

## Werewolf Ecology: Monstrosity, Environmental Anxiety, and the Return of the Wild

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### Abstract

This paper intends to develop the concept of Werewolf Ecology, reading the werewolf not merely as a supernatural creature but as an environmental metaphor shaped by anxieties of global ecology. The hybridity of the werewolves caught between human and animal, culture and wilderness, embodies the breakdown of boundaries that defines the Anthropocene. As forests shrink, species vanish, and the instability of the climate intensifies, the werewolf resurfaces in literature and film as a symbolic return of the wild, a reminder of the ecosystem's modernity attempted to suppress. Through this lens, lycanthropy becomes a form of ecological haunting, nature erupting within the human subject, insisting on recognition.

The paper argues that werewolf narratives encode global green fears like pandemics, species loss, habitat destruction, while simultaneously subverting anthropocentric frameworks. The werewolf's transformation marks a violent refusal of human supremacy, staging a post human ethics where the human is no longer the central figure but a shifting threshold between species. Moreover, the werewolf can be read as an eco-subaltern figure; a once-sacred forest spirit demonised by colonial and capitalist regimes, displaced from its ecological authority, and forced into the role of monster. This reframing allows for a politically charged interpretation in which monstrosity signals resistance rather than deviance.

Ultimately, Werewolf Ecology reveals how monstrous bodies become ecological texts, archives of environmental grief, guilt, and rebellion. By tracing the werewolf across folklore, gothic literature, and contemporary media, the paper shows how this figure articulates global environmental instability through the aesthetics of horror and the poetics of metamorphosis. The werewolf's howl, often heard at the edges of civilisation, becomes a warning: the wild returns, not from the forest, but from within the human form itself.

**Keywords:** Werewolf Ecology, Anthropocene, Eco-Gothic, Posthumanism, Eco-subaltern

## Introduction

The figure of the werewolf endures because it lives precisely where human certainty falters—at the unstable threshold where the human self begins to loosen and animal instinct seeps through. It marks a place where the secure architecture of civilisation thins out and the wilderness presses up from beneath, demanding acknowledgement. This paper proposes Werewolf Ecology as a conceptual approach that interprets the lycanthrope not merely as a relic of folklore or a spectacle of horror, but as a symbolic expression shaped by ecological precarity, Anthropocene anxieties, and the unruly agency of the nonhuman world. From this vantage, the werewolf's transformation is less a supernatural distortion than an environmental event, a moment when the suppressed wilderness resurfaces within the human frame and reclaimed landscapes erupt into narrative space.

Montague Summers' *The Werewolf in Lore and Legend* offers a deep archive for understanding how werewolf stories historically emerge from landscapes marked by scarcity, cold, hunger, or untamed wildness. His collection reveals that these beasts typically lurk in forests that withstand human encroachment, in snow-bitten villages edging starvation, or in the margins where settlement and wilderness contest one another. Summers repeatedly observes that werewolf narratives often surge during periods of ecological pressure—when harvests fail, winters sharpen, or predators grow bold in times of famine (Summers 14). The werewolf becomes, in this sense, a cultural response to environmental instability. It incarnates the fear that nature, pushed aside but never subdued, may return to reclaim its territory with teeth bared.

This ecological through-line carries seamlessly into Stephen King's *Cycle of the Werewolf*, which relocates the creature to a modern American town but preserves its elemental ties. The novella's calendar structure—twelve months, twelve disturbances—situates lycanthropic violence within the ebb and flow of seasonal change: blizzards, rains, heatwaves, mists. Each chapter doubles as a study of weather, atmosphere, and shifting ecological moods.

The werewolf's appearances correspond to these transitions, as though the creature were another force of climate, responsive to pressures beyond human control. King's emphasis on the full moon underscores the idea that human bodies remain susceptible to planetary rhythms, cycles, and forces that civilisation seeks, unsuccessfully, to master.

This ecological reading resonates strongly with ecogothic thought. Andrew Smith suggests the Gothic genre is animated by returns—by the resurgence of what modernity tries hardest to silence (Smith 27). The werewolf exemplifies this resurgence: instinct, appetite, predation, and ecological force surge back into the carefully policed boundaries of the human. The creature’s violence is not meaningless chaos; it is an expression of the wild reasserting itself where humans assumed stability. It ruptures not only bodily form but humanity’s confidence in its supremacy over nature.

Such ruptures become especially potent in the Anthropocene, a period defined by collapsing distinctions between human systems and nonhuman dynamics. Donna Haraway’s call to “become-with” the nonhuman (Haraway 102) finds a literal embodiment in the werewolf, whose metamorphosis entwines human and animal in a single mutable being. The transformation signals a kind of posthuman dissolution, wherein the human body ceases to stand apart from ecological forces and instead becomes a site for their expression. The boundary that once safeguarded human exceptionalism frays, exposing a vulnerability long denied.

