

## **Hungry Unlike the Wolf: Ecology, Posthumanism, Narratology in Fred Vargas's *Seeking Whom He May Devour***

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"If there's a sound to be heard, and we're not hearing it, it means we're deaf. The earth isn't dumb, but we are not skilled enough. We need a specialist, an interpreter, someone who can hear the sound of the earth".

"What do you call one of those?" asked Justin, anxiously.

"An archaeologist," said Adamsberg, taking out his telephone. "Or a shit-stirrer, if you prefer".

(Fred Vargas, *This Night's Foul Work* 112-113)

### **Introduction**

The digging, *unearthing*, and piecing together by which an archaeologist seeks to hear "the sound of the earth" is broadly equivalent to literature, writing, and criticism. An aspiration of ecocriticism has been to question social, cultural and literary conventions as to how humanity regards nonhuman nature and our relationship to it. It, too, aspires to a muddying of the waters, a shit stirring, if you like. This has meant, in part, addressing the religious, scientific, and philosophical orthodoxies by which, for centuries, humankind has regarded itself as separate from and superior to 'Nature'. Consequently, ecocritics have frequently sought out literary texts that articulate the values of deep ecology (Garrard 20), meaning both a sense of interconnection – affinity with, dependence on – the landscape and other animals, and a belief in nonhuman nature's "intrinsic value" (see Sessions 68). This position represents a fundamentally necessary corrective to western orthodoxy. Yet, at the same time, such a philosophy can, at its worst, fetishize nature (Luke 33) or harbour, on occasion, misanthropic, inhumanist elements (Garrard 22). Moreover, while it is true, as Garrard points out, that deep ecological ecocriticism generally assumes a softer "orientation" (22), necessarily addressing western culture's humanistic bias, such readings can, at times, have a tendency to slip back towards what they are, ostensibly, supposed to be challenging, in their "unconscious Cartesian separation of the human 'Me' from the exoticized 'Not me' of a static and reified nature" (Westling 28). This article will work in relation to two interconnected paradigms both of which seek to put the 'me' back into nature while unearthing a fundamentally ecological human 'being': posthumanism and animal studies. It examines a novel by the author and archaeologist quoted at the head of this article – the French crime writer Fred Vargas's *Seeking Whom He May Devour* (*L'Homme à l'envers* 1999 [Trans. 2005]).

## Posthumanism

Though posthumanism remains “in process” and “highly contested” (Hayles 239), the common element, Bruce Clarke writes, “of its several definitions is to relativize or decentre the human by coupling it to some other order of being” (2-3). Encompassing “evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xvi), Louise Westling has identified two main ‘tendencies’ within posthumanism, the technological (or Cyborg) and the animal (29). The first, as usefully explored in N. Katherine Hayles’ *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), encapsulates two main ideas: that if the body is “the original prosthesis” by which we “learn to manipulate” our environment, then this elemental aspect of human being has merely been extended by recent technological modes of human evolution – the cybernetic, virtual, computer simulated etc (2-3); secondly, that the “essential function” of all life, even “the great cosmos itself,” is “processing information” (239). This is a view that downplays “material instantiation,” so that “embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life” (2). While Hayles does argue that this removes the faith in ‘conscious agency’ that has been the basis for a human will to mastery and dominance over nature (288), it can all too easily be seen, as Westling writes, as merely a “further elaboration of the Cartesian mechanistic definition of humans as transcendent minds manipulating a realm of material otherness” (29).

She, in turn, identifies two aspects that might constitute a revitalised, material sense of the human. The first is our embodiment within the physical environment. Westling explores this in a discussion of phenomenology, citing Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the supposedly mute land is full of voices, being, language. These, she explains, are “intertwined with our embodied selves,” acting, therefore, as a “source of meaning” (the “sound of the earth” to which Vargas refers) (39). The most ecologically germane aspect of posthumanism that Westling, and others, have identified emanates, though, from animal studies. Here, posthumanism emphasises “the embeddedness [...] of the ‘human’ in all that it is not”; that we are, in a “profound sense constituted as human subjects within and atop a nonhuman otherness” (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 193). This, however, occurs in a dynamic model of species interacting in a configuration of fluidity, mutability, discordance, even tension, a paradigm, in essence, of likeness and difference. What this means is that while animals do exist as a key component of humanity’s ecological being, it is also imperative, not least in terms of a proper regard for the integrity of other animals, that we recognise and acknowledge species difference. As Jhan Hochman puts it, while we “need to study [...] how to become nature,” we “also need to pull back and grant these beings and entities unromanticized difference, an autonomy apart from humans, a kind of privacy” (16; and see Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 192-193).

