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A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning: "Vibrant Death" in Jim Crace's *Being Dead*

Yasın Posthuman Fenomenolojisi: Jim Crace'in *Being Dead* Romanında "Canlı Ölüm"

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ABSTRACT
Since its publication in 1999, literary scholars have paid continuous attention to Jim Crace's *Being Dead,* observing especially the novel's varied materialist and anti-exceptionalist implications. Nevertheless, Crace's distinct reconciliation of posthumanist allusions with human mourning anticipates exploration. Correspondingly, Nina Lykke's theoretical work on death studies, *Vibrant Death: A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning* (2022), offers a novel framework to explore Crace's re-ontologisation of death and mourning from a post-anthropocentric perspective. *Being Dead* is about a middle-aged couple, Celice and Joseph, both zoologists, who are murdered and consequently left exposed to the elements at a beach which holds emotional and professional significance for them. The novel interposingly narrates the events of these characters' lives and transcorporeal afterlives at the beach within a continuum; by doing so, *Being Dead* not only complicates life/death, mind/matter and human/nonhuman divisions, but also carries out a posthumanist practice of mourning and commemoration for the deceased in which affected readers participate. In other words, in place of pervasive and often anthropocentric perceptions of death and the afterlife, *Being Dead* instead reimagines commemorative mourning as one of the means of continuing/(re)vitalising the dead with emphasis on the entangled roles of various nonhuman and human agents – including dead bodies as vibrant material entities – in this process. Thereby this article reads *Being Dead* as a narrative of posthuman mourning that resonates with Lykke's phenomenological reconfiguration of death and what follows as vibrant.

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Introduction

"Vibrant death" is a figuration by philosopher-poet Nina Lykke, inspired by "political philosopher Jane Bennett's conceptualization of 'vibrant matter'" and an application of it to the dead body suggesting "if all matter is conative, vibrant, and striving to persevere, then this must apply not only to living bodies, but also to dead ones" (Lykke, 2022, p. 8).[1] In accordance with this perspective on death, Lykke also re-establishes the position of the mourning subject "I" as one of posthuman norm-critical resistance, experiencing and perceiving death "differently," and contemplating "spiritual materialist as well as vitalist materialist pathways to co-become[2] and

[1] See Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010).
[2] By "co-becoming," Lykke refers to the radically changing "material existence" of "vibrant corpse[s]" as well as their mourners' affected engagement or immersion in this process, which thus constitutes a relational transformation (Lykke, 2022, p. 88). While dead bodies undergo material metamorphoses, they

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reconnect with" the dead (2022, p. 7). Both deliberations are highly applicable to *Being Dead;* moreover, Lykke acknowledges that because human remains and mourning are arenas undeniably entwined with anthropocentric significance, "these are also locations where it is of key importance to initiate critical posthumanizing and de-exceptionalizing work" (2022, p. 8). I argue that this is also a challenge *Being Dead* takes on by simultaneously exposing readers to the touching life stories of its characters, Celice and Joseph, as well as their striking open-air decomposing. Whereby, the reader's position is re-established as the mourning subject "I" who is not only moved/affected to commemorate and thus (re)vitalise Celice and Joseph but also – perhaps even more forcibly so – to contemplate human death from a de-exceptionalized/ posthumanist perspective.

Author and critic Adam Begley, who is one of *Being Dead*'s earliest commentators, makes this innovative and fitting suggestion as to what category Crace's unusual narrative may fall into; "[t]he story of Joseph and Celice is a rotting-corpse comedy that begins with death, encompasses a thirty-year love story and ends happily (sort of), with the banal morning innocence of a (doomed) middle-aged couple" (2002, p. 238). Begley's description highlights the novel's convoluted temporal structure, a key component of Celice and Joseph's (re)vitalisation. *Being Dead* begins by introducing its main characters; the doctors of zoology, their commemorative trip to Baritone Bay dunes and the hefty price they paid for such nostalgia: death by murder. Next, the narrator quickly moves on to contemplate how differently Celice and Joseph's deaths would have been received if it had happened a hundred years ago, referring to an old communal mourning ceremony called *quivering*, additionally deemed "resurrections of the dead" (Crace, 2013, p. 4).[3] Also suggesting that, *Being Dead,* the novel itself or its story will similarly be a kind of mourning ritual, "a *quivering* of sorts" (Crace, 2013, p. 4).

From this point on, what Begley aptly calls the "three clocks" or narrative strands of *Being Dead* start (2002, p. 237), although as Philip Tew notes, these strands do overlap at times, or become indistinguishable, creating "labyrinthine" chronologies (2006, p. 137). The first of the interposing narrative clocks/strands is relatively linear, monitoring Baritone Bay dunes as well as Celice and Joseph's "[s]ix days of grace" there, that is their minutely depicted open-air decomposition finalised by a police dog's detection (Crace, 2013, p. 199). The linear clock also applies to Syl, the couple's adult daughter who is somewhat slow to notice that her parents are missing. The second one goes thirty years back in time and starts to trail Celice and Joseph's life/love stories. It reveals how they first met as zoology students on field and became lovers at Baritone Bay, also the place where a fellow student named Festa died tragically by fire, an accident for which Celice has always blamed herself. Finally, the third clock is set in reverse, it starts at 3:50 pm on a Tuesday afternoon, time of death for Celice whose husband out-suffers her by half an hour. This narrative strand then tracks the events of the day of the murder backwards, almost hour by hour, until it is finally 6:10 in the morning and Celice and Joseph are safely back in their beds. At this point, the narrator proclaims that "this has been a *quivering* of sorts for Joseph and Celice […] [t]he dead are resurrected and they lie in bed at backward-running dawn" (Crace, 2013, p. 204). For Begley, *Being Dead* "accomplishes a resurrection of sorts" because "Joseph and Celice are 'rescued from the dunes by memory' [… or] "more accurately, by the novelist's imagination" (2002, p. 238). To this we can add the affected reader's imagination, which is after all where Celice and Joseph's re-interpreted *quiverings* take place, time after time, reading after reading, as posthuman mourning rituals of co-becoming with the dead whereby the focus is shifted from the metaphysical or transcendental to transcorporeal[4] afterlives.

