11

*Frozen, The Grey, and the Possibilities of Posthumanist Horror*

*Dawn Keetley*

Just as wolves have been appearing in places from which they had once been driven—Yellowstone National Park, California, even the outskirts of Paris—so too have they, with notable frequency since the turn of the twenty-first century, been stealing into film. In *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Adam Green’s *Frozen* (2010), *Wolf Town* (2011), *The Grey* (2011), *The Bourne Legacy* (2012), and even Walt Disney’s *Frozen* (2013), wolves stalk and sometimes brutally savage humans. To appropriate George Monbiot’s phrase from his environmental manifesto, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life* (2014), the horror genre has experienced a ‘rewilding’. The wolf (on and off-screen) has materialized, moreover, in tandem with critical animal studies and posthumanist theory, both of which assert the porousness of the ontological divide between human and nonhuman animals, a convergence that raises the interrelated questions: How does the horror film frame the animal, particularly the wolf, in the early twenty-first century? Do its intertwined representations of animals and humans suggest the possibility of a ‘posthumanist’ horror film? Or, is the animal horror film built upon a distinctly humanist scaffold, dependent on the continual drawing and re-drawing of a fixed boundary line between humans and other animals, between humans and the ‘monsters’ that the repression and exclusion of the ‘animal’ inevitably produce?

To suggest that the horror film might have a prevailing humanist orientation is to recognize the prior profound denial upon which the humanist ‘self’ is constructed. The ‘human’ of humanism, Cary Wolfe (2010) claims, is built on the disavowal of its ‘animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary’ (p. xv). A prominent strain of posthumanist theory challenges this humanist self, asserting instead a ‘human’ that is thoroughly imbricated in its biological
‘ecologies’—enmeshed in the organic matter both within and around, in those ‘animal, plant, and material forces that surround and overtake the human’, as Elizabeth Grosz (2011) puts it (p. 11). These organic forces—biological, animal, vegetable—thoroughly unsettle autonomy, agency, reason and self-knowledge, as well as humans’ vaunted difference from nonhuman animals. Given this definition, ‘posthuman’ paradoxically becomes something of a misnomer since humans’ ‘animal origins in nature’ have actually always been there, despite our enduring refusal of them. As Wolfe (2010) puts it, this strand of posthumanism ‘comes both before and after humanism’ (p. xv). And also, of course, during humanism’s long reign.

This chapter explores, then, what is more accurately called the abiding nonhuman than the posthuman, although the ‘nonhuman otherness’ of the subject has certainly been a central preoccupation of avowedly posthumanist theory. Rosi Braidotti (2009) has argued that the paradigm shifts effected by Darwin and Freud, harbingers of posthumanism, ‘opened up a profound nonhumanness at the heart of the subject’ (p. 528; emphasis mine). Posthumanist theorists have continued to elaborate on that nonhumanness, insisting that it profoundly unsettles the humanist ‘self’. Wolfe (2003), for instance, claims that ‘we—whoever “we” are—are in a profound sense constituted as human subjects within and atop a nonhuman otherness that postmodern theory has worked hard to release from the bad-faith repressions and disavowals of humanism’ (p. 193; emphasis mine). And Roberto Esposito (2012) has described how the ‘person’ is ‘traversed by a power that is foreign to it’, what he calls a ‘non-human’ organic life (p. 24; emphasis mine). In articulating a (posthuman) subject that is intractably traversed by a ‘nonhuman’ substratum, Braidotti, Wolfe and Esposito all signal how posthumanism and horror might intersect. Horror films might productively exploit the profound existential terror of the ‘nonhuman otherness’ that abides within.

Most horror films, however, are predicated upon a quite different (humanist) notion of the self. Horror’s defining monsters, on the other side of the boundary-line from the ‘normal’ world of humans, are created precisely from all those material (and animal) forces that the ‘human’ subject extrudes. Pramod K. Nayar (2014) has argued that ‘the human defines itself as such by denying the illegitimate animal within itself, by seeking an expulsion of the animal inside’. While the presence of the animal, Nayar writes, ‘makes the human monstrous’ (p. 85), and thus must be expelled, the very process of expulsion also makes monsters. In order to forfend against its own monstrosity, in other words,