While these debates offer a rightful and necessary decentring of the human, there has been relatively little consideration of the implications of posthumanism for whether and how we think about retaining expressly humanist perspectives and interests. Yet posthumanism surely neglects the logic of its own position – i.e. that of the fundamental

difference between, and integrity of, each and every species – in neglecting such questions. Furthermore, *posthumanism* cannot really be differentiated from *inhumanism* or *anti-humanism* – philosophies which have, at times, bedevilled deep ecology – unless there is some retention of its originating terms – i.e. a consideration of what, ecologically, ‘humanism’ means; or even what it means, in this context, to be ‘humanist’.

Some interesting perspectives have arisen, however, in what are (broadly) posthumanist debates. Philosophically, for instance, Wolfe presents human nature as open and closed – “open on the level of structure to energy flows, environmental perturbations, and the like, but closed on the level of self-referential organization” (*Posthumanism* xxiv-xxv). More pragmatically, Kate Soper’s “critical realism” posits a balance between an acceptance of self-referentiality – “It is inevitable,” she argues, “that our attitudes to nature will be ‘anthropocentric’ in certain respects since there is no way of conceiving our relations to it other than through the mediation of ideas about ourselves” (13) – and an insistence on “limits imposed by the structure of the world [...] upon what it is possible for human beings to be and do” (34). And, ethically, Tim Hayward has stipulated the need for a negotiation between *enlightened* self-interest, though “harnessed to environmental ends” (17), and ethical acknowledgement of the interests of, in particular, other animals (see 15-16). While, on the one hand, he argues, it is intrinsic to political theory that “one cannot reasonably or realistically assume that people are generally motivated to do other than what they take to be their own interest” (7), on the other, ethical awareness has developed out of our species’ capacity to think from other viewpoints (15), not least our adaptation of a sense of moral responsibility to other humans. In this light, humanistic concern, Hayward writes, “may actually be a precondition of concern for nonhumans” (13).

While this moral uniqueness in humans may be challenged, say in new areas such as zoosemiotics, if we stick (for now) to the focus of this essay, Hayward’s approach exemplifies, in many ways, a very posthuman formulation – a flexible, agile ecological ethics in which humanity’s species needs are perpetually scrutinised and counterbalanced against an acknowledgement of and attention to the interests of other species. This might even (although Hayward indicates otherwise (15-16)) be extended to plants and the land itself, as in Leopold’s ‘land ethic’. Accordingly, Wolfe’s contention that ecological posthumanism involves “engaging directly the problem of anthropocentrism and speciesism and how practices of thinking and reading must change in light of their critique” (*Posthumanism* xix), might be modified, slightly, through Hayward’s finer distinction between speciesism and anthropocentrism (14).

### **Narrative, and Narratology**

While Hayles’ ‘technological’ posthumanism might not be entirely serviceable, ecocritically speaking, she does usefully indicate ways in which literature might disseminate posthuman ideas. Literary texts, she argues, offer ‘passageways’ that enable “stories coming out of narrowly focused scientific theories to circulate more widely

through the body politic" (21), a view not dissimilar to Bruno Latour's translation model of how scientific ideas pass into and are adapted within society (see 132-144). For Hayles, "The heart that keeps this circulatory system flowing is narrative" (21-22). With its "polymorphous digressions, located actions, and personified agents" (22), literary narrative has the potential, she suggests, to untangle the complexity of posthuman ecology and to particularise and humanise what can be a somewhat disorienting system of thought.

Such a view is extended in Bruce Clarke's *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (1998). Clarke argues that the "complexity of our [posthuman] systemic situatedness" requires equivalently complex modes of articulation and understanding (5). These can be attained through narrative, particularly as it has become understood in recent narratological theory. Through the work of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, Clarke identifies, within posthumanism, three interwoven biological, social, and psychic realms. He then maps these onto the revised, three-tier model of narrative introduced by Gérard Genette and developed by Mieke Bal where a third dimension – consisting, in Genette's words, "of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself" (qtd. in Clarke 21) – is introduced into the conventional divide between discourse and story. This creates a complex narratological system where "all layers are in virtual operation at once and from both [i.e. both the other] directions" (Clarke 22). Yet rather than engendering (as perhaps implied) the loss of any stable referent, narrative, in this model, retains a capacity to ground our understanding.

