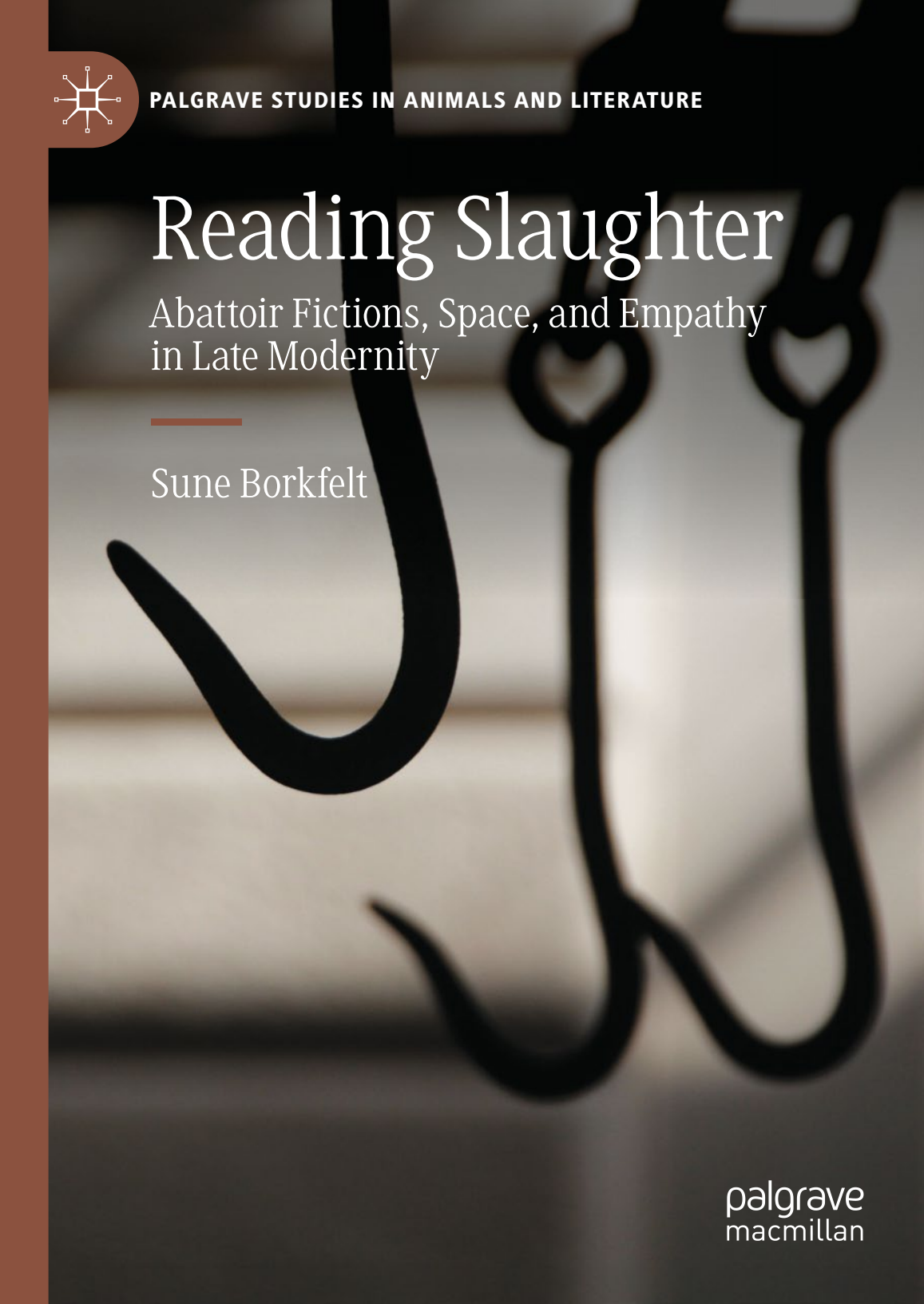

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Abattoir Fictions, Space, and Empathy in Late Modernity

Sune Borkfelt

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Chapter 3 includes verse lines from 'The Pig' from *Dirty Beasts* by Roald Dahl (Jonathan Cape Ltd. & Penguin Books Ltd), © The Roald Dahl Story Company Limited; reproduced by permission of David Higham Associates.

Finally, many animals—both human and nonhuman, and near and far—inspire and encourage me every day. Chief among these are Deva and Dicte, whose continuing faith in their nerdy father never fails to touch my heart.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Fleshing Out Invisibilities

Some years ago, I stumbled, somewhat coincidentally, upon a short 1929 text on slaughterhouse architecture, in which the French philosopher and cultural critic Georges Bataille observed that 'today, the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a boat carrying cholera' (1997, 22). Around the same time, with a different project in mind, I had been reading a few texts on empathy and literature. Trying to theorize how we react emotionally to fiction, these texts often proceeded from the simple assumptions that not only do '[f]ictional stories … allow us access to environments and situations that are difficult to experience firsthand', but they also let us experience emotions in relation to such situations and to 'types of individuals with whom we have no personal experience' (Mar and Oatley 2008, 181; see also Feagin 1988, 486–87). Given my work in the field of literary animal studies, it dawned on me that in the juxtaposition of these quite different kinds of texts and claims lay an interesting, if tentative, research question: if slaughterhouses are isolated, and therefore rarely experienced first-hand, what may that do to how they are written and read when they appear in fiction? The ideas and questions have since multiplied and complexified significantly, but the present book is a result of the curiosity sparked by that question.

Although striking in its phrasing, Bataille's claim about the isolation of the slaughterhouse is unexceptional, albeit such isolation was both less widespread and of more recent origin in 1929 than it is today. While the process has been gradual and has varied between countries, regions, and

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cities, numerous scholars—historians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists—have commented on how the slaughter of animals (in industrialized countries, at least) has become increasingly invisible, isolated, and avoided in relation to the public (e.g. Adams 2000, 51–53; Bulliet 2005, 3; Fitzgerald 2010, 59, 66; Joy 2010, 21; Lee 2008b; Otter 2008; Pachirat 2011, 3–4; Singer 1990, 95, 150; Smith 2002, 50–53; Vialles 1994, 28). Though her description is not universally applicable in every detail, it is unsurprising that artist and activist Sue Coe states of U.S. slaughterhouses at the beginning of her book *Dead Meat* that '[t]he public is not welcome. Slaughterhouses, especially the larger ones, are guarded like military compounds, and it is almost impossible to gain access' (1995, v). While some of my analyses in the chapters that follow point to nuances, complexities, and variations in the isolation of slaughterhouses, for the most part I take this avoidance and isolation as a given precondition for the slaughterhouse fictions written within western traditions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I attempt, in other words, to make sense of western, and especially Anglo-American, slaughterhouse fictions as they appear in late modernity. Hence, while each chapter contains a specific argument about or contextual perspective on slaughterhouse fictions, together the chapters that follow to some extent form a survey of slaughterhouse fictions written during or after the development of these conditions of isolation and avoidance of slaughter, which cling to the modern abattoir as an institution. Thus, while I occasionally consider texts depicting pre-industrial slaughterhouses as part of accounting for the history of its emergence, or for contrast, my concern is ultimately with literature's relationship to that modern 'cursed and quarantined' space of killing, of which Bataille writes, and to the nonhuman animals whose lives are ended there. The fact that slaughterhouses are such specific sites in contemporary, industrialized societies, and are the places in which the overwhelming majority of animals used by humans are killed, prompts many questions about how they are imagined, configured, and reconfigured, broadly, in modern literary fiction.

In the present book, I thus address this topic via the central idea that literature has something to tell us about slaughterhouses, which works in relation to how isolated readers and authors are from slaughter. I attempt to tease out what that may mean in particular (kinds of) depictions, which sometimes differ significantly in terms of for example genre, perspective, readership, employed literary techniques, or historical and geographical contexts. In doing so, I pay attention also to what the literary

slaughterhouse means as a specific kind of site, in which such meanings are formed, renegotiated, and challenged, and thus also to what this may tell us about literature itself as a medium or cultural device. By doing this, and by considering a wide array of texts that range from the canonical to the relatively unknown, I provide new perspectives and insights into how such fictions treat other animals and reflect (or reject) current human-animal relationships more generally. In the process, moreover, I hope to give a sense of a trajectory of developments in how twentieth and twenty-first century fictions portray slaughterhouses, and the human-animal relations affected by them.

Visibility and Slaughterhouse Histories

The modern abattoir, and its gradual separation from social life, emerged out of a complex interplay of political, practical, and hygienic factors over the course of the nineteenth century, as sights, sounds, and smells of slaughter in many places became, for various reasons, intolerable as parts of city life (see, e.g., Borkfelt 2019; Fitzgerald 2010; Lee 2008a, b). Nevertheless, uneasiness, horror, and disgust were connected to the experience of animal slaughter long before nineteenth-century slaughterhouse reforms sought to more consistently create a distance between the general public and the killing of animals. In recounting the Pythagorean stance on meat in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid compared the slaughter of animals to that of humans and castigated those who could 'cut a kid's throat while it lets forth wails like a child's', and despite Roman uses of animals as spectacle in the arena, butchers appear to have eventually been 'confined to one quarter or place' in ancient Rome (Ovid 2000, 15.463–467; Devron 1880, 217). Similarly, the authorities in medieval London made repeated attempts to contain the nuisance of slaughter and make butchers comply with acts and ordinances requiring large animals to be slaughtered outside the city walls (Jones 1976, 78–82). In *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More positioned the 'slaughtering of livestock and cleaning of carcasses' outside the town in his ideal society, where such acts were carried out by condemned criminals for fear that it would 'destroy … natural feelings of humanity' in ordinary people if they were to engage in them (1965, 81). Meanwhile, a short-lived 1488 act that forbade the killing of cattle within London's city walls was in effect when More's work was first published (Jones 1976, 82). Writing in 1713, Alexander Pope likewise considered 'nothing more shocking or horrid' than a kitchen 'covered with blood, and filled with the

cries of creatures expiring in tortures', and compared it to an 'image of a giant's den in a romance, bestrow'd with the scattered heads and mangled limbs of those who were slain by his cruelty', and other Enlightenment figures expressed similar sentiments (Pope 1948, 235; Thomas 1983, 299). Throughout European history, numerous writers have thus expressed horror at the twin pursuits of slaughter and meat eating. The 'humane mind' was, as the Romantic poet and animal advocate John Oswald wrote in 1791, '[d]isgusted with continual scenes of slaughter and desolation, pierced by the incessant shrieks of suffering innocents' and would turn away 'abhorrent from the view' of slaughter (2000, 40).

The sights, sounds, and smells of the systematic slaughter of animals for food have, in other words, rarely been considered pleasant,[1] and even those arguing for the construction of new abattoirs in the nineteenth century often admitted that the practice of slaughter involved inherent or necessary 'evils' (e.g. Liveryman of London 1847, 11; Horne 1850, 329).

More systematic removal of slaughter from public sight was first instituted in France, with Napoleon's slaughterhouse reforms in the first and second decades of the nineteenth century, which led to the establishment of public abattoirs outside urban centres (Lee 2008b, 50–51; Philo and MacLachlan 2018, 92; Schwarz 1901, 8; Vialles 1994, 15, 17).[2] As the French anthropologist, Noëlie Vialles notes, these events coincide with the emergence of the term 'abattoir', which unlike slaughterhouses ('tueries' in French) is defined not just as a place of slaughter, but also by its location outside the city walls (1994, 15).[3] As such, it was the example of Paris that was to be invoked by proponents of slaughterhouse reform in other European countries throughout the nineteenth century (Brantz 2008, 71; Schwarz 1901 8). Indeed, slaughterhouse reform and the

[1] While it is difficult to find sources that speak of slaughterhouse smells in unequivocally positive terms, present-day discussions do sometimes suggest people get 'used to' the smells (e.g. Andrew-Gee 2013; News Staff 2012). Moreover, such smells are sometimes framed positively through the metaphorical 'smell of money' (e.g. Seigel 1990).

[2] Unlike the literary depictions of slaughterhouses that are the main focus of this book, histories of slaughter, urban animal trade, and the institutions that surrounded them have been explored by a number of scholars. See, for example, Brantz (2008), Burt (2006), Geier (2017), Lee (2008a, b), MacLachlan (2007), Otter (2004, 2008), and Pacyga (2015).

[3] Although the terms 'slaughterhouse' and 'abattoir' are today used interchangeably in English, they were largely used with different meanings in English texts of the nineteenth century, drawing on the original French distinction. Thus, the word 'slaughterhouse' was generally used only to refer to private establishments, often located inside the city, while abattoirs were usually large public establishments on the outskirts.

erection of abattoirs on the outskirts of cities became 'a European-wide phenomenon' over the course of the century, as cities across a number of countries and provinces followed the French example (Brantz 2008, 71–72).

The reasons cited for replacing private slaughterhouses with new publicly run abattoirs were numerous and included various concerns about public health and hygiene, overcrowding, and animal cruelty, often detailed through depictions of the smells, sounds, and sights connected with the work of traditional, small-scale slaughterhouses inside the cities. It is interesting, though, how the matter of visibility seems to have played a key role in these processes. While part of the reason for municipal abattoirs was often to make slaughter and butchery easier to regulate by making it more visible to authorities, it is, as one researcher notes, ironic that the new 'public' abattoirs 'increasingly removed animal slaughter from the view of the general public' (Fitzgerald 2010, 60). But sights of blood, filth, and animal cruelty often propelled discussions on the subject of slaughter and animals inside city boundaries, and more generally, a growing unwillingness to see the connection between meat and animal also seems to have occurred.

Indeed, the slaughterhouse reforms of the nineteenth century were foreshadowed by developments in eating and tableside manners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where the practice of cutting up whole animals at the table gradually became unfashionable (Elias 2000, 101–102). The sociologist Norbert Elias has argued that these were some of the first steps in a development of a sentiment, in which 'the sight and carving of a dead animal' goes from being a pleasure in connection with dining to being so displeasing that 'reminders that the meat dish has something to do with the killing of an animal are avoided to the utmost' (102). As William Hazlitt wrote in 1826, '[a]nimals that are made use of as food should either be so small as to be imperceptible, or else we should dig into the quarry of life, hew away the masses, and not leave the form standing to reproach us with our gluttony and cruelty' (1931, 173). Otherwise, an animal 'brought to table in the form which it occupied while living' could seem like it was 'sent to scare away appetite' (173–74). Yet meat consumption as such remained popular and in many places grew during the nineteenth century (Hartwell 1961, 406, 409; Perren 1978, 1–3).

In most places, the establishment of public abattoirs came in tandem with prohibitions against private slaughterhouses in the city. In this way,

the abattoirs did not just constitute a new place for slaughter, but a replacement for the way slaughter had previously been carried out, which lessened the frequency of city dwellers' encounters with farm animals and made the slaughter of animals for food an object of increased public control. Slaughterhouses in the city had meant driving animals through the city, often both on their way to and from live animal markets. With new developments, both animals and dead meat could increasingly be transported by rail, with the animals arriving at cattle markets on the outskirts of cities, where the public abattoirs could then be found close by, if not immediately adjacent (Joyce 2003, 78; Perren 1978, 60, 107). As meat was increasingly a part of more people's daily lives in nineteenth-century Europe, a connection arose between the distancing of meat from animal and making farm animals distant from human daily lives.

Today, then, most of us in the West live lives in which we only rarely, if ever, encounter the animals who are the sources of meat products, or, indeed, very many other kinds of nonhuman animals (apart from companion animals), which is largely the result of developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Berger 2009; Bulliet 2005; O'Sullivan 2011, 2). Although he was more concerned with the psychological and symbolic than with physical distance, John Berger has for instance argued that the last couple of centuries have seen a 'cultural marginalization of animals', which has profoundly changed the ways in which we view and relate to (or don't view or relate to) other animals in general and domestic non-companion animals in particular (2009, 25). Similarly, historian Richard W. Bulliet has dubbed this new condition 'postdomesticity' since most people do not have regular contact with domestic animals other than companion animals. Bulliet argues that 'postdomestic people live far away, both physically and psychologically, from the animals that produce the food, fiber, and hides they depend on, and they never witness the births, sexual congress, and slaughter of these animals' (2005, 3). Although animal products are still consumed in stupefying quantities, we avoid the sights connected to their production because, Bulliet contends, postdomestic urbanites 'experience feelings of guilt, shame, and disgust when they think (as seldom as possible) about the industrial processes by which domestic animals are rendered into products and about how those products come to market' (3). Carol J. Adams has influentially argued that it is a part of this avoidance that animals become 'absent referents' in relation to meat products in three ways: literally, because the actual animal from whom the meat came is dead and cut up into smaller pieces that make it

less recognizable as animal; definitionally, because 'we change the way we talk about them' and use words that do not invoke the dead animal; and metaphorically, when '[a]nimals become metaphors for people's experiences' (2000, 51–53). While literature arguably often makes animals disappear in the latter two ways, literary depictions can also be used to make us reflect on all of these processes.

Decoding Slaughterhouses

Because of the multiplicity of ideas of the modern slaughterhouse—its development, the emotions, and identity politics it provokes or negotiates—there is arguably no single straightforward way to make sense of its complexities, of the manifold nuances of its relations to social space, to human and nonhuman animals, and of the variety of ways in which it figures (or is disavowed) in social and literary imaginaries. While the occasional literary scholar has sought to shed light on some facet of the modern slaughterhouse in a single text or two, historians have attempted to map both the sentiments surrounding slaughter as they have developed over centuries and the development of the slaughterhouse as a specific space of killing, bound to technological and architectural innovations. Geographers, meanwhile, have noted how the presence or absence of slaughterhouses has helped shape physical spaces as well as our conceptions of urban or rural spaces more generally, and psychologists have attempted to understand the disavowed presence of these places of killing in our lives through concepts such as avoidance, numbing, and cognitive dissonance. More broadly, anthropologists and sociologists have grappled both with how social relations work within the abattoir and with the effects of such places of slaughter on the social space outside them.

Attempting to do justice to the complexity that allows for all of these different perspectives, I prefer to think of the various practices surrounding meat production as systemic structures in which human and nonhuman individuals both get caught up and contribute, often hegemonically so. As I expand upon below, the slaughterhouse stands in a peculiar relation to social space, which is at once separate from it and undeniably tied to it. Urban, suburban, and generally most built social space is free from the animals who become meat products, and where they do appear, they appear as othered within discourses that suggest to us that their lives should be taken less seriously than human lives or the lives of animals

classified differently (such as companion animals), if they are to be considered at all.

Social theorist Zygmunt Bauman has written about our relations with other humans that 'what we call "the others" we live with … is what we *know* of them' (1993, 146). As a consequence, Bauman writes, the 'truly anonymous Other is outside or beyond social space' and the space between intimacy and anonymity is made up of various classes and categories, into which we can put others (149). Thus, we know them 'as types, not persons'. Yet we may, according to Bauman, have a 'subliminal awareness that there is, potentially, a human who could be an object of knowledge', even when it comes to those humans who are truly anonymous to us, which implies at least an acknowledgment of their individuality, even if we lack the knowledge that could make that human being less than completely anonymous to us (149). Much like our knowledge of human Others is limited to the point of anonymity by social and cognitive distance, our knowledge of the nonhuman animals whose lives are ended in abattoirs, our ideas of them, and their lives and deaths, are limited by the systematic concealment of the abattoir itself. These animals, however, are so far beyond Bauman's social space that we do not have the awareness of a potential individual, who can be an object of knowledge, which Bauman allows in the case of anonymous humans. They are there, in our everyday lives, only as a suppressed awareness that agricultural animals exist (and die), in the plural, collectively, as a category or 'type' somewhere at the distant source end of the processes that bring about meat. The individual animal, and the exact processes by which even the collective animals die and become food products, remains distant and concealed in the anonymity of the abattoir. By engaging with the slaughterhouse, literary narratives can help lift that concealment, challenge invisibility, and add 'knowledge' in the form of descriptions and narratives that prompt us to imagine the hidden space of slaughter. In this way, how we imagine literary spaces can challenge the conventions of our social space and suggest the need for a reappraisal of the 'others' slaughtered and eaten. Though my focus here is on fictions written since the invention of the industrial abattoir, this is not to say that texts from earlier periods never hold the potential for such reappraisal. Rather, when they sometimes do so, it most often happens through depictions of the public nature of slaughter rather than through descriptions of hidden spaces. In other words, earlier texts often focus on the conventions of their times and can therefore be read as more of a challenge to the openness surrounding slaughter than to the act of slaughter itself.

As I have considered elsewhere, any experience of slaughter and encounters with the animals who are slaughtered that *does* occur, happens not just visually, but through other senses as well (Borkfelt 2019). In other words, while I write about the 'invisibility' of the slaughterhouse, it is important to recognize the role of, not least, smell and sound in our relation to slaughter; the isolation of the abattoir does not just obstruct sight, but attempts to keep both sounds and smells hidden away as well. Indeed, both the smells and the sounds of slaughter have historically often been significant to complaints about the proximity of slaughterhouses, just as conscious efforts have been directed towards eliminating them. In my readings, I seek to remain conscious of this fact, and attempt to approach slaughterhouse fictions with an attentiveness to these senses as a sort of heuristic through which an approximation of the slaughterhouse may happen for authors and readers. This is not least significant because slaughterhouse fictions often play upon emotions tied as much, if not more, to smell or sound as to vision. Smell, particularly, is often perceived as subjective and closely connected to our emotions; cultural geographer J. Douglas Porteous, for instance, argues in his work on 'smellscape' that 'smell is an important sense in that it is primarily a very basic, emotional, arousing sense' and historian Connie Y. Chiang notes similarly that smell has 'deeply emotional possibilities' that make it 'a valuable tool for cultural analysis' (Porteous 1985, 357; Chiang 2008, 406). Through this, odours in texts may unleash responses in readers differently or more easily (Borkfelt 2019). Similarly, as suggested by the frequent notion that animals' cries are like those of small children (e.g. Fiddes 1991, 130; Ozeki 1998, 207), the sounds of slaughter also have significant emotional potential and have often been heard as signs of the animals' all too recognizable feelings (e.g. Otter 2004, 46; Smith 2002, 50; Borkfelt 2019). In many cases, therefore, the potential of texts to arouse feelings such as empathy, which I discuss in the next chapter, or to draw attention to nonhuman animals' vulnerability in ways that approximate them to humans (or vice versa), may happen more through invoking these emotive senses than through descriptions bound to visual experience.

As many scholars have noted, much of the language commonly used in relation to slaughter, by contrast, often obscures or downplays the similarities that might prompt emotional response or ethical doubts (Adams 2000, 74–81; Croney and Reynnells 2008; Dunayer 2001, 137; Glenn 2004, 69; Jepson 2008; Mitchell 2011; Pachirat 2011, 230; Stibbe 2012, 29; Vialles 1994, 22–23). Indeed, linguist Jill Jepson argues that the

'unambiguous moral revulsion' attached to the term 'slaughter' itself when it is used about humans

> seems to stem from the very fact that *slaughter* is so devoid of evaluative or emotional content when used for animals. The one who slaughters animals for food is expected to do so without sentiment. The detached, impassive killing of cows, chickens, turkeys, or pigs is accepted as business and survival. However, applying that impassivity to the killing of humans is despicable. It is the very suggestion of indifference on the part of the agent that makes *slaughter* a term of such strong evaluative content when it is used for human beings. (2008, 144, italics orig.)

There is thus an implicit hierarchical assumption to the ways in which we talk about slaughter, given that we evaluate the word differently based on whether we use it about our own or another species. Nevertheless, discourses surrounding slaughterhouses and the slaughter of other animals are also filled with language that masks what is spoken about or 'ameliorate[s] the ambiguities and tensions evoked by the killing of animals' (Jepson 2008, 129).

Noting the distancing effect of euphemisms applied to slaughter, political scientist Timothy Pachirat sees both a symbolic and an actual connection between language use and more physical means of creating distance:

> The shaded window from the front office to the fabrication department suggests a paradoxical relation between society at large and its acts of fabrication, both physical and linguistic. These acts demonstrate a mastery over perception and are a source of showmanship and pride, but they retain their efficacy only to the extent that the inner workings required to produce them remain out of sight. They are enabling fictions–the words we use in the stories we tell to make the status quo livable. At their sites of production there is both pride and wariness in revealing how the fictions are written. (2011, 32)

Thus, there is a particular interplay between fictionality and the ways in which we construct the distance between the killing of animals and the consumption of animal products. It is in drawing upon the capability of language to affect our imaginations that these 'enabling fictions' of the slaughterhouse can in some ways be seen as having a resemblance to the stories told in literary fiction. However, whereas the former has the effect and the intention of making killing less dramatic, literary narratives that

engage with the slaughterhouse as a setting are far more likely to employ language exactly for dramatic effect. Hence, it can function as a kind of counter-discourse whose language often creates room for subjectivity and emotional lives in other animals, or which subvert, question, or challenge conventional industry narratives and language use through human characters' perspectives. In other words, the language of literary fiction is arguably less likely to neutralize the acts of the slaughterhouse, because doing so makes the language, and thus the narrative, *less* involving. Similarly, whereas common language surrounding the killing of other animals will often use 'the passive voice … to avoid assigning agency' (Jepson 2008, 131), agency is commonly what drives literary narrative forward and is therefore unlikely to be obscured in fiction unless dramatic effect requires it.

It is from these basic reflections about the nature of literature viewed in relation to slaughter that I set out to show what the literature of the slaughterhouse can do. Slaughterhouse fictions, I argue through my discussions and readings, have the potential to do a number of things, depending on other characteristics of the particular texts in question: they can produce and manage empathy; they can employ anthropomorphism to manipulate ideas of sameness and difference; they can insinuate the politics of place, and particularly ideas of urbanity and rurality, into our understanding of animal killing; they can complicate power relations by narrating human identity in relation to such killing; and they can allow the quarantined slaughterhouse to leak into our consciousness through common fears and ideas of deviance from the norms of our social space.

Heterotopias and the Invisibility of Violence and Death

Regardless of how the experience of the slaughter of other animals happens, it is clear that it is experienced more rarely by consumers today, despite more animals being slaughtered. While they have happened gradually and slightly differently in different parts of the West, the developments since the nineteenth century have gone clearly in the direction of decreased visibility. As Noëlie Vialles observes, the urbanite is 'never, in terms of his daily alimentary experience, brought face to face with the animal,' and instead, 'so far as he is concerned, the banishment of the abattoir has fully achieved the effect intended' (1994, 28). Indeed, Vialles contends, it is

the fact that 'he is spared the sight of animals being slaughtered' that allows the 'town-dweller' to tuck 'serenely into his meat' (28). As I briefly touched upon above, both sociologists and psychologists also point to invisibility as a 'primary defense of the system' (Joy 2010, 21). Melanie Joy, for instance, argues that it allows for continued grand scale meat eating and notes that 'invisibility reflects the defences *avoidance* and *denial* and is the foundation on which all other mechanisms stand' (2010, 21, italics orig.). Similarly, sociologist Lois Presser notes how animals intended for meat are often left out of cultural discourses; indeed, she states, 'most' people interviewed on the subject of meat eating in her study on harm lacked knowledge about factory farming and 'failed to grasp the systemic nature of the abuse' animals endure in the meat industry (Presser 2013, 53–55, 60–63). Thus, as Joy notes, the invisibility of the processes of slaughter 'enables us … to consume beef without envisioning the animal we're eating' (2010, 21).

The ways in which different—cultural, social, psychological, geographical—constituents intertwine to form the removal, avoidance, concealment, and invisibility of slaughterhouses are also one reason why they are different from other partially hidden or avoided places of violence and death in our societies. Meat eating constitutes a more direct connection between the actions of people's daily lives and the violence of the slaughterhouse than whatever connections the majority have with for example psychiatric hospitals, crematoriums, prisons, or places of execution. Thus, given the majority's dietary habits, complicity seems more straightforward and, possibly for that reason, a need for more mechanisms of avoidance or invisibility arises when it comes to the slaughter of other animals.

These differences may also be part of the reason why fiction seems to approach slaughterhouses very differently from other places of violence. Whereas, as Jon Thompson writes in the first line of his study of crime fiction and Empire, '[o]urs is a culture fascinated by crime' (1993, 1), including the violent kinds perpetrated on humans, literature and film do not show fascination on a similar scale with violence done to other animals, or with the places where such violence happens. Accordingly, literary history can show centuries of fascination with prisons, prisoners, and punishment (cf. Alber 2007; Brombert 1978; Carrabine 2010; Finn 1996; Grass 2003), but no similar breadth of fascination with the slaughter of animals and even less with slaughterhouses as such.

There are, however, also similarities to be drawn between slaughterhouses and other places of violence, not least, in terms of how we tend to

often render the places themselves inconspicuous in our daily lives and concern ourselves with their reality only when we have to. In this sense, the analysis of literature about slaughterhouses may also provide insights into our attitudes to other kinds of institutionalized violence, insofar as the literature draws out issues of invisibility and concealment. Michel Foucault, for instance, discusses the way in which there has been a movement away from public and violent forms of punishment, and Alex Mackintosh notes how the movement away from forms of entertainment such as bear baiting and cockfighting in some ways mirrors this development (Mackintosh 2017, 170–175; Foucault 1977). Moreover, as Mackintosh notes, 'as the gallows was [sic] replaced by the prison and the carceral society, moments of extreme pain were replaced for animals by a great confinement, in the form of battery farms that drastically restricted the animal's [sic] movement in space, and biopolitical techniques to render their bodies more productive and at the same time more docile' (179). However, while in both cases, the move was away from public display, the number of animals subjected to violence and slaughter continued to grow as 'the slaughter of animals for food – carried out on a vaster scale than ever before – became increasingly invisible, driven out of city centres often by the same campaigners who argued against animal baiting' (Mackintosh 2017, 181). As already noted, the relegation of slaughterhouses to the margins of cities, and of societal consciousness, happened gradually and by slightly different means in different places. But whether it happened through mass-scale centralization as in Chicago's famed Union Stock Yards, through legislative efforts (with varied success) at relocation and concentration of slaughter outside cities in various European countries, or as in England through more muddled processes and debates, the direction was unmistakably towards greater invisibility and concealment (Fitzgerald 2010, 60; Lee 2008b; Otter 2008).

The increased invisibility of both animals and slaughter not only keeps ethical concerns neatly tucked away, but often also obscures concerns about working conditions and hygiene associated with modern slaughterhouses. Just as in the development of the modern prison, issues of placement and the development of new architectural designs were instrumental in this development. Thus, Georges Bataille was led to argue when commenting on the architecture of slaughterhouses that

> …today, the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a boat carrying cholera. In fact, the victims of this curse are not butchers or animals, but the

> good people themselves, who, through this, are only able to bear their own ugliness, an ugliness that is effectively an answer to an unhealthy need for cleanliness, for a bilious small-mindedness and for boredom. The curse (which terrifies only those who utter it) leads them to vegetate as far as possible from the slaughterhouses. They exile themselves, by way of an antidote, in an amorphous world, where there is no longer anything terrible, and where, enduring the ineradicable obsession with ignominy, they are reduced to eating cheese. (1997, 22)

As a thinker intent on overturning social norms, Bataille suggests that the architecture of the modern slaughterhouse is both suppressing and unhealthy for humans. Buildings and monuments, for Bataille, are 'true masters' of the people, and their symbolism and shape hold great significance in terms of enforcing, among other things, the 'order and constraint' that helps keep the ruling norms of a society in place (qtd. in Leach 1997, 21). Just as with the modern prison, the architecture of the slaughterhouse building is a vehicle for the biopolitical control of bodies, although neither Foucault nor Bataille concern themselves with how it controls nonhuman bodies in addition to the human ones. Bataille's own main objection is directed towards what he finds to be an 'unhealthy need for cleanliness' in the norms of slaughterhouse architecture when compared to earlier practices of religious animal sacrifice. Yet the suppressing, symbolic meaning of the slaughterhouse in all its anonymity necessarily lies in the practice of hiding away and quarantining the practice of animal slaughter itself. We must not have access to the sights, sounds, or smells of slaughter, since their absence helps preserve our norms of consumption and the illusion of foods removed from acts of killing that could otherwise bring issues of both ethics and hygiene to the forefront. As the architectural historian Paula Young Lee notes, the slaughterhouse '[b]y design … deliberately evades the gaze, because for others to witness its activities implies responsibility for the killing, tethering the consumption of mass-produced meat to a collective cultural guilt', making 'it's palimpsest-like neutrality … not only a design decision but a consequence of the institution's inescapable violence' (2008b, 47).

In its particular role in relation to issues of visibility, isolation, and access, the slaughterhouse shares characteristics with places such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals. As Lee also points out, slaughterhouses align with Foucault's notion of 'heterotopias' as 'real sites where time and space exist in unresolved multiples rather than unified monoliths' (2008a, 6).

Foucault's theory details and allows for different categories of heterotopias in society, and slaughterhouses—with gradual processes of isolation and at times differing relations to social life—may take different heterotopic forms.[4] Lee, for instance, argues that 'the slaughterhouse is best described as a heterotopia of "compensation," or a type of heterotopia that replaces the messiness of everyday life with a clean, futureless arrangement' (2008a, 6). Lee's categorization thus details one heterotopic function, which the slaughterhouse has, arguing that it allows us to imagine an 'ideal slaughterhouse' which is 'a consequence-free site of pleasure' in which animals that are 'culled from the fertile land, are infinitely renewable and always willing' (2008a, 6). Yet it is important for my purposes in the present book to broaden this by adding that slaughterhouses will arguably also often be what Foucault calls 'heterotopias of deviation … in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (1986, 25). As nonhuman animals other than pets have become increasingly marginalized from society, they have arguably also become increasingly deviant in the sense that they challenge human societal order when they appear where humans do not want or expect them, or when they display subjectivity that may disrupt our more objectifying aims. As such, they are killed (which adds another layer of deviation through death) and/or placed elsewhere, in heterotopias such as the zoo or the slaughterhouse, depending on their particular way of deviating, which can largely be read in the ways in which we categorize them (as 'wild', 'vermin', 'farm animals', etc.). In this way, they come to resemble those humans, like criminals or the mentally ill, whom we may similarly place in particular heterotopic institutions depending on how they are deemed to deviate from cultural or societal norms. Heterotopias, writes Foucault, 'always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' and are generally 'not freely accessible' (1986, 26). Entry is instead either 'compulsory', as in the case of prisons, 'or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications' (26). As Lee points out, '[t]housands of bodies enter into the slaughterhouse, giving the impression of accessibility, but it enforces an elaborate system of "permissions" that excludes some animals from entering (such as diseased animals) and other animals from exiting (those that are still

[4] It is important to note that different categories of heterotopias refer, largely, to their functions in relation to surrounding society. These functions, and thus the categories, are often not mutually exclusive and may frequently overlap.

living)' (2008a, 6). The animals in this way face both compulsory entry and a system of 'rites and purifications' in the form of hygiene rules and inspection for disease, and to some extent, the latter is also true of the human workers who enter. Moreover, among those excluded are also the average citizen and consumer, whose physical and visual access to the heterotopia of the slaughterhouse is controlled to keep outside society free from the deviance found inside in the forms of animals and death. In this way, the heterotopia—while clearly connected to outside society in a number of ways—functions to create the illusion of cleanliness and an outside free of recognizably undesirable, deviant bodies.

In engaging with the insides of slaughterhouses, literary depictions today inevitably highlight some of the ties between these heterotopic spaces and other places, which are otherwise conceptually severed by the politics, architecture, and geography of slaughterhouses. As a particular collective interpretation of space and place, the heterotopic slaughterhouse is itself necessarily narrative in nature. That is, it is through the ways in which space/place dynamics are used to 'make sense of our being-in-the-world'—how they work in our understanding of our lives—that the social meaning of places and spaces is formed through interpretive processes, which is in essence a narrative process (Bieger and Maruo-Schröder 2016, 4). In this sense, fiction that allows readers who under normal circumstances are kept outside a heterotopic space such as the slaughterhouse to glance inside will arguably take on a function as counter-narrative, whether critical of the slaughter happening inside or not. In other words, it disrupts the rules of access that usually apply to the heterotopia and thus the multifaceted system of visual control tied to the slaughterhouse as an institution.

This control of visibility—realized through architecture, placement, and the control of access—does not just keep outside eyes away, but like the control in prisons also keeps the bodies (living and dead, human and nonhuman) inside under surveillance. In the words of Alex Mackintosh, 'as prisons and schools developed mechanisms of surveillance and timetables to discipline the bodies of their inmates, so too did farms and slaughterhouses' (2017, 179). Moreover, control of visibility is also found in the divisions of work and partition of space inside abattoirs; as political scientist Timothy Pachirat observes, workers are divided into specific groups with access to particular areas and particular parts of the slaughtering process (2011, 82–83). In turn, this system of access is kept in place through further surveillance:

> Through the wide windows of this office, the managers have a sightline to almost every area of the kill floor's clean side. Suggestively, the killing work on the dirty side remains concealed from the manager's office behind the opaque wall dividing the clean and dirty sides. From their wide windows, the kill floor managers monitor the white, red, yellow, green, orange and blue hard hats, using a simple color schematic to determine with one sweep of the eye whether everyone is in his or her proper place. (83–84)

Thus, in a seeming paradox, obstructions to visibility are kept in place through supervision in carefully intertwined systems of visual control. In this way the slaughterhouse, behind its 'opaque walls', is 'a highly variegated terrain with its own front, middle, and backstage spaces, its own mountains and valleys of visibility' (Pachirat 2011, 84). Indeed, in the cattle slaughterhouse that Pachirat writes about, the division of workspace helps to obscure the work of killing even from those engaged directly in it since the 'knocker', who fires a steel bolt into the skull of the animal, is separated from the 'presticker' and the 'sticker', who cut open the animal's throat, by a wall that hinders anyone from having complete visibility of the entire killing process (53–61).[5] Thus, 'even on the kill floor itself, the site where one might least expect the realities of killing to be sequestered, immediate and visceral confrontation with the work of industrialized killing is neutralized through a division of labor that finds its sensory expression in a meticulous partitioning of space' (Pachirat 2011, 84).

As Pachirat notes, the slaughterhouse in this way is a space where an ideal of total visibility for control and surveillance (not unlike that of the panoptic prison) works 'in close symbiosis with the continued segregation of the work of killing itself, demonstrating the capacity for surveillance and sight to reinforce, rather than subvert, distance and concealment' (2011, 239–40). Even for the quality controllers, who 'are practically the only participants in the work of industrialized killing who have access to, and are expected to traverse, the entire kill floor', the 'horror of the violent work' is fragmented and 'a focus on food safety deflects attention away from the … killing onto the technical realm of hygiene' (2011, 206–07). This, in turn, is mirrored in the way public debates about the meat industry often focus on contamination, zoonoses, or animal welfare in a way

[5] As Jonathan Burt points out, while divisions of labour that ensure no worker can be singled out as the killer are common, they do 'not always apply universally or historically' (2006, 122). Nöelie Vialles, however, notes a similarly evasive division of labour in her anthropological study of French slaughterhouses (1994, 46).

that keeps us from overly considering the killing itself. The heterotopia as such remains an unquestioned site only to be debated in terms of how well it performs its task of segregating us from the unclean and/or unpleasant.

Thus, the heterotopic slaughterhouse is part of a system that mitigates our relationship with the violence caused by the consumption of the products that come out of it, segregating people from the animals whose flesh they eat. As Pachirat also hints at, it is the norm that the meat we eat is cut up, disguised, and packaged so that we are only rarely allowed to recognize the food as an individual animal, or indeed, as having been a living animal at all (2011, 3).

Hence, sustaining the illusion of morally clean meat, the act of turning live animals into products remains unseen and unheard in relation to all of its individual constituents: the animals themselves, while alive, are rarely seen by the majority of people in postdomestic societies; the actual killing and the cutting up of animal corpses into pieces of meat is hidden behind the often windowless walls of anonymous slaughterhouse architecture; and the final products are removed—through cutting up, packaging, preparation, and psychological avoidance techniques—from the animals they once were.

Literature and the Invisible Slaughterhouse

By effectively hiding the violence of the slaughterhouse from our everyday lives, the distancing—the creation and continuance of slaughterhouses as heterotopias—adds new layers or dualities (seen/unseen, inside/outside, accessible/inaccessible) to a site replete with renegotiations and blurrings of categories (human/animal, self/other, life/death, human/nature) that carry literary potential. Perhaps unsurprisingly, depictions of slaughterhouses have changed alongside the accessibility to slaughter and the locations and visibility of slaughterhouses. Depictions of cattle markets and slaughterhouses by Victorian authors simply relied on and reflected that such scenes were a recognizable part of city life at the time. For many, they were part of common urban experience, which authors needed only amplify. Charles Dickens, for instance, has a description of London's Smithfield Market in *Oliver Twist* (1838), which contains reminders of debates about the market, which would have also been transferable to the debates and situations in other places at the time, but which did not need to describe animals' suffering or the actions of people

in great detail to be effective and evocative (1993, 146–47; Geier 2017, 60–61; Borkfelt 2019, 227–229).

Other writers of the period wrote fiction with the more direct purpose of taking part in debates about the market and the slaughterhouses nearby, and these are therefore often more detailed (see also Borkfelt 2019). Yet even here, the detailed descriptions tend to depict the scenes that take place away from public attention, in the backhouses and yards, rather than in the streets or the market itself. In these ways, questions of proximity and distance were even then central to fiction about animal slaughter, and while slaughter may have been commonly accessible, reformers also made claims that the worst scenes were hidden from polite society. As one reformer noted in 1848, some 'poor beasts' were 'in such a state that daylight might prove rather disastrous to their owners' and were 'therefore driven, dragged or forced into some of the dark and filthy yards or slaughterhouses in the neighbourhood' of Smithfield (Bull 1848, 9). It was therefore up to writers to inform the public of what happened in the backyards or cellars where slaughter was also carried out, and Victorian reformers and writers like Richard Horne and Eliza Meteyard attempted just that in stories, which took readers into a knacker's yard and butchers' backyards in poor neighbourhoods around Smithfield, respectively.

Since such texts were written with the specific aim of taking part in contemporary debates, and at least partially had the purpose of agitating for the removal of slaughter from the city, dramatic and emotive language was often used to these ends. Authors would frequently insert more argumentative passages in the stories, attempting to show causal connections between the overcrowding and chaos of urban locations, animal cruelty carried out there, and a variety of hygienic issues and diseases (Dickens and Wills 1850, 124; Horne 1850, 329–330; Silverpen 1847, 522–523, 527–528). As historian Christopher Otter notes, there was a 'historical drift … toward deodorized space and hidden horror' in the Victorian period (2004, 64), and depictions drew on wishes for reform by pointing to what Diana Donald has called the 'painful proximity' of 'sites of cruelty' (1999, 516).

Victorian depictions of slaughter centre on concerns perceived as mostly human, given the ways in which slaughter was carried out in great proximity to daily life, and in this sense, the depictions were, to a greater or lesser extent, devoted to questioning the place, rather than the nature, of slaughter. Thus, while issues of animal cruelty were sometimes used to press the message or goal of removing slaughter, there was little concern

or uneasiness related to the recognized necessity of actually killing animals in itself. In general, human emotions in relation to actual killing of animals showed themselves in stories of individual slaughter, such as the pig slaughter that upsets the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) (1978, 52–55), rather than in depictions of slaughterhouses where such actions were daily business. Thus, in the slaughterhouse narratives of the time, any concern for individualized animals tended to be for the pain as well as sometimes a sense of the animals' dignity, which could help the case against what was seen as chaotic and undignified conditions in city slaughterhouses.

Given that the place of the slaughterhouse in society has changed, today's depictions of slaughter, and the violence connected with it, differ from older depictions in various ways. Few today have access to slaughterhouses, and readers' everyday lives are more shielded from experiences of the killing of animals; hence, literary depictions have developed so that, increasingly, what is more or less explicitly drawn upon, subverted, challenged, or exhibited, has become distance, rather than proximity, between acts of slaughter and the reader/consumer.

In the process by which slaughterhouses, and the animals and their deaths along with them, have increasingly been displaced to the margins of society, places of slaughter have lost their significance as the *places* they were, imbued with meaning, living presences, and emotional attachment, even if much of the meaning and emotion attached to slaughter used to be negative or represent a challenge to human self-concepts. Instead, they have increasingly become mostly liminal *spaces* in our lives in the form of largely anonymous buildings in locations that are for most people without qualitative significance. They are heterotopias meant to clear the *places* we live our lives—both physically and psychologically—of that which is deviant, unclean, or emotionally uncomfortable. In Timothy Pachirat's words, 'the contemporary slaughterhouse is "a place that is no-place," physically hidden … and socially veiled' (2011, 3–4). Literature, however, can provide access into these heterotopias in ways that once again make them qualitatively significant; in fiction, what may be conceived as *space* in the real world can become *place* as its perceived neutrality and liminality are eroded, and it is (re)connected with values, emotions, and living presences.

As Pachirat repeatedly returns to throughout his study of the contemporary slaughterhouse, there is a peculiar relationship between visibility and concealment at work both within the slaughterhouse itself and in the relationship between the slaughterhouse and the rest of society (2011, e.g.

14, 247–247, 251–254). Simply making the hidden visible is therefore not the way to effect change. As he explains while drawing on the theories of Norbert Elias, emotive responses to the repugnant or morally disgusting are 'increasingly refined and widespread as the frontiers of repugnance grow. These frontiers, in turn, expand in proportion to the advancement of a civilizing process that has as its central mechanism concealment and distance, the hiding away of what is distasteful' (2011, 251). Therefore, Pachirat argues, there is a symbiotic relationship between 'sight and sequestration', in which ideals of full visibility and 'of a glass-walled slaughterhouse paradoxically [rely] on the very distance and concealment they seek to counteract for the emotive engine that is implicitly or explicitly assumed to generate their transformational power' (2011, 252). There is a risk that in simply creating new forms of visibility, new forms of distance are also emphasized. The notions of 'humane slaughter' or of 'free-range' meat, for instance, gain a significant part of their appeal through a notion of distance to other, presumably worse, forms of slaughter and animal-rearing, which in turn work as a deflection from, or a rationalization of, any harm done in the allegedly 'humane' production. Similarly, even contemporary intensive farming and slaughtering practices gain credibility as more acceptable by referring to current standards of inspection or current regulations regarding slaughter, which imply better conditions than in the past. In this way, there is a very real possibility that more visibility will simply help obscure, rationalize, and normalize killing under these new circumstances.

Truly engaging with the realities of slaughter, then, requires more than the mere exposure of the space in which it happens. Space needs to become place, experienced from the inside by living beings, human or nonhuman, and this requires reflection and qualitative, emotional engagement in the way that literature will often invite, regardless of the message, perspective, or attitude to the slaughterhouse depicted in the specific text. Where heterotopias in themselves create fictions of neutral and morally 'clean' *spaces* that stand apart from an also 'clean' society, the role of literary fiction becomes one of questioning such prevailing fictions by depicting experienced *places* and thus emphasizing qualitative, and possibly emotional, engagement. As sociologist Jocelyne Porcher has argued, the increasing industrialization and intensification of 'animal production' from the nineteenth century onwards 'reduced the multiple rationales of work with animals to a single one: the technical-economic rationale' and thus 'other rationales, particularly the relational rationale, have been repressed' (2011,

5). In this way, the meat industry has become a site of 'affectivity repression', which 'consists in dismissing feelings as well as aesthetic and moral concerns' (5). Thus, technology, as well as the science behind it, is not neutral, even if often viewed as merely 'the outcome of objective science and knowledge simply being put into play', as it happens in the meat industry (Hamilton and Taylor 2013, 86). Rather, technology in general as well as in the particular application to mass slaughter has 'a social side, or at least a social consequence', or in other words, a consequence for humans as well as for relations with the animals turned into products (Hamilton and Taylor 2013, 87). Literature and art, in turn, tends to both question and complicate technologies, removing their neutrality, and to bring feelings and consequences back into discourses on our relations with, and uses and slaughter of, other animals. Writing on art and cognitive dissonance in relation to meat eating, Melanie Joy argues that art can be a way to do what she calls 'witnessing' and that when bearing witness, 'we are not merely observers; we emotionally connect with the experience of those we are witnessing. We *empathize*' (2010, 138, italics orig.). It is thus not coincidental that the next chapter of this book turns precisely to the relationship between literature and emotional states such as empathy.

Scope and Outline of *Reading Slaughter*

Before outlining the remaining chapters, a few general words on the selection of works covered, and the kinds of authors and discourses they represent, are in order. The perceptive reader will already have gathered that there is a near-exclusive focus on works from so-called western countries, given that it is in these parts of the world that the modern, heterotopic abattoir takes form and is sustained most consistently in late modernity. As will become apparent, however, works depicting slaughterhouses also have a tendency to be written by white and predominantly male authors, albeit with a few notable exceptions, and in many cases similarly to focus on white, male characters. The relative absences of non-whites and women (whether as authors or characters), marked by this predominance of white masculinity are meaningful, as is the presence of women or minorities when they occur.[6] While it should not come as a surprise that slaughterhouse

[6] Some relative absences on the literary scene can, of course, be attributed to societal conditions and systemic structures in publishing that have historically allowed, and continue to allow, white men better access to the literary scene. For instance, Richard Jean So (2020) has

work has traditionally been construed as predominantly male, it has also often, not least in U.S. contexts, been carried out by immigrants or people from marginalized ethnic or racial groupings. In this way, slaughterhouse work can in some contexts be, and has been, read in relation to human hierarchies in which politics of both gender and racialization are carried out (e.g. Johnson 2018, 30–31, 67–83; Pachirat 2011, 16–17, 63, 73–74, 172–173; Stull and Broadway 2013, 91–92; Vialles 1994, 94–124).

Since abattoir fictions, even within western contexts, have been written in relation to quite different conditions, such issues of absence or marginalization play out very differently in relation to different works. There are important and notable differences between, for example, the depiction of workers from Spain and Italy in a Swiss slaughterhouse, a focus on immigrant workers from Eastern Europe or from Mexico in different historical periods, and the presence (or absence) of African American workers in novels by white authors. Yet they are all tied to how politics of identity and marginalization play out within the particular context of abattoirs in late modernity, and it matters whether and how authors include characters from such minorities, especially if they write within geographical or historical contexts where these would be present in real life. Throughout the chapters that follow, I touch upon such issues occasionally in relation to specific analyses. However, since these issues are best discussed in detail after a number of the works I consider have been introduced and analysed, it is not until Chap. 6 that I engage with the politics of gender, race, and ethnicity in more detail.

Apart from a few recent forays in animal studies, consideration of nonhuman animals is almost completely absent from scholarly discussions within the field of narrative empathy. In order to be able to consider narrative empathy in relation to slaughterhouse fictions, I therefore use part of Chap. 2 attempting to remedy this general omission and discussing the implicit anthropocentrism of scholarly work on literature and empathy. I start the chapter, however, by briefly introducing the relevant concepts and issues in the field of narrative empathy, and set up the delimitations of the argument I wish to propose in relation to it. Much work on empathy and literature understandably focuses on characters, but does so through

recently documented an astounding degree of racial inequality in the U.S. publishing industry in the latter half of the twentieth century, and statistics also continue to show a predominance of male writers in terms of publication figures, awards, and reviews (King 2010; VIDA 2020; for a more historical argument on gender inequalities in literature, see Olsen 1978).

assumptions that these are human and therefore often considers empathy in relation to what are seen as human attributes. In order to broaden the discussion and make it applicable to nonhuman animals in fiction—and to slaughterhouse fictions in particular—I question such basic assumptions, arguing that they have consequences not just in relation to animals, but also for the scholarly arguments on narrative empathy in relation to humans. This leads me to discuss anthropomorphism, anonymity, and individuality in nonhuman characters, while gradually closing in on what the context of abattoirs and our distance to them may mean in relation to empathy and slaughterhouse fictions specifically, using examples from texts I consider more closely in later chapters. I close the chapter with a short discussion of how such ideas of empathy may be brought to work alongside other ideas on emotions and literature as well as the emphasis on vulnerability found in Anat Pick's concept of 'creaturely poetics'.

In a way, Chap. 3 bridges the two previous chapters, which provide some historical and theoretical background, with the subsequent chapters that focus more closely on readings of specific primary texts in particular contexts. Thus, the chapter attempts to do both, as it proceeds from a general discussion of anthropomorphism as a literary technique (which I start by defining in narrow terms, compared to some other scholars) that I also place in the specific context of slaughterhouse fictions, on to readings of two specific texts, which both overtly employ so-called anthropomorphic characters in the form of speaking nonhuman animals. Through the discussion and my readings of James Agee's short story, 'A Mother's Tale' (1952), and Neil Astley's postmodern eco-fable, *The End of My Tether* (2002), and their slaughterhouse depictions specifically, I argue for what rich literary uses of anthropomorphism can do for nonhuman animals.

The emergence of the modern abattoir as an isolated space is inseparable from the development of the modern city, which is often imagined as a place free from most nonhuman animals, but also as a place in which humans are crowded together and become anonymous or devalued in ways that may resemble the role of the nonhuman animals destined to become meat. Reading a range of texts spanning the twentieth century, Chap. 4 discusses the different ways in which slaughterhouses are conceptually both connected to and disconnected from the city and its human beings in works by Upton Sinclair, Alfred Döblin, Tillie Olsen, Scott Nearing, Archie Hind, and Tristan Egolf. From the different contexts and approaches of these authors emerge slaughterhouse fictions that at once

differ from each other in significant ways and speak to the development of both the modern city and the modern abattoir.

Despite its connections with the city, however, the slaughterhouse is also connected to ideas about rurality, not least because the animals who die there continue to be imagined as rural in what Charles Taylor has called the 'social imaginary' (2004, 23). In Chap. 5, I address this theme through two contemporary, yet completely different, texts, John Berger's 'A Question of Place' (1979) and Swiss author Beat Sterchi's *The Cow* (1983), which each in their own way bring tensions surrounding the slaughter of animals to the forefront through juxtapositions of the rural with urban modernity. Whereas Berger's text follows the slaughter of a single cow in a simple peasant community, and only implies urban modernity as the presumed starting point of its readers, much of Sterchi's novel is set in an abattoir that, despite being placed on the outskirts of a city, is undeniably tied to the countryside through the novel's plot and structure. Both texts, through their different approaches, end up simultaneously questioning and drawing upon conventional ideas of rurality in the social imaginary.

From considering the space/place dynamics of slaughterhouses in relation to wider places in the social imaginary, I turn my focus to the human identities affected by slaughterhouses in Chap. 6. Not only are politics of racialization and gender carried out inside, and in relation to, slaughterhouses, but they are also places of work that potentially carry social stigma. Moreover, through traditionally gendered kinds of work, slaughterhouses produce products also often gendered through societies' cultural norms and imaginaries. As such, slaughterhouses are places that not only contain identity politics within, but also affect ideas of identity beyond themselves. Through their connection to blood and routine killing, slaughterers have, for instance, often been regarded with suspicion or viewed as desensitized, which slaughterhouse fictions such as Gertrude Colmore's *The Angel and the Outcast* (1907) and Kenneth Cook's *Bloodhouse* (1974) play upon in surprising ways, as the deviance of slaughter is seen to leak out into society through those who work there. Colmore's work, moreover, foregrounds clear gender divisions in slaughter work, which other texts sometimes allude to more briefly. Likewise, while the slaughterhouse seems at first absent in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998), it nonetheless becomes an important part of how that novel explores the gender politics of meat that permeate its plot in various ways.

Chapter 7 returns, in a manner, to questions of space and place while retaining focus on deviance as I consider the role of slaughterhouses in horror fiction. Often imagined as both gruesome and disgusting, the slaughterhouses in horror fiction come to represent the fear of the violent deviance usually kept within the closed space of the abattoir, which leaks into our world through works such as Matthew Stokoe's *Cows* (1997) or Conrad Williams' *The Scalding Rooms* (2007). This fear of the horrific abattoir in our midst becomes apparent not least as its violence towards nonhuman animals becomes violence towards humans, and as the genre exploits uneasiness surrounding slaughter and meat in depictions of humans becoming meat such as Clive Barker's 'The Midnight Meat Train' (1984), Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000), and Joseph D'Lacey's *Meat* (2008). I end the book with a short concluding discussion in which I offer perspectives on the on-going cultural formation of slaughter and meat in the social imaginary of the twenty-first century.

Highlighting chronology or strict genre divisions only when I consider it to be fruitful, my thematic approach aims to create a structure for this book, which allows me to tease out issues, alignments, and juxtapositions in ways that might be impeded by strict adherence to a timeline or to pre-set categorizations of literary works. Although there is always a particular chapter in which a main analysis of a given text is found, this means that I take the liberty of using my primary texts as examples in different contexts when they become relevant to the themes of more than one chapter.[7] It is hoped that this approach displays a variety of perspectives while nonetheless retaining a sense of a trajectory and coherence in my discussions of the messy space of slaughter as it is drawn out into literary imaginaries.

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[7] This is true to some degree of a number of texts, but especially of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), which is arguably both the most canonical text I discuss and historically the first literary depiction of the industrial abattoir, and one that influences later slaughterhouse fictions both directly and indirectly. Thus, while my main analysis of *The Jungle* is found in Chap. 4, every chapter uses the novel to exemplify, compare, or juxtapose, while particular aspects of the novel are considered in the context of narrative empathy in Chap. 2.

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CHAPTER 2

Literary Narratives and the Empathics of Slaughter

With a few notable exceptions, research on empathic and sympathetic responses to literature so far mostly tends to ignore nonhuman animals. This is the case despite the fact that real-life empathy and sympathy for nonhumans is relatively commonplace. As anyone who has had a loved companion animal in pain should be able to attest to—and as myriad YouTube videos of people saving animals in distress also suggest—empathic responses to the suffering of other species can come at least as naturally as empathy between humans, and humans are also not the only beings who experience such cross-species emotional responses (de Waal 2012; Keen 2007, 8–9).

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which most theories on emotional and cognitive responses to literature tend to ignore or overlook nonhuman animals that appear on the page, and ways in which nonhuman animals might be included in such theoretical explorations. I suggest that by disregarding the nonhuman, scholars risk fundamental flaws in their arguments, and overlook the potential of their own theories and research on the effects of literature; more specifically, I relate the fictional abattoir and the subject of slaughter to such debates and theories and ultimately suggest a kind of 'slaughter empathics' that may arise when narrative empathy is applied to the modern abattoir.

Fiction has been suggested to affect readers and to change the ways in which we view, relate to, and interact with the world in various ways; it is

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considered by philosophers and literary theorists as a vehicle for expanding our knowledge of the real world and of real-life emotions (e.g. Keen 2007, xv; Lamarque 1996, 2; Nünning 2014, 110–111), engendering emotional or affective states such as empathy or sympathy (e.g. Feagin 1988, 1996; Mar and Oatley 2008; Keen 2007; Sklar 2013), and to have persuasive qualities by generating both cognitive and emotional responses (Nünning 2014; Sklar 2013). Moreover, persuasion research suggests that kinds of fiction which challenge readers to think actively about the contents may especially have the potential to change our minds, since our attitudes and beliefs tend to be more long-lasting and resistant to change when much mental effort and careful deliberation has gone into shaping them (Petty et al. 1995).[1] Viewed together with recent empirical studies, which suggest literature can increase empathy and sympathy in readers (Djikic et al. 2013; Johnson 2012; Małecki et al. 2019a, b), this may have significant consequences for the moral value of reading fiction. It may mean that engaging with the ideas of fiction can change morality not just fleetingly, but in more lasting ways, perhaps lending some credence to thinkers who have previously suggested that we may owe moral developments in our societies in part to the reading of literature, because fiction may help cultivate empathic or sympathetic understanding of others (Nussbaum 1997; Pinker 2011, 586–590). The influential philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues that

> narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another's needs, and understands the way circumstances shape those needs, while respecting separateness and privacy. This is so because of the way in which literary imagining both inspires intense concern with the fate of characters and defines those characters as containing a rich inner life, not all of which is open to view; in the process, the reader learns to have respect for the hidden contents of that inner world, seeing its importance in defining a creature as fully human. (1997, 90)

[1] In fact, research indicates that just the perception of careful deliberation may be enough for attitudes and beliefs to become strongly held (Barden and Petty 2008; Barden and Tormala 2014). That is, we may not actually need to think carefully about an attitude or belief when acquiring it for it to become long-lasting and resistant to change, but merely have to believe that we have thought about it. Whether this also means, for instance, that different types of fiction have different persuasive potential tied to the degree to which we perceive them as requiring mental effort, is a topic for future research.

Despite Nussbaum's humanist approach and anthropocentric phrasing,[2] it is easy to think that if there is any truth to her claims, then there is little reason to believe that reading literature could not also help to engender change in our attitudes and behaviour towards other species; if our empathy for fictional humans can help us better understand or respect real-life humans who are different from us in various ways, empathy for fictional nonhumans could well be able to do much the same for our relations to members of other species.

