

# Old Thies, a Livonian Werewolf

*A Classic Case in  
Comparative Perspective*

Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln

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## The Trial

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### Transcript from the Hearings at the Provincial Court of Venden (April 28, 1691)

Judicial Acts of the Royal Court of the provincial district of Venden  
[today’s Cēsis] held at Jürgensburg, the 28th of April, 1691

From the above named trial, from the state’s complaint against the  
church thief of Jürgensburg [today’s Jaunpils], Pirsen Tönnis,  
and further concerning an inhabitant of Kaltenbrunn [today’s  
Kniedriņi] named Old Thiess

With regard to Lycanthropy and other prohibited and impious acts  
(*prohibitorum et nefandorum gestorum*).

Presiding judges: Assessor Bengt Johan Ackerstaff, as substitute  
District Court Judge Assessor Gabriel Berger.

[1] Thereafter, the Kaltenbrunn innkeeper Peter smiled after taking the oath of witnesses. He was asked: Why did he do that?

A: Since he saw that his tenant, Old Thiess, also had to swear.

Q: Why should that man's testimony concerning the church thief not be confirmed by an oath as well as his own?

A: Everyone knows that he goes around with the devil and was a werewolf. How could Old Thiess swear an oath, since he would not lie about such things and he had pursued them for many years?

[2] Old Thiess was charged accordingly, after hearing the other witnesses giving this testimony with reproaches, and he freely admitted that he had previously been a werewolf. However, he had given it up again after a time and truly that was about ten years ago. He further reported that this had already come up in the case at Nitau [today's Nitaure], where Herr Baron Crohnstern, Herr Rosenthal, and Caulich were still judges, regarding the time Skeistan, a peasant from Lemburg [today's Mälpils] who had recently died, broke Thiess's nose when he was carrying back the grain blossoms that Skeistan winnowed in hell in order to take away the growth of the grain. But the aforementioned judges in that case did nothing to him; rather, they only laughed at it and as Skeistan did not appear, they let him go free again.

[3] A broader inquiry was asked about him: Was Thiess always in good health and with his wits about him? Had he not been, and was he not still, somewhat mad? Whereupon, in addition to the others present who knew Thiess well, the substitute Herr District Court Judge Bengt Johan Ackerstaff, on whose estate Thiess had lived and worked for several years, declared that he understood his health never to have failed him, also that he never lied about such things, and when the aforementioned judges did nothing and let him go free in the earlier case, he was idolized by the peasants.

[4] He was asked this: In what place and at what time had Skeistan struck him and with what?

A: In hell, with a broomstick on which a horsetail was tied.

The Herr Presiding Judge testified that at that time Thiess's nose was injured.

[5] Q: How did the witness come to hell and where is that located?

A: The werewolves go thither on foot in wolf form, to the place at the end of the lake called Puer Esser, in a swamp below Lemberg about a half mile from Klingenberg [today's Akenstaka], the estate of the substitute Herr Presiding Judge. There were lordly chambers and commissioned doorkeepers, who stoutly resist those who want to take back the grain blossoms and the grain the sorcerers brought there. The grain blossoms were guarded in a special container and the grain in another.

[6] Q: Which form do they assume when they transform themselves into wolves?

A: They have a wolf pelt, which only they put on. He had it from a peasant of Marienburg [today's Alūksne], who came from Riga, and he turned it over to a peasant from Alla [today's Allaži] a few years ago. But in response to a question, he would not name either of them. And when a special inquiry was made, he changed his story and said they just went into the bush and took off their normal clothes and immediately changed to wolves. They ran about as wolves and seized whatever horses and livestock fell to them, but he had taken no large animals, only lambs, kids, piglets, and the like. But in the area of Segewold [today's Sigulda] there was a farmhand named Tyrummen, now dead, and he was truly extraordinary. The witness was nothing compared to him, as one person is given more power than another by the devil and that man had taken such large animals as presented themselves, including fattened pigs, and he carried these off from the farm. And then he feasted with his company, as twenty or thirty of them often came together along the road, roasted the animals, and devoured a huge amount.

[7] Q: How did they get fire and tools there?

A: They took fire from the farmstead and made spits out of wood. They took a cauldron from the farmstead and singed the hair off the animals. They eat nothing raw.

[8] Q: Did the witness often take part in such meals and find himself at banquets?

A: Yes, and so what?

Q: What happened to the small animals he had taken?

A: These they also consumed.

[9] Q: If they were transformed into wolves, why didn't they eat meat raw, as wolves do?