Two aspects of the narratological system laid out by Bal help achieve this. First, what Bal calls the *fabula*, though it is more generally referred to as the 'story' – i.e. the logical, often chronologically ordered sequence of events – far from being 'innocent', operates as "an enforced abstraction from the relative complexity of discourses" available in the events being narrated (Clarke 34). It functions, that is, as "a *reduction of the complexity* of the discourse" (Clarke 35). This occurs, furthermore, in cahoots with what Bal calls 'text'. Here, the medium and structure of language signs (e.g. the organisation of the words on a page into a recognisable generic structure) function as signifiers, representative and meaningful within a given *social* system. The text, in other words, creates a quite particular understanding and/or effect on the reader's consciousness, perception, or *psyche*, as indeed is often the case with genre fiction.

This is reinforced by the second element, focalisation. Here it is argued that the function of the narrator – i.e. that of mediating between story, author and reader – can be supplemented, and overridden, by a "reflector: a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator" (Clarke 26). The focaliser can, of course, be the narrator. However, where s/he is a reflector character, the act of focalisation, frequently conveyed through free indirect discourse, is frequently obscure to all but the most analytical reader, thereby quietly manipulating our interpretation.

The *focalizer* is the point from which the elements are viewed [...] If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other

characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. (Bal 104)

What this means is that while the complexity of narrative corresponds to the similarly complex, fluid, and mutable categories of interweaving biological, social and psychic realms, literature, nevertheless, has a capacity for organising that radical instability into something more comprehensible, for example a meaning that might help to illuminate humanity's decentred position in the 'more-than-human' world.

Roman Bartosch has suggested that, in theory, "high literature" – with its aesthetic language, complex narratives, depth of characterisation, and "potential to irritate" or create tension – is well placed to articulate ecological complexity (101). My emphasis, however, will be on popular or genre fiction. Beyond its formulaic simplicity, lies a degree of freedom as to which components are chosen to constitute the plot. Working sideways on from the story/discourse divide, Scott McCracken has described this in relation to what he calls vertical and horizontal narratives. The (horizontal) plot – where the crime takes place, is procedurally investigated, and solved – occurs within an 'associative' vertical membrane (57). That vertical plane offers scope for elaborating the contextual elements surrounding the crime so that, as has often been pointed out, crime novels can act as ciphers for the presentation of social problems or concerns that are worked through, perhaps partially resolved, alongside the solving of the crime. As McCracken concludes, "the narrative form provides an interpretive framework from within which the reader can position him or herself in relation to the modern world" (50).

In an ecocritical context, Ursula Heise has indicated that while the "foregrounding of causal connections that are not immediately obvious [...] calls for at least a rudimentary, and often quite elaborate, narrative articulation" (762), this need not preclude popular fiction. Consequently, in discussing the narrative articulation of toxicity and risk, she has invoked crime fiction, arguing that the generic features of the detective novel, "the evaluation of clues and eyewitness accounts and [...] the discovery and exposure of the criminal" (763), might be deployed in parallel to guide the reader towards a broader understanding of risk itself. One might suggest, then, that crime fiction is similarly well placed to unravel and piece back together the complex fragments of posthumanist being. As I will now argue, this is precisely what Vargas does do in *Seeking Whom He May Devour*.

### **Vargas and the Crime Novel**

Fred Vargas (Frederique Audouin-Rouzeau) was born in 1957 in what she has described as the "sad landscape of Normandy" (House n.p.). The pseudonym is taken from her sister, an artist, who herself adopted Vargas after Ava Gardner's character, Maria Vargas, in *The Barefoot Contessa*. Fred employed the pseudonym because, she has said, detective fiction is a 'despised genre' in French literary culture. At the time of the

publication of her first novel, she was seeking a post at the French national scientific research agency CNRS (Spinney n.p.).