Some empirical studies have supported the idea that reading narratives can affect feelings and attitudes in relation to other animals. In one study by Małecki et al., in which researchers measured attitude changes in Polish university students who read narratives about violence to nonhuman animals, the researchers concluded 'that empathy and empathic concern felt for an animal character in a story can induce a certain attitudinal change' (2019a, 5). Moreover, a different study by some of the same researchers actually measured the effect of a slaughterhouse narrative under conditions where different groups of readers were told the narrative was fiction and non-fiction, respectively. Here, the researchers found 'that while the story significantly improved the readers' attitudes as compared to the control group [who read a text on a different topic], there was no significant difference between the degree of influence between the two groups' (Małecki et al. 2019b, 79). In other words, the studies indicate animal narratives can and do effect empathy and attitudinal change, and that they do this regardless of their perceived fictionality. Indeed, as the researchers note and as I will touch upon again below, there are theories that suggest 'that a narrative perceived to be fictional might have a stronger impact than one perceived to be factual' (79).

Such theories can be connected to arguments that fiction gives us access to the experience of emotions in relation to situations which we do not encounter in real life (Feagin 1988, 486–487; Mar and Oatley 2008, 181; Nünning 2014, 110–111). Essentially, feelings elicited by places that we do not encounter in reality can be available to us through the reading of fiction, and this would include the feelings potentially involved in interaction with nonhuman animals removed from our everyday lives in reality,

[2] Nussbaum considers animal ethics and the emotions of nonhuman animals in later works, especially *Upheavals of Thought* (2001) and *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), albeit still from a decidedly humanist perspective. (See, for instance, her consideration of nonhuman feelings in relation to (non-fiction) narrative in the former, 119–125).

where they are found behind the closed doors and windowless walls of present-day abattoirs. Since the nonhuman animals slaughtered for human consumption usually remain unseen by the majority of readers, literary depictions of abattoirs will draw our attention to those animals and allow us to experience emotions in relation to them; even when nonhuman animals are not individualized or even seen in the narrative, the mere depiction of the insides of abattoirs can still draw our attention to the obvious, but obscured and disavowed, fact that animals, and their deaths, have a significant presence in our societies. Our use of them is the sole reason for those buildings, which are usually inconspicuous, but for that reason may become all the more conspicuous when depicted in literary narratives.

Moreover, whereas in reality we may be aware that encountering places of violence can be psychologically or emotionally stirring in uncomfortable ways—and may thus tend to avoid visiting such places—they may take us by surprise when reading, especially since immersion in fictional narratives requires us to lower our guard to some extent. Not only does fiction require a certain suspension of disbelief, but as literary theorist Suzanne Keen argues in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), 'fiction does disarm readers of some of the protective layers of cautious reasoning that may inhibit empathy in the real world' (28). In other words, getting the full experience from reading fiction requires us to become somewhat vulnerable to the impressions it leaves on us. Keen, however, also theorizes that reading fiction may only enhance empathy that is already present, rather than engender new empathies, which might at first glance seem to limit the potential of literature considerably (2007, 12). However, taking the example of nonhuman animals and abattoirs, this may not be an obstacle to literature having an effect. Indeed, some writers hint that empathy for animals being slaughtered, or the potential for it, is likely already present in some, if not most, people. Carol J. Adams, for instance, contends that '[o]n an emotional level everyone has some discomfort with the eating of animals', and psychologist Melanie Joy argues that we feel for animals automatically and that current practices connected to the use and slaughter of other animals clash with such feelings and with our self-perception as compassionate people, leading to cognitive dissonance when confronted (Adams 2000, 77; Joy 2010, 124–129; see also Presser 2013, 65–67).[3] If

[3]While it is mostly unconcerned with literary narratives, there is also an ongoing philosophical discussion of empathy in relation to other animals (e.g. Aaltola 2018; Gruen 2015; Jenni 2016; Kasperbauer 2015). Although some reject empathy as insufficient in producing

that is so, then fiction on slaughter may be viewed as a vehicle for challenging readers to deal with their own emotional discomfort at what goes on inside abattoirs.

Delimitations and Definitions

Writing about narrative empathy is tricky. The effects of literature, and its relationship to empathy particularly, are significant and sometimes controversial issues of academic debate. Let me say, therefore, that while the views outlined and stances taken above are important to keep in mind, my aim is not primarily to contribute to disputes about whether and how literary empathy furthers prosocial behaviour, or whether different kinds of literature are more or less likely to have a socializing effect. These are relevant questions, of course, but my concern here is with the absence of nonhuman animals from such discussions and with how (human responses to, and feelings for) nonhuman animals may or may not be incorporated into theorizing on the effects of literature, especially in the context of abattoirs and the animals therein. In other words, I want to contribute to remedying the unfortunate and counterproductive general omission of nonhuman animals from discussions on literary empathy, and to help situate nonhuman animals, and nonhuman-human relations, in such debates. Even more specifically, I do this with the primary aim of considering what narrative empathy may mean in the context of fiction that depicts what happens inside abattoirs and, ultimately, in order to suggest the potential for what I call the 'slaughter empathics' that I argue can arise from abattoir fictions.

The term 'empathy' is understood in a number of different ways despite its rather recent origins. Indeed, as Vera Nünning notes, 'there are about as many definitions of empathy as scholars interested in the topic' (2014, 94; see also, Batson 2011). Coined as a word in the English language as an adaptation of the German word *Einfühlung* ('feeling into') only in the early twentieth century, empathy is often seen as the more far-reaching

moral concern (see Kasperbauer 2015), and others suggest empathy needs to be actively cultivated to avoid 'moral laziness' (Jenni 2016), the debates overall imply that empathy for other animals is a common phenomenon, albeit often obstructed by a lack of confrontation with animals in animal industries. In addition, some empirical studies indicate the presence of empathy towards other animals (including those exploited industrially) as relatively commonplace, albeit often more prevalent for female than male respondents (e.g. Angantyr et al. 2011; Hills 1995; Lutz 2016).

and personal cousin of sympathy. Suzanne Keen, for instance, distinguishes between 'the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as *empathy*, and the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as *sympathy*', and most scholars generally follow this basic line of distinction, while popular usage continues to often confuse the two (Keen 2007, 4; Coplan and Goldie 2011, x–xi).[4] This does not, however, mean that there is agreement on exactly what empathy is, in the sense that researchers do not always agree on the processes that bring it about or the components that make it up. For instance, many, though not all, see empathy as having both a cognitive component—allowing us perspective-taking and imagination into the other—and an emotional component of compassionate feelings (Daly and Morton 2008, 246; Davis 1980), but there are different interpretations of which cognitive processes may be involved and whether emotional response gives rise to mental attention, cognitive processing leads to emotional response, or both, though the two are often seen as 'inextricably linked' (De Filip 2014, 95). For instance, probing the uses of empathy for animal ethics, philosopher Elisa Aaltola suggests there are six different 'varieties of empathy', where the sixth form, what she calls 'reflective empathy', has a 'heterogenic richness' that combines the other varieties 'set against an attentive, second-order frame of mind, that allows us to continuously seek to remain attuned to how, why and with whom we are empathizing and how we could cultivate our ability to both know and experience others' (2018, 217).

Here, I will start from a broad definition of empathy as an emotional and cognitive state in which one shares, or believes that one shares, some of the feelings and perspective of the other. My definition thus assumes a close connection between the emotional and the cognitive, and views both as integral to empathic processes. With this definition, I follow theorists who highlight so-called second order beliefs, that is, beliefs about the feelings and beliefs of others, as essential to empathizing (Feagin 1988; Dadlez 1997, 166–175). This also points to how empathy is linked to the way we interpret or 'read' others. As Aaltola rightly points out, empathy 'is not a method of accessing objective truths but instead an interpretation

[4] It is worth noting, as Suzanne Keen (2007, 42–44), for instance, convincingly argues, that writers like David Hume and Adam Smith, who wrote before the term 'empathy' was coined, often used 'sympathy' to designate an emotional response that corresponds more closely to what is today most often called empathy (see also the discussion of Hume in Dadlez 1997, 167–168, or the discussion of Smith in Aaltola 2018, 27–30).

based on our life histories, physiologies and contexts', but it nonetheless 'is meaningful, for empathy appears to us as a form of knowing or identifying' (2018, 10). Empathy is, in other words, a gateway to forms of knowledge about the other, where we are also bringing something to the table through our interpretive efforts and our own experience, which goes a long way to showing why it can be a significant way of engaging with the beings we meet in literary depictions.

Second-order beliefs are also of particular significance when considering empathy for other animals, because they mean that when we empathize with nonhuman animals, we also believe that they have feelings. This may seem trivial, but in light of a long philosophical and practical tradition of denigrating or denying the existence of emotions in other animals, it is in fact quite significant. It also says something about the potential effects of literature about nonhumans: because empathy is necessarily tied to emotional states that you empathize with, empathy for other animals means believing that such animals have feelings, and texts provoking empathy for nonhuman animals therefore highlight or bring forth such beliefs, which might otherwise be denied or ignored in largely rationalist and humanist traditions. In this way, the emotional component of empathy can help change the frame within which the cognitive component functions and thus the kind of knowledge accessible through our interpretive efforts.

At this point, it is worth devoting a few paragraphs to two potentially relevant differences between sympathetic and empathetic responses to literature. The first is Susan Feagin's argument that sympathy, as opposed to empathy, 'does require attributing desires or interests to a character, having desires of one's own for the well-being of that character, and having beliefs about what may or will befall that character' (1996, 128). According to Feagin's theory, this is significant because it means that the object of one's sympathy cannot be identified 'after the fact', whereas with empathy one may realize that one is 'empathizing with a fictional character in the sense that' you can discover during the process that you are 'experiencing as a reader … a state similar to one it is reasonable to attribute to a fictional character' (1996, 128). Hence, there is no need for initial attribution of psychological properties to a character as a generator of empathy, whereas this is needed for sympathy to occur.

This indicates that empathy is the more spontaneous emotional state of the two, which arguably makes it more akin to some real-life reactions to nonhuman suffering; we are perhaps more likely to react spontaneously to

the cries of an animal that we recognize as signs of distress than we are to first stop and calculate the psychological properties of the animal. Yet this also potentially means less careful consideration of nonhuman animals' closeness to humans, at least initially, which could be seen as problematic. For instance, Aaltola's division between different kinds of empathy, mentioned above, points to potential problems with some varieties of empathy if not combined with each other, especially if there is no reflection on why one is empathizing. In relation to literature, however, this could be viewed as a potential strength: readers may be given to the spontaneity of empathy even if they are prone to theoretical scepticism concerning the minds and feelings of nonhuman animals or might otherwise rationalize their suffering. It may simply be that readers can be surprised by the empathy they feel, and such spontaneity could side-line or bracket any rationalizations for cognitive dissonance people experience regarding, for instance, the slaughter of nonhuman animals. Moreover, because the experience is one of fiction rather than real life, it may instead be prolonged; whereas many in real life may react to slaughter through avoidance, readers may keep reading as they are already immersed and following a plot. The narratologist Vera Nünning, for instance, argues that

> reading fiction usually involves a longer exposure to empathic responses than in real-life experiences. In complex social situations, we are unlikely to remain passive for an extended period of time. As a rule, people cannot remain silent observers for long, as some kind of response is required. […] When reading fiction, we remain an – albeit anything but passive – observer; for hours at a stretch, readers' or viewers' empathic reactions are allowed to continue without any disturbance from the outside. Such an extensive and intensive practice of empathic feelings, if engaged in regularly, can leave physiological traces and predispose readers to similar feelings in everyday situations. (2014, 102)

While there may be less social pressure to react to nonhuman suffering in some situations, and while societal norms may in the case of nonhuman animal slaughter teach us to turn away rather than intervene or object, the prolonged exposure to our own empathic responses as 'observers' when reading would be just as relevant in the case of nonhumans as in the human-centred narratives Nünning is presumably thinking of. Indeed, we may theorize in the case of such generally accepted slaughter that prolonged emotional exposure to it through fiction could teach us about

feelings of our own, which societal norms or a desire for psychological consistency might otherwise have us avoid.

This leads to the second potentially relevant difference between empathy and sympathy, namely that, in addition to not presupposing the attribution of psychological properties, empathy may be more related to a certain kind of immersion than sympathy is. As Lori Gruen notes, 'sympathy for another is felt from the outside, the third-person perspective', and involves a very clear distinction between the sympathizer and the object of sympathy (2015, 44). Empathy, however, is somehow more closely connected to the feelings of the one with whom it is felt; in Gruen's words, it 'recognizes connection with and understanding of the circumstances of the other' and attempts 'to take in as much about another's situation and perspective as possible' (45). This does not mean that empathic response requires complete understanding of the other or their situation, nor does it mean abandoning your own perspectives or attitudes, but unlike sympathy, it does entail a certain attempt at understanding and immersion into the feelings of the other, perhaps not unlike the immersion we sometimes experience into fictional lives and worlds.

Literary Empathy and Animals: Exclusions and Misconceptions

Given the lack of attention to the nonhuman, which too often seems to arise from scholarly endeavours in the humanist tradition, it is perhaps not all that surprising that nonhuman animals have generally been absent from discussions on the emotions we experience when reading. In fact, while empathy—including its connections to narratives—has in recent years been given increasing attention from some ecocritics and animal studies researchers (e.g. Weik von Mossner 2017; Aaltola 2018, 27–54; Małecki et al. 2019a, b, 2020), most work done on narrative empathy still overlooks or ignores nonhuman animals. And yet, as mentioned above, it seems odd to exclude nonhumans from such discourse, given the fact that real-life emotional reactions happen in relation to members of other species as well as our own, and since various kinds of nonhumans appear frequently in literary narratives.

One reason why animals are so often forgotten may be that scholarly attention to literary empathy tends to emphasize characters as the objects of our empathy or sympathy, and to implicitly, if not explicitly, consider

such characters to be of human form. This is the case, for instance, in Howard Sklar's *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction* (2013), which has arguments about characters at its heart and already on the first page of the introduction denotes these as 'fictional "people"' (1). Another example, Vera Nünning's *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds* (2014), similarly places emphasis on characterization without ever explicitly acknowledging the possibility that such characters might be nonhuman or explicitly defining what it takes for a fictional being to be considered a character. Nünning does, however, theorize that reading fiction 'can help readers to understand and share emotions of characters who are very different from themselves' (103), thereby echoing a number of other scholars. Such difference could, in theory, be across species lines; although Nünning never as much as hints that this can be the case, she also never explicitly states that the characters with whom we empathize *have to be* human. In this way, for Nünning and many others, the absence of consideration for the nonhuman in discussions on our emotional reactions to literature may be considered more of a serious oversight than a wilful omission. Indeed, an explicit consideration of the nonhuman could help theorists in conceptualizing and defining important concepts for their theories, such as the meaning or extent of difference between readers and characters in relation to empathy or other emotions, or the more fundamental question of what it takes for someone to be considered a character in a work of literature. After all, one could argue that identification with literary characters—that is, textual artefacts made of ink and paper—already reaches beyond the human and thus demonstrates literary empathy to be, in a sense, inherently posthumanist in nature.

An important exception to the general omission of animals from work on literary empathy is Suzanne Keen's seminal work, *Empathy and the Novel*, in which she does attempt to more closely consider the possible extent of characters' difference from ourselves and uses nonhuman animals in doing so. Like other writers on the subject, Keen points to a 'strong pattern' in readers' 'empathetic reading experiences … supporting the notion that character identification lies at the heart of readers' empathy' (2007, 68). Keen, however, also states firmly that the 'characters need not be human' and points to readers' reactions to Anna Sewell's classic novel *Black Beauty* (1877) and animal trickster stories from 'widely dispersed cultures' in order to support this (68). Indeed, for Keen, this inclusion of nonhuman animals strengthens arguments about how easily we may empathize when reading: 'If character identification routinely

overcomes the significant barrier of species difference, as it appears to do', she writes, 'then readers' empathy may be swiftly activated by a simple sign of an active agent' (68). This, in turn, leads Keen to the first of a number of central hypotheses that she proposes in her book, namely that 'empathy for fictional characters may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization' (69).

However, it is worth noticing the way in which Keen conceptualizes the animal here. Emphasizing 'species difference' as a 'significant barrier', Keen is in effect strengthening the argument for literary empathy by othering nonhuman animals and upholding a human/animal dichotomy, which empathy across species lines could otherwise be seen to put into question. This appears to be the underlying pattern in Keen's thinking about nonhuman animals in literature; shortly after, for instance, she proposes a hypothesis that 'spontaneous empathy for a fictional character's feelings opens the way for character identification (even in the face of strong differences, e.g.: the protagonist is a rabbit)', once again using the animal to exemplify 'strong differences' in relation to the human (70). But this is just one possible reading of what it may mean when readers can empathize with nonhuman characters; indeed, one might just as well argue that the strong inclination of readers to identify and empathize with nonhumans in literature could imply that the difference between humans and other species is *less* significant than anthropocentric and humanist cultural norms would usually have us think.

It is worth noting, too, that Keen's specific examples of animals as objects of literary empathy are found in a particular literary tradition of 'anthropomorphism', where many of the characters she sees as being on the other side of the 'significant barrier of species difference' are arguably to a large extent humans in a nonhuman bodily form.[5] This potentially has at least two significant consequences for her arguments, the first of which is that the implication that anthropomorphism—that is, a significant likeness to humans—in nonhuman characters is needed for empathy to occur simply threatens to undermine her argument that these animals are then

[5] Here, I use the term 'anthropomorphism' in a fairly narrow literary sense, which aligns with Keen's classic literary examples, to refer to the attribution of (supposedly) uniquely human characteristics to nonhuman characters, especially the use of human language (in thought or speech) by characters with nonhuman animal bodies. A broader discussion of the theoretical complexity of anthropomorphism as a concept is found in Chap. 3.

characterized by 'strong differences' or are on the other side of some 'significant barrier'. Moreover, the second consequence of her reliance on these kinds of examples in her arguments is that it implies that her notion of 'species difference' is, to a very significant degree, based on the physical appearance of the animal character in question. This reveals a very particular way of thinking about nonhuman animals in relation to the human and stands in opposition to more complex ideas that would emphasize animals' phenomenology or sense of being in the world, their sense perceptions, perspective, or mental and emotional qualities, all of which theoretically also play a part in engendering empathic feelings towards other beings. Indeed, since empathy is an emotional state, it could be *more* closely tied to such 'inner' characteristics than to physical appearance. Arguably then, the characteristics of 'animal' characters we are to empathize with in Keen's argument are the anthropomorphic or 'human' characteristics, not ones belonging to the nonhuman *as nonhuman*. Ultimately, then, the actual animal being, beyond its physical appearance, disappears even in Keen's discussion of literary empathy, despite her nonhuman examples.

This also implicitly calls into question one of Keen's central concepts, namely that of identity. Since identity is one of the 'minimal elements', which Keen proposes as prerequisites for empathy with characters, it seems relevant to ask how Keen understands this concept: which elements make up the 'identity' of a literary character, and to what extent may these elements then be applicable to nonhuman animals? Despite its centrality to her argument, Keen never explicitly defines what she means by identity, but in her discussion of empathy for characters, it is closely tied to readers' identification with characters as separate individuals. Writing of empathy for unattractive characters, she proposes that 'minimal requirements for identification' are 'a name (or a pronoun), a situation, and an implicit feeling' and that this 'might be all that is required to spark empathy' (2007, 76).

Keen's emphasis on naming here is interesting; while she allows for the more anonymous character identified simply by 'a pronoun', it seems to be the ability to set apart the character as a separate, feeling individual, with whom we can identify, that is at the heart of her arguments. This is in part very understandable; as I have argued elsewhere, naming other animals has a tendency to draw them 'closer to us' and make us more likely to think of a given animal 'as an individual, a person' (Borkfelt 2011, 121), and there is a certain logic to thinking this may make us more prone

to an empathic response. However, this also creates a moral imperative to pay attention to the emphasis we tend to place on naming, so we don't underestimate or forget those creatures we do not name individually (Borkfelt 2011, 123–124). Here, Keen in part fails in terms of the nonhumans in literature. Erica Fudge, interpreting Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis, observes that it 'is as if the animals had no identity, no presence without Adam' being there to name them (2002, 8). Similarly, here it seems as if the unnamed or more anonymous animals are forgotten in Keen's arguments about identification. Does this then mean that such unnamed animals in texts, for instance the anonymous animals slaughtered in literary abattoirs, are beyond the potential reach of readers' empathy? As I argue below, this need not be the case, but it would seem to be the most likely conclusion on such animals drawn from Keen's arguments about identification, characters, and empathy. This is problematic, not just for our consideration of nonhuman animals, but also for our consideration of the anonymous, de-individualized other more generally—Bauman's 'truly anonymous Other [who] is outside or beyond social space' (1993, 149).[6] Indeed, since many theorists specifically consider the ability of literature to contribute to an understanding of those who are unlike ourselves to be—either potentially or in actuality—an important part of its empathic potential (e.g. Batson et al. 2002, 1666; Feagin 1988, 498; Gruen 2015, 72; Hakemulder 2000, 97; Nünning 2014, 103), interrogating the extent to which this potential works against anonymity and de-individualization seems very important, and engaging with the role of the unnamed animal and the de-individualized animal in literary works could be a way of doing this.

Empathy and Anonymous Animals

In many ways, the intense focus on characters and characterization in literary theory on empathy (and sympathy) makes sense. In most literary narratives, characters are central to the plot, and narration, whether in first or third person and whether homo- or heterodiegetic, takes a point of view tied closely to one or more specific characters, whom we are meant to understand and identify with to a greater or lesser extent. As some have argued, this access into the feelings and thoughts of characters potentially

[6] See the first chapter for my discussion of Bauman's anonymous other in relation to animals in abattoirs.

very different from ourselves can help us gain new perspectives and may at times, directly or indirectly, engender empathy or sympathy for real-life others who share some characteristics with these fictional beings (e.g. Batson et al. 2002, 1666; Nussbaum 1997, 90).[7] As I will discuss later in this chapter, the use of nonhuman characters can have similar potential, even if the use of anthropomorphism may sometimes complicate the issues at stake.

However, given the fact that other animals in our societies are often considered in terms of groups (flocks, herds) instead of individually or are often objectified, turned into products, or used as aesthetic items on a par with inanimate objects, it seems worth asking questions about the role of such de-individualized or anonymized animals in literature.[8] Are there ways in which literature may draw or keep our attention to such animals as subjects, who in real life may only have our very momentary or objectifying attention, even without turning them into full-fledged, individual characters?

Here, the abattoir seems a case in point. In no place are animals more materially and systematically objectified than in the place that kills them in order to turn them into products for human consumption, and literary depictions often reflect this. Thus, as is apparent from examples in some of the chapters that follow, many literary scenes taking place in abattoirs retain their main focus on the human characters, where the nonhuman animals may remain in the background as part of the depicted environment or as observed objects.

Nevertheless, such an initial denial of subjectivity may not always be the obstacle it would first appear to be. Despite the importance of character identification to our reading experiences, our feelings in relation to a given narrative situation are likely not tied *only* to character identity; even

[7] On the other hand, of course, such claims for the effects of literature are best viewed as claims about the *potential* effects of reading and not as absolutes; empathy or sympathy for real-life beings is not a given, but a possible outcome of the perspective-taking and imaginary exercise that literature can provide. It is thus perfectly possible for some to weep for fictional characters and disregard similar real-life suffering; responses may differ and 'the ability to appreciate fiction is no guarantee of either ethical enlightenment or moral dissolution' (Feagin 1996, 100).

[8] This is not to say that it is not possible to empathize with a herd (or a pack, or a swarm, or a flock), but rather that there are likely important emotional aspects to how these are perceived, which can often render the individuals in the groups anonymous in various contexts.

Suzanne Keen notes that '[e]mpathy with a given situation responds to plot as much as to character, though it often finds its focus in a character's feelings' (2007, 79). For Keen, this is part of the explanation why we may experience situations when we feel for characters whom we actually dislike, because we recognize the difficulty of their situations, but it also points to something more complex in our feelings when we read, namely that what we recognize, identify with, and react to are more likely emotional states than characters as a whole. After all, as Susan Feagin rightly points out, there are no actual beings, whose psychological states one can simulate while reading (1996, 101). Empathic response to reading, she argues, is therefore more a simulation of processes we recognize than an identification with whole, complex characters who are dissimilar to us in many other ways. This also in a way echoes Keen's assertion that 'only minimal requirements' are needed for us to empathize, discussed above, although it emphasizes interior processes rather than exterior identificatory markers like names or pronouns.

If recognition of emotional states and mental processes in relation to depicted situations is what is needed to spark empathy when we read, the question might well be whether these need to be depicted from the inside of characters in order for us to develop an understanding complete enough for us to also feel for those who are experiencing such states. Indeed, Keen points out that '[m]ost theorists agree that purely externalized narration tends not to invite readers' empathy', which leads some to conclude that first person narration is more effective in producing empathic responses than third person narration—a position Keen rightly draws into question on various points (2007, 97; 98–99). Such a position, moreover, also implies that literary empathy differs immensely from instances of real-life empathy, where we will readily infer—and empathize with—the suffering of others based on external signs, such as facial expressions, posture, screams, and cries. Surely, we may similarly infer the feelings of characters who have 'tears starting in their eyes' or are 'laughing nervously', as do the visitors to the abattoir in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) in a pivotal scene, which I discuss in terms of empathy for nonhumans below (1985, 44). Indeed, if depictions of such external signs were not enough, there is always a narrative framework that even in externalized narration may supply information, which might even be lacking in real-life situations where empathy occurs. In other words, the position that externalized narration does not invite empathy too simplistically seems to discount the possible effect of our interpretive efforts on empathic responses when we read.

Whatever the power of externalized narration may generally be, I would like to suggest that such circumstances are often present in the depiction of nonhuman suffering in abattoirs.

Placing herself partly in opposition to what the position sceptical of 'externalized narration' may imply, Susan Feagin argues convincingly that showing, rather than telling, the emotional reactions of characters is better at inducing simulations of emotions in readers, whether the depiction happens through first or third person points of view (1996, 105–106). As indicated above, such a reliance on readers' interpretive efforts corresponds well with the ways in which we perceive the emotional states of others in the real world; it is also, however, what most often happens when we experience the suffering of nonhuman animals in depictions of abattoirs. Here, we are often not 'told', but 'shown', what animals feel or that they suffer; that is, we are left to interpret their suffering from external narration of their reactions to what they go through, as well as in some cases, from the reactions of human characters who respond empathically. Consider, for instance, the following passage from *The Jungle*:

> They had chains which they fastened about the leg of the nearest hog, and the other end of the chain they hooked into one of the rings on the wheel. So, as the wheel turned, a hog was suddenly jerked off his feet and borne aloft.
>
> At the same instant the ear was assailed by a most terrifying shriek; the visitors started in alarm, the women turned pale and shrank back. The shriek was followed by another, louder and yet more agonizing – for once started upon that journey, the hog never came back; at the top of the wheel, he was shunted off upon a trolley, and went sailing down the room. And meantime another was swung up, and then another, and another, until there was a double line of them, each dangling by a foot and kicking in frenzy – and squealing. The uproar was appalling, perilous to the ear drums; one feared there was too much sound for the room to hold – that the walls must give way or the ceiling crack. There were high squeals and low squeals, grunts, and wails of agony; there would come a momentary lull, and then a fresh outburst, louder than ever, surging up to a deafening climax. It was too much for some of the visitors – the men would look at each other, laughing nervously, and the women would stand with hands clenched, and the blood rushing to their faces, and the tears starting in their eyes. (Sinclair 1985, 43–44)

In this passage, readers as well as characters are confronted with the initial processes of actual slaughter, which prior to this has only been described

in very general terms, where the animals have only been considered in the plural. As the hogs are hoisted onto the disassembly lines, however, this changes. Not only is focus momentarily drawn to an individual hog, crucially described with the pronoun 'he', but attention is for the first time squarely on the reactions of the animals themselves. This is done, in large part, through the shrieks and squeals of the hogs, which establish pain and distress as individual in the otherwise anonymizing grouping of animals, and show nonhuman agency, even though nothing suggests any individual hog is different from the others. Sinclair's depiction here touches specifically upon the anonymization and distance with which animals on their way to slaughter are usually regarded; neither readers nor characters know or notice the animals as individuals prior to the process of slaughter. Yet, through what seems like universally recognizable reactions to suffering, the animals are—despite their anonymity—drawn out from objects in the background to subjects, whose individual expressions of suffering suddenly come to dominate the soundscape surrounding the characters and heighten the emotive potential of the scene.

That readers may react to such scenes of suffering, even of anonymized individuals, should not come as a surprise; as Feagin notes, albeit perhaps in somewhat too general terms, '[e]xplicit descriptions of torture to any human being (or higher-order animal) tend to be disturbing' (1996, 122). Whatever differences we may perceive between ourselves and the sufferer, we often recognize at the very least the bodily suffering, through a sense of shared embodiment, which provides an understanding of what it means for the sufferer to be in pain. Responding to 'shown' suffering in this way does not require a fixed identity of the sufferer; we do not need to be 'told' the feelings behind to recognize the signs of distress, which the sounds of the animals indicate, to be able to sympathetically imagine beyond our own species. We can recognize a sense of shared phenomenology, which in and of itself holds emotive potential transcending the namelessness and previous inconspicuousness of the animals.

The emotive potential of the slaughterhouse scenes in *The Jungle* is further helped along by the reactions of the characters to the screams of the hogs on the disassembly lines. As the men are clearly shown to be uncomfortable and the women turn 'pale' and have 'tears starting in their eyes', we are not only invited to empathize with the nonhuman animals, but also with the humans witnessing slaughter—to share in their empathy, as it were—implying that the characters' reactions are the intuitive and obvious reactions for feeling persons to have when faced directly with the

mass slaughter of other animals. In this way, the reactions of some characters may work as emotional cues to our own reactions, which may also help along empathy for the more anonymized, less fully characterized, beings depicted in a piece of literature, whether human or nonhuman.

It is, of course, difficult to generalize about readers' emotional reactions to texts; every reader is different and not all readers will react with the same emotions to any given passage. However, as theorists have argued in different forms since Aristotle, it seems likely that fiction can, through various narrative techniques and attention to certain kinds of content, open up more or less emotional—including empathic or sympathetic—potential, and despite the general focus on characters and characterization in literary research on emotions, the anonymity of the creatures depicted need not get in the way of this. Indeed, in the case of *The Jungle*, much of the novel's narrative relies heavily on the slaughter of nonhuman animals functioning as a kind of grand metaphor for the suffering of the workers, whose cause Sinclair wished to champion. This is in part made clear from the narrator's comments at the beginning of the slaughterhouse scenes themselves: 'In these chutes the stream of animals was continuous; it was uncanny to watch them, pressing on to their fate, all unsuspicious – a very river of death. Our friends were not poetical, and the sight suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny' (1985, 42). Only too late does the novel's protagonist realize the reality of this comparison: 'Jurgis recollected now how … he had stood and watched the hog killing, and thought how cruel and savage it was, and come away congratulating himself that he was not a hog; now his new acquaintance showed him that a hog was just what he had been – one of the packers' hogs' (376). While as a metaphor nonhuman suffering can be said to remain in the background of the novel's primary concern, it also helps to illustrate the importance of feeling for nonhuman suffering in the novel; only through our feeling for the nonhuman and the recognition of the comparison to our own suffering as valid does the metaphor gain power as a symbol of the workers' suffering, or of human suffering more generally. If, on the other hand, we do not empathize to some degree with the suffering of the hogs and the other animals slaughtered, the metaphor loses its power, and so does the depiction of the suffering it is meant to symbolise.[9]

[9] However, it is also, as I argue in my analysis in Chap. 4, possible to read *The Jungle* in a way that disregards the metaphor altogether, seeing instead a shared sense of suffering grounded in a common vulnerability that runs across species.

It also seems worth noting how the anonymity of animals in some fictional abattoirs mirrors our relations to the animals slaughtered in real life; in a way, such depictions may be closer to our real-life experiences than those that personalize or anthropomorphise the animals. In an article on 'Imagining and Appreciating Fictions', Susan Feagin explains in detail 'why empathizing with a fictional character's emotions cannot be analyzed like empathizing with real life emotions' and points out that 'neither the individuals with whom one empathizes nor their emotions exist, and one's empathy plays no role in deliberations about whether to do something about the situation' (1988, 493). However, this is arguably one aspect of empathic responses to fiction in relation to which the animals in fictional slaughterhouses usually differ from human characters in fiction; unlike both human characters and real humans, nonhuman animals in slaughterhouses—whether fictional or real—are often not thought of as individuals, and the animals in the fictional abattoir therefore do not differ much at an individual level from those in the real one. Thus, these animals—their being and their treatment—resemble animals destined for slaughter in the real world in ways that human or heavily anthropomorphised characters may not resemble their real-life counterparts. In a certain sense, the animals slaughtered in fiction are not removed from the reality and plight of real-life animals in the same way, since these real animals are not individualized and function merely as means to an end, just as fictional animals may just exist as collective props in depicting the processes of slaughter or whichever part of a given plot takes place in the slaughterhouse.

Arguably, then, one obstacle for transforming empathy for human characters brought on by reading fiction into empathy in real life is often not present when it comes to the animals we read about, which should then theoretically strengthen the literary quality of illuminating and reminding us of scenarios in real life in these cases. Moreover, even when fiction individualizes nonhuman animals destined for slaughter, it does not necessarily provide the reader with reason to think the individual characteristics are then different from those of real-life animals, since the individualities of animals in real abattoirs remain obscure and undefined to most of us in modern societies.

Empathy and Nonhuman Individualities

While empathy need not be limited to personified characters with clearly discernible identities, it is clear that readers do empathize with characters and that characterization and identity do play a role in such empathic reading experiences. Moreover, despite her reliance on anthropomorphism as an enabler of empathic response, Suzanne Keen is certainly right to point out that characters with whom we empathize 'need not be human' (2007, 68). However, as discussed, the emphasis Keen places on anthropomorphism seems to suggest that it is our ability to see 'human' or 'humanlike' characteristics in nonhuman characters that makes us prone to empathizing with them. Keen further develops this reliance on anthropomorphism in a later article on graphic narratives, in which she considers giving various human or humanlike physical traits to the animals depicted as 'fast tracks' to eliciting human emotional responses in these narratives (2011b).[10] In a number of ways, such an approach makes sense; after all, theorists and scholars on empathy and sympathy since Hume have pointed to how such feelings and responses are often tied to bias, and have framed this in terms of similarity, familiarity, or a preference for 'in-groups' (e.g. Hoffman 2000, 206–213; Hume 1985, 368–369). Psychologist Martin L. Hoffman, for instance, attributes such bias to human evolution:

> Evolution theorists agree that humans evolved in small groups and that although altruism was necessary for survival within groups, the scarcity of resources often pitted one group against another. It should therefore not be surprising that a person is more likely to empathize with and help those who are members of his or her family, ethnic or racial group – his or her in-group, in short. And when we consider that members of one's in-group are similar to each other and to oneself and share feelings of closeness and affection, it should not be surprising that a person is also more likely to empathize with friends than with strangers and with people who are similar to oneself than with people who are different. (2000, 206)

It is important to note here that ideas of in- or out-groups do not straightforwardly align with species and that empathy is about beliefs about others' feelings and phenomenology rather than about exactness,

[10] Interestingly, in another article from 2011, Keen's analysis of empathy for nonhuman animals in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* seems less reliant on anthropomorphism, although unfortunately she does not address this issue directly in that context (2011a).

and therefore potentially fluid across species lines. Nevertheless, if we are hardwired by evolution to have this kind of in-group bias, it would be likely for some people within speciesist cultures to empathize more easily with humans than with other species, and more easily with members of other species the more they resemble members of our own in various ways, whether as readers or in real-life scenarios. However, it seems important to remember that even when this is so, this does not preclude empathizing—to some degree or in some situations—with those who are dissimilar or outside our in-group, including other animals.[11] Moreover, as already mentioned, several scholars and theorists argue that the ability to engender empathy for members of out-groups—in other words, overcoming bias based on similarity and familiarity—is exactly one of the things achieved in reading literature. Analysing empathy in Victorian novels on social issues, Mary-Catherine Harrison, for instance, argues that 'the ethical potential of narrative empathy can in some ways surpass that of interpersonal empathy because of its ability to overcome … "similarity bias," that is, our unwillingness or inability to empathize with people who are not like ourselves' (2011, 257). Indeed, she suggests, fictional narratives may prompt readers to reconfigure their 'criteria for similarity' (255):

> Narrative empathy, I predict, can likewise operate by encouraging readers to identify resemblances that they might not otherwise observe in characters from other cultural groups. In particular, narrative empathy supplants criteria based on demographic similarity, like race or class, with criteria based on shared emotional responses, changing the categories by which individuals judge similitude and difference. (270)

While Harrison's main focus is on class, her argument seems readily transferable to the subject of species difference. Moreover, just as 'deliberate treatment of cultural difference … can be especially useful for subverting similarity bias' (259), deliberate treatment of species difference and anthropocentric prejudice, seen for instance in depictions of feeling nonhuman individuals, could well work along similar lines.

[11] In addition, it seems plausible that some people might readily include other animals within their in-group, for instance in the form of companion animals, and thus might be more disposed to empathic responses in relation to other animals (or certain species of animals), real or fictitious, although this may only rarely help along empathy for animals in abattoirs, given the institutionalized distancing of these from our social lives or environment.

Arguably, then, while we should be aware of the role anthropomorphic depictions may play for narrative empathy, we should not exclude the possibility that narratives less reliant on humanising the nonhuman might also engender empathic responses to individual nonhumans in fiction. In other words, while anthropomorphic techniques—for example, nonhuman narration, nonhuman animals speaking in human language, smiling or exhibiting human facial features[12]—may help empathic responses to nonhuman animals in fiction along, there are likely other, less humanising ways of doing the same as well. There are ways of making individual nonhuman animals in narratives emotionally or empathically stirring while they remain, fully and wholly, narrated as of their own species.

Consider, for instance, the particular cow in Ruth Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats* (1998), who 'balked, minced, then slammed her bulk against the sides of the pen. She had just watched the cow before her being killed, and the cow before that, and she was terrified' (283).[13] The cow here is seen *as a cow*, going to slaughter, and is, I would argue, not anthropomorphised to any significant degree.[14] Instead, we read the reactions of the cow through the eyes of the female protagonist, getting not just her logical interpretation of the cow's emotional reactions ('she was terrified'), but being shown those reactions so we can follow that interpretation and identify with the likely feeling to result from the situation the animal is in. Even if we sceptically read the fear of the cow as the projection of the protagonist's own empathic feelings at watching, this does not amount to direct anthropomorphisation, but merely to a reflection on what must be termed a likely reaction of someone faced with the slaughter of a large animal without being habituated to it. Any empathic response aroused, then, will be for the cow herself—as well as possibly the onlookers—not for particular human-like characteristics of an anthropomorphised animal.

Individualization is, however, significant in Ozeki's depiction of cow slaughter. If we consider how this scene conforms to Keen's 'minimal requirements' needed for us to identify and empathize—'a name (or a pronoun), a situation, and an implicit feeling'—all of these requirements

[12] These examples correspond to those used by Keen: nonhuman narration is found in Sewell's *Black Beauty*, while animal tricksters would tend to be speaking animals (2007, 68), and the smiles and eyebrows of lions are, in Keen's words, part of 'the emotional immediacy of anthropomorphized animal faces' in the graphic novel *Pride of Baghdad* (2011b, 140, 147–148; Vaughan and Henrichon 2006).

[13] I discuss *My Year of Meats* in more detail in Chap. 6.

[14] See my discussion of how to define anthropomorphism in Chap. 3.

are present (2007, 76). The situation is clear, and involves a threat to the animal depicted, and while the feeling is made explicit by the human narrator, it seems safe to say that even prior to this, the situation of slaughter is easily understood as distressing for the cow, given the reactions described. Furthermore, the use of the subject pronouns 'she' and 'her', rather than the objectifying 'it', helps along the individualization of the animal being led to slaughter. It is worth pointing out that while these pronouns are traditionally reserved for humans and specifically personalized animals (although increasingly used more broadly about other animals as well), and may as such sometimes narratively function as a step towards anthropomorphism, their use does not in itself constitute anything anthropomorphic; it is merely a recognition of the biological fact of individuality—possibly coupled with a philosophical recognition of a kind of personhood—in nonhuman animals. That the slaughter witnessed is that of a female animal is also clearly not coincidental and helps along identification in a novel in which the story, told partly by a homodiegetic female narrator, intertwines issues of objectification, gender, and meat in various ways.

With examples such as the one above in mind, I argue that Keen tends to overemphasize the importance of anthropomorphism and overlook what nonhuman animals in fiction represent *as nonhuman* rather than as beings seen through a lens of anthropomorphic approximation to the human. As such, emphasis or insistence on anthropomorphism as the vehicle for empathy with other animals surrenders itself too easily to similarity bias. This does not mean, however, that similarity cannot help along empathy; it just means that there is more going on in literature, which can be viewed as a medium able to overcome or, at the very least, challenge our tendency to empathize more strongly with those similar to us, whether human or nonhuman. Thus, Keen may well be correct that anthropomorphism can help empathy along, but failing to discuss how empathy for fictional nonhuman animals can work without anthropomorphism conversely threatens to undermine or contradict her notion that only 'minimal requirements' are needed for empathy. That is, if we can empathize with human characters with very little characterization, as Keen argues, why should we need the closer examination and approximation provided by anthropomorphism to empathize with nonhuman characters? As is hopefully apparent from the above, I argue that we do not. After all, it is the inner lives and feelings that are the ultimate objects of our empathy, and while we need media for interpreting these internal processes of the

characters, anthropomorphic features such as those emphasized by Keen are not the only media through which we may discern the emotional states of fictional nonhuman animals. Hence, empathic responses to nonhuman animals *as* nonhuman are both possible and plausible.

Emotion, Context, and Distance to Slaughter

Arguing for an empathy-based ethic in our relationships with other animals, Lori Gruen points to how empathy gives us a contextual approach that other ethical approaches often fail to provide. As ecofeminist scholar Marti Kheel has argued, traditional ethical argumentation involves 'truncated narratives', which isolate ethical problems from their broader causes and their 'embedded context' (Gruen 2015, 11–13; Kheel 1993, 255). Such ethical theorizing thus focuses on what actions are ethically viable or what obligations one has from the subject's point of view, but fails to consider the situation from the point of view of the being who is the object of ethical consideration. Moreover, it runs the risk of setting 'up a binary in which there is a victim and a hero, and thus obscure[s] the possibility that the hero may be part of the cause of the larger problem' (Gruen 2015, 13). Empathy, on the other hand, actively seeks to enter into the feelings and points of view of the other, thus disrupting such a binary and opening up the possibility of considering larger contexts of the ethical problem.

In a similar vein, engaging emotionally with literature can be seen as a way of digging more deeply into issues and seeing them in other contexts that challenge, and can possibly help to reshape, habitual ways of thinking and feeling. Whether such emotional engagement is viewed as a way of learning about one's own emotions or about culturally sanctioned ways of feeling (Nünning 2014, 111, 113–115) or as a way of guarding 'against intellectual and emotional myopia', and keeping us 'mentally flexible' (Feagin 1988, 500), the ways in which fiction provides context for emotional situations seems central. As David S. Miall, for instance, argues based on empirical studies, 'a literary text engages with the reader's own experience and … helps the reader to think about it afresh, even to reconfigure it and understand it in a new light', and the key features for this process are 'the dehabituating power of literary forms' and 'empathic projection into the lives of others through narrative' (2000, 50). As Keen points out, this makes 'empathy a companion to defamiliarization', which prompts her to theorize that 'unusual or striking representations in the literary text promote foregrounding and open the way to empathetic

reading' (2007, 87). One way in which a representation can be 'striking' is through the setting of part of a narrative in an unusual or unsettling place or environment, and—along with other places, such as prisons and asylums—the heterotopic abattoir is one such place; indeed, as the slaughter of other animals has gradually become further removed from our everyday lives, such an environment must seem ever more striking and unusual to the average reader. Despite the distance between the slaughter of other animals and our daily lives, however, the abattoir is also simultaneously connected to those daily lives in a most intimate way through the consumption of its products. Thus, the ability of literature to confront us with the unusual and striking meets with emotional potential and ethical tension in representations of slaughter and, as I return to repeatedly in later chapters, fictional texts depicting abattoirs draw on this complex interplay in various ways, letting dehabituation, emotion, and a sense of ethical disquiet potentially highlight and mutually reinforce each other.

For example, in its endeavour to 'frighten the country by a picture of what its industrial masters were doing to their victims' (Sinclair 1906, 594), Sinclair's *The Jungle* continually plays on what is normally seen and unseen by the imagined or intended reader, making both implicit and explicit connections to emotional reactions and ethical considerations. While initially implying something emotionally and ethically unsettling about the 'uncanny' view of animals walking to their deaths before the actual slaughter is described (Sinclair 1985, 42), the novel later sums up the experience of the characters watching the pig slaughter at Packingtown:

> It was all so businesslike that one watched it fascinated. It was pork-making by machinery, pork-making by applied mathematics. And yet somehow the most matter-of-fact person could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests – and so perfectly within their rights! They had done nothing to deserve it; and it was adding insult to injury, as the thing was done here, swinging them up in this cold-blooded, impersonal way, without a pretence at apology, without the homage of a tear. … It was like some horrible crime committed in a dungeon, all unseen and unheeded, buried out of sight and of memory. (44–45)

Although of an earlier date, these last sentences mirror Georges Bataille's comments on slaughterhouses and the quarantining of slaughter, which I considered in the first chapter. For most, the problematic aspects of

slaughtering other animals are 'buried out of sight' through the placement and architecture of the abattoirs. Moreover, while the slaughter itself is shown to be ethically unsettling in *The Jungle*, it is shown to the characters visiting the slaughterhouses as an example of industrial progress and its 'wonderful efficiency' (Sinclair 1985, 42). Thus, while characters in the novel are shown much of the slaughtering process (and more than visitors to a present-day abattoir would be likely to see), they are shown this in a certain context, in which the size of the structure and the efficiency of its design and machinery are ultimately the main focus, and the final impression of the main character therefore one of fascination rather than empathy or ethical qualms. In Bataille's words, the architecture and design of the buildings remain the 'true masters' of the people and their thoughts (Leach 1997, 21).

For the reader, however, the 'knowledge' of animal slaughter and of individual animals produced by the novel remains at the forefront, leaving the possibility of empathic response open, not least because the novel's main focus on the lives and conditions of workers relies on it. This is assured not only through the many authorial comments that imply to the reader that the characters' fascination with the buildings and processes is problematic and ill-fated, but also through the sceptical and sarcastic comments of a more experienced character, whose remarks make it clear that there are significant downsides to the efficient processes and that 'the visitors did not see any more than the packers wanted them to' (Sinclair 1985, 43).

While Sinclair's critique of capitalism and workers' conditions is expressed as universally true, the ethical issues surrounding animal slaughter are further highlighted by the mention towards the end of the novel that it seems to be 'especially true in Packingtown; there seemed to be something about the work of slaughtering that tended to ruthlessness and ferocity' (376). It is even suggested that the eating of animals will cease if capitalism ceases, because nobody will want to do the unpleasant work and 'eventually those who want to eat meat will have to do their own killing – and how long do you think the custom would survive then?' (408). Having been confronted with the usually unseen through graphic and unsettling descriptions of slaughter, readers are thus finally invited almost explicitly to consider their own feelings surrounding the slaughter of animals for meat and their own potential ability to perform it.

Empathy, Vulnerability, Sentimentalism, and Care

In this chapter so far, I have discussed what I see as failings of debates on literary empathy, but also what I believe are empathy's strengths in an attempt to show how it holds potential as a framework for discussing texts about nonhuman animals, particularly in the context and relative anonymity of slaughterhouses. As I use empathy in my readings, however, I am highly influenced also by Anat Pick's influential ideas about 'creaturely' vulnerability and Josephine Donovan's aesthetics of care, both of which become entwined with empathy in how I read texts in the following chapters.

While Pick does not connect her concept of creatureliness to empathy, I see a connection that goes through the sense of shared phenomenology, which my notion of empathy implies. For Pick, the creaturely works differently from philosophies that seek to expand notions of nonhuman subjectivity to bring it closer to the human. Instead, she insists, '[t]he gesture is one of *contraction*: making ourselves "less human," as it were, whilst seeking to grant animals a share in our world of subjectivity' (2011, 6, italics orig.). Creaturely readings, in this way, seek to destabilise anthropocentrism by highlighting the shared experience of embodiment, and specifically, the vulnerability that comes with being embodied. In my arguments about empathy above, I attempt something similar, namely to position empathy as a cognitive and emotional focus that sets aside difference in order to focus on what may be (imagined as) shared with the being (or character) who is the object of one's empathy. Like Pick's creatureliness, my approach to empathy does not deny difference, but works against human exceptionalism by focusing on what we either know or can imagine to be shared. That is, we may not know the exact phenomenology of the pig going to slaughter, but we *do know* the more material sense of experience that comes with being embodied, and the vulnerability that follows from it: the experience of a body subjected to pain (or pleasure), the fear of hurt to one's body, distress at being compelled as an embodied being, and so on. In this way, while Pick focuses creaturely vulnerability on working against human exceptionalism, it can also function as a source of empathic attentiveness and imagination.

As considered earlier, empathy itself must necessarily be viewed as connected with other emotional states, which we empathize with and thus to some extent experience while empathizing. As such, engaging empathically while reading can be viewed as a kind of learning ground or a site of

emotional experimentation, as a number of scholars argue. Vera Nünning, for instance, argues that fiction 'broadens our emotional horizon in the sense of expanding the range of emotions which we can identify and feel empathy with', while also allowing 'for a kind of fine-tuning and differentiation between emotional nuances', which would be difficult in 'real-life situations', while Susan Feagin considers '[e]motional and affective responses' to fiction to be 'affective "trials and error"' (Nünning 2014, 114; Feagin 1996, 97). Indeed, Nünning expands such ideas and argues that 'fiction plays an important part in the dissemination of "feeling rules"', meaning our knowledge and perception of the cultural appropriateness and adequate intensity of various emotions in different kinds of situations (2014, 115–116).

A frequent charge against those who take other animals' feelings into account is that of sentimentalism, and fiction that engages with nonhuman feeling or critiques killing thus risks being seen as less rational and given to a supposedly irrational and privileged sentimentality, which only those removed from the reality of real-life slaughter can afford. This is, for instance, the sentiment expressed through the protagonist Mat in the Scottish writer Archie Hind's novel *The Dear Green Place* (1966),[15] as he works at the local abattoir in Glasgow:

> Mat had in his time come across horrified descriptions of shambles and he had shared in the horror of the writers, recoiling from what appeared to be the awfulness of the experience. He had only worked in the slaughter-house for a few weeks before he learned to despise this point of view. It began to seem to him that the morbidness was a projection by the writer on to the shambles that he viewed and that the recoil was a luxury which could be afforded by the writer in not being involved or responsible for the shambles.
>
> A man, Mat thought, need not be insensitive because he was not squeamish, nor devoid of pity – it was a point of professional pride to the slaughterman that he would kill an animal neatly and quickly without causing it unnecessary suffering. (2008, 109)

Mat's thoughts on the 'horror' of writers and readers here can be read as a depiction of how workers may repress emotions to maintain a positive self-image. As anthropologist Eimear McLoughlin argues, in relation to what she dubs the 'emotionography' of the slaughterhouse, what happens in slaughterhouses 'demands that human and non-human identities are

[15] I discuss the depiction of the abattoir in this novel further in Chap. 4.

redefined so that emotions are kept in check and do not conflict with *what has to be done*' (2019, 324, italics orig.). That, in Mat's view, 'recoil was a luxury which could be afforded' by those who have no direct involvement or responsibility in relation to the slaughter, conversely suggests that anyone who does have such direct involvement needs to distance themselves from any feelings of horror or disgust. As McLoughlin's research suggests, 'the identity of the ideal slaughter worker … is routinely constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in the daily travails of killing', in part 'through the cultivation of an emotional stoicism', which 'ensures that [workers'] emotions fall into line with company feeling rules that cultivate emotional detachment' (2019, 338, see also, Hamilton and McCabe 2016, 345).[16] Mat's rationalization of his work as a necessity—implied by the idea that recoil is 'afforded' and by the idea of 'unnecessary suffering'—exemplifies such cultivation, as do his attempts at deeming certain emotional responses ('horror', 'recoil') 'a luxury' and 'squeamish', and his appeal to a seemingly more rational 'professional pride' in killing.

Implicit in this kind of charge against those horrified writers and readers is also a particular approach to aesthetics, which parallels the emotional dissociation and detachment exhibited by Mat. Thus, Mat's critique of writers and readers implies an approach in which the writer or artist is similarly meant to portray the artistic object in a detached manner, rather than with emotional investment. Rather than giving in and getting emotionally involved, one should focus on the professional work to be done, as the slaughterer does, viewing the animal as an object to be 'neatly' and 'quickly' handled in a way that is both practically and emotionally hygienic, allowing only for the objectifying emotion of pity and not for an empathic reaction to the killing or suffering of subjects. Such an aesthetic is antithetical to empathic involvement in art and literature, and it also denies the reader access to the kind of potential for emotional learning or experimenting through literature essential to theorists like Nünning and Feagin. At the very least, charging a text or its author with being overly sentimental implies that some benevolent and compassionate emotions should not be tried out in the specific context of that text or its subject matter. Instead, we are left with the emotion of pity in a form that is objectifying rather

[16] Psychologists similarly point to emotion work that takes place in order to cope with killing animals. Melanie Joy, for instance, argues that meat consumption and slaughter involve 'psychic numbing' in the form of a 'separation of thoughts from feelings, as manifested in various psychological defense mechanisms' (2002, 75).

than empathically engaging through the sense of vulnerability one shares with the suffering other.

There is an echo of Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* here, where the choice of emotions is between a subjective fear and an objectifying pity, making the tension between these two the foundation of our emotional responses to art, and theorists have sometimes viewed such responses as a form of purgation or harmless emotional outlet (Donovan 2016, 194; Aristotle 2013, 23, 33). As others have argued, however, this leaves us with too narrow a theory of literary emotions (Feagin 1988, 493; Donovan 2016, 194–195). Furthermore, explaining her notion of an 'aesthetics of care' in writings about nonhuman animals, Josephine Donovan argues that pity is better understood as a 'caring compassion and sympathy' which removes or downplays the objectifying component of pity and allows for ecofeminist readings that approach other animals and nature more engagingly, through an ethics of care (194–196). Such aesthetics of care are rather akin to ideas of narrative empathy, which similarly engage with subjectivities. As Donovan writes, drawing on Martin Buber, 'an aesthetics of care entails a "mimetic comportment" wherein the writer or artist engages with her subject matter in an I-thou relationship where the other is perceived as a subject, not an object, as in the I-it construction' (92). While readers' empathic and other emotional responses need not correspond to writers' intentions (see Keen 2007, 75–76), a willingness to go beyond an objectifying aesthetic does seem conducive to empathic response, not least when those depicted are of a species or in situations that position them as objects, such as the animals in abattoirs. While not a precondition for empathic response, then, writers' attentiveness to nonhuman subjectivity may enhance experiences of empathy or make them more likely.

Similarly, Pick's 'creaturely ethics' asks '[w]hat are the limits of attention?' but 'does not depend on fulfilling any preliminary criteria of subjectivity' (2011, 193). Neither empathy nor the creaturely are thus based on pre-set abstract criteria about the other, but concerned instead with more immediate attentiveness to what may be shared. As Pick notes, the creaturely finds its source 'in the recognition of the materiality and vulnerability of all living bodies, whether human or not' (193). While fiction may help inform our ideas of the inner lives of other animals, it is important not to think of empathy in terms of accuracy. What employing our imaginations to empathize with nonhuman animals in literature gives us is not primarily a detailed knowledge of nonhuman consciousness, but rather an emotional 'knowledge', continuous reminders, that such consciousness

exists, and a means by which we may endeavour to imagine it, cognitively and emotionally. Literature, in this way, can help us stretch our imaginary abilities and keep alive the willingness to imagine—through what is perceived as shared—what it may be like to be beings different from us in various situations. Unlike philosophical speculation, experiencing other subjectivities through literature avoids abstractions such as 'animals do not suffer' and instead offers impressions of possible realities, allowing us to experience through different lenses. McLoughlin's work on the management of feelings in the slaughterhouse shows the ethical significance of nonhuman 'emotional landscape[s]' being 'within our imagination', 'through embodied communication and intersubjective relations', even if they are ultimately 'out of our reach' in terms of accuracy (2019, 324). As fiction already engages our imaginations with the emotional lives of others, an empathic attentiveness to embodied lives in the text may similarly, if more positively, help inform the ethics of our relations with the kinds of lives we imagine, whether human or nonhuman.

In addition, fiction may help us gain a more profound or nuanced understanding of our own emotions, not only because it can 'highlight fleeting moments of feeling which are usually lost in the flow of experiences', but also because it can provide a more detailed grasp of the feelings of others and give us access to empathizing with feelings we 'would not be able to identify in interactive encounters' (Nünning 2014, 114, 111). This may make fiction particularly potent for empathizing with the emotions of those whose emotional expressions we may normally have difficulty understanding, such as members of other species. In other words, where it may in some instances be difficult to know when a given nonhuman animal is experiencing which feelings in real life—due to differences in outward reactions to emotions and a more general lack of interspecies understanding—we may more precisely empathize with such nonhuman feelings in certain literary situations. Arguably, compared with many real-life situations, fiction can simply provide us with better time and opportunity to truly contemplate emotions, whether our own or those of others, and the consequences of those emotions.

According to researchers in the field, emotions 'probably need to be put into words first' in order to be remembered and we are therefore unlikely to remember and recognize various fleeting emotions in everyday life (Nünning 2014, 114; Rosenberg and Ekman 1994, 224). Furthermore, as Nünning correctly observes, 'our view of our own recent emotions is often coloured by the tendency to justify them in retrospect and to adjust

them to our current goals' (2014, 114). This makes reading fiction especially interesting in relation to emotionally difficult situations which we might seek to avoid in real life, such as prolonged exposure to the suffering or slaughter of other animals. Keen, for instance, argues that 'readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion' (2007, 88). Where in reality defence mechanisms may kick in to help us justify or avoid the emotional consequences of the slaughter we witness (or, more likely, disavow), fiction places them in a narrative for us, and the narrative encourages us to contemplate them and to some extent relieves us from the need for emotional defences felt in real-life experiences. Thus, readers may learn more about their own emotions in relation to slaughter through reading fiction than they are likely to learn about them in other contexts.

Moreover, some psychologists go a little further and suggest that 'attitudes and emotions would exert a stronger influence in fictional contexts than in factual ones', because readers processing fiction are 'unfettered by concerns with the historical, moral or societal significance of the event' (Prentice and Gerrig 1999, 541). In other words, because the events we read about are not real, and we need not consider the consequences of our attitudes towards them, we may allow our feelings about them to influence us more strongly. David S. Miall similarly views reading literature as 'an "offline" way of experimenting with emotions and experiences', a safe space in which letting our guard down may help us gain 'insight into their implications' and thus prepare us for real-life situations and make us more adaptable (2000, 50). This ties the opportunity of probing and understanding our own feelings through reading, which Nünning posits, to a greater degree of openness to experiencing those feelings in the first place, which is likely when reading fiction.

Ultimately then, readers may feel less need to employ defence mechanisms when reading fiction, and this may be an essential part of both the value and the enjoyment of doing so, opening the door to kinds of empathic attentiveness, which might otherwise often be avoided when it comes to the animals who are killed in slaughterhouses. The kind of 'slaughter empathics', which I have endeavoured to argue for in this chapter, draws on this openness and potential for attentiveness, which I suggest can help make slaughterhouse fictions a vehicle for readers to face discomforts with what happens inside the otherwise closed and distanced modern abattoir. Some of the general strengths of narrative empathy seem very

well suited to this task: fiction's general ability to confront readers with the unusual or striking; its ability to get readers to lower some of their defences; narrative empathy's potential to speak for out-groups and to help reconfigure the criteria by which readers judge similarity. In the meeting with the complexities of the modern abattoir, these strengths can work in a complex interplay with the ethical tensions and emotional potential of slaughter, in part exactly because of how slaughter is otherwise avoided and obscured in late modernity. That is, while I would certainly not want to suggest that depictions of slaughter of single animals outside abattoirs could never work in similar ways—especially when read in a society in which slaughter is generally disavowed—the reliance on fiction's ability to shed light on what is hidden from view, and to make readers engage with it emotionally, seems crucial to such slaughter empathics. In this kind of literary meeting with the slaughter of other animals, readers get the chance to go beyond objectifying aesthetics, and to apply attentiveness to emotional similarities as well as to external signs of feeling and suffering, which nonhuman animals exhibit as they are slaughtered; thus readers can explore their own empathy for beings in situations, which are rarely encountered as openly by most people in late modernity, if at all.