A: That wasn't the way. Rather, they eat it like men, roasted.

[10] Q: How could they handle things, if according to his testimony they had wolves' heads and paws? With what could they hold knives, prepare the food, or use other tools to accomplish their work?

A: They used no knives, but tore pieces off with their teeth, and with their paws they stuck the pieces on spits that they found, and when they consumed the meat, they had already turned back into men, but they made no use of bread. They took salt with them from the farmstead as they departed.

[11] Q: Did they fully sate themselves and did the devil eat with them?

A: He affirms the first point and denies the second [*Prius affirmat, posterius negat*]. But the sorcerers [*die zaubere*] eat with the devil in hell. The werewolves were not admitted there with them. Nevertheless, they sometimes quickly run in and snatch something, then run back with it as if fleeing. If they are caught, the guards appointed by the devil strike them with long iron goads they call canes [*ruten*] and they hunt them down as if they were dogs, for the devil can't stand them—*Ne erez* in the Latvian idiom.

[12] Q: If the devil can't bear them, why do they become werewolves and run to hell?

A: It happens for this reason, that they thereby might drag out of hell the things the sorcerers brought there: animals, grain, and other produce. In the previous year, he and the others had delayed and they did not come into hell at the right time when the gates were still open, so they couldn't carry off the grain blossoms and the grain the sorcerers had taken inside, and we had a bad year for grain. But this year, he and the others did the right things at the proper time. The witness himself brought out of hell as much barley, oats, and rye as he could carry. Therefore, this year we have all kinds of grain in abundance, although more oats than barley.

[13] Q: When do such things take place?

A: On St. Lucia's Eve before Christmas.

Q: How often in the year do they go into hell together?

A: Ordinarily thrice: Pentecost Eve, St. John's Eve, and St. Lucia's Eve. The first two are not always exactly on these nights, but when the grain is blossoming. Then and at the time of sowing, the sorcerers carry off the yield [lit. *segen*, the yield obtained by God's grace] and thereafter carry it into hell, so the werewolves work hard to bring it back.

[14] Q: Who was with him in this company the last St. Lucia's Eve?

A: They came from many places, those from Rodenpeisch [today's Ropaži] and Sunszel [today's Suntaži] together. Who knew them all or asked after their names? There were different bands. Before this, Skeistan Rein, son of the abovementioned Skeistan, had been in his band, but now he didn't see him there and he didn't know how that happened.

To a question regarding the men of Jürgensburg [today's Jaunpils], he said: Those of Jürgensburg must belong to another band, for one finds few of them in his band.

[15] Q: How could the witness say that on last St. Lucia's Eve they had already brought back this year's prosperity from hell, which the sorcerers had taken there, since the sowing and blossoming time was now just approaching and thus nothing could yet be harvested?

A: The sorcerers had their own special time and the devil had already sowed long before. Thereafter, the sorcerers took something from that and brought it to hell, and this was the prosperity the werewolves carried back out of hell, and subsequently much growth followed from our seed, just as rich fruit was obtained from the trees, which was also taken from hell, as was good fishing. Already since Christmas there was perfectly verdant grain of all sorts and trees, whose growth similarly came from hell. Since they also brought a lot of fish back from the sorcerers last St. Lucia's Eve, one could hope for better fishing this year. Nevertheless, if the sorcerers also took the grain blossoms and took them to hell, they would have nothing to work with, except what was sown and grew in hell.

[16] Q: Whenever they go to other feasts at that place in hell, do they find such buildings and do the same ones consistently stay there?

A: Yes.

Q: How is it that the other people who dwell nearby can't also see this?

A: It's not on top but under the earth, and the entrance is protected by a gate that no one can find, except someone who belongs inside.

[17] Q: Weren't there women and girls among the werewolves? Also were Germans found among them?

A: Women were certainly among the werewolves, but girls were not. Rather, they were of use to the flying sprites [*Puicken*] or dragons and were sent out to take away the yield of milk and butter. The Germans don't join their company; rather, they have a special hell of their own.

[18]: Q: Where do the werewolves go after death?

A: They are buried like other people and their souls come to heaven, but the devil takes the sorcerers' souls for himself.

Q: Is the witness diligent toward the church, does he listen faithfully to the word of God, does he pray diligently, and does he take the Lord's Supper?

A: No, he does neither the one nor the other.

[19] Q: How can the soul of someone who does not serve God, but the devil, and who does not go to church, seldom to confession, and does not take the Lord's Supper, as the witness admitted of himself, ever come to God?

