

**EATING RITES: (RE)HUMANISED ZOMBIE
AND SPECIESIST SACRIFICE IN *WARM BODIES*
AND *IN THE FLESH***

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.



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7th January 2015

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ABSTRACT

My thesis brings Gothic and animal studies into conversation to examine the violence of eating rituals in human culture towards the animals and animality. Eating is conceptualised in three registers—literal, symbolic, and discursive—and explored through the lens of the contemporary Gothic in popular culture, where a particular trending motif of the *rehumanised zombie* stretches the biological and ontological logic of the monster species mythology by returning the zombie to its original human state. Jonathan Levine’s film adaptation of *Warm Bodies* (2013) and Dominic Mitchell’s zombie TV drama *In the Flesh* (2013-) demonstrate how these three eating modes are enacted through the narrative of Gothic rehumanisation. The implication of this tripartite metonymic eating is that they are all predicated on the speciesist logic of compulsorily sacrificing the nonhuman other—zombie and animal. The figure of the rehumanised zombie in *Warm Bodies* and *In the Flesh* thus not only performs but also naturalises the concomitant *exclusionary* violence of sacrificing the nonhuman other within *inclusionary* tactics of anthropocentric discourses.

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1. The Metonymy of Eating and the Sacrificial Animal

Eating is carnal and spiritual, nourishing for both the body and soul. It begins with the simple relationship between the eating subject and the object being eaten. Eating is therefore also relational because it sets up the binary relationship between the two of them. The overall picture is, however, far more complex when this pair is webbed into a more sophisticated network of eating relations. A balance between the subject and object is ideally observed, until, of course, desire comes along to disrupt the equilibrium. When eating is *overly* skewed in favour of one party and at the expense of the other, it becomes a form of violence and power play. One therefore “eat[s] badly,” as Derrida would say, if the subject eats to nourish only the “self,” without “*learning* and *giving* to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat” (“Eating Well” 115; emphasis in the original). Over time, as this one-sided situation becomes systematically reinforced and institutionalised, the violence of this parasitic relationship is not only repressed but also naturalised, and therefore legitimised. Such is the relationship between the *human* eater and the *nonhuman animal* being eaten.

In *Animal Rites*, Cary Wolfe questions this humanist exploitation of the nonhuman animal, as well as the inadequacy of existing philosophical debates in addressing this issue. He states that posthumanist theories, which are supposed to

dispute the logocentric, anthropocentric subject in fact end up reinstating its very determination precisely because their investigation does not transcend the human species itself, or, even when it attempts to overcome the dogmatic barrier

between the human and the nonhuman, it still tackles the question of the animal with an exclusionary approach. (qtd. in Pireddu 111)

Indeed, posthumanist theories, rather than challenging the status quo, slips back into a humanist framework without actually redressing the imbalance in the human-animal divide. The animal is thus yet to be properly accounted for by posthumanist discourses.

To move the debate forward, Wolfe focuses on the materialisation of the discourses of animality in human culture. It would, however, be a gross misconception of Wolfe's work to think that it is only about the animals and the related ethics. Rather than slipping into the reductionist trap of oversimplifying the posthumanist debate to a mere championing of animal rights, Mitchell explains, in reference to the title *Animal Rites*, that Wolfe himself "strategically circumvents the current impasse over animal *rights* by focusing on the rituals we construct around the figures of animals and the 'animate'—our narratives of brutality and cannibalism, monstrosity and normativity, our metaphors of animation and the anima or soul" (xiv; emphasis in the original). In this regard, Wolfe situates the discourse of animality within the larger cultural landscape, taking a deconstructionist approach to unpack the ideological abuse of the nonhuman animal in aesthetic works.

In fact, Wolfe's emphasis on the performative provides an invaluable bridge between Derrida's "Eating Well" and his own *Animal Rites*. Combining Derrida's specific eating motif and Wolfe's emphasis on the performative

rituals, one is able to examine the “eating rites”¹ involved in constructing humanity and animality (hence the title of my thesis). With the eating motif, one can examine the relational dynamics between the human and nonhuman animal, which, as discussed above, is characterised by the violence of systematic exploitation. With the performative ritual, one can understand how this particular dynamics is repeated endlessly throughout history and in different forms. Eating *as* a performative ritual is thus responsible for naturalising the recurring violence and repression constitutive of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman animal throughout the history of mankind.

In the “Limits of Digestion” interview, Birnbaum and Olsson cited a quote by German philosopher Novalis that had inspired Derrida in his contemplation of the eating motif in speculative thought:

All enjoyment, all taking in and assimilation, is eating, or rather: eating is nothing other than assimilation. All spiritual pleasure can be expressed through eating. In friendship, one really eats of the friend, or feeds on him. It is a genuine trope to substitute the body for the spirit—and, at a commemorative dinner for a friend, to enjoy, with bold, supersensual imagination, his flesh in every bite, and his blood in every gulp. This certainly seems barbaric to the taste of our time—but who forces us to think of precisely the raw, rotting flesh and blood? The physical assimilation is mysterious enough to be a beautiful image of the spiritual *meaning*—and are blood and

¹ The pun of “eating *rights*” will be considered in my final chapter.

flesh really so loathsome and ignoble? In truth, there is more here than gold and diamonds, and the time is soon at hand when we will have a higher conception of the organic body.

Who knows how sublime a symbol blood is? It is precisely that which is disgusting in the organic components that points to something very lofty in them. We recoil from them, as if from ghosts, and sense with childish terror a mysterious world in this mix, perhaps an old acquaintance. But to return to the commemorative dinner—can't it be imagined that our friend has turned into a being whose body has now become bread, and whose blood has become wine? [emphasis in the original]

(Novalis 102-3)

As a ritual, eating is implicated in the dichotomisation of the sacred and profane; what can be eaten, what must be repressed and therefore sacrificed for the sake of civility. The “raw, rotting flesh and blood” in the above excerpt is a graphic reminder of the violence of literal eating that runs counter to civil taste. Sublimated eating, which imbues eating with an elevated symbolic significance, is much easier on the stomach. More importantly, what is even more repressed, as evident in the excerpt itself, is the fact that in nearly every “commemorative dinner” held by humans, the most taken-for-granted source of this “flesh and blood” actually comes from the nonhuman animals, where the violence of their undoing is concealed and repressed before they end up as carcasses and delicacies on the dining table. The literal sacrifice of the nonhuman animal thus enables the spiritual transcendence of the human. Somewhere, a compulsory space is created for the barbaric and impure, a

cesspool of the “disgusting” that must be kept away from the rest of the “organic components” that constitute human civilisation. Such is the rationalisation of a purist conception of an anthropocentric reality, where nonhuman animals and animality must be cast *by* and *for* the humans into this compulsory space, the sacrificial altars, to be burnt, made meaning of, and then conveniently repressed.

On one hand, eating is conventionally understood on the material level as a cultural ritual of feeding oneself with something “external and foreign” (Derrida, “Limits of Digestion” 2) for physical sustenance and pleasure. On the other, it can also be deployed as a vocabulary for articulating other forms of subject-object relationality beyond this literal register: “In friendship, one really eats of the friend, or feeds on him” (Novalis 102). This opens up the notion of eating to other registers of relationality, such as how different symbolic subjects relate to one another and how different forms of knowledge interact within a discursive space. There are thus three modes of eating—literal, symbolic, and discursive—to be considered in the conception of the human-nonhuman relationship. Derrida calls this tripartite eating the “metonymy of introjection” (“Eating Well” 115), that is, the eating ritual and how it replicates its relational structure of eating in the various registers of the language. Each mode feeds off the other in support of the institution of consumption, which in turn, feeds off the compulsorily sacrificed nonhuman animal so as to produce the food, logic, and knowledge required to nourish the monolith of humanity.

One of the cultural fields in which this tripartite eating flourishes is the Gothic in popular culture. As Angela Carter comments, “we live in Gothic

times” (122) where marginalised genres start to “prevail over canonised counterparts” (qtd. in Botting 285), leading to an increased presence, almost over-saturation, of monster figures such as the vampires and zombies within the popular culture landscape. Indeed, Mitchell observes the “obsession of popular culture in our time with figures of animality, animation, artificial life forms, cloning, and biotechnology; and above all, the fundamental issue of biopower, biotechnology, and human rights in a time when so many human beings are treated as animals or worse” (xiv). The Gothic in popular culture is but one of the symptoms of this obsession with the ritualistic eating of the animal and animality.

This thesis begins with a systematic study of each of the three registers of eating, the overlapping relations between them and how they all follow the same trajectory of positing the nonhuman animal as the ultimate sacrifice. This sets the foundation for the next chapter, where this tripartite eating is worked through the Gothic texts *Warm Bodies* and *In the Flesh*. Common to these texts is a particular trending motif in the Gothic genre of the *rehumanised zombie* that stretches the biological and ontological of the monster species mythology by returning the zombie to its original human state. As mentioned, the implication of the tripartite metonymic eating is that they are all predicated on the speciesist logic of compulsorily sacrificing the nonhuman other—zombie and animal. The figure of the rehumanised zombie in *Warm Bodies* and *In the Flesh* thus not only performs but also naturalises the concomitant *exclusionary* violence of sacrificing the nonhuman other within *inclusionary* tactics of anthropocentric discourses.

1.1. Literal eating: carnivorism, cannibalism, and Gothic vegetarianism

Eating is one of the most naturalised performative acts in human culture connecting the human species to nature. In particular, the eating of meat, or carnivorism, has come to define the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. Historically, the “natural” dynamics is such that the human subject is almost always the hunter and the eater, while the animal the hunted and objectified food to be eaten. Except for a few religiously fetishised ones, thousands of years of human civilisation have born witness to this glacial but systematic establishment of a rather one-sided relationship. The fissure of this human-animal relationship grew irreparably wider with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. Principle identifies this period as the “turning point in the modern relationship between humans and nonhumans, when the institutionalised speciesism characteristic of society today began to take hold” (“Introduction” 1). Indeed, he states that

In industrialising society, a paradigm shift in the agricultural means of production—from tillage to animal pasturage and mechanised slaughter—led to the commodification of animals and the institutionalisation of meat, radically altering the relationship between the species. Such a transformation led to a dramatic increase in the availability and consumption of meat and, consequently, to anthropocentric society’s attempts to rationalise the realities of animal slaughter and deny species likeness by enforcing, “clear boundaries between the states of the dead and living. (“(M)eating” 25)

The material institutionalisation of animals as mass produced and mass consumed meat, backed by the legitimising strategies of Enlightenment rationality, ineluctably installs meat-eating as an ideological “mark of cultural superiority” (Miller 72) for the human species. As a system, Petsche argues, carnivorism “depends upon the speciesist recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of humans” (104)—a process of cherry-picking “human” criteria problematised in animal rights discourses—and an ideology that secures and naturalises the relationship between the human eater and the animal being eaten. In *Theory of Religion*, Bataille explains that the nonhuman animal is nothing more than a “corpse” and a “thing” (39). Nonhuman animals are reduced to that of a “thing [as] a basic human given” (Bataille 39) and sacrificed for the utilitarian purpose of serving mankind, either as resources or as domestic pets. Within this carnivorist logic, the nonhuman animal is no longer seen as an animal, but a naturalised, fetishised commodity of the modern consumerist culture (Petsche 106). Indeed, as Stephanie Rowe proclaims, “if humanity has forsaken its concern for nonhuman animals, it is due to ‘the rhetoric of a carnivorous culture, not nature’” (qtd. in Petsche 104).

Derrida makes a distinction between animal and human in eating. In “Limits of Digestion,” he posits that “animals have a negative relation to the object because they simply swallow it. Human negativity, however, is reflected: man does not in fact devour the object, but rather incorporates it abstractly, and thereby creates the inner space that is the subject” (2).

Carnivorous eating is thus essential to the symbolic formation of human subjectivity, while negating animal subjectivity. In fact, “being a carnivore,” Calarco argues, “is at the very heart of becoming a full subject in society”

(qtd. in Pestsche 105). In other words, the nonhuman animal not only offers flesh as food in the literal sense, but also gives flesh to the subjectivity of a carnivorous human. In “Force of Law,” Derrida asserts that

In *our* culture, carnivorous sacrifice is fundamental, dominant, regulated by the highest industrial technology, as is biological experimentation on animals—so vital to our modernity [. . .] Carnivorous sacrifice is essential to the structure of subjectivity [because it forms] the basis of our culture and our law, and all the cannibalism, symbolic or not, that structure intersubjectivity in nursing, love, mourning, and, in truth, in all symbolic or linguistic appropriations. [emphasis in the original] (247)

Much is at stake in securing the species order—of human as eater and animal as the eaten—through the sacrificial logic and structure of carnivorism, the latter being one of the pillars in the formation of human subjectivity. Anxieties abound when this species order is threatened by another form of eating, that of cannibalism, where the human is posited in the same position as the animal as meat. If, as Pestsche claims, “when the animal becomes meat it is no longer merely about the assertion of human superiority but the erasure of animal subjectivity or animality itself” (106), then by the same reasoning, when human becomes meat, it is not just about the relinquishment of the authority of anthropocentrism, but more gravely, the erasure of human subjectivity or humanity itself—a vision deemed apocalyptic by all measures.