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CHAPTER 3

Anthropomorphism and the Abattoir

Writing about anthropomorphism inherently poses a challenge in that the word refers to a contested phenomenon, of whose meaning there are different conceptions. It is usually taken to refer to the attribution of human characteristics to beings or things that are not human, but such a definition begs more specifics: which kinds of characteristics qualify (feelings, mental states, physical attributes, motivations, beliefs, etc.)? Moreover, do these characteristics need to be truly uniquely human, just perceived as unique to us, or simply shared between humans and others?

Across animal studies, anthropomorphism seems to be a concept that is equally often defended, criticized, promoted, and problematized in disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, cognitive ethology, and literary studies. As researchers have altered their approaches and various presumptions of human uniqueness have increasingly, and rightly, been disproven, questioned, or criticized, the inherent anthropocentrism of anthropomorphism as a concept has itself accordingly been scrutinized (e.g. Taylor 2011; Tyler 2003). Indeed, there is a way in which discussions on anthropomorphism—as a term and as a practice—always necessarily incorporate and depend upon at least a tacit acceptance of a human/animal binary, which is arguably inherently speciesist and thus problematic and in need of rethinking (Varsava 2014; Fudge 2002, 144). Certainly, our anthropomorphic inclinations *can* in a number of ways have negative consequences for other animals, but on the other hand, as James Serpell has argued, 'it is questionable whether the animal protection and conservation

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movements would even exist if not for the bond of sympathy engendered for nonhuman animals by anthropomorphic thinking' (2005, 132).

Discussing anthropomorphism in any depth is thus hardly a straightforward task. Yet, as a term, it remains convenient and so prominent as to be unavoidable in the field. Despite a number of useful related, more precise, and sometimes competing terms—such as therianthropism, theriomorphism, zoomorphism, and egomorphism (Baker 2001, 108; Garrard 2012, 154; Milton 2005)—'anthropomorphism' is still the most widely used term for describing the mixture of characteristics perceived somehow as 'human' with those of other animals (or other beings, or inanimate objects).[1] Whether one thinks of it as little more than sentimental projection or as a means of recognizing what we have in common, it is a fact that because we tend to think about other animals in relation to ourselves—to see in them something of ourselves—anthropomorphism as a concept remains ever-present and ever-relevant. Indeed, if one chooses to approach the subject epistemologically, it is possible to argue that any representation of another animal will always be inherently anthropomorphic in the sense that it is filtered through human experience and language.

Even within the relatively narrow debates on anthropomorphism in literary studies, opinions are divided as to what exactly constitutes an anthropomorphic representation, from those who argue that 'all fictional animals are anthropomorphised to some degree' to various considerations of anthropomorphism as tied to the depiction of specific characteristics in the beings that are anthropomorphised (Cadman 2016, 172). Thus, when I argued in the previous chapter that the cow slaughtered in a pivotal scene in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* is 'not anthropomorphised to any significant degree', I employed a specific ontological conceptualization of what it means to represent an animal anthropomorphically, with which some would disagree. I maintained, in effect, that depicting an animal as having characteristics—including feelings and experiences—which we can reasonably assume are shared between humans and the animal species in question, is not anthropomorphic. To insist that such a depiction of a

[1] For the present discussion, I will stick to using the terms 'anthropomorphism', for the projection of human characteristics onto other animals (or the representation of other animals as having such characteristics), and 'zoomorphism', for the projection of other species' characteristics onto humans (or the representation of human characters as having particular features of other species). Yet it is worth noting that even these terms are used differently in current debates and that, indeed, the line between the two is often blurry or dependent on perspective.

cow—as a gendered animal experiencing feelings of fear—is anthropomorphic would, I argue, be to either over-emphasize human epistemology or effectively engage in what the primatologist Frans de Waal (1999) has called 'anthropodenial' by refusing to let go of human uniqueness despite evidence to the contrary.

In this chapter, I proceed from this same general viewpoint, as I discuss the implications of anthropomorphism in relation to slaughterhouse fictions and argue for the value of a rich literary use of anthropomorphism, somewhat akin to what Kari Weil calls 'critical anthropomorphism', as a mode that allows ethical and empathic attention to the experiences of nonhuman animals without claiming accurate knowledge of such experience (2012, 20). Albeit in very different ways, the two slaughterhouse fictions around which most of the chapter revolves are illustrative of such a rich and critical approach to anthropomorphic modes.

Slaughter and the Anthropomorphic Animal

One could reasonably claim that when discussing the empathic potential of the pig slaughter in Sinclair's *The Jungle* in the previous chapter, I also, at least implicitly, argued that the scene's depiction of the hogs is not anthropomorphic. As with *My Year of Meats*, I would argue this is because the narration never attributes characteristics to the nonhuman animals that it is unreasonable to assume they actually have, although some are shared with humans. Indeed, in the case of Sinclair's novel, the narrator never explicitly connects the squeals of the hogs with particular feelings or mental states. Making any such connections is left to the human characters, some of whom clearly do so, and the reader, whom I argue can hardly avoid seeing the behaviour of the pigs as an expression of suffering and might well come to empathize. Yet of course, some readers may read more characteristics into the hogs than others do, including potentially some that pigs do not actually have outside of fiction. In other words, even if a text does not (by my strict definition) actually anthropomorphise, the reader may still read it anthropomorphically.

To be sure, Sinclair himself took a different view of his work. His insistence many years later that the passage was originally meant to be read as 'hilarious farce' suggests a sort of anthropomorphic transgression as the supposed source of humour (1962, 164). Moreover, it must be said that using other animals as metaphors for humans—as Sinclair clearly intended to do—is always in a certain sense an exercise in anthropomorphism (Baker

2001, 81). If it were not, it would cease to be metaphor, because the tenor and vehicle would then be the same. As I argue in my own reading of the novel in the next chapter, however, the specific metaphor of suffering in the slaughter scene is an unstable one, and a more radically animal-friendly reading can ultimately transcend it altogether. Despite Sinclair's apparent notion that the attribution of feelings to the cries of the hogs during slaughter is a farcical element, humans actually tend to find it very difficult not to make inferences about the inner lives of other animals, and arguably for good reason (de Waal 1999, 263–64; Horowitz and Bekoff 2007, 24; Kennedy 1992, 5; Mitchell and Hamm 1997, 174–75). As Sowon S. Park has argued, for instance, just because we cannot fully share in the experiences of members of other species, it does not mean that what she calls 'inductive inference' cannot help us understand such experiences to some extent (2013, 150–53). Indeed, many people very often seem to reach such understanding when, for instance, they interpret the behaviour of companion animals and discern the animals' excitement or desires for food, for going outside, for being stroked, and so on.

As Park notes, many thinkers 'have been spurred into inquiry by the potent mixture of our epistemological desire and our epistemological insufficiency towards the non-human animal', and they have most often come to define 'our relationship with animals around our insufficiency—what we don't know about animals' (151). But while it may be that Thomas Nagel deemed it impossible to know what it is like to be a bat, or that Jacques Derrida had difficulties discerning what lay behind the gaze of his cat as he got out of the shower, literature can at least venture some guesses and has the liberty to elaborate on them. Where many may see an animal that is, in Derrida's words, 'wholly other', who is defined by an 'abyssal rupture' between itself and our own species, authors of fiction often see opportunity (Derrida 2008, 11, 31). In other words, fiction often explores what we feel we share with, and what we might know about, other animals—through assumptions, inferences, and anthropomorphism. It is, among other things, a tool that lets us explore ideas about others, and about how we relate to others. Viewed in this light, one might argue that if Sinclair truly expected his readers simply to laugh at scenes depicting animals' suffering, he lacked a certain consciousness of the nature of his medium.

Sure enough, however, some fiction is arguably meant to be taken less seriously than philosophers' speculations, and anthropomorphism can be used to signal such a lack of seriousness. Over-reaching and depicting the

patently unrealistic or the fanciful is part of the exercise.[2] As Park notes, inductive inferences work 'through making hypotheses and learning from our mistakes' (2013, 154). Literature as a medium, however, lets us play with inferences and ideas, and tests the limits of what we find believable, allowing us in the process to learn about ourselves and about our relations with other animals. For instance, we know we are not actually meant to believe other animals speak in human language just because they do so in fiction, but just how much suspension of disbelief is needed will differ between texts. Just because we are not meant to believe they truly speak in human tongues, it does not necessarily follow that we are not meant to find the feelings or thoughts nonhuman characters express in stories realistic for the species in question, nor that we are meant to dismiss ideas of nonhuman communication completely.

Nevertheless, there is now a tradition that tells us nonhuman characters, and especially talking ones, should generally not be taken too seriously. Kathryn Perry notes that 'there is an insistence on the simplicity, triviality, and transparency of talking animals and their suitability for innocent readers' in early modern and modern literary periods (2004, 20). Similarly, in her study on talking animals in British children's fiction of the long nineteenth century, Tess Cosslett argues that 'the animal story has migrated down the hierarchy of literary genres from adults to children' as the perceived gap between being a child and an adult has grown (2006, 1). We have thus learned to perceive the anthropomorphic animal tale more as childish entertainment than as a complex literary form that is potentially for readers of all ages. Such attitudes are arguably part of a wider tendency to take animals less seriously than other topics, which has obvious political and social consequences. Steve Baker sees '[t]he dominant cultural view that the subject of animals is essentially trivial, or is associated principally with memories of childhood' as a clear example of how 'culture typically deflects our attention' from particular issues and 'makes them seem unworthy of analysis' (2001, 8). In an extreme form, such trivialization allows meat and other animal products to be advertised through anthropomorphic animal characters, who are used as entertaining figures that obscure the harsher truths about what production actually does to real animals, and to ensure consumers continue to support such practices (Leitsberger et al. 2016; Borkfelt et al. 2015, 1058–62).

[2] One might of course argue that Cartesian dogma about animals as automata without thoughts similarly overreaches beyond the realistic in the opposite direction.

There are, of course, also famous examples of how certain kinds of anthropomorphic representations have helped highlight specific kinds of cruelties to animals. Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), with its equine narrator, is famously credited with helping bring about abolition of the bearing-rein, and Chris Noonan's film *Babe* (1995), about a pig who evades slaughter by performing the tasks of a sheep-dog (by learning to talk to the sheep), is often credited with turning children off pork (Cosslett 2006, 74; Mizelle 2011, 154). In a sense, then, anthropomorphism can be used both to help deflect our attention from, and direct our attention towards, how we treat other animals in the real world. Purposefully placing heavily anthropomorphised animals directly in the abattoir seems perhaps more tricky, however. There is a reason why farm animals' end purpose as meat is 'almost never presented as a fact of animal existence in stories told to children', for example (Hoult-Saros 2016, xvii). As places of mass killing, slaughterhouses seem antithetical to entertainment and anything but trivial, and as heterotopias, they are often meant to remain outside of our consciousness.

There is thus a seriousness surrounding what happens in slaughterhouses, which does not exactly invite highly anthropomorphic modes of representation, or related literary techniques, when these have become something typically taken to signal a lack of gravity. This applies to other serious issues as well, if to varying degrees, although there are nearly always examples of representations that try to challenge such norms or exploit them artistically. Arguably, for instance, it is a striking feature of Art Spiegelman's representation of the Holocaust in his famous graphic novel *Maus* (1986) that he depicts his characters with the faces of nonhuman animals. Indeed, the defamiliarization created through the zoomorphic nature of his characters may be seen as a way of making the unbearable horror of his subject matter easier to handle artistically, in part because it somewhat softens readers' confrontation with the undeniable gravity of the historical events he is depicting (Boyd 2007, 235–37; Witek 1989, 103). Among its many effects, the blend of human and nonhuman characteristics here creates a distance by placing actual people and characters as tenor and vehicle in a metaphor, and it gives Spiegelman a way of reimagining human tragedy.[3] In the literary slaughterhouse, however, the victims

[3] It is worth noting, though, that Spiegelman's use of animal allegory is complex and has numerous effects, not all of which necessarily defamiliarize, and his narrative at times draws explicit attention to ways in which the form can be problematized (see, e.g. Baker 2001,

are already nonhuman, and anthropomorphizing them could be perceived as increasing the horror through approximation to humans, which may seem in bad taste. Thus, dealing with anthropomorphism in slaughterhouse settings is arguably a complex and difficult task, especially if the author does not set out to trivialize the suffering of nonhuman animals. Hence, depictions of highly anthropomorphised animals being slaughtered for meat are relatively rare.

Of course, children's stories with anthropomorphic depictions sometimes allude to slaughterhouses, or at least to slaughter. In such cases, the extraordinary animal protagonists often evade that fate exactly through their anthropomorphic properties. Examples include E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and Dick King-Smith's *The Sheep-Pig* (1983), and their adaptations into film, as well as Peter Lord and Nick Park's animated film *Chicken Run* (2000), in all of which some mix of animals' abilities to talk and hatch plans leads to their rescue. Certainly, some of these depictions can be read as tacit critiques of slaughter or meat eating, but depicting the *threat* of slaughter for talking animal characters is still far from a representation of their actual slaughter. Moreover, such depictions risk criticism for actually heightening the objectification of real animals, since the animal characters are only special due to how anthropomorphism approximates them to humans and this is what saves them (Leitsberger et al. 2016, 1010–11; Stewart and Cole 2009, 463, 471). Thus, it becomes possible to argue that such depictions contain an implicit acceptance that other animals, who are not extraordinary in these ways, are meant for slaughter. Studies suggest that meat eaters are motivated to deny minds to animals used for food, since '[r]ecognizing that the animals we eat have minds makes them similar to us in morally important ways, and this recognition conflicts with our use of animals for food' (Bastian et al. 2012, 248, 250–51). Hence, it makes sense that, on the one hand, anthropomorphic animals typically evade slaughter and, on the other, depictions of slaughter very rarely feature animals that talk or show advanced mental skills. We clearly do not shy away from depicting cows, pigs, chickens, and other animals used in meat production anthropomorphically in films and books as well as in advertising (even advertisements for meat), yet the connection between the specific anthropomorphic animal and slaughter typically

139–49; Gavrilă 2017, 69–72; Herman 2011, 168–69; McGlothlin 2003, 183). In the 2011 book *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman discusses the animal metaphors at length, including how they 'allowed for a distancing from the horrors described' (149).

remains rather vague, if it is there at all (Hoult-Saros 2016, xiii, 50; Paul 1996, 178–80; Stewart and Cole 2009).

This is not to say that anthropomorphic depictions cannot work in favour of nonhuman animals, though, even in relation to how they are used for food. Talking animals are, after all, always showing us something that resists the ideas about 'dumb' creatures on which human-nonhuman hierarchies in part rely, and they are thus, as Steve Baker writes, 'an invitation to a subversive pleasure' (2001, 159). Tess Cosslett points out how 'stories for children about animals are implicitly taking a perspective from "lower" down' in the established social hierarchy that also places animals below humans, and 'can have the effect of upsetting its terms' (2006, 2). This is very much a part of the potential of anthropomorphism, and is hardly limited to stories aimed at younger audiences. As Baker argues, 'it is the very instability of the anthropomorphized animal's identity which can make contact or even proximity with it so hazardous for those with an overblown sense of their own importance, power and identity' (2001, 159).

Different representations employ this instability in various ways. *Babe*, for instance, unlike the book that inspired it, starts with a scene from a factory farm (albeit a fairly benign one with straw to rummage and lie in and space to move around). Here, we witness the separation of a sow from her piglets—Babe among them—as she is driven off for slaughter, thus connecting the character of Babe with the fates of real pigs in industrial agriculture before his particular story is told. In addition, John Simons has argued that because Babe's approach to shepherding is one of communication, which differentiates it from the threat of violence from the dogs, the film 'shows … a possible circumvention of conventional inter-species relationships and a different way of enabling mutual interactions' (2002, 138).[4] Another dynamic, which anthropomorphism allows for, is a reversal of the roles of humans and other animals, often for comic effect. Roald Dahl's poem 'The Pig', found in an illustrated collection of verse for children entitled *Dirty Beasts* (1984), tells the story of a 'wonderfully clever pig', who reads books and wonders about the meaning of life, until it occurs to him why humans are keeping him:

[4] For a more elaborate analysis of the animal politics in *Babe*, which discusses the film in the context of meat and positions it in relation to other works, see McHugh 2011, 186–201 (see also Fudge 2002, 85–92; Mizelle 2011, 152–54; Stewart and Cole 2009, 469–72).

'They want my bacon slice by slice
'To sell at a tremendous price!
'They want my tender juicy chops
'To put in all the butchers' shops!
'They want my pork to make a roast
'And that's the part'll cost the most!

The pig therefore decides to turn the tables and ultimately eats the farmer with 'no remorse', providing for a humorous conclusion to the poem. Here, anthropomorphism is taken to an extreme, in which the animal is so humanized that its lower place in the hierarchy is essentially the only real difference between pig and human, and even this is arguably reversed by the poem's ending. Quentin Blake's illustrations show the pig at a desk in his study, and both illustration and text imply that the farmer has a rather ample physical shape, which resembles that of the pig. The inversion of roles that happens at the end therefore seems less a perversion of order and more a logical conclusion, carrying the suggestion that who eats whom is rather more a matter of who outsmarts whom than of a natural hierarchy. Similar sentiments might be drawn even from the details of an allegorical story like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), at the beginning of which the wise old boar called Major disputes the idea that the human-animal hierarchy on the farm is 'the order of nature' (1951, 8).[5] He then goes on to list ways in which humans are inferior to animals, because they depend on other species for food and labour, thus inverting the typical rationale, which sees domestication as a sign of human superiority, and somewhat counteracting the implicit anthropocentrism of the novel's anthropomorphic mode (9).

It should also not be overlooked that while anthropomorphism projects some characteristics from our species onto others, it can also 'alert us to those shared characteristics that appear to bind the species together' (Simons 2002, 139). Arguing against scientific tendencies to see other

[5] It should be noted that even when there is significant merit or historical evidence that lend authority to allegorical or metaphorical readings of animal stories, it is hardly the case that these texts do not (also) tell us something about nonhuman animals (see, for example, discussions on *Animal Farm* in McHugh 2011, 181–85 and Asker 1996, 60–70). Helen Tiffin, for instance, points out how 'allegories depend on the constant interplay of difference and similarity for their effect', for which reason animal allegories—including *Animal Farm*—rely on particular assumptions about 'the species boundary' that should not be overlooked when reading them (2007b, 252–53).

animals as only reacting, rather than acting as subjects, Vinciane Despret implies that anthropomorphism tells us something real in our encounters with actual animals and notes how attributing subjectivity to other animals was a natural part of the work of nineteenth-century naturalists, including Charles Darwin (2016, 34, 38–41, 139–40). 'Who', Despret asks about the accusation of anthropomorphism, 'claims to be protected with this accusation? The animal to whom we ascribe too much, or too little, and thus fail to recognize its ways of being? Or does it consist of defending some positions, some ways of doing science, some professional identities?' (41).

Although Despret's focus is on science, and thus on the laboratory rather than the abattoir, versions of these questions are poignant for places of slaughter as well. A part of what is protected by denying or underestimating animals' similarities to humans is obviously ways of exploiting nonhumans, which may help explain the relative rarity of highly anthropomorphic depictions in slaughterhouse fictions. The fact remains, however, that we *do* attribute various feelings, thoughts, motives, and so on, to other animals when we actually encounter them. A meeting between a human and another animal—even the highly objectified nonhuman victim of the slaughterhouse—is, after all, a meeting between two beings, not of a being and an inanimate object with no interests. This is, among other things, what anthropomorphic depictions tap into. In addition to its work of making animals disappear physically, a part of the job of the slaughterhouse is to shut down such responses that rely on recognition of likeness. Its concealment, its objectifying discourses, mechanization, and rationales surrounding its supposed necessity all in a sense help us to deny that what we see when we look at the animals who are slaughtered are living beings with whom we share experiences of being in the world. The existence of the slaughterhouse, its rationale, relies on highlighting perceptions of difference and downplaying similarities. This would seem to clash in obvious ways with depicting the animals through an anthropomorphic lens.

'Before either animal individuality or subjectivity can be imagined, an animal must be singled out as a promising prospect for anthropomorphism', argue Daston and Mitman, thus conversely pointing out how anthropomorphism is connected to the act of imagining *individuals* (2005, 11). It is individuals, whose subjectivities it foregrounds, and the more highly anthropomorphised, the more inescapable the fact of individuality becomes. This defies the mass logic of modern meat production; an anthropomorphized animal is necessarily removed from being just one

production unit among many. Joining Eileen Crist's work on anthropomorphism with Cary Wolfe's critique of humanism as an effort to transcend embodiment, Sam Cadman argues that a certain brand of anthropomorphism, which asks us to actually imagine animal experience, 'has the potential to destabilise the human/animal binary, simply because humanist discourses generally foreclose an awareness of embodied existence at all' (2016, 171). Because the abattoir is a place where mind and body are conceptually disconnected along a human/animal binary that helps justify slaughter and elevates 'the human', the anthropomorphic animal that remains nonhuman but nevertheless shows signs of mind has the potential to show the two as inevitably connected. Thus, in connection with slaughter fictions, anthropomorphism as a technique may counteract the *ontological* erasure of animal being that it otherwise necessarily embodies, because it points to the *physical* erasure happening in slaughter as also an erasure of individuality and subjectivity.

The opening of Adam Roberts's humorous science fiction novel *Bête* (2014) both shows and satirizes exactly this effect. Here, the novel's first line immediately brings to the foreground both the ethics of slaughter and the confusion of categories brought on by anthropomorphism: 'As I raised the bolt-gun to its head the cow said: "Won't you at least Turing-test me, Graham?"' (3). The cow has had a speech-inducing microchip implanted by animal activists—a fact, which it appears to be fully aware of—yet it maintains that its human-like consciousness is real and slaughter unnecessary, and proceeds to beg for its life. While the effect is satirical, the scene thus also confronts the reader with the importance of discourses and categorizations in our ethical choices regarding other animals. Indeed, the novel's premise highlights this conspicuously; as killing talking animals eventually becomes illegal, killing those who do not speak remains legal, resulting in a number of funny and thought provoking dilemmas and situations. At the same time, however, *Bête* also in part appears to question the effects and usefulness of anthropomorphism in ethical relations. The novel's narrator and protagonist compares the speaking cows to talking dolls, implying that what changes in relevant ways when nonhuman characters speak are not the animals themselves as much as our perception of them.

The opening of *Bête* is not set in an abattoir, yet it does highlight the apparent need to explain away the consciousness and subjectivity of the animals slaughtered in meat production. Just as the microchip is for the narrator of *Bête*, the concept of anthropomorphism can of course fulfil this function of being an excuse used to remove the ethical dilemmas and

animal politics of the fictional abattoir from those in real life. Yet both the microchip in the novel and anthropomorphism more generally provide an instability, which is difficult to ignore and may itself require further explanation. Perhaps this is why slaughterhouse fictions like Matthew Stokoe's *Cows* (1997) and Conrad Williams's *The Scalding Rooms* (2007)—which feature, respectively, a speaking cow and talking parts of slaughtered animals—use anthropomorphism mostly as an insight into the absurdity of the slaughterhouse setting or the instability of human characters' minds.[6]

In the end, anthropomorphism is a versatile tool for authors, which can have different implications for the animal politics of specific texts, and embodies its own subversive potential in relation to its initial anthropocentric implications. Brian Boyd argues in the context of *Maus* that the anthropomorphic animal metaphor 'allows us, as all animal stories do, to project ourselves onto the neutral figures of animals' (2007, 237). In the fictional slaughterhouse, however, other animals are hardly neutral when their exploitation as victims of unequal power relations comes to the foreground. In the rest of this chapter, I will look in more detail at two texts, which both engage with the politics of our relations to other animals by employing talking animals in the context of slaughterhouses, albeit in quite different ways.

Narrating Bovine Mythology in James Agee's 'A Mother's Tale'

James Agee's short story 'A Mother's Tale' (1952) makes for an interesting study of how distance and proximity can work in the interplay between allegory and anthropomorphic animal fable. Here, a mother cow finds herself pressed to answer questions from a group of calves after they have seen cattle being rounded up and driven away. In response to their questions about the purpose and destination of this drive, she relates the story of 'one who came back' as it has been passed down through bovine generations (1968, 226). Thus, the bulk of the story is filtered through a bovine narrator, with only short passages of omniscient narration. The myth-like story she tells is that of a steer, The One Who Came Back, who travelled by train to the stockyards, where he met The Man With The Hammer and endured a partial skinning before escaping and, incredibly, returning to warn his herd. As a narrator, the mother cow shifts between

[6] I return to both these novels in Chap. 7.

hesitation about relating the story and its grisly details and wanting to save the life of her own calf by shocking him out of wanting to go onto the range, though she is herself unsure about the degree of truth behind what she is relating. The story thus plays on a tension between two conceptions of motherhood: while the mother cow's pedagogical concerns in relation to narration seem highly anthropomorphic, her biological motherhood is put to the purpose of a continuous production of calves for meat production in a way that absurdly clashes with ideals of maternal care. As the cattle are initially being driven away, the mother cannot 'be sure whether there were any she recognized. She knew that among them there must be a son of hers; she had not seen him since some previous spring, and she would not be seeing him again' (222). The reader's attention is consequently drawn to the anthropomorphic mode by showing how the bovine narrator is a composite of two constituents that fit together only uncomfortably: the thinking subject and the production unit.

Unsurprisingly, critics have largely tended to read the story as allegory, although of what there is less agreement. As Robert McKay neatly sums up:

> 'A Mother's Tale' has variously been interpreted as 'an allegorical fable dealing with human destiny'; a 'symbolic fable' about Agee's own mortality; 'a polemic against war'; a 'skeptical commentary' on 'the individual's struggle with modern society'; 'Agee's most refined statement on the nature of art and the nature of truth'; and a moral lesson that 'it is proper to rail and struggle against fate but fate cannot be avoided'. (2016, 146)

When I have used it in teaching, students almost without exception believe the story to be at least partly about the Holocaust—a reading that draws heavily on descriptions of the cattle's journey by train, and one that also resonates with the story's post-war context (Nohrnberg 1998, 200; Kramer 1975, 128–29; Solomon 2012, 109n20). Indeed, different elements of the story, its historical context, and topics of clear interest to its author all resonate with various allegorical interpretations. At the same time, in light of the critical tradition of reading animals as symbols, anthropomorphism can arguably be seen as encouraging such readings. Yet the use of the anthropomorphic mode in 'A Mother's Tale' has more to offer than just the displacement of other animals into symbols used to discuss events in human history or aspects of the human condition.

In their attempts to take the text's nonhuman component more seriously in its own right, both McKay and Jouni Teittinen draw attention to

Agee's use of dramatic irony. The mother's story is met with scepticism and doubt from the calves; yet less than the rather supernatural strength of The One Who Came Back and his incredible journey back, what they seem to doubt is what The One supposedly related from the journey and stockyards, and thus what readers know is true: the facts of meat production. As McKay argues, their doubt 'paradoxically opens the space to confirm the validity of The One Who Came Back's harrowing testimony', since 'the "knowledge" the postwar reader has (but disavows) about meat production forcibly surfaces in any ironic response to the calves' naive doubts about it' (2016, 150). In addition, as Teittinen (2016, 154) also briefly touches upon, something similar is true of the cattle's ignorance as they are transported to the stockyards. Each time the train stops, the cattle erroneously think this is done in order to feed them, and when they finally arrive and are let out, it is described as 'the most wonderful and happy moment of' The One's life. Moreover, in their meeting with the stockyards the cattle are

> so pleased to be in their new home, and so surprised and delighted to find they were among thousands upon thousands of strangers of their own kind, all lifting up their voices in peacefulness and thanksgiving, and they were so wonderstruck by all they could see, it was so beautiful and so grand. (Agee 1968, 230)

The irony of the positive emotions expressed in this passage is unlikely to be lost on the reader, who knows that the cattle have in fact travelled to this place to be slaughtered. Written differently or put into another context, the ignorance of anthropomorphised nonhuman characters might come across as humorous, possibly derogatorily so, but in the context of the stockyards, it serves a different purpose. While it does portray the animals as somewhat naïve, the anthropomorphic mode here suggests a more serious mood, since it forces readers to confront the discrepancy between the attitudes and feelings of the cattle and the reality of industrialised mass slaughter.

The dark fatalism readers can recognize in the animals' situation clearly also opens up or supports a number of allegorical readings of the story. Yet it is the underlying all too real treatment of animals that makes the story, including such readings, come across coherently. The story's anthropomorphic mode is thus tied to, and all interpretations that draw upon it are deeply dependent upon, readers' knowledge of nonhuman fates in the real

world. Hence, both human and bovine traits remain significant in Agee's anthropomorphic mode, which ties them closely together. At one point in the stockyards, there is a shift in the wind so that it 'blew over them straight from the great buildings, and it brought a strange and very powerful smell which confused and disturbed them' (231). In The One's narrative, he describes this smell as 'unlike anything he had known before. It smelled like old fire, he said, and old blood and fear and darkness and sorrow and most terrible and brutal force and something else, something in it that made him want to run away' (231). While it is certainly possible to imagine an allegorical reading in which humans notice the ominous smell of crematoriums or battlefields, the smells here also go beyond human sense experience and epistemology. Thus, a number of the impressions carried by the smell suggest both the mode of being and the superior olfactory capabilities of a prey animal more than they appeal to any human-centred reading. In particular, the indefinable 'something … that made him want to run away', which we are told 'swept through every one of them' seems to evoke the experience of being both a flock animal and potential prey (231). Such moments of emphasis on clearly nonhuman experience seem not just unnecessary for many of the individualist allegorical readings of the story, but if taken seriously seem to work against them.

Agee's use of anthropomorphism also leads some critics to view 'A Mother's Tale' as 'rather sentimental' or as dealing with 'a matter that in lesser hands than Agee's could have been utterly incredible and verged upon silliness', which can allow them to partially dismiss what the story insists on telling us about animals (Solomon 2012, 97; Larsen 1971, 12). However, such relatively superficial dismissals ring less true when one considers the level of detail with which the trials of The One Who Came Back are described. Specifically, after he is knocked unconscious by The Man With The Hammer, a powerful passage occurs as he wakes inside the slaughterhouse:

> How long he lay in this darkness he couldn't know, but when he began to come out of it, all he knew was the most unspeakably dreadful pain. He was upside down and very slowly swinging and turning, for he was hanging by the tendons of his heels from great frightful hooks, and he has told us that the feeling was as if his hide were being torn from him inch by inch, in one piece. And then as he became more clearly aware he found that this was exactly what was happening. Knives would sliver and slice along both flanks,

> between the hide and the living flesh; then there was a moment of most precious relief; then red hands seized his hide and there was a jerking of the hide and a tearing of tissue which it was almost as terrible to hear as to feel, turning his whole body and the poor head at the bottom of it; and then the knives again. (Agee 1968, 235)

Naturally, it is possible to read these lines as part of an allegory. Given messianic overtones present throughout much of the story, for instance, it is easy to see in the suffering of The One Who Came Back, something of a religious symbolism. Yet even this kind of reading needs to acknowledge the intense suffering the steer goes through in order to make this a useful vehicle for discussing human suffering and sacrifice. This is further underscored by the way Agee's style manages to fuse symbolism with realism; the shift from simile ('the feeling was *as if* his hide were being torn from him') to its realization in flesh ('this was exactly what was happening') suggests that what at first seems symbolic can in fact have violent reality behind it. The reader is thus encouraged to acknowledge the reality of what happens to steers in slaughterhouses, even as the specific story contains clear departures from realism in both style and content.

Hence, as Agee's style resists a categorization of the story as purely allegorical, the level of violent detail—experienced through the anthropomorphic steer—further resists the trivialization so often connected to that very mode of writing. The violence of the slaughterhouse seems too real, and too visceral, for the kind of reading that might otherwise manage to dismiss the story's animal content by pointing to anthropomorphism as trivializing. It is thus not just that, as Bill Solomon (2012, 99) expresses it, 'the sympathy and compassion expressed in "A Mother's Tale" are not based on an exclusively human-centred system of values', but that the text works against readings that ignore or dismiss as trivial any concerns regarding nonhuman animals. Tess Cosslett (2006, 2) has highlighted anthropomorphic animal stories' ability to take a perspective from the bottom of an assumed species hierarchy; in 'A Mother's Tale', Agee manages to apply this potential force of the genre, while at the same time contradicting readers' expectations about the negligibility of what talking animals convey in literary fiction.

Agee's subversive use of anthropomorphism connects with other ways in which his story complicates our expectations of how literature works. When the cattle have arrived and are fed well at the stockyards, the 'sharp ones' rationalize their train journey 'as a kind of harsh trying or proving

our worthiness', and suggest it is 'entirely fitting and proper that we could earn our way through to such rewards as these, only through suffering, and through being patient under pain which was beyond our understanding' (Agee 1968, 232). As Solomon argues, this passage brings interpretation 'into critical focus … as a defensive gesture, as a mystifying action that alleviates anxiety while increasing vulnerability' (2012, 103). Because of their effort at interpreting their new life situation, the cattle are wholly unprepared for their subsequent encounter with The Man With The Hammer and the realities of industrial slaughter; the interpretation that averts attention from what is problematic about human-animal relations may bring satisfaction, but is ultimately untenable. Reading the story through a formalist lens, Solomon argues that '[t]he animals' retroactive imposition of a narrative pattern onto the preceding events has the (defamiliarizing) effect of bringing to the reader's attention his or her own impulse to derive solace from' the kind of 'meaningfully organized structures' we find in 'interpretive frames of reference' (103).

There are, of course, clearly religious overtones in the interpretive effort of the cattle, just as the idea of finding solace in narrative structures lends itself easily to allegorical readings emphasizing the uncertainties of death, which certainly fit with topics that also occupied Agee. However, the meat industry also has its own narrative structures that allow consumers to avoid looking too sharply at the grim fates of other animals. Just as the mother's story brings into doubt the calves' ideas of going onto the wonderful range to live out their days happily, so Agee's narrative breaks the illusion of a benign animal industry found in advertising and pastoral imagery and confronts us with the killing and suffering that is an inevitable part of meat production. The reader is thus brought face-to-face with what average consumers will look away from in order to find pleasure in their meals.

It is not exactly that Agee's animal fable can be said to promote vegetarianism, or that it suggests any other kind of solution to the horrors its animals suffer through. As McKay argues, 'the fullest recognition Agee is able to envision of animals' appeal to contemporary ethical accountability is a form of "moral realism" about animal slaughter that finds it simultaneously inevitable and unbearable' (2016, 151). Nevertheless, in tandem with the story's anthropomorphism, the critical approach to interpretive efforts does help upset species hierarchies by challenging the ways in which narratives keep such hierarchies—and the practices they allow for—in place. This, in turn, attracts attention to heterotopic qualities of modern

industrial slaughterhouses by flagging the contrast between their reality and the idyllic rural animal existence on the range imagined by the story's calves.

Agee's story thus both uses dramatic irony to tease out what the reader knows to be true of meat production and makes interpretations, which might make this knowledge seem more benign, seem suspect. Both at the level of story (because of the calves' doubt and the cattle's interpretations) and at the level of interpretation (due to the multiple allegorical possibilities that present themselves), 'A Mother's Tale' forces the reader to consider what is real and what is not. This is also apparent in how the mother's story takes on the qualities of myth, which help create a distance that on the one hand allows for the doubts that force the reader to confirm the realities of meat production, while on the other underscoring the unlikelihood of the story's key moment when the steer manages to escape the slaughterhouse:

> then, with a scream, and a supreme straining of all his strength, he tore himself from the hooks and collapsed sprawling on the floor and, scrambling to his feet, charged the men with the knives. […] He ran down a glowing floor of blood and down endless corridors which were hung with the bleeding carcasses of our kind and with bleeding fragments of carcasses, among blood-clothed men who carried bleeding weapons, and out of that vast room into the open, and over and through one fence after another, shoving aside many an astounded stranger and shouting out warnings as he ran, and away up the railroad toward the West. (Agee 1968, 236)

Like other features of the story, the escape complicates how we read and construct narratives. Readers know there is a significant portion of truth to the facts of meat production related in the story, suggesting that the escape must have happened since it is a precondition for the story being told and retold in the first place. Yet the conditions of the escape seem next to impossible and make sense only because the story, as told by the mother, has the qualities of myth, and its very unlikelihood helps underline the grim inevitability of what awaits animals reared for meat.

There is, then, both a persistent insistence on the facts and violence of the slaughterhouse, emphasized during the escape not least by the repeated references to blood as the text maps the space of slaughter ('floor of blood', 'bleeding carcasses', 'bleeding fragments', 'blood-clothed', 'bleeding weapons'), and a questioning of the reliability of the narrative. As first The One Who Came Back and now the mother tell and retell the story,

they are motivated by the wish to convince their audiences: The One wishes for the cows to take action against man's exploitation, while the mother has the more modest wish of discouraging her son from going onto the range. Dramatic embellishments in the narrative can therefore be attributed to the anthropomorphic animals' desires for the creation of affect. Indeed, just before she relates the details of the slaughterhouse to the calves, the mother decides 'not to soften it' in order to 'teach them a lesson they wouldn't forget in a hurry' (235).

Bill Solomon argues that Agee's story ends up emphasizing feeling 'at the expense of cognition' due to 'the formal methods of enstrangement Agee employs in the text' (2012, 99–100). However, I argue, exactly because of the use of anthropomorphism, the reader must acknowledge the contribution of both knowledge and affect in the way the story produces its effects. Just as the dramatic irony leaves little room to deny knowledge of how meat is produced, so the access to bovine experience, which anthropomorphic narration allows for, centralizes affect in the narrative, since it depicts slaughter dramatically from the victim's perspective. The story's force thus lies in the interplay between feeling and cognition; while some literary devices in Agee's story create distance, the story also relies on the approximation of its characters to the readers, which happens in large part through the way its bovine perspectives are combined with an emphasis on embodiment.

The detailed attention to slaughter as an embodied experience, in which the cutting and tearing of hides and the running of blood are repeatedly emphasized, points to the vulnerability of bodies as such and aligns well with Anat Pick's concept of creatureliness, which stresses exactly such vulnerability as a common experience across species. While the anthropomorphic mode necessarily highlights experience as individual, the story simultaneously shows how such vulnerability is shared. The narrative is imbued with an element of horror as The One runs 'down endless corridors … with bleeding carcasses of our kind', which draws on the species indeterminacy of anthropomorphism and infuses the words 'our kind' with an ambiguity that intensifies the experience, even as it also emphasizes the shared fate of bovines. Anthropomorphism here seems to invite the creaturely (and/or vice versa), performing a 'gesture … of *contraction*' that approximates us to animals, while they get 'a share in our world of subjectivity' (Pick 2011, 6, italics orig.).

McKay similarly emphasizes how 'Agee evokes both the individual being's unique relation to its eventual death and especially the bodily

nature of that relation' (2016, 148). There is, he points out, a combination of unmistakably bovine embodiment *and* commonality of bodily experience across species, which is found not just in depictions of slaughter in the text, but in the detailed descriptions of The One's movement and experience of his body. Whatever distancing literary techniques Agee employs, the text thus manages an approximation through anthropomorphism, which seems anything but trivial.

Agee's story ends by once again invoking dramatic irony and thus stirring readers' knowledge of slaughter and meat production. Pressed on the question of whether she believes the story she has just related is true, the mother ultimately reassures the calves by saying it is just a story used 'to frighten children with' (once again complicating the uses of narratives). Her son, meanwhile, distrusts his mother and feels unsure what to believe:

> The trouble was, her son was thinking, you could never trust her. If she said a thing was so, she was probably just trying to get her way with you. If she said a thing wasn't so, it probably was so. But you could never be sure. Not without seeing for yourself. I'm going to go, he told himself; I don't care *what* she wants. And if it isn't so, why then I'll live on the range and make the great journey and find out what *is* so. And if what she told was true, why then I'll know ahead of time and the one *I* will charge is The Man With The Hammer. I'll put Him and His Hammer out of the way forever, and that will make me an even better hero than The One Who Came Back. (Agee 1968, 243, italics orig.)

Readers, of course, know perfectly well that it *is* so. Moreover, they know the mythical qualities of the story skew its message by personifying evil in The Man With The Hammer rather than recognising the systemic nature of slaughterhouses and meat production, and thus see that the calf's solution will be as ineffective as the mother's telling of the story has been. Through the complex mix of emphasis on knowledge and affect, distance and proximity, reality and symbolism, Agee's story manages to transcend the typical connotations of anthropomorphism and to use it as a mode that highlights, rather than trivializes, what processes of slaughter do to countless individual beings. Yet whatever critique of human-bovine relations the story offers remains counterbalanced by a sense of bleak inevitability and dark fatalism. 'A Mother's Tale' may be 'informed by an authorial desire to lament the predicament of relatively powerless creatures', as Solomon (2012, 97) phrases it, but lamentation also seems to be all that can be done.

Absurdity and Anthropomorphism: Astley's *The End of My Tether*

If Agee's story ultimately employs anthropomorphism to serve up a bleak and pessimistic outlook on human-animal relations, Neil Astley's humorous novel *The End of My Tether* (2002) offers a somewhat richer spectrum of possibilities for how humans can relate to the nonhuman world. Part detective story, part environmental fable, and part satire of rural England, Astley's novel is difficult to pin down, but a challenging read with postmodern characteristics that has also been characterized as 'absurd' and called 'a farrago of folklore, mythology and magic' (Cornwell 2006, 286). Plot twists happen both on and off stage and in different historical periods, there are significant metafictional components to the story, and some characters are ontologically unstable in ways that render various binaries and categories fluid. Readers are therefore gradually prompted to leave behind assumptions about species identities and interspecies communication, and the novel ultimately offers perspectives from both the living and the dead of different species.

The majority of the plot is, however, centred in and around the town of Otteridge in the fictional Loamshire, where police inspector George Kernan investigates the murder of a scientist, whose premature demise may be tied to his knowledge about the causes of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or 'mad cow disease'. Indeed, much of the novel revolves in various ways around the causes and spread of BSE and other spongiform diseases; an epigraph refers to the BSE crisis of the late 1990s as 'the 1996–98 Beef War' and dedicates the novel in part 'to the memory of the two and a half million cattle needlessly slaughtered', thus highlighting that the crisis was man-made rather than a naturally occurring misfortune (Astley 2002, 6). The use of the word 'war' furthermore ties human-animal relations together with a number of scenes in the novel set on battlefields in France during the First World War. Here, soldiers are depicted as sacrificed by upper-class officers and the familiar trope that compares soldiers to animals going to slaughter is repeatedly employed; the soldiers sometimes baa 'like sheep' and the officers' betrayal of the soldiers they command is likened directly to BSE, which is seen as a betrayal of peaceful herbivores made sick through unnatural processes (227, 307, 347).[7]

[7] The novel displays a consciousness of the universality of such tropes through a number of direct and indirect intertextual references. At one point, for instance, a character reads a few

Similar connections between class injustices and the unfair treatment of nonhuman animals are found in the Loamshire setting, as the novel gradually reveals the involvement of a corrupt network of the community's most powerful people, who not only hunt and feast on meat, but also own both the local slaughterhouse and a nearby chemical plant that has contaminated the local river. The unfair treatment of animals is in this way woven into an intersectional web that makes it as much of a social justice issue as an environmental or animal rights issue as the plot intertwines the interests of humans and other animals in various ways.

Into this complex mix of issues and literary techniques come talking animals that speak both among themselves and, ostensibly, to particular characters such as Kernan, who over the process of the novel turns out to be no ordinary human, but the 'Green Man' (also called 'Cernunnos') who is both part of and protector of nature, and who has lived for several generations. He and some other characters also turn out to be shapeshifters who at times take on the guise of one animal or another, which is just one of a number of ways in which the novel contradicts the ways readers will be used to thinking about species categorizations. For instance, many animals are understood to have reincarnated several times and as having previously lived lives as humans. In contrast to the conventional species hierarchy of earthly life, therefore, other animals are seen as 'superior creatures' to humans at the level of souls (416, 538).[8]

In a particular sense, then, the anthropomorphism in Astley's novel is 'explained' in that the novel establishes its own epistemology, which destabilises (some) species identities, and within which the communication of nonhuman animals is commonplace. Unlike Agee's 'A Mother's Tale', which makes no attempt to explain its talking cows and conditions parts of its plot on the cows making often incorrect inferences about the motivations of humans, *The End of My Tether* thus overtly embraces anthropomorphism as a way of imagining different kinds of relations between

lines from Wilfred Owen's poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917), in which soldiers 'die as cattle' (Astley 2002, 98).

[8] Leading ecocritic Greg Garrard defines the concept of allomorphism as an 'avowal of the wondrous strangeness of animals' and a difference perceived as 'a kind of superiority' (see Garrard 2012, 154, 167), in which sense the superiority of nonhuman animals in *The End of My Tether* arguably makes them allomorphic rather than anthropomorphic. However, this inversion of hierarchical structures is only gradually revealed to the reader. In this discussion, I will continue to consider the animals as anthropomorphic insofar as they share abilities of speech and thought with human characters.

species and letting other animals speak against human misdoings. Yet almost all of the novel's animals remain firmly rooted in their nonhumanness, since they are neither zoomorphic humans nor obvious symbols for anything human. The animals' perspectives as representatives of nonhuman interests are thus not easily explained away; rather, they remain at the forefront as an indictment of abuse and oppression suffered at the hands of humans. Even if one was to write off the novel as simply 'absurd' due to the ways in which its plot and characters defy common logic (see Cornwell 2006, 286–7), it would take considerable effort to ignore the way it does not just communicate *through* animals as do some other texts, but given its environmental theme and concerns with BSE also *about* them. That is, the fates of real nonhumans at the hands of humans are so integral a part of the novel's world that it becomes all but impossible to derogatorily dismiss animal content as unimportant.

The fact that nonhuman animals and their voices play such an important part not just in the plot, but also for the very epistemology within which it must be understood, lends additional power to the episodes in which animals are actually harmed or killed, including the various scenes that take place at the slaughterhouse, which becomes increasingly central to the story in the second half of the novel. Here, the omniscient narration revisits the slaughterhouse a number of times from different perspectives, as it becomes clear that the murder victim was shot with a captive-bolt pistol slaughterers use for cattle. The first time Otteridge slaughterhouse is described in any detail is when the mysterious character of Lizzie Gizzard visits, under the guise of being a radio journalist, in order to find out more about the use of the bolt pistol, which may have been used in the murder Kernan is investigating. As she is given a tour of the slaughterhouse by its manager Colin Coombes, readers are treated to three different positions on the subject of slaughter: while omniscient narration allows access to Lizzie's own vegetarian ethic, Coombes speaks from the logic of production, yet tries to accommodate the third perspective of potential listeners concerned about animal welfare. The listeners, Lizzie tells him, are likely farmers who 'care about their animals' and 'want to know they're being treated well, humanely killed' (Astley 2002, 308). Coombes, however, is described as 'a man who dealt in facts' and who 'tended to forget that the people who raised the animals he slaughtered would be bothered at all about their welfare once they had sent them to be killed' (308). Thus, through positioning these different perspectives in relation to each other, the scene comes to reflect both the coldly rational logic of production and

the amount of doublespeak in communicating about slaughter, viewed as an issue fraught with hidden agendas and a careful consideration of what any potential audience would, or would rather not, like to know about how meat is produced.

Because of the questions Lizzie asks to avoid suspicion about her real motivation, and Coombes' somewhat sadistic wish to shock Lizzie, whom he sees as an 'attractive power-bitch' (317), readers are at this point given much technical information about slaughter that is useful when the slaughterhouse reappears later in the novel. However, it is the contrast between these cold facts and the thoughts of the characters that makes the scene truly engaging, as it forces readers to consider different attitudes to slaughter. Particularly, the novel implies a comparability of animal slaughter to the killing of humans, not just in the bolt pistol being used for both purposes, but also in Lizzie's thoughts as she tours the slaughterhouse. 'Each chain a noose', Lizzie thinks as she looks at the chains used to hoist the animals after stunning, before a passage that implicitly makes the controversial connection between the slaughter of animals and the Holocaust (310). Concerned with how animals see 'their fellows being stunned, shackled and hoisted', Lizzie is reminded of 'a scene from a film, when women had been jostled into a place like this and ordered to line up naked' before an SS officer stared at their naked bodies and chose just one, who got to survive (310). Unlike 'A Mother's Tale', which puts the responsibility for the comparison squarely on the reader who may choose to interpret the anthropomorphic story along such lines, Astley's novel thus more directly implies a way in which the Holocaust, the slaughter of animals, and the abuse of women may all be connected: they all amount to abuse of power over bodies.

The novel thus highlights how the vulnerability of the animals' bodies, on which the logic of meat production relies, is in fact a shared characteristic between humans and other animals, the abuse of whom operates in tandem with an objectifying stance towards living beings. As the SS officer assesses the women's bodies, so the slaughterers assess the amount of enzymes needed as an injection to soften the meat 'based on the weight of the beast', and Coombes looks at Lizzie's breasts with a 'predatory gaze' (317, 318). It is easy to see how this part of the novel can be read through the lens of the creaturely; while the Holocaust is often seen as epitomic of dehumanization, Pick argues that it 'took to its limit the violence inherent in the distinction between human and inhuman' and thus if it 'proves anything at all, it is that Jewish (and other) bodies are animal bodies'

(2011, 51). It is, perhaps, at this level of bodily exploitation that our own animality becomes most apparent and thus most uncomfortable when we have based our sense of worth and our idea of what it means to be human exactly on *not* being animal.

The anthropomorphism in *The End of My Tether* complicates this, however. On the one hand, the fact that species lines are unstable, and characteristics overtly shared, increases what humans and nonhumans seemingly have in common, and the way the novel plays with reincarnation and shapeshifting implies that the bodies of different beings are both interchangeable and equally vulnerable. On the other, nonhuman animals become clearly *more than* bodies in the novel's world and, indeed, their bodies seem superior in the sense that souls incarnate into the types of animals slaughtered after having been humans rather than in the opposite direction. As Lizzie's visit to the slaughterhouse is ending, she looks towards a window in the ceiling and notices how

> around the high window … the souls of many pigs had gathered. These were the pigs … killed that morning. Having followed their carcasses into cold store, they had returned to hold the usual ritual of observing their killers, trying to understand them. There was a soul-gatherer answering their questions, which mainly expressed their incredulity that the humans who had fed and looked after them had given them to these other men, who had taken their lives. What right had they to do this? Did they not realize that all animals had souls, and every creature had the right to live? Why should humans eat the flesh of their fellow creatures? Could they not eat plants and berries, fruits and vegetables, which were very tasty? The gatherer was very patient, Lizzie thought, answering each question in turn, slowly and sympathetically.
>
> Soon all the pigs were calm and quiet, as they had never been in life. But that did not excuse the crime. Their betrayal. (Astley 2002, 318)

This passage exemplifies how the notion that other animals have something to say about their own slaughter is a permanent feature throughout the novel, as the story complicates human-nonhuman relations and plays with ideas of similarity and alterity. The animals' greater consciousness of how human and nonhuman beings are connected metaphysically is reflected in their 'incredulity' and their notion that they are 'fellow creatures' to the humans, allowing them to perceive their slaughter not just as a physical act of violence, but as a 'betrayal'. There is thus a sense that slaughter is a kind of breach of an ethical contract, reflected also in the

language of rights employed by the pigs ('What right had they to do this?', 'the right to live').

The fellowship of creatures expressed by the pigs contrasts sharply with how Coombes describes animals as 'units' and 'product' when Lizzie interviews him—a use of language she clearly dislikes (308, 315). Anthropomorphism here becomes part of a reality that by its very nature contradicts the language of capitalist production, which Coombes employs, because animals' souls asking the critical questions about meat eating and slaughter places the questions outside the earthly epistemology within which they are normally asked. Instead, readers are given a novel perspective within which the logic of systemically using others in the pursuit of particular benefits or production quotas simply does not apply, which invalidates many common pragmatic and socially contingent replies to critiques of meat eating and other exploitative practices.

Hence, Astley's novel does not just present different perspectives on the slaughterhouse, but different modes of experiencing it based on the degree to which characters have knowledge of what is beyond the humanly observable in the novel, and on different emotional approaches. While Coombes approaches the work in a dispassionate way focused on what he perceives as facts, Lizzie's tour of the slaughterhouse is characterized by powerful sense impressions and emotional reactions, even if she mostly keeps them to herself as she plays the professional journalist. She hears 'the clanging and clatter of metal gates, the rattle of shackles, the loud continuous din of the conveyor-belts, the shouts of slaughtermen', as well as 'shrieks of pigs squealing like babies'; she asks questions 'queasily' or with 'eyes wide and staring like a calf's'; and she is 'afraid of her own question' when she asks about stunning (309, 311, 312). Meanwhile, she reflects on the ambiguities in Coombes' choice of words: when he speaks of stunning animals into 'insensibility' before sticking them, thus perceiving pain as purely physical, she adopts 'insensibility' as 'the word for how she felt … stunned' (311). The slaughterhouse is thus portrayed as an affective place in which facts, figures, and the rationalist language of production are used to downplay the metaphysical aspects of the work as well as the violence of killing. The question of sensibility resurfaces later in their conversation, when Lizzie asks questions about the state of the animal after it has been shot with the bolt pistol:

– And you really do know it's unconscious then? People tend to be alarmed if the animal is still moving in some way…

> – It's only natural for people to react that way, Lizzie. Even after successful stunning, erratic uncoordinated reflex movements can occur – they can even happen after decapitation – but that doesn't necessarily indicate consciousness or sensibility.
> – Sensibility, thought Lizzie. And insensibility. Clinging to life on the one hand, preparing for death on the other. (314, ellipsis orig.)

While Lizzie's question and the reference to how 'people' might react imply that acts of killing and slaughter are affectively uncomfortable, Coombes' answer fails to consider how uneasiness at a being moving when supposedly dead or unconscious essentially speaks to the metaphysicality of acts of killing. His dismissal of what he calls 'erratic uncoordinated reflex movements' implies that it is the physical movements themselves that are chaotic and disturbing rather than the uncertainty about killing and suffering at the root of people's uneasiness. This metaphysical nature of the concern is, in turn, reflected in Lizzie's subsequent thoughts.

Simultaneously, however, there remains an ambiguity rooted in the different possible meanings of the word 'sensibility', which implicitly questions who is sensible and who is insensible (with different meanings of those words). On the subsequent page, after once again claiming that the stunned, hoisted animal is 'insensible to pain', Coombes experiences 'a feeling of superiority over this woman professional who was allowing her feelings to interfere with her work' (315). Yet, ironically, their dialogue has left the impression that *he* is indeed the one, who is 'insensible' to the pain of others and who fails to acknowledge that the work has inherently affective qualities to it. The victims, by contrast, can be read as essentially performing an empathic effort as their souls assemble to try to 'understand' 'their killers' (318).

When the novel later revisits the slaughterhouse, the perspectives of anthropomorphic animals directly contradict Coombes' assertion that stunning renders them unconscious and unable to feel pain (389, 416–7). One particularly noteworthy scene occurs after inspector Kernan has left his human body behind and has temporarily taken up residence in the body of a white heifer, who is actually an animal form of a mythical being called the Morrigan.[9] As the heifer is urged up the ramp for slaughter, the

[9] The Morrigan is a female figure, who is originally from Irish mythology, in which she is typically associated with war and fate, but also often with the land and animals, especially livestock. In the words of one study, the Morrigan 'oversees the land, its stock and its society.

other cows around her discuss their experience of slaughter based on past incarnations in a passage from which it is worth quoting a lengthy excerpt:

> – This is the bit I always dread, said one of the cows. The anticipation is almost as bad as the slaughter itself. I used to think the dentist was bad, but at least the injection cut out the pain. You never had pain like this as humans.
> – […]
> – This is the price you pay for staying a cow, the first cow said. You have to put up with this barbarity at the end. Still, it's nothing when you're used to it, as the eels said when they were skinned alive. At least we get our years of passive meditation. They think we're stupid, but most of the time our minds are off elsewhere.
> – Until they do this to you, said a third cow. […]
> – But they can't help being stupid, offered the first cow, thinking themselves so superior when it's the animals they kill who have kept their spirituality while they've lost theirs, or most of them have. And some of those who haven't will become cows.
> – But then they'll get treated like this, said the cow with the crumpled horn, indicating the white heifer, who was about to be stunned. And they get eaten by the next generation of humans.
> – So a human could eat his own grandmother and not realise? asked the third cow. (416)

The perspective given here is truly novel. Unlike in Agee's 'A Mother's Tale', the cows here know exactly what is coming, in detail, through past experience, allowing for a contemplation of slaughter that is markedly different from what is found in other slaughterhouse representations. While the passage is arguably humorous, and should possibly be categorized as belonging to the absurd,[10] the humour here happens at the expense of humans and their misconceptions about other animals. It is thus not the case that anthropomorphic nonhuman animals are largely the targets, nor symbols of human targets, as one might typically expect when anthropomorphism is used for humorous effect. Rather, Astley employs a critical anthropomorphism, in which the depiction of the slaughterhouse from

Her shape-shifting is an expression of her affinity with the whole living universe of creatures, bird, animal and human' (Herbert 1996, 145).

[10] Although he considers it only briefly, and does not consider any of its slaughterhouse scenes, Neil Cornwell places Astley's novel firmly within the absurdist in his study of *The Absurd in Literature* (2006, 286–7).

the animals' perspective is used to satirize the kind of self-assured notions of human superiority and ideas of nonhuman experience as limited, which Coombes expresses in the interview earlier in the novel. It is not, of course, that the novel claims its own complex mythology and spiritual nonhuman phenomenology as reality, but that it attempts to lay bare the anthropocentrism behind assumptions such as those made by Coombes (and other characters), which align more generally with how human cultures often assume species hierarchies based purely on human observations and interests.

Astley's novel thus employs anthropomorphism in a way that actively seeks to question how humans speak about nonhuman experience in ways that serve our interests in exploiting other animals. In her book *Animal*, Erica Fudge points out that there is a way in which something may be labelled anthropomorphic in order 'to undercut the dangerous possibility that the gap between human and animal is not so large after all' (2002, 144). That is, the concept of anthropomorphism is presented as suspect in order to protect human interests against an emphasis on similarities between ourselves and other animals that might otherwise challenge them. As Sherryl Vint aptly puts it, simply assuming anthropomorphism to be a 'fallacy' in this way 'is an alibi for human behaviour' (2010, 13). Thus, while it is certainly possible to argue that anthropomorphism can go too far in its presumptions about nonhuman experience, the denial or downplaying of such experience is no less problematic, and certainly no less ideological. For many critics, including Vint, the challenge for either readers or authors therefore becomes finding a balance in which we are 'attuned to resisting the two fallacies of too inclusive an anthropomorphism and too constant an anthropodenial' (13). In other words, we must find ways of always respecting both the differences and the similarities between ourselves and other animals in order to do justice to the complexity of our relations with them and the singularity of each species, or each creature.

The End of My Tether, however, takes an approach that goes through a narrative so confused and seemingly absurd that nobody is likely to think it an attempt at realistically portraying nonhuman experience. That is, it disarms the charge of fallacious anthropomorphism by making its use conspicuous and overtly absurd. Yet this paradoxically opens up the possibility of exposing the absurdity of common denials of nonhuman experience as well, because its premise forces the reader to continually reconsider the epistemologies through which the novel—and thus also the common anthropocentric attitudes expressed—are to be understood. Thus, the

novel contains numerous instances in which nonhuman experience clashes with human attitudes, and human characters are frequently marked as unsympathetic through their insensitivity to nonhuman experience or suffering. In one episode, for example, the souls of some squirrels oversee a dinner in which two of them are served in a squirrel pie after one of the diners has carried out a 'decimation of the squirrel population', which he in part excuses by the 'damage' squirrels cause to trees, leading the squirrel souls to comment on the 'damage on a massive scale' caused by humans not just to trees, but 'to the whole environment of Loamshire' (Astley 2002, 321). By comparison, however, the slaughterhouse is more central to vital parts of the plot and, in this context, functions as an epitome of human exploitation of other animals. It is hence a place in which tensions between different understandings of the world are at their highest, because it displays the consequences of anthropocentrism at its most violent and hence nonhuman experience at its most unpleasant, as the cows comment on while being stunned and having their throats cut.

It is perhaps helpful here to briefly compare the cows' approach to slaughter with a somewhat similar scene that closes in on approaching slaughter in Don LePan's dystopian novel *Animals* (2009). Here, since the relevant species of nonhuman animals are extinct, human children with severe mental disabilities, called 'mongrels', have been dehumanized to the point at which they are used for meat production, which is exactly how the novel's protagonist Sam ends up. Thus, somewhat similarly to what happens in Astley's novel, we briefly witness the approach to slaughter from the perspective of someone about to be slaughtered, yet the subject in *Animals* is human and thus not an anthropomorphized character in any traditional sense. Unlike some of the others in line for slaughter, Sam does not panic and we are told he 'did not feel scared, he felt empty, he had a knowing of death inside him now, he would be all right, he told himself that again and again and again' (LePan 2010, 151). Instead of thinking critically of those killing him, he thinks back on his life, a part of which he has lived rather happily as a family pet.