A: The werewolves do not serve the devil, for they take away from him that which the sorcerers brought him, and for that reason the devil is so hostile to them that he cannot bear them. Rather, he has them driven off with iron goads, as if they were dogs, for the werewolves are God's hounds. But the sorcerers serve the devil and do everything according to his will, therefore their souls belong to him. Everything the werewolves do profits people best, for if they didn't exist and the devil made off with the prosperity, robbed or stole it, all the world's prosperity would depart, and (the witness) confirmed this with an oath, adding that in the preceding year, the Russian werewolves came earlier and recovered the prosperity of their land. Therefore they had had good growth in their land, while that of this land failed, for they had come too late on this side. But this year they



came before the Russians and thus it was a fruitful year and good for flax. And why should God not accept his soul, even if he didn't go to church or take the Lord's Supper, for in his youth he was not properly instructed in this.

[20] Q: Was not evil done, as he admits, by the theft of his neighbor's animals, but also to the image of God in which he as a man had been shaped, by replacing his own proper form with that of a wolf? He broke the oath he had sworn to his savior Christ as part of his holy baptism, in which he had renounced the devil, all his creatures and works. Having forgotten God's way, he committed other highly forbidden sins of similar sort, consistently turning to abomination and scandal, not to God's house where he formerly could come to knowledge and service of God through preaching and Christian instruction. Instead, he preferred to run to hell. But did not the Herr Pastor still nurture the farmhands and diligently exhort them to come to prayer and to church and to let themselves be instructed?

A: He had done little harm to livestock; others did much more. It was true that the pastor nurtured the farmhands, whom he instructed and who prayed with him. The witness also prayed according to what the pastor had recited to him, but having once fallen into ways from which he could not extricate himself, he could not still learn new things at his age.

[21] Q: How old is he and where was he born?

A: When the Swedes captured Riga [1621], he already knew how to plow and harrow. He was by birth a Kurländer.

[22] Q: If he still was in hell last St. Lucia's Eve, why did he previously maintain that he had long before already handed over his wolf-vocation to a peasant from Alla?

A: He had not spoken the truth in that, but now he wanted to renounce that, as he had no more strength and was old.

[23] Q: What advantage did he gain from becoming a werewolf, since in most obvious ways he was a poor man and thoroughly powerless?

A: None. Rather, a scoundrel from Marienburg did this to him by a drink of something he brought and thus from that time on he had to conduct himself like the other werewolves.

[24] Q: Did they receive any sign from the devil through which he could know them?

A: No, but the devil branded the sorcerers and was generous with them, and fed them with dead horses' heads, lizards, snakes, and similar vermin.

[25] Q: Since he is now so old and feeble that he must expect his death any day, does he want to die as a werewolf?

A: No. Before his death, he wants to impart it to another, to whom he alone can convey it.

[26] Q: In what way will he impart this to another?

A: He will do as happened to him and one is permitted only once to drink and to breathe into the tankard three times, and to say the words "It will be for you as it was for me" (*Es werde dir so wie mir*), and if the recipient receives and accepts the tankard, the witness will then be freed from it.

[27] Q: Did he not think that such a thing was also a sin and a delusion from the devil? Can he impart it to anyone unless that man, like him, knows nothing about God and himself chooses to accept it?

A: He can freely impart it to no one except a man who chooses to accept it and wants to have it. But many have already spoken to him about it, since he is old and feeble, so that he might cede it to them.

[28] Q: Who are the ones who spoke to him thus?

A: They were far from here, some around the Herr Judge's estate, some below Sunszel and he knew not to tell their names.

[29] Q: If the witness and others transformed into wolves and had the form of wolves, weren't they attacked by dogs or shot at by guards, especially since, as the witness says, there are big, fierce dogs in hell?

A: They could easily escape the dogs and the guards might well have shot at them, if they could get near them. The hellhounds did nothing to them.

Q: According to his account of this fellow Tyrummen, the peasant from Segewold, they went into farmsteads and carried off some fattened pigs. But the servants were surely not without dogs. Didn't they attack them and weren't they bitten?

A: The dogs were then always on guard and that being the case, the

werewolves would run away from them so fast that the dogs couldn't catch them. But Tyrummen had truly been a bad fellow and he had done such great wrongs to the people that God therefore let him die young.

To the question where then does his soul abide, he said that this is unknown to him, whether God or the devil took it.

[30] Q: Where do the grain, trees, and whatever else they snatch from the devil blossom and what do they undertake with it?

A: They throw it in the air and from that, prosperity comes back over the whole land, over the rich and poor.