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also remain vibrant agents that affect, teach, and reshape the mourner's ways of sensing, understanding, and inhabiting the world.

[3] *Quivering* is a ceremony of Crace's invention during which mourners interact with the dead body and commemorate.

[4] Transcorporeality, "a posthumanist mode of new materialism and material feminism," "means that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them" (Alaimo, 2018, p. 435).

Almost thirty years after publication, critical interest in *Being Dead* has been constant. In 2014, Jim Byatt proposed that Crace uses the image of decaying bodies as "fertile" substance for "a narrative in which the distinction between life and death becomes blurred," whereby decomposition indicates "transition" and "redistribution" instead of "termination" (p.248). Resonantly, in 2015, Sarah Bezan also studied the novel's problematisation of life/death distinctions, this time from a vitalist materialist perspective, arguing that *Being Dead* creates a "necro-ecological" narrative of interspecies community; "a set of relations […] deeply embedded in the structure of the world composed of organisms both human and animal, living and dead" (p. 205). These articles which consider *Being Dead*'s materialist implications from respective perspectives amplify this study's contemplations on Crace's destabilising approach to the mind/matter and other consequential dualisms.

Moreover, in 2021, Nicky Gardiner noted that while concurrent critical corpus on *Being Dead* identifies its materialist ethics, there has been some unwillingness to study the novel's contemplations on love since it is traditionally conceptualised as a humanising force (p. 152). In his chapter "Hopeless necromantics," which applies Stacy Alaimo's conceptualisation of transcorporeality to *Being Dead*, Gardiner argues that "[c]ollapsing the necrotic and the erotic, the novel's 'necromantic' corpses reconceptualise love itself as a transcorporeal phenomenon that passes between the bodies of humans and landscapes alike" (2021, p. 148). Gardiner's analysis of love, a traditionally humanised conceptualisation re-presented as more-than-human in *Being Dead,* resonates with my aim in this article, which is to explore Jim Crace's posthumanisation of mourning, an arena often perceived as essentially humanist.

Accordingly, this article's contribution to foregoing critical discussions is a reconceptualization of mourning in *Being Dead* as a posthuman phenomenon. I argue that, when Lykke's figuration of vibrant death is applied to *Being Dead*, Crace's work emerges as a narrative of posthuman mourning, instigating a postmodern/readerly process of affected co-becomings with the dead. As such, *Being Dead* also subverts the mind/body and other related dichotomies and refutes the traditional/humanist abjection or dismissal of the dead body. In the following sections, the article first outlines Lykke's figuration of vibrant death and posthuman phenomenology of mourning, before turning to a close reading of *Being Dead* that demonstrates how the novel enacts posthuman mourning through trascorporeal afterlives and readerly participation.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Scholars note the remarkable growth and continuous popularity of "two intersectional fields" since the past decade: "the posthumanities and the environmental humanities, both of which are currently interdependent and inextricably linked with literary studies" (Ağın and Yılmaz, 2025, p. 2). Indeed, because of their mutually calculated divergence from the dualistic ontology of Descartes and his Enlightenment humanism legacy, various fields of literary criticism concerned respectively with ecology, the nonhuman, and the human body converge under the larger umbrella of posthumanities today. This is an irony considering that traditions which follow from Cartesian dualism also tend to group the human body together with the world's material phenomena. In contrast however, Cartesian traditions often consider what is material as secondary, while distinguishing and exalting the place of the mind, of consciousness, reason or *cogito* as humans supposedly possess what other beings lack, the thinking "I." Thus, duality also becomes a part of the human condition, divided between the thinking interior, representing the subject "I," the essence of being, and its material exterior, the "less" relevant, "non-agentic" body. A shortcoming of this is that, when cognition stops and consciousness disappears, the "subject" should cease to exist, in this world at least. In other words, what remains of the human is rendered "irrelevant," and the dead body is understood to lack agency or any effect on the world or on others. Yet this assumption proves untenable, as the dead body continues to exert effects even when it is conveniently tucked away. Perhaps it is in reaction to this shortcoming that the posthumanities focus more and more on the human body today, especially on dichotomous perceptions of the dead body. Various scholars are now developing non-anthropocentric, non-dualistic frameworks to understand and reconceptualise our relationship with death as both a

material and an intellectual phenomenon. Accordingly, while this article is grounded primarily in Nina Lykke's figuration of vibrant death and her posthuman phenomenology of mourning, concepts from animal studies and ecocriticism are engaged selectively and instrumentally to support the material and interspecies dimensions of posthuman mourning.

Resonantly, the phenomenology of her mourning "I," and of vibrant death, Lykke suggests, is "relentlessly posthuman, and transcorporeally [i.e. materially and affectively] interconnected with more-than-human worlds" (2022, p. 12). In her entry for the *More Posthuman Glossary*, she describes vibrant death as follows:

> [It] is a figuration which reontologizes death […] with a posthuman phenomenology of mourning as lens. The reontologization is critically turned against dualist (Christian and Cartesian) conceptualizations and modern Western imaginaries of death. It rejects the ways in which the human corpse, as a result of the dualist mind/body divides, is constructed as a piece of base, inert machine-like matter, left-by the immortal soul and/or the rational subject. (2023, p. 155)

It is precisely this reduction of the dead body to inert matter that Lykke identifies as one of the key obstacles to alternative, non-dualistic practices of mourning and *Being Dead* is observed to work against this obstacle in the following section. Lykke further argues that the Western "abjection" (Kristeva, 1982/1980)[5] of dead human bodies is also a result of such mind/body divisions (Lykke, 2023, p. 155). In response to these, she alternatively offers an understanding of "death as vibrant;" "not in opposition to life, but existing in a flat continuum intertwined with it; death as an articulation of the vitality and vibrancy characterizing all matter, whether dead or alive, inanimate or animate, non-human or human" (Lykke, 2022, p. 7). In her framework, death is regarded as "corporeally metamorphosed states of being," as an example, Lykke refers to her own deceased partner, who is now dust, "ashes mixed with sand in a seabed," as well as "spectral phenomenality" experienced by mourners (2022, p. 12). This perspective of death neither disregards material nor intellectual phenomena, thus accommodating a reformed approach to mourning as well.