While Vargas's novels adhere closely to the conventions of crime fiction, her work is quirky, a key element of which is the dialogue she instigates between the modern world and a mythical past. This is underlined in a suggestive link Alistair Rolls has made in proposing that Commissaire Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg, the detective-hero of Vargas's most recent novels, might be regarded as a "flâneur-detective" (*Mostly French* 22). Adamsberg, indeed, shares both the practice and context of Baudelaire's archetype. On the one hand, "rather than viewing the case from the objective perspective of the impartial reader of evidence, he allows his thoughts to run off at tangents, following the movements of the case (as it were, in real time) and other trajectories [...] sprung from his own creativity" (Rolls, "Retrieving the Exiled Reference" 134). On the other, he conforms to the view of the *flâneur* as someone who, loitering mainly in the city, casts a reflective, critical gaze on modernity. For McCracken 'The modern detective tale negotiates between an idea of modern life as ordered and comprehensible and the fear that such an order is fragile, and that a pre-existing disorder will break through' (52). Rolls suggests, correspondingly, that in Vargas's novels "the trauma of the modern world" compels us towards "a remembrance of the past that takes the form of a reworking or mythologization" (*Mostly French* 21). This, in turn, offers "a way of reconstructing a parallel mythology" that might "temper the reality of the modern world" ("Retrieving the Exiled Reference" 134-135). Hence, Vargas's deployment of the mythical performs precisely the function that Clarke attributes to posthuman narratives – a 'restless' interrogation that tests the viability (in ecological terms) of conceptions of the (post)human (see 1-2).

Vargas is scathing about contemporary French literary fiction. "I'm sick of it, especially as Proust did this perfectly all those years ago. But when he spoke of himself, he spoke of the whole world. Most writers today just speak of themselves" (Wroe n.p.). Described, in the same interview, as a 'vociferous' political campaigner, Vargas sees her fiction in social and cultural terms. The particular form this takes is, then, to conceive "of the *polar*," the generic term given to French hardboiled detective fiction, as "a modern vehicle of mythologies" (Poole 97). She has said:

Detective stories are like legends and fairy tales. Big stories, animal stories, not intellectual stories, never. They are about the danger of life. (House)

I like to play with the old fears, the fears we learned as children. So I play with the wolf – the plague – and perhaps even the vampire one day. Why not? Detective stories have a vocation to help people live with their fears. I think they succeed. (Spinney)

As this indicates, a major element of Vargas's engagement with modernity concerns nature and animals. Her novels are triggered by mysterious happenings often involving nature: a beech sapling planted anonymously in someone's garden; the recovery of a big-toe bone from dog faeces in a Paris square; and, in *Seeking Whom He May Devour*, supposed wolf-killings around the Le Mercantour National Park in the Alps. Likewise,

Vargas has Adamsberg, possessed of inordinate intuitive powers, turning, in contemplative moments in which he seeks to unclog his mind, to nature: “He is calm, he can contemplate a landscape and stop,” she says (Spinney). And, he knows “by instinct” that what he needs is to find “a spot [...] sufficiently uninhabited, untended and unseen to let his mind unbutton and unbelt itself, but also sufficiently unprepossessing for him not to have to look at it and declare it to be beautiful. Breathtaking landscapes aren’t good for thinking in” (*Seeking* 128).

Fundamental to her novels, then, is a deployment of the countryside as part of the critical eye that myth or legend casts upon modernity (see McCracken 63). Rolls moves in this direction, though without ever quite developing this line of enquiry. He suggests that the ‘Ideal’, the mythical, in Vargas’s novels is frequently reinforced by the removal of the main characters from Paris, the books thereby initiating a dialogue between city and countryside (*Mostly French* 6, 26). Adamsberg, for example, becomes aware of the killings in Le Mercantour from the television in his Parisian apartment, before eventually travelling to the region. This recurring juxtaposition, in Vargas’s work, whereby the urban represents modernity’s estrangement, and the countryside a restorative alternative, culminates in an image taken from the Australian Northern Territory – of ‘lights appearing against a night sky and forming skeletal shapes and luminescent bats’ – which appears on the cover of *Un Lieu Incertain (An Uncertain Place)* (2008) (see Rolls *Mostly French* 26). All this is underscored by Vargas’s own reflections, on her novel *This Night’s Foul Work*, where Adamsberg travels back and forth to a Normandy village as part of the murder investigation:

I like to use these people from villages. Theirs are the voices that never move and never change [...] I think of the story like an orchestra with the violins and the brass at the front taking forward the action. But at the back are basses [...] making a noise that comes from eternity. I know the Normans very well because my mother’s family is from there. But for me they represent all village people, and by extension some sense of elemental humanity. (Wroe n.p.)