[31] Q: Hereafter he was spoken to sternly and reproached that this was only a devilish deceit and illusion. One could observe, among other things, that if the people of such a type had lost all their cattle and fattened pigs, wouldn't they track them and find signs of them, particularly the fattened pigs and where they were roasted and consumed?

A: They didn't steal close by; rather, at a distance, and who could track them?

[32] Q: How can such a thing be possible, that one of them could carry off fattened pigs and large horned animals, acting like a wolf, and in this form how could they carry it twenty, thirty miles or more through the woods and untilled fields, indeed going all the way from Estonia to this place here, as the witness testified, whereas he could have taken so much more here? Isn't this just a false flight of the imagination, a devilish deceit and delusion?

A: He maintained that it is truthful and Tyrummen, the fellow from Segewold, often stayed out for a full week. Then the witness and his society waited in the middle of the woods and if he hauled in a fattened pig, they consumed it together, but during the time they were in the woods, they lived on rabbits and other wild animals they caught. Now the witness has no more strength to run so far and trap or catch something, but he could have as much fish as he would like. And if nothing else should happen, then he would have special prosperity thereby.

[33] Q: Was it not his intention, before his death, to convert to

God, to let himself be instructed regarding His nature and will, to renounce such devilish excesses, to repent his sins and thereby save his soul from eternal damnation and the pains of hell?

A: Hereupon, he would not answer properly. He said, who knows where his soul would remain? He was now very old, what more could he grasp of such things? Finally, under pressing exhortations, he declared that he would desist and turn himself to God.

[34] Q: Where, then, did he learn to prophesy, since many people came to him and asked him what would happen to them?

A: He could not prophesy; rather, he was a horse doctor, and if other sinners had done harm to someone's horses, he counteracted that and removed it from them. Toward that end he used a few words, only about three, and he administered bread or salt to them, which he had blessed with these words.

[35] Q: What did he know about the sinners who do harm to horses?

A: They were the same witches or servants of the devil, who do nothing but evil.

[36] Q: What, then, were the words he used in this way?

A: Sun and moon go over the sea, bring back the soul that the devil brought to hell and give the animal back the life and health that was taken from it—and that helps other animals beside horses.

[37] Q: From whom did he learn such things?

A: From the same fellow of Marienburg who made him into a werewolf.

[38] Q: Is this fellow still alive?

A: Ah, it has been more than twenty years ago and the fellow was then already very old.

[39] Q: At that time where did the witness dwell and how did he come in contact with the fellow from Marienburg?

A: Originally below Klingenberg; later he was at Bahling. He first encountered a peasant of Rodenpeisch along the way and later they went together to a tavern in Bull [about three and a half miles away]. Then he taught it to him.

[40] Q: Since he previously said it cannot be taught to anyone who

asks it for himself, why did the witness seek to learn and obtain such knowledge from the fellow from Marienburg?

A: Previously he had not asked for anything, but the fellow from Marienburg gave him a drink in the tavern in the way whose effect was already described. Then he took joy in this and accepted it and was calm. But he hadn't thought it would involve so much evil.

[41] At this, he was strenuously advised, since he now knew that it did involve evil, why then did he not long since abandon it, reveal such things to the pastor and seek Christian means for his conversion, rather than still planning to impart such things to another?

A: He certainly should have done that, but he hadn't thought of it. But now it would accomplish nothing; rather, let everything fall out as it was. Things might go for him as he wished.

[42] He was further reproached with his evil obstinacy, as he still did not desire and would not grasp the means to accomplish his conversion and reconciliation with God.

A: Finally, after long exhortation and introduction of God's wrath and eternal damnation, in which it struck him that although he had not turned to God through proper repentance, a gracious God might still be gracious to him and save him from this.

[43] As he had first taken a wife just a few years before and in order to establish this union it was necessary to address the local Herr Pastor, and there was a palpable rumor of the devilish deeds he had done, did not the Herr Pastor of Lemburg set him straight on that account and warn him away from that, also instruct him regarding the temporal and eternal punishments such things would involve? And since he was able to make that union, had he had proper standing in the church at the time, or celebrated the Lord's Supper?

A: The Herr Pastor had instructed and warned him enough; he had also vowed to desist from such things and to turn himself to God and the Lord's Supper, but he hadn't kept it and things remained as they had been before.

[44] Q: Had he then made so strong a pact with the devil that he cannot withdraw from it?