Diverging from pathologizing traditions that follow Freud's foundational studies on mourning and melancholia (2005/1917), Lykke's norm-critical approach to mourning refutes temporal limitations set for mourners as these ultimately infer that the deceased needs to be left in the "past" and the "healthy" mourner needs to "move on" to a "future" without them (2022, pp. 39-43). Instead, her "figuration is based on an understanding of the relations between dead and living bodies as not merely existing in a fixed past, but to be seen […] as affective, transcorporeal, transversal connections that are ongoing, and continuously re/established in the here-and-now" (2022, p. 19). Lykke's figuration of vibrant death and her posthuman phenomenology of mourning challenge both the temporal finality and the ontological passivity traditionally ascribed to dead bodies. When applied to *Being Dead*, this framework demonstrates how the novel activates mourning as a posthuman practice through which Celice and Joseph persist – materially and affectively – not only for other characters but also for the reader.

Ultimately, Lykke rejects the claims that posthumanist ideas and phenomenology do not mix well by referring to posthuman feminist scholar Astrida Neimanis's work and the body phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2022, pp. 12-13). According to Neimanis, although phenomenology is sometimes seen as "antithetical" to "posthuman or new materialist understandings," Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment can be considered a move already in posthumanist orientation (2017, pp. 23-24). In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2005/1945), Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the corporeality of existence, experience and perception, instead of an "object" which we have, he reminds that "we are our body," "we are in the world through our body," and we accordingly "perceive the world with our body" (p. 239). Hence,

[5] This article engages Kristeva's concept of abjection *via* Lykke, who describes the dead body's "fall into abjection" as its construction as "inanimate" and "inhuman," due to a dualist hierarchy established between the elevated human subject and what is deemed base corpse matter (2022, p. 79).

"[f]or Merleau-Ponty, embodiment is consciousness" (Neimanis, 2017, p.48). Building on these ideas, Neimanis argues that suspending or "bracketing the understanding of 'the body' […] inherited from a dominant Western metaphysical tradition (that is, as a bounded materiality and individual subjectivity, and as universally *human*)" in order to explore "the ways in which bodies exceed these strictures, both conceptually and materially," "is a posthuman phenomenological exercise" (2017, p. 24).[6] Lykke applies this exercise to her own experience as the mourning subject "I" and explores how the deceased body of her partner can actively play a role beyond what is traditionally conceived or permitted in this process. What emerges is a "transcorporeal pursuit of spiritual-material processes of co-becoming with the dead" which transgress the traditional/humanist ways of mourning (Lykke, 2022, p. 12). Overall, Lykke's work can be considered a preliminary framework for revitalising and re-ontologising death from a non-dualistic, posthumanist perspective that acknowledges the afterlife of the body and its continued material effects and affective influence on the mourner. It therefore proves highly applicable to Jim Crace's *Being Dead*, which not only centres corporeal afterlives thematically, but also phenomenologically sustains Celice and Joseph's afterlives by producing affected reader-mourners.

Vibrant Death in Being Dead

It is evident that *Being Dead* is very matter-of-factly about the afterlife, it is not regarded from a metaphysical perspective. Still, Crace's is not a cold or unfeeling representation because death is not deemed terminal, the dead are in fact vibrant, vital or in a sense still "alive." To (re)vitalise the deceased, Celice and Joseph, Crace draws attention to two key elements of being dead and still agentic; merging with the environment (a process that also entails other living beings such as animals), and re-emerging through mourning, both related to Lykke's posthuman configuration of "co-becoming with the dead" (2022, p. 12). While the latter (i.e. posthuman mourning) presents the central concern and argument of this article, the two elements are inextricably connected hence need to be explored simultaneously.

Other scholars also note that Crace points at "the continuation of life once we are dead: the remains of Festa's charred body, for instance, have been absorbed by vegetation" (De Cristofaro, 2018, p. 69). Although they are discovered and removed from the beach after six days of grace, Celice and Joseph too are greatly absorbed by the dunes. Accordingly, Gardiner applies Alaimo's transcorporeality to *Being Dead* and explains that this notion "emphasises how 'the human body is radically open to its surrounding and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies,'" hence challenging the limits of "ontological separability in favour of an intra-active model of mutual becoming that necessitates a heightened ecological responsivity" (2021, pp. 150-51). Therefore, from a transcorporeal viewpoint, human remains emerge as the site of "reciprocal material connectivity that links humans and environments" as is the case for Crace's deceased and the dunes (Gardiner, 2021, p. 151).

Acknowledging this material connectivity between humans and environments enables Lykke's posthuman phenomenology of mourning and its application to *Being Dead* because when "[t]he thresholds between life and death are redefined as cyclical/spiralling shape-shifting rather than embedded in a chronological timeline," "ongoing, non-nostalgic relationships between the living and the dead" can be established (Lykke, 2023, p. 156). In other words, the deceased can be (re)vitalised through the mourner's interaction with the environment they have now become a part of, they need not be considered as left in the past, but rather as still existing in metamorphosed form. The subject "I" in Lykke's posthuman phenomenology of mourning

[6] Dan Zahavi explains that, for philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology, the phenomenological method of investigation requires a performance called "bracketing" or *epoché*. One interpretation of which is that during phenomenological inquiry, we need to bracket or suspend "our preconceived ideas, our habits of thoughts, our prejudices, and theoretical assumptions [...] the task of phenomenology is to effectuate an unprejudiced turn towards the objects," that is, "[w]e should focus on the things as they are encountered in experience, not on how we thought they were" (Zahavi, 2019, p. 33).

neither considers the "object" as departed from the world in disembodied soul format, nor as completely eradicated, instead, they are still considered in the world; "being here as a memory of the human subject" they were/are and also "very materially present as vibrant traces, as a fleshy posthuman materiality (dust, DNA, etc.)" (2022, p. 9).