For Vargas, that “elemental humanity” expands to encompass a regard for animals as integral to human being, a belief founded on her work as an archaeologist, as she explains to the *New Scientist*:

I specialise in animal bones. That leads me into many areas. Animals are everywhere in human life; in religion, food, clothes and commerce. Many of our diseases come from animals – malaria, for instance, or variant CJD. And because bones are often preserved, you can write about the poor in Hungary in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, for example, about whom there are no texts, because you have found contemporary animal bones. (Spinney n.p.)

Vargas has likewise channelled this understanding into activism. She has campaigned, for example, around avian flu, designing a breathable rubber suit as a personal barrier against the virus! While, ultimately, she separates her activism from her writing, Vargas does regard language and, therefore, literature as one of the unique modes by which humans can articulate a sense of their ecological being: “We are not like all the other animals and cannot live with just a pragmatic and realistic life. So we invent a second

reality, similar but not identical to ours, into which we escape to confront these perils” (Wroe n.p.). Consistent with her critique of a narcissistic French high literature, Vargas finds particular possibilities in detective fiction, echoing the conclusion drawn by many critics when she says, of crime novels, that “by resolving the problems they set themselves, [they] seem to resolve life’s problems” (Henley n.p.).

### ***Seeking Whom He May Devour***

*Seeking Whom He May Devour* is set around a series of killings of livestock and humans. Seemingly carried out by a werewolf, these are initially attributed to a lone (actual) wolf of (the blurb says) “unnatural size and strength.” While Adamsberg ultimately solves the crime, much of the plot centres around Camille (a musician and plumber) and her boyfriend Johnstone, a Canadian conservationist and filmmaker. Following the murder of her friend Suzanne Rosselin, Camille embarks on a quest, for most of the second half of the novel, to track down the killer, aided by Suzanne’s adopted African son, Soliman, and shepherd, Watchee. They are intermittently assisted by Johnstone who is primarily occupied, however, with defending the wolves, in the Mercantour wildlife reserve, from the vengeance of the local villagers. The novel, at its corresponding, vertical level, enacts an evaluation of the posthuman perspective. This occurs in relation to two main ecological ‘coordinates’: the landscape – in the shape of the French Alps; and the animal, in the figure of the wolf (and, indeed, werewolf).

### *The Alps*

Lawrence Buell’s influential paradigm as to what constitutes an ‘environmental text’ encompasses writings that emphasise the active agency of the physical environment as both self-referential entity and a determinant influence on human ‘being’. This occurs in his statement that “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (7). Here, this is particularly apparent in Vargas’s depiction of the French Alps as Camille travels in pursuit of the killer.

During her quest, Camille ascends, and spends the night on, the Col de la Bonette, at around 2700 metres altitude:

The familiar foliage of hazelnut and oak was long behind them. Now serried ranks of dark *sylvestris* pines marched over the hillsides. Camille found them as sinister and as disturbing as columns of black-clad soldiers. Further up you could make out the start of the larch forest which was a little lighter in colour but just as regimented and military, then the green-grey grass of the high plateau and then, higher up still, bare rock reaching to the summit. The higher you go the harsher it gets. (122)

The landscape is, in Buell’s sense, an all too physical presence. It is too, in the phenomenological sense, rich with potential meaning: “Wherever she cast her eyes, the mountains loomed in their dense, dark, opulent and hopeless solidity” (131). Yet, if this

constitutes language, it is a language largely devoid of clear signification. Camille is confronted by “empty space,” stone, “virgin forest” (131). Instead we get, at best, an ambiguously posthuman perspective where some sense of nonhuman nature’s intrinsic qualities is coupled with that of its ‘unromanticized difference’, its distancing from the human: “At 2,200 metres the last puny larches gave way to verdant carpets of grazing set against the grey slopes. A harsh kind of beauty, to be sure, a vast, noiseless, lunar landscape in which people, not to mention their sheep, were mere specks” (123). The primary meaning to be gained from this section of the novel is, then, of nature’s indifference, and the insignificance, vulnerability of the human: “in these immense uninhabited spaces, [a human is] no bigger than a flea on a mammoth’s back” (124); driving the borrowed, battered old truck, Camille ascends “inches from the sheer rising cliff” and can “see straight down to the bottom of the ravine”; compelled by the inadequacy of the truck in the landscape, she keeps “a wary eye on the water temperature gauge” (123); the road itself is “no more significant than a scratch on the mountainside” (123).