Perhaps unlike the details of the cows' experience in *The End of My Tether*, the reader is likely to readily believe Sam's perspective, because the narrative has told us he is human; indeed, it has been indicated that he has been misclassified as 'mongrel', although he is simply deaf. LePan thus does a lot to approximate Sam's way of experiencing to our own (as some instances of anthropomorphism arguably also do) and implicitly to argue that this experience is realistic. There is almost certainly, in this attempt at

approximation, an implicit critique of our disbelief in the painful experience of nonhuman animals in actual slaughterhouses, as LePan's novel quite explicitly argues against meat production. In the closing lines of *Animals*, just as he is pressing the bolt gun to Sam's skull and looking into his eyes, a worker in the slaughterhouse thinks how '[y]ou could imagine so many things if you looked in a creature's eyes, you could never know, it was like looking into the clouds, or into water, you could never know really, it was better to look away' (154). The line is chilling, in part because we know and relate to the thoughts behind those eyes as human, and it does include an implicit criticism of anthropodenial. Yet arguably, there is also too much effort done at an approximation to make the critique of anthropodenial truly poignant. LePan in effect criticizes readers for not exerting their imagination in relation to the nonhuman, while simultaneously removing the obstacles that might make such an imaginary exercise necessary in his own text. By comparison, *The End of My Tether* continually challenges readers' imaginations as it destabilizes ontological categorizations while it questions and reassesses the very epistemological foundations of how we relate to other animals, not least when it comes to what happens at its slaughterhouse.

While *Animals* is quite clearly didactic in its criticism, the humour, absurdity, and anthropomorphism in Astley's novel arguably has the potential to work disarmingly, as they are all techniques that can be taken to signal something quite different from didacticism (even if anthropomorphism as allegory has also traditionally been used for moral lessons). Yet *The End of My Tether* has no shortage of criticism of human behaviour and manages to use its anthropomorphism to undermine anthropocentric assumptions. It is also worth noting how the novel seeks to be subversive of anthropocentric attitudes at the level of language as well as through the story and its other literary techniques. When the white heifer—inside which are both Kernan and the Morrigan—approaches slaughter, Kernan recognizes among the slaughterhouse workers 'Joe Hartley, whose grandfather he had seen butchered' and Pete Gingell, whose 'granddad and most of his mates were slaughtered in another raid' in the First World War (Astley 2002, 416). As previously mentioned, Astley at several points in the novel clearly shows a great degree of consciousness of how the language of slaughter is often used metaphorically about the killing of humans, and about war specifically. Employing these metaphors in the slaughterhouse scene—in close proximity to their vehicle—however, strips them somewhat of their metaphorical status and rather highlights how the

two kinds of killing may be seen as alike. It thus once again highlights the creaturely vulnerability that defies the human/animal dichotomy on which the activities of the slaughterhouse so clearly rely.

It should also not be overlooked that while some characters in *The End of My Tether* at times seem to be promoting a distinctly vegetarian ethic that simply views killing as wrong, there is also a sense of ostensibly better human-animal relations found in rural traditions, which are now all but lost and involve more benign forms of killing.[11] This is hinted at, for instance, in the notions that farmers care about the welfare of their animals, as Lizzie tells Coombes when she interviews him, or in notions of hunting for sustenance as relatively benign. In one instance, which stands in contrast to the squirrel hunt mentioned above, the sympathetic character of Herne talks to the soul of a rabbit he has just shot, who expresses appreciation at the way he hunts (29). Most of all, however, it is implied by the presence in the novel of a chemical plant that pollutes its rural setting and in the theme of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, to which the novel keeps returning. As Kernan argues early in the novel, BSE is something 'we did … to ourselves and to our animals, and for money' (43). It is, in other words, the corrupting influence of industrial capitalism on human-animal relations which has changed these relations for the worse, which is also signified in Coombes' use of language at the slaughterhouse, when he refers to animals as 'units' or 'product'. The antithesis to this is not so much vegetarianism as it is any view that continues to see the animals as subjects. Outbreaks of cattle diseases such as BSE and Foot-and-Mouth Disease in England around the turn of the twenty-first century produced affective responses in the public in part because they exposed how industry had changed animal husbandry. The suggestion that BSE was caused by turning cows into cannibals revealed what to some seemed a perversion of nature for financial reasons, and when healthy animals were 'destroyed' to prevent the potential financial losses that would result from diseases spreading, it effectively made conspicuous the erasure of any consideration of the animals as subjects in favour of protecting production (Nehrlich 2004, 22–23; Tiffin 2007a, 23–24; Washer 2006, 261, 265). Given how Astley's novel draws on these crises,

[11] I discuss the theme of rurality in relation to slaughterhouse fictions in further detail in Chap. 5.

the anthropomorphism of the animals in the novel can be viewed as a reassertion of the animals' individualities and subjectivities, which contradicts the objectifying logic of the capitalist production system. This, ultimately, is also the lens through which one must read the novel's slaughterhouse scenes, some of which reassert the animals as subjects in the very place in which they are routinely—and physically—turned into objects. Like BSE, slaughter is depicted as a 'betrayal' of the relation between humans and the nonhuman world, yet the betrayal is less the killing in itself than the erasure of nonhuman subjectivities through the objectification of living creatures in the logic of production (Astley 2002, 307, 318). Astley's particular brand of anthropomorphism helps get this point across.

In a chapter reflecting on talking animals in literature, Karla Armbruster notes that 'many critics' concerned with animals seem to agree that literary texts need to 'somehow remind the reader of the real animals that hover outside the human-created text, both inviting the reader to identify with the nonhuman animal as a fellow living being and reminding him or her of the inevitable differences between humans and other species' (2013, 24). This, I would argue, *The End of My Tether* manages perhaps surprisingly well, if through unconventional means and in spite of typical expectations of texts employing anthropomorphic modes. Certainly, with its metaphysical anthropomorphism, Astley's novel would fall short of criteria many critics would set for reminding readers of fellow creatures in a way that is also attentive to difference. Kate Soper (2005, 306), for instance, prefers what she labels the 'naturalistic' mode in part because it portrays the animal 'in its alien and natural otherness'—something Astley's intricate and ontologically unstable nonhuman characters can hardly do, alien though they are at times. And yet, the novel clearly shares with Soper's naturalistic modes a resistance to what she calls 'appropriative symbolism' (306). Although the novel clearly plays with animal symbolism in its use of mythology, its nonhuman characters are never just, in Soper's words, creatures 'in some more formalised bestiary emblematic of ourselves' (306). In the end, Astley roots his plot and setting(s) too deeply in the actual fates of nonhuman animals—from the BSE crisis, to countryside hunts, to the slaughterhouse—for the story to become just another fable about humans in animal form.

Slaughter, Anthropomorphism, Empathy

Discussing notions of dominion and the human reluctance to attribute the capacity of thought to other animals, Erica Fudge writes:

> An animal cannot think, we argue, and therefore it is down to us to think for it. If we firmly believed that a cow could think like us it would become very difficult to justify eating it. Instead, we decide that a cow can't think as we understand the term, and that it is therefore morally acceptable to eat the cow. In these terms, dominion is a claim for the human right – even duty – to treat animals as objects of use rather than as fellow subjects of the planet. (2002, 13–14)

When we read about animals who talk and think as we do, our sense of species superiority is contradicted, at least implicitly. Of course, anthropomorphism does offer us a way out, a way to re-establish ideas of dominion so we can continue to justify eating the cow. All we need to do is point out that the characters are anthropomorphised, implying that they are unrealistically human-like and should thus not be taken too seriously.

It can also, however, offer us an invitation to explore the ways in which we mobilize our imaginations in our relations to other animals. One could argue that the ease with which we accept portrayals of the inner lives of other animals (and their expressions of this) when we read should make us think, given the scepticism with which claims about such inner lives are sometimes met in the real world. In his foreword to Vinciane Despret's *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, Bruno Latour points out how odd it can seem that scientists will dismiss the experiences of naturally occurring encounters with other animals as 'artificial fictions', while insisting on highly controlled, artificially constructed conditions for scientific study of animal behaviours (Despret 2016, viii). Strange and sometimes inaccurate as anthropomorphism may be, making inferences about the inner lives of animals is also a natural inclination of ours, and it speaks, if not to the animals' own experience, then certainly to our experience of animals. That is, we *do* consider animals—albeit perhaps some more than others—to have feelings, passions, thoughts, and agency, and literary depictions tease this fact out by implicitly having us decide which aspects of them we find realistic and which we find exaggerated or implausible.

Kari Weil is obviously using a broader definition of the concept than I have applied in most of this chapter when, drawing on Daston and Mitman, she notes that 'anthropomorphism is the first step to attributing mind to another being and, hence, to acknowledging an other as a subject capable of pain, pleasure, and will' (2012, 47). And yet, the basic principle is the same: it is a matter of imagining the inner lives of others, based on what we perceive ourselves and them to have in common and on how we read their expressions. It is a practice that, as Mary Midgley points out in *Beast and Man*, applies in our relations to humans as well as other animals, and one that is basically the same whether we are talking about our literary imaginations or our consideration of others in the real world (2002, 332–4). The notion of 'critical anthropomorphism', which Weil promotes, is one in which 'we open ourselves to touch and be touched by others as fellow subjects and may imagine their pain, pleasure, and need in anthropomorphic terms, but stop short of believing that we can know their experience' (Weil 2012, 20). This, in turn, she builds on the notion of a 'critical empathy' based, in Jill Bennett's words, on a 'conjunction of affect and critical awareness' (Weil 2012, 20; Bennett 2005, 10). For Bennett, this is 'an empathy grounded not in affinity (*feeling for* another insofar as we can imagine *being* that other) but on a feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible' (10, emphasis orig.).

At first glance, one might easily question whether the kinds of anthropomorphism found in literary texts are able to live up to the emphasis on difference that both Weil and Bennett emphasize as part of thinking and feeling oneself into the encounter with an other. To some extent, it may well depend on the specific text. But literary representations (not just the anthropomorphic ones) generally require readers to be just as alert to difference as to likeness in the characters represented. Fiction is less about the accuracy of what is on the page than about the reality of what we think and feel as we read. It can be, exactly, an invitation to engage in a 'conjunction of affect and critical awareness' and thus depictions of animals that represent their inner lives, thoughts, and passions can be seen as an invitation to experience feelings and thoughts in relation to different degrees of difference and similarity between ourselves and the nonhuman characters.

Anthropomorphism does not give us accuracy, but it does allow us to think and feel in ways that contradict clear-cut notions of a human/animal binary, opening up the possibility that some nonhumans may be more easily relatable than some humans may be. In both the texts I have examined

at length in this chapter, some humans seem stranger, more different from us, than the anthropomorphised nonhuman characters, whose feelings we are privy to. The humans in Agee's 'A Mother's Tale' are viewed only from afar or known only through myth. The Man With The Hammer is, from the narrative's perspective, arguably more mythical creature than human being, while the mother and calves experience highly relatable feelings such as doubt, fear, and care. The landscape of *The End of My Tether* makes it distinctly more difficult to empathize with its often cynical and selfish upper-class exploiters of nature than with shapeshifters, mythical figures and, indeed, both dead and living nonhuman animals. This is so because anthropomorphism allows us shifts in perspective that take us outside the human, allowing us to think and feel differently about both the nonhuman species depicted and ourselves. It gives us, at the very least, the attempt at viewing the human species critically from a perspective that—while not accurately that of the nonhuman animal—is also not in any straightforward way that of a human. Even if, due to the novel's humour and absurdity, Astley's talking animal characters do not directly elicit empathy when they are being slaughtered, they do undoubtedly open up the possibility that one should and could feel empathy for animals, and thus for those slaughtered in real life. This is because anthropomorphism is used in the novel specifically to let animals express ways in which they suffer in a slaughtering practice that does not deviate so much from the reality of slaughterhouses that such suffering is not believable as a possibility.

John Berger famously argued that we live in a world where animals have been marginalized and reduced to spectacle and representations so that 'animals are always the observed' and '[t]he fact that they can observe us has lost all significance' (2009, 27). For Berger, the 'ever-extending knowledge' about other animals collected through our observation becomes 'an index of our power, and thus of what separates us from them' (27). Anthropomorphization, however, can both make us the observed and—through its inherent ontological instability—undermine the kind of knowledge that is based purely on our observation of other animals. It is possible, perhaps, that literature can in this way turn an indicting gaze on us more intently than the real animals, whom we may forget to look in the eye.

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CHAPTER 4

Flesh of the City: Slaughterhouses and the Urban

'When we refer to the city we generally consider humans as the only living referent found there', Roberto Marchesini asserts in his writing on animals in the city (2016, 80). Conceptually, ideas of the urban are linked to the social, which too often seems to implicitly only incorporate human life. Thus, when 'urban theory' is viewed as a framework that helps to 'distinguish intrinsically urban phenomena from the rest of social reality', such 'social reality' has in effect meant human experience (Scott and Storper 2014, 1; Holmberg 2015, 6–7), and 'historians by and large still treat cities … as an artificial creation of humans, who are themselves regarded as outside of nature' (Melosi 2010, 4). In this way, the city is predicated upon the familiar contrasts between culture and nature and between the human and the nonhuman. And yet, as scholars and theorists have begun to point out, the city was never just human, nor was it ever—strictly speaking—meant to be devoid of nonhuman life (Brown 2016; Holmberg 2015, 2). For instance, animals intended for meat consumption—as well as, for example, horses for transport and cows in dairies—used to be a part of city life in the Western world, helping alongside human inhabitants to define the kinds of places that cities were. Frederick L. Brown, in his animal history of Seattle, traces the development of that city from this kind of 'livestock-friendly organic town' of the late nineteenth century 'to the … livestock-averse modern city of the early twentieth century, to the paradoxical city of the later twentieth century and beyond', in which we are

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'celebrating benevolence toward animals while exploiting distant and hidden livestock' (2016, 6). Such transformations are mirrored in countless other cities and have simultaneously changed the processes of meaning-formation tied to ideas of the city and the lives lived there.

Slaughterhouses and their gradual concealment or removal have had their role to play in such developments and thus new conceptualizations both of the city and of the slaughterhouse have mutually affected the layers of meaning attached to one and to the other. Paul S. Sutter writes in his foreword to Brown's book that '[t]he magic of the modern city has been to make animals disappear' (xi)—a feat done not least through the removal of livestock to other places, but in the modern city also through the often marginally placed heterotopic spaces of slaughterhouses, which ensure that animals physically disappear in order to reappear in the city only as cellophane-wrapped finished product.

Nevertheless, the animals whose lives have ended in slaughterhouses *are* therefore present in that final form and it is only through imaginative effort, or perhaps rather through a lapse in imaginative effort, that the city seems devoid of these animals. Thus, as Sutter also writes, today's 'cities are the places where it has been easiest to make believe that we are separate from the animal world', even while our lives are deeply entangled with those of members of other species (Brown 2016, x).

The history of the slaughterhouse and its shifting relation to city life makes it representative of the tensions and negotiations that continually complicate and destabilize nature/culture or urban/rural dichotomies. Whereas the modern slaughterhouse can in most European contexts be seen as having grown out of a wish to remove slaughter from city life, other cities have at times been virtually synonymous with their great meat industries; while the industries that led to Cincinnati's nineteenth-century nickname 'Porkopolis' or to Chicago's fame as 'hog butcher for the world' may have caused problems, such designations also reveal a sense of pride in place attached to the number of animals turned into products (Wade 2003, 11; Sandburg 1914, 191). While I suggested in the first chapter that today's slaughterhouses have largely been relegated to a rather marginal space in our lives, their relation to dynamics of place and space is thus also in some ways more complex, both in light of how the phenomenon of slaughter has been treated historically and of how we often choose (or attempt) to disregard it today. Cities, by contrast, are nearly always conceived of as places, objects of attachment, full of meaning, life, and emotion, if also often as alienating and anonymizing. The literary

slaughterhouses I discuss in this chapter have, albeit in markedly different ways, clear relations to ideas of the city and to—real or imagined—contrasts and entanglements between the human and the nonhuman, the cultural and the natural, the urban and the rural, which both cities and slaughterhouses may at times be said to represent.

Concealment and Deindividualization: Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*

As the chapter introducing the 'Sodderbrook Poultry Plant' in Tristan Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard* (1998) commences, it quickly becomes clear that, in more ways than one, the slaughter facility occupies a kind of liminal space in relation to the American Midwest community in which the novel is set. While 'the plant is one of the largest and most prosperous in the area' and 'a distinguishing hallmark of the community', this is described as being 'to the eternal chagrin of most locals', and the slaughterhouse is accordingly situated in a geographically marginal position 'outside the main perimeter of production plants on the south end of town' (Egolf 1998, 128). Moreover, the plant is negatively credited with having started an influx of 'Mexican and Central American immigrants', about whom locals disparagingly use the ethnic slur 'wetbacks', into the local town of Baker and to have 'paved the road to keep them coming for years on end' (127). Thus, in the eyes of locals, its construction is viewed as 'the beginning of some kind of end, though', the narrator informs us, 'contrary to prevalent stereotypes, the Sodderbrook wetbacks have always been the most docile bunch in town' (127). The poultry plant in this way seems to be a space that the local community would rather forget, but also one that through its financial importance and its effects on the demographics of the town insists on its continuing attachment to, and influence upon, the community; it is an approximate reminder of that which the locals would rather keep distant, be it the plant's existence itself or the immigrants it attracts.

Easily read within the context of the decline of family farms in rural communities, *Lord of the Barnyard* is perhaps best known as a 400-page novel without a single line of dialogue, and for its rather scathing critique of the small-mindedness of Midwesterners. It centres on a diversity of perspectives on the protagonist John Kaltenbrunner, who is presented in the book's 'prologue' as someone whose 'name had become a household

word, one generally equated with all that was wrong in creation' (xii). John is remembered in local lore as 'the freak on the tractor, the corncrib fascist, the troglodytic goatroper from just north of the river – the one who rarely spoke a word to anyone but who, nevertheless, unfailingly succeeded in alienating, revolting, and terrifying just about every living being he came in contact with' (xiii). Hence, not unlike the poultry plant, he seems marginalized and near-universally despised, yet somehow vital to the way the community views itself. He is, in other words, a problematic character, whose actions and general demeanour—even though the third person narrative is plainly sympathetic to him—remain unsettling and outside the norm; he is a misfit and a mystery, albeit clearly one who is treated unfairly.

This is also seen in the chapter describing his time working in the poultry plant. Immediately placed in the kill room of the plant, John—who is in his late teens at the time—is at first the object of wagers on how quickly he will break down and give up the job, but he soon puts all such expectations to shame. This hardly comes as a surprise to the reader, who will at this point have come to appreciate John's peculiar character, but it does add to the somewhat disconcerting feeling that surrounds him. As working in the plant is clearly psychologically taxing, we are implicitly asked to contemplate what it says about a young man's psyche that he can be placed in the most violent part of the plant and markedly outperform expectations in his work of killing.

As is the case in a number of other slaughterhouse narratives, the nature of the work and the plight of the worker are arguably the main foci of how slaughterhouse labour is described in *Lord of the Barnyard*. However, while some others mainly highlight physical and financial consequences for the workers, what come to the forefront in Egolf's depiction are the psychological consequences of killing as a profession. Essentially, two possibilities stand out for those who carry out the work over an extended period of time: they may go mad, and possibly end up killing themselves, or they may slowly die on the inside like 'the Zombie', who has 'been manning the kill room for seventeen years and counting' and has 'all the air of a dead man about him' (132):

> Everyone agreed that the gruesome, taxing nature of the work could drive a reasonably sensitive soul to the brink of madness, particularly when deprived of ample breathing time. But in other cases, when concerning more calloused, downtrodden souls like the Zombie, the result was often

> more akin to drug-induced anaesthesia than pressurized revolt. Individuals like the Zombie, and at least two hundred others along the tiers, were left as hollowed-out automatons who, after so many years, could scarcely register the light of day any more. (133)

However, perhaps most noteworthy is the way in which the work and its ill-effects appear as routinized in the narrative. While the work of killing is gory and psychologically damaging, the scale of it makes it too much of a routine to ever consider at the level of the individual animal, just as it becomes clear that the individualities of employees matter little to the employers, which mirrors their marginalization from the community more generally, whether they appear to be freaks like John or fit the racial epithet of 'wetbacks'. It is also, however, a feature of the way the work itself is all-consuming and makes their lives seem virtually indistinguishable from one another to the reader, the outside observer, and to those managing the plant. As such, most workers simply follow a 'circuitous route from time clock to tavern, then home to bed', which John also finds 'a difficult pattern *not* to follow' (137, italics orig.). Thus, workers' lives come to reflect the repetition and routine inherent to the nature of the work, which shows itself both physically and psychologically to also encompass breaks and free time. For John, the 'thirty minute break in the parking lot' is marred by the way 'the screeching of the belt, which had ground to a halt and given way to an ominous calm, still rang through his head in nerve-shattering repetition, just as the stiffening in his right hand from maintaining the grip on the cleaver all morning only commenced to crawl up into his forearms with the temporary inactivity', and he has similar problems getting work out of his head the night after his first day at the plant (133–34; 135). Time away from work therefore serves more as momentary stillness in which one can realize the psychological and physical discomforts of the work than as actual time away from it. In this way, the novel reflects how dehumanizing physical control of the (dis)assembly line worker extends both into the psychological realm and into time spent outside the workplace. As Tzachi Zamir notes in an insightful reading of moral issues present in the text, '[t]rauma can partly consist of such brutal invasions of inner space by an overwhelming context, an inability to maintain the divide between rest and work' (2011, 934). The professional routine is also shown to be part of what obscures the violence done to the turkeys being slaughtered. As Zamir observes, this jumps out at the reader already during the description of John's initial interview for the job. In the

'standard rundown' of routine questions put to prospective workers (allergies, history of mental illness, knowledge of Spanish etc.), the question '*Did he have any objection to working with a knife?*' is italicized, highlighting how this, while a standard question one might get for other less violent jobs (e.g. working in a kitchen), is ominous in all its vagueness due to its precise applicability to the specific work of killing in the present job (Egolf 1998, 129; Zamir 2011, 935). Not just routinization and repetition of ordinary work, but also the rhetoric thereof, thus serve to obscure the violence done to both humans and nonhumans in the hidden reality of what is in fact anything *but* an ordinary job from the perspective of most outsiders.

The novel's focus on its protagonist, however, allows the absurdity and violence of the work—otherwise obscured by routinized mass production—to be viewed through the individual worker. By his first lunch break, John has thus already 'singlehandedly cut three thousand throats', while at the entire poultry plant during 'the holiday season 25,000 birds on average were killed, cleaned and packaged every day' (Egolf 1998, 33, 131). Linguistic contrast is significant here; while the word 'throats' is eerily accurate and evocative of anatomical similarities between humans and nonhumans, the scale of the work, and the number of birds killed, render the animals anonymous and inconsequential; they are devoid of meaning at an individual level.

The workers are similarly threatened by disappearance at the individual level. Yet the 'at least two hundred others along the tiers', who are 'left as hollowed-out automatons' suggest not just deindividualization, but also dehumanization (133). The expression 'hollowed-out automatons' suggests an entanglement of creatures, human and nonhuman, which links the physical evisceration of the turkeys with the psychological and emotional void created in most workers. The novel twists around an echo of the French philosopher René Descartes' infamous suggestion that nonhuman animals were 'automata' without souls or reason (1970, 244) and makes the human workers, who slaughter such animals, deficient in the inner qualities that have often been viewed as essential to our humanity. The workers in the poultry plant accordingly appear engaged in a silent struggle—albeit one they are inevitably losing—to preserve a sense of such basic humanity. Yet, paradoxically, it is bodily functions that Cartesian thinking might characterize as animal that become signs of a resistant sensibility. Thus, in the kill room, even seasoned workers are 'prone to occasional fits of vomiting', which are viewed 'as a lingering testimony to one's

residual, albeit withering, humanity' (Egolf 1998, 137). Hence, it is the sense of something shared through embodiment, something creaturely, which confirms humanity as a resistance to mechanistic reduction.

At the same time, the incompatibility of human fellow feeling with production line work creates tension when accidents occur:

> In the event of an injury, the belt was rarely even brought to a halt. The natural human inclination to gather around the latest casualty in an inquiring pack was eradicated by the howling reproaches of the foremen. Ideally, when an accident did occur, everyone continued working without missing a single hack, stroke or thrust. Before the victim could be strapped into place by responding medics, a pitiless traditional Mexican death chant would go up all along the tiers… (136)

While the workers' Mexican identities offer the semblance of resistance to capitalism's dehumanizing logic through their death chant, the work environment of the plant is here shown as artificial in the way that it seeks to curb 'natural human inclination' and discourages any behaviour that might slow production. Meanwhile, the language of the text blurs species categories by describing a human gathering as a 'pack' and the foremen as 'howling'. The turkeys, similarly, fail to fit squarely with the expected characteristics of their species; they are, we are told, 'pharmaceutical monstrosities; born and bred on massive cycles of steroids, housed in overpacked assembly cages, and transmogrified by dietary impurities that rendered them hostile to virtually all outside forms of life' (131).

The systematic nature of the work, and the disappearance of individuality and humanity, contributes significantly to making Egolf's text ethically unsettling. The routine appears as numbing for any reflection on the violence of the work, whether to humans or nonhumans. This also adds yet another layer to the ghostly or zombie-like ring of an expression like 'hollowed-out automatons', which comes to reflect even more than the routine of the work and the entangled victimization of workers and turkeys; the 'automatons' are also both the radical and logical extension of the numbness or purposeful blindness of the average consumer, which has been achieved through the total exclusion of slaughter and farm animals from urbanites' everyday lives and the absence of reference to the live animals when their flesh is eaten. The novel's narrative in this way not only relies on the ability of fiction to give us access to environments or situations that we would be unlikely to experience first-hand; it also provides

an opportunity to extend our capability for empathy to the humans (and possibly nonhumans) in that secluded, concealed space—to consider the emotional lives that are numbed or suppressed by the work carried out there (Mar and Oatley 2008, 181).

In the background of Egolf's depictions of slaughter work looms a continual blurring and questioning of culture/nature and human/nonhuman dichotomies. The rearing of the turkeys into 'pharmaceutical monstrosities' would seem, for instance, to place them somehow clearly among the human-made, the cultural rather than the natural, yet this defies general notions of what animal being is supposed to be, and the entire turkey rearing and slaughtering operations are hidden from normal human everyday life as if not a part of culture. What is at stake is thus how we would like to represent culture and how we would like to perceive humanity as often both cultural and adhering to natural principles. This tension is also brought out in how John finds his new slaughterhouse reality begins 'to corroborate the contentions of various firearms and game advocates who adamantly maintain that the due processes which put meat on our boards ultimately make the packs of heavily armed trolls roaming the forests in reckless hunting parties look like concerned humanitarians' (Egolf 1998, 129). Such common arguments, which espouse the supposed naturalness of hunting by comparing it with the artificiality of modern meat production that affords the animal no chance of escape, draw on ideas of a humanity that has generally strayed too far from healthier and more ethical, supposedly natural, ways of securing meat. Indeed, such assertions are often aimed specifically at urban populations' alleged double standards, sentimentality, and estrangement from nature (e.g. Gjerris et al. 2016, 31, 153–54; Luke 1997, 33; Lynge 1990, 11–13, 89–90). This brings to the forefront the question of whether and how lines may be drawn—and drawn ethically—between culture and nature, although the novel's characterization of the 'general simian-mindedness' and 'apparent spiritual and intellectual incapacity' of hunters does little to suggest such a question is easily answered (Egolf 1998, 129).

While the initial description of the poultry plant may be, in Zamir's words, 'dispassionately informative' (2011, 933), it is nevertheless weirdly alienating and unsettling in its presentation of the unavoidably visceral work of 'disembowelment' along 'evisceration tiers' and through the 'kill room' or the 'scalding vats'—to which are later added further viscerality and violence in the form of 'coagulated plasma, feces and scorched feathers', 'a shin-deep lake of gore', or the 'electrocution box' (Egolf 1998,

128, 130, 131). Nevertheless, much of what may be disquieting about Egolf's descriptions ultimately lies in the way we are also invited to contemplate the phenomenon of turkey slaughter in its symbolic and cultural context, of which most Americans are a part in real life. The internal death implied by the terms 'Zombie' and 'hollowed-out automatons' mirrors the physical deaths that are a direct result of the work carried out, while the unfamiliarity of the terms used about the work reminds us of how uncommon (and uncomfortable) the scenes depicted are to most readers in real life. Thus, the evocative quality of the words Egolf chooses to describe the work is all the more important exactly because it is a description of something most readers will not have experienced first-hand. This is highlighted by references to concealment within the narrative; in addition to the location of the plant on the margins of the town, the description of the inside of the plant tells us 'the kill room is situated behind closed doors', hiding the act of killing even from those who turn the bodies into products as they come out of there (128). This fact of concealment is further emphasized by John's realization during his first break that

> he had just been inundated with a concentrated dose of a far-off corner of reality most of the nation was not even aware existed. It shed a whole new light on his conception of packaged holiday turkeys lining the shelves at the supermarket. He thought of families all across the nation, rich and poor and all walks of life alike, meandering through candy-coated meat departments beneath soft lighting and holiday muzak. (133)

Here as well, it is through contrasts that Egolf makes the descriptions of animal slaughter so unsettling. The text highlights the extreme differences between the reality of the slaughterhouse and the reality of consumers. The metaphorical 'new light' being shed for John stands in stark contrast to the 'soft lighting' in which consumers find their meats, while also reminding the reader of a previous line that tells us experienced workers can 'scarcely register the light of day anymore' (133). Thus, in the context of slaughter, the natural light of day is replaced both by the new light of a different, and harsher, reality and by the soft light designed to disguise this reality, demonstrating how what is seen, and consequently what remains unseen, relies on cultural fabrications in our everyday lives. The entire process of meat production—from producer to consumer—is portrayed here as artificial or of a different reality and, in part because of the contrast with daylight, arguably unnatural. Moreover, Egolf's descriptions of

'candy-coated meat departments' and 'holiday muzak' highlight the distance between consumers' general sensory reality and 'the overwhelming stench of bloodshed', 'the screaming of shackled birds', 'the stench of scorched quills', or 'the caustic odor of blood' experienced by John in his daily work routine (131, 135, 137); the cultural manipulation of knowledge is thus not a mere issue of visual concealment, but stretches into olfactory and aural realms as well. Meanwhile, the use of the word 'reality' for John's experiences creates an insistence on the narrative as an illumination of something real in the reader's life, not least since the reader will very likely be a part of the 'families all across the nation' who consume the products of slaughter. In this way, readers of Egolf's novel are confronted with the cultural significance of slaughterhouses and with how—as consumers—they are shielded from the heterotopia of the slaughterhouse.

As the above demonstrates, Egolf's depiction of the slaughterhouse makes great effort to not only break through the concealment of slaughter, but also to point to the concealment itself, leaving the reader with little escape from the fact of slaughter and its connection to the meat on our plates. As I touched upon in relation to Sinclair's *The Jungle* in Chap. 2, highlighting unpleasant aspects of slaughter helps to create a situation in which the reader can share, and empathize with, the dramatic experiences of the central character. However, where Sinclair at times highlights the screams of individual animals in creating a human-animal metaphor that works as the basis for possible empathy with both, Egolf's work stirs our feelings partly because the animals remain plural and are never individualized in the language he uses; it is the mass and mechanization of the process, the viscerality of it, and the psychological deterioration of the workers that makes the process of turkey slaughter seem horrific and questionable. So while we are reminded that 'most of the nation lives far outside of having to stare its meal square in the eye before plowing in'—suggesting that perhaps we should—that 'eye' is just as much a metaphor for the whole production and its consequences as it is the eye of any individual animal (Egolf 1998, 133). Yet it also gives us the opportunity to, in Bauman's terms, become aware of the individual animal as a possible 'object of knowledge', which nonetheless remains encased in the complete anonymity of the Other (Bauman 1993, 149).

The connection of the turkey slaughter in Egolf's novel to the holidays only serves to make the situation even more disconcerting by adding worship to the mix. In discussing the quarantining of the abattoir, Georges

Bataille asserts that slaughterhouses emerged 'from religion insofar as the temples past … had a dual purpose, being used for both supplication and slaughter', and sees reluctance to engage with abattoirs in contrast to those origins (1997, 22). Egolf's narrative, however, points out that the connection to religion is still present, at least in the case of turkeys slaughtered for the holidays. For instance, while the Zombie resembles 'a callowed old whisky priest distributing communion wafers with an aura of devitalized sanctimoniousness', the work stations are repeatedly referred to as 'cleaving altars' and John's workday as 'an unrelenting litany of bloodshed' carried out in 'an ongoing lament of jammed drainpipes, severed jugulars, screaming turkeys, and thunderclaps from the electrocution box' (Egolf 1998, 132, 136). Thus, tropes remind readers that connections between slaughter and religion remain; even as we go to great lengths to conceal it, a part of the holidays' celebration of peace and salvation is intimately connected to bloodshed—animal sacrifice is a continuing, if transformed, cultural tradition rather than a thing of the past.

The key differences are, of course, that where animal sacrifice used to happen as a public religious act, it is now hidden, and that in animal sacrifice, the animal is usually marked by some degree of individuality—it is chosen for sacrifice and thus moves beyond the conceptual plurality typical of animals destined for slaughter at the abattoir. In this way, Egolf's depiction of the 'poultry plant' echoes Bataille by pointing to the corruption that the concealment of slaughter brings to our relationship with reality. As Zamir writes, fiction 'both refers to and creates experience. Through this double movement, literature can broaden our factual intake both by center-staging less noted facts … and by modifying one's relation to the facts one already knows' (2011, 937). In *Lord of the Barnyard*, the illumination of the slaughterhouse that we, through cultural constructions, normally conceal from ourselves, allows us not only to experience the characters' relation to slaughter, but also to re-experience, and possibly modify, our own.

Egolf's poultry plant ultimately creates an uncanny entanglement of human and nonhuman fates; neither really conforms to prevalent ideas of humanity or animality. Instead, both human and nonhuman animals exist in a liminal space that blurs human/nonhuman and culture/nature boundaries, which the distance between slaughterhouse and supermarket otherwise helps keep most people from questioning. Such boundaries are further put into question by implicit comparisons between the turkey slaughter and violence towards humans; John's first day at the plant is 'not

unlike an incoming grunt's initiation to the troops in full-scale conflict' and once routine kicks in, he is referred to as 'a sweat-soaked executioner' (Egolf 1998, 130, 137). In the destructive, industrial slaughter process, both human and nonhuman animals become degraded life forms and disposable victims of violence.

Slaughter and the Working Beast

There is a complex and powerful metaphorical relationship between the industrial worker and the herded animal being led to slaughter. Not only are herded animals a common trope used in connection with workers flocking to the factory in both film and literature (Ameel 2013, 259), but the victimization of the animal resonates strongly in various depictions of exploited and expendable workers in industrial, capitalist culture.

In depictions of slaughterhouses, the tenor and vehicle of such metaphors meet as the animal vehicle becomes physically present in the lives of workers, creating a convergence of metaphor and story. Thus, violence becomes multi-layered, with the worker acting both as victim and victimizer in the daily routine of slaughterhouse work. As I have already touched briefly upon in Chap. 2, this is what happens in Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), when the comparison between labourers and hogs 'pressing on to their fate, all unsuspicious' helps to heighten emotional tension in the introduction to Packingtown's grand scale slaughter operations and bring the suffering of both workers and animals to the forefront of the narrative (1985, 42). Perhaps because it foregrounds animals' sufferings to such a relatively high degree, some critics have viewed the intended symbolism of the hogs as a metaphor that ultimately fails, and have seen this as part of an explanation for how Sinclair, in his own words, 'aimed at the public's heart and by accident hit it in the stomach' (1906, 594). Carol J. Adams, for instance, argues that the hog slaughter 'failed as a metaphor for the fate of the worker in *The Jungle* because the novel carried too much information on how the animal was violently killed', and Michael Malay convincingly builds on this argument in an astute analysis of Sinclair's language and level of detail, which 'cannot help but reveal the conditions under which animals lived and died in the stockyards' in real life (Adams 2000, 63; Malay 2017, 131). As Malay points out, *The Jungle* can in this way be read not just as *about* the stockyards, but also as a product *of* the stockyards, in the sense that Sinclair's real-life experience with Packingtown helped infuse his writing with a 'pacing of … language', a 'particularity

of … metaphors' and a level of detail that 'all bear testimony to the speed, energy and materiality of the stockyards' (2017, 141).

To the degree that the metaphor fails, however, its failure to strike the right balance in focus on tenor and vehicle—workers' sufferings and animals' sufferings—also has to do with the physical location of slaughter and its separation from the everyday lives of readers, and therefore with the distance that has increasingly come to characterize the slaughterhouse as an institution over the last century and a half or so. It is worth keeping in mind that the Chicago stockyards at the beginning of the twentieth century had a somewhat ambiguous relation to the rest of society, at once a distinct part of town which was geographically separate from the rest of society and—unlike most modern abattoirs—a symbol of industrial pride and progress that tourists could visit on tours and that helped define the city of Chicago (Pacyga 2015; Wade 2003). Sinclair, however, was sceptical of such symbolism, and in his wish to use the novel to further a socialist agenda and help labourers therefore sought to undermine illusory ideas of industrial progress and technology as unequivocally positive. In the novel's initial depiction of the stockyards, narrative commentary and instances of sarcasm continually serve to expose the naiveté in the initial awe with which the protagonist Jurgis Rudkus and the other characters view the place. While the guests are 'breathless with wonder' and Jurgis himself feels a 'sense of pride' at becoming 'a cog in this marvellous machine', the narrator comments on how it is 'quite uncanny' to watch the 'river of death' made up of animals going to slaughter, and undermines the awe the characters feel by explicitly pointing out the metaphor: 'Our friends were not poetical, and the sight [of animals going to slaughter] suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny; they thought only of the wonderful efficiency of it all' (Sinclair 1985, 40, 41, 42). This suggestion of a gap between lived reality and perception is continued through a critical comment on advertising,

> from which the visitor realized suddenly that he had come to the home of many of the torments of his life. It was here that they made those products with the wonders of which they pestered him so – by placards that defaced the landscape when he travelled, and by staring advertisements in the newspapers and magazines – by silly little jingles that he could not get out of his mind, and gaudy pictures that lurked for him around every street corner. (42–43)

Made in the context of a slaughterhouse narrative, such a critique of how the finished meat products are presented shares similarities with the way the different realities of consumers and slaughterhouse workers are depicted by Egolf almost a century later in *Lord of the Barnyard*. One thing that is different, however, is the expectation of industrial wonder that is still tied to the stockyards in Sinclair's contemporary reality. As this is slowly, but surely, stripped away by the narrator's comments, what readers are left with is the raw reality of the violence to animals that happens behind that veil of perception. In such a reading, then, it is in part the gradual peeling away of the layers of representation and distance that normally surround the institutions of mass slaughter, which ends up leaving the novel's depictions of slaughter as striking as they are. Rather than making a distant and hidden space of the slaughterhouse into place by adding significance, as later slaughterhouse narratives arguably do, *The Jungle* in this way performs a transformation of the stockyards as place. The narrative develops them from imbued with values and feelings tied to awe at industrial innovation and grandeur into a place that finds its emotional significance in the suffering that goes on there, and the way Sinclair establishes the metaphor early on means that the first suffering depicted in detail is that of nonhuman animals being slaughtered.

That the characters in *The Jungle* naively trust the illusion that almost exclusively shows the positive sides of grand-scale industry when they first visit the stockyards—that they go along 'all unsuspicious' like the animals—also helps strip them of much of their agency in the scenes that unfold there. To be sure, Jurgis and some of the other newly arrived immigrants gradually become better informed as the novel progresses and they become victims of the industrial machinery themselves, and also episodically display a will to fight back against the injustices they face. Generally, however, they are depicted as helpless victims of systems they do not understand, and any recognition of how Packingtown really works tends to come too late. Thus, throughout the course of the novel, the family of Lithuanian immigrants is gradually torn apart by poverty alongside a host of injustices, diseases, and accidents, leaving all but Jurgis dead, disappeared, or living off prostitution. As many critics have remarked, Sinclair's characters have a tendency to lack complexity and instead become 'trapped animals or mindless cogs', or 'allegorical scapegoats of urban poverty', to be taken as types illustrating Sinclair's more general message about the conditions of the working class (Tavernier-Courbin 1995, 256; Den Tandt 1998, 174; Rideout 1956, 35). Indeed, as Michael Lundblad's perceptive

analysis of the novel shows, when Jurgis *is* seen to fight back against the injustice they face, he is frequently animalized as a wild, instinct-driven working-class beast (Lundblad 2013, 113–114). For instance, when faced with the boss who has pressured his young wife Ona into prostitution, Jurgis is depicted attacking like a predatory animal sinking 'his teeth into the man's cheek; and when they tore him away he was dripping with blood, and little ribbons of skin were hanging in his mouth' (Sinclair 1985, 183). Even his socialist awakening towards the end of the novel has him 'roaring in the voice of a wild beast' (367).

For Lundblad, who argues that the novel's overarching metaphor is that of the jungle rather than slaughter, such animalizing metaphors are problematic in their naturalization of 'animal instincts', because this 'also embeds the perfect excuse for ignoring the hog-squeal of either hogs or workers, since pain and suffering, if not death, are nothing if not "natural" in "the jungle"' (2013, 118). What such imagery also helps to do, however, is keep the nonhuman animal at the forefront of the narrative, where a connection is created between animality and agency while the agency of the individual human worker dwindles, at least in terms of characterization and in the language deployed at key moments in the novel. This also applies to the initial introduction of the mass slaughter facility, where the hogs hoisted onto the disassembly line are 'kicking in frenzy – and squealing' and let forth 'high squeals and low squeals, grunts, and wails of agony' in successive outbursts (Sinclair 1985, 44). Thus, as I suggested in Chap. 2, these evocative sounds of slaughter may be read as agential; while they are ultimately and obviously futile, the sounds of the hogs being slaughtered are 'so very human in their protests' and sharply contrast with the naïve and awed numbness of the human characters in the scene (44). Indeed, even the workers carrying out the slaughter seem silent and lacking in agency when contrasted with the animals themselves:

> Meantime … the men upon the floor were going about their work. Neither squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to them; one by one they hooked up the hogs, and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats. There was a long line of hogs, with squeals and life-blood ebbing away together; until at last each started again, and vanished with a splash into a huge vat of boiling water. (44)

Unlike the visitors who watch 'fascinated' and are essentially awed silent, though, the workers are simply part of the unfeeling machinery that carries

out the slaughter in a 'cold-blooded, impersonal way, without a pretence at apology, without the homage of a tear' (44). This may be read as a reflection of the deindividualizing and dehumanizing nature of (dis)assembly line work or as a depiction of slaughterhouse workers as manly, resilient, and unemotional in ways that align with how, in the words of one anthropologist, 'masculine ideals of physicality and emotional detachment *need* to be embedded in slaughtering practices' (McLoughlin 2019, 17, emphasis orig.). Either way, however, it becomes difficult to empathize or even identify with the feelings of the humans in the slaughterhouse, because very few feelings are shown on their part, whereas the animals' distress is more easily inferred from their vocal outbursts.

Given the sometimes excruciating attention to detail and to the suffering of the animals, it is, as Malay points out, difficult to read the descriptions of slaughter in *The Jungle* as just 'a straightforward symbol for unchecked capitalism', or as, in Sinclair's own words, 'hilarious farce' (Malay 2017, 131; Sinclair 1962, 164). The animal metaphor is arguably just too real, too indicative of how slaughter was actually carried out in the stockyards. With such a convergence of metaphor and story, a reading that tries to ignore the suffering of the animals being slaughtered comes up short, because it means ignoring large parts of the emotionally evocative content that is actually on the page. Instead, a reading that accepts that such convergence is indicative also of an *actual*, and not just a symbolic, convergence of the fates of workers and animals, has a better chance of actually highlighting the plight of workers, as Sinclair originally set out to do.

In this way, the metaphor only fails insofar as readers insist—as Sinclair did himself—on keeping human and nonhuman fates—the tenor and vehicle of the novel's overriding metaphor—ethically separate and allowing only for humans to have moral significance. But it is also possible to remove the normative component from the metaphor by disregarding what Cary Wolfe has called the 'institution of speciesism', that is, the assumption that other animals are inherently worth less than humans and can accordingly be treated worse, and the 'discourse of species' which builds on that assumption (2003, 2, 6–7). In such a reading, the idea that workers are treated 'like animals' becomes a statement of *shared* suffering and *shared* degradation rather than just an attempt to show the degradation of the worker under capitalism through reference to 'lower' animals. Indeed, since *The Jungle* continually blurs animality and humanity in various ways, as Lundblad's analysis demonstrates abundantly, it can be read

as exposing the artificiality of attempting to separate the two (Lundblad 2013, 108–118). To be sure, Lundblad is right to suggest as problematic the way Sinclair's novel ends up naturalizing 'a Darwinist-Freudian construction of "animality" even as it attempts to keep it under control through collective action' when the novel points to socialism as a way to rise above the supposedly 'animal' passions of working class individuals (116–117). But the novel's mix of the human and nonhuman also allows for a realization of actual similarities between different species and how they are exploited by capitalism. As Malay also insists, 'an animal interpretation need not exclude a socialist reading' of *The Jungle* if one is sensitive to the 'deep links between a society's oppression of marginalized workers and its treatment of nonhuman others' (2017, 134).

These links work at different levels. For one, the novel makes clear how the same socio-economic system is responsible for the *physical* destruction of both nonhuman animals and workers, as a number of people are hurt or die as both the direct and indirect result of how work is carried out in the stockyards. For another, there is an interesting analogy between the physical dismemberment, and thus fragmentation, of animals and the concurrent fragmentation of the *concept* of the worker in the industrial slaughterhouse. Where the work of slaughter would have earlier been a craft carried out by one or few workers on each individual animal, the invention of disassembly lines fragmented the role of the skilled craftsman into a succession of single actions:

> [The pig] was then again strung up by machinery, and sent upon another trolley ride; this time passing between two lines of men, who sat upon a raised platform, each doing a single thing to the carcass as it came to him. One scraped the outside of a leg; another scraped the inside of the same leg. One with a swift stroke cut the throat; another with two swift strokes severed the head…. Another made a slit down the body; a second opened the body wider; a third with a saw cut the breast-bone; a fourth loosened the entrails; a fifth pulled them out…. There were men to scrape each side, and men to scrape the back; there were men to clean the carcass inside, to trim and wash it. (Sinclair 1985, 46)

As the sociologist William E. Thompson has observed, line speeds and a lack of individual control of one's work create conditions where the 'assembly line is not a tool used by the worker, but a machine which controls him/her' and ultimately reduces the worker to 'an extension of' the

machine (1983, 228). While this symbolically dismantles slaughter as a craft, the workers' physicality is also exploited in the uniformity of the work, which together with the line speed makes the risk of injury higher. As such, workers' own movements work against them as a source of danger along the disassembly line, somewhat resembling the way hogs' physicality was used against them as they 'went up by the power of their own legs, and then their weight carried them back through all the processes necessary to make them into pork' (Sinclair 1985, 42). As *The Jungle* also shows, since less skill was required, workers became more easily exchangeable, making it easier for employers to exploit their need for work. Like the animals, they had come to matter less as individuals, as Jurgis realizes towards the end of the novel:

> Jurgis recollected how, when he had first come to Packingtown, he had stood and watched the hog killing, and thought how cruel and savage it was, and come away congratulating himself that he was not a hog; now his new acquaintance showed him that a hog was just what he had been – one of the packer's hogs. What they wanted from a hog was all the profits that could be got out of him; and that was what they wanted from the working man… (376)

As Malay notes, there is a limit to how far one can read this passage as being concerned with animals, given that the 'outrage' here is not directed at 'the pervasiveness of violence against animals but at the structural violence capitalism maintains over the working class' (2017, 134). Nevertheless, for any reader who still has the initial slaughterhouse scenes in mind, the connection between human and nonhuman suffering is difficult to deny. Indeed, *The Jungle* seems to hint at such a connection again when the lack of consideration for the industrial worker is described as 'true everywhere in the world, but … especially true in Packingtown; there seemed to be something about the work of slaughtering that tended to ruthlessness and ferocity' (Sinclair 1985, 376).

As Philip Armstrong notes, *The Jungle* can be read as suggesting that 'screening from public view of the mass slaughter of animals' happens 'less by means of absolute secrecy, and more as a kind of complicity between the industry's techniques of managed visibility and public will-to-ignorance' (2008, 141). Nevertheless, the novel's message—and its use of animal slaughter as metaphor for the subjugation of workers—hinge on the idea that the full truths about neither the treatment of workers nor the slaughter of animals are known to most readers beforehand. As the

narrator frames it, the slaughter of the hogs 'was like some horrible crime committed in a dungeon, all unseen and unheeded, buried out of sight and of memory' (Sinclair 1985, 45). After all, Sinclair envisioned his work as a kind of literary exposé that could 'frighten the country by a picture of what its industrial masters were doing to their victims' and clearly chose to use the nonhuman victims as a vehicle for his story about the human ones (1906, 594). In his wish to expose the conditions of the workers to the world, therefore, Sinclair could hardly help but point to animal suffering as both real and connected to the human suffering in the modern mass slaughter facilities of Chicago; if his slaughter metaphor was to elicit any empathy or sympathy, and for his work to be seen as bringing an unknown plight of workers to light, his largely middle-class readership would need to know the details of animal suffering in contrast to the comfort of their daily lives, behind the advertisements, behind fascination with technological innovation, and behind ideas of Packingtown as tourist attraction.

While it is likely the first detailed literary depiction of modern methods of slaughter, *The Jungle* is far from the only novel to consider the degradation of labourers within the context of slaughter or abuse of nonhuman animals. Indeed, the disregard for the lives of workers is a theme that many literary depictions of slaughterhouses seem to have in common. Two examples, Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* and Scott Nearing's *Free Born*—both arguably socialist Depression-era novels—each in their own way engage with the slaughter industry through the experience of labourers, although neither novel pays the kind of close attention to nonhuman suffering that is so striking in Sinclair's novel. Indeed, in Nearing's 1932 novel—which follows a young 'Negro' boy named Jim, who seeks refuge in Chicago after his family is driven from successive homes elsewhere—the descriptions of sheep slaughter in Packingtown seem almost pointedly mechanical and dispassionate when compared to Sinclair's:

> One end of the chain was fastened around a sheep's hind leg. The other end was thrown over a hook in a big revolving wheel that jerked the sheep into the air and connected its leg chain with a moving belt that carried the sheep past a waiting line of workers. One cut the sheep's throat; another slid the hide about the hind legs; a third cut open the fore-leg knuckles; a fourth loosened the hide about the tail. When the carcass reached [Jim's brother] Tom, it was his business to grab the hide by the tail and strip it from the back and sides. (Nearing 1932, 117)

While clearly inspired by *The Jungle* in its descriptions of the Hurford wheel and disassembly line work—as well as in some of its broader socialist or communist agenda[1]—*Free Born* stops short of the kinds of symbolism that makes many critics view Sinclair's novel as so problematic. As a consequence, though, this leaves the slaughter in the novel without any attention at all to the animals' reactions, and the language used about nonhuman animals is objectifying and inanimate, with 'a sheep' being referred to as 'it', in contrast to the use of the personifying 'he' in the hog slaughter passages in *The Jungle*. Accordingly, the instances in *Free Born* when animal similes are employed are also tonally flat in a way that makes it difficult to read it as anything but completely compliant with a discourse of species when black characters are described as being 'driven like cattle' (150, 205). But neither is the slaughterhouse work in itself described as particularly bad. At most, it is 'exacting' and 'dirty' as 'carcasses kept coming and the line kept moving' (117). Instead, Nearing's focus is on race issues and structural injustices, as *Free Born* takes on the perspective of the black men that make their way into the stockyards as strike breakers, just as it is the case for 'a throng of stupid black negroes and foreigners' in *The Jungle*[2] (Nearing 1932, 118; Sinclair 1985, 322, 324).

While Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio* also stops short of the detailed attention to animal suffering found in *The Jungle*, the slaughtered animals are nevertheless more strikingly present than in *Free Born*. Written in the 1930s but not published until 1974, *Yonnondio* tells the story of a migrant family, who move to a city resembling Omaha, where some end up suffering as workers in the stench and heat of slaughter facilities. Focalized in large parts through Mazie, a child perhaps nine years old, the novel's narrative style is made to fit its protagonist, even when she is not present, with some parts consisting of a fragmented stream of consciousness-like experience serving more to create a series of impressions than a progression of plot. Thus, the slaughterhouse is described much in terms of sense impressions such as smell, heat, sounds, and

[1] Indeed, when Jim has his own moment of socialist conversion—not dissimilar to, if perhaps more realistic than, that of Jurgis in Sinclair's novel—*The Jungle* is one of the books he reads on the subject (Nearing 1932, 177).

[2] I return to the politics of race and ethnicity in both these novels, and in Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*, in Chap. 6. For analysis of Sinclair's vilification and animalization of black workers, see also, for example, Noon (2004) 430–32 and Lundblad (2013) 113–14.

> …sudden torrents swirling (the strong hose trying to wash down the blood, the oil, the offal, the slime). And over and over, the one constant motion–ruffle fat pullers, pluck separators, bladder, kidney, bung, small and middle gut cutters, cleaners, trimmers, slimers, flooders, inflators–*meshed, geared*.
>
> *Geared, meshed*: the kill room: knockers, shacklers, pritcher-uppers, stickers, headers, rippers, leg breakers, breast and aitch sawyers, caul pullers, fell cutters, rumpers, splitters, vat dippers, skinners, gutters, pluckers. (Olsen 2004, 166, italics orig.)

There is a sense in which the descriptions here are imbued with the same kind of mechanistic order, imposed by the running disassembly lines and conveyer belts, which is found in *Free Born*. Yet the lists of tools, parts, and job titles also create uncanniness in the raw physicality and violence of the words and a kind of textual bewilderment in their unfamiliarity. Words such as 'gut cutters', 'slimers', 'shacklers', 'stickers', and 'leg breakers' indicate at once the distance from daily life outside the slaughterhouse and the violence of the work, while the list form maintains a rhythm indicative of the movement of machinery and the speed of work. Both thematically and rhythmically, this is also borne out by how the insides of the slaughterhouse are introduced shortly before:

> Hell.
>
> Choreographed by Beedo, the B system, speed-up stopwatch, convey. Music by rasp crash screech knock steamhiss thud machinedrum. Abandon self, all ye who enter here. Become component part, geared, meshed, timed, controlled.
>
> Hell. Half-seen figures through hissing cloud vapor, the live steam from great scalding vats. Hogs dangling, dancing along the convey, 300, 350 an hour; Mary running running along the rickety platform to keep up, stamping, stamping the hides. To the shuddering drum of the skull crush machine … everyone the same motion all the hours through… (165)

It is striking, here, how different Olsen's use of metaphor is from Sinclair's in their descriptions of the same work in the same kind of environment. By invoking the metaphor of dance rather than one based on nonhuman animals, Olsen creates an emphasis on movement in both style and content. There is a sense in which all beings—humans and nonhumans—become equally enmeshed in the process here. Olsen narrativises the anonymizing effects of assembly line work, which sociologists have later pointed to (Berger et al. 1974, 31; Thompson 1983, 228); all have to 'abandon self'

as the movement of machine takes over and controls the movement of flesh, and the individualities of both labourers and animals cease to matter, as the former become part of the work and the latter disappear so that '300' and '350' become indistinguishable numbers. As the hogs are 'dangling, dancing', they are both passive in their objectification and active participants in the rhythm, just like both humans and machines. Through this, there is a sense in which the passages might be read as an expression of the 'creaturely', drawing on a sense of embodied vulnerability that is shared by human and nonhuman animals, and which becomes especially conspicuous in the control of machines over bodies carried out at industrial slaughterhouses.

This sense of enmeshment is enhanced by the stylistic focus on sense impressions and actions rather than on characters. As hogs are 'dangling, dancing' and Mary is 'running running' and 'stamping, stamping' their being is overridden by the rhythm of the work and 'the shuddering drum of the scull crush machine', which serves as a reminder of violence and of the vulnerability of bodies. Moreover, the initial decidedly machined 'music' is joined by the more ambiguous sounds of '[c]lawing dinning jutting gnashing noises, so overweening that only at scream pitch can the human voice be heard', by the '[h]eat of hell' and the 'smothering stench from the blood house below' (Olsen 2004, 166). In *Yonnondio*, then, the slaughterhouse is more than anything a harsh and *embodied* experience that is *felt* in both style and content, which makes it markedly different from both the tonally flat mechanistic description in *Free Born* and the perhaps overly intellectual (and over-explained) metaphorical approach of *The Jungle*.

Yonnondio, however, goes even further and—drawing on the heat of working alongside steam pipes and scalding vats in summer—envisions the hot and violent slaughterhouse as a hell. Likely, for a socialist such as Olsen, this is in part meant to suggest that the hell to worry about is found in the lives of workers in this world rather than in the afterlife. Nevertheless, the creaturely enmeshment of the preceding descriptions seems to mix with a religious echo as the description of slaughterhouse experience concludes: 'All through the jumble of buildings old and new; of pens, walkways, slippery stairs, overhead chutes, conveys, steam pipes; of death, dismemberment and vanishing entire for harmless creatures meek and mild, frisky, wild–Hell' (167). By describing its buildings and interiors, this final passage highlights the actuality of the slaughterhouse as place—as a real hell that can be experienced rather than just believed. As the 'death,

dismemberment and vanishing entire for harmless creatures' suggests, however, it is a hell for nonhuman as well as human animals. Moreover, the use of 'harmless creatures, meek and mild' suggests not just an analogy between the animals slaughtered and Christ, the sacrificial lamb of God in Charles Wesley's popular poetic children's prayer 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild', but also seems to implicitly compare the innocent life of the animals to that of the novel's child protagonist, Mazie (Wesley 1742, 194). The slaughterhouse—where human and nonhuman lives are enmeshed, degraded, dismembered—thus embodies a disorder that disrupts the innocent feelings and logic of a child. Indeed, if those that go through hell are the 'harmless creatures, meek and mild', who would get to go to heaven?

Despite the differences in their literary treatment of slaughterhouses, one thing that *The Jungle*, *Free Born*, and *Yonnondio* have in common is that they draw out reminders of the heterotopic abattoir into their city narratives and thus expose the illusion of the city as a place that is free of both nonhuman animal beings and the moral questions that cling to our relations with them. While the slaughterhouses are referred to as a 'dungeon' that is 'buried out of sight' in *The Jungle* (Sinclair 1985, 45), and as 'windowless' buildings where animal transports come in at night, out of sight, in *Yonnondio* (Olsen 2004, 166, 163), they reveal their presence in other ways. For instance, upon their initial arrival in Chicago, the Lithuanian immigrants in Sinclair's novel slowly become aware of 'a sound made up of ten thousand little sounds', 'a vague disturbance, a trouble' 'like the murmurings of bees in the spring', and realize that this is 'made by animals, that it was the distant lowing of ten thousand cattle, the distant grunting of ten thousand swine' (Sinclair 1985, 32–33). These sounds expose a nonhuman animal presence, one that seems to exist regardless of the listening of humans, forcing people to, as Steven Connor terms it in his work on soundscapes, 'lend an ear to other listenings', to overhear, to consider that these are voices waiting to be silenced (2014, 18). Thus, the sounds imply the unexpected nonhuman assertion of self that seems to exist almost in spite of the city, changing the soundscape that humans would have desired or expected. Accordingly, the sounds—and the realization of their origin—stir the curiosity of the newly arrived family: 'They would have liked to follow it up, but, alas, they had no time for adventures just then' (Sinclair 1985, 33).