Correspondingly, Crace's novel enacts the phenomenon Lykke describes as posthuman mourning for Celice and Joseph by intertwiningly tracing the memory of their lives as well as the details of their material afterlives on the beach:

> There's nothing after death for Joseph and Celice but 'death and nothing after'. Yet there can be a *quivering* of sorts. It might be fitting, even kind, to first encounter them like this, out on the coast, traduced, spreadeagled and absurd, as they conclude their lives, when they are at their ugliest, and then regress, reclaiming them from death. To start their journey as they disembark, but then to take them back where they have travelled from, is to produce a version of eternity. […] The doctors of zoology were out of time, perhaps, but they can be rescued from the dunes by memory, receding, and tucked up in their waking beds again. (2013, pp. 4-5)

At this point, it is established that *Being Dead* is a *quivering*: an immortalising rescue mission that integrates remembrance and decaying bodies, that is Celice and Joseph's "intellectual" and "material" remains. Other scholars too note that the novel is "consciously an endeavor to reproduce that old, imagined form of prayer for the dead," a kind of *quivering* (Tate, 2018, p. 189). Accordingly, it is important to examine what exactly Crace imagines that "form of prayer" to be.

The narrator muses that if Celice and Joseph died and had been found one hundred years ago, they would have been "lamented publicly" as "their family and their neighbours would have held a midnight *quivering* for them" (Crace, 2013, p. 2). First the bodies would have been prepped, cleaned and laid out on their bed, side by side, holding hands, then the mourners would come "to start their venerations, weeping till their shoulders shook, tapping on the floorboards with their boots and sticks, rattling their bracelets and their cuffs" (2013, p. 2). Principally then, *quivering* is not an implausible ritual, but more importantly, it is not figurative either, Crace uses the term directly or verbatim, referring literally to mourners vibrating with grief: "[t]he greater the racket the deeper the grief. A *quivering* should make the whole house rattle […i]t ought to keep the neighbourhood awake (2013, pp. 2-3). Not just the mourners, but the house and the dead bodies are made to resonate with the vibrations of *quivering*, moreover, through retelling and recollection, the chronological timeline that demarcates the threshold between life and death is reversed to materialise what is a kind of "second coming" for the deceased:

> They'd grip the mattress and the bedboards, a shoal of hands, to quiver the murdered couple, winnowing and shaking out their wrongdoings so that they'd enter heaven unopposed. […] the neighbours and the relatives would reminisce about the dead […] their recollections would regress through the years. Their memories, exposed to the backward-running time of *quiverings* […] would up-end the hourglass of Celice and Joseph's life together and let their sands reverse. (2013, pp. 3-4)

As the narrator underlines, this is how *quiverings* "would have been," in those "optimistic times" when "death was an ill-lit corridor with all its greater rooms beyond" (2013, p.3). Thereby, it is understood that this "would have been" ritual is a quivering in anticipation, it is held in the prospect of –and in preparation for—a metaphysical afterlife. In a sense, Crace's narrative reworks this imagined ritual by retaining its backward moving recollective logic while stripping it of its metaphysical destination. The quivering we "hold" or manifest for Celice and Joseph, in our imaginaries as affected and embodied readers, is therefore not a rehearsal for heaven but a vibrant quivering of matter itself, that is "*the materiality of which we are composed"* as Bennett proclaims (2010, p. 12). In other words, if *Being Dead* is a sort of fictional *quivering*, it is a posthuman and postmodern one which co-creates Celice and Joseph's transcorporeal death-life continuum with readerly participation.

At this point, a question might be raised as to how something fictional/imaginary, and as such situated entirely in "the human mind," be posthumanised as transcorporeal to which embodiment phenomenology and vitalist materialism can respond by reminding that "consciousness is embodiment" (Neimanis, 2017, p. 48), and "that human individuals are themselves composed of vital materials, that our powers [including cognitive/meaning-making ones] are thing-power" (Bennett, 2010, p. 11). Indeed, in her account of vibrant matter and thing-power, Bennett refers to the entangled powers of textual "things" as well:

> The sentences of this book also emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from "my" memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power. What is at work here is what Deleuze and Guattari [2005/1980] call an assemblage. (2010, p. 23)

Therefore, in Bennett's application of Deleuze-Guattarian "assemblage" to textual matter (i.e. what is on the pages of a book), cognitive powers are not distinguished from but coincide with material ones, moreover, both human and nonhuman actants or agents become conglomerate parts of an overall "meaning-making" and "co-becoming" process (Lykke, 2022, p. 171). Within this perspective, like all texts, as the product of confederate agencies and thing-power, *Being Dead* is already an assemblage. However, the novel's readerly quality necessitates that we too take part in this assemblage substantially, becoming macro actants in Celice and Joseph's fictional *quivering* to (re)vitalise these characters.