Cannibalism is thus perceived as savage, animalistic, and monstrous within the context of human civilisation. Such literal eating of the human as meat by fellow humans is necessarily constructed as a monstrous taboo in

civilised societies in order to preserve the ontological sanctity of the human. Unsurprisingly, species boundaries, tenuously secured by carnivorism and easily threatened by cannibalism, are ideal fodder for Gothic consumption. In his introduction to a series of critical essays intersecting Gothic studies and ecocriticism, Principle argues that

Nineteenth- and twenty-first century Gothic aesthetics are closely knit; both are the product of periods of seismic, industrial, mechanical, or technological growth that radically destabilised conceptions of non/human identity. Indeed present-day environmental and ethical concerns for human and nonhuman life can be traced to emerging, eschatological fears over the extinction of the human race in the industrialising nineteenth century, when the commodification of the animals caused a paradigmatic breach in our relationship with nature. The Gothic often portrays this estrangement in panicked, dystopian terms, as humans' reluctance to come to terms with their nonhuman ancestry and the common, biological original of all life. Indeed the Gothic is wont to remind us that we are shaped not only by where we come from, but by what we eat, and how we interact with the environment and all forms of life. ("Introduction" 2)

Indeed, we are what we eat. Following the logic of this aphorism, if "what we eat is monstrous [such as human or dead corpses]," Principle argues, then "consumption is [not only] coded as a formula for monstrosity" ("(M)eating" 26) but also a sobering reminder that "we are all meat" (Principle,

“Introduction” 5) and, conversely, meat-eating monsters. The Gothic genre, as suggested, mobilises the meat-eating ideologies of carnivorism and cannibalism in constructing monstrosity, “unleash[ing] a categorical crisis that threatens to fracture the allegedly irreducible biological and ontological binaries that constitute an anthropocentric conception of reality. The act of meat-eating implies a breach of both human-nonhuman and life-death distinctions, suggesting a monstrous state of cross-species corporeality and ontological liminality” (Principle, “Introducion” 3). It is thus necessary to deploy naturalising ideologies to suppress the destabilising threat of this monstrous meat-eating discourse. Ideology works best when its operations are well camouflaged; so for a discourse that has been buried for so long, it would hardly be any surprise if the recent surge in ecocritical discourses unravels countless examples within the Gothic tradition where the construction of monstrosity is articulated *explicitly* through one of the most naturalised practices in human culture, that of meat-eating.

A few classic Gothic monsters, such as Dracula and Frankenstein’s creature, have already been mobilised to problematise the monstrous construct in relation to the species divide upheld by meat diets. In “(M)eating Dracula: Food and Death in Stoker’s Novel,” Principle makes an insightful point on the uncanny resemblance between carnivorism and cannibalism as embodied by the characters Harker and Dracula; both are “bound by the same necrophagous impulse, that is they both ‘eat death’; one a carnivore who eats passively slaughtered nonhumans and the other a cannibal who eats humans he kills (or renders undead) himself” (31). But unlike the Dracula’s tabooed cannibalism, Harker’s “form of corpse consumption, carnivorism [. . .] is sanctioned by

modern flesh-eating society” (32), as long as the acts of animal slaughter are kept out of sight. That both necrophagous eaters are more similar than what the text’s binary structure suggests is glossed over by the monstrous construct used to maintain species difference and order. Monstrous consumption, Principle concludes, thus “perilously underscores the (in)distinction between carnivorism and cannibalism, exploding conventional notions of species identity by threatening a reversion to the Darwinian sameness that nineteenth century anthropocentric authority sought so vigorously to suppress” (32).

While meat-eating signals an entry into the carnivorist and speciesist order, refusing to eat animal meat by *choice*, and hence revealing it to be a naturalised habit, is a clear resistance and threat to the dominance of the anthropocentric social order that depends on the “ostensibly natural diet of carnivorism” (Petsche 107). In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the creature establishes his moral goodness through vegetarianism when pleading with Frankenstein to make him a female companion: “My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment” (120). In foregrounding his vegetarian diet, the creature tries to mitigate his monstrosity. More importantly, Petsche argues that Frankenstein’s creature, “as a commodity of industrial animal food production that was not consumed but resurrected only to reject the human practice of meat-eating, endangers the speciesist and carnivorist social order” (99). Gothic vegetarianism thus deflects monstrosity on to the carnivorous humans whose culture and dominance—not sustenance, as “acorns and berries” would suffice—depend on the seemingly gratuitous and excessive exploitation of nonhuman animals.

The trope of Gothic vegetarianism finds its way into the vampire genre with the rise of the sympathetic vampire with a moral conscience. In the TV drama *True Blood*, some of these vampires sublimate their desire for human blood by turning to an inferior but socially and morally acceptable alternative—the synthetic blood called Tru Blood. Teenage vampires Edward Cullen and Stefan Salvatore of the respective *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* series resort to hunting animals in the forest for bare sustenance, practising a kind of self-imposed Gothic vegetarianism that not only downplays their monstrous otherness but also complements their image as teen icons of fantasy romance. In “Dying to Eat: The Vegetarian Ethics of *Twilight*,” Kazez parallels Stephenie Meyer’s concept of Gothic vegetarianism with conventional vegetarianism: “Edward satisfies his nutritional requirements by feasting on animal blood, which makes him, he says, a vegetarian—by vampire standards. Animal blood is like tofu, for the Cullen family, but they live on a human-free diet anyway, because it’s the right thing to do” (25). Although eating is a must for survival in the Gothic world, eating animals is ethically preferred to eating humans, as it is the “right thing to do,” betraying an underlying speciesist bias where the humans are placed in an “exalted moral category and [. . .] that animals exist to serve human purposes” (Kazez 25-6). Tenga and Zimmerman suggest that Gothic vegetarianism is a move to restore and maintain species order, arguing that the reformed vampires willingly abstain from feeding on humans directly but “feed on the same animals that humans eat [. . .] to acknowledge human priority as being at the top of the food chain, to which many humans believe they are biblically and biologically entitled” (80). Gothic vegetarianism is therefore highly

problematic because, far from being a morally elevated form of eating, if not more hypocritical, it reveals itself to be an equally deeply anthropocentric and speciesist “alternative” grounded in the same sacrificial logic of “feed[ing] on the same animals” as that of carnivorism.

Whether it is carnivorism, cannibalism, or Gothic vegetarianism, the nonhuman animal serves as the literal food and rhetorical logic for legitimising and delegitimising the various dietary habits. Through an EcoGothic lens, the rituals of eating and abstaining from meat not only expose the constructedness and anxieties of unstable species boundaries, but also reveal the ideological strategies for upholding anthropocentric hegemony at the expense of the nonhuman other. From the outset, the animal is positioned as a default “thing,” stripped of any subjectivity, because, as Bataille argues, “man does not eat anything before he has made an object of it”; even before the animal is food on the table, it was already retroactively defined “as a thing beforehand” by the carnivorous human (39). The parasitic logic of this human-animal relationship is taken to a clean finish; after the animal is eaten, digested, and parasited of all of its nutrition, it is expelled to the periphery of civilisation as excrement. The healthful nourishment and purification of the human body and culture is thus complete, reboot, and poised for the next round of sacrificial rite—an endless, mechanised, and inhumane repetition in the modern industrialised era of mass production and consumption.

1.2. Symbolic anthropophagy: social oppression and assimilation

In the “Eating Well” interview, Derrida discusses the question of the animal and the entrenchment of carnivorist ideologies in subjectivity

formation. He attaches the prefix “carno-” to his already “famous portmanteau designation of the essence of Western metaphysics” (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 100) to introduce the new term “carnophallogocentrism” (“Eating Well” 113).

Malatino offers a useful breakdown of this term:

In his addition of the prefix “carno” to phallogocentrism, [Derrida] is iterating a linkage between masculinity and meat-eating [. . .] Phallogocentrism is a tripartite conjunction of “phallus,” used to denote not an anatomical penis, but rather the symbolic or representative instances wherein the phallus is conflated with the signification of power; “logos,” the Greek term for “word,” “speech,” and “reason” that serves to highlight a particular kind of privileged gendering operative in the realms of language; and “centrism,” which points to the organisation of discourse around this conflation of reason and masculinity. Derrida’s addition of “carno” to this term imbricates acts of meat eating and animal sacrifice as key to the discursive construction of subjects of Reason. Masculinity and carnivorousness work together to support the virility, power, and authority of one who argues, dialogues, and speaks reasonably.

(131)

Whether it is eating or speaking, subjectivity and, as Roy argues, “ethical imperative [pass] through, indeed [begin] with, the mouth” (328). Within this carnophallogocentric structure, the carnivorous man of Reason and his oral fulfilments require the sacrifice of the nonhuman animal. Wolfe calls this systematic exploitation of the nonhuman species a form of institutionalised

speciesism, arguing that the latter is “not only a logical or linguistic structure that marginalises and objectifies the other solely based on species, but also a whole network of material practices that reproduce that logic as a materialised *institution* and rely on it for legitimisation. [In doing so, it] takes for granted the fundamental sacrifice of *nonhuman animals* (in what we eat, what we wear, the testing of the products we buy, etc.)” (101; emphasis in the original). Speciesism is thus a monolithic institution that has a profound material basis in human culture for the ideological production of speciesist logic in various social contexts.

The consequences of institutionalised speciesism, however, extend beyond the animals. As Wolfe argues, besides the animals directly involved, *humans* who are treated with this logic of the animal are implicated as well:

The humanist concept of subjectivity is inseparable from the discourse and *institution* of speciesism, which relies upon the tacit acceptance [. . .] that the full transcendence of the “human” requires the sacrifice of the “animal” and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in a “noncriminal putting to death” (as Derrida puts it) not only of animals, but other *humans* as well, by marking *them* as animals. [emphasis in the original] (43)

The question of social marking is also a question of legality. To begin with, Derrida argues in “Force of Law” that the animal is not considered a “subject of the law and of right” (246). In marking the human as an animal, dehumanisation tactics play right into this “place left open” of the law that allows for a “noncriminal putting to death” (“Eating Well” 112). This

dangerous speciesist logic implies that killing animals is technically *not* illegal, so then killing animalised humans can be *rationalised* as being not illegal; in fact, it may even be rationalised as a just move in certain contexts. Whether it is literal or symbolic eating, these operations of “ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse,” Derrida argues, are “as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’ [. . .], a symbolic operation when the corpse is ‘human’” (112). Both forms of eating are thus symbiotic. In continuing to legitimise and sustain the institution of speciesism at the material base level, Wolfe claims, “the ideological work of marking human others as animals for the purposes of their objectification and sacrifice” (101) can then be executed effectively.

The human-animal relationship thus has a profound impact on human-human intersubjectivity. In the latter, symbolic eating between the human self and human other takes on the distinct tone of anthropophagy. Derrida claims that *all* cultures practise this symbolic form of human-eating: “The so called nonanthropophagic cultures practise symbolic anthropophagy and even construct their most elevated socius, indeed the sublimity of their morality, their politics, and their right, on this anthropophagy” (114). While literal cannibalism is typically marked as a savage practice, it is highly ironic that civilised societies should unwittingly embrace symbolic anthropophagy as a basic mode of exchange between human subjects, slotting these subjects into their respective social strata. Eating in its symbolic register, Pireddu posits, is thus “a metonymy for the carnophallogocentric introjections of the other by an authoritative and autonomous human subject” (118). In other words, the dominant party carnophallogocentrically introjects the other “abstractly” in order

to create an “inner space that is the subject” (Derrida, “Limits of Digestion” 2). The hegemonic schema of carnophallogocentrism, an institution enabled by the uneven human-animal relations, thus becomes a structuring principle for the way the human self relates to the human other, where the dominant human eats the dominated one to construct its own and the other’s subjectivity.

The most straightforward example of symbolic anthropophagy is social oppression. In *Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams examines the problem of the double gesture of carnophallogentrism in oppressing women and animals simultaneously. Through the lens of ecological feminism, she provides a detailed analysis of how the institution of speciesism “transcodes the edible bodies of animals and the sexualised bodies of women” (qtd. in Wolfe 104), arguing that

in speciesist, sexist society, both women and animals are subject to a twofold process of objectification that foregrounds edible or sexually charged body parts and makes what [she] calls an ‘absent referent’ of the subjectivity and ontogeny of the other [. . .] Thus, for example, dead cows are ‘meat,’ baby ones ‘veal,’ dead and dismembered pigs ‘pork,’ and so on. The sexist absenting of women operates by the same sort of renaming of women as animals (chick, beaver, Playboy bunny) and figurative dismemberment (piece of ass, leg man or breast man). (qtd. in Wolfe 105)

The carnophallogocentric structure of transcoding species and gender thus allows man to acquire power and authority as a subject of what Derrida calls

“carnivorous virility” (“Eating Well” 113). Through this transcoding strategy, women and animals can be legitimately “eaten” by the “carnivorous masculine man” within an overarching “logic of domination” (qtd. in Wolfe 105), that is, the logic of carnophallogentrism.

This oppressive logic also extends to the discourse of race. Wolfe argues that historically, the discourse of animality has been deployed for social oppression in human-human intersubjectivity, based on a “strategy whose legitimacy and force depend [. . .] on the prior taking for granted of the traditional ontological distinction, and consequent ethical divide, between human and nonhuman animals” (“Intro,” *Zoontologies* xx). In terms of racial relations, Étienne Balibar claims that “every theoretical racism draws upon *anthropological universals*”, underneath which lies “the persistent presence of the same ‘question’: that of the *difference between humanity and animality*” that is responsible for “the systematic ‘bestialisation’ of individuals and racialised human groups” (56-7; emphasis in the original). In other words, the discourse of animality is essential to the theoretical conceptualisation of the history of racism (Balibar 57). In fact, theoretical racism is founded on the “sacrificial economy of speciesism,” where the “unquestioned availability of ‘animality,’” Wolfe posits, “[acts] as a means of naturalising and grounding racist discourse” (*Animal Rites* 167). What this also means is that for animality to be a “crucial supplement to the discourse of racism,” there must be a “prior tak[ing] for granted” of the ontological distinction and ethical divide between the human and nonhuman animal. Anthropocentric discourses on social oppression are thus, as Wolfe argues, also “inseparable from the discourse and *institution* of speciesism” (43; emphasis in the original).