Across the three novels, however, it is smell that continually suggests the ever-close presence of not just animals, but slaughterhouses, in the

cityscape. As in both nineteenth-century depictions and sociological studies (e.g. Pachirat 2011, 3, 20–21), it is smell that already from a distance reveals not just the presence of, but the organic matter within, slaughterhouses in or around the city. In a description that seems to capture how smell reveals physical presence almost tangibly, Sinclair's Lithuanian family catch a whiff of a 'strange, pungent odour' before coming closer and finding that 'you could literally taste it, as well as smell it – you could take hold of it, almost, and examine it at your leisure' (1985, 32). However, Sinclair's characters are rather blank slates when it comes to detailed expectations of what the city should be like, and so think little more of it until they know the stockyards much better. Young Jim, Nearing's protagonist in *Free Born*, better expresses the difference between city ideals and reality; upon realizing the animal nature of a 'repellent, disgusting, almost revolting' smell, he is noticeably surprised at the combination of city and slaughter:

> A slaughter house! Could there be a stinking slaughter house right here in the middle of a great city like Chicago. Jim turned, incredulous, to ask Sam the question. The breeze freshened as he did so and their mouths and nostrils were filled with the vile odor.
>
> Sam laughed good-naturedly. 'Of course it's de plant,' he assured them. 'Whut yo' all t'ink?'
>
> 'But not in de city!' Jim expostulated. (1932, 116)

The exchange is telling; not only does it set up ideals of city life to echo an ideological notion that cities should be improvements on rural living, it also indirectly reflects the nature of heterotopias in relation to society and, specifically, political moves to get slaughter out of American towns during the last few decades that preceded the publication of Nearing's novel. Jim recognizes the smell from a butcher in a smaller town that 'killed cattle, sheep and hogs, dumping the blood and offal through a chute in the side of the building' into a yard where 'a drove of pigs … guzzled the blood and grunted and fought over the reeking entrails', but had not expected something like that in a big city (116). His idea of the city rather correlates with what Brown (2016, 6) calls the 'livestock-averse modern city', but also with more general ideas of the city as a uniformly human place.

Such ideas are arguably also reflected in *Yonnondio*, where Mazie's family live on a farm for a period before moving to the city, and the novel therefore comes to show a contrast between the anonymity of the slaughter animals in the city and the more personal relationships with the animals

in the countryside, where for instance Mazie and her mother 'milked the cow or fed the horse and hog' and bring chickens into the cellar in wintertime (Olsen 2004, 60). The animal presence is noticeable in the city in *Yonnondio*, though; animal transports for the slaughterhouses, for instance, have 'thick-packed lambs and calves and hogs snuffling and swaying and stamping, cattle lowing plaintively', and the smells of the slaughter industry seem constantly present (163). Indeed, the first chapter of the family's city life abounds with references to bad smells that form a figurative sign of an oppressive and ever-present industry: 'That stench is a reminder–a proclamation–*I rule here*. It speaks for the packinghouses, heart of all that moves in these streets' (68). As the chapter proceeds, the children repeatedly protest the foul odour, which they experience as inescapable and nauseating (70, 76, 79–80), in what can arguably be read as a kind of moral, as well as physical, discord between the vulnerability of children and the presence of the slaughter industry. As Linda Ray Pratt observes in her introduction to the novel's 2004 re-publication, one episode particularly creates a sense that the packinghouse comes to stand for all that is unpleasant in Mazie's new city life:

> When Mazie rises from that pavement [after running frightened by the hustle and bustle of the city, and falling], she sees 'A-R-M-O-U-R-S' spelled out before her on the packinghouse. The violence of the streets, the odor of vomit that hangs in the air from the meat processing, the abuse at home, the contempt at school, the 'blackness of terror' her daydreams cannot shut out: all come together in the name of the packinghouse that pollutes the air and sets the terms of their existence. 'Armoursarmoursarmours' she murmurs to herself over and over. (xii)

This is surely, as Pratt views it, a criticism on Olsen's part of the chaos, violence, and poverty created by capitalist industry, seen through the eyes of a bewildered child, but for Mazie, the violence also extends beyond the human realm.[3] As she runs on, 'trying to run away from the stink', she is held back as 'Mr. Krycksz held her arm. He was all stink, all stink, he helped kill cows, cows like Brindle, and Annamae said he washed blood off

[3] It is worth noting here how one of the major American meatpacking companies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Armours and Company, also takes on a synecdochic function in relation to capitalist power as a whole in *Yonnondio*, just as it was one of the 'Big Four' meatpacking companies, which Sinclair indirectly criticized (without naming them), with a similar purpose in mind, when he wrote *The Jungle*.

himself' (100). While Mazie is glad to have Mr. Kryckszi walk her home along shadowy streets, there is also a sense in which the description of him links the 'stink' and the killing, a sense of moral impurity, which is difficult to wash off along with the blood, just like the smell. This sense that the killer of cows is ethically tainted—that his being 'all stink' is an expression of something moral as well as olfactory—is further enhanced by the mention of an individual animal, 'Brindle'. While she is not mentioned by name anywhere else in the book, the naming of an individual animal contrasts with, and thus highlights, the common urban theme of anonymization: in the city and in the slaughterhouse, individuals, both human and nonhuman, tend to disappear.

The Proud Slaughterer's Sense of Place: Hind's *The Dear Green Place*

The disappearance of the individualities of workers along disassembly lines in depictions such as those considered above leaves little room for the dignity of the slaughterer as a professional or for the work of slaughtering as a craft. Other, sometimes more ambiguous, depictions create more room for the skills required for carrying out slaughter, and can be read in part as responses to earlier representations, which cast the transformation of live animals into meat products in a less favourable light.

One such novel is Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place* (1966); at once a deeply Glaswegian city novel and a self-reflexive novel about writing, it sees its protagonist Mat Craig take some pleasure in working at the central slaughterhouse in Glasgow. As I mentioned in Chap. 2, *The Dear Green Place* describes how working at the slaughterhouse makes Mat 'despise' the way earlier 'horrified descriptions' in literature depict the work of slaughter and view the attitudes of earlier writers on the subject as a kind of privileged sentimentalism (Hind 2008, 109). There can be little doubt that depictions such as the one in *The Jungle*—with its sometimes emotionally charged descriptions of the suffering and death of animals—are referred to here, given the fame of that earlier novel. Yet what Hind offers as an alternative is ultimately less downplaying the suffering of other animals than emphasizing—perhaps even attempting to redeem—the slaughterer as a skilled and useful labourer.

As Mat and his colleagues start working at the slaughterhouse early in the morning, the entire process of what happens from when 'a beast' is 'felled' until a 'carcase' is 'ready for the butcher', who collects it from the

slaughterhouse, is described in minute detail[4] (110, 113). The emphasis is on the particularity and skill of the work, carried out with specific tools like the 'eight-inch sticking knife', 'the straight sticking knife', 'the curved skinning knife' and 'the big seven-pound cleaver', and with obvious precision as when an artery is 'slit … longitudinally', 'a semi-circular cut' is made, 'the narrow breast-bone' is 'split in a clean straight line', or when one worker is 'pulling the head back and stroking with his knife through the joint between the skull and the first vertebrae' (110–112). Thus, focus is on the process of the worker and the details of every precise incision, slit, cut, or 'flick of the knife' rather than on the actual animal being slaughtered (111). Indeed, the level of detail and attention to the process renders the animal purely physical substance; as the work itself turns live animal into material object, so the description surrenders it to an aesthetic materiality. One might read this connection, between the slaughter itself and the process of writing about it, as implicitly comparing the two and thus underscoring the idea of the slaughterhouse worker as a kind of artisan. Indeed, 'the most skilled and difficult part of all the killer's work'—the splitting of the backbone—leaves the carcase as 'two separate sides of beef, opened out like a book', suggesting an analogy between the skills required in writing and slaughtering, Mat's two otherwise quite disparate fields of work (113).

The depiction of slaughter in Hind's novel can be read as contrasting with earlier depictions in other ways as well, not least in how the process is perceived sensuously. One might, with some effort, read the viscerality of the detailed descriptions of dismemberment as unsettling, since it arguably brings matter from the heterotopia out into the reader's experience, but in actuality the tone and style of the novel invites a different approach to the tactility of the experience. Using what Moira Burgess perceives as a 'directness' of writing 'with economy, precision and beauty' (1986, 60), Hind rather approaches the corporeality of slaughter as almost sensual in its both physical and practical materiality:

> In the morning, when Mat had worked hard for an hour or two, and he was beginning to work up an appetite for breakfast, he would notice the smell of the meat and the rich bloom of the flesh as he sliced through it with his knife

[4] Having worked in the municipal slaughterhouse in Glasgow, Hind arguably had a more profound first-hand experience with slaughter than Sinclair, who did his research as a visitor to the Chicago stockyards (Hind 2008, xi; Sinclair 1906, 593).

> and this would make him salivate. … In the same way Mat enjoyed the warmth of the blood on his hands, the smooth bland sheets of fat which were trimmed from the paunch, the silken slightly tacky feel of the intestines, the dry flaky texture of the lung, or the slabby firm feeling of a haunch or a shoulder. It was a world of simple and strong sensuousness, with a lot in it that would appeal to anyone starved of bodily activity and sensuous stimulation. (2008, 113–14)

On the one hand, the tactility of the process here is clearly meant to create a contrast with Mat's earlier office job. As the narrator tells us, 'there was something [in the process of slaughter] which Mat counted as important and which he had tried to formulate clearly to himself; it was the need to be intimately involved in a material process', an idea that originates in him 'from long tedious hours spent adding columns of figures' (114). But the sense of intimacy in the handling of animal matter, and the enjoyment of the smell of unprepared meat, here also stands in stark contrast to the descriptions of smell and viscera in so many other literary depictions of slaughterhouses. Even more so, it is a rejection of the squeamishness of earlier writers when it comes to the material realities of the abattoir.

At an earlier point in the chapter, immediately after the critique of 'the horror of writers' at the slaughterhouse experience, Hind contrasts those earlier descriptions with Mat's reality and a more unemotional approach, when Mat notes how with the morning's work

> the slaughtering floor would turn pink with watery blood, the electric light would begin to glare on the fleshy slabs which hung glistening and palpitating from the rails, the steam from the hot pipes and the gutted carcases cast a haze which was suffused with red reflected from bloody floors, the meat, and the pans of steaming blood. All this caused the same effect of morbidezza which Rembrandt had caught so calmly in his painting of a flayed carcase which hung in the Glasgow Art Galleries. The ultimate wisdom of art, a healthy liveliness and acceptance of sensuous life. (109–10)

It is in their lack of 'acceptance of sensuous life', then, that earlier writers fail where Rembrandt has succeeded, in Mat's view. As a writer, Mat—like Hind—is looking for the connection between art and real experience in the city *and* in the slaughterhouse. Because he is closer, indeed deeply involved in, the experience of slaughter, the logic seems to be that his feelings—aesthetic and moral—are consequently more genuine or authentic; in his sensuous enjoyment of experience—in its implicit acceptance of

death and disassembly of bodies—lies a connection to the material, the *real*, that for the outsider may be clouded by their own feelings. Hence, not only the 'horror' of writers, but also Mat's observation 'that any visitors to the slaughter-house were more concerned with their own feelings, their own disgust, than they were with pity for the animals' (109).

In the emotional landscape painted by Mat (and Hind), any possibility for empathy with animals is eclipsed through a sleight of hand that allows only the choice between an objectifying pity, an emotional over-investment that focuses on the self, and being attuned to a reality that accepts death rather unemotionally as part of material reality. However, what Mat's contempt for the 'horrified descriptions of shambles' by other writers overlooks is of course that not all slaughterhouses are the same. As Hind depicts it, the Glasgow abattoir where Mat works is, for example, made up of a number of smaller 'slaughter-rooms' in which the entire process of slaughter is carried out by two workers, one animal at a time, under conditions that are a far cry from the disassembly line systems of the Chicago stockyards. As such, the Glasgow slaughterhouse has none of the deindividualizing or degrading effects that affect the lives of workers and often numb both feelings and bodies in the mass slaughter operations depicted elsewhere.

Paradoxically, though, the connection between the intellect of the writer, or artist, and sensuous reality that Mat seeks and seems to find in the work, is also the one that he is symbolically severing in the oxen he helps slaughter. As a helper for the 'killer', Mat has the task of 'pithing':

> In Scotland, an ox when it is killed by a bolt pistol, is pithed; that is, a long cane is passed through the hole in the skull down through the canal in the spine through which the spinal cord runs. The effect of this pithing, or caning, is to scramble the brain and prevent the nervous system of the animal from passing gratuitous and unnecessary messages to the muscles of the body, to destroy the organisation on which the animal depends for its life. (107)

While the description of pithing—and many other practices in the slaughterhouse—is clearly indicative of legal and political debates on humane slaughter in Britain in the decades preceding the novel's publication,[5]

[5] Ideas on 'humane' slaughter seem to provide much of the rationale behind Hind's depiction of the slaughterhouse and are, for instance, especially apparent in a short discussion of Jewish slaughter, or when Mat highlights the slaughterman's 'professional pride' in avoiding

there is also a sense in which the narrative's reality here can be read as undermining what is otherwise implied by the connections both Mat and Hind at times seem to be making between the slaughterhouse and artistic endeavours. Indeed, just as Mat is seen to 'insert his knife between the last vertebrae and the skull to sever … the spinal cord' while 'hoping to obliterate the last possible gleam of consciousness which might lurk inside the narrow sloping skull', so the work severs Mat from his own artistic endeavours (107). As we are told at the beginning of the chapter, when he 'started work in the slaughter-house he stopped writing altogether' (104).

While the novel depicts an abattoir with little to complain about in terms of working conditions and also never truly questions the ethics of slaughtering animals as such, the slaughterhouse is thus seen to be both symbolically and physically disruptive, indeed destructive, for the connection between brain and body, affecting both human and nonhuman, if in markedly different ways. Thus, the narrative may ultimately tease out a sense of something shared and vulnerable, something *creaturely*, almost despite itself. Indeed, Mat repeatedly shows signs of anxiety when it comes to the moments when the connection between brain and body, the question of consciousness, seems uncertain. Thus, at the beginning he feels 'slight revulsion' and 'dislike' in relation to 'the moment when the animals, the frisky wee bullocks, the quiet maternal cows, the placid indifferent bulls, had their heads tied to the stunning post, and the gun, the bolt pistol, was fired into their forehead between the eyes' (106). This feeling seems even more profound in Jewish slaughter, where the bolt pistol is not used and there is

> the possible moment of consciousness, when the head loosened and the animal took that last great breath through the chittering windpipe … The horror of a possible combination of consciousness and the irrevocable state of death. It was a kind of metaphysical horror that Mat felt at the idea of consciousness, if even only for a second, knowing that it was cut off from its animal source, a horror even worse than the ineluctable obliteration of the gun. (107)

While it can arguably be read as at least in part contradictory to Mat's assertions of joy in sensuousness, what may be more striking about this

'unnecessary suffering' (106, 109). The British Parliament debated Jewish slaughter in relation to animal welfare on several occasions in the 1950s and 1960s (see Burt 2006, 131–33).

moment is its liminality. This is a moment in which the dichotomies of life and death, of feeling and thought, of symbol and reality, and therefore ultimately also of human and nonhuman, seem to converge and collapse. It is through *creatureliness*, through being able to relate to a 'consciousness'—a shared state of being—and of awareness of vulnerability, that Mat experiences a 'metaphysical horror'. This horror lies beyond Mat's sensuous experience and also ultimately contradicts the logic of the slaughterhouse, in which human and nonhuman states of consciousness have to be viewed as inherently different. Arguably, it also stretches beyond the confines of what language can convey and puts into question the descriptions of the animals: as head is severed from body—'consciousness' from 'its animal source'—where do the characteristics of the animals go? Is it the mind or the body that is 'frisky', 'maternal', 'placid', or 'indifferent'?

Ultimately, of course, Mat never acts on this sense of shared vulnerability of the moment and its metaphysicality remains without consequence. When later questioned on the killing, he rejects the idea that the cows feel afraid by thinking in purely physical terms; arguing that they are 'too stupid' to realize what is going on, he bases his argument on 'how narrow the skull was and how surprisingly little room there was for it in the brain box' (150). Thus, the logic of the slaughterhouse, of human/nonhuman dichotomy, is what still remains once the moment of 'metaphysical horror' subsides.

As Hind's novel is deeply invested in the dialectics of place, and in emotional attachment to Glasgow, 'the dear green place' from which it takes its title, its evocation of the abattoir within the city mirrors that of the city itself, and ultimately seeks to resolve both city and slaughterhouse into something pleasant. Just as Hind's—and Mat's—portrait of Glasgow is a personal one that distances itself from depictions of alienation and anonymity that other city narratives often draw on, so the depiction of the slaughterhouse distances itself from the ideas of death and distance connected to such places. Accordingly, while the abattoir is 'inside a huge area, surrounded by buff coloured walls' along with both the 'cattle market' and the 'meat market', Mat is 'attracted' by what he sees as 'the liveliness, the tremendous sense of physical vitality which came from the hard work, the men, the cattle, the movement' in the place (104, 110). Indeed, the men in the slaughterhouse have 'hilarious ball games … sliding and slipping about on the tarmac after a tiny rubber ball, or hectic comical fights … with buckets of water and hoses' (115). Like other features of the narrative, this contrasts with most other depictions of abattoirs, and

especially with those that show the numbing and de-individualizing effects of working on a disassembly line. It is the abattoir made to be about life and joy rather than death and violence.

And yet, the slaughterhouse as place becomes connected to trauma through the events that happen within, and through repeated mentions of 'the concrete floor' onto which 'big heavy bodies' are 'felled' (105–06). This provides a hint, again, of a shared bodily vulnerability; in an earlier event in the novel, Mat as a child declines to climb a wall in part because he is 'terrified … of the sickeningly hard concrete floor' beneath it, while a friend of his falls onto the concrete and dies, prompting Mat to feel 'his head go all empty and … imagine the cracking of bone on the hard … floor' (54–57).[6] Indeed, even as an adult in the slaughterhouse, Mat experiences falls on the concrete floor twice: once during a ball game and once as he is flung across the room by an improperly stunned bull (115, 171). In the end, even the sensuous and lively abattoir thus betrays a sense of trauma, of the creaturely, of a place with a particularly intense reality that seems beyond the symbolism so often ascribed to it. As Mat himself thinks, an animal when shot goes down '[l]ike a felled ox … For nothing, other than the thing itself, could convey the quick loosening of the limbs as they slackened and folded under the animal and it would drop on its knees, its stomach, and its chin, all together, making an odd sound combining the slap of soft flesh and the solid but dull crunch of the padded bone as the chin bounced loosely on the concrete floor' (106).

Humans and Animals: Parallel Disappearances in the Urban

There is something inherently urban about symbolism that compares human masses to driven cattle or herded sheep, where the individual disappears in favour of a group or flock, however disparate. It is easy for individuals to disappear in the densely peopled labyrinths of cities; one might argue workers become parts of an apparatus that serves to keep the city running, while the individual person is controlled and kept in line by the economic, social, and industrial mechanisms that drive society. As the animals are driven towards their fates, so are the majority of humans in the city, never fully in control of their lives. It should therefore not be surprising when novels that concern themselves with city life use such symbolism,

[6] I am grateful to Robert McKay for this observation.

nor when they employ the slaughterhouse to show figurative similarities between the very real fates of human and nonhuman animals. Marian Scholtmeijer goes so far as to suggest that '[u]rban stories propose … that the urban person's loss of identity has a violence to it that might pass unnoticed were it not for the potential analogy with the actual, physical violence done to animals' (1993, 149–50). There is certainly a sense of something creaturely in this; could it be that in the context of the city—that place that is conceived as standing ontologically clear of nature and animality—we nonetheless find it hard to come to terms with our vulnerability and precariousness without referring, at least figuratively, to what we share with other animals?

Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), often considered the quintessential German city novel (Fries 1978, 41n), seems to embody this kind of logic, and towards the novel's end has its protagonist, Franz Biberkopf, break down, crying 'I'm guilty, I'm not a human being, I'm a beast, a monster' ('ich bin schuldig, ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin ein Vieh, ein Untier') (Döblin 2004, 367/1961, 488). There is, of course, a generality to this animal metaphor, which relies on a simplistic discourse of species—a sense in which this is just a comparison that degrades the man to something 'animal-like', meaning unthinking (Fries 1978, 61). Franz is coming to terms with his own unthinkingness, his lack of thoughtful individuality. Read in this way, the novel highlights the 'dehumanizing effects of modern city life' (Winslow 2003, 359), the violence of an oppressive order that breaks down the individual human into something like a herded animal, based on the assumption that such animals are somehow deficient in individuality. As a number of scholars have noted, though, there is a connection between events towards the end of the novel and earlier parts, in which animals meet their deaths at the city slaughterhouse (Komar 1981, 322; Schoonover 1977, 196–97; Winslow 2003, 358). In this particular passage, use of the German word 'Vieh'—which directly translated means cattle—suggests not only a symbolic affiliation with ideas of herd mentality, but also an analogy with nonhuman animal slaughter that shows not just the guilt that Franz confesses, but also his status as a 'sacrificial victim' (Komar 1981, 322).

The 'slaughter- and stock-yards' in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* are a reflection of the city as well as of city life. As Henrietta Schoonover notes, the slaughterhouse and its affiliated markets constitute 'a universe complete within itself', with its 'expanse of 47.88 hectares, equal to 118.31 acres', its order imposed from above by an 'administrative body' and according

to an ordinance that controls traffic and fees (Schoonover 1977, 220; Döblin 2004, 103–4). Moreover, it shares with the city the key feature that much of it remains unseen or hidden; with a multitude of walls, rooms, and 'doors, black openings through which the animals are driven' ('schwarze Öffnungen zum Eintrieb der Tiere'), none of its subjects—the animals—ever get to see or know all that is going on (2004, 104/1961, 146).[7] Instead, its victims are led unknowingly to their deaths in slaughter rooms, which are described as 'death tribunals for the animals' ('Totesgerichte für die Tiere') (104/146); thus, what Schoonover calls the '[g]rotesque … cold, efficient order' of the slaughterhouse is implicitly compared to the order that governs society at large (1977, 220).[8]

Like Döblin's image of the modern city, the slaughterhouse thus unavoidably leads its oblivious victims to their fate: 'you won't get out of here alive' (2004, 104). Moreover, this happens regardless of guilt, as illustrated by the slaughter of an innocent, gentle calf:

> But what is this man doing with the cute little calf? He leads it alone by a rope … now he takes the little animal to a bench. … He lifts the delicate little calf with both arms, puts it on the bench, it does not protest as he lays it down. … And sure enough, the man … takes the butt-end, lifts it lightly, it does not require much strength for such a delicate creature, and gives the gentle animal a blow on the neck.
>
> … and he looks under the bench, his knife is lying there, with his foot he pushes the receptacle for the blood into place. Then zzing, the knife is drawn straight across the neck, through the throat … The blood spurts, a dark, red, thick, bubbling liquid. (113)

This moment is later reiterated when Franz's central love interest, Mieze, is murdered by his rival Reinhold and the two killings are textually intertwined:

> When a little calf is to be slaughtered, they tie a rope around its neck and lead it to the bench. Then they lift the little calf, put it on the bench, and tie it firmly.
>
> …

[7] It is a common notion that cities embody a sense of mystery and include hidden (often underground) parts and lives that remain unseen by most citizens. I return to this in relation to some of the horror texts discussed in Chap. 7.

[8] For an interesting reading of the slaughterhouse in the novel as grotesque, albeit one that stays within the confines of the discourse of species, see Schoonover (1977) 219–27.

> He kneels on her back, his hands are around her throat, his thumbs in the nape of her neck, her body contracts, contracts. Her body contracts.
>
> …
>
> Her body contracts, contracts, her body, Mieze's body. Murderer, she says. …
>
> Whereupon the animal is given a blow on the neck with a wooden club, and the arteries on both sides of the neck are opened with a knife; a tin basin receives the blood.
>
> … That was hard work. Is she still talkin'? No, she's stopped her yapping. The bitch. (289–91)

It is possible to read this parallel as a kind of dehumanization of Mieze and thus as a trivialization of her murder. Winslow (2003, 358), for instance, argues that it 'severely undercuts the horror and inhumanity' of the murder, and Schoonover more generally concludes that 'Franz sinks to the level of beasts' due to the animal imagery in the novel (1977, 214). To be sure, this does seem to make a certain sense in a city narrative where individuals often come to seem purposeless and their lives hence meaningless. Yet there is a sense in which exactly this cityscape, and its similarities with the slaughterhouse, shows something creaturely about life, death, and vulnerability in the city. Even if just symbolic, the comparison of human and nonhuman deaths at the hands of others draws out what humans in the city share with other creatures and thus ultimately points to the reality of their suffering, their deaths, as well as our own.

This is further underscored by the headings of the two chapters that take place in the slaughterhouse, which respectively constitute the first and second lines of a biblical verse taken from Ecclesiastes (3.19) that directly equates the deaths of humans and other animals: 'For it happens alike with Man and Beast; as the Beast dies, so Man dies, too' ('Denn es geht dem Menchen wie dem Vieh; wie dies stirbt, so stirbt er auch') and 'And they all have the same Breath, and Men have no more than Beasts' ('Und haben alle einerlei Odem, under der Mensch hat nichts mehr denn das Vieh') (Döblin 2004, 103, 113/1961, 145, 157). In relation to death, all lives are equally vulnerable. As the final part of the verse from Ecclesiastes (which Döblin does not include) states, 'all is vanity'; in Döblin's bleak vision of the modern city, it is pointless to think humans are any less controlled, any less in peril, or any higher than, the other animals that are led to slaughter.

After all, not unlike Sinclair's hogs in *The Jungle*, the animals at the slaughterhouse in Döblin's novel are full of life, as they 'bleat and low over the railings of their pens', 'grunt and sniff the ground', fight, 'snarl', and 'once the door is open … rush out, squealing, grunting, and screaming' (2004, 104–5). In their actions, the animals pursue their own purposes, their own meaning, demonstrating a state of liveliness that resists a status as simply figurative, as well as contrasts with their physical objectification and deaths in a slaughterhouse whose order mirrors that of the city as a whole. If human lives become meaningless in the grotesque order of the city (Schoonover 1977, 226), then, it is likely because *all* lives lose meaning under such an order rather than because humans are degraded through animalization.

While also sites of meaning-formation, both cities and abattoirs can thus be construed as places that promote a reduction of the meaning of human and nonhuman individuals; as the individual enters, he or she comes to serve not their own purpose, but an economic purpose tied to the order of the place, as worker, as consumer, as an item of trade, as meat. In each their own ways, both the city and the slaughterhouse promise nourishment and life to the masses, yet rely on deindividualization and death. As places they are, in this sense, also paradoxical. It is through its promises made by an economic order—of work, of sustenance—that the city attracts the migrant families and individuals in the novels by Sinclair, Olsen, and Nearing, but it is an order that requires the anonymization and objectification of humans and nonhumans alike. Thus, it is through the effort to sustain an order similar to that of the abattoir that the city disappoints, leading to death, deindividualization, and decay for its subjects.

In *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction*, Marian Scholtmeijer observes that '[a]s far as the imagination is concerned', the victimization of nonhuman animals happens most strongly in urban settings (1993, 142). As she asserts, even though 'there is no reason to think that cruelty to animals in the city is any worse or more frequent than cruelty to animals in the country … qualities hover about urban cruelty to animals which arouse particular indignation' (142). Numerous literary depictions of animals in cities and, indeed, real-life cases of animal cruelty, would seem to suggest Scholtmeijer is largely correct in her assertions; as she argues, it makes a particular kind of sense that Black Beauty, in Anna Sewell's novel of the same name, suffers the 'worst torments' in the city only to find 'peace' when 'retired to rural life' (142). Indeed, the marketing of the very products of slaughterhouses often draws on popular notions that animals

belong and are happier in rural settings, away from the crowded lives of consumers, although critics argue such notions do more to promote the happiness of consumers than of animals (e.g. Borkfelt et al. 2015).

And yet, through their connections to the urban, slaughterhouse settings in fiction seem to contradict Scholtmeijer to some degree. After all, if slaughterhouses belong to cities then, surely, nonhuman deaths and suffering at the hands of humans *are* more frequent in urban settings. In addition, Scholtmeijer argues that part of the reason why cruelty to animals in the city appeals to our imaginations is its salience, 'because animals are scarce in cities and their nature marks them out conspicuously from the background of city ways', yet the salience of animals in slaughterhouses is, arguably, far more complicated exactly because people seek to avoid witnessing what goes on inside such places (1993, 142). As Scholtmeijer rightly points out, another important factor is 'dissonance because cruelty to animals jars with civilized ideals maintained by urban people' (142). Nevertheless, of course, one could argue that, while in real life it serves to obscure the lives and deaths of many animals, this clash with urban ideals might be exactly what makes the slaughterhouse especially salient when we read about it in fiction. Whether symbolic or not, the slaughter of animals has the potential to confront us with both our own guilt and our own vulnerability, and its deep connections to urban life potentially disrupt notions of what cities should be, of how we treat other animals, and thus ultimately of who we are ourselves.

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CHAPTER 5

Ruralities and the Abattoir

Given the close connections between the urban and violence in representations, it is perhaps not surprising that very few texts depict slaughterhouses as belonging to the countryside. For example, while the small-town community in Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*, considered in the previous chapter, certainly in some ways reflects a critique of what one might term rural America, something about the scale and purpose of production at its turkey slaughterhouse remains clearly tied to late modern urbanity. As Scholtmeijer argues, in our imaginations at least, the victimization of nonhuman animals happens most strongly in urban settings, 'while pains inflicted upon animals in the country appear to blend in with the trials of natural existence' (1993, 142). While it is typically no less a cultural landscape than cityscapes are, the countryside is nonetheless imagined as more natural, and any violence to animals that happens there consequently comes to seem more benign, justified, or unavoidable. In contrast to their relation to the city, 'animals are central to how the rural is both materially and imaginatively constructed', and their lives and deaths in the countryside are consequently more easily naturalized (Jones 2003, 283). Thus, some ways of killing animals seem to fit with how we most often imagine the rural, while other killings belong imaginatively elsewhere. Writing on the ways in which 'the countryside has come to acquire the symbolic status as the idyllic alternative to urban environments', rural geographer Michael Bunce notes how urbanisation has involved 'the substitution of the natural rhythms of farm work and country life with the time and work discipline

S. Borkfelt, *Reading Slaughter*, Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98915-6_5

of the factory system' (2003, 15–16). Ideas of the rural, it seems, contrast with the urban not least through the ways in which production takes place, which in turn affect the ways in which nonhuman animals caught up in such production must be regarded. Although people inhabiting the countryside may demonize the predator that kills 'their' animals, nonhuman animals killing each other fit conceptions of rurality as a part of nature, which makes human killing of animals—whether on the farm or in the process of hunting—just a logical extension of what is already conceived as natural.

The factory conditions of the modern abattoir, however, decidedly clash with such conceptions of animals' place in relation to rurality. As Bunce illustrates by quoting an article about E.coli water pollution in the rural community of Walkerton, Ontario, the rural is conceptualized in ways that make one expect only the idyll of animal life and not downsides to production, such as pollution and death. Thus, the article uses words such as 'picturesque', 'community', and 'bucolic', in order to depict 'the conventional rural idyll … humans working in harmony with nature … a whole scene of contentment and plenty' (2003, 14). Cows are 'contentedly grazing' in the article while the real town is more likely to have them in 'intensive feedlots', and overall 'the language intentionally romanticises the setting to emphasize the sense of threat to rural peace and harmony' posed by the pollution of its water supply (14). Bunce suggests that a 'simple answer' to questions about the apparent durability of such discourses in the face of changing realities may 'be that the values that sustain the rural idyll speak of a profound and universal human need for connection with land, nature and community, a psychology which, as people have become increasingly separated from these experiences, reflects the literal meaning of nostalgia' (2003, 15). It is these kinds of feelings that backwoods horror—a sort of flipside of rural imaginings—plays on when it turns rural idyll into scenes of horror and violence that clash with expectations, and scenes of animal abuse and mass slaughter similarly fail to fit into the 'peace and harmony' so often associated with the countryside.

It should be acknowledged here that contrasts between the urban and the rural, and the positioning of rurality in relation to identity politics, to nature, and to human-animal relations, are by no means new phenomena. There is a reason why Leo Marx called this contrast 'an ancient literary device' in his classic work on technology and American pastoral ideals (1964, 19). Raymond Williams' seminal work *The Country and the City* (1973) traces discourses in literature that lament changes to the

countryside or loss of rural traditions back to ancient Greece, although he also highlights numerous works in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature, when industrialisation made some aspects of the contrast more profound. Throughout such literatures, the rural is most often cast as connected to what has been, or what is being lost, in what Williams calls 'the recurring myth of a happier and more natural past' (1973, 40). Focusing more specifically on human-animal relations, Josephine Donovan argues that what she calls 'local-color novels' in the early nineteenth century demonstrate how 'boundaries between the species commonly accepted now were then blurred, less restrictive, or in many cases simply nonexistent' (2016, 130). As she postulates, 'peasant culture' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries incorporated a 'personalist ethic that accords animals equal ontological status' (131). In other words nonhuman animals, while still used for human purposes, were subjects whose interests mattered and with whom people in peasant culture had personal relationships.

By contrast, Victorian cities were criticised for their 'social and political failings', not least because of the threat that 'the poverty and overcrowding of the industrial working classes' was perceived to pose for 'established social and moral order' (Bunce 1994, 15). Such connections between class and place-based identities, tied to contrasts between the rural and the urban, provide just one example of the many ways in which the identity politics of place intersect then and now with various other markers of identity such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race. While considering this in detail would exceed the scope of the present chapter, what is worth pointing out is that human-animal relations also play a significant role in the identity politics connected to such rural/urban contrasts. For example, London's Smithfield Market was disliked by many, not just because animals, with their smells and noises, were increasingly seen as antithetical to city life, but also because of the perceived immoral and sometimes animalized behaviours of dealers, drovers, prostitutes, and others attracted to the market.[1]

[1] Some reformers, in addition, complained that the scenes at Smithfield were harmful to children's moral development, provided 'horrible training in cruelty and torture', and were 'the truest school for the glories of the hangman and the gibbet' (Cook 1851, 50; Silverpen 1847, 528). Dickens, similarly, described the market as a place in which 'butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass' in *Oliver Twist* and as a 'shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam' in *Great Expectations* (1993, 146; 1996, 165).

In the nineteenth century, such perceived immoralities were also seen as causes of animal cruelty, which contrasted with ideas of how animals were treated in the countryside. In their co-written short story 'The Heart of Mid-London' (1850), for instance, Charles Dickens and William Henry Wills have the protagonist, Mr. Bovington, make the journey from 'the peaceful glades of Long Hornets' to Smithfield Market to sell sheep and cattle, only to be absolutely horrified at how the animals are treated both on the journey and at the market (121). The contrast between Bovington's countryside attitudes and the actual treatment of animals in the city here becomes one of the ways in which the market and its related businesses are depicted negatively. Thus, after the journey to the city, Bovington 'would have given any money to relieve' his thirsting sheep, and also asks to be ensured that 'humane drovers' are found to drive the animals through the city to the market. The city-dwelling 'master-drover', by contrast, 'had not the remotest idea what a humane driver was or where the article was to be found' (122). Thus, Bovington eventually returns to the countryside regarding Smithfield as 'an odious spot, associated with cruelty, fanaticism, wickedness and torture' and a 'stronghold … of prejudice, ignorance, cupidity, and stupidity' (125).

While the city has rarely been imagined as an animal-friendly site, one needs only to think of the myriad depictions of countryside animals found in children's literature to realise how closely tied rural settings are to positive animal stories in our social imaginary. As Charles Taylor writes, the social imaginary includes 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (2004, 23). Perhaps more in the context of the rural than elsewhere, it seems feasible to claim that the 'others' and 'fellows' people see themselves as having social relations with may as well be nonhuman as human. After all, the peasant can have expectations of his animals, just as it seems reasonable that the animals can have expectations towards their human caretakers. This, in turn, is both reflected and enhanced when the social imaginary is, in Taylor's words, 'carried in images, stories, and legends' (23). As Bunce asserts, '[f]or generations of young children animals *are* the country folk—the real inhabitants of villages, woods, fields and river banks' (1994, 65, italics orig.). Animals are thus seen to belong in the rural, and belong not as objects, but as subjects whose interests matter. For older audiences, James Herriot's books (1970–92) (and the subsequent TV-series

produced by the BBC) similarly provide a rural idyll that is full of confusions and funny episodes, yet reassuringly simple and—centred as they are on the work of a veterinarian—with an obvious care for the welfare of both nonhuman animals and the humans attached to them. Rural lives, in our social imaginary and many of our cultural representations, is both happier and simpler, for nonhuman animals as well as human ones.

If cities are emblematic of modernity and industrial progress, with all their pros and cons, then the rural is conversely viewed either through the romantic lens of a nostalgic longing for simpler and more 'natural' lives, or as strangely backwards, tainted by irrational ways of living and thinking that the majority of people have left behind. Thus, where our relations to other animals in the city may seem rather opaque as slaughter is hidden and meat products no longer resemble the living animals they came from, animals have a more conspicuous presence in the ways we imagine the countryside. The distance between daily life and the slaughter that brings meat about may seem less profound in a rural setting, and local slaughterhouses may be less heterotopic when viewed from a rural perspective, in which the animals may (be imagined to) have lived in plain sight before meeting their end. In places where perhaps not long ago it was tradition to simply slaughter animals on the farms, small-scale slaughterhouses can more easily be viewed as just a new form of such traditions, and thus as a continuation (rather than an innovation or perversion) of human-nonhuman relations as they have always been.

Nostalgia, Rurality, and 'A Question of Place'

John Berger's very short story 'A Question of Place' (1979) is one example of how the sense of tradition and rhythm in rural work can be at the heart of a story set in a slaughterhouse. As the opening story of *Pig Earth*, the second volume of Berger's *Into Their Labours* trilogy, 'A Question of Place' is a difficult text to pin down. It depicts in detail the slaughter and dismemberment of a cow from live animal to the splitting and weighing of the carcass, but since the book's fiction is interspersed with pieces of non-fiction and poetry, it is difficult to know the degree to which this particular story is fictional. Is it a description of an actual slaughter—of an actual cow—in a rural slaughterhouse, or is it a figment of Berger's imagination? And since we do not know, how are we as readers supposed to react to it? The story (and thus the book) starts in medias res, with 'Over the cow's brow the son places a black leather mask and ties it to the horns. The

leather has become black through usage. The cow can see nothing' (Berger 1979, 1). Robin Lippincott views this as a reflection of the story's title, since Berger 'does not preface the book, nor does he introduce scene or character, but launches … into the stunning evocation and high drama of an animal slaughtering; Berger *places* us among the peasants' (1991, 138, italics orig.).

The effect of such placement is less clear, however; Peter Hitchcock asserts that being placed right into the slaughter of a cow is meant to 'shock the reader who does not farm', yet the story has very little emotional content that would support such a notion, unless one assumes that slaughter will always appear shocking to modern urbanites (2001, 23). What *is* clear is that the slaughter is routine, as signalled early on by the mask having 'become black through usage'. Indeed, we are told, while the mask will stay on this particular cow for 'less than a minute', it provides 'twenty hours of night' annually, which suggests more than 1200 animals are slaughtered over the course of a year (Berger 1979, 1). This at once reveals that the setting is a small-scale slaughterhouse, in which only a few animals are slaughtered each day, and suggests the continuation of processes and traditions of labour as they have always been in the small rural community. This focus on the rhythm of country life and work itself is further emphasized by the relative anonymity of the human characters, who are only known to the reader as 'a peasant', 'an old man, his wife … and their son'—the two generations being suggestive of a tradition and a craft passed down (1). Ultimately, it is the work in the small, family-run slaughterhouse, and the way the characters are embedded in a particular rural way of life, which are central to the impressions that Berger seems to want to leave his readers with; the exact identities of the people are less important than their ways of being.

Although Lippincott is largely correct to assert that in *Pig Earth* the '[a]nimals, too, are characters … because they are such a part of the peasants [sic] way of life', emphasis is never really on the nonhuman perspective in 'A Question of Place' (1991, 138). Indeed, alongside the cow's slight hesitation to move forward, the information that '[t]he cow can see nothing' at the beginning is the closest the story ever comes to giving us a sense of the cow's own experience. One might, moreover, read this as an expression of the abstract 'abyss of non-comprehension' across which humans and other animals contemplate each other, of which Berger has famously written, as much as a testament to the specific situation of the particular cow (2009, 13–14). Perhaps this is why Hitchcock so easily

reads the cow and slaughter as a 'symbol [that] pervades the writing that follows' in the rest of the book (2001, 27). For Hitchcock, there is a temptation 'to say that, like the cow, the peasant village was held together in the first place by energy', and it is this energy—perceived at the moment when it disappears and the animal drops dead—which he sees as symbolic of an 'extinction of being' that 'is not reserved for the moment of transition', when industrialism takes over, but 'immanent to the peasant's experience of tradition itself' (27–28). Yet while such a reading may accurately pinpoint the central tension of the book as being about the difference between the experiences of readers and those of peasants in rural traditions ostensibly under threat from raging modernity, it also ignores central features of the opening story.

While the story's title, and the relative anonymity of the characters, might imply differently, one of the key strengths of 'A Question of Place'—and, indeed, of many of the texts in *Pig Earth*—is the way the writing repeatedly zooms in on individuals' lives as they are in moments of work:

> Between mother and son there is a complicity. They time their work together without a word. Occasionally they glance at each other, without smiling but with comprehension. She fetches a four-wheeled trolley, like an elongated, very large open-work pram. He slits each hind leg with a single stroke of his tiny knife and inserts the hooks. She presses the button to start the electric hoist. The cow's carcass is lifted above them both and then lowered into the pram. Together they push the pram forward. (Berger 1979, 2–3)

The attention to detail in Berger's writing speaks against a reading like Hitchcock's, which sees the cow's slaughter firstly as symbolic. Rather, as the title of the story could also be seen to suggest, it seeks to be as present as possible, and to embed the reader in the rhythm and reality of the work carried out. While it may perhaps seem like a paradox, this makes the individuals in the story important, for just as they are enmeshed in rural life and work routines, so the work and way of life exist only by virtue of the people in it; rural work, rural life, place, tools, materials, people, and animals form a coherent and inseparable whole.

This coherent whole also makes the slaughtered cow more significant in her own right. The story emphasizes exactly that labour and traditions do not happen in a vacuum, but with, for, and to individuals, both human and nonhuman. Just as the workers and their craft are important to the process of slaughter, so is each individual animal, in contrast to what

happens in modern industrialized slaughter. This is reflected not just in the consistent use of the subject pronoun 'her' about the cow, but also in the singularity of the animal before and throughout slaughter: from the story's first line, she is '*the* cow' (my emphasis), not just 'a cow'. Moreover, the peasant seems to regard the slaughter with an ambivalence that is easily read as an attachment to the individual cow: he reassures himself at the beginning that this is 'the best moment' for slaughter, and afterwards points out the two 'decomposing' teats that led to his decision (1, 3). Thus, while Hitchcock notes the importance of intimacy in other stories in the collection, his symbolic reading of 'A Question of Place' fails to recognize the importance of the cow being slaughtered as a singular creature. Indeed, it is a key feature of the rural life, which Berger depicts, that there is time to notice each individual animal, unlike in factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses.

Because each individual, human and nonhuman, is allowed his or her place as a singular creature, Berger's story can be read as restoring a dignity that industrialization has taken away from both workers and animals in abattoirs. With an element of nostalgia, the text celebrates a proximity of beings in the rural, while continually stressing the reality of what happens. Thus, the violence of killing remains intact, as does the ambivalence an observer may feel. As the 'springed bolt' is placed 'against the cow's head', the narrator complicates the politics of this rural slaughter routine by comparing it to an execution and remarks how the mask 'renders the victim more passive, and protects the executioner from the last look of the victim's eyes' (1). The ambivalence of the act is furthered by the uncertainty of the text's fictionality; indeed, the text itself seems to suggest that the loss of the cow's life is somehow too real for its literary depiction:

> Her legs fold and her body collapses instantaneously. When a viaduct breaks, its masonry – seen from a distance – appears to fall slowly into the valley below. The same with the wall of a building, following an explosion. But the cow came down as fast as lightning. It was not cement which held her body together, but energy. (1)

Metaphors, it seems, cannot adequately convey the immediacy of the experience; the taking of life just before one's eyes is not comparable to the fall of human constructions, but only to lightning—a natural bolt of energy like that which disappears in the same moment. Similarly,

metaphor ultimately seems to fail when the cow's throat is subsequently cut, 'and the blood flows out on to the floor. For a moment it takes the form of an enormous velvet skirt, whose tiny waist band is the lip of the wound. Then it flows on and resembles nothing' (2). As Raymond A. Mazurek suggests in his reading of *Pig Earth*, 'the physical reality of the blood is beyond language or metaphor' (1984, 139). All deaths are equally real in a rural life where there is time to contemplate them. As the narrator notes, 'a large animal dies as quickly as a small one' (Berger 1979, 2).

Slaughter, in Berger's rural landscapes, may be a tradition and even an inevitability, and the narrator notes that the cow ultimately becomes 'sides of meat such as the hungry have dreamt of for hundreds of thousands of years' (3–4). Yet this does not make it less ambivalent or less metaphysical; on the contrary, the proximity and rhythm of rural experience provides the time and intimacy that in turn allows for contemplation.

After her death, however, the cow becomes mere material. The slaughterers work 'like tailors', and when 'the son axes the breast bone', it 'is similar to the last axing of a tree before it falls, for from that moment onwards, the cow, no longer an animal, is transformed into meat, just as a tree is transformed into timber' (3).[2] Whereas metaphors fail to encompass the metaphysical nature of the process of killing and the moment of death, the carcass as material becomes pliable to language and comparison.

As the text ends, the reader is suddenly transported to the stable, where the peasant puts a young heifer in the stall where the now slaughtered cow used to be. 'By next summer', the story concludes, 'she will have come to remember it, so that each evening and morning, when she is fetched in from the fields for milking, she will know which place in the stable is hers' (4). The question of place, it turns out, is a question of belonging, of routine, of seasons in the cyclical, rhythmical, and predictable existence of rural life, viewed nostalgically from the readers' existence in modernity.

This implicit nostalgia for rural life found in writing like Berger's stories is directly connected to the marginalization of animals that is the subject of his famous essay 'Why Look at Animals?'. Nostalgia, indeed, bears witness, primarily, to an absence. As we have experienced the marginalization of animals of which Berger writes, nostalgia has arisen for a kind of rurality that still allowed for a proximity to animals as living beings, rather than

[2] Perhaps especially because Berger's countryside in *Pig Earth* is unmistakably French, one can also read this comparison as a reminder of the etymological connections between the word 'abattoir' and the language of forestry in the French language (see Vialles 1994, 23).

just as production units. Stories such as, for instance, the ones in E. B. White's famous children's book *Charlotte's Web* or the film *Babe* (Noonan 1995), in which individual agricultural animals stand out and manage to escape being slaughtered, can arguably only take place in a particular kind of rurality. This is not only because the countryside is where the animals used in agriculture are found, but just as much because a certain kind of imagined rural life and rhythm is what leaves time and room to contemplate them as individuals. Perhaps this is also why it is in children's literature that we most often encounter humans having personal relationships with 'farm animals'; childhood, too, is characteristically imagined as something of a simpler, more innocent life, about which authors and readers may feel nostalgic. When eight-year-old Fern argues that '[t]he pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If *I* had been very small at birth, would you have killed *me*?' in *Charlotte's Web*, she expresses herself with an empathy that sees no difference between herself and the young pig she will later name Wilbur (White 1963, 8, italics orig.). Adults in modernity may find the practice of such empathic engagement 'unrealistic', yet it carries a nostalgic appeal and promotes a notion that innocence (in both children and animals) should be protected, especially when an individual is being considered, and slaughtering animals the way it is actually done fits this badly. Hence, animals on farms in children's literature are most often either saved from slaughter, as happens to Wilbur, or are imaginatively 'understood to have entered willingly into an agreement in which they offer bodily products (though almost never meat) or services … in exchange for shelter, food, water and protection' (Hoult-Saros 2016, xiii). While countryside fictions aimed at older demographics can rarely escape the realities of slaughter in these ways, they often continue to cling to ideals of rural idyll, in which humans have empathic relations with nonhuman subjects, who live their lives in contentment and face slaughter individually and without much drama, if at all.[3] Hence, abattoirs carrying out multiple slaughters remain rare in rural fictions.

[3] In this respect, Neil Astley's *The End of My Tether*, which I considered in Chap. 3, is a somewhat unique exception, in that it both draws on imagined rural idyll and in some ways dramatically breaks with it, not least in its depiction of the slaughterhouse.

Bovines and Rural/Urban Contrasts: Sterchi's *The Cow*

One novel whose animal politics rely on contrasts and connections between rurality and the urban abattoir to an exceptional degree is Swiss author Beat Sterchi's *The Cow* (orig. *Blösch*, 1983). A novel of great complexity, *The Cow* essentially revolves around the fates of two characters in 1960s Switzerland: an imported Spanish worker named Ambrosio, and Blösch, the red 'lead cow' (Sterchi 1999, 13) in the milking herd on a small farm in a Swiss valley where five of the novel's 12 chapters, depicting the events of a few months, take place. Six chapters, however, take place on Ambrosio's final day working in an abattoir, in March 1969, while a single chapter takes the form of questions and answers about his seven years as a slaughterhouse worker prior to that day. These chapters on the two settings are interspersed, so that the two places become connected through the novel's structure as well as its plot. Hence, while we follow Ambrosio's first few months in the valley, we know from the first line that he will eventually end up as a slaughterhouse worker, and both the second and fourth chapters depict Blösch arriving for slaughter at the abattoir (from different perspectives). This is not only parallel to the way you know that virtually every animal on a farm is destined to be slaughtered eventually, thus setting up the comparatively idyllic rural scene as manifestly and always connected to the slaughterhouse, but it also sets a rather sombre tone for most of the novel.

Consequently, the novel's rural valley arguably soon loses some of the idyllic feel that readers might otherwise associate with such a setting. This is true in other ways as well. Thus, tensions in the relationship between rurality and modernity are frequently brought to the forefront in the rural chapters. Indeed, the very reason why Ambrosio arrives in the valley is that Knuchel, the owner of a milk farm, is resisting the pressure to let machines do the milking and therefore needs an extra worker to do the milking by hand. Knuchel is, in this and other respects, representative of idyllic, if ultimately doomed, rural attitudes not unlike those implicit in Berger's 'A Question of Place': he prioritises time for every single animal, names his cows (9, 65), and takes extra time on Sundays to care for any injuries or discomforts in the animals (6–7). Positioning the novel as an expression of emerging 'ecological voice' in Swiss literature, Andrew Liston reads this as a 'bio-egalitarian' attitude on Knuchel's part, and goes so far as to claim that Knuchel 'treats humans no differently from animals' (Liston 2011,

135). While this arguably overstates the novel's rural animal-friendliness (for instance, one chapter depicts the slaughter of a pig on the farm (Sterchi 1999, 269–70)), there is certainly a sense in which 'the conventional differentiation between mankind and animals is diminished' on Knuchel's farm, and it is easy to see how Liston reads this as part of an overarching biocentrism in the novel (Liston 2011, 135). Indeed, the farm work is at times depicted as a kind of perfect symbiosis between farmer and cows:

> These ministrations [Knuchel's extra care for the cows on Sundays] could not be met with equanimity by the animals. All twelve of them stretched and tautened their red-and-white patchwork hides, presented their udders, and swished about with their tails in such a way as to gladden old Knuchel's heart, so that he had to go and give each cow an extra pitchforkful of fresh straw to lie on. (Sterchi 1999, 7)

The cows are thus highly cooperative in their own milking, for which they are 'all trying to outdo themselves' and keep 'still in the best cow manner' (9). In this way, the novel partly relies on the kind of idyllic rurality where animals willingly serve humans, which Stacy Hoult-Saros (2016, xiii, 50) identifies as ubiquitous in children's fiction taking place in rural settings, and which is also often found in modern animal product marketing (Grillo 2016, 26–27; Borkfelt et al. 2015, 1058–61). Knuchel, for his part, gives extra care and extra straw to lie on, clearly resisting the capitalist logic that drives both the slaughterhouse and the automation of milking that has become common on neighbouring farms, and as a result has the best milk yields in the valley (Sterchi 1999, 7–9).

Sterchi's novel thus plays on a dichotomy between the traditional rural and the modern urban, where the former is depicted as more benign, and enforces human-animal hierarchies less violently than the latter. The modernization of milking can in this light be seen as a sign of a conceptually urban faith in technology that is creeping into, and corrupting, the countryside. Yet *The Cow* also points out how 'the slaughterhouse behind the high fence at the edge of the beautiful city' is connected to the countryside, both in its geographically marginal location and because the countryside supplies it with animals (280). It thus simultaneously resists and relies on polarity between the urban and the rural in its narrative content, just as it does in its structure, which makes its critique of human relations to other animals and nature somewhat more complex. Sterchi has pointed

out that the valley is still simple and can be 'surveyed from one standpoint' (Liston 2011, 152), which stands in contrast to the abattoir both because modern abattoirs enforce a politics of sight that subdivides them (see, e.g., Pachirat 2011, 44–45) and due to the 'walls, fences, hedges, wire surrounds, glass bricks, frosted-glass windows' that hide it from its surroundings (Sterchi 1999, 240). The idyll of the rural scene is, however, appended by a certain backwardness, seen for instance in how most inhabitants are rather suspicious, or even hostile, towards outsiders such as Ambrosio and his friend Luigi, who is an Italian worker on another farm (e.g. 2–3, 30, 73–74, 88–93). The rural landscape, after all, is also a site of control, and the restriction of movement is one way in which the valley is kept simple and easily overseen. Animals are behind fences and walls in their allotted fields and sheds, and citizens keep an eye on who comes and goes in their small community. As the local mayor tells Knuchel: 'You've got to keep an eye on foreigners, Hans. They can't be allowed to just do what they want' (74). As illustrated when the cows on Knuchel's farm make a collective effort to trample the fence and escape to 'considerably thicker and higher' pastures, they too are not usually allowed to do just 'what they want' (218, 220–23). Not unlike the slaughterhouse, the rural valley, too, has fences that keep animals in as well as, metaphorically, a 'high fence' attempting to close it off from the outside world.

A central feature that sets Sterchi's depiction of the slaughterhouse apart from that of the valley, however, is the novel's mix of narrative styles. While the chapters set in the valley are presented as a fairly straightforward, chronological, past tense, third person narrative, with an omniscient narrator and some passages of free indirect discourse, the slaughterhouse chapters are different: here narrative styles shift, the narrative is told from multiple perspectives and in different tenses, making the chapters generally more disorienting for the reader. Consequently, the abattoir becomes a more confusing setting stylistically, which corresponds well to the fact that its different constituents cannot all be surveyed at once, the way it is possible in the valley. Liston notes that the narrative in the rural chapters 'alternates continually between' Ambrosio and Blösch 'so that they are given narratospatial equality' (2011, 138). In the abattoir setting this changes; although both are still central to the narrative, neither is particularly important as an individual within the capitalist logic of meat production, and the narrative reflects this by treating them equally with other workers and animals, who also appear as, respectively, replaceable and commodifiable.

The narrative in the abattoir chapters is not without order, however. Thus, one perspective that the novel keeps returning to is the first person narrative of an apprentice at the abattoir, told in the present tense. These sections always start with a time stamp, which in part serves the function of signalling the chronological progression of a kind of plot that details the events of the day in the abattoir. It also alerts the reader to how time is strictly monitored and controlled along the slaughterhouse disassembly lines, in sharp contrast with the more flexible rural rhythms that allow for variations from day to day on Knuchel's farm, depending on the needs of both human and nonhuman animals. Interspersed among these passages of present tense narration are blocks of text with multiple perspectives and confusing dialogue that do not always allow the reader to know who is talking, as well as blocks of text told by a third person narrator, who gives the reader a more coherent past tense narrative of some events, but through alternating focalizers. The shifting narrative modes and styles not only contrast with the more easily discernible storytelling of the rural sections; they also align the abattoir setting more closely with the alienating and fragmented styles of some earlier city novels, such as Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, to whose depiction of a slaughterhouse *The Cow* also refers directly (Sterchi 1999, 260). Changes in the narrative thus also help position industrialized slaughter as an urban phenomenon.

The play with narrative styles is closely tied to the ways the book both uses and comments on language and communication. The third person narrative in parts of the abattoir chapters is often interrupted, sometimes mid-sentence, by short italicized passages with technical language of the kind one might find in instruction manuals, regulations, scientific reports, or textbooks:

> – *Caramba! Esa vaca!* Blösch! *Yo la conozco!* Blösch! *and cattle are mammals, belonging to the order of artiodactyla, the sub-order of ruminants, and the family of cavicorni or bovidae*, and lame in one leg Blösch miserably followed Krummen out of the cattle wagon, and along the platform. (57)

> The longest knife from Überländer's sheath was stuck in the throat of the first calf, and *when bleeding an animal in a hanging position, check that no urine or spittle is allowed to mix with the blood in the collecting utensil. The blood must not come into contact with either the butcher's hands or the hide of the animal*, and: paff! The fourth calf convulsed. Its limbs jerked up to its body, and it swung back. A good shot for a wriggling, overweight animal. (235)

While the blocks of technical language often provide the reader with useful information about rules, animal anatomy, or technical details in slaughterhouse work, they also serve the function of commenting on the use of language itself. As Liston notes, the biology textbook excerpt inserted into the passage where Ambrosio recognizes Blösch as she arrives at the abattoir has 'analytical and objectifying generalisations [that] jar with the narrator's description, which amounts to clear evidence of an individual character' and also contrasts with the emotion found in Ambrosio's outburst (2011, 150). Its coolly scientific language, which reflects the emotionless rationale of the abattoir's production, is insufficient to capture the lived reality of Ambrosio, and his memories of life with Blösch in the rural valley. In the former, she is an object and a unit of production, in the latter—as well as in the mind of the reader—she is a feeling individual, whom Ambrosio cares about.

The sense that the textbook language works as a kind of barrier to understanding lived reality is not unlike the actual language barrier that prevents many locals in the valley, as well as possibly some readers, from understanding the sentences uttered by foreign workers such as Ambrosio and Luigi in Spanish and Italian, which are also italicized. In both cases, the barriers serve to highlight the inadequacies of language. In the abattoir, a biology textbook cannot capture the fact of individual personalities in the animals, and a manual for slaughterhouse workers cannot truly capture the reality of killing and bleeding an actual, living animal. In the rural valley, spoken languages are often less efficient communication than the more attentive and instinctual feel that sometimes allows Knuchel or Ambrosio to know the wellbeing or intention of animals, as well as of people whose spoken language they cannot understand.

Discussing the novel's use of language at some length, Liston argues that 'the narrative puts humans and animals on the same level, and language, which is another way we commonly like to differentiate ourselves from animals, is reduced to a rudimentary and imprecise means of communication' (139). This, for Liston, makes Sterchi's text 'eco-polyphonic' in the sense that 'it contains a variety of languages and ways of communicating (body language, mooing, barking)' (140). While it is certainly true that the book emphasizes different kinds of communication, however, there are marked differences between how this works in rural and abattoir settings. Thus, whereas in the rural setting human language barriers are somewhat on a par with barriers to understanding the expressions of non-human animals, the rationale of the abattoir aligns with the italicized

technical language, which leaves no room for contemplation of nonhuman agency or individuality. The foreign workers, by contrast, may be viewed by the slaughterhouse management as largely replaceable, but remain subjects in communication where the animals become objects. The language politics of the abattoir thus arguably enforce a more rigid and hierarchical human/animal dichotomy than is found on Knuchel's farm, where different kinds of communication matter more.

This is not to say that the abattoir does not also put the agency of workers under pressure, however. Indeed, both their relative anonymity and their rather joyless existence is soon impressed upon the reader at the beginning of the working day:

> No tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor. No rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief, but instead, a number of pork butchers and slaughtermen and hog-drivers, and tripers and trimmers and gravediggers emerged one after another from the changing room. Their constrained gestures expressed reluctance. They were still stiff from sleep, they were grumpy and they smoked, and they filed sullenly past the clock-in to work. To work, which held no attraction. (Sterchi 1999, 50)

Not unlike the 'hollowed-out automatons' in Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*, the workers seem to have no identity besides their job titles in the abattoir; more than a place for a change of clothes, the changing room is the place where they change as they leave their individual identities behind. From there on, there is only to submit to their work, to which they file much like the cattle going to slaughter. These constrained gestures are supplemented by constrained voices: the first thing we learn from the apprentice in the abattoir is how he feels unable to speak up in front of the manager Bössiger to suggest that 'there are one or two things that can't be defined in terms of mere facts and figures' in a slaughterhouse (44). Yet 'facts and figures' are exactly what the abattoir reduces both workers and other animals to.