Crace's narrator states that for Celice and Joseph to be observed in this form, as decaying bodies, in the environment they are slowly merging with, while commemorating the stories of their life together, is a "fitting" aspect of the mourning practice that *Being Dead* initiates (2013, pp. 4-5). This resonates further with Lykke's application of assemblage to her posthuman phenomenology of mourning. Lykke suggests that the mourning subject "I" is not a solitary agent or "sovereign observer of detached objects" but part of a transcorporeal "mourning-assemblage" in which various coalescing subjects/objects (e.g. the mourner, funeral rituals, the dead, their material and phenomenal remains, heirlooms, the environment/place of burial/death etc.) co-become actants of post-mortem affectivity and meaning-making processes (2022, pp. 171-172). In the light of this, it can be argued that *Being Dead* entices a fictional-mourning-assemblage whereby, through literary imagination, the reader, the narrator and the text co-become actants of Celice and Joseph's mourning rituals and continue these characters beyond death/ beyond the text. This fictional-mourning-assemblage is activated through the novel's sustained attention to decomposing bodies in-tandem with their affective life stories. Just like the fictional mourners of *quivering*, the readers find themselves reminiscing about the dead while –in a sense— in the presence of the dead. Consequently, readings of *Being Dead* maintain an unceasing mourning ritual for Celice and Joseph. This fictional-mourning-assemblage, thus works to contemplate death "differently" as well, challenging the humanist dismissal of decomposing bodies as empty vessels, and considerations of the dead as "gone from this world" in one way or the other.

This point can be further supported by analysing the prefatory poem included in the novel. "The Biologist's Valediction to his Wife" is purportedly from the collection *Offcuts* by another imaginary author of Crace's invention named Sherwin Stephens:

> Don't count on Heaven, or on Hell.
> You're dead. That's it. Adieu. Farewell.
> Eternity awaits? Oh, sure!
> It's Putrefaction and Manure
> And unrelenting Rot, Rot, Rot,
> As you regress, from *Zoo*. to *Bot*. (Crace, 2013)

A sharp, self-assured, even sarcastic tone prevails in the initial half of the poem as the persona first refutes metaphysical afterlife narratives, this aligns with the broader meaning(s) *Being Dead* conveys. However, the biologist does not stop there, he proceeds to affirm the "finality thesis" [7] and also equates decomposition with degeneration, evoking an almost Aristotelian order of beings in which the "botanical" is placed hierarchically lower than the "zoological." These lines resonate with the analytical objectives of scientific practice and represent its apathetic language, also contradicting vitalist materialist perspectives in essence. Nonetheless, the scientist's confident tone shifts to a confounded one in the second half of the poem:

> I'll Grieve, of course,
> Departing wife,
> Though Grieving's never
> Lengthened Life
> Or coaxed a single extra Breath
> Out of a Body touched-by Death. (Crace, 2013)

While the rationalist biologist infers that nothing will remain of his "departing" wife, it is also evidenced that she persists, at the very "least" affectively, through her husband's grief. In this sense, *Being Dead* is not only designed as a challenging alternative to metaphysical afterlife accounts, but it also provides a consoling answer to the biologist's conundrum and refutes the finality thesis. This is achieved by displaying Celice and Joseph's post-mortem persistence and phenomenality, and thus re-ontologising death as vibrant/vital. Likewise, if Crace's reader can behold Celice and Joseph's deaths and thus (re)cognise the perpetual vibrancy of the materiality of which we all are composed, this too may serve as an alternative afterlife narrative of "comfort."

The idea that *Being Dead* presents an alternative to existing afterlife conceptualisations (either as complete eradication or metaphysical transcendence), is one reinforced by the author himself, Crace says he invented *quivering*: "this supposed notion that when people die, the relatives gather around and starting with the moment of their death, peel back their life to the moment when they'd been born, almost redelivering them to the beginnings of their life" (2000). Moreover, while Crace takes pride in being a kind of voluntarily anonymous author "who erases himself" from his work according to Begley (2002, p. 227), he nonetheless suggests in interviews that *Being Dead* can be an exemption to this –as a product of personal inspiration— with reference to the "inadequacy" of his atheism in providing consolidation and comfort when faced with death and loss (Crace, 2000). Because of this, Crace, recounts that burying his father –who was also an atheist—without a funeral as he had asked, "was a huge mistake" that influenced *Being Dead* (2000). Crace communicates the lack of commemoration for his father regretfully, relating what he finds inadequate or insufficient about the situation to what he deems atheism's "bleak" perspective on death (2000). Later, he re-articulates this in another interview about *Being Dead*:

> Here was going to be a book which denied the narratives of comfort you find in religions. […] but it needed to come up with its own version, its own narrative of comfort, one which was worldly and ungodly, but which also allowed that although death is absolutely final, nevertheless something does survive and that there is a certain immortality of a kind. (Crace, as cited in Tew, 2006, p. 26)

Evidently, *quivering* is only one of *Being Dead*'s answers as to how the dead remain vibrant. Perhaps more glaringly, the novel explores how Celice and Joseph's dead bodies strive to persevere even before any other human character notices their deaths. Likewise, the lack of commemoration Crace laments is just one problematic aspect of the finality thesis. The other issue is, such a perspective on death, as "absolutely final," ultimately infers that the dead body is no longer significant. As the subject is considered to be extinguished entirely with death,

[7] Val Plumwood uses "Finality Thesis" while referring to the belief that death is the final "end of the story" (2012, p. 95).

funerary practices inevitably resonate more with "disposal" than "ritual" or "ceremonial."

On the other hand, adopting a view of vibrant death, as metamorphosing co-becomings/ continuities, "implies that dying as being disposed of becomes deeply unethical, no matter whether the body being disposed of is human or non-human" (Lykke, 2022, p. 249). That is because, understanding death as vibrant, as Lykke suggests, "leads to envisioning every critter on the planet being provided a vibrant space to unfold its potentials for a bio-and geoegalitarian shapeshifting dance on the thresholds of life and death" (2022, p. 249). This is arguably what *Being Dead* implies by referring to Celice and Joseph's six days of open-air decomposition on the dunes celebratorily as a period of "grace." Baritone Bay dunes is where Celice and Joseph's vibrant shapeshifting unfolds, although, in a sense, cut short before reaching its full potential as the narrator laments their removal: "[i]t is, of course, a pity that the police dogs ever caught the scent of human carrion and led their poking masters to the dunes to clear away the corpses for 'proper burial', so that the dead could be less splendid in a grave" (Crace, 2013, p. 207). While the propriety of modern Western human burial craft is questioned, the "better" alternative is given as that of the earth itself:

