil you have been doing was done because of the urge of hunger" (*Little Flowers* 89). Hereby, the difference between the saint and the wolf is the social performance of the person. As saint, Saint Francis choses to be an outsider, but he manages to overcome the harmful desperation which the excruciating state of saintly existence can include. Failing to overcome these urges results in becoming a wolf. Saint Francis understands this and finds a way to help his failed brother by bringing the two separated worlds (of the inside and outside) together.

The message is clear: Even a decent human being, even a friar, might become a robber and a criminal and fall to sin if they were suffering from starvation. Herein lies a doubling between the wolf and the criminal man. But even further, there lies a reflection between Saint Francis who knows this pain and knows how to overcome it. Having chosen a life of poverty, the saint can talk from experience. The solution is to have the people of Gubbio care for the

wolf and provide him with food whenever he enters their homes. This is a clear example of communal *caritas* where the ones who have economic stability help those in need and are also able to empathize with them.[25]

Those who have economic stability might in turn have less, but their desire to hold onto material riches over charitable generosity can be interpreted as a sinful tendency. This interpretation introduces another form of doubling, which can be seen in the instance when Saint Francis tells the people of Gubbio to turn back to God, repent their sins and afterwards to help the wolf by feeding him. If they were sinful before the humble and impoverished Saint Francis came, and the wolf was sent by God to remind them of the repercussions of their sins, and Saint Francis was in turn sent to help, it follows logically that the people of Gubbio were guilty of the sin of avarice, "[t]he vice opposed to Caritas-Misericoria" as Freyhan points out (81).

This avarice would be theft. The people having more than they need to live comfortably, but simultaneously allowing for others to be stranded in the wild as outsiders, signifies a crime on the part of the community. Such a lifestyle reflects the misdeeds of a savage wolf who steals and kills to get what it wants (rather than *needs*, as in the case of the wolf who is forgiven). In this sense, the citizens keep what they do not need from the wolf who is thereby driven into savage desperation. In other words, the people of Gubbio might themselves stand accused of being greedy and, in a sense, of killing (by starving others through withholding resources) and stealing for their own personal gain. Therefore, they might be accused of being wolves themselves, and even worse than the forgiven one.

Conclusion

To twist the infamous words of Thomas Hobbes: Homo lupo homo est. Instead of man being the wolf of man ("homo homini lupus est"), man becomes the humanitarian helper of the wolf, the sinner, who needs help, rather than a continuance of the vicious treatment his

sins entailed. Thus, the notorious wolf from the grim fairy tale tradition is set in a new light announcing a counter initiative against the Hobbsian inclination to only be kind to one's own, but aggressively alienating toward outsiders. Rather, the breaking of social borders and the reallocation of personal wealth toward building a commonwealth within the miracle story connects the heavenly sermon for repentance with a worldly service of Caritas-Misericordias, and with a sense for political order, in which the doubling underscores and explains the mutual benefit of institutionalizing such services. This is highlighted in "The Little Flowers" where Saint Francis creates a "peace pact" (89) with the wolf. Regarding this perspective, the story spreads a wide moral compass and requests and reminds its global audience then and now that they should treat all outsiders and strangers with more respect and kindness. Reiterating the biological analogy by Jack Zipes, if the fairy tale should be seen as a virus which must be treated with brutal force, if necessary, the hagiographic tradition prefers to see the virus as an afflicted patient itself and provides an example of a helpful salve.

Notes

[1] Zipes (2006) likens the biological phenomenon *meme* to the fairy tale. The virus which originates, spreads, disseminates, and develops over the course of time. So also, according to Zipes's theory, the "survival stories" of fairy tales have developed over the centuries and adjusted themselves to our time and concurrent issues (27).

[2] Different religious and philosophical cultures, their coherent hagiographies, and the fluidity of the genre are discussed in detail in the book "Early Medieval Hagiography" by James T. Palmer (2018).