While Wolfe posits that social oppression is predicated on the sacrifice of the nonhuman animal; the apparently opposite operation, that of social *assimilation*, actually enacts the same, if not more cleverly disguised, speciesist violence on the animal. Although assimilationism has real social benefits on the practical level, philosophically, it is highly problematic. One way of interrogating it is by staging inclusionary regimes, such as homonormativity, in a different context. In his analysis of the short film *Gay Zombie*, Grilli examines the problem of coupling the discourses of species and sexuality, specifically that of zombieness and homosexuality, within a homonormative regime. He argues that

the superimposition-equalisation of gays and zombies [. . .] makes it possible to explore the risks of homonormative repression: just as, in a heteronormative context, a gay man is rejected by the group, so in a place where what elsewhere counts as stigma is the rule, such as the gay community, a new stigma, such as being a zombie, brings about the exact same rejection. (56)

In *Gay Zombie*, the gay zombie protagonist is discriminated against by the gay human community based on his species status; the “superimposition-equalisation” of two or more discourses of otherness thus exposes the exclusionary gaps, or more precisely, the repressed, sacrificial subjects, of “new” dominant regimes. The homonormative regime is revealed to be speciesist; rather unsurprisingly, the sacrificial lamb is the nonhuman zombie. Wolfe points out that speciesism “relies upon the tacit acceptance [. . .] that the full transcendence of the ‘human’ requires the sacrifice of the ‘animal’ and

the animalistic” (43)—the operative word being “tacit.” Indeed, without juxtaposing humanist discourses with the species discourse, closed regimes such as heteronormativity and homonormativity suffer the blind spot of being oblivious to the repressed, unspoken sacrifice of the nonhuman species used for supporting them, until the right context comes along to illuminate their exclusionary gaps.

Social oppression and assimilation, while conventionally thought to be diametrically opposed operations, are actually two sides of the same coin; both processes involve incorporating—in both the physical and social sense of the word—the social other into the dominant digestive system, and both sing the same speciesist tune. Dehumanisation, or animalisation, within an oppressive regime is premised on the discourse of speciesism, while the seemingly inclusionary regime of socially integrating the *human* other into the normative centre belies an anthropocentric prejudice that requires *another* other, that of the nonhuman animal, to remain outside the doors, such as in the case of excluding bestiality from the socially accepted range of queer sexualities. Animality is thus symbolically expelled from the ontological territory of humanity in order to achieve what Wolfe calls the “full transcendence of the ‘human’” (43).

1.3. Discursive parasitism: ideological “asymmetry between discourses”

Beyond the symbolic level of intersubjective formation among real subjects and fictional characters, the larger discourses in general, such as sexuality, gender, race, and species, are also mobilised in political and literary contexts on the metatextual level, replicating similar relational dynamics. In

“Subject to Sacrifice,” Wolfe examines the problematics of having two or more larger discursive forces operate simultaneously within a multi-coded text. Butler cautions against assuming that these embedded discourses carry equal weight or perform equal workload, drawing special attention to the inherent “asymmetry between discourses” (qtd. in Wolfe 99). In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argues that

It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations. The assertion of their abstract or structural equivalence not only misses the specific histories of their construction and elaboration, but also delays the important work of thinking through the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation. (xxvi)

Social discourses, when pitted against one another within the same space, engender a discursive hierarchy that is deeply ideological in itself. As Wolfe posits, it is in the “unevenness of social discourses” (99), the fissures within these tectonic movements, that the most ideological work is accomplished. In reference to his close analysis of the film *The Silence of the Lambs*, Wolfe claims that the discourses of gender and class “all remain in play, powerful in their own right [but] these discourses ‘deploy each other’ in [a necessarily] uneven ideological space specific to this film” (99). In fact, Wolfe explains, “this [uneven] deployment is critical to the systematic rearticulation of these codes in terms of the most far-reaching and powerful discourse in the film: the discourse of species” (99). In other words, discursive asymmetry within a text

is a requisite condition for effective ideological production, so that in a text like *The Silence of the Lambs*, when the far more taken-for-granted species discourse is stealthily but powerfully mobilised to rearticulate humanist discourses, speciesism becomes the necessary but ideologically enabling product in this deployment.

In *Flesh and Warm Bodies*, zombieness, articulated through the species discourse, serves as an allegory of *human* otherness in the text. While humanity, zombieness, and animality are allegorically coded, these discourses are by no means deployed evenly; in fact, the discursive unevenness is skewed very much in favour of humanist discourses, where humanity is constituted over and against nonhuman otherness. Serres captures the dynamics of such lop-sided relations in a social context, arguing that

A human group is organised with one-way relations, where one eats the other and where the second cannot benefit at all from the first [. . .] The flow goes one way, never the other. I call this semiconduction, this valve, this single arrow, this relation without a reversal of direction, “parasitic” (5)

In the context of the species discourse, the nonhuman other, set as a contrastive negative to the human in a binary relation, is parasited by its counterpart and drained of its nutrition to nourish anthropocentric discourses. Even though the human-nonhuman relationship comprises two components, there is a lack of reciprocity in this exchange. Rather than an “exchange value,” the organisation of this relation, as Serres posits, is based on an “abuse value” defined as “complete, irrevocable consummation” that flows in only “one direction” (80). This abusive dynamics then translates into a

corresponding power hierarchy, where the dominant eats the dominated.

Serres relates the notion of the parasite to the eating motif:

Parasite. The prefix *para-* means “near,” “next to,” measures a distance. The *sitos* is the food. In this open mouth that speaks and eats, what is next to eating, its neighbouring function, is what emits sound. *Para* measures a difference between a reception and, on the contrary, an expansion. The latter makes one’s own what is in common and what will soon be even more one’s own, the living body. It already eats space. (144)

In “Eating Well,” Derrida claims that Western metaphysics is entwined in a regime of carnophallogocentrism, implicating the eating culture of mankind; even Serres’ concept of the parasite demonstrates that relationality is always constituted by the metonymy of eating. “To parasite,” according to Serres, “means to eat next to,” before the relation quickly transitions into “eating at the expense of [and] always [eat]ing the same thing, the host” (7). Metonymic eating is thus not only fundamentally carnivorous, but also speciesist in that it requires the sacrifice of the animal and animality. In this one-sided, exploitative relationship, Wolfe argues that humanity plays the “primary parasitism” while animality the “sacrificial secondary expulsion” (“Intro,” *Parasite* xvii). Discursive parasitism, which is an epistemological form of eating, thus enacts what Spivak calls “epistemic violence” (76). In a speciesist context, the violence lies in the discursive manipulation and disavowal of a reductive notion of animality to construct humanist knowledge and reality. In other words, the sacrificial violence of the nonhuman animal is, as Wolfe argues, to allow for the “transcendence of the human” (*Animal Rites* 66), that

is, upholding the ontological status of the human as a transcendental being, with or without the slightest awareness of a deep-seated human superiority complex.

This form of discursive parasitism is particularly prominent though deeply repressed in the Gothic genre. As a social metaphor, the Gothic monster is encoded with the fears and anxieties of its time, particularly in relation to social otherness. The discourse of species, evoking the human-nonhuman divide along biological and ontological lines, institutes itself as a privileged locus for working out the tensions of other humanist divides such as man-woman and white-black. This discursive deployment sets up the various divides as structural analogies within the Gothic text itself. In order for this deployment to work, the human-nonhuman divide has to be taken, in the first place, as a *naturalised* dichotomy of a deeply taken-for-granted discourse, which would then give the impression of a pseudo-stable construct. In offering the uncontested pseudo-stability of a metaphorical terrain for ironing out those humanist tensions, the species discourse generates the *mirroring* effect of naturalising the corresponding binaristic relations governing human-human intersubjectivity. Such superimposition can be characterised as an ideological sleight-of-hand. While humanist discourses are deconstructed and interrogated through the species discourse, the latter remains nothing but an allegorical platform, left intact and *still* deeply problematic. Discursive parasitism therefore enacts epistemic violence on the nonhuman species, replicating the sort of violence that comes with speciesist sacrifice in other registers—literal and symbolic—of eating.

2. Gothic (Re)humanisation and the Sacrificial Zombie



Fig. 1. Screenshot from *The Walking Dead* (“Coda”). The image of zombies inside a church juxtaposed with a biblical line from the Last Supper: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

A horde of zombies overruns a church in the zombie-infested, post-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead* TV drama, looking for something—human as food-“thing” in the Bataillean sense—to eat. Etched across the arch in this scene (refer to fig. 1) are the ominous words from the Last Supper: “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (King James Version, John 6.54). This biblical line resonates with Gothic irony. In literalising the conventional zombie tropes of resurrection, cannibalism, and immortality, the juxtaposition in this image signals a flagrant transgression of the sacred institution of religion by profane Gothic elements within a dystopian universe. The church is no longer the “Lord’s house” that Father Gabriel still imagines it to be; it is, as Maggie replies to him matter-of-factly, nothing but “four walls and a roof” (“Four Walls and a Roof”), a practical stopover for the human eaters (zombies) and

humans to be eaten (human survivors) alike, as well as a slaughterhouse for exterminating a rival group consisting of cannibalistic humans.

Indeed, in juxtaposing the symbolic dimension of the eating motif in the Last Supper quote with the literal cannibalism of the traditional zombies, this image captures the unnerving synergy between the different registers of eating within the zombie text. The narrative involves not only different forms of literal eating, but also the register of symbolic anthropophagy that shapes the intersubjective dynamics among the characters. One example of humans symbolically cannibalising other humans is the massacre of the cannibals by other *human* survivors inside the church. Before this incident, the latter were themselves almost slaughtered—just like animals—by the former in an abattoir-like warehouse, where they were made to kneel before a trough, their throats slit and bodies left to bleed dry. The church massacre is no doubt a form of revenge, but it also allays the group's fear of being symbolically *and* literally preyed on by those cannibalistic humans again. It is worth noting that all this human drama happens with, ironically, the “real” cannibals, that is, the zombies, lurking in the backdrop.

The Walking Dead thus far focuses on the micro-narratives of characters negotiating, whether it be losing or recuperating, humanity in numerous life-and-death situations. A recent shift in the zombie genre gives rise to other texts that express a far greater ambition in the transcendental project of restoring and securing humanity—a greater “hope” for humanity. In these texts, the once-human zombie is given a second chance of becoming human again. The zombie genre thus starts showing signs of taking on an assimilationist attitude towards the nonhuman monster.

Warm Bodies and *In the Flesh* are two such texts that embody this trend. But as discussed in the previous chapter, this Gothic trend is highly problematic as it reinforces the institution of speciesism through the three registers of eating. Eating *within* and *of* these texts thus begin with the act of ingestion, then digestion, and finally the excretion of the zombie-animal, all on the literal, symbolic, and discursive level.

2.1. *Fourth wave zombie: the “sentient and sympathetic ghoul”*

Gothic creatures in the past, as noted by Botting, were “once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant” (286). They epitomised the pure monster that satisfied the position of and desire for horror and the abject in culture. In contemporary popular culture, however, these Gothic creatures have taken on a sympathetic turn to become “fascinating, attractive, and more humane” (Bishop 159), a generic evolution that happened in tandem with the changing socio-political climate of the assimilationist human rights movements in various societies in the last forty years or so. Although these creatures are being humanised, or anthropomorphised, they still retain trappings of their monstrosity. In particular, the ones that have undergone, still are undergoing, this humanising evolution of the horror genre are the vampire, the zombie, and the werewolf. It is not by chance that they are the ones chosen out of the many other monsters within the horror pool; they share the same mythological thread in that they were once human before turning into the pure monster. It is only logical that events come full circle, where the reversal and demythologisation of monstrosity begin with these popular half-human, half monstrous creatures.

The rise of the sympathetic vampire began in the 1970s with Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), then adapted into the highly sexualised, Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (1994). Bishop argues that "vampires were no longer merely devious fiends to be feared and hunted, but rather romantic and tragic souls with human emulated, most especially in the recent 'teen vampire' craze ignited by Meyers' *Twilight* series of novels" (159) and the subsequent five-part film series *The Twilight Saga* (2008-12). Indeed, this "new" vampire, as Tenga and Zimmerman note, "obeys human laws, respects Western society's norms, and shares its values" (77), echoing the assimilationist ethos of the "new homonormativity" movement as defined by Duggan to be "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50). The "new" assimilationist vampire has come to be a metaphor for the homonormative LGBT subject, an idea that is explicitly taken up in the TV drama *True Blood* (2008-14) in its analogous portrayal of the vampires' civil rights movement. Because the homonormative subject has now become a "subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122) as the heteronormative subject, the dehumanising strategy of depicting the sexual other as the pure monster ineluctably falls short. With the rise of the sympathetic vampire, true monstrosity has disappeared, creating what Tenga and Zimmerman call a "horror vacuum" (84), one in which the vampire's successor is expected to fill. Its undead cousin, the zombie, enters the scene naturally. Tenga and Zimmerman explain

this cultural phenomenon by arguing that “the zombie’s rise in popularity alongside the vampire’s reform and humanisation offers compelling evidence of the human need for a genuinely abject monster” (84). Indeed, throughout history, culture has always had its fair share of pure monsters by renewing its horror repertoire through countless reinterpretations and innovations.

The zombie genre is, however, also starting to follow the lead of its vampire cousin in its current incarnation of the sympathetic vampire. The history of the zombie tradition can be briefly charted in four waves: the first wave zombie is rooted in “Haitian folklore and African roots” and these zombies are “reanimated corpses that were used primarily as slaves and who neither threatened the living nor ate human flesh” (Tenga and Zimmerman 84). Romero ushered in with his *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) the second wave where he combined the Caribbean zombie figure with that of the flesh-eating ghoul to produce the canonical zombie “marked by an indomitable impulse to cannibalism” (Grilli 47). The third wave plays on the idea of speed, transforming the lumbering zombie into the “fast zombie” (Riley 196), popularised by Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002), as a metaphor for the rapid contagion of infectious biological diseases and e-viruses (Riley 196-9).² As a reaction to the heightened immediacy and accelerated onslaught of the third wave “fast zombie,” the fourth wave zombie becomes a necessary and natural progression of the zombie genre, a defensive desire to allay and domesticate this unrelenting threat. Bishop calls this fourth wave zombie the “sentient and sympathetic ghoul” (160).

² Grilli calls the sympathetic zombie, which I categorise as the fourth wave zombie, the “third kind of zombie” (47). He does not seem to recognise the “fast zombie” as constituting a new wave in the zombie tradition.