> The dunes could have disposed of Joseph and Celice themselves. […] The earth is practised in the craft of burial. […] It embraces and adopts the dead. Joseph and Celice would have turned to landscape, given time. […] They would become nothing special. Gulls die. And so do flies and crabs. […] So, had it not been for the dogs, the residues of Joseph and Celice's lives would have been tossed and tumbled in the dunes to nourish and renew themselves in different forms. They might have found a brief eternity below the sand, together at first, still touching […] or sink into the clods and pebbles of the earth. A slower journey than a hearse. (2013, pp. 207-208)

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that earth's egalitarian burial craft which would have made Celice and Joseph "nothing special," no different than dead gulls and crabs, need not be understood as a diminutive or degenerative deliberation if considered from a vitalist materialist perspective. As Bennett proclaims, the position of vitalist materialism, although de-exceptionalising, is not one of misanthropy, on the contrary, in acknowledging the fact that "[e]ach human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant, matter," one of its aims is "to name that other way to promote human health and happiness*: to raise the status of the materiality of which we are composed"* (2010, pp. 12-13). In the light of this, it can be argued that Celice and Joseph tumbling in the dunes to be renewed in different forms is also a sort of *quivering*/(re)vitalisation, it is the de-exceptionalising, posthumanising, shapeshifting dance of the vibrant materiality of which they and all the earth(lings) is/are composed of.

A similar perspective is professed by ecofeminist Val Plumwood who suggests that the "old narratives of post-earth transcendence are dead, but modernity has not replaced them by any meaningful or comforting new ones about earthly life" (2012, p. 94). Hence the contemporary evasion of death which is articulated by concrete grave slabs and other mortuary/funerary practices that contribute to "hyper-separate" humans from nature, "conceive death as apart from and opposed to life" and express "human exceptionalism and the Cartesian project of defeating human mortality not by religion in the afterlife but by a technological–medical war against nature in this life" (Plumwood, 2012, p. 94). Instead, Plumwood vouches for a return to "ecological, animist materialism" that regards the afterlife as "a positive, ecological presence," as "positive traces in the lives of other species—not no story, but another, continuing story," such a perspective, she argues, is "a route to healing grief," a (re)vision of death as "flowing on into, even a journey into, a tranquil and beautiful landscape" (2012, pp. 95-96). Plumwood's call for an earthly, ecological narrative of death thus anticipates the logic through which *Being Dead* re-situates human mortality within multispecies and transcorporeal continuities.

In Plumwood's materialist sense, Celice and Joseph's continuous story, "as traces in the lives of other species," is also inextricably linked to posthuman grief and mourning. That is because, de-

excetionalizing the human and human death allows the re-ontologisation of mortality from what Plumwood deems a "positive" perspective – an idea that can also be traced in Lykke as well as *Being Dead*. To support this point, the function of other species in Crace's de-exceptionalizing approach to human death and grief will be explored. The fact that Crace's main characters are zoologists is a significant aspect of this approach as it enables his subversion of the mind/body dichotomy and other related anthropocentric dualisms, such as the assumed human/animal divide. As Crace's narrator reminds us, Celice and Joseph are scientists who regard death as an omnipresent phenomenon which treats all living beings similarly (2013, p. 40). Correspondingly, their own afterlife on the sandy beach dunes mirrors that of various animal specimens they study:

> Here in the dunes—with Celice's spread body, her rustling hair, her husband hanging from her leg, as centrepiece—was a fine display to illustrate the annual fieldwork lecture that she gave, normally with slides of putrefying seals or tide-abandoned fish, to the faculty's new and squeamish students: "Anyone who studies nature must get used to violence. You'll have to make yourselves companionable with death [...] She meant that fear of death is fear of life, a cliché amongst scientists, and preachers too. Both know that life and death are inextricably entwined, the double helix of existence. Both want to give life meaning only because it clearly has none, other than to replicate and decompose. (Crace, 2013, p. 40)

From their violent slaughter by a predator to the open decomposition of their bodies exposed to elements, all aspects of Celice and Joseph's death replicate "natural" animal deaths.[8] By subjecting his human characters to an ostensibly animal death, Crace instigates a process of disillusionment that reminds readers of their embeddedness within the world's systems, thereby challenging the exceptionalized position humans of the Anthropocene often ascribe to themselves. As Bezan states, "[s]hifting from a treatment of the non-human animal as a source of knowledge, Joseph and Celice's deaths enable them to enter into a heightened, entangled state of relations with the non-human world outside of the bounds of natural scientific practice" (2015, p. 198). Moreover, the ever-elusive meaning of human life, the narrator reveals, is no different than that of other animals, "to replicate and decompose." Indeed, qualities which are supposed to be distinctively human come under scrutiny from multiple perspectives in *Being Dead*, thus Crace's characters reemerge as "human animal[s]," not exalted, but burdened by their "uniquely" human capacities (Crace, 2013, p. 37).

