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Even in today's world there are corners where past evils still cast their terror-haunted shadows. When the young man, Christian, came to his inheritance—a once grand mansion in just such a remote corner of France, he knew only that there was some sort of alternate claim to that ancient building and its lands. Even as the villagers acknowledged him as lord of the manor, there came two from the forest to stake out their interest. And with them came fear and desire, terror and love ... a combination which could be irresistible—and also fatal.

Lycanthia: or The Children of Wolves Details

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Salimbol says

"Lycanthia" was a nice surprise to me, as I actually think that it's one of the better of Lee's books. The prose is, as always, lush, without becoming too purple, the setting seems to live and breathe, the plot is tight and rises to a taut climax, the characterisations are satisfying, and the sensuality that always infuses her stories is present but not allowed to overpower the narrative.

Courtney says

Took awhile to get into this. Sort of a period piece/werewolf saga. Not all that scary, but interesting.

Tim Covell says

Lee works her magic on the werewolf genre. Not among my favourite works by her, thanks to a dislikable protagonist and a thin story, but there are rich sensual moments, a wonderful gothic atmosphere, and morality lessons.

Pam Baddeley says

The setting for this novel appears to be a remote part of France in the early twentieth century - certainly there are trains and cars. Gas lamps, an invention of the previous century are much in evidence, but this is not surprising in the countryside where electrical supplies would have appeared later. Christian is a talented pianist but seems eaten up with ennui and a preoccupation with his own, presumed imminent, demise - as he has been exhibiting symptoms which point to tuberculosis. He has come to live out his remaining months at an old chateau which had been in the family for centuries, then sold by his grandfather to pay off debts - but with a clause which allowed it to revert to his grandson Christian if the buyer died without issue. As the buyer's children were lost in a boating accident and he drank himself to death, the house now belongs to Christian, who does not want it. He has only come to such a remote place to escape emotional ties in 'the city', including those with a female relative with whom he became entangled.

Christian treats the servants like dirt and is by turns petulant and slothful. He picks up on references to a local family who are shunned by the community, and eventually goes looking for them, trying to work out if theirs are the dogs which have followed him and come to the chateau. But of course - as the title discloses - these are not dogs but his werewolf neighbours, with whom he becomes embroiled. Unfortunately, local superstition will not permit this to continue.

As ever with Lee, the writing is lush at times and vivid and yet ... I didn't find much sympathy for any of the characters, and especially not the protagonist who was a right royal pain. I did feel a bit sorry for the chauffeur, but that was about it. The main character is a grown up spoiled brat essentially. But the standard

of the writing brings the overall rating up to 3 stars.

Ming says

The story itself was pretty well plotted, I didn't see the conclusion coming but I suppose it was always on the horizon - it didn't shock me. I'm slightly deflated by the ending though, since it still feels slightly anticlimatic, but it wasn't a cop-out ending, and was a perfectly reasonable way to resolve the story.

I quite liked this novel - it wasn't amazing, but parts of the novel featured some really good writing from Lee. I was also surprised by this strange emotional twinge I felt inside of me when Christian first confronted Sylvie about the de Lagenays. I also appreciated how Lee managed to work some of the French-ness into the English dialogue without being too overbearing about it, like that part when Madame Tienne asks Christian to come with him "if you please." (s'il vous plait) And he replies curtly: "I don't please." As for weaknesses of this novel, I want to say something about characterisation, but I think that's a rather nitpicky comment since we're dealing with werewolves - I'm actually glad Lee didn't indulge in overly expository explanations of what the werewolves are and how the superstitious beliefs of the villages worked - just enough was relayed to the reader to get a good sense of what's going on.

All in all, a pretty solid (if not entirely spectacular) book. And definitely an interesting way of telling a werewolf story.

Lorelei says

An interesting, not entirely run-of-the mill treatment of werewolves. I never learned exactly where the story was supposed to have taken place, some old world Eastern European country it seems. The main character is a bit precious, to say the least, and turns out to be not very likable in the end, imo. The ending is not fairytale, and is very well done. And I did it with no spoilers, which was a bit of a challenge, I must say. ;-)

David says

As a prose stylist, Lee is insanely good, and while some complain that her protagonists are unpleasant and/or hard to relate to, I have no problem with that. Where she's been known to lose her way, in my estimation, is plotting that's either scanty or overly reliant on twists, and that's not the case here: the events are intriguing as they occur, and the ending isn't easily anticipated but seems inevitable once you've gotten there.

Althea Ann says

I must admit to a deep affection for Gothic Romances, cheesiness and all. 'Lycanthia' is decidedly the best entry into that field I've encountered, with the twists that one expects from Tanith Lee elevating the book

past all the clichés of the genre.

Here, in a 19th-century French (?) setting, the hapless (?) protagonist is a young man, Christian Dorse. Finding himself the unexpected heir to an ancestral manor house, he betakes himself to languish in his new property. Languishing is what he aims for – Christian believes himself to be an invalid (although it's not quite clear if he is), and is a self-centered, not very likable individual. All he wants to do is to be left alone, to play the piano, and to feel sorry for himself.

However, his house, with its strange servants, the insular village nearby, and – most of all – the neighboring woods, seem to harbor sinister secrets. It's not clear if Christian's destiny is to fulfill a traditional role in a way of life he has never known, or if he will be shunned as an outsider.