A: The devil has nothing to do with him. Rather, he—namely, the

witness—was God’s hound and he stole from the devil that which the sorcerers brought to him. Therefore, the devil was an enemy to him.

[45] Q: Had he also taught such things to his wife?

A: He instantly denied it.

[46] Q: Did he also help people with the words reported previously, if something bad happened to them or something occurred, or did he use other words and means for that?

A: He helped people, as well as animals, with those words, and he gave them salt or bread in a warm beer when he had blown over it three times and spoken the words over it.

[47] Q: What did he get for that?

A: Some people give him one guilder, some two, and everyone gave as much as he wished. From several he got grain, also pigs and other things.

[48] Q: Was it then always a known cure and had he helped many in such a manner?

A: He affirmed that whatever had already come under his care in such a manner, its genesis was known, but how could he recount all of those he had helped? Three years earlier, he had also served a fellow from Jürgensburg, Gricke Jahnen, stepson of the blessed Herr Pastor, and he helped him recover from a truly bad leg. And from him he received one külnet of wheat for that. And previously in a different place, his advice was also sought by Andreas Ammon, but he could give him no help as a witness.

[49] Q: What means did he use for this cure?

A: He had gathered plants in the field for it and worked holy salt into it, and he gave the patient a drink of this. He also sprinkled a powder made from this over the bad leg by which the sickness must be overcome—and it would have overcome syphilis. If someone had pain in his hands and feet, he could also remove that, as if speaking a charm over a fire.

[50] Q: What charm did he speak and what words did he use?

A: To staunch bleeding, he used these words: *Sausse warne zaur gaissem skreij, asne ne las*, that is: A dried-up crow flew through the air, there are no blood drops there. And then the blood was staunched straightaway. But for pain of the limbs, one uses a few words or one

also pronounces a charm over a fire. Now he did not want to admit more, after which he might remark that such things could be badly done. Rather, he said only that if someone burned or injured himself with hot water, and they sought his counsel, he sprinkled a yellow herb and rubbed it over the spot and from that it got better in three or four days; otherwise it took a long time to heal.

[51] Q: What kind of herb was it? Who showed it to him? And did he use any words on it?

A: To the first: It's called fire-herb, it grows in the hayfields. To the second: There are countless people in the world from whom one can learn something. To the third: No. But he put salt on it, over which consecrated words had previously been spoken.

[52] At this point, he had to show the judges how he did this and he was given bread and salt so they could see the way he handled them. Thereafter, he broke the bread in three pieces, saying there must be no more than three pieces. He put salt around them, spoke the first consecrated words over them three times, bowed, rotated the plate on which they lay so that each of the pieces came against his mouth. Then he blew over them, exhaling, and his hand swept around and once again he repeated that with this he could remove all the illnesses and woes that had been done to anyone by the sinners, the sorcerers.

[53] Thereafter, he was ordered to eat the bread himself that had been manipulated in this fashion, since he maintained that he had eaten nothing the previous evening and he was hungry. He himself initially said that he could eat nothing, yet finally, upon further urging, he took the soft part of the bread, dipped it on command in the salt, and called it a type of consecrated bread, but he also did not want to eat it all. Rather, he stood on ceremony and kept requesting something to drink, but it was withheld from him. He was obliged to throw the remaining salt into the fire with his own hand in the presence of those assembled so that there would be no further superstitious misdeeds of his, whereupon he did so unwillingly.

[54] Q: Since he previously complained about his back hurting, but now he had consumed his purportedly consecrated bread and salt, which he normally gave to help all his patients, would it now have the

same effect as when it was given by him so that he would be freed by it and feel no more pains?

A: It could not help himself, but only others.

[55] Q: Why didn't it help him?

A: He could not reach to his own back, otherwise it might well also help him. Still, he repeated his speech that it had no effect on himself.

[56] Q: Why should it not help him as well as others, if it were not a devilish deception?

[A:] Thereafter he hesitated and remained silent a good while. Finally, he said: Sometimes it also helped himself, and sometimes not.

[57] Q: Why did he invoke sun and moon, rather than God, to whom the sun and moon, also heaven and earth, are subject and without whom nothing can happen? Also, cannot the sun and moon come over the sea and appear to us daily?

A: How could he use something other than the customary words—and there was no further clarification to obtain from him.

[58] Q: Did he use such words by day or night?

A: By day.

[59] Q: Could he also do injury to someone who had inflicted harm on him or on someone else?

A: No, all his deeds were directed only to the good. But whoever did evil to him, things would not go well for him.