Through a comparison of the human animal and the couple's first postmortem visitor, the fictional *Claudatus* beetle, the narrator contemplates on our relationship with death which is configured or embodied as a mythical fish:

> He didn't carry with him any of that burden which makes the human animal so cumbersome, the certainty that death was fast approaching and could arrive at any time, with its plunging snout […] Mondazy's Fish again. It's only those who glimpse the awful, endless corridor of death, too gross to contemplate, that need to lose themselves in love or art. His species had no poets. He was not fearful of Mondazy's Fish. He had not spent, like us, his lifetime concocting systems to deny mortality. (Crace, 2013, p. 37)

Mondazy, a fictional author, again of Crace's invention, refers to this folkloric figure of death as "a silent, unforgiving predator that comes at night out of the sea," the predatory "[f]ish comes and takes your father and your mother from their bed" (Crace, 2013, p. 106). However, unlike other animals, the human animal is forever haunted by the prospect of the Fish and contemplates how to avoid it: "Wise people in Wetropolis who did not want to die until they were old and ready for it, stretched nets across the headboards of their beds, or wore a fishhook on a chain around their throats" (Crace, 2013, p. 107).[9] As the narrator points out, this superstition is a result/part of the systems that humans spend lifetimes concocting to deny

[8] The murderer is likened to various predatory animals; a "lion," "fox," and a "rook" (Crace, 2013, p. 28).
[9] "Wetropolis" is a nickname for the fictional Baritone Bay town.

mortality. Arguably these systems of denial are also closely related to our attempt to exalt the place of the human above other beings, hence, human death is imagined as different from animal death which Crace also subverts. In other words, *Being Dead* renders Celice and Joseph's deaths analogous to animal mortality, astutely undermining the belief that the human, human death and the human corpse occupy an exceptional category. For Sebastian Groes "[t]his is precisely the irony of the human condition" *Being Dead* foregrounds; "our brain power and enhanced cognitive capacity enable us to fantasise that we are eternal gods, but we simply are animals, after all" (2018, p. 156). This de-exceptionalization of the human condition is also crucial to posthuman mourning, since it dismantles the premise that human death requires fundamentally different, symbolic or metaphysical consolations. In short, the novel's animalising of human mortality is not incidental; it is also the mechanism by which mourning becomes posthuman because the dead persist as metamorphosing ecological participants.

From a similar perspective, Byatt argues that Crace's "boldest statement" in *Being Dead* is that "in creating a civilized, technological, hygienic society, we have simultaneously manufactured the taboo, the sense of disgust, and the potential for nature to offend order" (2014, p. 260). The "horrifying" open-air decomposition of Celice and Joseph is "horrifying precisely because of [their] high-achieving respectability […] that stands as an exaggerated metaphor for the elevation of human society above the animalism of nature" (Byatt, 2014, p. 256). Celice and Joseph's relatively high status in human society serves as an exposition to what Byatt calls "the great myth of superiority," that is "the myth that by transcending the ordinary in life, somehow the ordinary death will, too, be transcended" (2014, p. 257). To this we can add the myth of humans' superiority over other animals which is expected to persist even in and after death. However, as *Being Dead* reminds, "[t]he plain and unforgiving facts were these;" "Celice and Joseph were soft fruit. They lived in tender bodies. They were vulnerable. They did not have the power not to die. They were, we are, all flesh, and then we are all meat" (Crace, 2013, p. 12). By insisting on this shared vulnerability and material destiny, the novel replaces human exceptionalism with another basis for mourning that is grounded in transcorporeal continuity instead of transcendence or otherworldliness, aligning death with the posthuman logic of co-becoming rather than a final or metaphysical estrangement.

Like Lykke, Val Plumwood is another philosopher who contemplates on her personal experiences and reconsiders death and grief from a non-dualistic perspective. Plumwood has a near death experience, she virtually escapes being eaten by a crocodile which is described as an epiphany. She notes that prior to this encounter, she had a "false consciousness":

> I knew I was food for crocodiles, that my body, like theirs, was made of meat. But then again in some very important way, I did not know it, absolutely rejected it. Somehow, the fact of being food for others had not seemed real […] Until that moment, I knew that I was food in the same remote, abstract way that I knew I was animal, was mortal. (2012, p. 10)

This realisation leads to a critique of the understanding of "the self as disembodied consciousness dissociated from the food-providing self as material body," as well as the "idea that humans are special, above and apart from other animals" (Plumwood, 2012, p. 11). To challenge these, she proposes "that the food/death imaginary we have lost touch with is a key to re-imagining ourselves ecologically, as members of a larger earth community of radical equality, mutual nurturance and support" (Plumwood, 2012, p.19). Arguably, Crace's novel too provides its readers with such a "positive" and egalitarian re-imagining of the dead body; as the rejected reality of death and decomposition, the role of other animals and nonhuman agents in this process, the fact of our postmortem edibility as human animals is purposefully brought to the fore. That purpose, in this sense, is to remind human animality and materiality which have been forgotten – historically – through dualistic thinking.

For Erica Fudge, the rejection or false consciousness Plumwood refers to is part of the human

systems of "calculated forgetting" (2023, p. 39). With reference to Jacques Derrida,[10] Fudge explains that historically, the human "belief in our utter difference from animals is something that we have had to work at," that is, "there have been calculations – willed choices – about the nature of animals that were taken up by philosophical thought and in time became the unthought (naturalized) orthodoxy" (2023, pp. 39-45). The reality of the human animal has been calculatedly forgotten, however, in epiphanic moments such as the one experienced by Plumwood, there comes a disillusionment with "who we have been naturalized to see ourselves as being," as "distinct, superior, better" (Fudge, 2023, p. 53). A key aspect of calculated forgetting is that because "in the consumption of the human by worms and other 'lower' creatures, humans cease to be the possessors of dominion, our postmortem humanity is understood to exist not in the (edible) body but beyond the realm of the physical – in the soul," accordingly, "a challenge to any distinctions established in the binaries human/animal, immortal/mortal can be found when our gaze is focused not on the rationally organized life, or on the eternal soul of the human, but on the body" (Fudge, 2023, p. 44). From this perspective, it can be argued that *Being Dead* is also a novel engaged in *calculated reminding,* a wilful challenge to human systems and dichotomies which disregard the body and forget or reject the reality of its mortality, fleshliness and affectivity. Like Fudge and Plumwood suggest, Crace reminds his readers that they are mortal human animals by exposing the postmortem consumption of Celice and Joseph by other animals. More than this, *Being Dead* can be read as a novel of *calculated reminding*, not simply because it exposes "the human animal," but because it restores the agency of the dead body that calculated forgetting aims to erase. The problem with forgetting/erasing human animality and materiality is not only ontological but also affective: once the human corpse is reduced to inert matter, it is imagined as incapable of effecting others positively and becomes abject. Crace resists this logic, insisting that Celice and Joseph continue to generate positive effects – love, recognition, attachment, nourishment and so on – even in and through decomposition. As such, their bodies are persistent actants within what Lykke deems the mourning-assemblage, a point that can be further supported through Syl's initial encounter with her dead parents.

