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## **Becoming Inhuman, Becoming Monstrous: Representation and Sacrifice in J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace and Lauren Beukes's Broken Monsters**

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Becoming Inhuman, Becoming Monstrous: Representation and Sacrifice in J.M. Coetzee's

*Disgrace* and Lauren Beukes's *Broken Monsters*

By

Anna Catherine Bills

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
In Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Bachelor of Arts  
In English  
In the College of Arts and Sciences

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The role of “the animal” within literature has long been that of a figure—a totem that brings with it implications of abjection, subjectivity, and oppression. In Western thought, there is a firm distinction drawn between the world of “the human” and that of the nonhuman animal. Humans are deemed “civilized,” marked by their possession of rationality and higher thought, while the nonhuman animal is inherently inferior, controlled by bestial instincts, and possessing no autonomy of its own, thus forming a rigid duality with the nonhuman animal firmly situated on the outside as the abject Other. As a figure, “the animal” operates as more than just a totem but also as the framework in which this duality is established and sustained. Its value is dictated largely by its ability to operate as a living symbol capable of augmenting and diminishing the subjectivities of a particular population, society, or individual. Yet it is interesting to note that when ever the figure of “the animal” is constituted alongside “the human,” it is often only while in the presence of the definitively “inhuman”—that which is marginalized, separate from the “civilized” human societies.

Due to its perceived inherent inferiority to the more “civilized” human societies, the nonhuman animal is not granted the same moral consideration or agency as any other human being. They are construed as tools or objects to be used by humans, and it is this through which they receive value. This way of conceptualizing the nonhuman animal, and even the figure of “the animal,” has bled over into how societies have conceptualized one another, but especially

those who they consider to be threats or *outside* an established society. This particular role is evident throughout history in rigid social structures where the figure of “the animal” operates as a tool to augment subjectivity, to construe a specific group of people as Other—as something that is a visible threat to the established order. As a threat, therefore, the Other is a population that is regarded as inhuman, disposable, and dangerous, needing control and if necessary, elimination.

During colonization in South Africa, colonialists adhered to the treatment of nonhuman animals as a standard for how they would then treat the colonized South African “natives.” The “natives” were largely perceived as “uncivilized” and backwards due to their differing cultures, languages, and lifestyles, more aligned with the natural world than the human. Consequently, as they were viewed as being a part of the natural world—and therefore, as “outside” the safety of society—they would be treated as such. Several theorists have acknowledged existing “intersections between the logics of violence deployed on animals” and the violences inflicted on “other racialized, ethnicized, classed, and gendered bodies (and other bodies marked as disposable),” and the figure of “the animal” acted as a crucial tool to creating these logical systems (Price 22). In “The Dog-Man Becoming Animal in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Tom Herron states how whether living or dead, “animals are entirely at the mercy of that other, supposedly high animal” whose world in which the “lower orders of creatures are [...] beneath regard, hardly worth bothering about” (Herron473). As a result, humans are able to eradicate the lives of animals without regret, and it is this manner of thinking that aided in the establishment of systems such as the South African Apartheid where a strict regime established upon the colonial legacy of white nationalist supremacy was able to accumulated privilege and economic wealth by systematically disenfranchising the black South African majority. In systems of

discrimination, the category of “human” is construed as exclusive, pertaining only to those deemed “civilized” by the deciding authority; those who did not fit these standards are then judged as not fully human, belonging more to the realm of the “animal” than the “civilized” humans. In this instance, the figure of “the animal” operates not just as a method of augmenting subjectivity and maintaining the established order, but also as a figure of historical value—the remnant of a history marked by gross human violation, daily degradation, and disenfranchisement at the hands of the ruling, white minority. In such a time of state sanctioned oppression, whether or not one was considered “animal” would decide whether or not they would then be deemed superfluous.

The figure of “the animal” is also seen operating with the United States, rooted in slavery and institutional discrimination where African Americans were portrayed and judged as inherently different and inferior to white Americans. This perceived difference then perpetuated and enforced the belief that African Americans were inherently Other, and so, they must be kept on the outskirts of society. Thus, most if not all social structures founded upon a rigid system of categorization have also been founded upon and sustained by methodical discrimination and oppression, where the figure of “the animal” acts as a tool to augment subjectivity. But what happens when these supposedly inherent, unyielding categories are disrupted?

In both South Africa and the United States, there is a period of time marked by a period of societal restructuring. It is a period marked by societal unrest, by economic failure, and by anger as previous social orders are dismantled by the disenfranchised population rising up against a system proven undoubtedly oppressive and unjust, outside of any constituting human right and dignity. The fall of these regimes saw to the rise of a group who believed themselves to be disenfranchised—the many white males who now find their “inherent” positions of power to

no longer be a guarantee. But without this categorical system and conventions that these white men had used to hold their subjectivities in place and maintain their power, their future is suddenly made indeterminate as they must now uphold their own subjectivity alone. The early twentieth century saw the emergence of such a population in the U.S. and South Africa amidst the global Depression in the appearance of white nationalists who have become frustrated and angered at the societal shift. In their minds, they have been displaced and rejected from a social narrative that had been promised to them, pushed to the margins of society by the rising group. To combat this sense of displacement, new imaginaries and narratives were concocted, ones where these white men stand as members of the disenfranchised and marginalized populace, disavowing their own white privilege, and pushing for another great societal restructuring—one where they would be returned to their places of power. They take on the rhetoric and methods of the oppressed and position themselves in the margins as liberators of a society that has, in their minds, wrongfully attacked them; it is here that the figure of “the animal” arises once again as this population uses the same language that had before been used to monitor supposedly “inferior” populations to now proclaim their liberation.

It is within this discourse that I will situate my argument. With the end of these systems of discrimination and oppression, societal restlessness and dissatisfaction is almost always inevitable. Claims to power that had previously been unquestionable are now anything but, leaving at least one population who believes they are being attacked. In the case of South Africa and the U.S., in order to combat a growing sense of failure and anger, white men have turned to fictitious narratives—such as the U.S.’s “Forgotten Man”—in the hope that it would grant them some element of satisfaction. It is critical to acknowledge that in doing so, this group is using the same language that had empowered the previously oppressed population—the same population

that had destabilized the social order—to transform themselves into the imagined victims of an unjust society. Just as the figure of “the animal” was utilized to augment the subjectivities of the Other, this figure may now be used to bolster their own quest.

Both J.M. Coetzee’s novel, *Disgrace*, and Lauren Beukes’s novel, *Broken Monster*, feature white men who believe they have become disenfranchised as a result of this restructuring and redistribution, and as a result both men have suffered the destruction of their sense of self. Coetzee’s character, David Lurie is a white South African who was once a renowned professor of literature but over time has been demoted to the position of a simple adjunct professor; although a self-proclaimed progressive, neo-liberal, when David Lurie finds the components he had founded his identity upon suddenly stripped away, he begins to imagine himself as one of the abject, and so he looks to the figure of “the animal” as a means to redemption. In the case of Beukes’s Clayton Broom, a failed artist turned serial killer, after having failed at achieving the satisfying “good life” narrative, Clayton follows the order of a mysterious entity known as “the dream” in order to pave the way to a new world order. In both novels, these white men believe that they have suffered as a result of a society that has forsaken them, and so now they must struggle to reorient themselves and their identities.

By first distinguishing between the figure of “the animal” as a symbol or totem, and the actual lives of animals, I will draw attention to the way in which the nonhuman animal may be construed in order to augment or diminish subjectivity, as well as illustrate this figure has operated within categorical systems to methodically disenfranchise particular populations. In the case of Coetzee’s David Lurie and Beukes’s Clayton Broom, this conceptualization is then co-opted by this white nationalist population in an attempt to restore or remedy what they perceive to be a failing society—to reestablish their positions of power. However, in reality both men



have simply adopted the methodology and terminology of the abolitionists and liberators while disavowing their own white privilege—in their minds, they are acting in a way that will help stabilize the shifting society—but in reality, as the figure of “the animal” is transformed into the actual animal, both men are made to face the realization that they have twisted this liberatory language and must now confront their own subjectivity.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE FIGURES OF ABJECTION AND SACRIFICE IN J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

During apartheid, the South African landscape was one of political and social unrest where the structural hierarchy rigidly enforced the power dynamic between white and black South Africans. After apartheid's end, much of this turmoil was put to rest, and a great restructuring was enacted on previous institutions of inequality. It is during this period of political transition that J.M. Coetzee writes two works—*The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*—in which he considers the function of the animal in literature. Coetzee conceptualizes the animal in two different ways: first as the figure of “the animal,” where “the animal” is used as a totem, a trope, whose primary function is to augment the subjectivities of the human. The figure of “the animal” is then situated against considerations of the actual lives of animals, whereby animals are perceived largely as resources to be used and consumed by human society. By setting these two distinctions against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa, however, Coetzee highlights how coming to understand the distinction between the figure of “the animal” and the lives of animals may in turn reveal a connection between the nonhuman animal and the relinquishment of power. In this paper, I will consider the implications of these two different conceptualization in relation to the ongoing political transition in post-apartheid South Africa, or the “Mandela years,” during which white South Africans imagined themselves as relinquishing power as the nation promised a grand restructuring of political and social intuitions. This is

clearly dramatized in Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*, where David Lurie, a white South African man, has lost his hold on his own identity, demoted as a result of the transforming educational institutions, and suffering emasculation in other areas of his life, particularly in relationship to his aging body. He holds on to the last vestiges of what he perceives grants him power—his sexual prowess and domination over women, but when even this claim is gone, David's sense of self is thrown into turmoil as he struggles to discover some form of redemption, illustrated by the evolving self-representations of the figure of his animal "totem" as he is made to confront the actual lives of animals.