[60] The Herr Pastor of this place, Magister Bucholtz, was summoned and asked to attend the proceedings. He sought to urge this self-professed *Seegensprecher*,<sup>1</sup> a sinner caught in the devil's snares, to take to heart his grievous sins, by which he was led astray and in which he persisted for so many years, and to stir his conscience that he might convert and repent by a rightful repentance and he might make an abjuration of these devilish things.

[61] He showed himself willing and (the pastor) addressed Thiess most movingly, as he truly had chosen God in holy baptism to protect himself from such works of the devil and he also renounced all the devil's works. Why did he, on the contrary sin in the same manner, wantonly persisting in the same forbidden evil deeds, as he himself admitted, things forbidden by God, for such a long time without repentance or conversion up to now? Also, did he not know that he thereby



sinned grievously against God, and was he prepared for temporal, as well as eternal punishment and damnation if he did not desist? But if there was sincere repentance and suffering for his sins and deceits, God and the authorities offered forgiveness and grace.

[62] At this, he showed himself truly obstinate and remained insistent that all he had done was no sin against God. Rather, he had done God much service thereby in fulfillment of His will that they recover the prosperity from the devil, which the sorcerers had carried to him, and he thereby did good for the whole land. They also shared the prosperity with one another and this year would turn out well. By their diligence they came before the Russians, so that everyone in this land had profited and a magnificent increase would follow. The sorcerers were God's enemies and had no portion in heaven, but they (i.e., the werewolves) were God's friends and hunting dogs, whom he uses against the devil and the sorcerers, and therefore their souls came to heaven.

[63] The more the Herr Pastor reproached him for his errors and devilish delusion, and struggled to lead him away from them to bring him to the path of wisdom, also to move him to repentance, the more obstinate Thiess showed himself to be and throughout he would not hear that it was evil work that he pursued. He said that he understood this better than the Herr Pastor, who was still young, and he lost his temper at the Herr Pastor's speech, adding that what vexed him so much was that previously no one else had been prosecuted, although he was not the first and would not be the last who had practiced these same things. If it was evil, why had they let others get away with it?

[64] Now the court further urged him to change his mind, alternating kindness and threats, urging him to recognize the many misdeeds he had committed and his grievous crimes, or at least their bad results. Instead, he persisted that he had not done wrong and if such things were sins, would not the judges before whom he previously appeared, who were as wise as the present ones and who understood such things well, have informed him of this and not smiled at it? But if they now would have it that he should not do this anymore, he would give it up henceforward, because he was old and feeble.

[65] At this, the court now resumed questioning the church thief

from Jürgensburg, Pirsen Tönnis, and others regarding the previously mentioned trial of Thiess and what happened to him in a tavern of Kaltenbrunn or Nödinghoff [an alternate name for Kaltenbrunn]. On that occasion, twelve questions were put to him regarding the offenses of Old Thiess, further regarding the day that he (i.e., Thiess) was drinking with Pirsen Tönnis and he agreed to make a net for Ilgasch, a peasant from Nitau, who had put lots of coins in his purse. But when Pirsen Tönnis asked him what he did with that, he answered that he used it for a prosperity blessing for all the grain and livestock and there was salt that needed to be blessed. Gurrian, a peasant of Jürgensburg, had given this to him when he went to Riga, so that he could consecrate it. Initially, Thiess denied it, but then he admitted that when he was absent during his trip to Riga, the old innkeeper Gurrian Steppe had left all sorts of grain with Thiess's wife to be blessed and there were wheat, barley, oats, flax, and salt each separately tied up in a piece of cloth. He had left the salt for him to bless, as he had a sick cow in his farmstead.

[66] Pirsen Tönnis further stated that Thiess told what Gurrian sought to obtain thereby, that his livestock would give him milk and the wolf do him no harm, as Thiess also maintained he could provide that.

[67] Thereafter, the following question was offered: In what way did he do such things?

A: With the following words that he spoke thereby: "Sun and moon go over the sea to this farm and give it much milk." And it would be so. Also, when he charmed the wolves, he said: "Sun and moon, come over the sea and lead the livestock of this one so that no wolf does harm to them." So nothing happened to the livestock, yet this did not profit the werewolves, to whom this did not apply; rather, it left them free and it could not be extended to prohibit anyone.

[68] Q: Did anyone other than the peasant from Jürgensburg seek blessing from him?

A: He would not go so far as to admit that and to the next question—Could he also charm bears so they would do no harm to the grain and livestock?—he answered: No one can command birds of the bush and animals of the forest.