Grilli notes that the zombie genre had first taken a sympathetic turn with Daniel O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) where the zombie has consciousness, "is able to talk and has an individual personality" (47). The rise of zombie comedies, or "zombodies" and the "splatstick" comedy in the 1990s,³ as Bishop observes, is a sign of the cinema beginning to "deflect the horror of the zombies through humour and satire" where the creatures are humanised, "give[n] limited sentience [and] barely articulate speech" (81). Within the darker horror genre itself, Romero also began humanising his zombies with Bub the zombie lab rat (refer to fig. 2) of a paternalistic Frankensteinian scientist in *Day of the Dead* (1985) and Big Daddy, a weapon-wielding zombie, (refer to fig. 3) in *Land of the Dead* (2005) who galvanises the rest of the zombies in an organised invasion of the human city.⁴ These two films, Bishop argues, marked Romero's initiation into the



Fig. 2. Screenshot from *Day of the Dead*. Bub is put through a series of test to see if he can remember things from his human past. Here, he is asked to recall how to use the phone.

³ In more recent times, the more known productions are Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and Ruben Fleischer's *Zombieland* (2009)

⁴ In his chapter on "Humanising the Living Dead," Kyle Bishop analyses the use of "cinematic suture" (166) to encourage audience sympathy for and identification with these humanised zombies in *Day of the Dead* (1985) and *Land of the Dead* (2005).



Fig. 3. Screenshot from *Land of the Dead*. Big Daddy learns how to use the machine gun by a stroke of luck and fires it at an escaping vehicle.

nascent development of the zombie figure as a “fully realised zombie protagonist” (159).

Critics have considered the potential of the zombie in being humanised, just like its vampire counterpart. Grilli argues for the relatability of the zombie figure, stating that although the zombie is a “mirror of the emptied out and alienated humanity,” its characteristic “fierce, immediate and unconditional impulses” contrasts paradoxically with the “zombified” humans of the modern condition, thus making the zombie seem less “a source of horror [than] an object of more or less strong empathy” (51). The natural transition then for the evolution of the zombie genre is to humanise the zombie, to grant it, as Grilli argues, “consciousness and personality” (51). He goes on to argue for the redemptive potential of the zombie figure that once represented complete lack:

I believe that the zombie’s shift from an unambiguously fearsome and horrible creature to an alien not totally devoid of sympathetic traits is driven by the acknowledgement of its

potential to represent not the essence of pure negativity, like so many horror-movie monsters, from the protagonist of *Halloween* (Usa, John Carpenter, 1978) to the little girl in *The Ring* (Usa-Japan, Gore Verbinski, 2002, remake of *Ringu*, Japan, Hideo Nakata, 1998) but a wounded, but still somehow potentially *positive* vision of humanity. This also explains why zombies, werewolves and vampires, unlike more radical aliens, can bend to sympathetic and comic treatments. [emphasis in the original] (53)

These nonhuman monsters, which were previously human, thus also represent hope for humanity, rather than just the traditional conception of them as “pure negativity.” They can be returned literally to their human state, be *rehumanised*, rather than just a literary gesture of being humanised. The humans who have become *like* the monsters can then reclaim their humanity vicariously through the rehumanised monsters, whose monstrosity is literally, though questionably, exorcised from the figure.

One contemporary example of the rehumanised zombie taking centre stage is Jonathan Levine’s *Warm Bodies* (2013), adapted from Isaac Marion’s novel of the same title (2010). In literary terms, this means that the zombie finally gets to play the protagonist, rather than serving as a mere narrative tool. In the rom-com *Warm Bodies*, R, the zombie protagonist, falls in love with the human protagonist Julie and literally becomes a human eventually. This idea of the zombie-human romance is hinted at earlier in Andrew Currie’s *Fido* (2007), where the female owner, having fallen out of love with her husband, takes a liking to her zombie domestic helper Fido (“faith”). The difference

between Fido and R is that Fido does not turn into a human in the end. *Warm Bodies* takes the zombie-human romance further, drawing on the obvious analogy of the classic Shakespearean couple Romeo and Juliet. This film signals the zombie figure's Hollywood debut into the romance genre, as if to declare, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner, that it has caught up with its vampire cousin in having its own brand of zombie romance. But the fact remains that for any *human* romance to work, just as in Disney's adaptation (1991) of the traditional French fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast* and many other Gothic narratives, the nonhuman monster has to become a human, or at least take a human form. In this regard, the zombie has to turn into a human or look like a human, with little or no visible signs of bodily wear and tear or decay, while the vampire largely retains its already impeccable human visage. The rehumanisation mythology within the romance genre in popular culture is thus an old technique being recycled by "new" monster figures.

Besides literal rehumanisation, Bishop predicts that another way forward for the zombie genre is through serialisation, as the "exploration into the *human* can only be fully explored over the course of a long-term narrative form" (206; emphasis in the original).⁵ Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard's comic series *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2003-), then turned into the TV drama of the same name (2010-present) by Frank Darabont, is the best example of the serialised zombie narrative.⁶ But as Bishop has noted, *The Walking Dead* series is less about the zombies and more about the humans

⁵ This has happened with the vampire genre since Josh Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and in more recent times, Alan Ball's *True Blood* (2008-14), Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), and Julie Plec's *The Originals* (2013-present)

⁶ Other serialised zombie narratives include Charlie Brooker's BAFTA-nominated 5-episode series *Dead Set* (2008) and Karl Schaefer and Craig Engler's *Z Nation* (2014)

(206). The zombies are largely ornamental in the series' meditation on humanity. Bishop argues that "the next step in the evolution of this highly specially [*sic*] subgenre will likely literalise the metaphor, presenting narratives in which the zombies tell their own stories, acting as true protagonists and even heroes" (196). Indeed, roughly three years after making this prediction, Dominic Mitchell's TV drama *In the Flesh* (BBC Three, 2013-) combines the rehumanised zombie figure and the serialised narrative form to explore the journey of the protagonist Kieren Walker, a medically treated zombie known as the Partially Deceased Syndrome sufferer.

2.2. *Are zombie and human different species? Liminality and the pharmakon*

Broadly speaking, members of a particular species share an arbitrary set of characteristics. The notion of "species" has historically been examined along biological and ontological lines by scientists and philosophers. One leading voice is animal rights advocate and ethics philosopher Peter Singer. In *Animal Liberation*, Singer questions the whole selective process in biological discourses of isolating arbitrary "criterion" (such as pain) for (dis)qualifying animals for ethical consideration, arguing elsewhere in his "Prologue" to *In Defense of Animals* that "whatever the test we propose as a means of separating human from nonhuman animals, it is plain that if all nonhuman animals are going to fail it, some humans will fail as well" (qtd. in Wolfe 34). Going by this logic, any humanist attempt to distinguish the human from the nonhuman other along species lines, based on insisting the exclusivity of certain features to humanity, is bound to fail and reflect back on the inadequacy of the human category to accommodate *all* humans.

The notion and distinction of broad species categories such as the human and animal, as with any other definitional attempts, will always be problematised by exceptions that prove the *constructed* rule. But this does not stop the desire for and efforts in species categorisation; borders continue to be rigorously policed in various disciplines to negotiate certain conceptions of reality and power relations. While species categorisation proves to be highly problematic, it remains ideologically productive for subject-formation.

In his analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs*, Wolfe maps the relationship between humanity and animality on to a “species grid,” identifying four species types: firstly, there are the “animalised animals,” the nonhuman animals that are the taken-for-granted objects of mankind’s systematic exploitation and “carnivorous sacrifice”; secondly, there are those “humanised animals,” or domesticated “pets,” that are “exempted from the sacrificial regime by endowing them with human features”; thirdly, there are “animalised humans,” humans who are dehumanised and brutally mistreated based on the logic of the animal; and lastly, there is the idealistic notion of the “humanised human” (100-1).

Both *Flesh* and *Warm Bodies* contain three identifiable, *analogous* types that can be superimposed on to Wolfe’s species continuum: firstly, the privileged human (the humanised human); secondly, the Partially Deceased Syndrome sufferer in *Flesh* and Corpses in *Warm Bodies* (both the humanised animal and the animalised human; the undecidable); and lastly, the rabid rotter in *Flesh* and Boney in *Warm Bodies* (the animalised animal) (refer to figs. 4-5). The influence of the “human” and “animal” signifiers in this act of naming is evident; as you move across the spectrum, the three species types diminish



Fig. 4. Screenshots from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episodes 1-3). The aesthetics of the visage and its transmutation: Amy Dyer in her three looks as the rotter (top), the PDS sufferer (middle), and the “human” (bottom; PDS sufferer with human make-up on).



Fig. 5. Screenshots from *Warm Bodies*. The aesthetics of the three distinct states of being: the fleshless Boneyes (top), the degenerating Corpse (middle), and finally the rehumanised Corpse (bottom).

in “humanness” and conversely increase in “animality.” In this inversely proportionate play of the two signifiers, dehumanisation and animalisation are essentially two sides of the same coin. This species spectrum translates into a corresponding power hierarchy with the dominant “human” at the apex. But as with any taxonomical system reflexively defensive of the imaginary borders of its nomenclature, the structure quickly loses the permeability of its boundaries. The species terms and subjects are then socially hierarchised according to the delineations set up by the “human” and “animal” signifiers.

The *Flesh* series introduces the PDS term as a convenient yet memorable shorthand to foreground the in-betweenness and undecidability of the species boundary. It describes the condition of zombies that have been medically treated to curb their cannibalistic desires for human brains. It also functions as a politically correct label to destigmatise the PDS status and to facilitate the nation’s integration programme, the “PDS Domiciled Care Initiative” (Season 1, Episode 1), aimed at reassimilating the PDS sufferers into the human society. Grilli highlights the irony in the use of politically correct terms. He sees such strategy as a patronising form of “inclusive repression” that aims to “neutralise all potential centrifugal deviance by apparent acceptance,” arguing that

repressive inclusion can be recognised in the conformity of the gay community discourse to a politically correct form of expression and, of course, in political correctness as such; even though this passes for recognition of diversity, its ultimate aim is in my opinion the wish to erase diversity from discourse. The refusal to call things by their name [. . .] is the first step of a

blunting of perception which ends in the impossibility to recognise the peculiarity and irreducibility of the individual as such. Far from accepting the other, political correctness makes it impossible to perceive its otherness, and ultimately its very existence. (58)

If anything, the use of the word “Partially” shows a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the liminality of the PDS sufferer; a concept that is already native to the traditional zombie figure itself. This is, however, quickly problematised by the word that follows—“Deceased.” Here, the “human” signifier comes into play again. Despite the undecidable liminality of the PDS sufferer as being between life and death, only the “deceased” aspect is chosen to be reflected in the label. This rhetorical strategy prescribes the province of life exclusively to the living human, while interpellating the partially dead, rather than living, PDS sufferers as subjects lacking in life, and hence humanity.

Kieren, as well as many other PDS characters like him, is essentially a *rehumanised*⁷ zombie. It is necessary to append the prefix “re-“ to “humanised” because these PDS characters are not just humanised in the literary sense of anthropomorphism, but are literally, though gradually over the course of the narrative, converted back to their original “human” state. It involves a biological transformation of the species from nonhuman to human; a reversal of the human-turned-monster mythology in popular culture. In terms of the aesthetics of the show, the organic wholesomeness of the human visage is “restored” for the rehumanised PDS sufferer as part of humanity’s

⁷ In an interview with the creator of *Flesh*, Dominic Mitchell uses the exact word “rehumanise” to describe the phenomenon of the PDS sufferer becoming human again.

delusional civilising mission to remove or hide any trace of animality, particularly in the privileged site of the human face. The full transformation, however, happens only at the close of the second season with the character Amy, while the front part presents the PDS sufferer as an ambiguously separate species with some human attributes that is on its way to becoming a full human again. Although rehumanisation is literalised on the level of species, the “human” aspect of the rehumanised PDS sufferer in its liminal state is far from the ideological reality of its label.

Unlike the rehumanised Kieren, the male zombie protagonist of *Warm Bodies* R faces the doomed fate of regressing into an irreversible state of degradation, that of becoming a Boney. In a desperate attempt to cling to his literally and figuratively declining humanity, R resorts to hoarding human paraphernalia in his empty airplane (refer to fig. 6). His favourite possession is the gramophone, where he explains to Julie that vinyl has “better sound” than the iPod, and hence feels “more alive” to him. Indeed, R is depicted as the

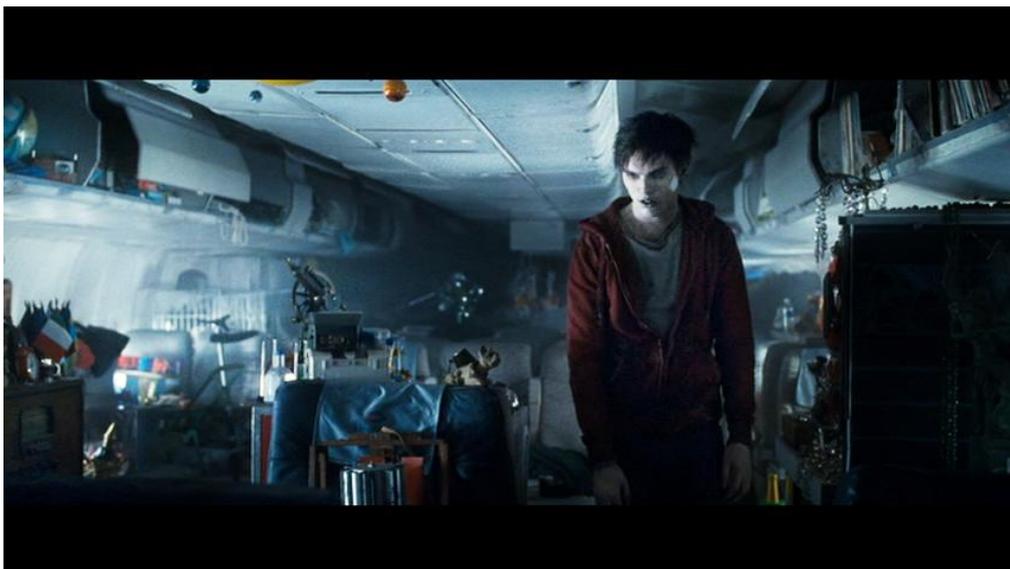


Fig. 6. Screenshot from *Warm Bodies*. R hoards in his empty airplane human items that remind of him of the humanity that is slipping away from him.

most humanised Corpse who shows a desire to hold on to his humanity through the aesthetics. Language also plays an integral part in this struggle. Initially, R laments his lack of communicativeness with other Corpses, as compared to the pre-apocalyptic days of human-to-human communication: “It must have been so much better before, when everyone could express themselves and communicate their feelings and just enjoy each other’s company.” This statement is, however, infused with a satirical tone when juxtaposed with the flashback of a scene at the airport where nearly all the humans are preoccupied with their technological devices. The Corpse is a metaphor for the disconnected human; disconnected from humanity itself because of the lack of connection through verbal communication. Therefore, R is uncharacteristically loquacious for a zombie during the opening voiceover narration where he speaks with linguistic competence. This is, however, contrasted with his “grunting” self and the occasional “almost-conversations” he has with his best Corpse friend M in the diegetic world. Rather than a reflection of the Corpse’s linguistic inability, this impediment is more of a speech degeneration, which corresponds to its eroding humanity. Later, however, after meeting Julie, and motivated by love, R regains some linguistic capability and hence his “humanity,” where he is able to stutter snatches of words and phrases. Aesthetic forms, including language, thus become an indicator of possessing and *re*-possessing humanity.