The idea that the role of "the animal" acts as a figure or totem is not an unfamiliar one to scholars. In Nicola Moffat's article "Rape and the (Animal) Other: Making Monsters in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," Moffat considers how "the constitutionality of rape" and "becoming-animal" are related to identity formation for David Lurie. Moffat also notes how "the animal" has a long history in "the Western aesthetic tradition" as representative figures, particularly in their use as metaphors or symbols to emphasize certain characteristics (Moffat 405, 416). Whereas in some instances, Moffat argues that "the animal" serves as a figure to augment the individual's own subjectivities, in others it is a signifier of a "repressed or disavowed aspect of the the patient's remembered experience, now festering silently into pathology" and transformed into what she refers to as "metonymic displacements of unprocessed trauma" (Moffat 419). In her book entitled *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, while attempting to reorient the priorities of the poststructuralist feminist agenda, Rosi Braidotti also discusses the utilization of "the animal" in Western thought, where "the animal" is typically thought of as "the metaphysical other of man" or simply as "living metaphors" (Braidotti 121, 125). She asserts that now figures of "the animal" have become "highly iconic emblems within our language and

culture,” evidenced by the attribution of different values and meanings to particular animals (Braidotti 125). In any case, the figure of “the animal” has been reduced to little more than a “living [metaphor],” a totem that may act a a stand-in for human qualities, and a method by which subjectivities may be augmented or diminished (Braidotti 125).

If on one hand, the metaphorical animal has become a totem for augmenting or diminishing subjectivities as well as general humanness, on the other, “the animal” has also become highly synonymous with that which is perceived to be inherently inferior, irrational, and bestial—anything that is outright discouraged or feared by human society. As a result, the figure of “the animal” has come to represent the marginalized and abject of society—marginalized groups whose racialized, classed, and gendered bodies are regarded as dirty, unwanted, or unnecessary. In his book, *Animals and Desire in South African Fiction: Biopolitics and the Resistance to Colonization*, Jason Price examines this evolving role in the context of South African apartheid, where the boundary between the human and “the animal” has enabled a “‘non-criminal putting to death’ of the animal,” which then became justification for the “precedent for the treatment of the native peoples of South Africa during colonization” (Price 17). South African apartheid is rooted in a “white nationalist supremacy,” which would build and consolidate wealth, privilege, and dominance for “the white minority of the population,” while systematically disenfranchising the majority of the population (Price 2).

As Val Plumwood discusses in her article, “Decolonizing relationships with nature,” during apartheid the usage and continuance of “the category ‘human’ as an exclusive category” was paramount to establishing and maintaining the social hierarchy, with those who are “thought of as less ideal or more primitive forms of the human” relegated to what she called the “sphere of ‘nature’” (Plumwood 52). This included any group that the dominant group—in this case, white

South Africans—perceived to exemplify the “more animal stage of human development” (Plumwood 52). However, when this way of structuring society was overthrown, again the white South Africans who previously had assumed an “inherent” superiority by fortune of being born with white skin have lost this claim to power, and now they must struggle to reorient themselves in the shifting social hierarchies.

It is in the midst of this discourse that J.M. Coetzee writes *The Lives of Animals*, where he has the character Elizabeth Costello, who identifies herself as a “colonial,” set forth the distinction between the “figure of the animal” (as totem or metaphor outlined above) and the *lives* of animals.<sup>1</sup> Like the scholars above, Elizabeth acknowledges how the presence of “the animal” in literature and poetry, whether actual or metaphorical, is typically that of “a stand in for human qualities,” whose value is dictated by the role it plays in embodying some other aspect of the more important, human characters, rather than acting as a character itself, possessing its own agency or subjectivity (Coetzee 50). She uses the figures of “the animal” in poetry as an example, such as “the lion for courage, the owl for wisdom, and so forth;” even in those whose poetry “does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him,” the figure of “the animal” is still simply that: a figure or an object (Coetzee 148). In Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, understanding this distinction between “the animal” and the lives of animals will become critical, I argue, when the animal is instantly brought forth out of the metaphorical, and into living presence within the novel. David comes face-to-face with what had for him only been an extension of his own self-representations. This

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<sup>1</sup> The lives of animals have been taken up by biopolitical discourses such as Price’s, but consideration of the actual lives of animals that began as early as the mid-nineties with Donna Haraway’s early work now informs scholarly work on the anthropocene, and, insists that we should “stay with the trouble.” See Donna Haraway’s book of the same name that is circulating as a touchstone for contemporary South African scholars [*Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*].

transition from metaphor to physical then becomes indicative of not just David's own struggle with his displacement, but of an even greater power struggle taking place in the rapidly evolving society around him as an entire social hierarchy is being overwritten around him.

It is little surprise that David Lurie—an educated, white South African man who has visibly taken great satisfaction in his expertise of Romanticism and mastery of the Western aesthetic tradition—would have absorbed this way of thought and rhetoric, both to augment his own subjectivity, while representing to himself his interaction with women and sexuality. This only becomes more prevalent as David struggles with his sense of emasculation. When the reader is introduced to David, he is already suffering from a blow to his masculinity—a consequence of the ongoing restructuring of the university environment, he claims, having been in his mind demoted from the prestigious position of professor, torn away from his passion for Romanticism, working now as an adjunct professor teaching composition. David has been made to take steps to readjust how he conceptualizes his sense of self. Whereas before, he could rely on the presumed superiority of his white skin in addition to his professorial position, his sense of self has now become solely dependent on his sexual prowess—a quality which he perceives to be the ultimate display of masculine power—and it is in these interactions that the figure of “the animal” becomes crucial to his identity.

In David's mind, he has “solved the problem of sex rather well” for a man of his age (Coetzee 1). Sexually, he possesses a strong sense of self. He is confident in the fact that “if he looked at a woman a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that,” and “for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life” (Coetzee 7). David's confidence is evident in his tendency to envision himself as a “viper” or a “fox” in contrast to the submissive nature of his female partners during his interactions; here, the figure of “the animal”

is directly related to David's own sense of self—in this area of his life, he feels powerful, confident, and “the animal” becomes indicative of this self-confidence (Coetzee 2, 23). Throughout the novel, all of David's sexual interactions are mirrored by his own animal-imaginings, often in the defined duality of fearsome predator and meek prey, a gendered script that is projected onto both himself as well as his female partner. To be male is to possess unquestionable dominance during all facets of life but especially during sex, and likewise, the women, although embodying different animals, must perform their part well—to be passive and submissive to his ministrations. With the prostitute Soraya—or “escort,” as he refers to her—David feels a sense of equivalence between them—although it quickly becomes evident that this equality exists almost entirely in his own mind, as he takes great pleasure in her docility and “because his pleasure is unending, an affection has grown up in him for her” (Coetzee 1). He muses that with her, his animal “totem” would be a snake, a “viper,” and imagines their sexual interactions to be “rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest,” dispassionate but fulfilling (Coetzee 2).

But this affection turns obsessive as he begins seeking her out in her daily life, and when he encounters her out in the world with her own children, her personality shifts and the illusion he had formed of their love is abruptly shattered. Suddenly, Soraya is no longer the willing, gentle partner David had come to expect and care for. In this interaction, she is not a lover but a mother, an agent, who confronts his harassment head on and orders David to “never phone [her] here again, never,” and by “demand,” he realizes that Soraya really means “*command*” (Coetzee 9). In the last interaction between he and Soraya, the power dynamics are upturned. Soraya is transformed from a prey animal into a predator facing down another predator, “but then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's den, into the home of her cubs”

(Coetzee 9). With the loss of this relationship, David is once again consumed with a sense of loss, no longer having his relationship with Soraya to anchor his identity. Previously, David had visible evidence that he still possessed that strong, masculine power in his relationship with Soraya, yet as that relationship is lost, the illusion crumbles. It is important to note that although David would refer to Soraya as an “escort,” her true occupation is that of a prostitute. Altering her occupation in his mind is just one way by which David created “evidence” of his own masculinity and power. The term “escort” implies a sense of luxury and indulgence while also hiding the fact that David has resorted to paying for sex, no longer able to seduce women with success as he could when he was younger. With his illusions of masculinity disrupted, David feels his own desire overwhelming him, leading him to Melanie.

Unlike with Soraya, his “relationship” with Melanie is much more one-sided—little more than a predator dominating its prey. She is young, inexperienced, “unresisting” to his undesired advances, and thus the animal totem David projects on her is equally innocent and weak: a songbird or “a rabbit” that lies docile as “the jaws of a fox close on its neck” (Coetzee 25). They meet in the classroom—student and teacher—and this uneven power dynamic carries over into the sexual as David makes his “advances.” This is evident in his firm refusal to believe their ensuing “relationship” qualifies rape even though it is “undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core” (Coetzee 23).<sup>2</sup> David asserts that women are highly attuned to “the weight of a desiring gaze,” and so in his mind, he believes that Melanie is being coy, playing the part he has given her as she teases him with the same “coquettish little smile as before” (Coetzee 10-1). This is in part

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<sup>2</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the two rapes in *Disgrace*, see Carine Mardorossian’s article “Rape and the Violence of Representation of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” where she analyzes the representation of sexual violence to reveal the inseparability of social categories such as gender, class, and race in order to argue that rape is not solely a gendered crime, but one complicated by considerations of race or class.



due to the “oedipal view of subjectivity and desire” that David has adopted, “one that leads him to instrumentalize others,” most often animals and women who are grouped as objects to be picked and chosen from, valued almost entirely for what he perceives to be their function (Price 49). David even justifies his desire by claiming that “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone” and is instead “part of the bounty she brings to the world. She has a duty to share it” (Coetzee 15). In the case of Melanie, it is her duty as a beautiful young woman to share her beauty and body because “she does not own herself;” David is simply assisting her in fulfilling the duty she owes to the world (Coetzee 15).

David’s projection of animal totems is not just limited to the women he shares a more prolonged connection with, however, but with all women he meets with over the course of the novel. Those whose dispositions and appearances please him, such as Soraya and Melanie, are imagined as animals with grace and docility, and are eroticized; yet those who displease him are given much more animalistic identities, most notably the secretary he sleeps with immediately after Soraya, for in her over eagerness, the woman “bucking and clawing [...] works herself into a froth of excitement that in the end only repels him” (Coetzee 9). As David continues to imagine Melanie and other women as their animal totems in his mind, he is “unconsciously [recreating her objectification,” as well as justifying his own actions (Moffat 418). Although she may appear to be “unresisting,” Melanie knows her “duty,” and so he continues on, willfully ignoring her unwilling nature and instead romanticizes the way she “[decides] to go slack, die within herself for the duration” as a rabbit would under the fangs of a fox (Coetzee 23). But Melanie does take action into her own hands, and David is reported for his crimes. Yet even then, at least in his mind, David firmly believes he has done nothing wrong but has simply fulfilled his duty as a “servant of Eros” (Coetzee 47). Rather than accept the responsibility, David instead chooses to

exile himself, fleeing to the smallholding of his daughter, Lucy—an unmarried lesbian woman who runs a boarding kennel for the guard dogs in the Eastern Cape—with the intent of repairing their own fractured relationship. At least, this is what he tells himself. David’s self-exile marks the moment when images of “the animal” transform into representations of the lives of animals, and Coetzee brings the lives of animals to the forefront of the narrative. Whereas before “the animal” has operated largely as a projection of his perception of his own self-representation, one that shifts and alters along with his turbulent sense of self, as David begins to work face-to-face with the animals he had previously only imagined and romanticized, he is made to reassess the preconceived notions he had maintained about animals.