Just as the apprentice fails to make himself heard, so are the animals' voices unheard. Though the narrative mentions mooing, snorting, and squealing on various occasions, the general emphasis is on how the work drowns out voices. Thus, Ambrosio's first impression of the slaughterhouse is tied not to living beings, human or nonhuman, but to '[t]he clattering of bone-saws, the humming of the ventilators and coolers, the noise as a whole' (312). Whatever voices are present, the abattoir swallows up as

the sounds and function of machines work in unison to make animals disappear:

> Swiftly and eerily the animals had their familiar form stripped away from them. No sooner were they dead, than they were hanging upside down on the overhead rail, naked and steaming, passing the keen gaze of the meat inspector. And the whole thing accelerated further, the din grew still more intense: the hydraulic knives whirred, the chain-lifts rattled, the electric saw chewed and shrieked and chattered its way down the spine of a slaughtered animal, the guillotine precision-crunched hooves and bones, and Kilchenmann's shots flew, bang, bang, bang, through the hall. The noise accumulated and washed back over the men in a hundredfold echo… (176)

As with the axing of the breastbone in Berger's 'A Question of Place', the animal is transformed into material through the ideology acted out in the slaughterhouse, in which the animal disappears abruptly at death. Simultaneously, work effectively silences both workers and animals. Voices in general, and nonhuman voices in particular, thus come to mean less in the abattoir than on Knuchel's farm. It is worth noticing, however, that the divide here is perhaps more between ideas of rurality and modernity than between the rural and the abattoir as settings. As Liston points out, Knuchel's resistance to the capitalist approach of other farmers manifests itself in language (2011, 141). Whereas other farmers talk about 'large cattle units' ('Großvieheinheiten') and 'milking processes' ('Melkverfahren') (Sterchi 1999, 159 & 166/1983, 185 & 193), signifying unsentimental economic value, Knuchel's approach to his cows is one of emotional attachment and co-living individuals: 'I have no large cattle units in my shed! I have cows …! Blösch … is the best of them, Baby's the stupidest, Spot is the youngest, and they are all good enough for me', he argues to the other farmers (Sterchi 1999, 159).

Nevertheless, the overarching contrast in the novel remains between traditional rural knowledges, which draw on feeling and experience, and a strictly capitalist rationality that seeks to eclipse individual concerns and special circumstances for economic gains. Despite making clear connections between the rural and the abattoir, Sterchi thus still plays on nostalgic ideas of a kind of rurality in which the use of animals can be cast as a kind of benign stewardship. Though the Knuchel farm is in some respects a controlled place with fences and sheds, Knuchel's own approach to keeping animals is somewhat laissez faire and relies on faith in old ways. He

takes pride in the individualities of the cows, who are allowed their idiosyncrasies, he gives them a bit of extra hay when in a good mood, and he prefers the town's old bull—tellingly named Gotthelf ('God's help')—to an especially large pedigree bull, as a mate for Blösch. Thus, he exudes a traditional rural attitude in which not everything should be controlled. The abattoir, by contrast, is cast as a heterotopic setting where control is paramount to proper operations:

> … I'm surprised they let you in!
>
> – They didn't. They banned me from the slaughterhouse, and *the organization of slaughterhouses, their sanitary and police supervision, their opening, closing, slaughtering and public visiting hours, etc., are all subject to licence from the local authority*, and Lukas said: The porter said I was an unauthorized person. So called. And unauthorized persons weren't allowed on the property of the city slaughterhouse. (254, italics orig.)

The technical language in this passage highlights the effort put into keeping the heterotopic slaughterhouse separate from surrounding society and echoes Foucault's conceptualization of the systems of 'opening' and 'closing' present in all heterotopias (1986, 26).

Yet, as the novel shows, reality rarely conforms to theory, and the abattoir shows lapses in control. Not only has 'an unauthorized person' found access, but the animals often challenge their own objectification in various ways. At a particular point during cow slaughter, 'every second animal refuses to lie down' (Sterchi 1999, 131), and the pigs continually squeal and scream (e.g. 321, 326, 330). These tensions make their way into the novel's language, in which both narrators and characters at times attempt to reassert objectification. The apprentice, for instance, refers to a still living animal as '[t]wo tonnes or more of tamed steer's flesh' (131), and in the largely male workplace a politics of objectification is intertwined with a sexual politics of meat, in which parts of women's anatomy are referred to as rumps ('Nierstück') and udders ('Euter'), and pigs are likened to prostitutes ('aufgetakelte Dirnen') (1999, 133 & 328/1983, 156 & 376; cf. Adams 2000). This is supplemented by the animal tropes that carry some of the workers' insults towards each other, as when the oldest worker, Rötlisberger, yells abuse at younger workers by telling them that they are 'like double-slimed pig's guts' ('beidseitig geschleimte Schweinsdärme') and likens their mental capacities to 'calves' brains' ('Kälbergehirnen') (1999, 331/1983, 379). The rationale of the abattoir is thus shown as

inseparable from an exploitative 'discourse of species' (cf. Wolfe 2003, 2, 6–7), which objectifies both humans and nonhumans, and draws on speciesist nonhuman animal stereotypes to keep hierarchies in place between humans and in relation to nonhuman animals.

The erasure of nonhuman animals as individuals worthy of ethical attention, which such a discourse of species promotes, is however countered by details in the language of the narrative, just as the abattoir's hierarchies are challenged by some of the events depicted. Unlike in the novel's rural chapters, the abattoir narrative never takes on the perspective of a nonhuman animal through free indirect discourse; with the exception of the occasional sounds made by the animals, any direct sense of nonhuman subjectivities remains absent. Yet the idea of animals as individuals persists, especially in the case of Blösch. Thus, Blösch remains an individual in the narrative even after being slaughtered, and even when only parts of her are mentioned. One way in which this is apparent is in the way the narrative plays with language by inventing words to signify specificities that otherwise lack a vocabulary; in the abattoir, this includes such words as 'blöschblood', 'blöschbloodplasma', and 'blöschstains' (Sterchi 1999, 99). Hence, the language of the narrative counteracts the physically objectifying rationale of the abattoir, according to which the specific animal disappears as it becomes parts labelled only as meat, blood, hide, and so on. Instead, the narrative retains this referent of the individual animal in the blood that would otherwise be seen only as liquid mass—thus counteracting the relegation of the animal to what Carol J. Adams (2000, 51) calls an 'absent referent'—and continually reminds the reader that she is indeed one of the novel's main characters, on whom much of the narrative's emotional thrust depends. In this way, the narrative tacitly undermines the discourse of species, whose assumption is that nonhuman animals are non-individual and hence, unlike humans, mere matter after death.

Blösch's name is the last word of the novel, as her dead body is condemned as 'inedible' on the final page, and she is generally mentioned by name whenever her parts are discussed after slaughter so that the reader is never allowed to see her simply as meat, or even as just a dead body. It is, however, another, unnamed, bovine individual who becomes the centre of a pivotal episode that arguably has a liberating effect for the workers in the final chapter. In the book's final pages, the workers defy their management and jointly participate in the sacrifice of a small cow by bleeding her and drinking her blood. In contrast to the rest of the killing carried out at the

abattoir, this happens slowly. The cow, who is marked as 'down for emergency slaughtering' (365)—meaning she is injured and must be slaughtered quickly to retain the value of the meat—is first paraded slowly through the abattoir and garlanded with flowers, while a single knife is whetted carefully. In this way, the workers defy normal slaughterhouse routine by slowing its speed and discarding the labelling of the animal as unfit, refusing to follow orders to take the animal back.

This slow and methodical approach clearly contrasts with the abattoir's usual procedures of mass killing, and leads Marian Scholtmeijer to argue that *The Cow* is 'built' on the argument that 'violence performed against animals in the sacrificial spirit constitutes better treatment and better knowledge than the irreligious utilitarianism of Euro-Western cultures' (2000, 375). Indeed, the bleeding of the cow is depicted as largely unproblematic, both as she rather willingly lets herself be led through the abattoir and when the freshly sharpened knife is used to cut her jugular vein:

> The little Eringer's head darted back but only a little. She stood there steadfastly, and so still, the bell only sounded once.
>
> But the gleaming black skin on her forehead was thrown into confusion, she mooed feebly, and her eyes lightened as they looked at the men standing in front of her. The cow stood and bled, and it was as if she knew that she was one of those mothers cheated of their rich white milk, who had offered their teats for thousands of years, and for thousands of years had been devoured in recompense. (Sterchi 1999, 374–5)

Thus, the sacrifice is depicted not only as more benign than the slaughter happening in modern abattoirs, but also as having a somehow mythic quality that connects the animal with her kind and with the fate of her species. Scholtmeijer argues that *The Cow* 'operate[s] upon the principle that mythic consciousness gives us a different animal from the one who presents himself or herself to ordinary senses', which is why the animal is then to be 'treated differently', and she critiques Sterchi for playing down the fact that the cow is still a victim of violence (2000, 381). As she argues, 'the best that is achieved for the animals is Sterchi's slow-down in slaughterhouse activity. Clearly, if each cow … is to be ceremonially sacrificed instead of grimly and routinely stunned and dismembered, fewer cows will be "processed"' (381).

However, the slow-down of slaughtering pace entailed by the sacrifice also works against some of the characteristics that otherwise cling to

slaughter when it is taken into the heterotopic space of the modern abattoir. While the sacrifice of the small Eringer still happens in the slaughterhouse, it becomes less confusing or obscure, and therefore more easily contemplated. In this way, the Eringer *is* a different animal from the reader's perspective, in part because there is time to notice her victimization in detail. Scholtmeijer is right that this slaughter, seen in contrast to the industrial slaughter carried out in the rest of the novel, 'gives credence to the idea that ritual sacrifice honors animals', especially given Sterchi's attempt to connect it to a consciousness of how cows have been exploited in general (385). But it also does more than that: in sacrificing the Eringer, the workers are insisting that the killing—each killing—is of importance and thus reclaiming the site of slaughter *as place* rather than heterotopic space. This is not unlike the importance attributed to each single animal, and thus each single slaughter, in Berger's rural French slaughterhouse or in the traditions of the rural valley that Knuchel attempts to hold on to. The novel's rural chapters demonstrate abundantly how places are emotionally significant both in themselves and because of the individuals that live there, and on Knuchel's farm no individual animal, no milking, and no slaughter is viewed as insignificant, even if not everything is purely idyllic.

While Scholtmeijer is critical of the inherent victimization in the sacrifice, Liston reads it as showing that 'the coercion of the animals to the slaughter' is not 'an inevitable part of the production of meat', because the Eringer stands still 'even when her throat is cut' (2011, 151). His 'biocentric' reading of *The Cow* thus sees the sacrifice only as a benign contrast to what is worse in the novel and it becomes a way in which slaughter can still be condoned. However, the different ways in which the sacrifice compares favourably to industrial mass slaughter do not ultimately negate the objectification of the little Eringer. It should not be overlooked in this context that the Eringer is female and all the slaughterers are male. As Josephine Donovan correctly notes in her feminist critique of animal sacrifice in modernist fiction, sacrificial acts are 'intimately connected to or derived from male bonding rituals' and ways of 'becoming men', and thus 'animal sacrifice enables a distancing from the feminized abjection the victim represents' (2016, 167). This, Donovan argues, in turn means that the 'slaughter of an objectified, feminized animal helps … to establish the masculine subject' (167).

The general 'association [of] women and femininity with the sacrificed, scapegoated animal', which Donovan demonstrates is 'well established', is easily recognized in Sterchi's novel as well (173). The significance of

Blösch and other female cows aside, the women in the novel are mostly insignificant and often objectified, while gendered slurs and comparisons serve to link them to both cows and pigs. In the sacrifice of the Eringer, the novel's attitudes to female humans and nonhumans seem to come together. The Eringer embodies a number of the feminized traits that Donovan identifies as commonly preferred for sacrificial victims: she is innocent, docile, female, and she is an object of, rather than a subject in, discourse. Thus, she is prey rather than predator, or, in the vernacular of the modern capitalist rationale behind the abattoir, product rather than consumer.

In the sacrifice, Sterchi's abattoir workers arguably reaffirm their status as important individuals in a way that the workers in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* never managed, and the Eringer's slaughter is thus important to the novel's critique of modern capitalist rationalism. *The Cow* is clearly inspired by Sinclair's novel, whose critique of the de-individualizing effects of modern slaughterhouse technology it largely shares, and it refers to the Chicago packinghouses a number of times (Sterchi 1999, 303–4, 338–42). Yet what happens to the Eringer also becomes about the workers manifesting both their masculinity and their status as subjects in the sacrifice itself, and this is done through the abjection of the female, seen both symbolically in the subservience they reject and physically in the Eringer. It is hardly coincidental that the sacrifice coincides with the domination and breakdown of the slaughterhouse manager's secretary Frau Spreussiger, whose 'udder', 'rump', and legs have been objects of lewd commentary earlier in the novel (133). As one of the workers walks into Bössiger's office, he stares 'so penetratingly at Frau Spreussiger sitting at her typewriter that she typed his words as though he'd just dictated them to her, and at the same time she stared, wide-eyed, at his encrusted face' (373). Like prey in the gaze of a predator, Frau Spreussiger is helplessly servile to a reaffirmed male gaze, at which she can only stare back in 'wide-eyed' surprise, anticipation, or fear. It follows only naturally that by the time the men are drinking the Eringer's blood, she is 'vomiting in sobbing spasms' (376).

Donovan speculates that one explanation for why 'blood sacrifice is felt to provide access to the sacred' is that 'the sacrificer' perceives himself as acceding to the sacred in his conquest: 'Blood sacrifice would then effect and signify a celebratory resurrection for the practitioner, who proves through the act that he is predator, not prey; he is the one who lives on in triumph' (2016, 183–84). In *The Cow*, the workers' 'celebratory

resurrection' is their reassertion of their own power as men, who will not be cowed by the abattoir's rules and technical language, of which Frau Spreussiger and her typewriter become an apt symbol. However, it comes at the expense of the female in both human and nonhuman forms. In this, Sterchi's novel would seem only too well to confirm Donovan's argument 'that the aesthetics of modernity' found in modernist literature's 'mythic troping of ritual sacrifice' is 'rooted in the masculine developmental epistemology, distancing and dominating an objectified, feminized *other*' (182, italics orig.).

With its placement in the final chapter, it perhaps seems natural to view the sacrifice of the Eringer as the novel's most significant event, and viewed as a denouement one might well argue that while it liberates the workers, it lets the animals down. It is thus easy to see how Scholtmeijer is critical of the novel when she suggests what we could 'ask of a literary text' is 'that it render the animal so charged and difficult a being that the animal is no longer amenable to exploitation, ideational or otherwise' (2000, 380). Yet arguably the most significant event in the novel is another one. Indeed, while the actual event is tucked away in bits of the second and fourth chapters, the entire novel seems in various ways to revolve around the arrival of Blösch to the slaughterhouse. As readers, we may not know it when we read the novel's very first lines about Ambrosio dropping his card into the clocking-in machine at the abattoir for the last time, but it is that fateful event, which makes it his last day there. It is also Ambrosio's act of walking out because he cannot face the slaughter of Blösch, which sets in motion the disruption of the plant's industrial rhythm, which culminates in the workers' revolt and sacrifice of the Eringer later in the day. The novel's rural chapters, meanwhile, help the reader gradually realize why this event is such a turning point and carries such emotional significance for Ambrosio.

In the fourth chapter, as the reader is thrown into the midst of cattle slaughter depicted in third person narrative, something is suddenly off, as Ambrosio becomes pale, starts shaking, and steps away from the carcass whose legs he is cutting of. As readers, we are thus given his reaction before a shift in perspective gives us the explanation that ties it to the depiction of Blösch's arrival earlier in the novel:

> No work? Fast asleep? Or is he looking for his middle finger again? Huber and Hofer hissed with twisted faces. Ambrosio didn't hear them. He froze. Krummen pulled the fourth cow into the hall on a rope. Ambrosio dropped

> his knife a second time. The cow being pulled in was Blösch. Blösch, the lead cow from Knuchel's shed. Ambrosio stepped back. It was seven years since he'd last seen that cow, but he recognized her at once, out on the ramp in front of the cattle-truck. (Sterchi 1999, 94)

The shifting perspectives of the narrative and the use of free indirect discourse makes it difficult to distinguish Ambrosio's own perspective from those of other characters and that of the third person narrator. No perspective seems to be more significant than others. Blösch's arrival at the abattoir is similarly accompanied by the realization that she has lost significance:

> The onetime pride of the highlands, the mainstay of Innerwald breeding, was being led to the scaffold uncelebrated and unheralded. Nowhere a ceremonial bell, an organ intoning, a fanfare calling attention. Where was Blösch's cowbell? Where was the embroidered ribbon? Where was the village band? (95)

The lack of ceremony for Blösch obviously stands in contrast to the sacrifice of the Eringer, which the reader will encounter later in the book, but it more importantly contrasts with how she was perceived when Ambrosio knew her on Knuchel's farm. Not only has she lost significance, but Knuchel's adoption of milking machines has left her without the personal attention that kept her well; she is 'worn to the bone', her horns are 'spindle-thin and decalcified', and 'her skull drooped from an emaciated neck' (95). Just as in the slaughterhouse, modern ways of production have taken all they can from the individual, leaving her without the dignity that once was hers. This is reflected in the insignificance of the single animal in the slaughterhouse process itself: 'Krummen didn't even look at the cow in his grasp. Kilchenmann! Shoot! Blösch lay long and lean on the floor' (95).

As Blösch is shot and taken on along the production line, Ambrosio walks straight out of the abattoir in a way that indicates shock as much as protest, not stopping to take off his bloody apparel and not hearing or seeing what happens around him. It would be easy to read this in a long tradition of animal symbolism, in which the animal simply stands in for human characters, whose suffering would then be the actual central focus of the narrative. Reading the novel in the context of 1980s politics, Malcolm Pender seems to do so, when he writes that 'Ambrosio … recognizes in Blösch his own exploited condition and immediately terminates

his employment' (1990, 159). To apply such a reading, however, not only erases and disregards animal suffering as insignificant, but is also out of keeping with the acute attention to nonhuman individuals and personalities throughout much of the novel, especially in its rural chapters. The disregard for the suffering of pigs and cows in the slaughterhouse in *The Cow* work exactly to highlight the importance of nonhuman animals as individuals in its rural setting, and vice versa.

Throughout its different settings and narratives, *The Cow* highlights ways in which humans and nonhuman animals are similar. Liston notes that the novel draws attention to instinctual acts such as scratching, itching, and rubbing in its human characters, which 'animalises' the humans, not unlike the way in which the novel places 'human and animal communication on the same level' in its treatment of animal sounds, body language, and spoken language (2011, 137, 156). Yet rather than talking about an animalization of humans, a more accurate way to express what the novel does might be to say that it carries out an approximation of human and nonhuman animals. After all, the cows are arguably just as important to the narrative as the humans, and the novel's rural chapters strongly emphasize their individual temperaments and personalities. In the slaughterhouse, too, an approximation is carried out, though here it is done by drawing attention to anatomical similarities between the human characters and the animals they carve up. For instance, veins in a cow's womb are compared directly to veins in the foreman's face, and in one instance, a story from Chicago is recounted, in which human skin and pigskin get caught together in a skinning machine (Sterchi 1999, 180, 340). At times, anatomy is mentioned ambiguously, so that it might belong to either human or nonhuman, as when '[b]loodied nostrils drip' or a 'throat below me stretches', and of course, humans and nonhumans also at times make similar movements or utter similar sounds (131). The shared vulnerability of workers and animals is also underlined by the fact that nearly every worker has some kind of injury stemming from the work.

Similarities like this arguably become even more conspicuous because of the changing narrative modes, which show shared features from different angles. The first person narrative of the slaughterhouse apprentice, for instance, shifts the reader between subject and object positions through passages in the second person such as '[t]hen I stick you' and 'I open your throat, following the strands of muscle, cut you open as far as the gristly white of your windpipe' (60). Read in this light, what Ambrosio experiences is less a symbolic recognition of how he has been exploited himself,

and more a recognition of how much he *shares* with Blösch, not just in terms of experiences, but of embodied being in the world, of creaturely vulnerability. It is this recognition that the cows he slaughters are individuals like Blösch, who in turn is so much like himself, that makes his act of walking out on the slaughter, rather than the later act of sacrifice, the main disruptive ethically charged act of the novel. The care for individuals, which was common for him in the rural setting, manifests itself in the only way it realistically can in an abattoir: by his refusal to participate.

The Cow is in some ways a confusing composite of urban and rural narratives and ideas. In the fragmented and shifting styles, reminiscent of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and the de-individualizing subjugation of industry workers found in a number of slaughterhouse fictions, if most prominently in Sinclair's *The Jungle*, it is a novel of the city and industrial slaughter. Yet it is also a novel in which acute attention is afforded to nonhuman animal individuals; this is in part an expression of rural rhythms and attention to detail, as in Berger's 'A Question of Place'. Like Berger, Sterchi highlights the singular role an individual animal can supposedly have in a rural society and does it so strongly that one such animal arguably shares the title of main character with a human counterpart. This is what the rural allows for in Sterchi's narrative, even if the novel is rather pessimistic about the continuance of such ways of life and does not exactly portray them uncritically. As the narrative makes clear, rural and urban are connected, both as contrasts and as co-conspirators in the exploitation of animals, but things clearly worsen with developments away from the rural traditions of care in which humans *live with* animals rather than just *own* them.

Rurality, Care Ethics, and Empathy

The social imaginary, Charles Taylor notes, is complex and can easily seem contradictory (2004, 24). This is certainly often the case when it comes to the rural and to nonhuman animals. It is perfectly possible for many people to both view themselves as animal lovers, or as having sympathy for the kind of rural care ethics that we find, for instance, in Sterchi's novel, and still participate in exploitation that ultimately means animals are treated as objects rather than subjects. Indeed, it is possible to argue that ideas of 'humane' or 'happy' meat seek to achieve just this aim of comfortably making the animal simultaneously subject and object (see, for example,

Cole 2011, 93–96; Pilgrim 2013, 123).[4] Representations of rurality and its human-animal relations that inform the social imaginary are certainly most often very far from the realities of factory farms and concentrated animal feeding operations, as well as from the industrial slaughterhouses that slaughter the large majority of animals.

As one work on critical rural studies argues, 'the imagined conditions of contemporary agricultural practices – and by extension the imagined conditions of rural life in the United States – both obscure the realities of contemporary agriculture and effectively insulate the large-scale actors who perpetuate these practices from scrutiny' (Thomas et al. 2011, 148). Much the same, of course, is true of representations and social imaginaries in other occidental cultures and beyond, if to somewhat varying degrees. Representations that question such common rural imaginings or use them as contrast to industrial production, as seen in Sterchi's novel, or in Astley's *The End of My Tether*, serve also to challenge this dominant function of many other rural representations. They largely demonstrate that such popular imaginings and simulacra of the rural represent something that has effectively died out, or at the very least is under threat and is not representative of how most animals are raised today, or of how they become meat. As such, they are fictions that challenge the other fictions that make up much of what we term 'rural'.

Yet at the same time, such texts both draw upon and perpetuate ideas of the rural as simple and caring. As Donovan argues of the 'premodern, preindustrial, and largely pre-capitalist' world depicted in the 'local-color' texts she analyses, it included personal relationships with animals, and hence 'subject status' (2016, 146). This is true, too, of the modern and postmodern texts by authors such as Berger, Sterchi, and Astley, for whom industrial agriculture and abattoirs loom large in the background. There is an implicit argument for empathic relations with other species in texts that show such ostensibly rural attitudes as ethically superior to urban industrial capitalism, or for what Donovan identifies as 'an ethic of care' in the earlier texts she writes about (147). As we have seen, in slaughterhouse fictions, the abattoir can help such arguments significantly along by being

[4] As Matthew Cole notes in an article connecting Foucault's ideas of disciplinary and pastoral power to animal welfare discourse, the very notion of 'happy meat' 'imputes subjectivity (being "happy") to an object (meat). This is literal nonsense, but useful to sustain the myth that pastoral power is not exploitative: the association of happiness with meat reinforces the idea that "farmed" animals exist only to "provide" meat' (2011, 94).

positioned as the violent antithesis to the more benign rural care ethics. Indeed, even if such literary works fail to provoke actual empathy for non-human animal characters in readers, they promote empathic caring for animals as a positive cultural value that is antithetical to the realities of mass slaughter operations.

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CHAPTER 6

Who Slaughters and Who Consumes? On Butcher(ing) Identities

As the complex and multifaceted relationships of slaughterhouses to wider issues of place and space—whether urban or rural—imply, abattoirs are sites for negotiating identities and relations, not just as they concern human domination of other species, but among humans as well. Who goes inside the abattoir, who stays outside, who works there, and how they are regarded, is hardly trivial or coincidental. The heterotopic nature of the abattoir points immediately to discourses of inclusion and exclusion, as do nineteenth-century concerns about the influence of open slaughterhouses on the sensibilities of women and children, or the modern-day attempts to make it illegal to distribute pictures or video from inside slaughterhouses or factory farms to the general public (e.g. Pachirat 2011, 5–7; Potter 2014; Purdy 2013; Woodhouse 2013). In effect, certain parts of the population are seen as more likely than others to be found in the abattoir, and some people as emphatically not belonging there. Thus, generally, only certain kinds of people are deemed acceptable or realistic parts of the slaughterhouse scene in the social imaginary.

The abattoir is, however, characteristically in the social imaginary as unimaginable, that is, as a place which is disavowed and only reluctantly imagined. It is perhaps in part a symptom of such reluctance, then, that there is somewhat a tendency towards homogeneity amongst authors who have written slaughterhouse fictions. A quick survey of the works considered in the present book, which I believe to be representative of slaughterhouse fictions in general, thus reveals an overwhelming majority of authors

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who are male and white. Indeed, at least until the 1990s, the works by female authors to most substantially consider slaughterhouses are Gertrude Colmore's *The Angel and the Outcast* (1907) and Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio*, yet Colmore's novel has long been out of print and Olsen's, while written in the 1930s, remained unpublished until 1974. Moreover, in both these novels—as well as in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* from 1998—slaughterhouses are linked to the violence of men.

Slaughter is thus tied to or reflects certain identities, and slaughterhouses remain connected to predominantly white masculinities. In part, of course, this may reflect how modern industrial abattoirs have emerged in, and continue to be tied to, societies dominated by Europeans and their descendants, which is also where the greatest per capita consumption of meat is found (OECD 2018, 157). Also, when it comes to slaughterhouse fictions, both historical and present-day structural imbalances in the market for literature surely affect the production and distribution of literary depictions.[1]

Yet there are identity issues that cling to slaughterhouses, and to slaughterhouse fictions, which can hardly be explained by reference to statistics alone. In most cases, at least, slaughter work fits the category of what sociologists have come to call 'dirty work'—because of the physical aspects of killing as well as, possibly, moral issues involved—which is widely held to influence workers' sense of self as well as how they are viewed by the rest of their communities (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, 414–6; Hughes 1951, 319).[2] In addition, few would likely contest that slaughter work is traditionally construed as male, which often holds true even when it may be practised by women (Pachirat 2011, 16, 63; Vialles 1994, 101–10). In some geographical and socio-political contexts, moreover, particular

[1] As I touched upon in the first chapter, the gradual emergence of industrial abattoirs and barriers to the visibility of slaughter in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries happened in parts of the world where populations are predominantly white. Moreover, the publishing industry and general literary scene, past and present, overwhelming favours white, male authors (King 2010; So 2020; VIDA 2020).

[2] There are, however, significant cultural, technological, and economic factors that may affect the levels of stigma and marginalization connected with slaughterhouse work. As scholars of 'dirty work' have noted, for instance, 'slaughterhouse workers are more likely to be stigmatized in France and Canada than in Cuba and Cambodia', since 'physical labor is more common and widespread' in the latter (Ashforth and Kreiner 2014, 425). Similarly, though for different reasons, researchers of Danish slaughterhouse workers note that these are not 'necessarily considered morally tainted', even though the work does carry 'potential for moral stigmatization' (Baran et al. 2016, 354).

ethnic and immigrant groups are heavily overrepresented amongst slaughterhouse workers (LeDuff 2003, 184; Sebastian 2017, 175; Stull and Broadway 2013, 91–92). Comparing American slaughterhouses in the early twenty-first century with the depictions in Sinclair's *The Jungle* a century earlier, for instance, the sociologists Donald Stull and Michael Broadway observe that 'immigrants and refugees still flock to packinghouse gates; only now they speak Spanish, Burmese, Somali, or K'iche Mayan instead of German, Polish, Czech, or Lithuanian' (2013, 91–92). Similarly, investigating 'the largest pork production plant in the world' in North Carolina, journalist Charlie LeDuff found few white employees within a system where jobs at the plant were largely divided by race, leaving 'blacks and Mexicans with the dirty jobs at the factory' (2003, 183, 184). In turn, this is reflected in some slaughterhouse fictions. Upton Sinclair's Lithuanian immigrants in *The Jungle*, the Mexican workers in Tristan Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*, and even the few Spanish and Italian workers in Beat Sterchi's *The Cow* could all be taken to exemplify this. This chapter looks into the identity politics of the slaughterhouse as these involve, in turn, racialization and ethnicity, a more general marginalization due to association with violence, and issues of gender and consumption.

Shades of Whiteness, Absence of Blackness

Writing into widely different historical and geographical contexts, it seems obvious that Sinclair, Egolf, and Sterchi approach the politics of how ethnicity plays into class and other human hierarchies rather differently. Sterchi, for instance, to a large degree leaves it up to the reader to interpret the origins of workers from their sometimes Spanish and Italian-sounding names. The hierarchies of the abattoir do, however, seem to place these foreign names near the bottom, with only the apprentice and the animals below them; as the former tells us in the first person: 'Everybody's got their personal scapegoat. The director's got Bössiger, Bössiger's got Krummen, Krummen's got Huber, Huber's got Hofer, Hofer's got Buri, Buri's got Luigi, Luigi's got Pasquale. And me? I give the stubborn pig in front of me a kick' (Sterchi 1999, 346). While the managers and more senior workers at the Swiss abattoir generally have German names, then, the hierarchies and identity politics in the work remain mostly implied and somewhat understated. What is clear is that the hierarchy of the abattoir includes both workers and animals, but whether the human pecking order is a matter of ethnicity, seniority, or both, remains up to interpretation.

Readers of Sterchi's novel also do not know, for instance, whether other workers in the abattoir have background stories similar to those of Ambrosio and his friend Luigi, who have come to Switzerland from Spain and Italy for farm work, but have both ended up in the abattoir when this initial employment disappeared. Instead, we are to a large degree left to infer the particular politics of place and identity tying names such as 'Piccolo', 'Fernando', 'Pasquale', and 'Eusebio' to an abattoir on the outskirts of a Swiss city (Sterchi 1999, 376). Such connections between place and the politics of ethnicity and racialization are clearer in both Sinclair's and Egolf's depictions, in which slaughterhouse workers are more clearly seen as immigrant populations who change local communities and are bound to slaughterhouse work as one of the lowest kinds of unskilled labour.

In Egolf's novel, this finds its expression especially in the 'wave of Mexican and Central American immigrants [who] poured into Baker in response to a state-wide labor call', when the poultry plant first opened 'in the mid-fifties', who are generally referred to through the ethnic slur, 'wetbacks', with the clear sense that locals see the immigrants as ruining the local community of the town (1998, 127). The poultry plant is thus to some extent a catalyst for change in the community and for the division between locals and those perceived as outsiders, who threaten the perceived order of the town as a place, though the immigrants 'live together on the outskirts of the community … in burned-out tenement houses leased by area slum lords' (127). As Netta Bar Yosef-Paz notes, however, the ethnic slur 'wetbacks' is just one of a number of derogatory labels applied to various groupings of people in the town of Baker, which is depicted as 'a divided and hateful society, obsessed with the tagging of people' (2016, 102). Reading the novel through a focus on 'filth', including the humans perceived as such, Bar Yosef-Paz observes 'how racial categories in the novel are often connected to filth in a subversive manner: relying on an excessive use of the word "filthy" and its synonyms, the racial categories become so blurred as to undermine not only the categories but also the very act of categorization' (102). In this way, how Egolf employs 'the classification of humans' in the novel ultimately becomes part of the novel's overall criticism of 'those who exclude the "other"' (102).

Part of how Egolf's novel problematizes categorization also hinges on the ways in which various labels and slurs rely on different identity markers such as class, gender, ethnicity, race, and animality in interconnected and sometimes interchangeable ways. Among the labels applied to the protagonist John Kaltenbrunner at school are, for instance, 'chicken boy',

'manure-boy', 'swine-herder', and 'nigger-lover' (Egolf 1998, 28). As the narrator remarks, John 'may as well have been an unemployed Jewish wetback surrogate mother', when he shows up at school 'in a disheveled mess' after having already worked in the stables for hours (28). Hence, while John actually has roots in the white middle class, this does not protect him from being an outcast; slurs and categorizations thus work largely through associations—with dirt, with animals, and with derogated racial and ethnic groupings—which are all used to marginalize. In this light, John's later employment at the poultry plant, where he works not only with animals but also with the Mexican 'wetbacks', becomes yet another marker of his fall in social status and his general marginalization from the Baker community. As Bar Yosef-Paz argues, 'John's representation as a poor white man with middle-class origins enables the novel to show racial complexities and to explore various shades of whiteness' (2016, 97). John is, despite his whiteness, made to occupy a role in the community equivalent to outcast racialized groupings, or even to nonhuman animals such as the turkeys he kills at the poultry plant. He is marked by his association with the plant—both metaphorically and literally; after his work day, he spends 'over twenty-five minutes with his back to the wall on the shower floor scouring the dried turkey blood that [has] spilled into his boot and clotted into the hairs on his ankles', and later he is marked by a serious work injury (Egolf 1998, 135). Ultimately, Egolf's novel thus draws attention to an intricate interplay of identity markers that can all come to play a part in marginalization, from poverty, ethnicity, and race, to animality and the workplace of the poultry plant itself.

A critique of the way racial politics play out around the poultry plant in Egolf's novel might point to the absence of women and black people. As Carol J. Adams noted just four years before the novel's publication, '[n]inety-five percent of all poultry workers [in the U.S.] are black women' (1994, 82). To some degree, it seems that Egolf is thus conflating the poultry industry with other parts of the U.S. meat industry that are both more male-dominated and rely more on immigration from Latin American countries (e.g. Pachirat 16–17, 73–74; Stull and Broadway 2013, 74), thus effectively erasing or marginalizing African American presence.

Insofar as one can generalize based on the relatively few works of fiction that venture inside a U.S. slaughterhouse in any detail, such absence or marginalization is almost always the case in such fictions. Perhaps this absence is even doubly striking since, as Lindgren Johnson has pointed out, the development of the modern abattoir, segregating animal killing

from the public, was in the U.S. largely framed through a discourse about both black and animal bodies through the so-called 'Slaughterhouse Cases' (2018, 30–31).[3] Sinclair, for example, introduces black characters only among the strike breakers, who are 'an assortment of the criminals and thugs of the city, besides negroes and the lowest foreigners – Greeks, Roumanians, Sicilians, and Slovaks', since 'very few of the better class of working men could be got for such work' (1985, 321–22).

Though *The Jungle*'s Lithuanian hero is among them, Sinclair generally seeks to strengthen his socialist message by portraying strike breakers as rowdy and stupid. In the process, however, he also depicts Packingtown as a place that attracts such people, creating connections between slaughter work and the social and racial hierarchies of society, in part by animalizing those at the bottom of such hierarchies with at least the partial implication that some of these groups of people do not belong in Chicago: 'The "Union Stockyards" were never a pleasant place, but now they were not only a collection of slaughter houses, but also the camping place of an army of fifteen or twenty thousand human beasts' (328). Though Sinclair can thus at times be seen to conflate some groups of immigrants and black people into one big, animalized group, it is clear that there is sympathy for the plight of the family of his Lithuanian hero. However, as others have pointed out, his depiction of the 'negroes' among the strike breakers is both decidedly racist and employs a number of animalizing tropes (Lundblad 2013, 113–114; Noon 2004, 130–131). Michael Lundblad, for instance, notes that the black strike breakers are described as 'bundles of instinct barely contained' (130). Moreover, when Jurgis oversees them in the slaughterhouse, they are incapable of taking orders, take too many breaks, and steal the knives (Sinclair 1985, 322–323).

Thus, while the novel of course relies on an overarching metaphor that draws a connection between the slaughtered animals and the immigrant workers, the animal epithets applied to black workers seem meant to be taken far more literally. As Mark Noon notes, it is significant that black men are repeatedly referred to as 'bucks', since this draws out a common stereotype of black men as overly libidinous and violent (2004, 431). Yet

[3] The U.S. Supreme Court Slaughterhouse Cases (1873) concerned the lawsuit of independent butchers in New Orleans claiming Fourteenth Amendment protection against the centralization of slaughter in a monopoly slaughterhouse. The court's ruling rejected the claims of the butchers and held that the amendment applied only to former slaves. For a detailed analysis of the 'convergence' of 'black and animal bodies' in this case and the newly created abattoirs, see Johnson 2018, 30–31 and 67–83. For a detailed historical consideration of the Slaughterhouse Cases and their political consequences, see Labbé and Lurie 2005.

it also draws on the ideas of unbridled animality and ties to untamed nature more generally; Sinclair's narrator remarks that '[t]he ancestors of these black people had been savages in Africa, and since then they had been chattel slaves, or had been held down by a community ruled by the traditions of slavery. Now for the first time they were free – free to gratify every passion, free to wreck themselves' (1985, 328). In contrast to the domesticated animals subdued in the slaughterhouses—and to the workers whose freedom Sinclair is championing—the black strike breakers are thus depicted as wild animals who, unable to handle their freedom, transform Packingtown even further into jungle-like conditions.

Far more sympathetic is Scott Nearing's portrayal of black slaughterhouse workers in *Free Born*. Like Sinclair's, Nearing's message is a socialist one, but since Nearing's protagonist Jim is black, Nearing's Depression-era socialism includes, and indeed primarily focuses on, sympathy for black workers. This may, however, also be linked to how Nearing's novel refuses to foreground nonhuman suffering; as I considered in Chap. 4, the novel's description of slaughter seems 'almost pointedly mechanical and dispassionate', especially when read alongside the highly emotive descriptions of slaughter in Sinclair's novel. It is certainly understandable if this is a sign of a reluctance on Nearing's part to tackle the respective plights of black people and nonhuman animals together. As Lindgren Johnson also notes, much pro-animal thinking bases itself on an ethical extensionism in which 'traditional markers of humanity such as classical agency and autonomy' are applied to nonhuman animals (2018, 8). Within such an extensionist frame, showing nonhuman animals as agents while demonstrating how humanism remains less than fully extended to black people (or other minorities) creates obvious problems as it risks being read as a comparison or even as highlighting the plight of animals above black people, and thus as an extension of centuries of dehumanization and animalization.

Perhaps this is one reason why, in depictions of slaughterhouses, such references connecting the oppression of non-whites to that of nonhuman animals are most conspicuous for their absence, yet their use in other contexts does suggest entanglements of not just questions of racial identity, but patterns of domination more generally, with the subject of slaughter and exploitation of animals. As Cary Wolfe stresses in his criticism of 'the humanist model of subjectivity':

> as long as this humanist and speciesist *structure* of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their

> species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species – or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference. (2003, 8, emphases orig.)

Wolfe quotes the analyses of Gayatri Spivak and Toni Morrison on patterns of dominance in which white men are always and inevitably at the top of hierarchies in which others are dehumanized, in order to show how, within a humanist framework, 'the aspiration of *human* freedom, extended to all, regardless of race or class or gender, has as its material condition of possibility absolute control over the lives of *nonhuman* others' (7, emphasis orig.).

In light of such discourses, one might wonder whether the relative absence of particular groups of humans in slaughterhouse fictions should be viewed as a marginalization not dissimilar to the silencing of nonhuman voices that discourses on meat so often carry out. Alternatively, if this is to be viewed as a reluctance on the part of authors to engage with non-white and/or female experiences of various aspects of slaughter in modernity, for fear of aligning human and nonhuman fates too closely with each other in more than metaphorical terms, it seems worth noting that despite any risks involved, doing so might also open up different perspectives on human-nonhuman relations or slaughter practices. Indeed, Wolfe's thinking would seem to suggest that—far from being just an avoidance of further marginalization or dehumanization—not engaging with such perspectives lets down both oppressed humans and nonhumans. Taking it a step further when she compared human slavery and animal oppression in *The Dreaded Comparison*, Marjorie Spiegel argued that

> Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist: one who has embraced the false notions of what animals are like. Those who are offended by comparison to a fellow sufferer have unquestioningly accepted the biased worldview presented by the masters. To deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our own power. It is to continue actively struggling to prove to our masters, past or present, that we are *similar to those who have abused us*, rather than to our fellow victims, those whom our masters have also victimized. (1996, 30)

Taken in isolation, Spiegel's take may seem insensitive to how both historical and present injustices have provided, and continue to provide, basis

for marginalization, and thus how dehumanization remains part of the lived experience of marginalized groups. Yet her point, that a denial of similarities between the oppressed ultimately favours the oppressor, seems an important one, and one that would be worth exploring further in literary contexts, as some critics have arguably done in discussing how black writers engage with and destabilize, human and nonhuman animal categories and distinctions (e.g. Johnson 2018; Jackson 2020). Not having such voices leaves us with what Johnson calls 'the ethical/phenomenological impoverishment of … white-authored worlds' (2018, 23). Indeed, one might suggest that literary works written or read along such lines might point to how the dual and often intertwined discourses of species and race render both the category of the 'animal' and of the 'human' untenable, as for instance Syl Ko's critical work has suggested (2020, 114–118).

Addressing African American contributions to ecoliterary traditions, Kimberly N. Ruffin similarly notes that due to their experience with 'the triumphs and troubles of life among those at the bottom of human hierarchies, African Americans have a keen knowledge of the ecological implications of social systems' and even goes so far as to say that 'their closeness to nonhuman nature, both forced and voluntary, gives them an opportunity to reflect on how these social systems have ecological impacts for nonhumans' (2010, 20). While one should be sensitive to the potential echo of discourses that conflate othered humans with nature to various degrees (whether in romanticized or imperialist terms), something similar could be argued about the different ethnic or racial groupings that have been found at the bottom of the hierarchies involved in slaughterhouse work; there are kinds of knowledge—of the social systems that manage slaughter and of the human and nonhuman beings and relations tangled up within them—which are lost insofar as these parts of the population do not (get the opportunity to) contribute to literary slaughter narratives. In this sense, while the relative absence of black characters already raises issues for especially U.S. depictions of slaughterhouses (and similar absences of other groups may raise issues elsewhere), it is perhaps more generally an absence of authors from the minorities among whom slaughter work has been a common lived experience, including African Americans, that is ultimately most problematic for our understanding of the spaces and places where slaughter is carried out.

Nevertheless, most slaughterhouse fictions remain centred on white men, and Nearing's and Sinclair's depictions are the only obvious literary

examples of black slaughterhouse workers.[4] This is not to say that African-American authors do not employ comparisons or metaphorical connections between slaughter and the treatment of black people by white oppressors, however. The protagonist in Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), for instance, is compared to a hog as he is unjustly condemned for murder in a town with a hog slaughterhouse, and John Edgar Wideman briefly depicts a pre-industrial slaughterhouse in relation to colonialism and race relations in *The Cattle Killing* (1996). Indeed, perhaps even more to the point, Alice Walker has not shied away from comparing present-day treatment of nonhuman animals with the exploitation of black slaves (Walker 1988, 3, 5; Spiegel 1996, 13–14). But there remains a potential for further exploring how such issues play out in the context of the modern, heterotopic abattoir.

Which kinds of human characters appear in slaughterhouse depictions, which comparisons are made, and through which kinds of narrators or focalizations are thus not trivial matters. Different kinds of characters mean different perspectives and a greater diversity of voices that may be heard, overheard, or ignored, as the different angles of the slaughterhouse fictions considered in this book attest to in other ways. At the very least, slaughterhouse workers in many cases share a vulnerability with the nonhuman animals they help slaughter and turn into products, not just in the risk of physical injury, but also in terms of stigmatization and marginalization. The slaughterhouse—as a site of meaning-formation and continual redrawing of boundaries—lets human relations and identity politics play out in particular ways. Before returning to how this works in relation to gender—particularly in the novels by Colmore and Ozeki—later in this chapter, it is worth taking a closer look at the more general taint of violence that may cling to slaughterers as they come across in literary narratives.

Violence in the Workplace: Deviance and Marginalization

One way to approach the subject of human identities in the slaughterhouse is to consider it in terms of deviance. The slaughterhouse as a heterotopia deviates from the norms of the rest of society, and it can thus taint

[4] While it is not a literary text, one may here also think of Charles Burnett's portrayal of a black slaughterhouse worker in his classic film *Killer of Sheep* (1977).

those who enter with its deviance. Indeed, butchers have historically often been considered deviant due to supposed insensitivity to violence and blood, and such insensitivities have often been thought to carry over into the human realm. In Cervantes' 'The Colloquy of the Dogs' (1613), for example, the butchers are not only depicted as troublemakers and thieves, but all who work at the slaughterhouse of Seville, 'from the lowest to the highest are', according to the dog Berganza, 'individuals without soul or conscience and have no fear of the King and his justice' (1952, 131). In fact, he claims, they 'would kill a man as quickly as they would a cow' (132). As in Thomas More's *Utopia*, the trade of the slaughterer was thought to demean human sentiment and natural feelings of compassion, and so slaughterers were best avoided when possible.

For centuries, the widespread notion that butchers became desensitized to blood and violence could also be found in the common idea that they were not allowed to serve on juries. While it was mentioned in some judicial contexts in eighteenth-century England (Shaw 1750, 369), this belief seems to have most often lacked factual basis; yet it was alluded to by writers such as Mandeville, Swift, and Dryden and still reiterated in nineteenth-century debates (Stevenson 1954; Thomas 1983, 295). It was akin to the idea that brutality in business could lead people to commit heinous acts in other aspects of their lives. Thus, the butchers in a story on Smithfield by Eliza Meteyard were shown to commit random acts of gratuitous violence towards animals, while she commented that such 'brutal cruelty' was 'inseparable from hideous crime'. Moreover, one butcher in the story simply seems to shrug at the violence: 'We 'se live among 'em, and git used to 'em', he simply answers when the accompanying doctor remarks upon the 'dreadful scenes' he is witnessing (Silverpen 1847, 524). Similarly, Sinclair depicted his stockyard workers as unusually violent in *The Jungle*, where the narrator comments that 'men who have to crack the heads of animals all day seem to get into the habit, and to practise on their friends, and even on their families' (1985, 24). It is somewhat along these lines that sociologists are today documenting actual correlations between violent crimes, aggression, and the business of animal slaughter, and suggesting that increased aggression, violent crime rates, and sex offenses are linked to slaughterhouses in ways that do not seem to be the same for other businesses (Fitzgerald et al. 2009).

It is thus a small step from deeming particular kinds of work brutal or barbaric to similarly marginalizing and othering those performing such

work. While society may crave meat, most people, as Margo DeMello points out, have little or 'no desire to either see animals being transformed into meat, or invite the slaughterhouse worker to dinner' (2012, 230). Accordingly, the slaughterhouse worker is often marginalized along with the work while, as discussed, the work is in many places also likely to fall to those already at the margins of society (Adams 1994, 81–82).

It is the moral stigma of jobs involving blood, killing, and dismembering, however, that seems mostly to create our need for the appearance of distance between consumers and the 'others' who actually do the work. As Timothy Pachirat observes, killing carries stigma to such a degree that psychological and social distancing to it happens even within the slaughterhouse, where 'the almost supernaturally evil powers invested in the act of shooting the animals by the other kill floor workers … [make] possible the construction of a killing "other" even on the kill floor' (2011, 159). Recounting the history of considering butchers as 'possessing a violent and brutal character', Noëlie Vialles notes how the shedding of blood 'appeared to impart a moral stain', in addition to the physical ones on the clothing of those slaughtering (1994, 77). Moreover, Vialles documents an astute awareness of such 'images of bloodthirsty cruelty' among French slaughterhouse workers. While these images are generally 'attributed to the past' or 'put down to a misunderstanding of slaughtering and a lack of coherence in people's demands', slaughterers also protest that 'people think we're savages' and insist on a significant difference between human blood and the blood of the animals they kill in order to distance themselves from the 'prejudicial assumption of a general insensitivity regarding all blood' (78–79). As Vialles observes, however, 'this also means that the abattoir imposes the blood = death equation'; thus, '[i]t is precisely because the blood of animals is everywhere that human blood must remain invisible' (78).

That connotations of insensitivity and violence continue to cling to slaughterhouse professions is also seen in common metaphorical uses of the slaughter of nonhuman animals. For instance, the slaughter of other animals is a frequent metaphor invoked in connection with the killing of humans in horror films (Eggertson and Forceville 2009, 441–444), and more generally, metaphorical uses of words like 'slaughter' and 'butcher' tend overwhelmingly to be conceived as negative and connected with insensitivity, lack of professionalism, or even with an inclination towards

violence (Drunkenmölle 2012, 221).[5] Moreover, such connotations align well with more general cultural notions where people harming other animals tend to be marked as 'evil' while 'willingness to sympathize with or care for animals remains a *sine qua non* indicator of good character and the ability to form meaningful social relationships' (Mason 2005, 158).

However, othering of slaughterers might also more generally be seen simply as part of the techniques employed to create distance between consumers and the systematic killing of other animals for meat (Joy 2010, 84–85; Pachirat 2011, 11, 158–59; Presser 2013, 60–61; Vialles 1994, 76–79). Ironically, in the case of butchers, such othering of other humans is often partly achieved through animalization or dehumanization. For instance, both generally and specifically in the case of slaughterers, the uses of terms such as 'brutal' or 'beastly' about violent actions implicitly animalizes those carrying them out and thus distances the supposedly 'human' from the spilling of blood.

Such connections between animalization and violence weave together the spilling of human and nonhuman blood in various ways. In an account of the torture and execution of Massola at Avignon, which Foucault uses as an example of an event that caused 'indignation' even in the early eighteenth century, we can thus read about the use of 'an iron bludgeon of the kind used in slaughter houses' and the detailed dismemberment of Massola 'as one does with an animal' (quoted in Foucault 1977, 51). Alex Mackintosh argues in his reading of the passage that such a 'spectacle is particularly shocking because of its slaughterhouse imagery', and it is precisely 'the reduction of the prisoner to an *animal* that is so shocking' in these kinds of descriptions (2017, 170). Thus, humanity is stripped away in part by placing it in opposition to an animality that is revealed within the victim (171). While this includes an implicit acceptance of such violence being done to other animals, it simultaneously shows slaughter as a demeaning act, in which the victim—human or nonhuman—is reduced to something less than they were. Hence, the animalization of the human through slaughter imagery draws out the violence of slaughter that would otherwise often be downplayed when the victims are nonhuman. Moreover, it highlights the fact that slaughter is always a violent exercise of power, regardless of how benign we might imagine it to be or of the

[5] The sentence 'My surgeon is a butcher' continues to be one of the most commonly discussed examples among researchers of metaphor across different disciplines (cf. Forceville 2014; Grady et al. 1999; Li et al. 2012).

distance we create between ourselves and the act of killing. In other words, the sheer viscerality and the slaughter imagery in descriptions of torture and executions serve as a reminder of the similarities between two types of situations in which dominant power is being exercised violently and directly on the bodies of those condemned.

In connections such as these, between human and nonhuman corporeality and vulnerability, lies an evocative potential of both acts and sites of slaughter, which can be used in literature. Whether the bodies affected are human or nonhuman, such visceral violence has the potential to bring out a notion of shared corporeality that blurs distinctions to dramatic effect. This, for instance, is what happens in Esteban Echeverría's classic story *The Slaughteryard* (*El Matadero*, 1871), which in a number of ways mirrors the kinds of torture scenes described in Foucault's work. Set in 1830s Argentina, Echeverría's story details an incident of mob violence against a political dissident in a city slaughter yard that is replete with rough characters and the symbolism of violence against the innocent. It is introduced as a place that 'appeared to hum with grotesque activity', as well as one filled with 'obscene and filthy words' spoken by 'the rabble of Buenos Aires slaughteryards', who display a 'beastly cynicism' ('cinismo bestial') (Echeverría 2010, 13, 16/76). Moreover, it is shown early on as a place with thieves and urchins fighting and stealing and, at one point, surrounding and baiting an 'old woman' 'as if they were dogs around a bull, pelting her with meat and dung, and guffawing and bellowing' (16); thus, the events of the slaughter yard form 'a reflection in miniature of the savage manner in which individuals and society claim their rights and thrash out their disputes' (17).

As the story unfolds, we witness first the attempted escape and finally the slaughter of a bull and then the torture of a young man, making comparisons between the two types of slaughter not only feasible, but difficult to deny. As the bull 'bellowed and foamed at the mouth in fury' at being lassoed, so the young man is 'beside himself with rage' and there is a continued focus on blood in both cases, from that 'gushing from [the bull's] wound' and on the 'blood-stained knife' of the butcher after the slaughter to the 'violent throb of [the young man's] arteries', the 'blood-spattered bullies' who lift him onto a table and a 'stream' or 'river' of blood finally emitted by the young man as he dies (17–18, 28, 23, 30, 31, 32). The parallel between the bull and the human victim is not lost on the characters, who comment that the young man is 'as angry as a wild bull', call for the butcher to '[s]lit his throat the way you slit the bull's', and cry out that

they will 'tame' him (27, 26, 29). In this way, the very real slaughter of a nonhuman animal quickly becomes a metaphor in the violent attack on a human, and the site of slaughter is thus essential in the animalization of the human victim, who is also called a 'dog' earlier on (24). This allows Echeverría to effectively draw out the connections between violence and the dehumanization of political dissidents. The victim is, however, far from the only one animalized in the story, and acts of slaughter become framed as animalizing those carrying them out as well as their victims. While the young man is primarily likened to the wild, yet innocent, bull, the mob and the butchers are compared to dogs and later other predators, as they are 'flocking to close in on the victim like birds of prey on the skeleton of an ox' and 'falling like vultures on a helpless victim' (16, 25, 26). Moreover, the young man himself calls the violence he is subjected to 'bestial' and compares his assailants to wolves, tigers, and panthers (29–30). In this way, the torture he endures is framed as acts of wild predators on their innocent prey, but at the same time contrasted with nature by the implication that the acts of butchers on innocent victims are, at a certain level, inhuman and that their violent profession and their attack on an innocent young man are related in a political system that sees 'anyone who was not a barbarian, a butcher, a cut-throat, or a thief; anyone who was decent or whose heart was in the right place' as a 'barbarous Unitarian' (32).

The site of the slaughter yard in Echeverría's story, then, lends itself to the dehumanization of both the butchers and their human victims, as well as the reduction of the large 'fierce-looking' bull, a 'splendid creature', into a carcass being cut up, which is significant to its plot and a key part of making the story's political message both dramatic and effective (17, 23). While the story predates modern abattoirs, it thus effectively displays some of the literary potential of sites of slaughter in terms of writing about violence, death, and identity. Similarly to Echeverría's slaughter yard, slaughterhouses are still places that tend to reduce the lived lives of both human workers and nonhuman animals. This is seen in the carving up of the bodies of the latter and the questioning or reduction of the identities of the former, whose bodies are controlled and surveyed and whose human characteristics can be put into question by a culture that both craves the product of their work and distances itself from the bloody realities of that work, sometimes to the point of viewing it with suspicion. As the sociologist William E. Thompson has put it in his immersive study of slaughterhouse line work, 'slaughtering and butchering cattle is generally viewed as an undesirable and repugnant job' (1983, 215).

Those depicting slaughter in late modernity also continue to draw on, and sometimes participate in, the stigmatization and marginalization of people working with slaughter. While clearly conceived as a way of bearing witness to nonhuman animal suffering, for instance, Sue Coe's haunting graphic work on animal industries at times seems to demonize workers, who are often depicted with dark or contorted faces. Indeed, Cary Wolfe finds it 'hard to find a human being with a face at all', and sees those he finds as 'often "beastly" or "animalistic" in the traditional, speciesist sense of the word' (2010, 147, 150). In the text that accompanies the graphic art in *Dead Meat* (1995), Coe often shows sympathy for workers' situations, and many of her images at the very least leave open the interpretation that sad faces of workers signify their suffering in the industrial machine, or leave workers' faces strangely anonymous or stripped of individuality (Coe 1995, 53, 59, 74–75). Similarly, it is certainly also possible to interpret the dark faces as symbolic of the conceptual darkness in which the work takes place, away from the eyes of the public. Yet the darkness, along with images that show smiling or uncannily relaxed men as they carry out abuse or slaughter work, seems at the same time at risk of perpetuating stereotypes of the slaughterhouse worker, who becomes positioned somewhere between the oppressed and the downright evil.[6] Beyond the immediate protest at the treatment and killing of animals, which is a key impetus for Coe's work, there is thus a sense of a lingering suspicion, or fear, that slaughterers come to lack sensitivity or may actually *enjoy* their work of killing, or—since many of her depictions in *Dead Meat* take observations in actual slaughterhouses as their starting point—possibly a downright horror at sometimes finding both enjoyment and a loss of sensibility to be realities.

These same suspicions or fears are a strong component of some literary depictions of slaughterers and butchers. An illustrative example is Australian author Kenneth Cook's *Bloodhouse* (1974), in which the

[6] See, for example, the images 'There Is No Escape', 'Hydroclipper', 'Death Pit', and 'New York State Slaughterhouse' in *Dead Meat* (Coe 1995, 40, insert between 40 and 41). It is worth noting that I am not suggesting that Coe sets out to stereotype or demonize workers, but that particular ideas about slaughterers in the social imaginary may nonetheless be read into her works. Coe herself (qtd. in Baker 2011, 18) expresses 'hope' that '[t]here's neutrality in how I depict the human beings' in her work and Susan McHugh (2011, 177) finds *Dead Meat* to be a 'success as a fragmentary narrative of the conflicting and converging interests of animals, workers, bosses, activists, and artists'. For a discussion of the nonhuman animal faces in Coe's work, see especially Wolfe (2010, 145–58) and Kuzniar (2011).

protagonist John Verdon, whose job it is to hit the skulls of animals with a sledgehammer at the local slaughterhouse, stands accused of murder. Laying out the decision they face, the judge here instructs the jury that '[t]he accused's occupation is a normal, recognized function in society' which gives 'no reason to suppose that a man of John Verdon's occupation is more given to violence than other men' (Cook 1974, 20).

The novella's narrative structure, however, emphasizes exactly the possibility of a connection between violence done to humans and that carried out in the slaughterhouse. Shifting between sections narrated in the second person and a limited omniscient third person narration means that lawyers for defence and prosecution, as well as the judge, effectively address readers directly, putting them in the place of the jury. Yet the instruction from the judge to 'remove from your mind any consideration of the work of the accused' is immediately followed by several pages depicting his workday in the slaughterhouse focalized through the accused John Verdon himself (20, 21–26). Hence, the lingering suspicion that there might be a connection is kept alive for the reader. Indeed, the judge's assertion that there is no reason to think Verdon more prone to violence is in this way almost immediately contradicted not just by depictions of his work of killing, but by his own experience that killing gives him a 'sensation' that he feels 'down to his loins' (21). Moreover, the narrator subsequently reveals that Verdon 'liked killing and he liked to be known as a good killer. Most days he put his hammer through the skulls of a hundred steers without mishap, and he hated it when something went wrong. It just didn't feel good unless he killed properly' (22).

The use of the near-oxymoronic phrase 'good killer' is extremely ambiguous; while Verdon's own meaning is seemingly tied to the professionalism found in using his hammer 'without mishap', the phrase also implicitly raises moral questions, not least because of the human death for which he is on trial. It is possible to read the novella as exploring exactly the question of what a 'good killer' is and whether Verdon is one. As the narrator later comments, Verdon is 'the instrument of a society which needed its meat but didn't have to kill it', in which sense he is a 'good killer' because he fulfils a purpose for his fellow citizens (25). The question, then, is whether by possibly having killed a human being he may have gone from being a 'good killer' to being a bad one. Readers are thus prompted to consider the distance between meat as they know it and the killing that happens in slaughterhouses, but importantly also how, and under which circumstances, killing is acceptable—a question that is put in

relation to species boundaries as both human and nonhuman deaths are part of the plot. This is further emphasized by two 'bad kills' in which Verdon fails to get a clean hit with his sledgehammer and the frustration with which he reacts on the second of these occasions: 'Enraged at the creature's failure to co-operate in its own death, Verdon leaped into the killing pen and stood on the heaving body. He still couldn't get a decent swing at it, but at least he could reach its head. Holding the hammer half way along the handle he pounded at the steer until it finally subsided' (25).

Verdon's enraged treatment of the steer foregrounds yet another meaning of what it might mean to be a 'good killer' in 1970s New South Wales, by depicting the antithesis to the ideas of 'humane slaughter' that seek to identify the necessary conditions for a 'good kill'. Jonathan Burt has shown that what constitutes humane slaughter must always be seen in the contexts created by ideological, moral, scientific, and religious conceptions that shape and modify what the good kill means in part 'by avoiding the overall question of killing and restricting the argument to the kill itself' (2006, 138–9). That is, through focus—in welfarist debates on humane slaughter—on *how* to kill, the question of *whether* to kill is obscured. *Bloodhouse*, however, re-invokes the question of killing as such. Through the implicit connections between the slaughter of nonhuman animals, which might otherwise be viewed only in terms of method, and murder, which is always necessarily viewed as a criminal act in itself, questions of whether to kill and of what killing does to the killer as well as the victim come to the foreground.