[69] Now, in the midst of the last examination of Thiess regarding

the way the missing remainder of church funds was administered, on a judicial demand, Herr Chief Deputy Clodt had the abovementioned peasant Gurrian brought in to speak regarding the testimony Thiess had given about him, i.e., that he had requested of him a blessing for his seed corn and salt for a sick cow. At first, Gurrian denied it and said he knew nothing about it. But after taking to heart all the circumstances, he changed his testimony and at the same time undermined it, particularly admitting that Thiess himself said such things to his face, that it was true, adding the reason he had lied and that it really meant nothing, also that nothing evil or wicked had been done. Who wouldn't want to have prosperity for the grain and help and advice regarding a sick animal? Hereafter, Gurrian spoke out somewhat candidly, that while Thiess was in his vocation he conferred prosperity. And the salt, so he said, could restore health to a sick animal and he himself would use such means as he had.

[70] Q: Was he previously acquainted with Thiess?

A: Who didn't know him? He was already an old fellow and had lived in the vicinity of this place for some time.

[71] Q: Had he not also sought and obtained the same presumed blessings from Thiess previously?

A: They both denied this instantly.

[72] Q: With whom else did Thiess share the presumed blessings in such measure?

A: How could he know that exactly? But it was commonly said of him that he was a werewolf and the former court also knew it well, but they had done nothing to him about it.

[73] Q: Where do the grain and salt purportedly blessed by Thiess remain?

A: He still has them in his farmstead.

[74] After he had named the place where he secured that, he brought it from there and placed it in separate linen bundles.

[75] Afterward, both the royal court and the Herr Pastor of this place, Magister Buchholz, earnestly and movingly reproached Gurrian, as well as Thiess, with their grievous sins, devilish temptations, superstitions, and idolatry. As Thiess still would not understand, it was necessary for Gurrian, who was himself not the subject of evil rumors,

to state that he was given to sorcery, standing in the presence of the judges and all assembled, especially in front of all the assembled peasants, regarding their delusion that some holiness was in these things. On the contrary, nothing could be decreed with regard to Thiess, so all was in confusion. In the end he [Gurrian] cast one bundle after another with his own hand into a fire that had been laid, following the Herr Pastor's proclamation of the true God, concerning his gracious mercy and forgiveness of the sins he had committed, also telling him henceforth to change and to abstain from the things that were previously highly forbidden. In order to avoid temporal and eternal punishments, he did this with fear and trembling and thereby openly atoned for the acknowledged public scandal. At the following Sunday's preaching, he was obliged to stand at the church post and as sacred conclusion he was legally condemned to be struck with twelve pairs of blows by the high executor. The Herr Pastor also emphasized for the whole community the strong and cruel punishment of such a person for his skills, and he admonished each one of them to desist from such things.

[76] Now in spite of the repeated admonitions as were given to Thiess to name the others who sought the same means from him and what he had been paid, he would be led to no further confession, pleading how could he remember that? He was an old fellow and could hardly think anymore what had happened earlier. Who had given him much, sometimes one, sometimes two, even three shillings or something else, but often nothing at all? That was not mercantile activity, in which one demands money. It was based on one's free will, whether one wanted to give or not.

[77] He was thereafter turned over to custody and this case was sent for deliberation and execution by the high commission in the event that His Royal Majesty's newly appointed Herr District Court Judge, whose ship was expected to arrive from Sweden, might complete and publish a judgment.

[78] Truly, even if one thoroughly considered the proceedings after the session at Venden [today's Cēsis], one could and would still not reach a definitive verdict on so difficult and doubtful a case. Rather, it was deemed important to have it pleaded again before the collegium at

the earliest forthcoming session of the new Herr District Court Judge von Palmberg and presented as a subject to be determined in law, so that therewith they might be able to consider and dispose of the most fully developed point of this crime, the like of which has seldom been presented up to now, even if it has been previously judged.

[79] Since District Court Judge von Palmberg's arrival was delayed more than expected and by His Royal Majesty's most gracious decree, the illustrious, praiseworthy Assessor of the Royal High Court, Herman Georg von Trautvetter, officially taking the place of the absent Herr District Court Judge, was ordered to preside over this royal district court. He took this up, along with other cases, and *perlectis actis et unitis votis* [having read the acts and vows], composed the following judgment.

**Verdict Pronounced by the High Court of Dorpat [Tartu]  
(October 31, 1692)<sup>2</sup>**

October 31, 1692, Oreshoff

Judges present: The illustrious, praiseworthy Assessor of the Royal High Court, Herman Georg von Trautvetter, in place of the absent District Court Judges: Assessor ordinarius Bengt Johan Ackerstaff. Assessor ordinarius Gabriel Berger.