In the beginning, David has been “more or less indifferent” to actual animals. Although from the start of the novel “the animal” has made up a large portion of his rhetoric and world perception, this has only been “the animal” as a metaphorical figure—he gives little thought to the lives of the animals that he has romanticized. In fact, animal welfare organizations remind him of religious organizations, and David notes how:

It’s admirable what you do, what [Bev] does, but to [him], animal welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or kick a cat. (Coetzee 71)

Much like his feelings towards religion, although David feels some sense of regard for those who would rein in their other desires to help the suffering beasts, he feels no great empathy or connection to the cause. For Bev and Lucy, it is a way for them “to share some [their] human privilege with the beasts,” but for David, humans are simply “of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different” (Coetzee 72). If there is a need to give

back somehow, David would prefer it be from generosity, and not some sense of guilt. As a result of his irrelevance, David's attempts at empathy and representation with the physical animals he encounters is illustrative of his attempts to reorient himself in the shifting social order. He yearns to reestablish his identity and place within society yet is still unable to reach it, to change. However, after an unimaginably violent attack on he and Lucy, David is reduced to a truly powerless state and he is converted. He begins to empathize—even over identify—with the burdened, used animals he has encountered at Bev Shaw's clinic; As "the animal" slowly becomes just an animal, David's sense of self undergoes a drastic transformation, shifting from that of a predator, powerful and masculine, to an abject beast who has been ostracized along with the rest of the mutts, ultimately invoking the root of David's insecurity: his fear of abject aging and the sudden inferiority it brings.

When David travels to his daughter Lucy's home, he is brought in direct contact with the actual lives of animals. Lucy lives alone in the country, in a house on land that she owns herself, and also runs a boarding shelter for dogs. When David questions her about her safety—for to be a woman living alone is somewhat unheard of and is certainly dangerous—Lucy points out the dogs. In his article, "The Dog-Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*," Tom Herron analyzes David's becoming-animal in relation to the racial anxiety he suffers from, as well as "conflation of black men and animals," Herron also notes that the dogs that Lucy cares for are "white people's dogs," an "apparatus of deterrence (including electrified fences and guns) designed to control the blacks" (Herron 472, 89). Out in the country, the "dogs still mean something. The more dogs, the more deterrence," and as long as she has them, she will be safe (Coetzee 58). The dogs she cares for are not just the Rottweilers," all of them vigilant "watchdogs" that have been trained to "snarl at the mere smell of a black man" (Coetzee 58,

108). It is also here that David meets Petrus, the self-proclaimed “dog-man,” and co-proprietor of Lucy’s property; when he meets him, David barely gives Petrus another glance—he is simply a black man who works for his daughter—seemingly content in the established hierarchy (Coetzee 62).

It is not long after he arrives at Lucy’s house that, due to his boredom, David is put to work assisting Bev Shaw at her animal clinic. While working with the “dumpy little woman,” David encounters the sick and forgotten, coming into contact with all manner of animal, from birds, to dogs, to livestock—every creature diseased, injured, and seemingly irredeemable. Most notably, though, are the dogs. Contrary to the dogs that David had met earlier at Lucy’s, these are not “well-groomed thoroughbreds,” the fierce guard dogs of the white colonial past, but “a mob of scrawny mongrels,” who crowd the pens, superfluous and unwanted (Coetzee 82). Although the mutts may suffer from all manner of ailments, the main cause of their confinement and eventual euthanasia is “their own fertility” (Coetzee 139). There are simply too many mutts, and so these excess creatures have been brought before Bev with the expectation that she will “make it disappear, dispatch it to oblivion” (Coetzee 139). Despite their abject state, though, Bev takes on the burden of caring for each animal that comes into her clinic, much to David’s own disgust. But with the continuous day-to-day contact with the discarded and diseased animals, witnessing again and again the care Bev offers the animals even on the doors of death, David’s own feelings towards them begins to change. First he empathizes with their abject lives, but then he begins to over-identify with them, finding similarities in their struggles while ignoring his own continued privilege.

The first day he volunteers, Bev looks over a goat who has been brought in after being savaged by a stray dog. The male goat although “bright enough” is in a pitiful state, his scrotum

mutilated and “alive with white grubs waving their blind heads in the air,” too far gone to save; Bev offers to give the buck a “quiet end” but is turned down, much to her sadness (Coetzee 80-1). With this case comes the realization to David that far from a place of healing, this clinic is a place of “last resort,” and in his mind Bev is not a vet, but a New Age Priestess who believes she can “lighten the load of Africa’s suffering beasts” (Coetzee 82). For David, this comes too close to what he believes his daughter is trying to do: to ease his suffering now that he is old, now that he is too far gone. The majority of his time is spent caring for the various dogs at the clinic, and it is with these dogs that David begins to feel a connection. After all, these mutts have done nothing wrong. They are here to be punished for what he believes is simply an animal’s natural instinct.

The mutts themselves are representative of even more than just David’s own projected identification. They, like the pedigree dogs Lucy boards, are the remnants of the white colonial past, symbolic of the overall political and racial instability bubbling under South Africa’s surface in a period of time where awkward reconciliation and uneasy peace clash. Paul Patton examines this relationship David develops with the dogs in his article, “Becoming-Animal and Pure Life in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” where David feels that both the pedigree dogs and the mutts at Bev’s clinic, like him, “are a part of the debris of history: animals out of place in the new South Africa” (Patton 108). Patton asserts that “becoming-animal is always a matter of enhancing and decreasing the powers one has,” and so David begins to over-identify with the dogs for he sees in them a similar loss of power and state of marginalization (Patton 106). Here is where his own tendency to slide back into an old way of thinking surfaces. David makes it well-known that he is a Romanticist, often recalling fondly the work of Wordsworth and Byron, and this is prevalent in his persistent tendency to seek refuge in the imaginary rather than reality, as well as his

conceptualization of animals as figures to augment his own struggles and subjectivities. The mutilated goat is one such early case. David is aghast at Bev's insistence on ending the goat's life with an injection of a drug she simply calls "lethal," and believes he has come to understand the hopelessness of her clinic (Coetzee 81-2). In this instance, David identifies with the goat's fate—his impotence as a buck, his unavoidable death—and he comes to the sudden realization that like the buck, this clinic might very well be his own resting place (Coetzee 82). Yet it is during his time with the mutts that David's propensity towards over-identification is most notable. He imagines their lives are, in some way, much like his own—arguable even better for they are "very egalitarian [...] no classes. No one too high and mighty to smell another's backside" (Coetzee 83). David's Romanticism, as mentioned earlier, functions almost like a veil, a fantasy, that he fashions to then cover the reality of the world, and it is as a result of these created imaginaries that he perceives the similarities between he and the mutts. In his mind, these dogs have, much like himself, also had their position in the hierarchy questioned, left behind by the course of history, victimized by their own sexual desires and superfluous numbers. Like the dogs, David believes that he too has been discarded by society due to no fault of his own, for he had only been adhering to instinct. Overall, from the beginning of the novel the mutt is presented not as a watchdog or an attack-dog, but as a "miserable creatures abandoned through no fault of its own: caged, abandoned, waiting to die or already dead, one upon whose head the disastrous political situation is suddenly dropped, crushing it," a situation David believes he knows only too well (Gal 249-50).

Later in the novel, David and Lucy become the victims of a violent attack committed by a group of black South Africans, where Lucy is raped and David is left horrifically injured and disfigured. As a result of his grievous injuries, David is forced to confront the specificity of his

own body that he had so desperately tried to ignore—his deplorable, aging body—and as he does so, his identification with the dogs begins to shift into an understanding of their lives as living animals. Immediately after the attack, David is shaky, “the first and most superficial signs of shock” he notes, but this trembling is also a characteristic of aging and a “taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hope, without desires, indifferent to the future” (Coetzee 105). David no longer has his powerful totem “the animal” to figure his self, and now as a result of his disfigurement, he must “get used to looking odd, worse than odd, repulsive—one of those sorry creatures whom children gawk at in the streets” (Coetzee 118). So he goes back to working with Bev, needing some sense of purpose to anchor his fading identity, and takes over the gruesome job of burning the dead dogs’ bodies. The burning of the bodies marks a large step towards David’s identity reformation, as well as functioning as a method by which he may achieve redemption. While at first he simply transported the bodies to the incinerator, when he witnesses the workmen “beat the bags with the back of their shovels before loading them, to break their rigid limbs,” he is struck by the disgrace with which they treated these bodies and takes over himself (Coetzee 141). The burning becomes ritualized in his own eyes, something sacred fueled by a need to somehow honor these forgotten bodies in the way that his own aging, injured body had not been, as well as a desire to believe that there is something more awaiting his own body once he is gone. Despite the belief that eventually he would acclimate to the weekly killings and disposal, David is distraught to find that “the more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets,” eventually breaking down in tears and confusion at his own reaction; when before he had been so apathetic to the plight of animals, the irreverent way in which the dogs’ bodies are treated before incineration—being beaten into a more manageable size, stuffed carelessly inside the incinerator—affects him greatly for reasons he can not yet understand

(Coetzee 139). In this instance, David feels a deep connection to the bodies of these dogs, linked by what he sees as the careless treatment of a body that has been deemed superfluous and so, disposable.

In *Disgrace*, “the animal” as a figure has not just been limited to David’s imaginings of sexual prowess. Over the course of the novel, David’s sense of self has been visibly unstable, and he is constantly suffering from moments of masculine confidence before sliding back into self-hatred and insecurity. Accordingly, the figure of “the animal” would thus appear when he feels particularly demoralized as the “embodiment of disgrace,” just as it appeared when he felt powerful (Herron 487). This becomes even more visible when the animal is brought into the physical, when David is mutilated by the gang of black men and now has a physical self that reflects the abjection and self-hatred he had internalized. David has been emasculated in almost every aspect of his life—from the failings of his steadily aging body, the apathy he feels while teaching, to his dwindling sexual life, and now within his own body. The abrupt conclusion of his “relationship” with Soraya brings the inadequacies of his body and sexuality into focus, and David considers whether it would be time to “retire from the game” or even face castration (Coetzee 9). The reality is that he is growing older, and as he ages, those aspects of his life that used to make up the foundation of his identity are failing him more and more as the balance of power shifts. As he takes over the ritualistic burning of bodies, in an unexpected turn, he has switched roles with Petrus, no longer David Lurie, the academic, but now David the “dog undertaker,” a variation on the “dog-man” (Coetzee 143).