As part of the rehumanisation mythology in *Flesh*, the PDS sufferer is injected in the back of its neck with Neurotriptyline. This chemical “artificially stimulates the neurogenesis of gial cells [. . .] needed for proper brain function,” allowing for the reconnection of the “cognitive circuitry,”

much like a “computer rebooting” (Season 1, Episode 1). During the course of this medication, the PDS sufferer loses its cannibalistic desire, or desire for food altogether, but regains human traits like language, memories, and emotions, further narrowing the gap between a human and a zombie. The medication is literally a shot of humanity, and also, in the case of social reintegration, a shot *at* humanity again. In other words, it is a second chance for the PDS sufferers. Only those who manage to achieve the desired effects of the medication of regaining some degree of humanity, or, on a symbolic level, of partially repossessing the “human” signifier, are allowed back into the human society. Another drug, Blue Oblivion, does the opposite. Snorted through the nose like recreational drug, it returns the PDS sufferer to a temporary state of rabidity, back to its rotter self.⁸ Neurotriptyline sedates, and in Wolfe’s terms, makes a “humanised human” of the PDS sufferer, while Blue Oblivion catalyses conflicts and turns the PDS sufferer into an “animalised animal” (101). They are the metaphorical switches of humanity and animality scaling between the extreme poles of the human and the rabid rotter on the species continuum.

In other words, these drugs bring out the human and the animalistic monster in the PDS sufferer. The body of the PDS sufferer thus becomes a site for the interplay between these two elements through the effects of the drugs. It is the Platonic “*pharmakon*” that finds its reified form in the figure of the PDS sufferer. Derrida describes the *pharmakon* as follows:

If the *pharmakon* is “ambivalent,” it is because it constitutes
the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and

⁸ The PDS occult group Undead Liberation Army disseminates this drug and its more radical members have used it in terrorist attacks in season two.

the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other [. . .] The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference. (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 127)

The body of the PDS sufferer, the *pharmakon*, is thus the ideological space, the “locus” for the “movement” and “play” of binary relations (life/death, human/zombie). Several PDS characters bear scars and stitches on their bodies and faces, but it is Kieren who epitomises this ambivalence in a particular scene. Fig. 7 is a visual representation of the liminal state of Kieren as a PDS sufferer, focusing on the eyes. Other parts of his face look “human”; his “FleshTone” mousse is intact but one of his “IrisAlways” (Season 1, Episode 1) contacts has been removed. The audience’s gaze, as well as Rick’s in the scene, is returned with an immediate and uncanny confrontation of Kieren’s double species eyes. Kieren is at once a human and a zombie. With or without



Fig. 7. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episode 2). Kieren takes off his left contact lens (right in the image) to remind Rick, who is about to shoot down two rabid rotters, that the latter are like him, in hopes of appealing to Rick’s empathy and love for him.

cosmetic help, this scene powerfully captures the dual species identity that all PDS sufferers straddle.

In *Warm Bodies*, the figure of the Corpse is also in a similar liminal position as the PDS sufferer. But unlike the PDS sufferer that rises from its grave, the Corpses become as such when the living humans are struck by an unknown cause that “could have been chemical warfare or an airborne virus, or a radioactive outbreak monkey.” Initially, the only path for the Corpse is to regress to become the purely animalistic Boney. The latter is also called a “skeleton” because during the Corpse’s literal nonhuman regression—the opposite process of rehumanisation—its human flesh gradually falls off until only the skeleton is left (refer to fig. 8). The biological degradation of the flesh thus symbolises the insidious erosion of the Corpses’s remaining humanity. As with *Flesh*, *Warm Bodies* encodes and fetishises the largest organ—the human flesh, as in skin—enveloping nearly the entire human body as a potent marker of humanity. It is also in this culturally coded biological barrier that the



Fig. 8. Screenshot from *Warm Bodies*. A Corpse peels off a piece of flesh from his face to reveal the skeletal interior, marking his slow but certain degradation of becoming a Boney.

species barrier is rooted.

Kieren's species otherness is not external to the human, for the same human body hosts this zombie foreignness. This is similar to the vampire figure, as Botting argues, as being "a figure of transgression disturbing boundaries between inside and outside, home and foreignness" (288). The familiar narrative of the zombie invasion of cities and homes once gave the impression of a "distant" relationship between the human self and the zombie other; with the PDS sufferer, both subjectivities are conflated within an embodied entity, for the zombie otherness has now penetrated and taken over the most intimate space of the human body to *co-exist* with the human self. Grilli argues that zombies are essentially "non-foreign aliens" and the "objectivation of a potentiality which can be assumed to be present in every human" (53). Although the traditional zombie figure reminds us of the paradoxes of binary relations, as many zombie critics have already noted, the figure of the PDS sufferer presents us with another paradox; that otherness is as foreign as it is native, a spatial localisation of the zombie other within the human self, both circulating within the *pharmakon* of the PDS sufferer's body. This concept even extends to the geographical space, for the First Rising sees zombies rising from within their own lands, such as Roarton's very own village cemetery. Both the PDS sufferer's body and origin connote unnerving proximity—the monstrous other is *in* us, beneath our skin, and *among* us, where "us" is easily "them." Indeed, French productions like Robin Campillo's *They Came Back* (2004) and the later television adaptation *The Returned* (2012) have explored the anxieties arising from the dead returning to their loved ones; partially familiar, for they retain past memories and the same

fully intact physical appearance as they had when they were alive; yet partially foreign, for their origins and agenda are shrouded in mystery. “[You were] born, bred, and died here” (Season 2, Episode 1), comments the PDS community care officer in disagreement with Kieren’s decision to leave Roarton: the PDS sufferers are not foreign aliens, they are or were close friends and families who have returned—so close, they could even be a potential version of us, and vice versa.

2.3. *Transcoding otherness: zombie-terrorist-animal as non-“subject of the law or of right”*

Unlike other Gothic texts where the zombie figure serves either as a social metaphor or a mere accessory in human-centric narratives, zombie otherness takes centre stage in *Flesh*. It can then be expected that the zombie allegory would be loaded with various metaphorical codes of otherness, and that the text would arrange its meanings according to this Gothic structure to lend a voice—if it does—to the relevant social others. In particular, two such codes, that of terrorism and animality, can be discerned.

The second season of *Flesh* begins with the foreboding news of terrorist elements within the PDS community and the news footage of an abandoned “Undead Liberation Army safe house” (Season 2, Episode 1) discovered to be used as a makeshift factory for producing Blue Oblivion. Four extremist members of the Undead Liberation Army are planning another terrorist attack, after “an aborted attack on the Eastford shopping centre” (Season 2, Episode 1); this time, on one of the city trams in Lancashire. They succeed in the “PDS terrorist attack” (Season 2, Episode 1); during which there was a dramatic

opening by one of the members, echoing a verse from the Revelation—“We are the first and the last! We are those that liveth and were dead! And behold, we are alive for evermore and have the keys to hell and death in our hands!” (Season 2, Episode 1)—followed by a self-inducement of rabidity through the use of Blue Oblivion.

The resistance of the PDS community against the living’s oppressive regime manifests on several levels in the second season. Of particular prominence is the presence of religious extremism among some of the PDS sufferers associated with the Undead Liberation Army, which is, itself, being misrepresented as an essentially terrorist organisation. The threat of the PDS extremists resonates strongly in Maxine Martin’s speech: “They may pretend to be like us, but what lies beneath that mask of make-up and medication is a cold, hard killer that cannot be reasoned with. The PDS sufferer in your home, in your shop, in your pub, is one missed dose away from tearing your head apart” (Season 2, Episode 1). Indeed, *Flesh* is filled with the xenophobic overtones of the reformed PDS sufferer lapsing into its old cannibalistic and hence destructive ways—just “one missed dose away” from terrorising the human society again. Zombieness is clearly deeply encoded with the discourses of terrorism and xenophobia; what ensues, of course, is a blanket disciplinary measure against *all* PDS sufferers who are deemed potential zombie-terrorists.

In a campaign video for the nation-wide “PDS Give Back Scheme” (Season 2, Episode 2), these discourses are foregrounded again as the PDS sufferers are treated like reformed terrorists whose citizenship has been revoked. Only upon completion of this scheme are they given the chance to be

“re-citizenised” (Season 2, Episode 2). Criminality, repentance, indebtedness, and guilt-inducing are emphasised in the language of the video, what with expressions like “helping the communities they once destroyed,” “rebuild[ing] British business they once tore apart” and “giving something back to the society they once ravaged” (Season 2, Episode 2). The campaign video contains patronising interviews of human victims that belie its immensely passive-aggressive and accusatory tone as it repeatedly alludes to the destructions caused by the terrorist-like PDS sufferers when they first rose and were in their untreated state. One problem with this retroactive move is that the untreated PDS sufferers, or rotters, had no self will, unlike the calculated agency of the extremist PDS sufferers in their planned terrorist attacks. It is “unjust,” as Derrida argues, “to judge someone [in this case, the animalistic rabid rotter] who does not understand the language in which the law is inscribed or the judgement pronounced, etc.” (“Force of Law” 246). Yet even when the PDS sufferers acquire the ability to speak in the same human language, they are still not fully accepted into the anthropocentric legal system because of their species liminality.⁹ The law is essentially speciesist. All PDS sufferers are then made to pay back, wearing a humiliating vest with the words “I’m PDS and I’m Giving Back” (Season 2, Episode 2) emblazoned on the back, for something that they did in their natural, untreated state, much like an animal being punished by law for instinctively killing a human. Precisely, much like an animal—for it is then that the PDS sufferer, the stateless “terrorist” who is not under the aegis of any nation, and who was not considered a subject in the eyes of the human law, but is now capriciously

⁹ This will be elaborated on slightly later in Simon’s recount of the Ravenshead massacre.

subjected to and reinscribed within it in order to deliver punishment, and be treated with speciesist logic as a non-subject of the law, just like an animal.

Flesh is therefore also heavily invested in transcoding zombieness with the discourse of animality which lays the rhetorical groundwork for legitimising discrimination among *human* groups against human others. The series contains several images of rabid rotters being treated like animals:

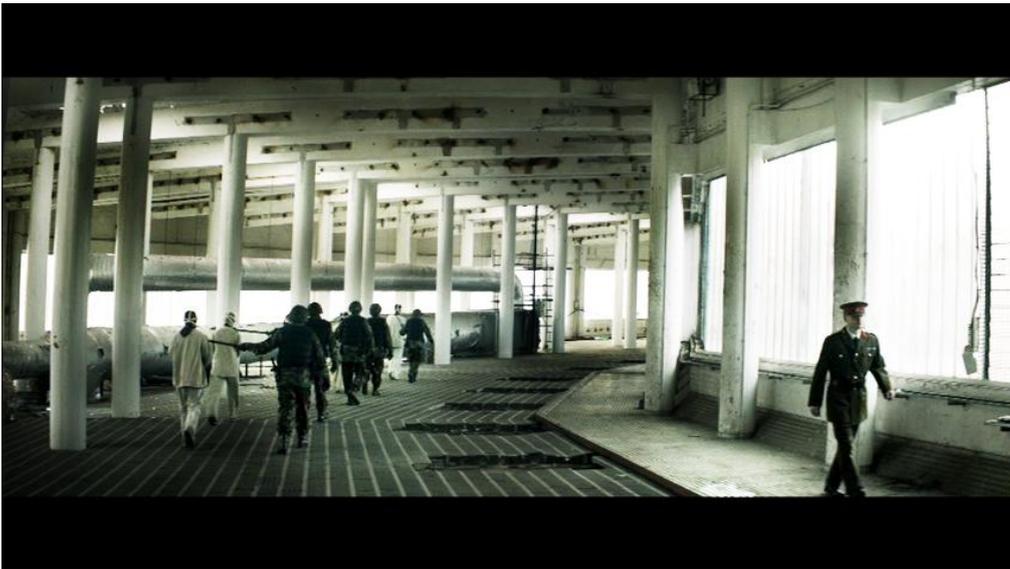


Fig. 9. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 5). Rabid rotters (on the left) are held by animal restraints and moved along by the armoured guards in the Partially Deceased Treatment Centre Norfolk.



Fig. 10. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 3). Rabid rotters are caged up while the PDS sufferers Kieren and Simon are instructed to clean the cage as part of the “PDS Give Back Scheme.”



Fig. 11. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 5). Doctors continue to perform vivisection on Simon despite his desperate plea for them to stop.