Camille feels, then, at this point, bound to an indifferent nature: “she stared straight at the mountain. The mountain did not bother to stare back. It remained sublimely indifferent to her existence” (131-132). And, with vertical and horizontal narratives intertwined

She was not at all confident. She could not see the story proceeding the way the young man and the shepherd thought it would. She saw something darker, more disorderly, something basically more fearful than the clockwork search they were clinging to with the map laid out in front of them.

Fearful and dangerous, too. (132)

A posthumanist perspective might, though, augment Buell’s paradigm by factoring in a more dialectical, two-way relationship, of mutually constitutive human and nonhuman, social and environmental, determinants. While the representation of the Alps in *Seeking Whom He May Devour* offers environmental representation (in Buell’s sense), that of the wolf functions much more ambiguously. So, as the story does indeed ‘proceed’, Vargas sifts and shapes her narrative elements in such a way that the differing responses of Camille and Johnstone come to constitute two competing conceptions of the legitimate balance between human and nonhuman interests, in a way which reaches a perhaps more palatable, posthuman, conclusion.

### *The Wolf/werewolf*

A further one of Buell’s principles for an “environmental text” is that “human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest” (7). This view is characterised and focalised, for much of the early part of the novel, by Johnstone. A long spell in the Arctic had dispelled for him any real need for human contact or community (13). Achieving the “certain detachment,” that Robinson Jeffers spoke of in relation to his concept of “inhumanism” (see Dooley 25), Johnstone regards the interests of the wolves

as prior to human interest, whether abstract concepts around conservation or material concerns such as farmers losing their livestock. Early in the novel, Johnstone debates whether to catch food for an old, ailing wolf “in defiance of Park law” and, in the end, extends his shift at the refuge by one night so as to catch two rabbits, reasoning “the laws of nature had long been in shreds. So what difference would it make?” (9). This, Johnstone blames squarely on humans, specifically modern societies estranged from and ignorant about the natural world: “he had long since stopped being worried by barking mad animal superstitions. Humankind has never been entirely rational about the wild. But here, in this cramped little land of France, everyone had lost the habit of the wild” (44). Ultimately, “Johnstone was on the side of the wolves. He reckoned that the bold beasts honoured the little land of France by crossing over the Alps like proud ghosts from a distant past. No way could you let them get shot by pint-size, sun-baked humans” (10).

As the supposed wolf killings intensify, spreading alarm throughout the village, Camille, for her part, spends two consecutive days observing the locals, who are primed to hunt the animal:

Small groups began to gather in the village square at first light [...] In theory they were banking on an animal that had not been seen since last winter or on a brand-new arrival from the other side of the Alps. So theoretically the animals in the wildlife reserve’s wolf-packs were not at risk. For now. But the expressions on people’s faces, their narrowed eyes and their silent expectancy told a different story. They said: war. (34)

Johnstone had hurried back to the reserve the night before, prepared “to fight with it [the wolf-pack] if need be” (34). However, though alarmed by the emotions of the villagers, and faithful to Johnstone, Camille’s response remains ambivalent.

Johnstone’s position was clear-cut, but she wasn’t so sure which side she was on. From afar, she would have defended the wolves, all and any wolves, but close up, things weren’t so simple. Shepherds did not dare to leave their flocks during seasonal migrations, the ewes weren’t lambing properly [...] children had stopped rambling over the peaks. But she also did not like war or extermination, and this hunt was the first step. (36)

Camille here weighs up competing and equally legitimate interests: the freedom and survival of the wolves balanced against human needs, of livelihood, fundamentally, but also leisure. Her ambivalence extends philosophically to questions concerning the balance between an animal “externality” fundamental to (post)human being and the “unromanticized difference” that Hochman describes. When the men return, “Their shuffling stride and glum tone” indicating that the beast had given them the slip, “Camille flashed mental congratulations to the wolf. Be seeing you, old buddy,” she thinks (37). Yet while monitoring the villagers from up in the hills, Camille has also been frightened – “her heart racing and her stick on guard” – by what was, in fact, a somewhat enigmatic wild boar who “came out of the undergrowth ten metres away, saw her standing there, and then went back into the scrub” (40-41).

The scene is significant. Camille’s humanness, we find, is always mediated via her own negotiation of human versus animal interests. This is opposed to Johnstone’s

inhumanist detachment. Vargas, until this point, has utilised an ambiguous, “open perspective structure” (Fludernik 39) shaped primarily through shifts in focalisation. Yet she is not averse to narrative manipulation in pursuit of a defining position:

...the truth is rarely certain in history, but when you are inventing a detective story, you are the master – you know the truth. (Spinney n.p.)

