Lycanthropy. A belief that a man will turn into a wolf (S-V-49)
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Definition and description
The term “Lycanthropy” means transformation of the man into wolf (from the Greek, Lycos, wolf, and Anthropos, man). According to popular beliefs, the metamorphosis from man to werewolf reveals itself both psychically and physically: werewolves have eyes made of glass, nails like shovels, sharp and long fangs; bushy and long haired body; they are generally considered very fast and ferocious and endowed with a superhuman force, tearing everyone he meets. However the Lycanthrope has his weak points: he can not see well, he has fear of the light, a crucifix can stop him maybe because he is considered possessed. The legend of the werewolf deeply permeates the culture of western people.

Historical and literary outlines
The first testimony about this belief comes from Erodoto, an ancient Greek historiographer, that refers about people from Schytia who turn into wolves once a year. Afterwards Petronius, a Latin author (1st A.D.), tells about a transformation of a soldier into a werewolf. During Middle Ages, under the influences of the Inquisition, lycanthropy was considered an Evil One’s manifestation and many people therefore believed possessed were to be condemned to the stake. During the Enlightenment, the phenomenon was subtracted from the religious sphere and it started to be embraced by literature and arts. In the following centuries this approach has continued and in the very last years Lycanthropy has been theme of many cinematographic productions.

Scientific approach in the past
The first ancient physician to have written about the wolfish disease was Claudius Galen (131-200 A.D.) who describes, in his manuscript “De Melancholia”, symptoms and therapy for the lycanthropy defined as a “Speciem Malinconiae”. The galenic work was servilely handed down to posterity by physician compilers of the following centuries. Only Actuarius, Byzantine physician and philosopher of 13th century, adds to the galenic symptomatology the misanthropy of the individuals affected by Lycanthropy in the periods free from the accesses, underlining a psychopathological aspect of the phenomenon. According to the theological doctrine of the 14th century, Lycanthropy was considered the effect of an hallucination caused by the Demon because he could not supposedly transform a human being into an animal, but he could just create illusions. Between the 16th and the 17th century this prospective was shared by many physicians: for example, Jean Fernel, Bodin (1587), Leloyer believed in demoniacal possession. On the contrary, Johann Wyer (1515 -1588) asserts a psychic etiopathogenesis of the Lycanthropy and suggests for this diseases the same treatments used for melancholia and a good feeding. Also Daniel Sennert distinguishes on a hand a “folie lupine” in the context of a maniacal activation and on the other a type of demoniacal possession. Starting to the 17th century, Lycanthropy began to be unusual in medical literature.

The sporadic appearance of the disease lead to coin new definitions like “Rabies hidrophobia” by Blankaart in 1679; “Melancholia zoantrophia” by Boissier de Sauvages in 1770; “Zoantropic Melancholia” by Cullen in 1793; “Melancholia Methamorphosis” by Heinroth in 1806; “Zoantrophia” by Esquirol in 1838. Morel, in one of the rare descriptions of the 19th century, still talks about a kind of “psychotic depression with mental deterioration”, but after this age Lycanthropy seems to move in the nosographical spectrum of chronic psychosis. Calmeil (1870) considers the Lycanthropy like “a fixed idea that upsets the imagination and the judgment….”. Also
Esquirol describes Licantropia as one subspecies of the “demonomanic delusion”. Leonardo Bianchi (1905) places Lycanthropy inside the group of the “metamorphosis delusions”; other authors explain the disease like a hallucinatory experience.

**Medical approach**
Nowadays it is supposed that many cases defined previously lycanthropes could comprehend some peculiar medical conditions: patients with facial deformity like *facies leonina* in leprosy, wolfish expression in the last state of syphilis, severe cases of congenital erythropoietic porphyry. In the last condition, the hypersensitivity to the solar light, the red eyes, excoriated skin, the hypertrichosis and the hyper pigmentation, the pallor and the itching due to the haemolytic anaemia, mental and neurological disease rendered the aspect of these patients similar to a werewolf.

In medical literature there are some cases referred to dementia and epilepsy.

**Psychiatric approach**
Dumas divides the lycanthropes in “imaginative” (for autosuggestion) and “instinctive” (with sexual instinct anomalies). Rogues de Fursac, in his psychiatric handbook, places Lycanthropy among the cases of personality transformations.

S. Arieti (1969) puts in evidence the presence of so-called “collective psychosis” in the Middle Ages or psychical epidemics and emphasizes the fact that it was not a real psychosis, but an induced hysterical psychoneuroses caused by the combined effects of the crowd on the inclined person. The atmosphere of superstition, ignorance or intense religiosity predisposed the unstable individuals to this kind of collective hypnosis. On the other hand, Arieti considers the sporadic recent cases in the context of schizophrenia and paranoia. Jung (1954) describes a case-report of a woman affected by lycanthropic delusion and interprets it like the coming to the surface of primitive instincts previously repressed. Recently Noll (1992) has approached the zooanthropia to the multiple personality disorder: in fact, like the patients affected with dissociative disorders lycanthropes show peculiar alterations of integrative processes of consciousness and of identity. Moreover among many of them the transformation from human to animal seems like to the switching observed in multiple identity dissociative disorder.

**Interviews**
Some interviews were conducted in the Centre of Italy between January and February 2006. The testimonies show that among rural, middle and old aged people, lycanthropic belief is still present. Many of them tell about experiences of facing the *lupo mannaro* (from the Latin *lupus hominarius* i.e. a wolf that looks like a human being). Those people describe this meeting as terrific and fearful event, even if some of them show sorrow for the werewolves because, according to popular tradition, they are considered affected by severe and obscure blood disease.

On the contrary, the urban and younger population says they had never seen a werewolf but they know this phenomenon like shown by literature and cinematographic productions. Also they consider the elderly tales about Lycanthropy as a folkloric legend.

**Conclusion**
The obscure phenomenon so-called Lycanthropy, because of its sporadic manifestation, now with more evident individually causes, then in a collective context of traditional beliefs, leads to many different etiologic and diagnostic proposals. At this stage, Lycanthropy do not seems to be a nosographic disease of its own, but a complex entity characterized by a zooantrophic delusional experience as it appears in many psychiatric disease: Schizophrenia; Bipolar Disorder, Organic psychotic Disorders, Dissociative Disorders, Personality Disorders; Factitious Disorders (Keck P.E. et al., 1988). The essential features are: delusional thought of being turned physically into a wolf, animal behaviour, desire of killing or attacking people around, hyper sexuality, tendency to social withdrawal and wandering about forests and cemeteries.
It is important to underline the stereotypy of content in the zooantrophic delusion in contrast of the great variability of correct thought. The victim of the delusion, in fact, turns into an animal belonging to domestic or wild milieu present in each culture. For example, in current medical literature, Lycanthropy concerns human transformations not only into wolf, but also into dog, horse, cat; in Asia and Africa, the metamorphose occurs in tiger, hyena, crocodile and shark. Probably, delusional contents satisfy drives common to all human beings, like aggressiveness and sexuality (Garlipp P.et al., 2004) that find their way of expression through the animals with a symbolic culture bound value.

References