The inversion of the hierarchy of power on the farm for Petrus and David is further exasperated by the appearance of twin lambs, purchased by Petrus for a feast to celebrate his new status as a landowner. The interactions between David and Petrus’s twin sheep are short but, in



his mind, significant—for David believes that he has forged an unusual connection with these sacrificial creatures. Initially, their presence is an annoyance for David. After all, they are Petrus’s sheep, and it should be Petrus who cares for them; instead he leaves them tethered up outside of his home where they bleat all day. David, who has slowly undertaken a change in his perception of animals, takes particular offense with this situation and claims that it wrong to bring “the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them” (Coetzee 121). For David, there is a stark difference in how he treats the sheep—he is the one who brings them closer to food and water—and how Petrus treats the sheep, and the lack of care Petrus demonstrates towards them disgusts David. The sheep are there for only a short while before being brought to slaughter as is the fate of all sheep to be “destined since birth for the butcher’s knife,” for they “do not own themselves, do not own their lives. They exist to be used, every last ounce of them, their flesh to be eaten, their bones to be crushed and fed to poultry” (Coetzee 120). David believes that the resentment he feels towards Petrus is solely for the sake of the sheep, that he has developed some sympathy for the plight of the poorly treated animals with whom...

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. (Coetzee 123).

Although David claims to still believe animals in principle do not a right to their own lives<sup>3</sup>, or a choice in the matter of which will die and which will live, the sheep’s plight still disturbs him.

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<sup>3</sup> Lurie states “I haven’t changed my ideas, if that is what you mean. I still don’t believe that animals have properly individual lives. Which among them get to live, which get to die, is not, as far as I am concerned, worth agonizing over” (123).

But there is another reason for his discomfort, rooted in the racist ideologies that still lurk deep within David. It is not quite so much as the treatment of the sheep that bothers him, but the fact that it is Petrus, the “dog-man,” Lucy’s once-worker now landowner (as well as his future son-in-law), who has gained enough money and power to buy sheep for a large meal (Coetzee 62). Suddenly in this situation, the social hierarchy that had previously been established—at least in David’s mind—is overturned as Petrus is the one with the power while David has been brought low through his defacement, and the rape of his daughter during the attack that had secured Petrus’s position. David feels more relation with the abject beasts of burden destined for sacrifice and slaughter, as his daughter is also prepared to sacrifice her own autonomy, wedding Petrus and forfeiting her land-ownership, in order to secure her safety. In order to maintain at least some semblance of superiority, David feels anger towards Petrus’s treatment of the sheep, even though he has treated livestock in much the same way during his life. But with Petrus, it is different. Whereas David believes he has learned to honor the animals he kills, making a sacred ritual out of the disposal of the bodies, in David’s eyes, Petrus shows no sense of this compassion or sacrifice. In Petrus’s mind (focalized through David’s judgment), a body is a body, and bodies—both animal bodies and women bodies—are little more than resources to be consumed and utilized. The newly “changed” David is simply unable to understand this almost sacrilegious way of thinking.

The difference that David perceives is that he has learned the true meaning of “sacrifice”—even as he disparages Lucy’s own voluntary sacrifice—and in his ritualistic burning of bodies, he has learned what it means to honor even the bodies of the dead. In the case of the sheep, Petrus is slaughtering both sheep for food only, for that is their function; but David has gradually become dependent on the concept of ritualistic sacrifice—his means of reorienting his

destabilized sense of self. Petrus's killing, as a result, is reprehensible in comparison to David's, and his daughter's, own sacrifice<sup>4</sup>. However, the concept of "sacrifice" is much more complex than just simply killing. When Georges Bataille discusses the intricacies of sacrifice, he defines "religious sacrifice" as "not to kill, but to relinquish and to give," or even as "the production of *sacred* things;" in these types of ritualistic sacrifice, the "importance of death and the identification between sacrificers" is paramount, and the killing itself is inconsequential, an "exhibition of a much deeper meaning": that of surpassing a previous order, that of apartheid within *Disgrace*, which has already been surpassed (Bataille 21, 213). In creating a ritual of "sacrificing" the bodies of the dogs, David believes that he is creating a sacred act that could, perhaps, lead the way to his own redemption in a time when his own relevance in his country has been, in Coetzee's words, "relegated to a back roads" or obscurity. Yet this belief also reveals facets of David's own hypocritical nature, for though he claims to know much of sacrifice, to have changed, he still has the tendency to slide back to old ways, such as the justification of his feelings of disgust towards Petrus, and his consistent inability to understand Lucy's decisions—her acting as an agent—who may be constructing her own sacred things. David claims to have changed in his perception of animals, having taken on the sacrificial burden of carrying the dogs' bodies to be burned, and even offers up the dancing mutt, "the young dog [...] the one who likes music," the one with which he had bonded with to be euthanized in a show of selfless sacrifice. After all, though he could make the choice to save him, in David's mind "a time must come, it

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<sup>4</sup> It is critical to note here that in David's mind, his judgment is founded upon what he believes is an empathetic concern for these sheep; however, as I have discussed earlier on, David's perceived "empathy" is not rooted in an understanding of the suffering of the lives of animals, but in the symbolic meaning these sacrificial animals represent—a visible example of the inversion of power between he and Petrus. Here, David still perceives "the animal" as a figure.

cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring [the dog] to Bev Shaw in her operating room” (Coetzee 214). Yet whether or not David has truly changed remains uncertain.

There are contradictions, however, between David’s “fall from grace” and his supposed sacrificial redemption. This stems in part from a tension in the free indirect discourse of the novel’s narration, a tension between the narrative as channeled through his own point of view and that which detaches into a more omniscient point of view, such as with his final confrontation with Soraya. David’s self-representations are directly demonstrative of the current state of his sense of self, from the confident predatory language and imagery that steeps his interactions with Melanie, to later following his own crumbling identity as he reimagines himself, not a predator, but as one of the old mutts one must cart to the crematorium every day while working with Bev. David claims that as a result of this process, he has found redemption, grace in his own disgrace; however, David Lurie was and still is a hypocritical character. In his article, “A Note on the Use of Animals for Remapping Victimhood in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” Naom Gal argues that over the course of the novel, Coetzee continuously emphasizes Lurie’s new marginalization, presenting instances where David is forced to come faced-to-face with his inadequacy, where he must continuously struggle to restructure his sense of self. This consistent repetition also works to give the reader the impression that he is deserving of forgiveness, redemption, and that in offering up his favorite dancing mutt, he is prepared to make a sacrifice for all of his past sins, to be a changed man. After all, where else would he discover a “sacrifice large enough proportions to redeem his collective-racial sin (as a white person in Africa), his personal-gender sin (as a man who abuses women and girls), and his humane sin (putting dogs to death)” (Gal 248)? Yet it remains very clear that in the end, David has not gained the understanding of the suffering and sacrifice of animals and others as he has claimed. He may

come close to understanding, but ultimately he still slides back into his old ways of perceiving the figure of “the animal” rather than the animal itself—and in doing so demonstrates his willful disavowment of his own past actions.

David’s immediate reaction to the attack on he and Lucy in the beginning of the novel is a prime example of this. The attack is terribly violent and traumatic for both he and Lucy, and so David’s response is expected. He responds with rage towards such an act and indignation at the utter lack of care given; yet this instance then highlights David’s own hypocrisy in “condemning the violent acts done to his daughter while denying his guilt for the violence he visits on women,” such as with Melanie (Price 65-6). There is not a point throughout the novel where David considers his actions towards Melanie as wrong or even as rape, instead passing it off as an act of Eros. In both of the cases, the defining difference is that David and Lucy are white, whereas the group of men—and most likely Melanie as well—are black; he may find similarities in his sexual behaviors and the animals he works with, and in many cases he does characterize his desire in the language of “animality,” but his tendency towards romanticization is strong, and he “neglects considering his position and actions of domination as rape” (Price 66). Even near the end of the novel, after David has supposedly found redemption and understanding in disgrace, he still slides back into his old tendencies when he goes to Melanie’s family with the guise of offering an apology, unable to stop himself from lusting after Melanie’s younger sister, Desiree. But this hypocrisy is conscious, because even at the novel’s end, David still appears to be the perfect figure of the neoliberal, white South African, who has claimed to have changed, to be above the racial tension in the Cape even as he refers to the black Africans in animalistic terms, as a pack of dogs, as swine. David figures himself as the sacrificial figure—not far from the “scapegoat” he believed the university needed in their disciplinary action. Much like that of

the lamb bound for slaughter, or the mutts condemned as a result of their rampant sexual drive. But in the end, can it really be said that he has repented? Or does he still continue to be a hypocritical figure, redeemed in his own mind, but still continuing on enforcing the same racist and sexist ideologies, and believing himself to be superior or above others?

*Disgrace* concludes with a scene of apparent sacrifice. David takes the mutt he has bonded with to Bev, well aware that “this dog would die for him,” and also aware that he could adopt the dog himself, yet he does not (Coetzee 210). He is just “giving him up” (Coetzee 215). This sacrificial act can be read as one will cleanse him of his past sins and transgressions, and yet, rather than the pure white lambs of religion, David chooses the crippled, young dog to bear his sins, for it is the mutts with which he has created a deep connection with. Perhaps David’s offering up of his favored dog is to be proof that he has truly repented and found redemption. Certainly in his own mind, David believes that he has come to understand the animal as more than just a figure or a totem for man, but as a living creature with a life that can be given and made sacred—just like his own. Yet in reality, in his “sacrifice” of the mutt, the animal once again becomes a figure of “the animal” as David continues to conflate his own sense of identity with that of “the animal,” albeit now rather than with the supremacy of a predator, it is with the veneration of the abjected and discarded. In David’s mind, he is just like them, one of the forgotten mutts left along the side of the road as the new world order plunges on ahead without him; but in imagining this, the animal is one again relegated to the role of figuration, a way for David to yet again reestablish his “superiority” in a changing world.