...when I'm writing a detective story I have invented the solution,” she chuckles. “I have cheated. I like resolution. In life and in stories. (House n.p.)

And if, in the early part of the novel, the ‘advantage’ lies, arguably, with Johnstone, this tilts inexorably towards Camille in one crucial passage.

In the novel, the suspicions of the villagers gradually shift to the apparent presence of a werewolf. The significance of the werewolf is obviously, in this context, its representation of the permeable boundary between human and nonhuman being. Vargas exploits the mythical resonance of the werewolf for quite some time with suspicion falling on Massart, a slaughterhouse worker. “Physically odd,” Massart resembles a werewolf because of his lack of body hair. As Johnstone explains to Camille, a werewolf is “an unhairy man [...] his wolf-coat is on the inside of his skin” (46). However, Massart is also a mainstay of village gossip on the basis that “He hasn't got a woman. Never has had a woman” (35). When Johnstone himself points the finger at Massart, it is the latter detail that he emphasises, suggesting to Camille that this all too human killer, who, thus far, has “murdered only female sheep” and Suzanne Rosselin, is motivated by “sexual violence” (90). Subsequent to this, the mythical component unravels, as the narrative steers us towards Camille's posthumanist – rather than any mythical or inhumanist – interpretation.

The key scene occurs at the opening of chapter fifteen, in the early hours of the day of Suzanne's funeral. Johnstone, no great admirer, is off to trap rabbits for the old, ailing wolf, a fact depicted, initially, with the affirmative connotations of earlier passages: Augustus and Electre [two wolves] are “expecting him [...] so was the whole crowd” (89). However, the text continues “He would come back down later for the fat lady's funeral, or so he had said.” That last clause is focalised through Camille and, in the doubt cast upon Johnstone's promise, he instantly becomes, in terms of *his* focalised passages, unreliable, and a character about whom we become, however subconsciously, sceptical.

That fact is reinforced by the scene's recurring references to sight. The chapter opens, “Camille did not switch on the light.” In the ensuing argument, where Johnstone, increasingly agitated, shifts between anger and condescension, he berates Camille for being “blind” to “evil” and “violence,” his final line, before leaving, the rather menacing “‘That's how it is,’ he whispered, ‘Animal life.’” However, Camille, we are told twice, is “beginning to grasp what had quite passed her by” (90). As Johnstone “disappeared from sight down the road,” her eyes have been opened. The reader learns on the following page of a time when Camille “still believed in love” (91).

The narrative displays a complexity symptomatic of the complex affinities and differences, the dual operations of mutual and self-interest, that characterise a posthuman perspective. In this scene, however, Vargas nudges the reader towards a final interpretation, one that serves the horizontal and vertical narratives alike. Much of the plot remains – including Camille’s quest across the Alps, initiated immediately after this scene, and Adamsberg’s ultimate resolution of the crime. Yet Camille signals here to the reader, through the generic convention of embedded clues, and her own “unconscious realization” of the truth, the identity of the murderer (see Rolls “Retrieving the Exiled Reference” 140). It is, correspondingly, the point where her nuanced posthumanism is asserted against Johnstone. Signified, now, as troublingly misanthropic, it transpires that he is the killer. Likewise, Johnstone embodies, in this regard, the extremities of inhumanism. While both Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey have stated that they would rather kill a human than an animal (Dooley 11), Johnstone never achieves what Patrick K. Dooley has identified as a later, “modified position” where both men discovered, in Abbey’s words, “that I was not opposed to mankind but only man-centredness” (Dooley 24).

## Conclusion

Cary Wolfe has cited Giorgio Agamben’s distinction, revived from Classical Greece, between *zoē* – “the simple fact of living common to all living beings” – and *bios*, “the form or way of life proper to an individual or group” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 100; Agamben 1). For *zoē* to become the basis of *bios* – this constituting, Agamben believes, the most critical challenge to modern politics – requires translating our own, “anthropocentric” sense of nature into a politics grounded in a human ecological ethics. Central to that translation is “language,” premised upon a further distinction Agamben makes between “voice,” the utterances of pain or pleasure of which all animals are capable, and “language,” a more conceptual, communicative act unique to humans (7-8). Such a juxtaposition, as with Hayward’s ethical ecology, might be qualified from a perspective whereby the question of animal communication is being reconsidered in fields such as biosemiotics or zoosemiotics. Yet for now, Agamben’s concept of language does help explain the likely role of the novelist, even if Vargas has said, “I don’t think the detective story is there to change social reality [...] decisive victories in social and political problems are not made by authors” (Wroe n.p.).