Jacques Derrida argued that 'canonized or hegemonic discourse' surrounding animals includes what he called a 'sacrificial structure', by maintaining ways of discerning the quality or nature of human life from the nature of animals' lives so as to avoid extending responsibilities toward humans to 'the living in general' (1995, 278). Through such a structure, discourses leave open 'a place … for a noncriminal putting to death' that is distinguishable from a criminal putting to death, in effect excluding the animal from being an other towards whom the responsibilities found in the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' can be directed (278–79). In *Bloodhouse*, however, the distinction between criminal and noncriminal putting to death becomes blurry. Thus, the place for a noncriminal putting to death has to either narrow, if such deaths are actually connected to criminal ones, or widen, if they are not, since the murder case at the centre of the novella opens the possibility that the criminal and noncriminal putting to death may be connected. Whether it narrows or widens comes to

depend on the question of guilt on Verdon's part, which is a question that the jury and the reader are asked to contemplate. As becomes clearer towards the end of the novella, moreover, Verdon likely did intend to kill someone using slaughterhouse methods, although the outcome is perhaps not what the reader anticipates. The denouement thus ultimately lends some credence to the idea that violence towards humans can be connected to the violence of the slaughterhouse. Yet the way the process places the reader in the role of the jury simultaneously encourages readers to think through their prejudice surrounding both slaughterers and the killing of animals.

The slaughterhouse becomes part of a renegotiation of human identity as it relates to death, but also of the discourses that surround death in the culture in question. Verdon's victims—whether human or nonhuman—are defined by their mortality, their vulnerability to his acts of killing, while he is defined by his ability to kill and thus rendered deviant in relation to humanity as it exists outside the slaughterhouse. Killing thus results in a loss of humanity for the killer even as that humanity in other humans becomes tied to the vulnerability they share with the animals that die by Verdon's hands in the slaughterhouse.

The complex connections between the slaughterer's role in social life and the (im)morality of killing suggested by Cook's novella means killing is shown as questionable in both moral and social terms, which blurs the question of responsibility. Since Verdon is 'an instrument' of society's appetites, there is an implication that we may all be responsible for his killing and mistreatment of animals, and by extension for the murder he may have committed. Certainly, this fits the way the meat industry (along with much commercial business in liberal-capitalist markets) typically views morality as 'the concern only of the individual consumer', whose demand for meat the industry is then ostensibly just responding to (Fiddes 1991, 203). Consumers, meanwhile, are able to shift responsibility onto the slaughterer through the perceived deviance tied to the job of killing, creating a cycle in which responsibility for violence is always displaced onto someone else. Nobody accepts the responsibility for the ethically questionable act of actually killing. Yet the need to place responsibility elsewhere clearly implies that acts of slaughter are perceived as ethically tainted. In *Bloodhouse*, however, responsibility is a complex issue that ultimately renders nobody blameless in relation to killing; just as it is difficult for the reader to disregard Verdon's enjoyment in killing and connections between his violence in and outside of the slaughterhouse, it remains

obvious that his attitudes to killing are shaped by the function he fulfils for those who eat meat but do not kill animals themselves.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, the instrumentality of slaughterhouse workers often shines through in depictions of abattoirs that try to avoid demonizing slaughterers and, indeed, those that quite unambiguously set out to champion workers' rights, such as Sinclair's *The Jungle* or Bertolt Brecht's play *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1931). Since both these works employ the Chicago stockyards to highlight the plight of the working classes and the extent of *human* inequality in capitalist society, intending little focus on other animals, blame is here shifted to the industrial upper classes, who through their exploitation of workers become 'butchers of men' (Brecht 1998, 11). Both texts in this way employ numerous metaphors and similes in which the slaughter of nonhuman animals becomes the vehicle used to describe the treatment of workers, who are instruments not just of society in a broader sense, but also of the capitalist owners, who use both workers and animals to add to their riches and thus become the truly deviant ones when compared to the sympathetically portrayed working masses. Yet both authors ultimately only attempt metaphorical relations and any serious focus on nonhuman suffering as more than figurative is left entirely to readers' will to read against the metaphors. If in markedly different ways, both Coe and Cook, by contrast, more easily invite a greater sense of entwinement between human and nonhuman suffering and deaths.

The consequences of slaughterhouses for both workers and the surrounding community also become central to the plot of Gertrude Colmore's *The Angel and the Outcast*, in which the sisters Yan and Lillian are born into a neighbourhood 'in Deptford, close to slaughter-houses, where are slain daily in their hundreds, sheep and cattle for the feeding of half London; and the slaughter-houses, with their men who kill and their women who work upon what is killed, create a society whose conversation is far from being in heaven' (Colmore 1907, 1). Lillian, however, is adopted by an upper class lady and brought up as her daughter, while Yan remains in the poor Deptford neighbourhood, watching her younger sister from afar, without ever revealing their biological relation. With its publication in 1907, the novel's premise is thus based on questions of nature and nurture found in popular and scientific debates at the time and shows Lillian becoming the 'angel' of the title, while Yan remains the 'outcast'.

Concurrently, the novel also reflects a period of transition as far as human relations to slaughterhouses are concerned, in that it at once

depicts people living in close proximity to slaughterhouses, and a society in which most people outside this immediate proximity live removed from the killing of animals that supplies their meat. As such, the novel presents readers with how both proximity and distance work in relation to 'the wall-enclosed space, where are penned and slain and prepared for the butchers' market unending relays of cattle and sheep' and a society in which the visibility or invisibility of slaughter is largely a class issue (127). In a tone that is sometimes quite moralistic, Colmore's novel thus points to the double standards of polite society when it comes to both the slaughter of animals and the lives of those that work in or live near slaughterhouses. In one striking passage, which is worth quoting at length, one character spends his Sunday visiting 'the building where work ceases not, nor suffering, on any day of the week, and where the Lord's Day Observance Society, busied with prohibitions anent museums and concerts, seeks no jurisdiction' (192). Meanwhile, the narrator comments,

> [i]n the churches the clergymen were reading and preaching from the book which teaches that it is blessed to be merciful, and the people listened decorously, with thoughts turning, as the close of the sermon drew near and breakfast receded further and further away, to the dinners and luncheons awaiting them on their return home; the good old English dinner of roast beef, or the more summerlike fare of lamb or chicken; and in their minds was no thought of the suffering, long drawn out, that went to the making of the time-honoured fare, nor any knowledge that in the pain, the illness, the terror of the slain, were bred the germs of manifold diseases, or that the slaughterman's hammer was constantly avenged by the surgeon's knife. For beef and the Bible are the bulwarks of England's greatness, and to read the one and eat the other, and to probe not too deeply into the origin of either, is the plain and obvious way to temporal and spiritual salvation. (192)

While the novel makes one of its two main characters into an 'angel' in part by lifting her out of the lower classes, Colmore thus at the same time delivers a scathing social and religious critique of the double standards that exist in polite society in relation to Christian duties of mercifulness.

This critique is woven into the plot. A central event in the novel is thus when Yan's estranged lover Bill, who works as a slaughterman, kills a co-worker with his poleaxe in a brawl over the treatment of a 'young bullock' being slaughtered (172–73). Yet the novel emphasizes how it is society's instrumentalization of Bill as a slaughterman that has led him to become a murderer, which becomes the central point of the barrister Rupert

Haste's defence of Bill in the ensuing murder trial. The argument that slaughtermen should be judged by different standards than others due to the work that society bids them do, however, is first made by the vegetarian Lord Cuxhaven at a dinner where Haste is present. Cuxhaven, who is generally presented as a sympathetic character, argues that slaughtermen are 'a class by themselves' who should be treated differently from 'other men' (177–78). Indeed, he asks rhetorically,

> [w]hat is the chief slaughtering centre of the world? Chicago. And do you know the number of murders committed in Chicago last year, in a city where the proportion of slaughtermen is greater than in any other city? A hundred and twenty-eight, my dear fellow, a hundred and twenty-eight; and in London – I should be afraid to say how many times its size – in the same year, twenty-four! What does that show of the brutalizing effect of such a trade? I say, and I say it emphatically, that the community has no right to apply the ordinary code to a class of men on whom it imposes, for its own selfish advantage, a trade so brutalizing as is the slaughter of animals for food. (178)

Cuxhaven's argument, and in part the novel as such, clearly utilizes traditional hierarchical thinking, in which the slaughterer is somehow closer to animals because of his 'brutalizing' work, and hence more prone to violence. Indeed, when Haste later puts forth a similar argument in court, he argues that slaughter work 'entails the blunting, if not the total extinction, of the finer sympathies; the suppression, if not the destruction, of those sentiments of pity for the suffering and compassion for the helpless which are the chief glory of advanced civilization, of Christian communities' (208). Thus, the language of what is really one of the novel's key arguments relies significantly on both human-animal hierarchies and ideas about English and European values as discernible in part through more compassionate attitudes to animals, which came into being during the nineteenth century (see Ritvo 1987, 126–30).

At the same time, however, the significant naturalist emphasis on heredity and environment in the novel somewhat implies the animality of humans as beings controlled by the laws of nature and the social environments in which they live. It is this dynamic, which Colmore uses to turn traditional notions about butchers' lack of morality and insensitivity to violence somewhat on its head. Where Upton Sinclair (1985, 24), in his attempt to stand up for the working man in *The Jungle*—published the year before Colmore's novel—only hints at the effects that the work might

have on slaughterers' treatment of other humans as they 'practice' their violent behaviour 'on their friends, and even on their families', Colmore uses this notion specifically to defend the slaughterer, even while her novel is also significantly more concerned with the suffering of nonhuman animals than Sinclair's was.

Unlike Sinclair, for instance, Colmore does not shy away from directly attributing feelings to the cattle, who are 'rebellious with fear, dazed with dread at the sight and smell of blood', and there is sometimes the sense in *The Angel and the Outcast* that it is exactly *because* the suffering of the animals is undeniable that the work may take its emotional toll on the workers (Colmore 1907, 166). As Bill at one point tells another man while having a drink: 'I'm a merciful man, and it's mercifulness wot draws me on to drink, for I dunno as I could get through with the job if I didn't 'ave a drop ter keep my blood up. An' there's many feels like me' (101). Yet the depiction of the relation between slaughter and the feelings of those humans who are near it is hardly consistent throughout the novel. Thus, passages set in the slaughterhouse and informed partly by ideas of humane slaughter that came out of the Victorian period depict the lower class people that surround and work in the slaughterhouses as largely unable to read the signs of animals in pain or distress. For instance, Yan in her first visit to the slaughterhouse is described as too 'unimaginative and crude in her ideas' to see anything other than 'brute fury in the resistance made by the cattle to their fate', and she watches 'wholly fascinated' a slaughter that is 'to her entirely spectacular, not in the least suggestive' (166).

The Angel and the Outcast thus makes it clear that while the proximity of slaughterhouses has a number of adverse effects on people, much of the coarseness of those in the Deptford community stems as much from poverty and a more general lower class environment as from the smells, sounds, and occasional sights of slaughter that are often mentioned or described in Colmore's novel. If quite didactically, the novel points its finger at the classes of society who have the good fortune to live away from slaughter, and who should therefore not judge the slaughterer, whose sensibilities are changed by the job society bids him do. As such, in Colmore's narrative, the butcher is less the demonized deviant and more the victim of a society whose desires for meat he helps fulfil. It is a message that can perhaps only be carried forth by depicting the conditions of slaughterhouses for those who might normally choose to ignore them. As one reviewer wrote of the novel, 'it is impossible that any author should have

inflicted upon his [sic] readers such ghastly descriptions of the doings in a slaughterhouse had he [sic] not a mission of reform in his [sic] mind' (*Spectator* 1907, 423).

(En)Gendered Slaughter

If Colmore's didacticism makes *The Angel and the Outcast* less engaging than some other slaughterhouse narratives, the novel is nevertheless also remarkable for its depiction of how slaughter work is divided by gender. As numerous scholars and critics have pointed out, cultural and social ideas about meat are permeated by conceptions of gender roles, and especially of masculinities, and such notions perhaps find their purest expression in conceptions of killing and slaughter work as manly (e.g. Adams 2000; Fiddes 1991, 144–62; Halley 2012; Rogers 2008; Rothgerber 2012; Sobal 2005; Vialles 1994, 94–124). In Colmore's depiction of the characters in the community, the violence of slaughter work in part manifests itself as violence towards women; talking of her slaughterman father, Yan at one point tells Bill how 'Wen 'e was sober 'e got rid of 'is spitefulness by mykin' awye with hanimals, an' wen 'e was drunk 'e was all for mykin awye with mother' (1907, 99). Although many women work in the slaughterhouse, none of them carry out any of the killing work, nor are they allowed to be in the sections of the slaughterhouse where killing takes place.

While Sinclair's *The Jungle* depicts similar divisions of labour in the Chicago stockyards around the same time, and also briefly mentions the potential violence of slaughtermen to their families, it never dwells on these issues and largely just accepts them as facts that supplement the story of the male protagonist.[7] Because Colmore's narrative, by contrast, is centred on female characters, issues related to how women are perceived in relation to slaughter come more to the foreground.

The division of labour is not, however, merely about perceived connections between killing and masculinity, but also about how the gender politics of the slaughterhouse leaves the most degrading work—namely the handling and cleaning of offal and entrails—to women. As Tillie Olsen was later to point out in relation to Omaha slaughterhouses in *Yonnondio*, the

[7] It is worth noting, though, that Sinclair's novel does show a sensibility towards, and sympathy for, the particular effects that poverty can have for women, not least in terms of the risks of childbirth without proper medical care, as well as prostitution and sexual blackmail.

hot rooms in which women worked with offal were places 'where men will not work' (2004, 166). Here, in Olsen's narrative, the women are 'breathing with open mouth, learning to pant shallow to endure the excrement reek of offal, the smothering stench from the blood house below' (166). Despite the different setting in *The Angel and the Outcast* some thirty years before Olsen's descriptions of 1930s Omaha, Yan's experience of her work in the Deptford slaughterhouse is remarkably similar:

> when Yan got to work, the warmth that had been friendly out of doors became an enemy. She stood at her tub, 'sliming the runners', that is, cleaning the entrails of the newly slaughtered animals and preparing them for sausage skins. It is not pleasant work. Intestines are not tempting to handle, and the smell of offal is not savoury. It is said that the humblest task may partake of the dignity of labour, yet this particular trade seems to have only a degrading effect upon the women who follow it, and to be out of keeping with an improved standard of manners and morals. (Colmore 1907, 158)

There is, it seems from Colmore's descriptions, a sense of both social and moral degradation attached to the work which women can carry out in the slaughterhouse. Writing about the American meatpacking industry, historian Roger Horowitz points to how women's jobs in the industry in the first half of the twentieth century carried 'far less social status' than men's jobs, and could be a source of shame rather than the pride sometimes attached to the jobs of male butchers (1997, 195). In Colmore's novel, Yan is at first resistant to taking the job when Bill suggests it, since '[i]t's beastly and dirty an' it stinks orful' (1907, 104). As the issue of bad smells connected to women's work in the slaughterhouse is a recurring one, it becomes an indicator of the suppression of women through their allocation to the dirtiest jobs in the poor slaughterhouse communities that both Colmore and Olsen depict.

While Bill as a slaughterman is able to talk of his trade with a certain pride when challenged by fellow drinkers after hours, Yan's job in the slaughterhouse thus gives her little besides suffering and exposure to bad odours, and certainly helps neither her social standing nor her self-worth (99–101). Bill's trade as a killer, by comparison, is a trade of skill, and both the narrator and the barrister Rupert Haste emphasize his skill in his defence, since 'his very mastery of his trade caused a hasty impulse to take on the form of a crime' when he committed the murder for which he is eventually put on trial (210). As Horowitz has pointed out, the very flow

of the meat through slaughterhouses, and the new processes that were added to take care of by-products in meatpacking, made gender 'simply part of the physical landscape, a seemingly intrinsic element of the production process reflected in places where men and women worked' (1997, 189). In effect, slaughterhouses came to shape attitudes to gender in relation to meat and slaughter as modern abattoirs developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and men's jobs were always in higher regard since 'no work can begin in a packinghouse until the animal is slaughtered' and the raw materials for processing thus provided (193). Like the animals, workers—and particularly women workers—were ultimately kept in place through the design of production lines and buildings that came with the industrial abattoir.

In *The Angel and the Outcast*, however, different and sometimes slightly contradictory values and attitudes to gender seem to be at play. While the narrator at one point comments that 'the way in which the women of the Slaughter Houses contribute to the feeding of their fellows is a way that makes ugly marks upon their faces and their minds', Yan is a character who is seen to be in a constant struggle between the good and the bad in herself as she attempts to resist drinking and acts out of love for both Lillian and Bill at various times (Colmore 1907, 128). Thus, though she does not always 'win' the 'battle' against her desires for drinking, readers are to understand that she is in many ways a good person for whom they should have sympathy (128). While smell is, for instance, connected to the base nature of her work and her fellow workers, it is thus telling of how she is essentially too good a person for slaughter work that she 'never' becomes 'accustomed' to 'the smell which hung always in the atmosphere' where the women work with intestines, just as she does not take part in the 'constantly gross, often worse than gross' talk of her fellow workers (158, 128). Hence, although we are interestingly told that 'the animal was strong and well grown in Yan', she escapes sinking to the level of the 'beastly' job she carries out, which is indicative of how the 'outcast' does, after all, have some of the qualities of her 'angel' sister, and how these qualities are challenged by the poverty and low morals of the slaughterhouse community (129, 104). Similarly, there are hints at sensibility to the suffering of animals, as when Yan dreams one night of 'the bellowing of frightened beasts, while blood flowed over her bed, crimsoning the sheets' (190). In the end, while her traditionally feminine sensibilities may be repressed by the environment Yan lives in, and may be better cultivated in

the polite society of her sister Lillian, Colmore's narrative nonetheless tacitly suggests that the nature of a good person cannot stay entirely hidden.

Horowitz notes of meatpacking in the U.S. that some of the structures that held gender divisions in place began to change in the second half of the twentieth century, not least as female workers became better organized and unions grew stronger, meaning that 'female packinghouse workers forced their way onto jobs where men still believed women did not belong' (1997, 211). Yet in effect, many slaughter professions—in the U.S. and elsewhere—remain highly gendered, in reality and, as most narratives considered in the present book attest to, not least in the way slaughter is imagined (e.g. Pachirat 2011, 16–17, 63, 73–74; Vialles 1994, 101–10).[8] Perhaps this is one reason why it can seem strangely fitting that the abattoir is also absent for much of Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998), given that its focus on meat is narrated mostly through two female characters. Certainly, given that 'Meat is the Message' is the first sentence of the novel's first chapter, the absence of actual slaughter for most of the narrative seems conspicuous (Ozeki 1998, 7).

Defining her influential concept of the 'absent referent', feminist critic Carol J. Adams asserts that

> [b]ehind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The 'absent referent' is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. … Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that 'meat,' meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image. (2000, 14)

In *My Year of Meats*, meat largely performs this function as a 'free-floating image'; it is, it seems, everywhere, yet, until very late in the novel, the living animals and their slaughter are hardly mentioned. Ozeki's novel is made up of a complex mix of different narrative forms (first and third person narratives, corporate memos and faxes, journal entries, programme notes and so on), which all serve to question boundaries between fact and fiction and destabilize any notion of authenticity (Cornyetz 2001, 211).

[8] As Horowitz's article shows, the gendering of slaughter work is historically tied to a complex interplay of technological advances, labour politics, and racial politics as well as social issues surrounding notions of gender per se, and has thus changed as these various issues have evolved in society. Yet, as he notes, '[t]he conditions under which women labor in the 1990s all too often recall Tillie Olsen's vivid account of the 1930s' (1997, 212).

At the centre of the narrative is a 'documentary' series for Japanese television titled *My American Wife!*, sponsored by a corporate lobby organization promoting the export of American meats ('BEEF-EX') and with the mandate of fostering 'among Japanese housewives a proper understanding of the wholesomeness of U.S. meats' (Ozeki 1998, 10). As the documentary affects, and ties together, the lives of two women—one the Japanese-American filmmaker hired to make the series, the other the wife of the Japanese advertising executive in charge of the show—the novel weaves together a complex web of issues concerning meat, media, and identity politics related to race, gender, and the export of ostensibly 'American' ideals. The filmmaker (and the novel's primary narrator), Jane Takagi-Little, is increasingly critical of the project in various ways.

As Susan McHugh has noted, 'no topic may be more conspicuously absent than animal slaughter in contemporary popular culture' (2011, 175). The plot of *My Year of Meats* reflects this absence, which is made all the more striking because the novel continually questions the authenticity of representations and the nature of truth itself, suggesting that truths are constructed rather than universal. This is done partly through the form of the novel, which repeatedly reminds readers of its relationship with the real world and thus blurs the line between fact and fiction. It is a chord struck from the beginning, with an 'Author's Note', which informs readers that the book 'is a work of fiction', only to question the fictionality by revealing that 'references to actual events, to real persons, living or dead, or to real locales are intended only to give the novel a sense of reality and authenticity'; thus, the distinction between fact and fiction is questioned and unstable before the reader embarks on the first chapter. This instability of the boundary between fact and fiction continues through an emphasis on, and discussion of, the possibilities and perils of representation throughout the book, alongside inclusion of factual information at times. At one particular point, leading up to a few pages on the history of the use of the growth hormone diethylstilbestrol (DES), Jane's narration asks readers to '[b]ear with me; this is an important Documentary Interlude', demonstrating again how the novel fictionalizes facticity itself as real events and issues are knitted into its fictions (Ozeki 1998, 124). Unusually for a novel, it also includes a bibliography at the end, which starts with yet another 'Author's Note', signed not by the author, but with Jane's initials, blurring also the distinction between author and narrator and thus a significant part of any basis for distinguishing between authenticity and fictionality in the narrative (363). As Jane states toward the end of the novel:

'In the Year of Meats, truth wasn't stranger than fiction; it *was* fiction. Ma says I'm neither here nor there, and if that's the case, so be it. Half documentarian, half fabulist … Maybe sometimes you have to make things up, to tell truths that alter outcomes' (360, emphasis and ellipsis orig.). Hence, we are told, there is truth in the novel's fiction and fiction in its truths—representations should not be trusted, but can be useful, and 'truths' should perhaps be judged on their outcomes.

Of course, since meat is a central theme of the novel, this applies not least to the 'truth' about American meats, which is constructed through the making of episodes of *My American Wife!* and disseminated to Japanese housewives. In the novel's perspective, then, meat without animal slaughter or other unpleasant aspects is constructed as culture, built as much on these absences as on its culinary presence within 'American' culture. The instalments of the show feature at their centre an American wife, preparing her best American, meaty meal for her family, through which the programme caters to preconceived ideas of ostensibly 'authentic' American cultural identity and its relation to meat. Thus, the wives in the show should preferably reflect particular demographics, since 'market studies show that the average Japanese wife finds a middle-to-upper-middle-class white American woman with two to three children to be both sufficiently exotic and yet reassuringly familiar', while the meat in the show should preferably be beef, with other meats seen as 'second class' (13, 12). As the advertising company tells Jane, 'remember this easy motto: "Pork is Possible, but Beef is Best!"' (12). The novel thus continually stresses ties between meat and identity; Jane correctly but disconcertingly translates the instructions she gets from the show's producers about what is 'desirable' (e.g. '[a]ttractiveness, wholesomeness') and 'undesirable' (e.g. '[p]hysical imperfections', '[s]econd class peoples') for the series, when she remarks to her lover Sloan that '[t]hey don't want their meat to have a synergistic association with deformities. Like race. Or poverty' (11–12, 57).

Most prominent among the many identity issues tied to the novel's narratives on meat is gender. *My American Wife!*, Jane relates to her research staff, 'is looking to create a new truism: *The wife who serves meat has a kinder, gentler mate*' (13, italics orig.). While this is on the surface about responding to 'Japanese market studies [which] show that Japanese wives often feel neglected by their husbands and are susceptible to the qualities of kindness, generosity, and sweetness that they see as typical of American men', the 'truism' contains an implicit threat of neglect and violence that

wives may experience if they do not serve meat. This is made explicit for Akiko, the novel's other main character, as she is expected to watch and rate the shows when they air in Japan and cook the week's meaty dish for her husband Joichi Ueno, who is in effect Jane's boss on the show. Here, disagreements about the wholesomeness and authenticity of the families portrayed, as well as Akiko's inability to stomach the beef in the dishes, lead to reactions that are anything but kind and gentle as Ueno abuses Akiko verbally, physically, and sexually. For Ueno, what he sees as Akiko's stubborn reluctance to eat meat is sabotage of his plans to father an heir, as he connects meat with not just male virility, but also the vitality and wholesomeness of the families with children he intends *My American Wife!* to portray.

My Year of Meats entwines the topics of meat and reproduction in various ways; Jane eventually discovers how her own problems with infertility may stem from her in utero exposure to DES, which was originally developed for cattle, but also prescribed to pregnant women in her mother's generation until it was linked to cancer and birth defects. From this point onwards, the use of hormones in meat becomes an important theme in the novel and demonstrates yet another, if more subtle, kind of violence and biopolitical control that affects both women and nonhuman animals. In effect, both women and animals are expected to perform particular roles—the women as mothers conforming to particular stereotypes, and the animals as reproductive units gaining weight for the meat industry—and they are medicated if they don't. The subtle violence of hormone poisoning is thus implicitly linked to sexual identities, which the novel highlights in other ways as well. Researching a potential episode of *My American Wife!*, Jane interviews the Dawes couple, who tell her how hormones from chicken gave the husband breasts and made him 'sound just like a woman', and visiting a rancher's family she later encounters five-year-old Rose, who has prematurely developed breasts, pubic hair, and menstrual bleeding (117, 275–76). Through its focus on the hormones in meat, the novel thus demonstrates and links the vulnerability of humans and nonhumans alike, since the hormones function as enhancers in biopolitical control of animals' bodies, yet can have adverse effects for humans who come into contact with those bodies, whether through proximity or consumption.

Like slaughter, however, this subtle violence of meat is supposed to remain under the radar of consumers, and Jane's subversive attempts to present it are clearly at odds with the happy, meat-filled American lives, which *My American Wife!* is intended to show. The same is, of course, the

case with the camera crew's visit to a slaughterhouse late in the novel. It is telling that the slaughterhouse scene itself questions the plausibility of what it depicts—namely a documentary film crew gaining full access to a slaughterhouse—and thus indirectly highlights the concealment of slaughter and its absence in the preceding parts of the narrative (and in media content more generally). When Jane and her crew arrive at the slaughterhouse, the manager there exclaims: 'I don't care who yer working for, I don't like this one bit. […] Said y'all want to take some pictures to take back home with you to Japan, but I'm damned if I know why. Kill floor's no place for sightseein' (280). The reference to sightseeing is significant not just for its implicit racial stereotyping of Japanese as tourists, but also because it highlights the selection that goes on in representation. In sightseeing, sights that are aesthetically pleasing or stimulating will typically be chosen over those that are unpleasant in one way or another. This is a selection not unlike, and yet often the reverse of, that in which documentary film makers will privilege some shots over others both in filming and editing. Thus, the mention of sightseeing can be read as alluding to problematic aspects of the representations of meat made by the documentary crew in earlier parts of the novel.

In making *My American Wife!* Jane and her crew have been performing the same task as a tour guide for sightseers and have constructed a pleasant and reassuring representation of meat in American culture for Japanese viewers, while arguably the job of documentary film makers is often seen as the opposite of this, namely uncovering that which needs to be seen, but is presently not. In this way, Ozeki highlights the presence of selection in what is seen by the public and what is regarded as unsightly and may be aesthetically or ethically unsettling in the negotiation of sight and representation. In this negotiation, reality is constructed through selection as the sights that are deemed suitable for public consumption will ultimately be seen, while others—and typically the sights found in abattoirs among them—will remain unseen. Ironically, then, the slaughterhouse boss is right in more ways than one when he says the abattoir is not for sightseeing, since the film crew is there to film and expose the unsightly and unpleasant, thus reversing the selection of reality that happens in sightseeing.

In a comment that attempts to uphold hegemonic masculine anthropocentrism by using the idea that 'city folks' are somehow out of touch with (natural or necessary) reality, Gale—the son of the feedlot owner connected with the slaughterhouse—half-mockingly states: 'We gotta educate

these city folks, show 'em how we murder our animals round here, ain't that right, Miz Takagi? How we stick it to 'em. That's what you want, ain't it?' (280). In Gale's passive-aggressive statement ideas about 'post-domesticity' and a humanity increasingly removed from the processes that bring about our food, proposed by theorists such as Richard W. Bulliet and John Berger, become means for justifying his manipulation of animals and women through implicit reference to a supposed clarity he allegedly has exactly because he is not 'city folks'. Yet Ozeki's narrative implicitly criticizes such ideas that automatically connect the rural to the natural or the urban to the unnatural. It does so both by continually questioning any—and all—truths and realities and by showing a meat industry that is thoroughly an unnatural construction—from the cultural representations of meat to the growth of cattle through hormone use—rather than a product of natural processes, whether pleasant or unpleasant.

To be sure, the reality of the slaughterhouse itself is depicted as overwhelming—and arguably stripped of the always questionable representations that make up the rest of the narrative—but it is depicted as far from pleasant and serves to highlight its absence from the preceding parts of the novel. Indeed, the reality found in the slaughterhouse seems to question the very way Jane perceives the world in general: 'Stepping into the slaughterhouse was like walking through an invisible wall into hell. Sight, sound, smell – every sense I thought I owned, that was mine, the slaughterhouse stripped from me, overpowered and assaulted' (Ozeki 1998, 281). That the language attached to her experience of the slaughterhouse is that of assault is no coincidence, since the novel continually plays on intersections between meat and gendered violence.

In *The Parallel Lives of Women and Cows* (2012), sociologist Jean O'Malley Halley explores ways in which American culture has developed through the normalization of male violence to women and animals, arguing that 'men, "real men," continue to become men through sexual and other violence. Gender *happens* through violence. Simultaneous to this ideology of becoming-through-violence, violence is also increasingly understood to be repulsive, and is therefore hidden from mainstream view' (Halley 2012, 122, emphasis orig.). Both hidden and violent, the slaughterhouse serves as a case in point for Halley, who uses her traumatic family history to exemplify entwinements of hidden male violence to women, children, and animals, as well as for Ozeki, who fictionalizes similar issues. In *My Year of Meats*, episodes of rape and sexual assault against both Akiko and Jane are easily read as Ueno's attempts at such

becoming-through-violence, which assigns the women particular roles as they are 'overpowered and assaulted'; as Ueno stresses on different occasions, he wishes to be a father, and he attempts to control women for this purpose. As Jane struggles to get him off her, it seems only 'to excite him further', and he later rapes Akiko both anally and vaginally since '[i]t doesn't matter where, because you are a sterile, useless woman', infuriated even by her lack of resistance (Ozeki 1998, 109, 238–39). Here the struggle seems to be part of the point of male violence, which creates identity by overpowering the resistance it encounters or provokes. Similarly, Gale's suggestion that the slaughterhouse demonstrates how to 'murder our animals' or 'stick it to 'em' suggests a violence that assigns or strengthens particular identities in the relation between slaughterers and their victims. As a woman—an abject being in a violent male-dominated workplace—then, it is fitting that Jane similarly feels that the senses by which she quite literally navigates her place in the world are 'stripped, overpowered and assaulted'.

As I touched upon briefly in Chap. 2, the events depicted when Jane and her film crew visit the slaughterhouse have potential for empathic engagement with the animals that have at this point otherwise been an absent referent for the first three quarters of the novel. The cow slaughter emphasizes the individual slaughtered and when they first arrive, Jane's narration describes 'bellows of pain' stemming from the whip cracks on cattle hides (279, 283). Yet, as in the rest of the novel, human identity issues steal most of the show in Ozeki's depiction of the slaughterhouse. In large parts, *My Year of Meats* is easily read as a kind of fictionalization of Carol J. Adams' theories of intersecting violence towards women and animals in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, which not only link rape and butchering, but also demonstrate how women are often portrayed as meat, while meat and animals are often objectified in feminine terms. Examples of such intersections in language and culture abound in the novel, from a stripper with a 'round rump' straddling Ueno's 'tenderloin', through pornography ('Texas T-Bone Does the Hoosier Hooters') in which 'the climax was always about meat', to 'kitchen magnets … shaped like voluptuous humanoid cows in cocktail gowns' at a beef trade show (Ozeki 1998, 43, 53, 227). Men in the novel thus consume women and animals in parallel, and the consumption of meat is closely tied to violent, exploitative masculinity.

Hence, there is significant justification for arguing, as Monica Chiu has done, that '[t]o refuse meat, in Ozeki's novel, is to reject men', which fits

nicely with Adams' proposal of vegetarianism as part of feminist resistance to patriarchal violence and power (Chiu 2004, 154). Yet the question of eating (or not eating) meat is somewhat more complicated in the novel. One possible critique of Adams' work is that her proposed vegetarianism 'is in danger of itself aligning women with passivity', which could actually strengthen gender stereotypes (Ryan 2015, 140). Ozeki, meanwhile, partly counters this critique through the inclusion of episodes where meat figures positively as part of female resistance or liberation. When Jane makes an episode of *My American Wife!* that features lamb chops, Ueno is furious because most Japanese lamb imports come from Australia rather than the U.S., but Akiko finds the meat 'delicious' and is able to keep it down, unlike the many beef dishes she is forced to make and eat, and when Akiko finally leaves Ueno and travels to the U.S., dishes with chicken and turkey form part of the social situations that make her feel welcome and cared for (Ozeki 1998, 143, 336–39). Akiko's rejection of Ueno is thus at least partly tied to the meats he considers inferior. Hence, the role of meat remains a largely personal issue, although one that Jane, too, struggles with. At one point when she is pregnant, she is nonetheless able to read about 'the death screams of a slaughtered lamb (exactly like the cry of a human baby)', yet still eat meat (207). Although she is able to observe and reflect on her own psychic numbing, she is unable to shake the habit. As Cheryl Fish has argued, the novel can at this point be taken to show 'that the desire to eat meat is caused by a combination of cultural, intellectual, biological, and habitual conditioning that should be personally confronted' (2009, 56).

To be sure, Jane's most subversive act is arguably her decision to make an episode of the series on a biracial lesbian vegetarian couple, but the novel ultimately depicts more of a diversity of possible modes of resistance to the identities male violence subjects women to, both symbolically and literally. Indeed, Jane's visit to the slaughterhouse, and the subsequent editing of the footage, are acts of resistance which are less about the personal self-control exercised through eating habits and more about the control of the representation that casts both women and animals as consumables. When Jane writes the original pitch for *My American Wife!* at the beginning of the novel, the wives on the show must be 'attractive, appetizing, and all-American' and 'never tough or hard to digest', while each episode 'must culminate in the celebration of a featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption' (Ozeki 1998, 8). By the time Jane visits the slaughterhouse, however, she has moved beyond such ideas of

easy consumption and is thus able to go inside the highly male place of violence to complicate the consumability of individuals. Although for Jane this complication happens particularly in the exposure of the use of hormones in meat, and of the effects they have on humans, the scene in the slaughterhouse itself also depicts the slaughter of a cow, who is clearly a conscious, female individual, and the male indifference to her suffering. When the cow is improperly stunned, the worker merely shrugs, climbs down, and wraps 'a chain around her hind leg. It was attached to a winch that hoisted her up into the air, where she hung upside down, slowly spinning, head straining, legs kicking wildly in their search for solid ground' (283). The slaughter thus becomes yet another act of normalized male violence that disregards the female subject for the benefit of consumption.

As exemplified by the fact that the target audience of *My American Wife!* are Japanese housewives, patriarchal commercialism paradoxically relies on women's consumption choices, which casts women into a dually passive identity as homemakers and consumers within frames and representations that reproduce a particular culture designed for the needs of men. Yet many of the women in the novel ultimately reject the normalized passivity that such a culture intends for them. By actively seeking to tell other, more diversified and complicated stories, Jane is continually challenging the representations that reproduce the roles of both women and animals (as meat) in society, just as Akiko is rejecting those representations when she disagrees with her husband about the authenticity or believability of families that appear on the show. As Akiko tries to explain to Ueno about the family on one episode: 'it felt like they were hiding something' (40). *My American Wife!* echoes meat as a product because, as it is envisioned by Ueno and BEEF-EX, it shows the perfect façade of the meaty family meal rather than the unwelcome truths underneath. Short as it is, the slaughterhouse scene in *My Year of Meats* epitomises what such unwelcome truths look like and thus how, in Jane's words, 'ignorance is an act of will' made 'over and over again' to keep things—including the roles of women and of animals—not as they are, but as we want them to be (334).

Slaughter, Identities, Animals

Ostensibly human identity politics in relation to slaughter also tell us a lot about how we view nonhuman animals. By doing work that is labelled 'brutal' or 'beastly', slaughterers become dehumanized through the idea

that violence is nature rather than culture, animal rather than human. Indeed, when used about humans as victims, the very word 'slaughter' itself easily comes to connote something deemed unworthy of humans. Viewed along these lines, creating a distance to slaughter can become a way in which we dissociate the supposedly 'human' from that which we term 'animal'. Yet slaughter also reminds us of how human and nonhuman fates are intertwined, how human and nonhuman blood is alike, how both workers and animals can be victims, while the sexualisation of 'meat' as a symbol for women reveals patterns of dominance in which the victimization and vulnerability of humans and animals intersect. Moreover, the discourse of species arguably finds one of its strongest expressions when the slaughtered animal is used disparagingly as a metaphor for humans that are marginalized and oppressed. As Carol J. Adams notes, '[i]f the words favored for insulting others are any sign, the animals whom we consume do not figure grandly in any hierarchy of value' (1994, 38). Thus, depictions of slaughter and attitudes to humans who are tangled up with abattoirs or compared to meat, or whose fates are compared to slaughter, show us something about not only slaughter itself, but also about how the marginalization of different humans and nonhumans in our social imaginary is reproduced through slaughter, through meat, and through representations thereof.

In addition, depictions of humans marginalized or victimized in the context of slaughter can sometimes serve as a reminder that speaking of animals as objectified does not necessarily imply that they are not also considered sentient or feeling. Saying that women or workers are objectified by capitalist industry or commercialism does not say that their sentience is denied, even if it is ignored. Indeed, for nonhuman animals at least, sentience may even function as part of an argument for continued exploitation, as it arguably does when slaughter is justified by calling it 'humane' (Higgin et al. 2011, 177–78). The objectification and marginalization of humans can thus make processes of domination and marginalization conspicuous, showing us patterns of exploitation that affect both humans and nonhumans. Erika Cudworth (2011, 154) has argued that 'farming of animals has long been, and continues to be, the most significant social formation of human-animal relations', yet killing—arguably the end point of such farming for the animals—similarly forms our relations with other animals and informs relations between humans as well, both when confronted and when absent.

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CHAPTER 7

Dark Spaces: The Horrific Slaughterhouse

There is, perhaps, an intuitive connection between the horror genre and slaughterhouse settings. When I have described my work on this book to people, especially outside of literary or animal studies, as being about literary slaughterhouses, they have often simply assumed I must be writing primarily, if not exclusively, about horror or gothic literature. To be sure, both the violence and isolation of slaughterhouses fit well with horrific modes; although slaughterhouses in my experience occur less frequently in horror novels and films than we might imagine, they remain a sort of archetypal horror setting alongside places like haunted castles and dark cemeteries (Aldana Reyes 2016, 8). Thus, even outside of the genres that typically engage most vividly with horror, the slaughterhouse often has an ambience that connects it with horrific or gothic modes, as illustrated by the uncanniness surrounding slaughterers and their workplace in, for example, Kenneth Cook's *Bloodhouse*, or by the images of workers as living dead in Tristan Egolf's *Lord of the Barnyard*. Indeed, one might plausibly extend Cyndy Hendershot's assertion that '[t]he disruptive Gothic' as a mode 'resists territorialisation by invading other genres' by viewing the appearance of slaughterhouses in other genres as just such an invasion (1998, 1).

At the heart of the horrific are arguably always questions of space and place, and an exploration of distance and proximity as horror literature (or films) allows readers (or viewers) to experience what they may fear or find repulsive at a safe distance (Clasen 2017, 53). While it typically plays on an

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approximation to the world of the reader, spaces in horror fiction are, most often, closed off in this sense as well as in the sense that the world of the story is often limited in time and/or space, so that the—in reality perhaps obvious—solution of simply removing oneself from the danger does not seem viable to the characters. Manuel Aguirre argues simply that '[t]he world is defined in horror literature as *space* and, furthermore, as a closed space' (1990, 2, italics orig.). However, while Aguirre's work considers closed space mostly in the form of human places that can be invaded or may unwillingly open up, it is helpful to consider horror in terms of its relation to heterotopias as well. In fact, heterotopic spaces can haunt literary works in two ways: either that which is seen to belong inside the heterotopia (zombies from the cemetery, monsters from the laboratory, criminals from the prison etc.) roams free outside it or we, meaning relatively non-deviant humans, willingly or unwillingly find ourselves inside a heterotopia that is normally considered as separate from our society.

As a heterotopia that we tend to keep at a distance, the abattoir therefore fits the genre well; by breaking down boundaries between the killings in the slaughterhouse and surrounding society—and often between the killing of other animals and that of humans—horror fiction can confront us with the anxieties that surround slaughter and that may indeed have led to the abattoir becoming a heterotopia in the first place. This also aligns with Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection as stemming from that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' and 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' in her seminal work *The Powers of Horror* (1982, 4). While the structure of the slaughterhouse itself is set in place to preserve a system, a hierarchy, and a distance so as to not confuse the flesh and blood of species placed at different hierarchical levels, slaughter itself does not respect such boundaries. Indeed, it is arguably exactly because the blood, flesh, screams, lives, and deaths of other animals can be so reminiscent of the same phenomena in humans that the slaughterhouse is often isolated. In its relation to the abject, it can stir both moral and physical disgust, and make us anxious about our own self-concepts and our own vulnerability.

'The abject confronts us', Kristeva argues, 'with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*', and it is thus through abjection that 'primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder' (12–13, italics orig.). Arguably, however, such acts of demarcation are by

no means confined to what Kristeva considers 'primitive societies'; rather, there is a constant negotiation of boundaries, a shifting process carried out in spaces where perceptions of culture are threatened by the nonhuman animal, because they may show how sex, murder, and violence belong as much, if not more, to the human as they do to the animal. The abattoir is one such place: a highly cultural construction that attempts internally to make killing and violence systematic—to establish order—while externally also attempting to separate such killing from entering our culture. When literature confronts us with the violence of the slaughterhouse, therefore, it is confronting us with the abject in the form of the ambiguities that arise from what we share with other animals despite discourses that tell us differently. Indeed, in our actions of violence and killing at the abattoir, we demonstrate only too abundantly how we shape cultural practice through exactly those sides of ourselves that we would rather imagine as being 'animal'. As such, slaughterhouses in literature can be seen as having almost an inherently disruptive quality to them, which provides ample opportunity for feelings such as anxiety, dread, disgust, and fear, which are the mainstay of gothic and horror fiction.

One view of horror is that it has the capacity to explore 'what is most repressed by society', for instance in the form of unspoken fears and traumas that we otherwise banish to heterotopias and attempt to forget about (Aldana Reyes 2016, 11). Since most people arguably collectively deny or forget about the slaughterhouse and what it represents in their daily lives (Gjerris 2015, 524–27; Joy 2002, 111–24; Presser 2013, 50–68), this certainly seems to open up an argument that horror is particularly well suited to delve into the anxieties connected with the slaughter of other animals. Some such anxieties may seem tied to perhaps somewhat abstract concerns with species identity and cultural imaginations, and thus might be tied more to a kind of uncertain dread than to more concrete feelings, such as fear and disgust. But then few should be in doubt that the slaughterhouse is also preoccupied with aspects of the bodily and organic that we may find repugnant, which also tend to be among the key ingredients in gothic or horrific texts (Morgan 2002, 77; Aldana Reyes 2014). Thus, these dual features—abstract uncertainties and anxieties on the one hand, and more concrete reminders of embodied vulnerability on the other—form a lens through which depictions of slaughterhouses infused with the horrific may be read.

Vulnerable Animal Horrors

While the violence towards nonhuman animals in horror genre abattoirs is often ultimately extended into, or fused with, violence towards humans, who may well in the process become meat themselves, it seems important to point out that such an extension is far from the only way in which slaughterhouses may elicit the emotions common to the horrific. One might argue that feelings such as fear or dread of the slaughterhouse are primarily tied to anxieties about our own bodily vulnerability that are simply triggered by the often ominous atmosphere surrounding institutionalized violence towards the bodies of other animals. Yet even such a claim immediately faces the question of the abject through a doubt or ambiguity surrounding violence, where it becomes difficult to tell whether we might feel dread at such abjection or due to the violent deaths of beings that in their embodied vulnerability seem less different from us than we might think and thus disrupt species categories.

The feeling of disgust, on the other hand, is perhaps slightly easier to pin down as something we might feel without necessarily tying it to our own human vulnerability, although such a connection remains possible. While disgust and horror are arguably different, albeit related, emotional responses (Miller 2004, 171–76), disgust is often considered one of the key emotional responses that horror literature may seek to elicit (Clasen 2017, 48–49). As a setting, the slaughterhouse almost by default seems to provide the needed ingredients for this: according to researchers on the evolution of disgust, such potentially commonplace items in slaughterhouses as faeces, blood, pus, and rotting meat are among the things likely to provoke disgust in humans (Curtis et al. 2004, 131). In addition, the more nonhuman animals are depicted as agents in literature, and destabilize psychological and cultural boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, the more likely it is that their remains may also come to be seen less as carcasses and more as corpses, which are yet another common catalyst for evoking disgust. Indeed, Susan Miller argues that while '[d]isgust responds to an encounter with something experienced as outside the self', it is the potential of this outside Other 'to be noxious and ready to transfer noxiousness to the self' that provokes the feeling of wanting to distance oneself from the other, which is at the root of disgust (2004, 13). At the slaughterhouse, such transgression of the boundaries of the self are ever imminent, as items for consumption are produced from

live animals that potentially hold an array of noxious substances, whether alive or dead.

Moreover, while there are different approaches to defining and categorizing the emotion of disgust, there is little doubt that the feared transgression may be moral, as well as pathogenic or sexual (Tybur et al. 2013, 66; Miller 2004, 64–68). Considering this, it is easily arguable that slaughterhouses also hold the potential for moral disgust—if not at the killing of nonhuman animals in itself, then at various kinds of abusive behaviour that may be carried out in the process of slaughter—in addition to the more pathogenically based kind.

One novel that makes sure to draw on such different kinds of disgust is Matthew Stokoe's infamously horrific *Cows* (1997). Described by *Publishers Weekly* as 'a phantasmagoria of extreme violence, death, sex, bestiality, self-surgery, torture, and a really, really, really bad mother-son relationship', *Cows* has also been heralded as possibly 'the most disgusting horror novel ever written' (*Publishers*; Seibold). It follows Steven, a despondent young man, whose life is marred by an oppressive mother that wishes he had never been born, as well as a general inability to find happiness or purpose in a life that he compares and contrasts with his desire for the overly idealized lives he watches on TV where 'nothing ever jumped out and stopped you or cut you off from life because you were right in there with it, you were part of it all and you didn't miss out on a thing' (Stokoe 2015, 3). It is with this mental background that Steven comes to work at the 'meat grinding plant', where on his first walk around the facility he is 'busy sucking in details of the scene around him to match later against the TV – jewels of actual experience to be taken home and gloated over' (7, 10). While the slaughterhouse is on the margins of society for most people—although its presence is signified by a 'deathstink', it is located 'at the edge of the city'—coming to work there represents a path of self-realization for Steven, who longs to have some kind of experience that can add meaning to his life; as the sadistic, perverted and murderous foreman Cripps tells Steven as he takes him inside: 'This is where things are real' (8, 11).

From the beginning, *Cows* thus plays on the place of the slaughterhouse as a heterotopia, the reality of which is repressed by culture, making its presence a constant potential source of anxiety through its exposure of the abjection found in our denial of how human the violence of slaughter really is. What we do in the abattoir, the novel seems to be saying, is the reality of who we are, and going inside gives us a picture of true human

nature that commercialized culture perpetually seeks to drown out in its never-ending flow of idealized images. Indeed, the novel continually explores the issue of what the modern human is made of, physically as well as psychologically and ethically; from a number of scatological episodes, and Steven's neighbour-come-girlfriend Lucy's obsession with finding an imagined 'poison' inside herself, to scenes that combine sexual depravity with near-cathartic experiences of killing, *Cows* relentlessly and viscerally probes the insides of its characters. As the novel progresses, this is complicated by what the slaughterhouse shows us of the insides of cows, and later by insights into the psyches of cows through Steven's, possibly telepathic, communication with one of them. Thus, in the novel's world, the notions of human uniqueness that routinely justify the workings of slaughterhouses are patently undermined by key features of the narrative; indeed, Lucy specifically wants Steven to 'look in the cows' in an attempt to locate the poison she wants to cut out of herself (16, 43).

In the introduction to the slaughterhouse, these ambiguities in issues of transgression and discharge/extraction are enmeshed with the narrative at the level of language:

> The meat plant squatted low in a gritted wasteland of industrial units, hunkered down and curled like a bellyshot animal. Smoke and steam coiled out of pipes in its sides and pools of water in the fractured concrete apron collected a scum of oil and condensing cow fear that reflected the jaundiced sky back at itself.
>
> Articulated trucks arrived endlessly. They pulled up at the stock pens spewing shit and black exhaust and emptied themselves of cows that farted and mooed and jerked around trying to remember if Mom ever said anything about a place like this. But there wasn't much time for remembering, the pens were in constant flux, draining at four animals a minute into the plant, through a hole in the wall. (9)

In its use of metaphors to personify both the plant and the trucks, the passage invigorates the themes that surround the novel's characters and demonstrates that the depravities found in the novel are endemic to the setting of the slaughterhouse. Its positioning on the outskirts of the city implies a state of alienation from society, which mirrors that of Steven, and by extension, of inhabitants of modern cities in general. In addition, compared to 'a bellyshot animal', the plant becomes symbolically connected to violence and sickness before its insides are even depicted, while it is also

seen metaphorically as a beast with intakes and exhausts. By implying that the technical language normally applied to its operations fails to adequately imagine its work, the passage points to the tensions that are connected to the function of the slaughterhouse; it is imagined as an organic entity that corresponds to the visceral nature of the killing that goes on inside, and foregrounds its possible emotionality. A significant part of this also lies in opening up the potential of imagining the feelings of the cows that are slaughtered. While the 'condensing cow fear' that leaks from the plant is at one level a metaphor for fluids from the slaughtering process, there is also a way in which it draws on the horror of the slaughterhouse as a place, in which fear is produced by the immediate threat to the lives that pour into it 'at four animals a minute'.

While one might initially mistake the attribution of feelings to the cows as being simply similar to the personification of the plant and trucks, the passage (as well as later events in the novel) reveals this to be a false assumption. Given that fear signifies a conception of a future, and that the cows try 'to remember if Mom ever said anything about a place like this', the cows are here—unlike the plant and the trucks—imagined as creatures living their lives in time, with both memory and imagination; like human lives generally, and Steven's particularly, theirs are lives that draw on narratives of both a past and a potential future. This hints at the possibility of sympathetically imagining cow life, by, in Suzanne Keen's words, making 'species difference' less of a 'significant barrier' and giving us the cows' situation with a corresponding feeling for us to relate to, although as I argue below the novel does not ultimately deliver on the empathic potential it here points towards (Keen 2007, 68).

The use of feeling as vehicle in a metaphor that has cows' bodily fluids as its tenor also fits the intense focus on the body in the novel. Reinstating the viscerality of human bodies into conceptions of the contemporary gothic in his book *Body Gothic*, Xavier Aldana Reyes points out that human feelings in *Cows* 'are dissected and explained from the internal viewpoint of the body and its components' in the sense that repressed anxieties and antipathies are imagined as 'filth' or 'fecal particles' collecting inside the body (2014, 106). For Aldana Reyes, 'this paints a portrait of Steven as a collection of chemical processes that undermines character traits like personality or individuality and emphasizes the determining role of biology in his perception of the world' (106). While the metaphor of 'condensing cow fear' keeps the connection between feelings and organic matter alive, it thus also inverts this symbolism; in contrast to Steven, the cows seem to

be living and experiencing through feeling in a way that (realistically) sees the threat to their bodies as external rather than internal. The cows' bodies gain meaning through the application of feeling and not the other way around, which keeps open the door to imagining cow individualities as more than mere biology.

The language employed in the introduction of the slaughterhouse is also a language of disgust, of bodily fluids and evacuations, which points at the bodily violations—the displacements of internal matter to outside of the body—that happen inside the building. To be sure, one might read *Cows* as a continual exploration of the tension and relation between the feelings of disgust and horror; Susan Miller asserts that when disgusted, 'a person operates as a defined, distinct being who has the power to extrude or evacuate something bad from the self and body', while '[i]n horror, the self-boundary is already diffused' (2004, 175). In the novel, the characters perpetually seek to control self-boundaries and expel both damaging physical matter and the overall experience of boredom, meaninglessness, and impotence that, for instance, Steven feels in relation to society and to his mother. In Aldana Reyes' words, 'Steven's horror revolves around the realization that, once we have mapped out our corporeality, there might be no space left for transcendence, no escape to, or hope for, a place where we might be freed from it' (2014, 107). Paradoxically, though, in his effort to escape this feeling of being only a body, Steven seeks power over others and in the process repeatedly does things that seem initially disgusting to him; he thus engages in actions that are easily read as diffusing the boundaries between the self and the various objects of disgust. This is, for instance, what happens when he eats his own fresh faeces as part of the power struggle with his mother, but also in a number of episodes where he engages in the killing, torture, and sexual exploitation of cows (Stokoe 2015, 66–67). In one particularly gruesome scene, Steven is first raped by his boss Cripps simultaneously with performing his first kill with a bolt pistol, and then witnesses other slaughtermen sexually abusing a still living cow by penetrating holes they have cut in her flanks (61–63). This initially causes Steven to lie down on the concrete floor feeling 'nausea' after having killed, and he later contemplates the 'mad, wantonly exposed selfishness of the slaughtermen' in what may be read as signs of moral disgust (Stokoe 2015, 62, 76; Miller 2004, 64–68). Yet, because he desires to feel something that transcends his bodily existence, Steven soon finds himself engaging in ever more gruesome torture and killing of both humans and

cows, and 'greedily' participating in the same sexual rituals (Stokoe 2015, 82). In effect, therefore, the slaughterhouse can be read as often negating the desire to expel the disgusting, by violently mixing human and nonhuman deaths, blood, and sexuality, thus continually drawing self-boundaries into question.

Because killing and torturing cows is an attempt to realize the potential of their more-than-bodily selves for Steven and the other slaughtermen, the connections between cow slaughter and issues of power become strikingly overt in *Cows*. Focus is less on the slaughterhouse feeding humans physically and more on what the killing of the animals may do to the human psyche. As the social anthropologist Nick Fiddes has argued, '[k]illing, cooking, and eating other animals' flesh provides perhaps the ultimate authentication of human superiority over the rest of nature' (1991, 65), yet

> the inherent conquest is rarely discussed overtly in the context of food provision. Our willingness to eschew confronting certain aspects of meat's identity is more than a matter of preferring to sidestep that which might be unsavoury. The fact that most of us make little mention of the domination inherent in rearing animals for slaughter does not indicate that it is irrelevant. On the contrary, that which remains unsaid about meat conveys an added dimension of meaning which is particularly potent. It is the very taken-for-grantedness of values implicit in the meat system which makes the message so powerful… (44)

In a forceful demonstration of how horror literature 'delv[es] into what is repressed by society', *Cows* exploits the potency of this unspoken domination by putting the issue of power front and centre, thus arguably doing 'cultural work that reflects our darkest, forgotten and best left unspoken fears' (Aldana Reyes 2016, 11). The central anxiety explored here is the fear of a human nature that we would rather not acknowledge, and thus of how slaughter and meat may reveal sides to the human that we find morally disgusting. As Susan Miller observes, '[s]elf-disgust is frequently moral in nature' (2004, 67). The increasing realization of this fear in the novel is ominously foregrounded early on, when Cripps tells Steven that '[w]e all have it, that dark core. It makes us men. And if we examine it, if we can bear to hold it up to ourselves and acknowledge it as our own, then it makes us more than men. The slaughter room is where we become complete, boy' (Stokoe 2015, 29). In Cripps' view—a view that Steven

gradually adopts—killing 'shows a man the truth of his power' and 'frees you to live as you should' (34–35).[1]

In this way, *Cows* arguably problematizes how the ideas of domination inherent to slaughter reduce others to an objectified state, as just bodies. In a rejection of ideas of a cow afterlife, which echoes Cartesian ideas of animals as machines, Cripps states bluntly that '[m]eat doesn't have the brains. It just works till it dies or until somebody cuts it up' (12). Aldana Reyes may be right to view this statement as a critique of 'the capitalist logic that turns animals into mere goods subject to the fluctuations of supply and demand', as well as a comment 'on the drone-like nature of the modern city-dweller' (2014, 107). Like many slaughterhouse narratives, *Cows* is a distinctly urban novel that holds a strong critique of consumer society. But there also seems to be a more basic issue at stake here, which concerns slaughter regardless of capitalist or urban contexts, namely the bare vulnerability of embodied being, or 'creatureliness' (Pick 2011), which human and nonhuman animals share, and which may become supremely conspicuous at slaughterhouses. After all, there is ample focus on the vulnerability of human as well as nonhuman bodies in the novel as the viscerally evocative killings of humans and nonhumans blend together, and when Steven starts work at the slaughterhouse the 'organs … piled into carts and limbs sheered from carcasses … make him aware of his own mortality' (Stokoe 2015, 30).

In such a vulnerability, as well as in the different hints at moral disgust—an emotion whose 'aggressiveness … reflects the notions of absolute good and bad in which disgust trades' (Miller 2004, 65)—could be the potential for recognizing nonhuman suffering and thus for feelings of compassion or empathy, but such notions remain largely absent in *Cows*. Instead, the novel foregrounds the absurdity of contemporary life by having Steven communicate with a group of escaped cows living in the city's underground tunnel system and eventually torture and kill Cripps at their request. This builds on the way the novel imagines Steven's absurd quest of self-realization that continually requires ever more extreme acts of violence and death. As Aldana Reyes also notes, the killings become

[1] The emphasis on the male gender here is not coincidental. Throughout the novel, women—as well as female cows—are viewed as either obstacles standing in the way of men's self-realization—as Steven's mother does—or as objects of desire and consumption. The novel thus relies heavily on a sexual politics of meat (cf. Adams 2000) that equates 'meat' animals with women, where both are pieces (literally and figuratively) in the puzzle of men's self-realization.

ritualized as sacrifices that earn the killers the feeling of being, in Cripps' words, 'more than men' (2014, 109; Stokoe 2015, 29). Josephine Donovan has argued that the long history of rituals meant to achieve 'masculine maturation' through animal sacrifice finds an expression in 'literary enactments of sacrifice' that risk becoming little more than 'a repetition of male expiatory rituals, abnegating the possibility of redemptive "wit(h)nessing" that might occur were the episodes otherwise construed' (2016, 182). Despite the voice given to the cows in the novel, *Cows* ultimately leaves little room for the kind of care ethics or 'wit(h)nessing' that Donovan argues in favour of, and thus for empathic engagement. Instead, a completely objectifying outlook is retained, both towards women—Steven tellingly imagines his girlfriend Lucy as someone 'he could invest … with whatever qualities he wanted', not unlike spicing and cooking a piece of meat—and towards the cows, whom the narrator at times refers to simply as 'beef' (Stokoe 2015, 161, 156).

The one voice that criticizes Steven's power-hungry quest for freedom through killing and torture is the Guernsey, who becomes an important character in the second half of the novel after first engaging Steven in conversation. Echoing common ideas that slaughterhouse workers become desensitized, the Guernsey states frankly that the result of Cripps' philosophy of self-realization through violence is not 'magic', as Cripps claims, but simply 'a way to stop yourself feeling' (78). Yet, paradoxically, it is also the Guernsey who relays the cows' request to Steven about killing Cripps, after which they too grow a lust for violence and, tellingly, for eating human flesh. As the Guernsey states after Steven has slowly dismembered the still living Cripps until he dies, the cows 'urging him on with a silent desire to see it done', the killing 'fucked their heads …a whole lot more than I figured' (132–33).