Callus and Lanfranco suggest that, as "*Being Dead* interposes chapters on the process of decomposition with chapters on the recollected life of Joseph and Celice," a "[c]ommemoration" is instigated which ensues "in the mind of their daughter, Syl, their memory is not done yet" (2018, p. 90). Again, it is inferred that *Being Dead* is a narrative of mourning, this time with the character of Syl in mind. While identifying Celice and Joseph at the dunes for the police, Syl realizes that "despite the damage and the wounds, they had not surrendered any of their nature or their character," "[t]hey'd not depersonalized," i.e. the dead are neither materially nor personally departed or extinguished (Crace, 2013, p. 168). It is further stated that "[t]hey were uplifting in their way, and oddly calm":

> The forensic officers had hoovered out the maggots, 'making them presentable', before the daughter came. Syl was too touched by the gentle nakedness and disposition of her parents to stop herself from sobbing. Sobbing on the edges of the sea as she had so many times before when Joseph and Celice were too far out to reach. [...] The body sheets had been pulled across again without Syl noticing, but she had got a snapshot printed in her mind. She'd not remember all the wounds, the gull damage, the black dry blood. It was her father's hand wrapped round her mother's leg that haunted and delighted her. It looked as if the leg and arm were keeping them earthbound. (Crace, 2013, pp. 167-68)

Joseph's hand which persists on clinging to Celice's leg for six days becomes a symbol of postmortem love as well as a material signifier of their previous life and stories. Likewise, the wounded bodies, the faded rectangular patch of grass they laid on top of, the scattered clothes they had stripped off, Celice's leather bag from Ankara, all become storied matter[11],

[10] See Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008/2006),

[11] Material ecocriticism's configuration of "storied matter" proposes that "the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be 'read' and interpreted as forming narratives, stories" (Iovino and Opperman, 2014, p. 3).

communicating the events that have transpired and immortalising the doctors of zoology:

> Their bodies had expired, but anyone could tell […] that Joseph and Celice were still devoted. For while his hand was touching her, curved round her shin, the couple seemed to have achieved that peace the world denies, a period of grace, defying even murder. Anyone who found them there, so wickedly disfigured, would nevertheless be bound to see that something of their love had survived the death of cells. The corpses were surrendered to the weather and the earth, but here were still a man and wife, quietly resting; flesh on flesh; dead, but not departed yet. (Crace, 2013, p. 2)

Evidently, these passages grant an alternative immortality to Celice and Joseph, a worldly hereafter which is not necessarily demarcated from but rather continuing from their life stories. Thus, Syl's response to the sight – and site – of her parents' death exemplifies the phenomenon Lykke deems posthuman mourning in practice: an affective recognition of the dead body's continued agency, rather than a symbolic attachment to a lost or transcendent subject. Thereby, resonant with Lykke's phenomenological configuration of vibrant death, Crace reconceptualises an alternative way of being dead and loved, being dead and agentic: *a way of being dead in the world*.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article's contribution to concurrent materialist and ecological perspectives on *Being Dead* is its examination of Crace's posthumanisation of human mourning. Drawing on Nina Lykke's posthuman phenomenology of mourning – configured through her vitalist materialist re-ontologisation of death as vibrant – this article has demonstrated that *Being Dead* instigates a readerly process of affective co-becomings with its dead characters. By simultaneously exposing readers to the intimate life stories of Celice and Joseph and to the vivid details of their vibrant open-air decomposition, the novel produces affected mourner-readers who participate in what may be understood as a fictional-mourning-assemblage. Much like the mourners of *quivering*, readers find themselves reminiscing about the dead while remaining in the presence of their decomposing corpses. As a result, repeated readings of *Being Dead* function as ongoing rituals of mourning that extend/sustain Celice and Joseph beyond death and beyond the text. Hence, this fictional-mourning-assemblage also functions to contemplate death from a posthumanist and vitalist materialist perspective by challenging the humanist dismissal or abjection of dead bodies.

In this sense, *Being Dead* depicts several material and fictional/narrative phenomena which help re-envision death, grief and the deceased; the main characters' consumption by other living beings, their merging with the environment, and their (re)emerging/(re)vitalisation through the postmodern and posthumanist processes of commemoration. Crucially, the novel's insistence on the animality and vibrant materiality of human death is not incidental but operates as a *calculated reminding* mechanism through which mourning itself becomes posthuman; since the dead persist as affective, ecological, transcorporeal actants rather than inert or abject matter.

Overall, Jim Crace's *Being Dead* approaches death non-dualistically as both an intellectual and material phenomenon, subverting pervasive Western imaginaries of the afterlife both as metaphysical transcendence and as complete annihilation. It challenges the mind/body, human/nonhuman and other related dichotomies by foregrounding nonhuman agency, the agency of the dead body, and by realistically depicting the place of humans in earth's systems. Through these, B*eing Dead* enacts a postmodern, posthumanist, and non-dualistic process of mourning and (re)vitalisation for Celice and Joseph by simultaneously tracing their lives and bodily afterlives within a continuum. In result, *Being Dead* emerges as a phenomenological narrative of posthuman mourning and vibrant death, and its characters deceased but not departed, since through the unique commemoration processes of the text "[t]he shrinking and retreating universe has left their deaths behind," and Celice and Joseph "are not mortal anymore" (Crace, 2013, p. 204).

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Declaration of AI Use

Any AI-assisted tools, if used, were limited to language editing. No AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The author(s) assume sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and final content of the manuscript.

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