### CHAPTER III

#### PEIRCING THE VEIL: MONSTROISTY AND THE SACRED IN BEUKES'S *BROKEN MONSTERS*

In the introduction to a special issue of *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, entitled, “South African representations of ‘America,’” scholars Ronit Frenkel and Andrea Spain highlight what appear to be “conduits” that travel between South Africa and the United States; this revelation ultimately illuminates the existence of “transnational connections” between the two continents that have facilitated the circulation of cultural and political influence—particularly of racialization and social stratification—through place, processes of categorization, and texts (Frenkel, Spain 193). But why is it that these transnational connections between South Africa and the U.S. are so significant to literary study? In this particular issue of *Safundi*, scholars are devoted to finding the answer to this question, as well as what exactly it is that links these two places so tightly. In their article, Frenkel and Spain draw attention to links “between oppressions that cut across nations and continents”—specifically a link deeply rooted in the systematic discrimination and oppression of black South Africans and black African Americans—and note how today, these connections have blurred the distinctions between what has formerly been understood as a “South African” text, and an “American” text (Frenkel, Spain 194). As I discussed previously in my past chapter, as this discrimination was brought to life, people of color called for a societal restructuring, and the pre-establish social order was disrupted. In South Africa, this would be the fall of Apartheid, which led to a great

reconfiguring of institutions and structures, resulting in a backlash as many white South Africans suddenly found their supposedly “innate” claim to power revoked, while other more progressive whites were made to confront the extent of their white privilege. In the U.S., this backlash was made visible in the appearance of America’s “forgotten man.”

The term, “the forgotten man,” came about in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it became politicized during the 1930s, when the U.S. and other countries were impacted by an economic failure that came to be known as the Great Depression. In 1932, President Franklin Roosevelt gave his “Forgotten Man” speech, where he declared that in order to rise up from their economic slump, society must “put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid” (Roosevelt )<sup>5</sup>. However, this terminology has rapidly become politicized as, rather than standing for a real population, it has become representative of a fiction—a group made up primarily of working-class or working-poor white men who have formed an imagined sense of disenfranchisement, deeply rooted in racial anxiety. These supposedly “forgotten men” believe that they have been displaced as a result of the societal reconfiguration, made abject, pushed to the margins and prevented from achieving the “good life” they believed they had earned. It is crucial to note, though, that this population is largely fictitious, for even though they may not have an unquestionable claim to superiority any longer, white men still possess a large amount of privilege due to the color of their skin and their gender. This fiction has originated from a perceived threat to the white men’s position of power by the rising presence of people of color and women within the social structure—these men are now confronted with their own privilege and rather than face this contestation and their own loss, they claim to be disenfranchised and “forgotten.” In “Shining Girls and Forgotten Men in Lauren Beukes’s Urban ‘America,’” Andrea

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase “forgotten men” was later shown to have been lifted from the late nineteenth-century Social Darwinist, William Graham Sumner’s work entitled *The Great Exception*.



Spain charts this politicized fiction, arguing that its rise circulates as a kind of global unconscious in both South Africa and the U.S. She goes on to argue that by imaging “the displacement and condensation of a rising global political unconscious,” Beukes accentuates the “violent drive of a white male imaginary [...] in both US and South African infrastructural urban histories,” especially when these frustrated men are confronted with their own privilege (Spain 259). Also significant is that in contrast to the South African author’s previous novels, *Broken Monsters* is situated right in the middle of the US’s rustbelt in what could be considered the “heartland” of the US: Detroit. Some scholars argue that doing so is a way for Beukes to “write about Johannesburg again,” for as well as being a part of the rustbelt, Detroit is also set apart as one of the U.S.’s most highly segregated cities (Frenkel, qtd in Spain 261). By switching perspectives—from the aspiring artist and serial killer, Clayton Broom, to the detective, Gabriele Versado, to Gabi’s young daughter, Layla, a girl with a vision—the poverty and racial tension within the city is made highly visible.

It is within this discourse of America’s “forgotten men” and racial anxiety that Beukes sets her novel. She emphasizes this imagined sense of failure felt by one of America’s supposedly “forgotten men,” Clayton Broom, as she blends together elements of crime fiction and the supernatural to reveal the horrors of the human mind when Clayton finds his mind infiltrated by “the dream”—a mysterious force that has taken over Clayton’s physical body in order to enact its own goals—as well as what can occur if that mind—and that sense of self—is disrupted. I will argue that as the line that separates “Clayton” and “the dream” grow weaker, so too does the line between the human and the nonhuman world as Clayton tries to bring them together through his art. However, what begins as a series of murders—or art, as Clayton perceives it—devolves into a desperate endeavor to pierce the veil between these two worlds as

Clayton seeks to create a new world order that would restore his place of power. Even as his own sense of self crumbles away, overwritten by “the dream,” Clayton is propelled by a desire to arise from the ashes of this old world; yet this paper will also argue that instead of rebirth, Clayton finds himself transformed into something monstrous, something that belongs does not belong to either the human or nonhuman world but is something *Other*.

The idea that the human and nonhuman—and by “nonhuman,” I primarily mean that which is considered “animal” or the dream-force operating within the novel—function in two distinctive and separate realms is not a new concept. There is a rather strong belief that to be considered “human” is to be innately more than “animal,” as being in possession of some specific characteristics that has distinguished them from that which is the nonhuman animal. Thus, the nonhuman animal has often been reduced to the figure of “the animal” whose value is dictated not by its importance as an autonomous entity, but, as argued in Chapter I of this thesis, by its usefulness in acting as a totem or symbol to augment or diminish the subjectivities of the individual or a people. As a figure, “the animal” can then be imbued with whatever symbolic meaning or importance that a particular community perceives in it, as well as be bestowed with all that is abject. In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, theorist Rosi Braidotti notes how in Western thought, there is a tendency to perceive “the animal” as the “metaphysical other of man,” as something that should be treated with hatred and disgust for it disrupts the established order of “civilized” society (Braidotti 121). The moral standing and respect granted to the “human” does not apply to “the animal,” and as a result, to be construed as animal is to be considered innately less than the “civilized” human beings. Similarly, when Jason Price examines this distinction within the context of South African apartheid in his book entitled *Animals and Desire in South African Fiction: Bioethics and Resistance to Colonization*, he notes

how this distinction “enables a ‘non-criminal putting to death’ of the animal” that can also be utilized as a “precedent for the treatment of the native peoples of South Africa” due to their status as “outside the human community” (Price 17). It is for this reason that Clayton’s “art,” which for him is something so wondrous and sublime, is perceived as something horrific by a large part of society. Each of Clayton’s murders blends together “the human” with “the animal” to the point of physically connecting these two supposedly distinct entities, and forcing society to face head on that which has been regarded as “outside,” disrupting what is thought to be known about the natural order. As both Braidotti and Price have acknowledged, to be judged “animal” is to be construed as outside of the established order. With such a dualistic way of construing “the human” and “the animal,” anything that blends the two categories is immediately imbued with a sense of naturalized fear for it is undeniably Other, and as a result, it must be excluded in order to preserve societal stability. Clayton perceives himself to be challenging this, breaking this order to walk through the door to go *outside* the social, to bring about a new sociality and potentiality.

Clayton’s desire to use the naturalized fear of the other to transcend that which is ostensibly human is immediately brought to the forefront of *Broken Monsters* with the novel’s opening, and a gruesome discovery: the body of a young boy has been discovered, and the detectives are horrified to see “a dark gash, right above where his hips should be, where he has been somehow...attached” to the hindquarters of a deer (Beukes 4). The description of body is laced with the abject—severed intestines “leaking shit and blood into the conjoined cavities,” the “gamy reek of the deer’s scent glands,” and even more horrifying, the way that the bodies are crudely sewn together so that “the flesh appears melted together at the seam,” creating something entirely Other (Beukes 4). Given the humorously dark moniker of “Bambi,” this marks the first

of a series of murders, each more grotesque than the last, and each marked by a chimerical appearance: human features and limbs physically attached to the nonhuman animal. The unmistakable horror and terror at these twisted bodies originates from what appears to be a breach of what had been thought to be safe and known, only to produce something entirely *unknown*, and thus, dangerous. Even as Clayton fantasizes about his “art” as liberatory—as a way to finally allow society to see—it might be said to hearken to medieval mixing, whereby figuring of animals stood for the alien, the criminal, the utterly foreign, or, that which is outside human sociality. Although her research most deals with the earlier centuries of France, in her article, “Man as rabid beast: Criminals into Animals in Late Medieval France,” Jolanta Komornicka research on the process of othering and investigates the linkage between the figure of “the animal” and “the criminal” in fourteenth-century France is critical to understanding what it is about Clayton, and about Clayton’s “art” that is so inherently horrific to the rest of society. Komornicka argues that due to long periods of warfare and plague, living animals are regarded with anger and fear; as such, the figure of “the animal” becomes representative of not only “internal unreason” within society, but also of a “very real manifestation of what lay outside human civilization and thus human control;” as a result of being perceived as “a mirror of the vices and virtues of human beings [...] the most reviled and loathed animals came to symbolize those who engendered hatred,” namely populations considered to be abject or marginalized (Komornicka 158, 168).