Vargas succeeds in exploiting the narrative complexity inherent within the popular novel, the “layers [...] in virtual operation at once,” of which Clarke speaks. In *Seeking Whom He May Devour*, the crime is solved in the organisation of the ‘story’ while, at the same time, discursively and through the focalisation of Camille, the reader is tentatively led towards the posthuman perspectives engendered by Vargas’s work as an archaeologist. Yet, as Clarke also indicates, while narrative can reduce the complexity of discourse, a more faithful adherence to ecological posthumanism, would temper

literature's self-referentiality with a continuing openness to the nonhuman. That, too, is built into Vargas's narrative.

Camille doesn't solve the crime yet she is, in many ways, the central agent and focaliser of the novel, at least prior to Adamsberg belatedly assuming centre stage. She is, most notably, the only character to get close to Johnstone. It is because of their intimate exchanges in the early, more speculative passages of the novel, that we experience, viscerally, the bullying, latently violent core of his personality. A straightforwardly ecofeminist interpretation might here be tempted to highlight the foregrounding of a female character as the novel's main narrative agent and as the actual detective (as opposed to the male detective hero characteristic of the crime novel). That, though, would not do justice either to Vargas – who also retains a great affection for Adamsberg – or to a philosophy which has justifiably been described as “perhaps the most sophisticated and intellectually developed branch of environmental criticism” (Clark 111). In actual fact, the novel accords much more closely to the sophisticated theoretical insights by which ecofeminism has much in common with posthumanism. These include aspects identified by Gretchen T. Legler: emphasis on deep (emotional and bodily) responses to nature that are, nevertheless, counterbalanced by a stress on the fluidity, historicity and constructedness of human-nonhuman relations; as well as on the breaking down of boundaries between human and nonhuman (230-2). Ironically, if Adamsberg retains one critical function in the vertical narrative, it is the balancing of Camille's sensitive ecological humanism with his own comparatively greater openness to the animal.

One of the book's sub-plots is Adamsberg's rivalry with Johnstone over Camille, a former lover of the detective's. However, while, in solving the crime, Adamsberg removes Johnstone from that particular equation, he retains a certain sympathy for Johnstone's attitude towards animals (though the motivation for the murders is actually vengeance for Johnstone's mother's adultery – he kills her ex-lovers, on behalf of his father). Adamsberg identifies with the allure of the wolf from his own Pyrenean upbringing; and he is pleasantly surprised by local officer Fromentin's knowledge of wolves and his admission that “I like animals [...] So I read up on them when I can” (249). Timothy Clark has read one of complexities of posthumanist literature as being the dialectic whereby (exhibiting the “inevitable” anthropocentrism of which Soper speaks) “Any study of a text on the non-human always becomes a study of humanity in some sense”; while, conversely, “The very presence of an animal can show up the fragility of speciesism and the violence of the practices that sustain it” (187). In this context, Adamsberg acts as the narrative agent through whom we retain a certain residual sympathy for Johnstone's preparedness to protect the wolves even at the expense of other humans:

“Augustus was an old wolf he took under his wing. When he was on his campaign he wasn't there to give Augustus his food, so the old wolf died. Johnstone was very sad about that”.

"He murdered five people and cried for a wolf?"  
"It was his wolf". (260)

In the novel, Vargas channels the ancientness of legend towards her own seeking out of a posthuman ethic. Ancient myth is brought back to life, 'debunked' as myth, but then (re)'legitimized' in the message it offers to modernity (see Rolls "Retrieving the Exiled Reference" 143-144): "I want to tell a story that identifies and deals with the dangers we face. It's no longer wild animals, but the fears are just as real, so I make a journey with the reader, confront the horror of humanity, and deliver them safely home" (Wroe n.p.). Agamben quotes Aristotle's view that "language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust" (7-8). With Johnstone's work complete, the reader has, impressed upon them, a basis for what is 'fitting' and what is 'just'. Alarm at the spectacle of the potential violence displayed by the villagers towards the wolves, and a general sense of the centrality of animal life to human life, is nevertheless coupled with the fact that, ultimately, the crime exposed is inhumanism, a callous, simplistic, misanthropic way of attempting to live with the complexities of posthuman being.

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