He meets a strange couple, outcast from the village, and seemingly helpless to resist, falls into a web of supernatural depravity (or is it natural, beautiful love?). Christian is spurred to become more than he was – to re-examine what in life is truly meaningful. But will he succeed in breaking from the mold he has created for himself?

Lycanthia is a genre novel, a werewolf story – and also a beautiful, challenging and thought-provoking work.

Carl Barlow says

The plot and setting could be straight out of a Hammer film, with werewolves, rambling mansions in winter pine forests, ancient folklore, disgruntled locals (there's even a village mob!). However, with Tanith Lee writing, it all becomes much deeper and much more affecting - the cliches are there, yes, but Lee's handling of them will never make your eyes roll. Her lush style is what sets this above: darkly charming, erotically-charged, knowing, sometimes dreamlike, often quite beautiful. Her characters are nuanced, subtle, and only the werewolves themselves have any redeeming qualities - this is Dark Fantasy at its best.

Cloud says

A delightful read, I felt it moved along at a good pace that keep me turning the pages to find out what happens next. Enough mystery around the setting that has the main character trying to figure out what is going on and what is illusions brought on by his illness. Lee does a wonderful job with giving all elements a weight and feel of life. Very pleased with the ending and left me feeling very satisfied. Definitely something I will pick back up in the future.

Alex says

Unfortunate book by a great author of fantasy. The history gets lost in the boring details of the surroundings of the characters. A story filled with cliches, predictable and unimaginative situations. So boring that the reading seemed endless.

Canavan says

☆☆☆

mark monday says

this is a tale of an insanely self-absorbed little twit of a pianist who returns to his recently re-acquired ancestral chateau. he's apparently dying and all he wants is a place to run to and hide, one where he can do his slow dance with death while moodily contemplating his sad life with all of the poisonous self-loathing typical to a Tanith Lee "hero". fortunately for him, he gets a new lease on life due to a pair of threatening yet strangely life-affirming were-cousins. unfortunately, some predictably ignorant peasants decide to get inbetween our sexy goth trio and their Lifelong Happiness At Last. damn, peasants are a real drag! especially if you are self-absorbed twit/pianist.

the above description does a profound disservice to this intriguing and rather gorgeously written bit of fantasia set in semi-modern times. but i couldn't restrain myself from the snark - it was almost like i wanted to have some petty revenge on the confounding and infuriating hero. i'll try to do better later in the review.

but first, a shout-out to Tanith Lee. now this is one of those authors who holds a special place in many fantasy-lovers minds. some love her for all of the boundaries she seemed comfortable in ignoring, the ruthlessness, the vivid imagination, the perversity, the strange sexual situations, the often lush prose, her chameleonic ability to write in many different genres. others loathe her for her often self-annihilatingly passive heroines and her despicable heroes, prose that moves beyond purple into ultraviolet, a cold-blooded disdain in providing happiness for either her characters or her readers, etc. i understand the divisiveness, but i fall squarely into the former camp - at least when i was much younger. Tanith Lee & Jack Vance & Michael Moorcock & Roger Zelazny were my go-to fantasy and scifi authors for a long while, until i gave up on fantasy for a shameful period of at least 10 years or so. but i'm back to my favorite genre and plan on catching up with all of my old favorites, to see if the magic is still there.

i'm glad i started off my Tanith Lee rediscovery by reading Lycanthia. this is a slim story and i read it all in one evening. it is a bewitching one as well. i was entranced from beginning to end because it has literally everything my blackened little unheart wants in my fantasy... Weird Ambiguity, a ton of it. Characterization that does not attempt to pull the reader's heartstrings and protagonists that are often stunningly unsympathetic and capable of doing terribly wrong things. Luscious, almost overripe prose, with frequent bits of dry gallows humor and sardonic self-awareness. Monstrous things that are not eye-rolling or corny. Cruelty & Tragedy & Despair that is not facile or there to check off boxes on the Gothic List of Necessary Things, but is carefully layered within the narrative and the characterization. a winding but not confusing plotline. a gothic atmosphere of mystery and potential violence.

"Atmosphere"... Lee knows how to create it! her descriptions of the sinister forest, the eerie little village, the off-kilter and enigmatic supporting characters, and especially the chateau itself... wonderfully baroque detail-porn that i totally ate up. the whole rich stew is swooningly romantic - not so much because of romance between the characters (although there is a feverish yet childlike version of that), but rather because of the swooningly romantic atmosphere. a classic kind of "Romantic" - of the Byron, Shelley, and Shelley school.

the central theme of the novel is fascinating: the idea of Self-Absorption and its impact, how it ruins any attempt to truly understand one's surroundings, the people in those surroundings, the context of an entire place. Lycanthia's aristocratic asshole of a hero, and what befalls him and his lovers, is a perfect encapsulation of the deleterious effect of such a trait. some may howl at the moon and live only to consume life, like beasts - and those around them can tremble with fear or anger or even lust; others may howl and rage only at themselves and their lot in life - and those around them can find themselves betrayed by that all-consuming narcissism, destroyed by that terminal inability to connect with anything outside of themselves.

Hesper says

Decadent™ fuckboy Christian gets a shot at becoming an actual human being. Through contact with werewolves. Moody, lush, and complex, it's one of the best Tanith Lee has written.

Ruby Hollyberry says

A very unusual werewolf story, atmospheric, visual, sorrowful, twisted, mystical and downright wyrd. :)