The absurdity present in this turn of events is a prominent feature in the rest of the novel. As the cows, guided and inspired by Steven's violent acts, make attacks with the aim of killing people and eating flesh, it is possible to read this as simply a reflection of the absurdity of an urban life that numbs people to the extent where it takes ever more extreme measures to escape boredom and anonymity. In one scene where the cows attack waiting passengers in an underground train station, the cows are described as emerging '[f]rom shadow to visibility'—a phrase that apart from its literal meaning might be taken both as a symbolic escape from anonymity and as a reflection of the invisibility of the animals slaughtered in modern abattoirs (172). Given the developments in this part of the novel, Aldana

Reyes concludes that *Cows* is 'a gothic narrative that delves in the despair and pain of living by aligning the human with the animal, by positioning them as players in the same ruthless existentialist game' (2014, 111). But the novel might just as well be read as exposing the absurdity of how we think about—and by extension treat—other animals. In this case, it is not so much a matter of 'aligning the human with the animal' as it is the other way around; at one level, *Cows* takes the idea of animals as, in Kristeva's (1982, 13) words, 'representatives of sex and murder' and asks what would happen if what this implicitly says about animals was true. What if normally docile, placid animals such as cows exhibited the kinds of behaviour that humans like to think of as 'animal' or 'bestial' in order not to recognize it as part of the 'human'? It thus turns the discourse of species on its head by making the animals less sympathetic as they turn out to be more like humans. While the novel may 'not offer a clear-cut critique of human rule or the abuse of cattle' (Aldana Reyes 2014, 111), it can in this way be read as exposing the absurdity of, and thus the anxieties tied to, the abjection of the animal.

Ultimately, though, *Cows* exploits the anxieties and fears connected to the violence humans carry out in our society's mass slaughter of other animals, but ends up delivering little in terms of an actual moral critique or a call for compassion in this context. As Steven distances himself more and more from human life (he ends up living with, and leading, the cows in their underground community), so does the reader through his focalization; thus, the killing of humans by cows looking for excitement becomes an increasingly trivial matter without any real moral implications, and the killing of cows at the slaughterhouse moves even further into the background.

Another text that draws on the slaughterhouse as a source of horror is Conrad Williams' dystopian gangster novella *The Scalding Rooms* (2007). It centres on Junko Cane, a former gangster, who now works as a cleaner at the local abattoir, which is described as

> in terrible shape. Its hooks and gantries are rusted and dull. The band saws have teeth missing, the bearings in the blood centrifuge are worn. There are weaknesses in the blades of the devertebration equipment and the head-slitting machines. The flaying installations break down continually. Rows of fat decanters are cracked and veined with indelible mould. Some pieces are so old they are stained with the blood of species now extinct. The eviscerator. The membrane removal device. The degreasing machine. The suture

> preparation unit. The gut reamer. All of it suffers from fatigue and stress, like the operators who fire it up day and night to chance their hands.
>
> The animals come here in their thousands to be inexpertly killed by this defective arsenal. (Williams 2007, 25)

Like a number of other slaughterhouse narratives, the description of the abattoir exploits the unsettling unfamiliarity and implicit violence of the various machines and devices used for the slaughtering process. The need for 'devertebration equipment', 'head-slitting machines', and a 'membrane removal device' points unequivocally towards the visceral nature of the work carried out and therefore towards the vulnerability of nonhuman bodies, but also of human bodies, which have most of the same physical parts and thus share the same embodied vulnerability. Unlike in the introduction to the slaughterhouse in *Cows*, which draws richly on figurative language for its work, it is here the matter-of-factly, detailed and precise description not of the work, but of the place and its equipment, that leads the reader to contemplate the horrific nature of the abattoir.

The description aptly fits the novella's post-apocalyptic setting and thus draws on dystopian fiction's more general ability to 'teeter on the brink of the horrific' (Aldana Reyes 2016, 8–9), which is effective in creating a sense that there are 'natural connections between the defective machinery and the ailing flesh of the workers' (Aldana Reyes 2014, 104). Indeed, it becomes possible to read the workers as simply part of the 'defective arsenal' that 'inexpertly' kills thousands of animals; as Aldana Reyes observes, there is a 'sense of tiredness and bleak inevitability' that clings to both the place and the bodies (2014, 104). The presence of 'blood of species now extinct', while also a potential source of moral disgust, serves further to suggest that the carelessness and decay that mark the various equipment are merely a symptom of a world plagued by desperation and despair, and a broader fight for survival than what might concern the animals now slaughtered.

However, the passage also seems tied to ideas of 'humane' slaughter that may no longer be a concern for the slaughterhouse, but inform the narrative. Since the direct consequence of the outworn machinery, dull blades, and inexpert slaughter is a likely increase in the suffering of animals, this points more directly towards despair at a loss of sensitivity, or rather a loss of the luxury of caring that may have once been possible. As the story makes clear, there is no shortage of reminders of the suffering and lives of the animals that are slaughtered; the animals arriving at the

abattoir by train are described as 'lowing with panic, eyes turned back into their heads, mouths gummy with froth', and in his work as a cleaner, Cane will 'get a headache trying to think of some other colour, some other sound, some other smell' (Williams 2007, 25, 26). Thus, as is the case in many other narratives of slaughter, the slaughterhouse constitutes an assault on the senses, which may speak to a repressed conscience as much as more physically bound feelings of disgust.

This issue of (the possible loss of) conscience is also expressed in the assertion that '[i]t was so easy, when you were involved every day in the cut and thrust of slaughterhouse work, to de-sensitise yourself to the point where the animals around you were nothing more than self-propelled sacks of meat'—a statement which the commingling of Cane's inner consciousness with general truisms in free indirect discourse makes all the more powerful (11). 'But', we are told, 'Cane was a careful man and wary of such laziness. It would be all too easy to let that outlook infect the other parts of his life, and he must not allow it' (11). Like his mental attempt to escape the sense impressions of the place, this points to the possibility of slaughterhouse work overpowering the minds of workers and robbing them of their independent identities. Yet it also expresses a more general anxiety, namely that of something escaping the heterotopic closed space; if the slaughterer cannot escape the desensitizing effects of slaughter, there is a risk that the lack of sensitivity may spread to the outside. The use of the word 'infect' is telling here; to people's daily lives outside the slaughterhouse, the loss of sensitivity is imagined as a threat to be feared and kept at bay, like a disease.

The fear of losing humane feelings also, however, contains an echo of a particular strain of thought in classic philosophy, which holds any ethical duties to abstain from violence towards animals to be a matter of how it may desensitize us to harming humans (Aquinas 1975, 119; Kant 1997, 212–13). While this is not in itself the most animal-friendly of positions, it draws its argument implicitly from what acts of violence towards humans and nonhumans have in common, namely the 'creaturely' vulnerability of the body; as Anat Pick argues drawing on the philosopher Ralph Acampora's work, such 'vulnerability dispassionately denotes the condition of being embodied as necessarily limited, and limited by necessity, but always already encompassing the dialogic relation between bodies that underlies caring' (2011, 15). In other words, this recognition of shared embodied vulnerability can serve as the basis for what Acampora calls 'a mental process of imaginatively empathetic identification' (2006, 75). In

The Scalding Rooms, this shared vulnerability is further underscored not just by various human threats to Cane and his family, but also by a new race of beings called the Mowers, who feed on human flesh. As humans are therefore no longer at the top of the food chain, their physical vulnerability becomes conspicuous and further destabilizes the hierarchies of power lived out at the slaughterhouse. Thus, echoing a scene in Sinclair's *The Jungle* depicting workers being turned into lard, and powerfully demonstrating the frailty of human flesh, Cane's final visit to the abattoir towards the end of the novella finds his wife's body cooking in a scalding vat while slaughterhouse boss Max Grappen is being eaten by a Mower in his office (Williams 2007, 92; Sinclair 1985, 120).

The uneasy relationship between humans and other animals in the novella is based on more than just a bodily vulnerability, though. It is telling, for instance, that when Cane has found his wife dead and fears the death of his son, he cries in 'deep, backbrain moans of animal loss' (Williams 2007, 97). In addition, while the anxieties surrounding being watched are a classic worry of dystopian fictions, it is arguably ominous in more ways than one that the abattoir itself is called 'The Eyes'. It is easy to read this as a reference to the effect the eyes of other animals may have on humans, perhaps bearing in mind the saying that eyes are windows to the soul. Indeed, eyes seem to play a crucial role in the ability of Cane to relate to nonhumans in the novella. Not only do the eyes of 'crippled animals' 'gaze upon the abattoir staff almost imploringly' as they are left to be slaughtered last, but in contrast to this feeling gaze, the Mower eating Grappen towards the end is described as having 'eyes like two captured puddles of de-oxygenated blood' (26, 92). Moreover, as Cane talks to the dead animals in the abattoir, thinking it helps him 'to keep his distance' and keep 'him sane', he notes that pigs are 'the prettiest of all animals. It was in their eyes. Almost human eyes, they had' (12). While this has a significant touch of anthropomorphic stereotyping to it—the different species of animals also speak in voices matching common popular beliefs about their intelligence or temper—it places the uneasiness surrounding animal deaths within an emphasis on nonhumans as individuals, in contrast, for instance, to the often more diffuse masses of animals in Stokoe's novel. Nonhumans and humans, it seems, are alike in ways that transcend the bodily as well, a point which is emphasized towards the end when Cane has a dialogue with the corpse of his wife, whose death may rest on his conscience, in a way that resembles his chat with a pig's head at the beginning (12–14, 91–92).

In all, the dystopian horror story in *The Scalding Rooms* depicts a society in which ideas of humanity have broken down, and so the abattoir similarly represents a breakdown in the way slaughter is carried out, where ideals of humane slaughter as well as the usual categorizations of animals as either meat or pets have become unrealistic; accordingly, cats and dogs are among the species routinely slaughtered there. Since ideas of humane slaughter and loving relations to animals can also be seen as a way of masking the inherent ethical issues in meat production, this means that the power structures behind meat eating are laid bare for all to see, and anxieties about vulnerability thus less easily repressed, as similarities between species become more conspicuous. The novella's dystopian depictions therefore strike at the heart of anxieties surrounding slaughter, which are arguably repressed in contemporary society.

Although in markedly different ways, both *Cows* and *The Scalding Rooms* thus exploit our uneasiness surrounding the heterotopic nature of slaughterhouses for horrific effect as they explore the anxieties stemming from the inherent domination and violence tied to such places. While both texts also depict the violent killings of humans, these deaths occur almost as an afterthought to, or in the case of Stokoe's novel even as a direct escalation of, the violence that starts within the walls of the abattoir. Whereas in *Cows* the more abstract anxieties ultimately take a backseat (alongside any empathic potential) in favour of extreme appeals to our disgust at physical matter that may make sustained suspension of disbelief difficult, Williams' novella keeps the anxieties tied to nonhuman-human relationships alive through its otherwise deadly dystopian landscape. While neither novel may offer what might be seen as a simple critique of eating meat or of slaughter itself, they thus both expose the horrors of slaughterhouses and erode the dominance found in our relations to the animals who are killed there.

Being Meat: Others Eating Humans

A common fear found in horrific stories is the fear of being eaten. There is, in the words of horror scholar Mathias Clasen, an 'overrepresentation of deadly carnivores in imaginary culture' that may be an expression not only of a curiosity about danger but also of how we train our minds to contemplate threats by imagining them (2017, 56–57). As the science writer David Quammen asserts, '[a]mong the earliest forms of human self-awareness was the awareness of being meat' (qtd. in Clasen 2017, 25).

Advancements of technology aside, humans 'are weak and vulnerable creatures', and if one takes an evolutionary perspective, there is arguably something rather primeval about the fear of being prey rather than predator; perhaps consequently, horror literature is full of monsters that threaten to eat us, whether they come in the forms of other animals, as aliens, or in more indiscernible shapes and sizes (Clasen 2017, 23). Arguably, in a society built on an established hierarchy that sees humans as the dominant species, such fears become even more unsettling, because they invert the order of the system we have become used to. Thus, when it comes to encounters with alien species, the human imaginary is filled with fears that they might view us as we have viewed other animals: as pests, as slaves, as wildlife to conquer in the process of colonization—or as meat.

Only in few instances, however, is the use of humans for meat depicted as systematic in the sense of an institutionalized violence analogous to that carried out in slaughterhouses. There may be obvious reasons for this: if the literature is to appeal to our fear of being prey, the uncertainty of the hunt—and inversion of hunter and hunted—arguably functions as a more realistic scenario. Thus, when the eating of human flesh is depicted as organized by way of an abattoir, it becomes about something more. Where we may fear the agency of the creature that hunts us down and eats us, the slaughterhouse begs deeper questions concerning planning and a different level of intention; it signifies a systematic disregard for the interests of those eaten, which may deepen the horror of finding oneself its object. Albeit in a different context, Jack Morgan argues that seeing ourselves as meat constitutes an 'anxiety of organism' that unnerves us in forcing us to recognize what we are made of, just as it may unnerve us 'when "meat" appears to us as dead animal' (2002, 91). As objects of the slaughterhouse, we do not just become prey forced to see our animal status as we are hunted by a predator in the wild; we become further objectified as 'meat' in the sense of a product for consumption.

The anxious realization of being meat is arguably what sparks much of the horror in Clive Barker's short story 'The Midnight Meat Train' (1984), in which the hero Leon Kaufman gradually uncovers how a butcher is slaughtering late night riders on a New York subway line in order to feed a race of creatures on whose existence the city's order somehow, enigmatically, rests. While the story is ripe with highly descriptive gore, it is arguably the systematic nature of the killing that makes the slaughter especially horrific. At the beginning of the story, three bodies are found 'hacked and disembowelled, as though an efficient abattoir

operative had been interrupted in his work', while there is a rumour of an earlier corpse that had been stripped in a 'neat and systematic way', where 'the clothes had been folded and placed in individual plastic bags', and the body itself had been 'meticulously shaved' (Barker 1998, 13). Accordingly, the murders are viewed as 'so thoroughly professional' that the police are focusing their attention on butchers and slaughterhouse workers in their search for the 'highly-organized mind' behind the killings (13).

From the beginning, the horror of the murders is in this way tied to their violation of place in the sense that something belonging inside the heterotopic slaughterhouse—highly methodical slaughter—is found outside of its closed space. This is seen at the level of language as well as plot; the killings are referred to in popular parlance as 'Subway Slaughter', and one victim is described as 'swiftly and efficiently dispatched as though she was a piece of meat' (13, 14). As Jill Jepson has demonstrated, the language used to describe the slaughter of nonhuman animals becomes particularly emotional and dramatic when used outside of its usual contexts and applied to humans (2008, 141–42); it is a linguistic transgression of the heterotopia into social space that is seen to mirror the threat of the physical violation it refers to. In the diner where Kaufman reads about the murders in 'The Midnight Meat Train', the systematic nature of the killings prompts theories that they are the result of 'something out there that's not human' (Barker 1998, 15). Since this constitutes an inversion of typical expectations—in which nonhuman predators would be seen as less, rather than more, methodical in their kills—it becomes possible to read this as an attempt to avoid recognizing how common such systematic violence is in human society, that is, to deny what is hidden inside society's heterotopic spaces.

Like Stokoe's *Cows*, the story thus draws its horror in part from the curious relation between repulsion and fascination with the, often unseen, violence of the city. Throughout the story, the sections focalized through Kaufman describe his love for the city, which is personified as a female, whom he gives 'the benefit of the doubt, even when her behaviour was less than ladylike' (13). Conceptualized as the 'less than ladylike' behaviour of the city, violence is thus partly gendered as masculine, but also seen as a fascinating darker side of the adored mistress, which one cannot help but want to explore. In the 2008 film adaptation of the story, co-produced by Barker, Kaufman—who has an office job in the short story—has been turned into a photographer, who pursues the murdering butcher into both the slaughterhouse and the subway in his quest to 'capture' the city

because 'no one's ever captured it. Not the way it really is' (Kitamura 2008). Not unlike the exploration of the 'dark core' of humans in *Cows*, it is here the fascination with the city's darker side that may make us reach out and explore the violence that society otherwise confines to heterotopias (Stokoe 2015, 29). In Barker's story, although seeing the murders reported in the paper gives Kaufman a feeling of 'mild disgust', he finds that 'being human, he could not entirely ignore the gory details on the page in front of him' and he cannot 'help wondering … about the man behind the atrocities' (1998, 14). Similarly, we are told, the murders make the city itself 'live in a state somewhere between hysteria and ecstasy' (14).

Louis J. Kern argues that the visceral violence of the 'splatterpunk' genre 'offends and repulses what we most treasure as human in ourselves – our rational minds, our compassion' while at the same time attracting 'us as a reflection of the repressed, the darkly instinctive level of human experience' (1996, 49). In 'The Midnight Meat Train', the repressed is the violence of the human, and the slaughterhouse undermines the notion that we are primarily governed by 'our rational minds, our compassion'. As the story proceeds, Kaufman is gradually more and more attracted to the violent murders until he eventually kills the man carrying them out and takes his place.[2] Kern reads this as a process in which 'a compulsion to voyeurism' gradually takes over and moves Kaufman 'from passivity to complicity' (50). While it makes Kaufman less passive as he engages in more violent behaviour, this reflects back upon the reader who is passively engaged by fascination in the reading of gore in narrative form. Thus, it can be read as implying that seeing the connections between the slaughter of nonhumans and humans which drive the story makes us complicit in such violence. The call of the ethical object in the slaughterhouse becomes more difficult to ignore as we experience its horror.

Crucially, the end consumers of the human flesh on the midnight meat train do not conform to general expectations of an 'Other' at whom we can point our finger in order to exempt ourselves from responsibility. Suggestive of tradition, they seem to Kaufman to be 'more geriatric than psychotic' as he realizes, looking at one, that 'generations of fictional

[2] The film adaptation depicts this development in more detail and shows how it affects other parts of Kaufman's life as well. For instance, we see him taking on a more controlling role in his relationship with his girlfriend (where earlier on we see her taking the initiative for sex), and, crucially, he starts eating meat where earlier he brought his own tofu to the diner (Kitamura 2008).

man-eaters had not prepared him for its distressing vulnerability' (Barker 1998, 31). The creatures thus seem somewhat diffuse even as they are concretely gorging on our flesh. While this can be read as symbolic of the opacity of power and the systems that sustain order in capitalist societies, it also reflects their citizens; just as the creatures consuming human flesh are said to keep society's social order in place, consumers of meat in capitalist societies keep the system in place by buying what is offered. This points the finger at ourselves, since no clear-cut enemy is in sight; just as Kaufman is forced to take the role of the slaughterer upon himself, so we must share in the responsibility.

Not unlike *Cows*, 'The Midnight Meat Train' suggests that we all have the dark side that is attracted by transgressive acts of violence and that this is a part of what we seek to hide when we separate the slaughterhouse from the rest of society, and separate the meat we eat from the animals who are killed for it. As the train driver says before violently killing Kaufman's girlfriend and tearing out her still beating heart at the end of the film adaptation: 'It must be done to keep the worlds separate' (Kitamura 2008).

A rather different approach to depicting humans as meat for others is found in Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000), in which we follow the character of Isserley as she drives up and down the Scottish highway A9 on the prowl for male hitchhikers with 'big muscles' she can pick up due to what readers may at first assume are sexual motives (Faber 2014, 1). As the novel progresses, however, we gradually learn that Isserley is in fact of an alien race and has been modified into what we know as human form to be able to do the job of collecting 'specimens' that can be fattened up, slaughtered, and exported to her home planet in the form of a meat product called 'voddissin'. The novel, however, does more than place humans in the object position as meat; an essential part of how it works relies on a reversal of nomenclature and a different hierarchy of physical characteristics from what is normal in the readers' world. Thus, it is Isserley and the other aliens—four-legged, furry creatures in their original state—who are called 'humans' in the novel, while what we know as humans are animals known as 'vodsels' (a deliberate misspelling of the Dutch 'voedsel', meaning nutrient or foodstuff). Yet this is only gradually revealed to the reader, who is likely to read the first part of the novel simply assuming that Isserley is what we would call human and sharing in her consciousness through the novel's free indirect style.

As others have observed, this narrative strategy 'draws the readers' attention to their anthropocentric assumptions about literary characters' (Gymnich and Segão Costa 2006, 85); gradually and surely, it destabilizes the species categories we are used to and tests how long we are willing to stick to the idea that Isserley is a member of our own species, despite her odd use of language and behaviour—from her use of the word 'specimens' about male humans in the beginning to the first use of the word 'vodsel' (in the ambiguous phrase 'vodsel chef') some 50 pages in, or possibly even further (Faber 2014, 1, 51). Indeed, since the reversal of nomenclature is in effect a reversal of subject and object status, it renders the category of the human abject for the reader in the sense that we become ambiguously caught between the nomenclature of the novel, in which we are animal objects, and readers' terminology that affords humans subject status. This in turn mirrors Isserley's own abject position as a physically altered human in vodsel form, which makes her dread meeting the visiting heir to the company behind the meat production, Amlis Vess: 'He'd be expecting to see a human being, and he would see a hideous animal instead. It was that moment of … of the sickening opposite of recognition that she just couldn't cope with' (75). As Sarah Dillon argues in her analysis applying Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal to the novel, 'Isserley needs to define herself by what she is not, but the attempt to do so is constantly challenged by the physical modifications to her body, which cause her to inhabit physically the limit between human and vodsel' (2011, 144). In effect, the same comes to apply psychologically for the reader as the novel mixes species categories and actions: the reader belongs to the species slaughtered and eaten in the novel's world, yet outside it to the species that slaughters and eats, and is also able to relate to Isserley as the primary focalizer.

In drawing on these features, a central part of the novel's tension is created by the relation between the relatability of—and empathy with—Isserley and the horror of eventually realizing her motivation and what is done to her victims. Indeed, even after learning these facts, readers are likely to continue feeling for Isserley, since her physical and psychological suffering—due to the modifications she has undergone to be able to carry out the job—is continually emphasized throughout the novel (e.g. 75, 92, 112–13, 229–30).

As a number of scholars have considered from their different perspectives, *Under the Skin* thus offers up a new and complex take on human/nonhuman relations in general and on meat eating in particular (e.g.

Calarco 2019; Dillon 2011; Dobrogoszcz 2020; Dunn 2016; Gymnich and Segão Costa 2006; Harder-Grinling and Jordaan 2003; Woodward 2010). It does so in part through its ever-present focus on how different perspectives are always incomplete or askew in various ways. Not only do the readers gradually have to readjust their perspectives as the story reveals itself, but shifts in focalization between Isserley and various hitchhikers at times serve to question her perspective. This, in turn, is itself a perspective that is constantly askew, since it is tied to a vodsel body but informed by the phenomenology of the novel's humans, her original form. When the ironically named 'Cradle', used for the removal of vodsels' tongues and testicles as well as for slaughter, is described as 'chest-high to a human', for instance, it refers to the much lower humans of the novel rather than to the chest-height of the readers' species (Faber 2014, 210). Readers, accordingly, have to constantly question and readjust their perspectives as they read the novel, just as they may be led to question their empathic allegiances as they inhabit Isserley's perspective while experiencing the horror of what is done to members of their own species in the novel (Kark and Vanderbeke 2020, 17; McKay n.d.).

The continuous questioning and readjustment of what is perceived is also significant to the novel's conceptualization of the slaughterhouse. The narrative constantly revolves around events to which the abattoir's function of turning live animals into meat is essential, yet just as in Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*, the story does not enter the *actual* slaughterhouse until fairly late in the novel—an absence that reflects how the violence towards animals is typically an absent referent in our dealings with meat as well as in representations of the animals before they become meat (Adams 2000, 14, 51–53). More concretely, the 'processing' of vodsels happens at the apparently remote Ablach Farm somewhere in Scotland. As Kirsty Dunn has noted, its remoteness can be read as 'a direct referral to the way Western factory farms are intentionally located far from public view', but also as a reflection of how slaughterhouses are remote from the consumer, since it is the location of both 'confinement *and* slaughter' (2016, 152, italics orig.). This is further emphasized by the fact that confinement and slaughter happen in subterranean levels of a building on the farm, as well as by Isserley's repeated expressions of unwillingness to visit these parts of the building (Faber 2014, 109, 111, 164–65; Dunn 2016, 153). However, the novel also implies that such concealment of slaughter and factory farming from view happens as much through a control of representation as through their physical locations. As Dunn argues, the natural scenery

that surrounds the farm can be read as 'a reference to the way nostalgic images of farms mask the realities of industrialized agriculture' (2016, 152). Similarly, ideas of animal welfare and 'humane' meat pop up at various stages in the novel in ways that may be read as deflections from the ethically problematic aspects of using vodsels for meat, as when the slaughterer Unser emphasizes the 'speed' of the process as a way of avoiding 'unnecessary suffering' (Faber 2014, 215).

In a particularly telling instance early in the novel, Isserley wonders how it can be that 'some of the most superbly fit and well-adapted vodsels', whom she imagines might have the chance 'to breed with a greater selection of females than average' can still be miserable (59–60). Researchers have argued that producers of animal products tend to emphasize physical well-being as the most important parameter for animal welfare, while consumers tend to adhere to different 'paradigms' that emphasize mental experiences, individual integrity, and ideas of 'naturalness' to a higher degree, and that this creates misconceptions about the degree of welfare experienced by animals in agricultural production (Borkfelt et al. 2015, 1055–56, 1068–69). Where Isserley here embodies the perspective of producers, for whom the animals are viewed in part as production units, the consumer perspective is surprisingly found in Amlis Vess, who despite being heir to the company Isserley works for turns out to be a vegetarian concerned with the ethics of killing vodsels for meat. Thus, one of the first things he does after arriving at Ablach is to let four vodsels loose. When Isserley later castigates him for it, she points out that the creatures have suffered frostbite and argues they 'would certainly have died, *just* from being outside', but Amlis disbelieves her, arguing that the world is the vodsels' natural habitat (Faber 2014, 114–15, italics orig.). Like Isserley, Amlis thus misunderstands the welfare needs of the vodsels. Yet where her ideas about their welfare arguably derive from her need to see vodsels as primitive instinct-driven creatures for whom only basic needs matter, *his* misconception comes in part from information about production having been withheld; unlike Isserley, for instance, he does not know that vodsels wore clothes before being captured, nor does he realize the physical modifications that they have already undergone on the farm. As a reflection of how consumers may be unaware of standard practices such as debeaking and castration in real-life factory farming, it thus follows the novel's more general emphasis on what is seen and unseen in meat production.

It makes sense, then, that it also takes a radical turn of events to actually bring the narrative inside the slaughter facility in the latter part of the novel. After an experience in which a hitchhiker assaults and attempts to rape her, Isserley undergoes an attitude change that at first leaves her with something like a contempt for her victims. Accordingly, she finds herself unable or unwilling to ask the questions she usually asks to make sure her victims will not be missed (ensuring the secrecy of the farm's operations), and thus shortly after ends up taking a highly sympathetic family man because the lack of conversation leaves her assuming he is 'a typical male of the species; stupid, uncommunicative, yet with a rodent cunning for evasion' (206). In her experience of decreasing sympathy for the vodsels, Isserley thus compares them to another animal that ostensibly seems even less sympathetic to her, making for a multi-layered discourse of species. This is telling, as it reveals the complexity of her feelings about vodsels; if a comparison to another animal is to have the intended degrading effect, her default must have been to regard vodsels more highly than these other animals. Just before she releases the toxin that sedates the hitcher, she is hit by his 'sheer brute alienness' and feels a surge of hate towards him that also makes little sense if she perceives vodsels as purely instinct-driven animals (206).

It is when she returns to the farm with this vodsel that she decides to follow the others down to the 'Processing Hall', where she has 'avoided coming … for four years', to see him being prepared for confinement (208–210, 213). Unlike earlier in the novel, her descent—this time to a level 'three storeys below the ground'—does not leave her feeling claustrophobic or nauseous; instead, she feels sure that she will 'get what she need[s]' from the experience (210). To her surprise, however, the removal of the vodsel's tongue and testicles leaves her biting 'her insensate lips to stop herself crying out with frustration', because it is quicker and less bloody than she had expected (215). In an apparent bloodlust, she therefore convinces Unser, the 'Chief Processor' (212), to bring a vodsel up for actual slaughter.

The scene is thus fraught with emotional tension. Robert McKay, for instance, argues that the scene sees Isserley 'embrac[ing] the violence embedded in meat-eating practices in a purely sadistic form of self-definition' (2014). Thus, he reads the slaughter as a reaffirmation of Isserley's 'pure power'; her place in the species hierarchy has become destabilised for her after the attempted rape, in which her physically vodsel form made her sexual prey for a male vodsel. Her act of witnessing the

slaughter of a vodsel she brought to the farm thus seeks to re-establish her position as a member of the superior species, which is constantly challenged by her abject physical state. Yet her powerful feelings continue to disrupt any simplified notion of species hierarchy:

> Unser yanked the chin up to expose the neck. With two graceful flicking motions of his wrist, he slashed open the arteries in the vodsel's neck, then stood back as a jet of blood gushed out, steaming hot and startlingly red against the silvery trough.
>
> 'Yes!' screamed Isserley involuntarily. 'Yes!' (Faber 2014, 219)

As Isserley expresses her powerful personalized lust for vengeance, she removes herself from the dispassionate, de-individualized approach that otherwise helps justify the slaughter of animals exactly by not considering their individualities significant. As Unser tells her just before he has her removed from the facility: 'We are doing a job here. … Feelings don't enter into it' (219).

Paradoxically, however, feelings have played a role in Isserley's job from the very beginning, since it has necessitated her having conversations with vodsels that clearly reveal they have emotions and social lives, as well as language—all characteristics that speciesist discourses often seek to deny the existence of in other animals in order to justify treating them as inferior. This is further emphasized for the reader by passages focalized through the hitchhikers, yet, in part because many of them are less than sympathetic characters who sexually objectify her, the reader's sympathies are likely to remain with Isserley, whose feelings and suffering we know more about. As a consequence, once slaughter is actually depicted, the depiction is more deeply involved in Isserley's feelings than those of the vodsels. In relation to an earlier instance in the book when the vodsels' pens are described in detail, Kirsty Dunn compellingly argues that 'the descriptions of the vodsels' close confinement is … intensely provocative and disconcerting for the reader in that they must picture, not chickens, hogs, or cattle in these dire conditions, but fellow human beings, who … have been physically mutilated in order to produce more docile and profitable bodies' (2016, 155). Yet in the actual slaughter scene, a significant part of the horror stems from the conflict between the species of those slaughtered and the point of view through which the reader is confronted with it. Thus, it is through our deep involvement in Isserley's feelings that the reader's empathic allegiance is questioned as she enthusiastically urges on the slaughter of a member of our own species.

The horrific realization that we are in a better position to understand and empathize not with the vodsels, but with Isserley, thus arguably constitutes the central emotional tension of the scene. In making members of our own species act as metaphors for other animals being slaughtered—a reversal of the metaphor employed in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*—Faber in effect challenges readers to consider the possible prejudices behind their empathic allegiances. This is further emphasized when, just before slaughter commences, focalization momentarily shifts to the vodsel's perspective, from which Isserley 'was the only creature in the room who looked anything like him. If anyone was going to do something for him, it would have to be her' (Faber 2014, 218). Through this misplaced hope of the vodsel, the novel thus highlights how emphasizing physical similarity in relation to empathy or sympathy is based on a faulty prejudice.

This focus on conflicting allegiances in the slaughterhouse scene is not so much an attack on empathy itself as on the power structures and rationalizations that may make us redirect or ignore empathic or sympathetic impulses in relation to beings by emphasizing differences as morally significant. The scene thus intensifies an argument already implicit in the novel's changed species nomenclature. As McKay argues, it is this aspect of the novel that shows how we often conflate notions of the biologically specific with ideas of what is morally significant (n.d.). An earlier instance, in which Isserley provides a rationalization for regarding vodsels as morally insignificant, demonstrates the importance of language for such conflation to happen:

> There was always the tendency to anthropomorphize. A vodsel might do something which resembled a human action; it might make a sound analogous with human distress, or make a gesture analogous with human supplication, and that made the ignorant observer jump to conclusions.
>
> In the end, though, vodsels couldn't do any of the things that really defined a human being. They couldn't siuwil, they couldn't mesnishtil, they had no concept of slan. In their brutishness, they'd never evolved to use hunshur; their communities were so rudimentary that hississins did not exist; nor did these creatures seem to see any need for chail, or even chailsinn. (Faber 2014, 173–74)

Isserley's rationalization provides her with the basis for 'why it was better that Amlis Vess didn't know that the vodsels had a language' (174). By pointing to other characteristics as those that are morally significant, she

seeks to curb Amlis' notion that language may make a moral difference. Yet paradoxically, of course, it is language that allows her to formulate the concepts she thinks defines the human. Indeed, since the meanings of the concepts she highlights remain unknown to the reader, we have no way of knowing whether vodsels actually lack these capacities or Isserley simply lacks knowledge of their use by that species and assumes, as we have assumed with other animals, that they lack certain capacities as long as these remain unobserved. The passage thus hints at an inherent speciesism in our epistemological approach to the world, and undermines rationalizations for deeming other species inherently inferior.

The intense emotions of Isserley in the slaughter scene thus negate her earlier rationalizations; what is at stake is instead Isserley's need to feel superior to the vodsels, which has become more acute after the attack and attempted rape she has endured. Similarly, while conceptualized as professionalism, the reactions of Unser and the others to her outburst may be read as simply a reluctance to acknowledge the extent to which slaughter relies on symbolic domination and feelings of superiority rather than sound rationalism. Through different means, but ultimately not unlike Barker's 'The Midnight Meat Train', Faber's novel thus probes the reasons and justifications for meat eating through depictions of humans being slaughtered and eaten, asking if the issue should really stir such strong emotions if it is truly justified.

Cannibalism and the Abattoir

While being asked to imagine humans being slaughtered and eaten may be horrific enough, such horrors seem to intensify when they simultaneously break taboos surrounding cannibalism. In cannibalism, those traditional boundaries between the eaters and the eaten that are based on species hierarchies are rendered moot as we eat members of our own species. As a practice, it therefore involves not just the physical threat of being eaten, but also an existential threat to concepts of humanity. 'We learn what a human being is', argues Cora Diamond in her famous article 'Eating Meat and Eating People', in part by distinguishing ourselves from animals by 'sitting at a table where *WE* eat *THEM*. We are around the table and they are on it' (1978, 470, capitals and italics orig., see also Burley 2016, 486–87). Whether one accepts Diamond's assumption that there is a single concept of the human or not, the separation of those eating from those eaten in this way seems central to much thinking about human identity.

Hence, if those that eat us are not different from us, it adds the horror of uncertainty to the horror of being eaten. Think, for instance, of zombies: while abjectly horrifying and unstable in their own right (in part because the threat of becoming one is also the threat of transcending the boundary of the human), zombies may also be read as an attempt to restore a certain kind of order by making sure that these man-eating humans are no longer *fully* human and can thus be more easily perceived as Other. As cannibalism breaks down distinctions between the eaters and the eaten, zombification creates a new binary to take the place of the old one that has become unstable.

Few narratives combine the instability of binaries already offered by the visceral work and intertwined vulnerabilities at slaughterhouses with the added uncertainties and horrors of cannibalism. Doing so, however, arguably provides an intensification of both; scenarios where we slaughter our own kind in an institutionalized fashion makes cannibalism no longer the exception, but a norm in which *our* horrors come to more exactly mirror those of other animals in actual abattoirs. Possibly the best example of this is found in Joseph D'Lacey's dystopian horror novel *Meat* (2008), in which there are no nonhuman animals and an appropriated discourse of species separates consumers from consumed, despite their common biological species.[3]

Set in an isolated enclave called Abyrne, surrounded by an encroaching wasteland in which there is 'nothing' except 'thirst, hunger and solitude until death', *Meat* revolves mostly around Richard Shanti, who is a valued bolt-gunner at Abyrne's meat plant (D'Lacey 2013, 7, 122). While we know from the very start that Shanti goes for daily runs with heavy burdens as a kind of self-flagellating act of self-purging, within the plant he is 'the calmest employee' despite his job of killing (1–2). 'If anyone could look into the eyes of the soon-to-be-bled-gutted-quartered-and-packed for the rest of his life without a hint of damage to the psyche' it would be Shanti, we are told, with the possible implication that, perhaps, nobody ever really could (2). Thus, in a setting that seems to perfectly fit Manuel Aguirre's notions of 'the town' as a 'closed space' found in horror fiction, from which there is no escape (Aguirre 1990, 2, 183), we are immediately

[3] Other interesting, if vastly different, examples of more or less organized cannibalism within contemporary or dystopian settings include Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh* (2017), Don LePan's *Animals* (2009), and Roald Dahl's 'Pig' (1960), as well as Alice Sheldon's (writing as James Tiptree, Jr.) 'Morality Meat' (1985).

faced with a threat that is not invasion, but the crippling effects of consumption coming from within.

Life in Abyrne's isolated society centres largely on meat, both as the main nourishment, produced by capitalist mogul Rory Magnus' company MMP, and as focal point for a religious mythology espoused by 'parsons' under the leadership of a 'Grand Bishop', in charge of controlling people's adherence to the teachings of such sacred texts as the 'Gut Psalter' and the 'Book of Giving':

> The Father sent his own children down to Earth so that we, his townsfolk, might eat. He made his children in his own image and laid down the commandments of the flesh so that we might be worthy of their sacrifice. Thus He commands us:
>
> Thou shalt eat the flesh of my children. My children are your cattle. Break their bodies as your daily bread, take their blood as your wine. By sharing daily in this bounty shall you be united with me. (D'Lacey 2013, 59)

Referred to as 'Chosen', those consumed are mythologized as given by God, and as willingly self-sacrificing. D'Lacey echoes the beginning of Genesis (1.27–28), in which men are made in the image of God, but at the same time problematizes the way the Bible relates this image to dominion over animals by making those consumed the sacred beings made 'in his own image'. This tacitly suggests the adaptability of religion when new cultural practices need to be justified and serves as a potential reminder that the same is the case with the eating of meat in real life—a point that is underscored by having the passage from Genesis 1.29, in which God grants all plants as the ideal food for humans, epigraph the novel's main text. Indeed, whereas in Genesis (9.2–6), the later permission to eat animals is followed by a prohibition against the killing of humans, justified exactly by their being made in the image of God, here that image comes to serve the opposite purpose of marking out beings as consumables.

The Chosen, argues the 'Book of Giving', 'give themselves freely', and their suffering 'is as nothing when compared to the suffering of mankind' (59). Yet both this and the notion that they are made in God's image for the purpose of being eaten seems questioned by the book's commandments, which seem to equally justify and dictate the practises of industrial farming. Thus, in a style reminiscent of Mosaic Law, it is made clear that the Chosen need to be modified despite their divine heritage:

Thou shalt keep my children silent by paring the reeds in their throats at the time of birth. Their silence is sacred and they must never speak the words of Heaven.
Thou shalt keep my children from mischief by taking two bones from each finger in their first week.
Thou shalt keep my children from wandering by taking the first two bones from the first toe of each foot in their second week.
Thou shalt keep my children hairless by baptising them in the fragrant font.
Thou shalt keep the mightiest male calves as bulls, that more strong children may be born.
Thou shalt keep all other male calves chaste by castrating them in their ninth year.
Thou shalt keep their mouths toothless. (59)

Physically, as well as through mythology, the Chosen are thus stripped of their humanity and linguistically recast in language known from the farming of bovines, which highlights how the dominance over those turned into meat is a biopolitical construction and meat eating itself an institutionalized political choice. In *Meat*, the religious-political move of making someone sacred is also the objectifying act that sets its object apart from the human subject and opens up the potential for sacrifice. The sacred is thus an integral part of the novel's peculiar discourse of species, which separates the culturally bound notions of what species difference means from the biological differences they are so often conflated with in the common discourse of the readers' world. *Meat* in this way demonstrates squarely how derogatory and exploitative discourses surrounding other species are not inevitable, but can in fact be separated from biological difference.

D'Lacey's appropriation of the discourse of species in *Meat* is similar to that found in Don LePan's *Animals*—another dystopian novel about institutionalized cannibalism, in which those with mental and physical handicaps are re-classified as 'mongrels' and slaughtered for meat. Yet where LePan's novel ties new species distinctions to congenital physical traits and traces the history of how re-categorizations develop, D'Lacey never directly reveals such a historical development, and instead shows the power of discourse by having the continual reclassification of individuals happen partly through physical mutilations dictated by a pre-existing discourse of species that constantly demands new objects. This also means that there is a constant threat of being reclassified as meat if one fails to live according to Abyrne's laws; when, for instance, a dairy employee is caught

exploiting female Chosen sexually—an act that might be seen to destabilize the novel's species barrier—he undergoes the physical adjustments that make him into one of them and is ultimately slaughtered (44–48, 54–55).

In his reading of the novel as 'body gothic', Aldana Reyes notes that the way 'one becomes meat in Abyrne is directly connected to a stripping down of a citizen's rights in a manner reminiscent of Giorgio Agamben's discussion on bare life and the victims of the Holocaust', given that 'the bodies of the Chosen are reduced to the pragmatic dimension of their nutritional values' (2014, 116). Yet whereas Agamben's basic notion of 'bare' or 'naked' life is that of a being stripped (in discourse, at least) of everything but its biology, the demarcation of the Chosen through the physical removal of parts of their biology seems to constitute a particularly extreme form of such a condition (Agamben 2000, 3–6). The 'stripping down' of rights in *Meat* thus seems to go beyond matters of citizens' rights as it becomes a physical stripping away of body parts that relate to basic biological functions for the beings in question. While they fulfil the obvious aim of keeping the discourse of species intact by denying the Chosen certain token features of humanity—language and opposable thumbs, for instance—the mutilations they undergo thus also pose questions about the vulnerability of bodies in general, and the acceptability of altering them, which points the finger indirectly at such modern farming practices as debeaking and castration. Being 'Chosen' in Abyrne is thus not just about being destined to end up as meat (or, in the case of some individuals, being used for milking or breeding), and thus not purely about 'nutritional values', but also about being denied even your full biological species being so that you can remain different from those who get to keep it.

In the alterations of the Chosen's physical abilities, central tenets of the theories of difference that underpin discourses of species and help justify (ab)uses of other animals are literally made flesh. Whereas, in the context of nonhuman animals in industrial agricultural production, the attribution of feelings and abilities to other animals has often implicitly and explicitly been dismissed as unduly anthropomorphic or sentimental exaggerations (e.g. Haynes 2008, ix, 8; Hubbard et al. 2007, 926), the Chosen of Abyrne are simply robbed of abilities to express themselves in order to end any discussion before it begins. Like confined animals denied the exercise of natural behaviour in factory farms, the Chosen are put in a position from which they are unable to contradict society's logic that they are

different not just morally, but fundamentally, and that they are willingly self-sacrificing for a greater good.[4]

It is from this logic that the slaughterhouse, and indeed society as a whole, in *Meat* operates. The novel brings out the tacitly accepted sacrificial and anthropocentric discourses of modern meat production and consumption by inscribing them specifically as law in Abyrne's religious and social systems, as well as directly on the bodies destined to be eaten. In the slaughterhouse, these discourses moreover meet the capitalist logic of industrial production as the different, but related, paradigms mutually reinforce each other. When Shanti says 'God is supreme. The flesh is sacred' each time he puts the bolt gun to the head of one of the Chosen, the novel reconnects meat eating to the sacrificial origins for which Georges Bataille expresses somewhat of a nostalgia in his critique of slaughterhouses (D'Lacey 2013, 3, 90–91; Bataille 1997, 22). Yet as this sacrificial logic is invoked in the very act of taking life, what seems to be actually sacred—what must be fed—are the demands of capitalist consumption itself: 'You wipe out cattle like a disease, Rick. Keep it up', chain manager Bob Torrance admiringly tells Shanti with an eye to keeping chain speed, and thus production levels, high (D'Lacey 2013, 2). The way in which the eating of other humans is institutionalized in *Meat* may provide a peculiar twist to Robin Wood's assertion that '[c]annibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism', by having actual cannibalism at the centre of actual capitalist ventures, but there also remains an inescapable metaphoric relationship (2003, 82–83). The novel perhaps expresses this most strongly in the seemingly unquestioning lust for meat exhibited by the townsfolk. When the town's power plant is sabotaged and meat production slows down as a result, the townsfolk eventually take to the streets and march towards the meat plant chanting 'we want meat' in a culmination of the desire for, and perceived necessity of, meat promoted by the espousal of both religious and capitalist ideologies in Abyrne (D'Lacey 2013, 254).

[4] The uses of animals in different cultures operate within—and have historically used—a similar logic of self-sacrifice, which in contemporary societies is found, for instance, in the marketing of animal products through anthropomorphized animal figures promoting their own exploitation and culinary quality (see Grillo 2016). So common is this notion that Douglas Adams famously parodied it in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* by having a talking cow actively promote pieces of her own body to customers in the restaurant (1980, 94–96).

Aldana Reyes reads the town's general reduction of the Chosen into edible objects in light of the 'large meat-packing plant whose workings remain a secret to the wide population', and it is certainly the case that Shanti sees things in the slaughterhouse that outsiders do not (2014, 116). Yet the novel seems to suggest that the interests and origins of the Chosen are less a secret than the object of a kind of collective wilful amnesia; those eaten are 'so much like animals that the townsfolk had forgotten what the Chosen were. Forgotten, or put it out of their minds' (34). This seems reminiscent of the 'willed blindness' to the suffering of animals in agricultural production, which the theologian Mickey Gjerris (paraphrasing an expression from J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*) proposes consumers engage in as they perpetuate contemporary habits of animal product consumption (2015, 524–27). Given that the Book of Giving, as one of Abyrne's central religious texts, details the treatment of the Chosen, there can be little doubt that the town's consumers know about the origins of their meat. Nevertheless, because the majority of the population do not actually experience the treatment and slaughter of the Chosen themselves, there remains room for, in Gjerris' words, 'knowing about it without allowing ourselves really to know it' (525).

In *Meat*, this distance between consumers and the lives and deaths of the consumed is illustrated especially through Shanti's relationship to his wife, Maya. While Shanti is reluctant to bring home meat, and has stopped eating it, Maya continually begs and argues with him to get him to take advantage of his special position at the meat plant, which can secure him high-quality cuts. When one of the parsons, who act as controlling authorities on people's adherence to the town's meat-based religion, imposes herself into their lives and comes to dinner to check up on them, the situation highlights the two different perspectives on the meat. After a short prayer which thanks God 'for the gift of meat on this day', the parson's simple act of cutting into the steak before her becomes highly ambiguous due to the different perspectives of the people present at the table: 'once the serrated edge of the knife was through the seared layer, it revealed the bloody flesh within. Watery red juices spread out on the plate as she sawed off a bite and forked it into her mouth' (D'Lacey 2013, 41). While the parson praises the excellence of the meat, her simple pleasure at the meal is implicitly undercut by Shanti's refusal to engage in willed blindness, which aligns with the reader's knowledge that the steak is in fact a piece of human flesh. As Aldana Reyes notes, the bloody flesh within the steak 'foregrounds the violence of the act; the slicing of the meat becomes a

form of attack on the human body it once belonged to' (2014, 115). This is exactly what Shanti sees and what Maya, like the average consumer in Gjerris' theory, disavows: that the meat eaten is part of a body that lived and reaches their plates only through violence; the 'sawed off … bite' the parson eats is not just analogous to the body parts sawed off in the slaughterhouse, it *is* such a body part. Thus, when in an earlier argument about meat and the well-being of the family Maya retorts that Shanti has 'to care about our bodies', it implicitly indicates how the novel's discourse of species is based on a willingness to ignore similarities between consumers and consumed: which bodies are 'our bodies' is a matter of how much violence one is willing to close one's eyes to (36).

While the meat plant in D'Lacey's novel is by no means an exception to the way slaughterhouses in horror fiction are generally associated with darkness, what seems darkened here is as much the minds of consumers as it is the plant itself. Meanwhile, readers are of course given no such option of remaining blind to the horrors of the novel's meat production, since it details numerous parts of the process, from the early mutilations of the Chosen, the keeping of 'calves' in 'darkened crates' in the production of 'veal', and rape-like mating for the purpose of breeding, to Shanti's work with the bolt gun and the subsequent dismemberment of bodies (e.g. 16, 59, 90–91, 171). As Mick Smith reminds us, though, the refusal to know is also a refusal to listen, since hearing animals' voices 'as a form of self-expression' threatens 'our separateness' (2002, 49). In *Meat*, the silencing of voices is made physical as 'the only scream of the Chosen that was ever heard' is 'that of a newborn calf' just before its vocal cords are removed (D'Lacey 2013, 19). Yet the novel makes clear how this mutilation is simply the logical end of a wider denial of self-expression. This is done through the fact that the Chosen, nevertheless, manage to communicate despite their physical mutilations. As Shanti gradually begins to internalize his vegan ethic, he also becomes attuned to the hisses and sighs of the Chosen and realizes that they do in fact communicate if one listens, and that they also communicate by tapping the pipes and railings at the plant. Indeed, even the 'cow fucker' Greville Snipe realizes after having been added to the herd that the sounds of the Chosen 'sounded like language in a way it never had before' (44, 54). Silencing, then, is at heart a social act, which falls away when insistence on separateness ceases, whether because one has been physically made into cattle or is developing an empathic stance towards them that makes one willing to bridge the gap created by discourse and objectification.

While *Meat* does portray an extreme form of capitalist commodification and consumption of bodies, capitalism is thus not ultimately at the root of the novel's greatest horrors. As the novel ends, industrial mogul Rory Magnus is dead and his meat production comes apart at the seams as the Chosen escape with the help of Shanti and others, who are embracing a different ethic. Yet the masses are marching to the plant in search of meat. As with a number of the other texts discussed in this chapter, the horror of *Meat* lies as much in the ease with which the violence is accepted, and even promoted tacitly through discourses whose truth is taken for granted, as it does in the violence itself. Indeed, it is the very recognisability of the discourses that bring the novel's violence about, which makes its narrative horrors so evocative.

What makes the cannibalistic slaughterhouse horrific is thus not just the violability of our own bodies in such a scenario, but the question of just how far we might go in closing our eyes, even as our habits of consumption come to hurt other humans and ourselves. *Meat* accordingly touches upon a number of different adverse effects of modern meat production. For instance, cannibalistic consumption in the novel is shown to lead to a degenerative brain disease known as 'the Shakes'; this is not unlike the phenomena of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and its human form variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob's Disease (vCJD), which were connected to the practice of making bovines cannibals by feeding them bone meal—a method of feeding also used for the Chosen in the novel (122; Ducrot et al. 2013, 4). As a result of consuming the Chosen, then, the citizens of Abyrne are being consumed from within, which—like zoonotic diseases in the real world—can serve to destabilize the discourses that allow for absolute distinctions between consumers and consumed. Thus, not unlike what happens in the physical inscription of discourse through mutilations on the Chosen, the disease changes the language used about the afflicted townsfolk when a need to 'subdue' them arises because they are 'unmanageable'—a term the novel has earlier established as one of the 'words … synonymous with meat' at the meat plant (D'Lacey 2013, 49, 66).

Taking a somewhat grander perspective, one might also read into the novel's premise a dark comment on the detrimental effects current meat production has on phenomena such as climate change and loss of biodiversity—*Meat* is, after all, set in a dystopian wasteland devoid of nonhuman animals, which seems likely to be a result of earlier environmental devastation. In the end though, it has the treatment of the Chosen at heart and leaves little doubt that these also function as a horrific metaphor for

the animals in today's slaughterhouses. As the novel continually stresses the individuality of the Chosen, its emotional focus is not so much on the traits that might make them human had they been categorized differently, but on the universality of being; what Shanti sees when he despatches the Chosen with the bolt gun is not so much a procession of humans as of eyes: 'New eyes. The same eyes. Eyes he'd seen a hundred thousand times. Their colours differed, their bloodlines varied' (91). As D'Lacey writes in a short 'Afterword' to the novel, what he saw in his 'mind's eye' while writing were 'animals waiting in line in steel corridors, waiting for death at the hands of men with targets to meet. Believe me, they don't go quietly or willingly. Who would?'[5] (271). In the end, what the horrific space of the cannibal slaughterhouse in fiction may do more than anything, is ask us to contemplate that question.

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[5] Perhaps interestingly, D'Lacey starts that same afterword by declaring that he is 'not a vegetarian. Yet' (271). In a short new preface to the novel's 2013 republication, however, he notes that 'by the time MEAT was in bookshops, I'd sworn off all flesh and haven't eaten it since. The decision was a direct result of the research I did whilst writing the book' (viii, capitals orig.).

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CHAPTER 8

Coda

Discussing the term 'meat' as 'a clue to the cultural hegemony achieved for the eating of animals', Carol J. Adams reminds us that '[w]hen we turn an animal into "meat," someone who has a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no distinctiveness, no uniqueness, no individuality' (1994, 24). In their operations, slaughterhouses today fulfil this function of transforming living beings into mere material, which in turn allows for the linguistic transformation (even though this sometimes precedes the physical transformation) that helps shape the stories we tell about those animals as no longer being animals. As Susan McHugh has pointed out, anthropologist Garry Marvin's question of '[h]ow much of an animal has there to be for it to be a dead animal?', originally posed in relation to taxidermy, 'also applies to the modern experience of meat' (McHugh 2011, 163).

Using literary texts to search for an answer to Marvin's question as it applies to meat yields no straightforward answer. Rather, slaughterhouse fictions reveal the complexity of how meat and slaughter are (dis)connected and how turning animals into material is a messy process not just physically, but conceptually and symbolically. Thus, different texts provide different answers; from those that automatically assume the transition into material at the moment of death, across those that pinpoint a particular moment during dismemberment (the splitting of the carcass in Berger's 'A Question of Place', for instance), to those where the individual animal's presence can linger in relation to its parts, as with the 'blöschblood' in

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Sterchi's *The Cow*. This multiplicity of answers to the question of when animal becomes material is important, not least because it demonstrates how, rather than being some naturally occurring ontological change, the transformation is ideological. Whoever effects, watches, or represents the transformation *decides* when the animal disappears and only material is left, and points of transformation look different depending on our attachment to the—human or nonhuman—individual who disappears.

Viewed from this perspective, slaughter produces imagined differences. Hence, slaughterhouse narratives can highlight how storytelling is fundamental in our relations to other animals, to slaughter, and to meat. They can tease out the stories (often implicitly) told to allow one animal to disappear at death while another (whether human or nonhuman) remains in our thoughts as an individual. In this way, literary slaughter fictions demonstrate the importance of storytelling in separating meat from animal, as well as in how we consider differences between species and between individual animals. Moreover, they open up spaces to contemplate and counter such stories, whether by allowing for affective relations to what they depict, emphasizing similarities or shared vulnerabilities, or foregrounding the difference of the animal other in ways that encourage us to reimagine relations, opening a path to what I, in Chap. 2, ultimately termed a 'slaughter empathics'.

Exploring the stories constructed around meat, slaughter, and their effects seems ever relevant at a time when they continue to change and take on new forms as different actors attempt to shape and affect our ideas of meat and its (dis)connections to animals. I am thinking here both of discourses on 'humane' practices in industrial agriculture and slaughter, and of the kinds of laws that seek to protect the processes carried out in factory farms and slaughterhouses from public scrutiny by prohibiting photographic representations and the distribution of information from inside (so-called 'ag-gag' laws), but also of how meat itself is allegedly changing in ways that ostensibly divorce it even further from its animal source. Discourses on in vitro meat grown from stem cells in labs frequently portray such meat as free from violence or even 'animal-free' (Bhat et al. 2017, 782; Mouat and Prince 2018, 315); as one ethical defence has it, the emerging technology for producing such 'cultured' meat allows the production of 'meat without involving any actual nonhuman animals' (Schaefer and Savulescu 2014, 188). Regardless of the

biological inaccuracy of such statements,[1] what we have with in vitro meat is, conceptually, the stories that usually separate animal and meat made physical—a new narrative made flesh, so to speak, in order to fulfil the functions that the storytelling surrounding transformations of animal into meat usually perform.

While the animal may, of course, be reinvoked in cooking and eating the meat[2]—particularly when these acts play a role in negotiating (often masculinist) identities—there appears, overall, to be a continuance of narratives in which animals disappear and the violence of slaughter is downplayed or isolated, beginning with the relocation of slaughterhouses in the nineteenth century, through their increasing isolation in the twentieth century, to ag-gag laws and in vitro meats in the twenty-first century. As I have contended throughout this book, slaughterhouse fictions function as counter-discourse to such narratives by reattaching us to spaces of slaughter as place and reinvoking nonhuman animals and the violence we do to them, and no doubt fiction will continue to fulfil this function as the narratives surrounding meat develop. Indeed, were ag-gag laws to become more widespread and comprehensive, fiction might become even more singularly the way in which encounters with animals going to slaughter are most likely to occur than it is at present. Even in narratives that do not particularly engage with our relations to other animals, the slaughterhouse in fiction almost necessarily negates the anonymity—the thingness—found in the mass noun 'meat'. The slaughterhouse is the site of transformation, and depictions of it thus reveal this process. In this sense, fictional depictions make meat suspicious by negating its conceptual separation from animals and reopening paths towards empathic response.

As I have endeavoured to show, re-invocations of violence and nonhuman individuality in fiction happen differently as the narratives surrounding slaughter converge with narratives rooted in the politics of place, of identities, or of emotions, and as they employ different modes of writing,

[1] In actuality, of course, at least one animal from whom the stem cells are taken is necessarily involved, even if it is the case that '[t]heoretically, a single farm animal may be used to produce the world's meat supply' (Bhat et al. 2017, 786). In addition, although there are efforts to find alternatives, the most common growth medium for the process remains a serum extracted from bovine foetuses (Laestadius 2015, 993).

[2] Indeed, in an interesting discussion of the interplay of questions concerning power and authenticity in relation to in vitro meat, John Miller has compellingly argued 'that cultured meat resolutely fails to contest' 'the continuing conception of human/animal relations in instrumentalist terms' (2012, 51).

such as anthropomorphism or the horrific. Different contexts tease out different sensibilities and anxieties in relation to slaughter as a practice, and in relation to our disconnectedness from that practice. Through fictions, the heterotopia of the slaughterhouse leaks, so to speak, into readers' lives and re-establishes itself as a place that has become separate from culture at least partly through storytelling, just as it is storytelling that can bring it back into our consciousness. While I have often opted to disregard chronology in order to tease out alignments and juxtapositions that a strictly historical approach might impede, there is of course also a historical argument that could be made here, about the repositioning and negotiations of the slaughterhouse during different (literary) periods. Indeed, my readings, considered differently, might also provide a history of the slaughterhouse as heterotopia seen through literary narratives, and future research could undoubtedly enrich this discussion by paying closer attention to how such a historical argument might be articulated.

It is, of course, difficult to tell where such a history might lead and how the stories surrounding meat will evolve going ahead. Certainly, the idea of in vitro meats implicitly contains the vision that the heterotopization of slaughterhouses might end in their complete and actual disappearance, whereas the darker visions of novels like Meat (D'Lacey's), Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh*, and LePan's *Animals* point to anxieties that meat, and its discourses, has become so strongly separated from its source that the latter could be changed with only minor adjustments to the narrative of meat itself. Notably and somewhat oddly, such visions converge in the fears of some that it might be exactly the disappearance of the animal in in vitro technologies that could lead to an acceptance of cannibalism (Schaefer and Savulescu 2014, 197–99; Schneider 2013, 1023–24). The exact basis for such fears remains somewhat unclear, since it is difficult to pinpoint why cannibalism remains intrinsically problematic once divorced from murder and desecration of human bodies. I would propose, however, that such fears are rooted in the fact that it exposes the sameness of flesh, and thus points to its vulnerability as it is shared across species. Through implicitly pointing to our vulnerability, cannibalism—even through cultured meats—thus threatens to undermine the human as a distinct category different from the species humans usually eat. At least one may read that into objections to cannibalism such as that of the philosopher Frederick Ferré, who argued that '[h]uman beings are entities so complex as to be capable of the most creative and free mental activities known in the universe' and hence '[i]t would be gross disrespect for such qualitative

excellence – the capacity for intense consciousness of being for oneself – to look at such an entity and see only meat' (1986, 403).

As I have argued, this same shared vulnerability found in the reality of the flesh that makes up both human and nonhuman bodies is part of what literary slaughterhouse depictions may bring to light, and it is part of what is behind the concealment of slaughter and the ideological disappearance of the animal in the process of slaughter. Certainly, as we have increasingly learned more about the complexities of other animals, it has challenged the kind of human exceptionalism that Ferré seems to have taken as a given. In this light, the on-going isolation of slaughterhouses—'buttressed', as geographers Chris Philo and Ian MacLachlan (2018, 88) have noted, 'by the complicity of human silences around these spaces'—can be read as a continuing effort to try to protect the narratives surrounding meat from being influenced by the changing narratives about animals.

In the end, the heterotopic nature of the slaughterhouse preserves hierarchies and dualisms, but narratives about what goes on inside can, in part by being a reminder of the vulnerability of embodiedness that is a potential key source of empathy, do exactly the opposite. Ultimately, slaughterhouse fictions always implicitly challenge fixed narratives that separate meat from animals—a material from living beings towards whom one can have feelings, and with whom one can empathize—while at the same time allowing us to contemplate those living creatures as they are slaughtered.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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