The motif of discipline is evident in the use of animal restraints (refer to fig. 9) and the man-size cage (refer to fig. 10) in the heavily militarised medical institution Norfolk. PDS animality is being portrayed as a pathology that needs to be contained and corrected. In fact, recent Gothic TV productions, such as Toby Whithouse's *Being Human* (2008-13), have seen an increased trend in portraying monstrous cannibalism as a pathological behaviour, associating it with a form of addiction that can be questionably controlled with the help of AA groups (refer to fig. 12). In their fierce pursuit of a "cure" for the PDS condition, the scientists of the pharmaceutical company Halperin and Weston perform aggressive vivisection on the body of Simon (refer to fig. 11). Being the first zombie to react to the PDS medication, Simon is valued by the doctors as a positive test subject, just like any other animal in animal testing. The scene dramatises the plight of the non-speaking animals used as guinea pigs in vivisection for the benefit of mankind by having the monstrous scientists wilfully ignore Simon's intelligible cry for help: "I don't want to do



Fig. 12. Screenshots from *Being Human* (top; Season 2, Episode 4) and *In the Flesh* (bottom; Season 1, Episode 1). Cannibalism (drinking blood and eating human brains) is portrayed as a pathological desire, in the same league as alcoholism, that requires the rehabilitative help of support groups in both texts.

this anymore. Please?” (Season 2, Episode 5). Simon is a voice for the hapless, silenced animals that are subjected to such speciesist treatment.

In another disciplinary institution, at the fundamentalist parish of Roarton, Vicar Oddie frames his condemnation of the PDS sufferers within the discourse of animality: “If you drug a wolf, it does not stop being a wolf. Aye, it’s docile for a while, and when the drugs wear off, it will tear you limb from limb! That is the nature of the beast! To maim! To kill! To devour!” (Season

2, Episode 1). In Vicar Oddie's eyes, the rabid rotter and the PDS sufferer are the same; the latter is not taken to have, borrowing Spivak's phrasing, "graduated into [partial] humanhood" (229), but remains a *potential* fully-fledged, animalistic zombie. Vicar Oddie continues his fire-and-brimstone rhetoric of describing them as "demons in disguise" and "agents of Satan" (Season 2, Episode 1), combining the discourses of religion and animality in demonising the PDS sufferers. As seen, animality, represented by the rabid rotters, is being strictly regulated by the disciplinary apparatuses of science and religion. Unless domesticated by medication or exorcised entirely, as would be the intention of the fundamentalist parish, radical speciesism is necessary, where PDS animality—or the possibility of reversion—cannot be allowed to go unchecked or remain a threat to humanity in the civilised societies of *Flesh*.

The image of the rabid rotter as an animalistic, human-killing monster is, however, complicated in a scene where the rabid rotters display "human" traits (refer to fig. 13). Granted, protective and survival instincts are not exclusive to the human species. What then makes this *image*—and less the qualities displayed—so "human" and powerfully ambivalent is the uncanny effect of witnessing from afar a human-looking adult zombie escorting a human-looking child zombie to safety after being discovered by the human hunters. Even Kieren is struck by the familiar and familial performance of "humanness" in this scene. In terms of the human apparel and figure behaviour, the audience is immediately reminded of the semblance of a father-daughter relation between the two zombies. The mimetic gesture of this "family scene" demonstrates what Shaviro argues to be the function of



Fig. 13. Screenshots from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episode 2). Rabid rotters make for the run after being discovered feasting on a sheep in the woods by the HVF hunters. They sit helpless on the ground with guns pointing at them.

zombies in their “mimetic replication of the human beings they once were” (85), problematising the speciesist basis for the human and zombie-animal divide.

The animal is altogether excluded from the law of human culture. In transcoding the zombie as the terrorist and ultimately, as the animal, *Flesh* establishes symbolic equivalence among these three subjectivities, rendering them non-subjects of the law. In “Force of Law,” Derrida argues that

An animal can be made to suffer, but one would never say, in a sense said to be proper, that it is a wronged subject, the victim of a crime, of a murder, of a rape or a theft, of a perjury [. . .]

There have been, there are still, many “subjects” among humankind who are not recognized as subjects and who receive this animal treatment [. . .] What one confusedly calls “animal,” the living thing as living and nothing more, is not a subject of the law or of right. (246)¹⁰

Because the human law does not include the animal as a proper subject to begin with, dehumanising or animalising tactics can be employed with impunity in many different scenarios. Human subjects, such as terrorists, prisoners-of-war, or any other social others, are projected into the signifying field of the animal within this judicial economy, treated as mere living objects, “the living thing as living and nothing more,” to be subjected to the disciplinary regimes of the social order.

Indeed, in *Flesh*, Simon recounts a trial that betrays the inferior status accorded to the PDS sufferers under the human law: “The Ravenshead massacre. A man went on a shooting spree in his own hometown. Shot ten Undead people in the head. He gets five years, because the judge says that the partially deceased people were only half a person” (Season 2, Episode 1). Within this judicial algorithm, the PDS sufferer’s subjectivity is calculated, albeit arbitrarily, to be “half” the value of a person. As the law only recognises and measures *human* loss, the relatively light five-year sentence given to the

¹⁰ Derrida acknowledges that in some cultures, the animal is recognised to some extent as a subject of the law, but argues that such examples are “considered to be either archaisms or still marginal and rare phenomena not constitutive of our culture” (246-7) In other words, they are but conscious exceptions made for the animal and not a true reflection of its status in human culture.

human murderer is made commensurate with the “half-*human*” status of the PDS victims; the other half of the PDS sufferer’s subjectivity, the nonhuman animal half, is, however, unaccounted for within this equation.

A crucial and powerful scene exemplifies how the PDS sufferer is implicated by this logic of the animal as a non-subject of the law. Bill Macy, the leader of the vigilante group Human Volunteer Force, is indiscriminate in his killing of the rotters. To him, the rotter and the PDS sufferer are the same: "A rotter is a rotter—drugs or no drugs" (Season 1, Episode 1). When he receives a tip-off that a PDS sufferer has returned to Roarton, he goes on a witch-hunt and finds Maggie Burton in her house. Initially, Bill was unable to pull the trigger on Maggie kneeling before him as he recognises the uncanny resemblance of her eyes: “Why do your eyes look like mine?” (Season 1, Episode 1). He then instructs Maggie to remove her contact lenses to reveal her true self as seen in fig. 14:

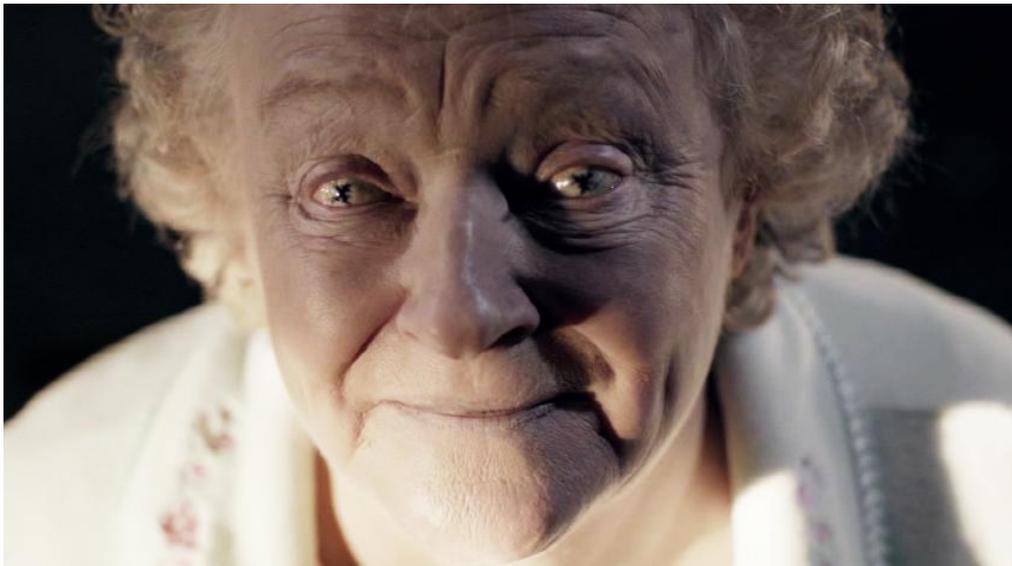


Fig. 14. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episode 1). Maggie Burton removes her contact lenses upon request to reveal her PDS eyes and smiles back at Bill before her impending execution.

The evocative power of the scene lies in the chasm between how the audience and Bill perceive Maggie and her death. The audience is led to view her death as murder while Bill sees it as a just execution of a monstrous zombie. For the audience, the use of close-up, Balázs argues, acts as a form of “visual anthropomorphism,” in which the uncanny objects, Maggie’s PDS eyes, are humanised—“a human soul [breathed] into them” (316). Wolfe argues that the eye is the “privileged sensory apparatus of the Freudian ‘human’” (176), one of *the* privileged sites of humanity. When literarily transposed on to the nonhuman other as the humanised eye, it allows one to acknowledge and “recognis[e] the being of the nonhuman other” (153). This shot focuses on Maggie’s humanised PDS eyes and her returned gaze, as well as her poignant smiling expression, to evoke audience sympathy when witnessing Maggie’s impending execution and recognising it as an act of murder.

Yet for Bill, things are different. In removing her contact lenses and revealing the perceived animality of the PDS eyes beneath the human disguise, Maggie performs the ceremony of peeling away the last vestige of humanity to secure the distinction, at least to Bill, between him and her as human and nonhuman zombie. Her perceived animality can therefore be monstrified. Indeed, throughout *Flesh*, the PDS eyes and their distinctly constricted and distorted pupils form a recurring motif that powerfully generates affective moments of not only uncanny dissonance but also ambivalent empathy. In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the eyes of the creature, Petsche argues, meet and return Victor’s gaze (101): “His eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me” (Shelley 40). Victor is repulsed by the creature’s “dull yellow eyes” (Shelley 38) and their signification of animality “in the form of [the creature’s]

gaze” (Petsche 101). Bill, on the other hand, unlike Victor Frankenstein, finds murderous comfort, even pleasure, in the uncanny dissonance of Maggie’s inhuman eyes, commenting “that’s more like it” (Season 1, Episode 1) after Maggie removes her lenses. Not only does this act affirm Maggie’s “inherent” nonhuman otherness, but it also affirms his own humanity and sense of self-righteousness in dispensing justice, that is, in exterminating the monstrous other. The perceived difference of the eyes, which translates into a warped sense of ontological difference and ethical pretext, opens up what Derrida calls a place for a “noncriminal putting to death” (“Eating Well” 112) of Maggie. According to this logic, Bill is thus able to “assert his desire to retain his ‘human nature’ over and against the animality that is observing him” (Petsche 102), as well as to execute Maggie with impunity, without becoming a murderer. Bill in fact believes it to be just for him to kill Maggie, for she is—or was, he does not care—an animalistic monster, and the animal is not a subject of the law. At the end of the first season, Bill is shot point blank by Ken Burton, Maggie’s husband, because the law fails to punish Bill for the murder of Maggie, as well as for Bill’s act of filicide for killing his own PDS son Rick. The need for vigilantism to restore justice that the law fails to pursue confirms once again the helpless animal status—and of the animal in general—of the PDS sufferer under the human law.

2.4. *Flesh-eating ideologies and human normativity*

The opening scene of the first season of *Flesh* begins with an eating scene in the abandoned supermarket of a zombie-infested world; two female soldiers, Lisa and Jem, of the Human Volunteer Force, an anti-zombie task

force, are having a merry banter over the walkie-talkie in separate venues on what to “pilfer” for snacks. Ostensibly exhilarated from the sense of freedom accorded by the anarchic situation, Lisa takes a joy ride on the supermarket trolley down the long aisle and accidentally runs headlong into a couple of zombies (who happen to be Kieren and Amy). Similar to witnessing an act of animal slaughter or culinary preparation, the rabid rotters grab her by the shoulder, smash her head purposefully against the shelf several times—like cracking open a nut—to reveal and relish the gastronomical contents inside her skull (refer to fig. 15). The initial scene of comfort eating is quickly turned against the audience into a disconcerting display of monstrous cannibalism.

From the outset, *Flesh* establishes the eating motif, in its several dietary variations, as one of the main sources of tension and anxiety in the text, recognising its ideological capacity to disrupt the anthropocentric social order. The rabid rotter’s very specific diet is a streamlined attack on the core of this order; unlike traditional zombies that feed on the rest of the human body, the rabid rotters in *Flesh* feed only on the brain. The human brain, being the seat of intellectual and emotional faculties—and which, according to Petsche, are the very elements for establishing human superiority over the nonhuman animal (104)—thus becomes a site in which the zombies symbolically resist anthropocentrism and speciesism—simply by eating the ideologically productive organ and *only* it.

The human species’ answer to this threat is Neurotriptyline, a state-endorsed chemical used to suppress the cannibalistic desires of the rabid rotter. Unlike the morally motivated Gothic vegetarianism of sympathetic vampires and the Frankenstein’s creature, suppressed cannibalism is an *enforced* dietary



Fig. 15. Screenshots from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episode 1). Kieren has occasional flashbacks of Amy and him as rabid rotters killing Lisa by swinging her head repeatedly against the shelf. Kieren then tears open the back of the head and feeds on the cranial content.

control. As a disciplinary measure, this chemically-induced sacrifice of the PDS sufferer's cannibalism preserves the sanctity of humans, preventing them from being reduced to a meat-thing stripped of all humanity. As a resistance to this enforced discipline, the opposite drug, Blue Oblivion, converts the PDS sufferer back to a state of temporary rabidity. The drug returns the cannibalistic desires locked away, symbolically granting the rabid rotter a liberating window that is being politically abused in extremist forms against speciesist institutions and the innocent humans.

Because of the dietary control, the PDS sufferer does not actually need to eat for sustenance, nor can they take any human food. "Solids and liquids," Amy explains, "are toxic" (Season 1, Episode 2) to PDS sufferers, resulting in violent orificial discharges. Not only is eating unnaturally curbed, human food is thus also portrayed as unnatural to the PDS bodies, where the bodily rejection of such human food—not necessarily animal meat—symbolically challenges the anthropocentric order that naturalises the consumption of such food. Unnatural non-eating also creates a split within the PDS subject; the latter is neither an animal-eating human, nor a human-eating zombie. Besides sacrificing its cannibalistic desires, the PDS sufferer is denied access to the food chain altogether and its attendant power structure—of which it would have been at the apex above the human because of its potential cannibalism. It falls outside of the conventional system of subjectivity based on dietary ideologies. The PDS sufferer then cannot be a full subject, but it is also precisely the case because it is the embodiment of a liminal subject that is "sliding constantly along a series of differences, including those that are thought to separate human from animal" (Calarco 142). The PDS sufferer's

non-eating and liminality thus reveal the hollowness of eating ideologies in securing human subjectivities.