If in face Clayton stands as a figure of the “forgotten man” imaginary in what Lauren Berlant has called our “historical present,” positioning himself as one of those who have been pushed to the margins of society, facing systematic disenfranchisement and discrimination, the figure of “the animal” emerges as evidence of his sense of alienation, in particular, as well as the

form that might enable his ascent. The consistent appearance of a crow—a bird that has been commonly associated with death and decay, a scavenger that lingers on the outskirts of society and feeds off the kills of another being—accompanies Clayton. This harbinger of his failed attempt of the sublime is a sign of the death and destruction that now follow him, for after failing in his attempt to transcend himself and ascend outside the social, the turn towards death is inevitable. It is telling that when Clayton is introduced, he is already visibly struggling with an internal sense of frustration and failure. Like the scavenging crow, he keeps to the outskirts of society, unable—or unwilling—to enter into the city due to his feelings of failure at not achieving the so-called “good life” he should have<sup>6</sup>. Now he drives through the night, experiencing waking dreams where “his brain summons shapes up out of the darkness” and transforms the wet leaves along the dark road into “a mush of crows, all rotten feathers and pointy beaks” (Beukes 31). Here the figure of “the animal” is not only one that is largely construed as a harbinger of death and waste, but it is also a notably abject figuring, not a whole bird but a “mush” of rotten parts squished together along the side of the road. Komornicka notes how the “half animal” is often more terrifying than the whole animal for it forms an image of “a revelatory instance of imaginative slippage between the human and animal”—a “revelatory” slipping because it revealed the true frailty of the line separating what is human, and what is animal (Komornicka 157). The horror the first body incites is highlighted by a physical manifestation of a half animal—a visibly crude blending of a human—and note that it is a young, African American boy from an upwardly mobile family, a figure of the forgotten man’s proposed cause of the societal restructuring that had led to Clayton’s displacement—and an animal to form

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<sup>6</sup> In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant defines her “cruel optimism” as the “relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic” (33). It is upon this definition that the conceptualization of the “good life” and failure to achieve is founded upon.

something definitively Other. Significantly, the theorist Giorgio Agamben also takes on this conceptualization of a “half animal” in his chapter from *Homo Sacer* entitled “The Ban and the Wolf.” Agamben draws the connection between the criminalized or outcast individual, and the “the *wargus*, the wolf-man” in ancient Germanic and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Agamben notes Rodolphe Jhering’s approximation of the wolf-man with what Jhering calls “*Friedlos*, the ‘man without peace,’” where to be considered “Friedlos” is to be considered an outcast and in some cases, as “already dead” (Agamben 105). Agamben then highlights how the outcast criminal is associated with the figure of the world in particular—savage, irrational, dangerous—and argues that what “remained in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city” (Agamben 105). This man is thus characterized as “a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man [...] who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither” (Agamben 105). Beukes takes this naturalized anxiety generated by the physical manifestation of this indistinction and brings it to the forefront as Clayton’s creations continue to illustrate this slippage, as well as Clayton’s own slippage into the realms of the nonhuman.

In contrast to the fear of this failing distinction, some theorists perceive such a future as immanent and even encourage society to strive for a harmonious union of the human and nonhuman realms. Multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway actively urges society to reconfigure their relations with the nonhuman and the earth in her book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. In the midst of spiraling ecological disaster, Haraway argues that it is time to move past what has been called the Anthropocene—a time denotes “great mass death and extinction; of onrushing disasters [...] of refusing to present in and to onrushing

catastrophe in time; of unprecedented looking away”—and into a new epoch she calls the “Chthulucene” where the human and nonhuman have become inextricably tied together (Haraway 35). By “Chthulucene,” Haraway does not refer to H.P. Lovecraft’s own nightmarish monster but rather the “diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces and collected things” that entangles even “the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus” (Haraway 101). Only a new world understanding of this magnitude would allow the order to be “reknitted” where “human beings are with and of the earth” and reinvent “conditions for multispecies flourishing” (Haraway 130). At first, it may appear that Clayton’s own inspired artwork is an attempt to enact such a change by forcing society to confront their own discomfort and proximity with the inhuman; however, just as Clayton fantasizes about his artwork’s liberatory nature, this too becomes another component to Clayton’s fantasy that he has appropriated and twisted, not only misunderstanding its original meaning and purpose, but misconstruing the “new world order” for his own purposes—to create a world order that could restore him to his position of power, rather than enabling anything that might look like a “multispecies flourishing.”

The Chthulucene as Haraway describes it refers to the idea that the human and nonhuman are already inextricably wound together, entangled to form what could be considered a “symbiotic” relationship fostering multispecies flourishing. Haraway takes this understanding of “symbiosis” a step further with her theory of “Symbiogenesis,” where she claims that there is a “cobbling together of living entities to make something new in the biological [...] mode” that would then potentially “open up the palette (and palate) of possible collaborative living” (Haraway 218). At first, it may be argued that Clayton does form some kind of symbiotic relationship—similar to the relationships that Haraway has described—with this entity he calls

“the dream.” When the reader first meets Clayton, he seems to fit into the criteria of the “forgotten man” fiction: older, white, living from job to job, and suffering from an perceived sense of disenfranchisement and rejection. This frustration and stagnancy is paralleled in his artistry, where although he claims the lack of work grants him time to devote to his craft, instead Clayton finds a similar sense of rejection as he is bypassed by curators and is unable to fit in with the younger artists of the “Eastern Market” (Beukes 75). Even when he is offered a chance to show his work, he becomes paralyzed while “everything he tried seemed like a dead thing under his hands” (Beukes 32). Clayton is apt with his hands and has experience as a laborer, but when it comes to talking and communicating with other people, he struggles. At the novel’s start, Clayton is propelled by a desire to somehow make up for his perceived past failures with the creation of his “legacy,” leading to his search for an ex-girlfriend who has supposedly kept his son away from him—perhaps if he can find and support this family, he will have a chance at the “good life.”<sup>7</sup> In reality, Charlie—his ex-girlfriend’s son—is not actually his; however, it is heavily apparent that Clayton has lost his rationality to this fantasy for he is willfully oblivious to Lou’s claim that Charlie is not his because “[they] did it once. Barely” (Beukes 38). In Clayton’s mind, he is being presented with the opportunity to sustain a family, to act as a “father figure” for Charlie and finally create some sort of legacy just like what his own father had wished for him (Beukes 40).

Desperate to keep hold of what he sees as his last chance to achieve a “satisfying narrative” for a life that has previously been filled with disappointment and failure, Clayton

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<sup>7</sup> For an extended discussion of Clayton’s “cruel optimism” and capital’s failure to guarantee the good life, again see Spain, Andrea. “Shining Girls and Forgotten Men in Lauren Beukes’s urban ‘America,’” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2017, pp. 258-78.



purses after Lou after she flees only to lose control of his car, glimpsing “feral eyes glowing in the darkness” before he crashes (Spain 261, Beukes 41). The “good life” he had dreamt of achieving seems suddenly out of reach. Moments after his wreck, Clayton locates the cause—a badly injured fawn that “[panics] at his touch, kicking out, trying to get to its feet. But there [is] too much wreckage inside” (Beukes 43). But as Clayton stares into its eyes, he suddenly experiences a strange sensation “like he was falling into its eyes,” and it is at that moment of eye contact when suddenly “there were doors opening in the trees all around him, a door swinging open in his head,” that “the dream” enters in (Beukes 43). This mysterious entity—known only to Clayton as “the dream”—takes over Clayton’s consciousness and body in order to navigate through city; but rather than fear the strange gaps in his memory, Clayton feels more inspired than ever, believing he has finally discovered the key to achieving that life he had always wished for, and while he “[slips] away into [his art], like diving into the deepest part of the lake,” his consciousness is stifled beneath the surface as “the dream” takes control with a single desire: to break through the rigid boundaries dividing up the world and reveal the “world beneath the world” (Beukes 90). It claims to sense a second world running just under the surface of the known external world, “unconscious currents beneath the city” that run through everything but especially in art, which prompts “the dream” to claim that perhaps “the world *can* be twisted and bent” (Beukes 91). Clayton’s artwork has come the closest to breaking through, but now, with its help, “the dream” is certain that together they can break through the veil. At this point, their relationship can arguably be considered to be “symbiotic” as both beings appear to benefit from the other’s relationship, with Clayton finding an answer to his rather unsatisfying narrative, and “the dream” given mobility and a physical form. Together, they create their first piece—the fawn-boy—hoping that “the fact of him, will rip through the skin between the worlds, let them

slip away, back home. Or bring them crashing in on them,” yet it ends in failure (Beukes 92). Thus, it must continue to craft its own grisly artistry and sew the physical bodies of the human and the nonhuman animal together, so that the world will made to finally *see*.

To see what, however, is not quite clear at first. According to “the dream” and its claims of a second world beneath the skin of the first, society must be made to see this second world; only then could “they slip away, back home” (Beukes 92). But this paper argues that in fact, the world that “the dream” and Clayton want to reveal and bring together highly resembles Haraway’s own assertion of the intricately tangled “Chthulucene”—though one that has been misconstrued by Clayton’s own imagined narrative. The world order that he perceives is very much in line with how he has come to understand what this new entangled world order would look like, as well as what his place would be within that new order, and so he and “the dream” believe that they know the secret to achieving Haraway’s Chthulucene. “The dream” states that “you need life to make life,” as well as form this new collaborative way of living, and it is with this in mind that he sews the hindquarters of the deer that caused his wreck to the torso of a young boy called Daveyton<sup>8</sup> (Beukes 91). “The dream” is confident that it did everything correctly with its first creation and even brings the body “close to the physical border between Canada and the Untied States, in the hopes that borders overlap” (Beukes 92). Despite this, the fawn-boy does not stand and walk (Beukes 92). It does not live like he believes it should. Still, “the dream” is determined to create this door, to liberate the world so that they finally understand and *see*, and so it will try again. Just as he has taken on the imaginary of the “forgotten man” and

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<sup>8</sup> It is notable in this instance that Clayton’s first victim is the young child of an upwardly mobile African American family—the same marginalized population that Clayton claims to have been displaced by due to societal restructuring. That his first target is their young son is also significant for Daveyton would represent another area where this family has succeeded while he has failed: leaving behind a legacy.

disavowed his white privilege, taking on the position and extracting art by the marginalized and abject, Clayton recklessly takes on Haraway's conceptualization of a Chthulucene epoch yet misunderstands the humility involved in such a becoming imagined by Haraway's understanding—as a world where human and nonhuman animal live harmoniously, one and the same. By contrast, Clayton has appropriated this understanding. This is not to say that Clayton has actually read Haraway, but rather it illuminates the appeal that proposals like Haraway's have for fascist thought, and for those who would misread her assertion of the Chthulucene as an individualistic objective, rather than a present period of time of multispecies flourishing, one that Haraway believes we are all currently embedded in. In Clayton's mind, however, the current state of the world is deplorable and, unable to handle the configuration of the social order, he calls for a new social order—one he believes that only he (and “the dream”) can bring about. The ultimate desire of “the dream” is to have its creations be made discernable to the entire world, to not just be viewed but also understood. If this occurs, then it would be able to finally open the door and “pierce the skin of the world, collapse dimensions, and open the doors,” allowing all the “dreams” and “dreamers” to escape (Beukes 236). Clayton's creations are visibly disturbing, horrific. Yet instead of stirring a sense of naturalized fear at what appears to be a visible slippage of the human into the inhuman towards a flourishing end, Clayton reinforces the *ban*—giving a visible representative of what is acceptable and what is not within the interior of the city, of society. But Clayton's creations also illustrate something more, something else that possesses the ability to shake the human to the core.