*Judgment*

In the officially published interrogation of an inhabitant of Kaltenbrunn named Thiess, with regard to lycanthropy, as also the perpetration of other vexatious and highly forbidden misdeeds, the royal district court decided, following the oral testimony of the accused that was heard by the court and what was expressed and established so well by the assigned court, these things were thereby found definitively to be right:

Accordingly, as the accused has made clear by his own testimony, for many years he showed himself to be a werewolf. He ran about with others, was also in hell, and in such groups he stole livestock from others and helped commit more acts of the same sort. It is not only in this case that one should regard all this as a diabolical delusion, since

such an opinion is also accepted before this court. Neither through the court's pronouncements, nor the moving speech by the Herr Pastor of Jürgensburg, did the accused let himself be led away from these deeds, nor did he uphold the vow he previously swore to the local Herr Pastor, nor did he listen to the Holy Word, nor did he present himself to take the Holy Sacrament. Rather, since he pronounced all sorts of prophecies and blessings strongly forbidden by the highest divine and lay authorities, thereby powerfully sinning against himself and the others whom he led into superstition, it is fair to consider this and punish him according to the severity of the law due to his truly weighty and vexatious offenses, to subject him to a well-deserved punishment, and to change him into an object of noteworthy aversion by public flogging. However, in view of his advanced age, only twenty pairs of blows will be administered by the hand of the *Scharfrichter*<sup>3</sup> of Lemburg before a public gathering of the peasantry in the parish, whose Herr Pastor will explain the terms of the sentence to demonstrate the offense of this malefactor to the bystanders to warn others against the same vexatious and punishable conduct and to warn them against superstitions. Thereafter, the accused will be condemned to banishment from the land forever, subject to ratification by the illustrious and most august court of Tartu [*salva tamen illustris et augustissimi dicasterii Dorpatensis leutatione*]. V.R.W.

L.S.

Hermann Georg von Trautvetter, in place of  
the absent District Court Judge.

Bengt Johan von Ackerstaff, Assessor.

Gabriel Berger, Assessor.

Forest, ce qu'il confessa librement à tout le monde, et ne le nioit à personne, croyant elider tout reproche et infamie de cet accident, en disant qu'il ne l'estoit plus" (de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance*, 309).

15. "Il s'est trouvé autrefois que c'estoit ce Monsieur de la Forest qui va à la chasse des sorciers et sorcieres, et leur donne la chasse par les bois et par les champs, iusques à les tirer du cercueil aprez leur decez, pour avoir le plaisir de les tourmenter, et les faire courir, voire apres la mort" (de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance*, 313).

16. "Il [Jean Grenier] n'a non plus inventé ce tiltre de Monsieur de la Forest, dont il nomme le malin esprit" (de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance*, 294).

17. Eva Pócs, "Nature and Culture—'The Raw and the Cooked': Shape-Shifting and Double Beings in Central and Eastern European Folklore," in Willem de Blécourt and Christa Agnes Tuczay, eds., *Tierverwandlungen: Codierung und Diskurse* (Tübingen: Francke, 2011), 99–134.

## Chapter One

1. *Segensprecher* can have a condescending, pejorative connotation, describing a conjuror and charlatan. The pastor enters just after Thiess has been describing his healing practice and consistently sees himself as obtaining blessings (*seggen*) for others, so an ambiguity here is probably intentional.

2. Translated from the trial transcript published by von Bruiningk, "Der Werwolf in Livland," 219–20.

3. An official who administers corporal punishment and also serves as executioner.

## Chapter Two

1. Law provides us with many analogies where important influences of Germanic mythology on the local religions (*Volksreligionen*) east of the Baltic are evident. For the cults described here, it is important to state explicitly that Germans also participated. And in fact, the North Estonian terms for the werewolf, *inimesehunt* ("human wolf") and *koduhunt* ("house wolf") are Germanic loanwords. Cf. Oskar Loorits, *Estnische Volksdichtung und Mythologie* (Tartu: Akadeemiline Kooperativ, 1932), 73.

2. Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, book 18, chaps. 45 and 46.

3. As this work was being printed, I learned of a Livonian trial transcript that confirms the evidence offered here in striking ways. I am reproducing the most important part of this transcript as an appendix to this volume.

4. See H. F. Feilberg, *Bidrag til en Ordbog over Jyske Almuesmål*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1886–1914) 2:731 ff.