[3] How and how far hagiographies traveled during the Middle Ages, how they were utilized, and what their cultural significance is, can be found in Samantha Kahn Herrick's book "Hagiography and the History of Latin Christendom, 500-1500."

[4] Simon Kempt (2018) provides insights on the medieval conception of sin and its implications (35).

[5] Antonio Montefusco (2013) provides a valuable overview of the multiple manuscripts of the *Acta*, as well as the complexities and scholarly debates surrounding the translation and the relationship between these two versions.

[6] "*The Deeds* […] does not consider those who went on mission to England and Germany, nor is it concerned with the first Brothers who went to France. Its primary concerns are limited to the histories of just two Italian Provinces, Umbria and the Marches" (Armstrong et al. 429).

[7] In a review of German translations G. van Poppel talks about a "Flutwelle" (194) of interest in the stories.

[8] An anonymous follower of d'Avranches is said to have copied his work and included several additions, including the mentioning of the wolf (Armstrong et al. 77).

[9] The historical significance of excommunication during the Middle Ages is discussed by James H. Provost (2005).

[10] The consequences of sin during the Middle Ages would be either death, or excommunication (Provost, 2005).

[11] This inadvertently connects to the philosophical foundation provided by Horace, who famously wrote "aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae" (Ferris-Hill and Horace, 2019). Whether or to what degree Horace's writings had a direct impact on how hagiographies were formulated will not be further discussed in this paper.

[12] Williams-Krapp and Williams (1980) distinguish between different versions. This paper will not go into more detail as to how the differences between these categories have produced a more nuanced reception of the work.

[13] Michael J.P. Robson talks about "evangelical poverty" (3).

[14] Roest's book focuses on the history of Franciscan education and learning, and provides insights into Francis of Assisi's biography, inserting itself into the dispute of whether Francis condemned *learning* (specifically literate studies) and was himself an illiterate man. Roest provides evidence that Francis could indeed read and was to a degree versed in the content of scripture and did not completely condemn such skills as a vice. Nonetheless, he regarded a more natural form of knowledge higher and did envision a utopic existence in "total poverty, humility and devotion" (11).

[15] Viviers main argument underlines how the fantastical story bears value for shaping a "modern ecological consciousness" in that Saint Francis's attitude toward nature was genuinely caring (80).

[16] Quoted in Salter (26).

[17] e.g., frater Masseus, frater Bernard, frater Leo and frater Juniperus to name a few (*Actus*).

[18] Only in the (notably) additional chapters "The Canticle of Brother Sun" (Brown 317) does another non-human element get referred to as brother (and the moon as sister) in the *Actus* and *Fioretti*.

[19] Aleksander Pluskowski's book "Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages" (2006) relates the Christian Church's negative impact on the real animal in Great Britain and Scandinavia.

[20] A.E. Wright (1998) provides an insight into how religiously orientated fables predominantly represented the wolf as an antagonist.

[21] Lehman's book goes into detail about Francis of Assisi's mission with a historical and biographical approach. Observing Francis's meeting with the sultan while joining in the crusade, Lehman explains how this mission was very much a utopian aphorism of "Friede und Heil" and not a hypocritical ploy to coerce lesser people into Christianity (240).

[22] Kemp points out that the extended meaning of the medieval conception of the term "cartias" goes beyond the English translation of "charity" although the notion of charity is included (36).

[23] Živković (2008) details how alms giving became more organized and how it impacted the community of Kotor where Saint Francis is depicted on the wall of the church of St. Anne.

[24] The applied kindness with regards to today's scientific medical standards in connection to Francis of Assisi is argued by Paschal M. Corby (2018) in relation to the saint's encounter with the leper.

[25] Saint Francis serving as a guide for the community shows his position as a

shepherd, or pastor—bearing the clerical responsibilities to care for his flock, or congregation. This reading can be connected to Holly J. Grieco who explains the concept of "cura animarum" which dictated the Fransiscans to protect and provide for their followers (132).

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