Why is it that his artwork, this physical representation of the inhuman, is so horrific to the rest of “civilized” human society? As I have discussed earlier, this fear is partially due to the physical manifestation of what both Komornicka and Agamben have referred to as the “half

animal”—where the “half animal” has been related to the criminal or outcast, the one who has been excluded from “human” societies and must live on the *outside*. That which is “half animal” is not wholly human, nor is it wholly animal, but rather it is something *Other*. When caught in the gaze of the nonhuman animal, the human waits for a moment of signification, but it does not arrive for the reality is that this signification does not exist. At first glance, it seems that this physical manifestation of the lack of signification between human and nonhuman is the reason that Clayton’s creations incite such horror; however, the horror may also be accredited to the gruesome violence and transgression that Clayton has enacted against human and animal alike, dismembering and mutilating the bodies, crudely sewing the parts together into a crude imitation of art. Still some would assert that it is out of this failure of signification that violence then emerges, such as Slavoj Žižek who argues that for “every violent acting out is a sign that there is something you are not able to put into words” or understand (Žižek). Along with the horror of their appearance these chimerical creations represent a failure to describe or locate this signification, forcibly breaking through the rigid categorization of the world and cause humankind to question itself. These categorical systems have long existed as a way of maintaining a stable order, of distinguishing that which is acceptable, and that which is not. When they are broken, the order becomes destabilized. When confronted by the nonhuman, however, these categories, founded upon and supported by decades of systematic discrimination and oppression, inevitably disintegrate, and the line between human and nonhuman becomes permeable. As an artist, Clayton has noticed how everyone and everything is firmly “locked into what [they] are,” yet through his art, he has come close to arriving at a moment like Derrida describes—a moment of malaise, absent of signification (Beukes 68). Together with “the dream,” though, Clayton comes even closer, but with one significant difference; whereas it can

be claimed that Derrida stares into the eyes of the nonhuman animal, falling into the “abyssal limit of the human,” and lingering there, Clayton falls without lingering. Just as when he met the gaze of the dying deer and fell into its eyes, feeling “doors” opening all around him and even within him, when Clayton meets the gaze of the nonhuman, he believes he has passed through it and risen from the ashes, reborn.

This concept of “rebirth,” and even further, of “transcendence” is a crucial component to understanding the complex fantasy that Clayton has created, together with “the dream.” From the outside perspective, the relationship between Clayton and “the dream” truly seems to be a symbiotic one,” and it appears as if Clayton has finally “transcended [himself]” and “evolved as an artist” (Beukes 69). After years of failure, Clayton believes that he has, in essence, been reborn anew, with his creations that have transcended the boundaries, transcended what we define as “human” and “animal.” In truth, though, what at first seems to be a transcendence into a new world preludes what can only be imminent destruction. Clayton had taken on the narrative of the “forgotten man,” believing that he has been wronged by a destabilized social order, and then in his desperation to achieve this perverse desire towards death, to escape the constraints of the social, Clayton then takes the rhetoric and art of the liberators, claiming that the artwork he and “the dream” have created will be the flame to spark a change in society, ushering in a new era. Rather than change, however, Clayton’s creation only incite fear, and as his consciousness becomes more blended with “the dream,” it is not long before Clayton loses himself, inadvertently transforming himself into something that is not completely human, nor does he belong completely to the realm of the nonhuman. Instead, as their previously symbiotic relationship becomes parasitic, Clayton becomes something *Other*, something monstrous, *Friedlos*.

With each perceived failure, “the dream” grows more desperate to somehow spread its vision out into the world, to let the truth be seen. Very quickly, Clayton’s sense of self becomes overwritten by the force of “the dream” as he is “eaten up inside by the dreaming thing he let into his head that didn’t mean to get trapped here” (Beukes 91). It had been “drawn out by the raw wound of the man’s mind, blazing like a lamp in one of those border places where the skin of the worlds is permeable” but now it only desires to escape and return to its home (Beukes 91). As the distinction between Clayton and “the dream” grows thinner, it becomes distorted and corrupt, culminating in its transformation into a living nightmare at the Fleischer Body Plant where Clayton proclaims he will reveal his greatest work yet. It is here that the distinction between dream and reality, the human and the nonhuman, begin to bend—and Clayton himself begins to fall apart, leaving behind only the monstrous “half-remembered semblance” of Clayton Broom. Along with noting the potential that may arise from accepting this lack of distinction between human and nonhuman, many of the scholars have also acknowledged another component to this distinction: the presence of the monstrous. Scholars Chris Koenig-Woodyard, Shalini Nanayakkara, and Yashvi Khatri have analyzed this presence across the humanities and the sciences in a special issue of *Monster Studies*, and they have argued that the “prowling and lurking, interrogating, and trans-morgrifying textual (re-)composition of monsters is deconstructive, abjective, and intertextual” (Woodyard et al. 2-5). They assert that “monstrosity” has come to be defined as really anything that may “transgress communally defined and maintained codes of legal and social behavior,” resulting in the “abnormal;” to cite Julia Kristeva, the “monstrous” is also the “abject,”<sup>9</sup> that which is “radically separate, loathsome. Not

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on this process of Othering, look at Julia Kristeva’s book entitled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, where Kristeva traces the historical process of the “abject” and its relation to the *Other*. To be considered “abject” is to stand “contrary [...] radically

me. Not that. But not thing either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (Woodyard et al. 10, Kristeva 2). Initially, Clayton’s art had incited the naturalized fear of the “half animal” and the *Other*, but as the previously harmonious relationship between Clayton and “the dream” devolves, this fear becomes actualized in Clayton’s own physical appearance, as he himself is transformed into something monstrous, Agamben’s own “half animal.”

Earlier in this paper, I used Agamben’s definition of the “half animal” to discuss the seemingly inherent fear that arises at the site of Clayton’s gruesome artwork—a fear that has been naturalized as a consequence of the relation drawn between the “half animal” and the criminalized body or outcast. In some ways, Clayton does fit into this conceptualization: he perceives himself to be an outcast, and this sense of exclusion only grows with the infiltration of “the dream.” Agamben then makes a surprising comparison where he assesses the sacred body and its relation to the criminal body, questioning “what is the status of the living body that seems no longer to belong to the world of the living?” (Agamben 96). A body that has become criminalized is simultaneously made sacred for it is living outside or beyond the law, considered neither living nor dead, just like those considered “*sacer*” (Agamben 96). But unless proper funeral rites are performed for this living dead body, Agamben asserts that this sacred body then exists as “a paradoxical being, who, while seeming to lead a normal life, in fact exists on a threshold that belongs neither to the world of the living nor to the world of the dead: he is a living dead man, or a living man who is actually a *larva*” (Agamben 99). As Clayton loses his sense of self, he greatly resembled this paradoxical being for he does linger upon a threshold; however, in Clayton’s case, this threshold is that between the human and nonhuman, and as “the

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excluded and draws [her] toward the place where meaning collapses,” and this exclusion then produces a process of othering (Kristeva 2). That which is excluded is held at a distance to myself, as different and separate from myself is believed to be *Other*.

dream” gains more control, this indistinct state becomes more apparent. “The dream” now struggles to remember how to appear human and fit into the world, feeling as if it has become “an infection trapped inside Clayton’s head”—something that does not belong and must fight to maintain its presence. Whereas before Clayton gave the appearance of “transcendence” and rebirth, now he resembles the monstrous artwork he has created, “with his “eyes too deep, too small, too far apart, the nose a malformed lump” and “when he speaks, his jaw opens too wide” (Beukes 383). In this state, Clayton is a paradoxical being, unable to keep on living in this external world but also unable to pierce through the border like he desires too. It is unlikely that “the dream” nor Clayton will be able to survive without the other as the novel comes to a close, and “the dream” realizes this. But this realization also brings clarity, for it now believes that if it truly is an infection, then it simply “needs to spread;” the humans themselves are “the doors. It needs to bring them all together, to focus them in one place, on *its* vision and purpose” (Beukes 270).

This culminates with Clayton’s final and greatest work, his solo exhibition at the Fleischer Body plant where the line between dreams and reality has become thinner than ever. He has gathered together all of the “dreamers” in one place, and now only remnants of “Clayton” still remain with “the dream” having to “hold on to things so tightly” in order to stay together, to stay present (Beukes 409). It has lost all pretenses of maintaining its human guise and has embraced its monstrous, collapsing appearance; its only desire is to fully open the “door” and set the dreams loose into the world. Ultimately, it is unable to survive in this world, on its own. During the showdown between Clayton and Detective Gabi, Clayton is shot, and with this goes “all of Clayton” and “the dream” knows that he has gone somewhere “it cannot follow [...] It’s loosed, but still trapped in this world, only now it is alone,” and, unable to find a stable form, it



must transform into a “black tentacle that snakes across the room,” reaching (Beukes 410-1). Still hoping that it will be able to bring the worlds a little bit close, “the dream” makes one last attempt to create new life, only this time, it succeeds. Here, the bird is brought back into the text as it emerges once again in a figure that has transcended the constraints of realistic, living animals, transformed from the death-bringing crow into a flaming, mystical phoenix. The body of Marcus, a young cop, has been “stretched in benediction, wearing a spiky halo of beams [...] gold wires stuck in his scalp,” with “wooden angel wings attached to his back, painted to look like flames,” and where his face used to be, “an ornately carved wooden door embedded in his skull”—and it walks freely (Beukes 402). In this instance, this transformation of the figure of a bird—a crow that has previously imbued with images of death and decay, into a magical creature that occupies a space beyond the realm of reality, is significant. In direct contrast to the crow, the phoenix is fiery and alive, symbolizing rebirth and new life. This phoenix is what Clayton believed he had been bringing about for society, the rebirth of a new world order, one where he has successfully dissolved the pre-established boundaries between human and nonhuman, and now stands as the sacred Creator. But like so many instances before, although Clayton might come close to grasping this idea of the sacred and rebirth, he still falls short of achieving it. The Phoenix is able to grasp the door in its face and pull it open just enough to reveal golden light, allowing “the dream” to sweep through the door and away, before the door is shattered and entry between realms is lost.