The PDS sufferer, however, is able to indulge in animal's brain as a form of recreational drug. At a PDS party at the Lambert Farm, Amy explains to Kieren why she takes sheep's brains: "Cos they make you feel amazing! They're not human brains, anyway, just sheep's brains, want some? (Season 2, Episode 2). In this sense, the PDS sufferer's recreational carnivorism—a situational practice akin to social drinking—and non-eating for sustenance can then be considered a partial version of Gothic vegetarianism, as humans are not taken as food and it is morally acceptable, as reasoned by Amy, to have animal's brain rather than human's, even if only for recreation, rather than for sustenance.

In *Warm Bodies*, however, the Corpses eat human brains for sustenance *and* pleasure. In one scene, after killing Julie's boyfriend Perry, R indulges in his brains to get "his memories, his thoughts, [and] his feelings," commenting that "the brain's the best part. The part that makes [him] feel human again." Later, while enjoying vicariously Perry's memories, R comes to the moment where he sees, from his victim's point of view, himself killing Perry and immediately spits out the brain. Clearly, though he cannot resist eating cannibalistically as "the new hunger [that the Corpses experience] is a very powerful thing," he is still capable of being morally conflicted by his own murderous deed. Rejecting the brain then becomes R's symbolic alignment with the anthropocentric species order of *not* treating the human as a source of food.

Indeed, such speciesist tendencies can be found in *Flesh* where it tries

to lodge the animal at the base of the food chain, securing its place *below* the human. In an earlier scene (refer back to Fig. 13), a pair of father-daughter rabid rotters performs Gothic vegetarianism by feeding on a sheep instead of a human. As discussed in the previous chapter, this scene exemplifies the zombie's "mimetic replication" of humanity. In light of the sheep carcass on the ground, this "mimetic replication" of the zombies' human past essentially replicates the scene of a family meal, where the animal is invariably the source of food on the table. Despite the textual coding of the rabid rotter with the discourse of animality, this scene effectively reasserts the *real* animal's position at the bottom of the species hierarchy—the human in between the animal and the carnivorous and cannibalistic rabid rotter at the top—as the ultimate object of "carnivorous sacrifice" in human culture (Grilli 49).

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Warm Bodies*, the remaining humans keep livestock (refer to fig. 16) within their fortress as their source of food to mark a dietary, and hence ontological, distinction from the cannibalistic Corpses and Boneys. Although these are casual images dotting R's heroic journey of "rescuing" Julie, they nonetheless form an integral part of the natural(ised) scene of a human community re-establishing itself where animals are unquestioningly posited at the bottom of the food chain. Carnivorism is then not only an essential survival tactic, but also a coping mechanism for the metaphysical crisis of humanity within this dystopian context, where the human population is dwindling and being preyed on by other nonhuman species. When Julie tries to reason with her father that the Corpses are potentially rehumanising and hence losing their cannibalistic desires, he retorts incredulously: "We're their food source. They are not becoming vegan. Okay?"



Fig. 16. Screenshots from *Warm Bodies*. When R sneaks into the human fortress, he passes by livestock such as the cows (top) and kids (bottom) that are bred as sources of food for the remaining human population within.

They don't eat broccoli. They eat brains, your mother's and your boyfriend's included." While the statement satirises the concept of Gothic vegetarianism with the recent surge of sympathetic monsters, it also reveals the underlying fear and anxieties of humans becoming a source of food for the nonhuman other, which would then collapse the already crumbling carnivorous and species order of the human stronghold.

If the PDS sufferer's non-eating were a voluntary moral choice, the

closest character that would exercise an authentic version of Gothic vegetarianism would be Kieren. Plagued by the numerous flashbacks of his past cannibalistic deed, Kieren is filled with moral repugnance of his eating trauma. In a confession to Jem, he expresses deep remorse and guilt about killing Lisa:

It feels awful. I'm not one of those who thinks that what we did was all right because it was necessary for our survival, or that we were somehow some advanced species, so killing the living doesn't count. It does count. I did kill her. And all that I can say is that I would have done anything to have stopped it. (Season 1, Episode 3)

His moral reproach is, however, problematic because his feelings and obligations are only directed towards the humans; when a couple of rabid rotters are caged in the medical institution, he keeps his distance from them to avoid being reminded of his animalistic past. In his efforts to recuperate his own humanity, animality becomes a necessary sacrifice, reinforcing the speciesist basis of Gothic vegetarianism.

Eating in any socially sanctioned dietary manner is a humanormative practice. As Gruen argues, "humanormativity, akin to heteronormativity (and later homonormativity), is the view that humans are the gauge or normative measure against which others are judged deficient, deviant, lacking" (213). To allay humanormative anxieties, *Warm Bodies* is keen to quickly reinstate Julie's species status as a human right after she wakes up on the first day of being "imprisoned" overnight in R's empty airplane. The first thing she says to him is that she is "starved" and the scenes that follow are images of

humanormative eating (refer to fig. 17). The text is thus able to re-establish Julie’s biological, and hence ontological, status as a human through this particular form of eating, a ritual that R, who does not share the same dietary preference as her, can only watch on in nostalgia and admiration of how beautifully *human* Julie is.



Fig. 17. Screenshots from *Warm Bodies*. Julie finds a can of “fruit cocktail” and is offered a bottle of beer by R.

Eating in *Flesh* is, however, also used as a device for maintaining humanormative facade of the PDS reality. When Kieren returns to his home, he is asked to sit down for his first meal as a PDS sufferer with his parents. His mum Sue has cooked his favourite “lamb,” but when he replies that he “does not eat anymore,” she begs him to “pretend for a little bit.” (Season 1, Episode 1). For Kieren’s parents, eating carnivorously is eating normally as a human being; pretending to eat carnivorously then becomes a necessary form of self-delusional assurance that Kieren still retains facets of his past human self. In the context of his loving family, pretending to eat the same animal, or humanormative eating, as Principle argues, erodes “the species difference and dominion that carnivorism is meant to enforce” (“(M)eating” 27). Later, species difference is indeed revealed to be non-contingent on their unconditional love for him, as Sue declares that she “would love [Kieren] with all her heart even if [he] came back as a goldfish” (Season 1, Episode 3). The proverbial sacrificial lamb, as literalised on the dining table of the Walker family (refer to fig. 18), is thus used as a coping mechanism to not only deflect their fear of Kieren’s potential cannibalism but also to normalise Kieren’s PDS condition by engaging the speciesist, humanity-assuring ideology of carnivorism.

Amy, on the other hand, does not resort to humanormative eating as she feels secure about her PDS identity. She, however, regains *human* hunger—not hunger for human—over time. At one point, Amy intuitively responds to her hunger pang and ransacks the kitchen for food. After taking a bite off a yogurt bar and then realising that she is eating like a human, she



Fig. 18. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 1, Episode 1). After the conversation, the camera pans down to this lamb dish on the table prepared by Kieren's mum Sue.

immediately spits it out with disgust and exclaims, “What am I doing?” (Season 2, Episode 4)—only this time, it is a voluntary, and not an involuntary bodily, rejection of food. Having grown anti-humanormative owing to the influence of the Undead Liberation Army, Amy recognises and resists naming and eating as normalising strategies of the human species to domesticate the PDS sufferers. Later, however, at a village fete on a date with Philip, Amy forgetfully indulges in a toffee apple. When questioned by Philip's mum, Amy replies, smiling, “I forgot. I'm PDS. Course. I don't eat. Whoops!” (Season 2, Episode 6), before pretending to throw up. Amy's dietary change signals the beginning of her rehumanisation. Her unwitting moments of lapsing into her natural human diet and her surprised reaction suggest the instrumental role of eating in ideologically constructing one's identity. More importantly, her instinctual desire for human food such as the yoghurt bar and toffee apple secures her position as a human in the species hierarchy. The initial fear of potential cannibalism and the need to sustain the illusion of humanormativity

are now replaced with the affirming rehumanisation of the PDS sufferer. The speciesist order is thus dietarily restored.

Although the PDS sufferer's eating desires are suppressed, it does not stop Rick from forcing himself to participate in the humanormative act of eating against his own PDS nature. Rick is in deep denial of his PDS status and pretends that he is still a normal human. For him, humanormative eating is to drink alcohol as he did when he was human. As an ex-soldier who died in the war, he conforms to the heteropatriarchal codes of drinking in the hyper-masculine pub Legion frequented by the male soldiers of the Human Volunteer Force (HVF). Bill Macy, his father, frequently plies him with cans of beer and even teases him in the pub on one occasion: "Talking about Vicky Barnes, you horny git? This one here (Gary) was making the moves while you were serving Queen and country, eh? [. . .] (Passes him an alcoholic shot) Get that down you. Kill the heartache" (Season 1, Episode 2). Indeed, the Legion, as Kieren explains, is "not just a pub" for drinking only; it is also an ideological space that not only reinforces heteropatriarchal but also heterosexist values. When he was still a human, Kieren was "barred for life" from the pub and "hated" by the soldiers because "[he] wasn't like them" (Season 1, Episode 2). The heterosexist environment is confirmed when Gary, one of the HVF members, interrogates Amy and suggests that "Girls' Grammar" is filled with "lezzies" (Season 1, Episode 2). He then turns his attention to Kieren, the feminised male with artistic talents, commenting that "he'd fit right in" (Season 1, Episode 2) the girls' school. Whether it is drinking or the conversation topic, the Legion, as a space for consumption, reinforces the discriminatory tendencies of heteronormativity against

femininity and homosexuality. More importantly, these tensions in relation to normative gender and sexuality are played out on the terrain of humanormativity. When Amy and Kieren enter the Legion, they are escorted to a “segregated area” (Season 1, Episode 2) in the back room, away from the humanormative drinking area. Incidentally, it is there at the “segregated area” that Kieren bumps into Rick, who was in a clandestine gay relationship with him when they were human. Rick not only has to perform being human, but also heterosexual in front of his father and the male soldiers. Forcing himself to drink, in this case, and engaging in the homophobic conversation—he laughs at Gary’s joke—thus allows him to align himself with the human-, heteronormative codes of the Legion, and to hide in the safety of his human-, heterosexual mask.

The borrowing of the species discourse of humanormative eating as a platform for articulating the discourse of human sexuality is evident in another scene. In the second season, another more successful romance presents itself to Kieren in the form of Simon, an openly PDS sufferer who refuses to wear the human mask. On one occasion, however, in order to get to know Kieren’s “world” better, Simon complies with his request to put on human make-up. When Simon meets his parents, Kieren’s father Steve addresses him as Kieren’s “mate,” a platonic term that suggests Steve’s ignorance of the true nature of their relationship. The luncheon does not pan out well for the gay PDS couple, as they are joined by a contrasting heterosexual human couple, Jem (Kieren’s sister) and Gary, who are both members of the Human Volunteer Force (refer to fig. 19). During the meal, in a maliciously deliberate act, Gary narrates in graphic details his experiences of killing rabid rotters



Fig. 19. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 4). Two opposing sets of couple—gay PDS (on the top right) and heterosexual human (bottom left)—are seated across the table having family luncheon with the parents. Kieren’s dad, Steve Walker, stops him mid-way in his description of his cannibalistic cravings when he was in his untreated state.

with Jem. While this happens Steve tries repeatedly to divert the subject by commenting on the food. Everyone except Gary at the table is visibly uncomfortable but it takes Kieren’s retaliation of an unsettling recount of his solitary, fearful “coming out of the casket” experience and his impassioned description of his subsequent cannibalistic hunger before Steve finally bursts out in anger and calls for a time-out: “That’s enough! Do you hear me? I will not have it” (Season 2, Episode 4). The juxtaposition in this scene of Gary’s story on the killing of reanimated corpses with Kieren’s on the desire to eat human corpses reveals speciesist bias and anxieties; talking at length about the legitimate killing of rabid rotters—which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a form of symbolic anthropophagy—is uncomfortable but ignorable, as “normal” as the culling of animals; while the mere mention of cannibalism instantly crosses the line. Even though Simon and Kieren try to disguise themselves as “normal” humans to create a conducive, humanormative environment, they still fail to level the playing field of pleasing the parents.

Kieren's retort succinctly captures this bias: "Did I cross the line, Dad? While they sit around and high-five each other about killing us like it's a big joke! Oh no, that's fine with everyone! I say one thing and that is indecent? I'm sorry, but that is bullshit!" (Season 2, Episode 4). Between the two couples, one heterosexual human while the other gay and pseudo-human, the latter couple does not stand a chance as their PDS selves eventually come back to haunt them via Gary's ill-meaning antagonism. In a way, the speciesist anxieties over cannibalism echo that of a homosexual panic. Zombieness thus becomes the meat shield, in place of homosexuality, for the expressed disapproval of Steve. The species discourse serves as a dramatised "off site" in testing normative limits, for this scene could well have been between a "normal" gay couple and a straight *human* couple, with the discourse of homosexuality taking the heat all on its own. The potential problematisation of heteronormativity is thus deflected on to a critique of the species discourse of humanormativity.

2.5. *The species(ist) closet: coming-out narratives of queer sexualities*

Flesh is a literary performance of the "carnivorous sacrifice" of the animal. The text deploys the species discourse, evoked through the zombie-animal dyadic code, to reopen and solve issues concerning discourses of the human. It is an epistemological exploitation—even epistemic violence—of animality, materialised in sound and image on the screen. In Gothic parlance, *Flesh* wears the layer of species discourse over its own flesh as a human would the animal skin for self-servingly functional (protective or cosmetic) purposes.