Cary Wolfe’s critique of anthropocentric binaries offers further clarity here. For Wolfe, posthumanism dismantles the rigid partitions that maintain human superiority (Wolfe 17). The werewolf is the narrative enactment of this dismantling. It resides in the interspace between categories, eroding the binary logic that divides species. In *Cycle of the Werewolf*, the creature’s dual existence—townsman by day, predator by night—mirrors the Anthropocene condition in which human social life and ecological disturbance constantly bleed into one another.

Considered as an eco-subaltern figure, the werewolf acquires yet another layer of significance. Summers’ ethnographic traces show that many shapeshifting traditions originate in communities that revered human–animal permeability, rather than feared it. Only with Christian expansion, colonial exploitation, and capitalist land policies were these shapeshifting beings rebranded as monstrous—an ideological strategy that helped justify the appropriation of lands long shared with wolves and other nonhuman beings. Jon T. Coleman’s research on wolf extermination campaigns in North America illustrates how the suppression of wolves became symbolic of human dominion over wilderness (Coleman 61). When the wolf is recast as a werewolf in cultural memory, the resulting monster often bears the imprint of this historical violence. It becomes the spectral survivor of a species pushed to the brink.

King's novella, though set in a contemporary American town, remains haunted by this earlier ecological regime. The werewolf that prowls Tarker's Mills feels like an emissary from the land's erased wildness, compelling the town to confront what it has forgotten: that the earth beneath its paved roads once thrummed with the life of wolves, forests, and ecosystems now diminished. Its reemergence destabilizes the town's self-image as a settled, domesticated space.

The metaphor extends into the sphere of biological anxiety. Lycanthropy, with its interspecies fluidity, engages fears of zoonotic contamination—fears sharply heightened in an era when the boundaries between species are increasingly porous. Summers documents how medieval werewolf cases often intertwined with anxieties about disease, contagion, and bodily corruption (Summers 87). In the Anthropocene, as climate change and habitat loss accelerate pathogen spillover, the werewolf's hybrid body becomes a chilling metaphor for feedback loops in which ecological disruption circles back into human vulnerability.

Beyond fear, the werewolf also registers mourning. Its howl, long romanticized, can be read as an acoustic record of environmental loss—of forests cleared, species hunted out, waterlogged or scorched biomes degraded beyond recognition. Werewolves in literature frequently emerge at moments of environmental upheaval: industrial expansion, deforestation, urban sprawl. King's seasonal structure reinforces this connection, as the creature's rage deepens in moments of atmospheric turbulence. It becomes an avatar of ecological retaliation, a reminder that nature unsettled does not remain silent.

Yet this creature is not only a symbol of devastation; it is a figure of resistance. Bruno Latour reminds us that the Anthropocene reframes nature as an active political presence, capable of responding to human violence (Latour 215). The werewolf embodies this responsiveness. It is the narrative form of a world that will not remain passive. Its return in fiction, film, and folklore signals cultural recognition—however sublimated—that environmental forces, once disregarded, are reasserting themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Within the frame of Werewolf Ecology, the lycanthrope does not target humanity out of malice, but to reintroduce the truth of entanglement. Its transformation under moonlight mirrors the planet's own unraveling cycles: volatile seasons, unstable climates, thresholds crossed. The werewolf becomes the Anthropocene's emissary, expressing through its own instability the instability of the world that produced it. Its body becomes an archive—a

repository of ecological trauma, colonial violence, species extinction, and environmental grief. The creature forces confrontation with uncomfortable truths: that the human world is not sealed, that the wild persists, that human dominance has always been provisional. The werewolf asks its readers to reconsider their relation to the nonhuman, to attend to those forces modernity sought to discipline or deny.

The fluid movement of this argument—intentionally without the interruption of subheadings—mirrors the werewolf's own refusal of containment. Just as the creature dissolves categories, the analysis moves across folklore, fiction, theory, and environmental crisis without rigid segmentation. This stylistic continuity enacts the conceptual heart of Werewolf Ecology: the entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds.

The werewolf's howl, often imagined at the remote edge of civilisation, resounds differently in the context of ecological crisis. It becomes not simply a monstrous cry but an environmental warning—one that echoes across centuries because it articulates a fear older than myth: that nature, long subdued, may return with a memory of our trespasses. The werewolf haunts not merely forests but the human imagination, because its hybridity reflects a truth we resist—our embeddedness in the world we have wounded.

In the end, the werewolf emerges as one of the most resonant figures for thinking through the Anthropocene. Its shifting form dismantles anthropocentric certainties; its violence mirrors ecological backlash; its history reveals how monstrosity grows from domination. Through the lens of Werewolf Ecology, the creature becomes an ecological parable, a site of posthuman transformation, a vessel of environmental memory, and a herald of the wild's inevitable return. To contemplate the werewolf is to approach the limits of the human and to acknowledge the wild that endures—within the land, within history, and within ourselves.

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