Ultimately, Clayton’s perverse desire to transcend the social, to bring about his vision of an era of a new sociality and potentiality fail; instead, rather than becoming a figure of the coming-sublime, of Haraway’s Chthulucene of multispecies flourishing, Clayton is instead transformed into Lovecraft’s own monstrous Cthulhu in its most negative formation. In popular

culture, H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu is perceived to be a monstrous figure—possessing wings like a dragon, the head of an octopus with numerous tentacles twisting and grasping, and a caricature of human form—as well as being perceived to be the figuration of ultimate destruction and death, believed to be the imprisoned source of constant anxiety for mankind, dwelling deep within the unconscious. As I have discussed earlier, Donna Haraway's decision to call her proposed epoch the "Chthulucene" is not linked to Lovecraft's feminized, monstrous Other, but is instead her attempt to reclaim and refigure it into a figure of potentiality. Feminists have historically sought to reclaim the monstrous, the feminine, and the abject, and Haraway's configuration of the Chthulucene is no different; however, although Clayton's assertion that his artwork will be the key to opening the doors of the social and dissolving the borders of human and nonhuman appear akin to this manner of reclamation, it is clear that in actuality, it is not a reclamation but an appropriation in order to bring about transcendence into the sublime. Instead of Haraway's reclaimed Chthulucene, Clayton becomes the embodiment of the original, monstrous Cthulhu, the *Freidlos*. This transformation comes to a culmination in the final scene at the warehouse, where Clayton has already had trouble stabilizing his physical, human form. During this showdown, the boundary between "dream" and "reality" is at its thinnest, and in its death throes after being shot by Detective Gabi, Clayton/"the dream" begins to fall apart, even forming a "black tentacle that snakes across the room"—a physical manifestation of Cthulhu brought to life (Beukes 410-1). Significantly, during this moment of transfiguration, only the Detective's young daughter, Layla, the girl with a vision and arguably the figure of the coming-future, is able to see these tentacles and understand what needs to be done. In the end, she is the one who allows the doors to open to let "the dream" escape.

In an interview with Lauren Beukes, she is asked who exactly are the “broken monsters” of the world. Her response is simply that “we’re all broken monsters. We all have little broken pieces inside” (Beukes 3). In the real world, though, there truly are no monsters but instead there are human beings, human killers, who are ultimately unable to face “the monstrosity within” and successfully work through it (Beukes 3). As for Clayton Broom, he is still just a human man who, unable to accept the reality of his place within shifting social structures, instead relies on his ability to co-opt distinct imaginaries, like the U.S.’s “Forgotten Man” summoning Cthulhu in order to travel outside the social, to establish a new sociality that would reestablish their positions of significance. Clayton lets in “the dream,” forms what seems to be a symbiotic partnership that quickly devolves into a one-sided relationship as he loses his hold on his mind and sense of self. Together, they attempt to bring together the human and nonhuman world, to forcibly reveal that, in essence, there is no distinct signification between the two; yet the danger is not in this attempt but in Clayton’s—and others like him who would misread proposals of flourishing in favor of an individualistic social—reliance on fictions and misinterpretation of crucial theory and rhetoric. Instead of becoming a figure of rebirth, one who would be able to usher in this new era where human and nonhuman lived together, Clayton becomes a monstrous figure that is of neither worlds, but is something completely *Other*. He is a figure of the white masculine who is unable—and unwilling—to accept the shifting power structures, who strikes back at this perceived betrayal, and in the process becomes corrupted and altered into something monstrous.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The philosopher Jacques Derrida describes a defining moment between the animal and the human as what he calls the *malaise*: the human looks into the animal's eyes, awaiting a moment of signification between what is considered human—that which is *inside* the social—and that which is, as Derrida calls it, the “wholly other.” Yet this moment of signification never arrives, and instead, he is “caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal” and must confront this lack of signification, as well as what it means (Derrida 372). As I have discussed earlier in my thesis, both David Lurie and Clayton Broom experience this unsettling moment, coming into direct contact with the nonhuman, where signification fails and the symbolic can no longer secure them to the social.

David Lurie feels emasculation both in the work place and in his sexual life—two areas that had previously formed the foundation on which he stabilized his identity. But amidst the great institutional restructuring, he is now “more out of place than ever [...] burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they” now perform (Coetzee 4). In the case of Clayton Broom, he has perceived a failure in the imagined societal promise of a “good life,” and now as he grows older, he feels disconnected from society—marginalized, lingering in the outskirts, without purpose. Both men are made to face this moment when the social “fails” them, and both struggle to reorient their sense of selves and find relevancy once again. Strangely enough, though, it is located as the figure of “the animal” emerges alongside the sacrificial—through sacrifice

and ritualization—where the figures of “the animal” and the sacred become the vehicle through which these men might find a new position of significance, perhaps even journeying outside of the social.

I have discussed at length how the figure of “the animal” does not operate simply as a figure or a symbol, but rather its figuration and reconfiguration provides the grounding for distinguishing between the human and the animal, that which is inside the social, and that which is outside it. This conceptualization allows for us to simultaneously constitute what it means to be “human” by way of construing what it means to be “inhuman” or “animal.” It is intricately linked to categorical systems of oppression and the abject Other; yet as Agamben has noted, this way of conceptualizing the figure of “the animal” may also result in a contradictory position due to its status as Other—utterly abject and dangerous, and thus kept firmly outside of “civilized” society, and as it is outside the social, this figure may then slip into the figuration of the “sacred” and “divine.” In both instances, the figure of “the animal” is critical to the conceptualization of what it means to be human, as well as establishing the “outside.” However, an interesting shift occurs when this figuration brought to the forefront of the discourse. The figure may then point to the presence of the actual living animal, and when this happens, human beings are made to face and work through the realization this incites.

Just as I have argued within the context of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Lauren Beukes’s *Broken Monsters*, a shocking revelation can occur when the figure of “the animal” is made tangible: the realization that this supposedly distinct, separation between what is “human” and what is “animal” does not exist. In the two novels, both David Lurie and Clayton Broom looked to the nonhuman animal as a possible method of reestablish their sense of self after their perceived displacement. For David, he depended upon his own self-representation of the figure

of “the animal” to maintain his illusory power in a society where the color of his skin no longer granted him “inherent” power. After his displacement and self-exile to the country, Coetzee brings this figure forward, and as David begins to interact with living animals, this representation begins to change. In his mind, the living animal becomes a vehicle through which he may find his redemption—transformed from a figure of abjection to the sacred—and as he begins to over-identify with the abject mutts of rural South Africa, he transforms himself into a sacrificial figure. Yet by the end of the novel, although the animal still exists as a physical presence, it is once again valued by David as merely a figure—although this time, it is as a figure of “sacrifice” rather than of power. As for Clayton Broom, the figure of “the animal” is critical in the fantasy he had created where he imagined himself as a harbinger of a new world order, imagining himself to be able to transcend outside the social and pierce through the rigid duality separating the human and the animal. In accomplishing such a task, Clayton believed he had truly achieved something wondrous, ushering a new sociality that would also allow him to transcend beyond himself. However, in Clayton’s hands, rather than an era of “multispecies flourishing,” Clayton instead appropriates this logic and transforms himself into a figuration destruction—not the Chthulucene, but Cthulhu itself.

Despite their obvious differences—David Lurie as the self-proclaimed neoliberal, white South African, educated and “progressive,” and Clayton Broom, a working-poor, white man and self-proclaimed artist—when both scenarios are put into relation to one another, it becomes startling clear that both men answer to the same logic of sacrifice and imagining their own relevance, reaching for transcendence and the sublime through art and ritual; in both scenarios too, the figure of “the animal” comes together with the sacral, acting as the vehicle through which they believe they will situate their new position of significance. These white men have

taken on the language and art of the disenfranchised and made it their own, while disavowing their own white privilege, driven by a desire for transcendence. But this transcendence comes at the terrible expense of other bodies. Although it may seem like David Lurie *has* indeed changed, having developed greater empathy for the suffering of the animals—and perhaps through them, the Other—culminating in the connection he perceives as he disposes of the numerous bodies of the unwanted mutts. He even claims to have taken on a sacrificial role—to have transformed himself into a sacrificial figure through the ritualization of death and the sacralization of the dogs’ bodies. It is clear though, that David has not changed but has simply taken on this sacrificial language and twisted it in a way that still allows him to maintain his illusion of power—he empathizes with the lives of animals who have been so callously treated by black South Africans, and in doing so, David has in his own mind once again attained a superior role. This again is seen with Clayton Broom who speaks of liberation and a new world order, in bringing together the nonhuman animal and human together in harmony. Although it may seem like Clayton senses and acknowledges the imminent dissolution between the human and inhuman, categorical systems, and what this dissolution means. But like David, Clayton has simply appropriated this conceptualization, imagining that only he can bring about this new sociality; in the end, Clayton is blinded by his desire for transcendence, and his supposed liberation fails. It is not in fact a harmonious new era of flourishing that he brings about, but rather a period where loss of signification results only in horror, blood and monstrosity.

Theorists and scholars have spoken of the intricate connections between the realm of the human and the nonhuman. In the past, the two have been kept rigidly separated, with the animal only ever appearing in the human realm as a figure, a tool, or in some cases, a monster; but what happens when this methodically maintained duality is dissolved? When the figure of “the

animal” becomes a living creature, no different from human beings? With such complex links between the two worlds, a joining of the two seems inevitable, and in these novels I have discussed, this breakage appears to be immanent. Yet both novels also feature white men who, when confronted by the Other and their own subjectivity, attach themselves to the sacred in order to navigate the new sociality, to perhaps even journey outside of the social. The figure of “the animal” is not simply a convention or trope; it stands as a figuration of historical memory and value, remaining as a remnant of a past filled with state-sanctioned violence and oppression. It is intricately wound together with the “outside,” as well as with the sacred, and in the hands of those frustrated at the current social order, who have imagined themselves to be disenfranchised, it even becomes a medium for transcendence. But both David and Clayton’s attempts at moving beyond ultimately end in failure. When forced to face the inevitable question that arises from confronting the Other, both men adhere to the same logic. They both inevitably fall to the sacred, looking to the logic of sacrifice as a way of reestablishing their own relevancy, driven by a desire to reach the sublime through art and ritual. When at last they are faced with this *malaise*, confronted by the wholly Other and inhuman, they reach a moment that can not possible be put into words. It is here, at this moment, as signification falls away, that these men are faced with the impossible question—the question of the animal.



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