In *Flesh*, species is paired with human sexuality: Kieren, as well as two other romantically linked PDS characters, Rick and Simon, is a gay PDS sufferer. The first season explores the closeted romance between Kieren and Rick. Here, the repressive discourse of homosexuality finds refuge in the narrative of closetedness, where the full expression of homosexual desires is constantly disrupted and truncated. Indeed, throughout the first season, the expression of homosexual desires is constantly suppressed to align with the ultra-conservative climate of Roarton Valley. Several elements hint strongly at the taboo status of homosexuality and the covert relationship between Kieren and Rick. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Legion pub is a heterosexist and homophobic place. Other suggestive parts include the meaningful shot-reverse-shot of Kieren looking wistfully at an Expressionist painting of Rick drawn by him, as well as the stashed away photograph of them together when they were still human. When Kieren and Rick finally meet for the first time as PDS sufferers at the Legion, Rick nervously opens with a casual “All right, mate?” (Season 1, Episode 2) and offers a platonic handshake that contrasts poignantly with their quivering lips and meaningful looks, betraying the intensity of their inexpressible affection for each other in this dangerously anti-gay environment. In the final episode of the first season, while warning Kieren about Bill’s plan to assassinate him, Rick’s phone call gets cut short—“Ren, about last night, I’m really . . .” (Season 1, Episode 3)—at the slight possibility of a romantic confession. The narrative deliberately curtails a fuller expression of homosexuality to reinforce the atmosphere of closetedness; a necessary move to bottle up the repressive energies in the first

season, only to set them free in the second, to perform, in gay rights parlance, the emancipatory ritual of coming out of the closet.

The coming-out narrative in *Flesh* is structured by the interplay between the discourses of species and human sexuality. In particular, the text employs the motifs of masking and unmasking to trace the metaphoric and metonymic movements of both discourses. In a speech to a group of PDS sufferers, each with their own insecurities, Simon, the twelfth disciple of the Undead Prophet, preaches on the oppressive regime of the living and the empowering effects of liberation:

I went down to the GP surgery today. They had two rabids there, locked up in a cage, that they're going to send away for treatment so that they can teach them to integrate, to be what the living demand. I found myself looking at them, wondering how long they were going to be in that cage. Huh. How long are you going to be in your cage? What's stopping you from being the people you are? Instead of copies of who you used to be. Of what they tell you you have to be. Why don't you break free? Why don't you show yourselves? Because when you do, when you finally do, I promise you're not going to want to go back. Because you're going to be beautiful, you're going to be flawless. You're going to be the future. (Season 2, Episode 3)

Human make-up is metaphorised as a "cage" that entraps true selves, an unnatural human skin that PDS sufferers are obliged to wear as a mark of normality. For Kieren, this human skin-cage not only suppresses his sexuality, but also acts as a defensive mechanism to mitigate his deep shame about

himself, a result of detrimental social conditioning. In his closeted state, Kieren religiously puts on his human mask, wearing his contact lenses and excessive cover-up mousse to conceal his true self, or selves (refer to fig. 20). If we characterise the allegorical dynamics between species and sexuality in terms of a corresponding surface/underground, outside/inside binary, Kieren (and Rick, to be discussed below) as a PDS sufferer is an incarnation of the repressed, closeted homosexual; his masking ritual and his human exterior are thus the performance and facade of heterosexuality respectively.

Staying masked ensures safety against the anti-PDS extremists. The consequences are dire as one of the unmasking acts of the series, performed by Rick, ends in tragedy. Both Rick and his father, Bill Macy, a radically anti-PDS vigilante, are in deep denial about Rick's PDS status. At one point, Bill tries to persuade Rick to kill Kieren, engaging the rhetoric of animality: "When you've finished him, say something like, 'When I met up with the Walker lad, he started foaming at the mouth.' Something like that. He's not a person, Rick. He's an animal. Worse than an animal. They might walk and talk, but rotters are evil" (Season 1, Episode 3). In a desperate attempt to appeal to his father's sense of empathy and love for him to spare Kieren's life, Rick unmask his human make-up to reveal his true zombie self and pleads with his father: "I don't want to hurt Ren. He's me best mate. If Ren's evil, Dad, then so am I" (Season 1, Episode 3). This is the furthest the first season goes in having Rick confess some kind of affection for Kieren, which is a highly dangerous attempt considering that his father is an irrational fundamentalist. Unable to articulate his gay desires directly, Rick borrows his zombie (which Bill perceives as animalistic) identity to help him with the



Fig. 20. Screenshots from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 1). Before removing his human make-up, Kieren covers the mirror with a towel, revealing the deep shame he has about his zombie self

coming-out process. In his analysis of Hemingway's works, Wolfe argues that the species discourse is sometimes used as an "off site" to solve or reopen "problems of race or gender [. . .] recoded as problems of species" (124). In this context, the gay allegory of zombieness allows the latter to serve as an "off site" to resolve Rick's sexual issues of being a closeted gay. Although Bill eventually kills his son in cold blood, exorcising both the zombie and the gay in him, Rick dies having come to terms with his true *selves* and reciprocated his love for Kieren, which he initially kept concealed, in this courageously suicidal sacrifice against his religiously brainwashed father.

The coming-out process for Kieren has a more positive tone to it. In the second season, following the failed luncheon, Kieren, in a fit of indignation, performs the ceremony of unmasking himself. He then proceeds to wipe away Simon's cover-up mousse in a suggestive manner (refer to fig. 21), signalling not only his acceptance of Simon's openness about his PDS status which he used to resent, but also the blossoming of their romantic relationship. Kieren's anger at his family's apparent discrimination against his PDS nature propels him to embrace his zombie self out of defiance. In exteriorising this one true zombie self, Kieren unlocks the allegorical code of the other true self, that of his sexuality—a reading enabled by the synchronised metonymic movements of the gay and zombie signifiers within the allegorical narrative of the text. Kieren's gay identity, which is symbolised by the zombie surrogate now fully externalised, is thus laid bare—in fact, this sexual awakening has already been foreshadowed in the earlier parts of the second season where Kieren takes the initiative to kiss Simon twice on separate occasions. Through the species discourse of zombieness and the



Fig. 21. Screenshots from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 4). Kieren removes his contact lenses and wipes away his human make-up, signalling the beginning of him embracing his PDS self. The cross in the background provides an apt religious subtext to the institutionalisation of true selves and desires. He then helps Simon wipe off his cover-up mousse as well.

unmasking ceremony, it is made known to us that Kieren has officially come to terms with his sexuality too.

The manner in which this coming-out discourse is executed is, however, deeply problematic as it perpetuates speciesist logic. Initially, *desires* of eating and sexuality overlap, where suppressed cannibalism is transcoded allegorically with repressed homosexuality. Yet in this coming-out process, only the homosexual desire receives liberation, while the cannibalistic

desire remains suppressed. In fact, with hints of Kieren's potential rehumanisation later in the series, his cannibalistic desire looks to be removed altogether. The asymmetry in these coupled discourses suggests that the sexuality "problem" can only be solved in the domain of human normativity, while the threatening element of cannibalism needs to be kept at bay. Cannibalistic desire thus cannot be metonymically unlocked together with sexual desire within the allegorical structure because of the speciesist logic that animality, associated with cannibalism itself, needs to be sacrificed for anthropocentric purposes. In unmasking his human disguise to reveal the zombie self, Kieren is ironically found to be wearing yet another layer of skin, belonging to that of the *toothless*—literally and figuratively, because of the suppressed cannibalism—zombie species—like an animal skin for utilitarian reasons—to express his sexual identity as a human. Kieren's closet, as well as his freedom from it, is thus essentially predicated on the speciesist sacrifice of the nonhuman other.

The romantic relationship between Amy Dyer and Philip Wilson adds another dimension to the dynamics between the discourses of species and sexuality: Philip, a human, is a councillor of the anti-PDS parish who happens to desire Amy, a PDS sufferer. During a protest outside the brothel, however, he publicly declares his support for the PDS sufferers, provoking outrage against him. Below is an image of the banner held by one of the protestors (refer to fig. 22):



Fig. 22. Screenshot from *In the Flesh* (Season 2, Episode 4). A protest scene outside the PDS brothel. A staunchly religious protester is seen carrying a banner that reads: "If a man lie with a."

The readable words on the banner recall the oft-quoted passage from the bible most commonly cited in anti-gay religious discourse for justifying the condemnation of same-sex relations by reducing the latter to the sexual act: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be upon them.*" (King James Version, Lev. 20.13; emphasis in the original). The framing of the shot teasingly cuts the banner off right before the object of the clause "If a man lie with a," inviting the knowing audience to participate in the language game of swapping "mankind" with "PDS sufferer," and to recognise that the corresponding signifiers homosexuality and zombieness—on top of their metaphorical connection established earlier—occupy the same metonymic position of otherness in the biblical quote. More importantly, though this quote is typically used to condemn two homosexual men, when put in the context of this scene, the target becomes that of the heterosexuals engaging in cross-species fornication. Equivalence is drawn, through these

interchangeable signifiers, in the sexual acts between two homosexual men and, between a heterosexual human and PDS sufferer. The heteronormative centre in the biblical quote shifts from a focus on heterosexuality alone to that of heterosexuality within the same species. Heteronormativity is subsumed within—eaten by—the larger discourse of humanormativity. One could even go so far as to argue that species *precedes* sexuality in a heteronormative regime, as the latter is automatically assumed to be the sole domain of the human species. The taken-for-grantedness of the species discourse in heteronormativity could also explain why the sexual taboos between the human and nonhuman other are more deeply repressed than some of the other queer sexualities in human cultures.

Just as homosexuality is queer by heteronormative standards, so is cross-species heterosexuality. Philip is fully aware of the social taboo of being with a PDS sufferer, yet he cannot suppress his queer heterosexual desires for Amy. His desire may easily be dismissed as the result of the fetishisation of the PDS condition, which is likely to be the case for most of the human patrons who seek those PDS sex workers. Philip, on the other hand, explains that he does not "fancy people with PDS as such" (Season 2, Episode 4), and, in a later confession, reassures Amy that he likes her for herself, "dead or alive" (Season 2, Episode 6). Queer heterosexuality, as portrayed in the text, evokes overtones of necrophilia and bestiality. These are self reflexively foregrounded in a scene where Amy teases Philip, after his public declaration at the protest scene, that "[his] reputation is in tatters, what with necrophilia and fancying rotters" (Season 2, Episode 4). The text draws some of its anti-PDS energy from these overtones, reflecting the deep-seated anxieties of

sexual taboos in humanist cultures where speciesist boundaries are drawn in relation to the sexual conduct between the human and the dead or animal. The figure of the PDS sufferer, cast in the same signifying field as the dead and animal, is thus the hybrid embodiment of the object of desire in both necrophilia and bestiality. This demonstrates the instrumental role of sexuality, mediated through the species discourse, in constructing monstrosity and taboo.

Philip is in a closet of his own, one that is more repressive and subdued than Kieren's. His narrative arc can thus be also seen as enacting the text's coming-out desires. Sandwiched between his political ambitions to climb the "greasy pole" (Season 2, Episode 2) and his affection for Amy, Philip is forced to lead a double life; despite being a member of authority in the anti-PDS movement in town, he engages in clandestine liaisons with Amy herself and later, with a PDS sex worker who has to pretend to be Amy as he wants a "full girlfriend experience" (Season 2, Episode 2). Eventually, after struggling with the moral dilemma of manipulating truths about the PDS sufferers, Philip decides to speak out against the witch-hunt at the protest scene outside the PDS brothel:

I think we should stop this. I think we should all stop pretending. You can only pretend for so long, and you're back stuck with yourself. What I'm trying to explain is that, if the idea that you were ever a pure person, it just makes everything else so much worse. It makes you so disappointing. People aren't pure. We are not good any more than they're evil or they're inhuman. Maybe we only have to pretend they're bad

because we have to pretend that we're good. But if we could just express our real selves and live with who we really are and love ourselves, then maybe . . . maybe we could accept and live with and . . . and love. (Season 2, Episode 4)

Philip then walks over to join the ranks of human patrons lined up against the wall to complete his public coming-out ritual. His coming-out, however, is only really complete when he makes his romantic confession to Amy in private shortly after the protest scene. On both public and private levels of the coming-out performance, Philip has come to terms with and expressed his queer heterosexual desires. More importantly, Philip is considered queer only because his heterosexuality is of a cross-species nature; an issue that he responds to directly in his speech. He politicises queer heterosexuality by subsuming it within a critique of speciesism—discrimination based on species. Rejecting firmly a purist notion of the human “person” used in constructing truths about morality against the “inhuman” other, he then moves on to poignantly evoke emancipatory notions of “real selves” in relation to coming out, either as a queer heterosexual, or as a PDS sufferer without having to wear human make-up. By speaking up for species difference, Philip’s speech thus appears to be engaging an egalitarian and anti-speciesist rhetoric.

This rhetoric is, however, problematic because Philip’s species egalitarianism is derived on humanormative terms. Throughout his queer romance with Amy, there is no clear evidence of him embracing Amy’s true PDS nature, that is, her cannibalistic desire and grotesque rabid rotter self, in its *entirety*. Although Amy does not wear her human disguise, revealing her PDS eyes, her PDS look is still a far cry from the transmogrified visage of her

animalistic self (refer back to fig. 4). Amy has only been consistently presented in a *humanised* light to Philip and it is also this identifiably “human” image of her that Philip falls in love with. Flashbacks of Amy as a monstrous rotter, on the other hand, are of a separate time and space from the later romantic scenes with Philip. The humanised, not animalistic, Amy is acceptable for the romance narrative. The audience is also oriented to identify with the humanormativised portrayal of their queer relationship and forget about the suppressed truths behind species difference. Amy’s PDS animality still needs to be strictly kept out of this humanormativised “queer” relationship. Thus, when Philip at a later point comes out of his queer closet and speaks out about egalitarianism despite species difference, it can be deceptively convincing because the ideologies of humanormativity have *already* been worked into the portrayal of the queer romance, which, incidentally is the source of motivation for his coming-out speech. In this sense, this imperceptible manipulation counts as an “ideological feint” (Wolfe 97)—a misleading move inspired by Carol Clover’s “Final Girl” trope in horror narratives—within queer discourses: Philip’s coming out speech is after all not as anti-speciesist, egalitarian, or queer as it is perceived to be.

Both Kieren’s and Philip’s coming-out process demonstrates the exclusionary gaps of existing and “new” regimes. Whether it is the hegemonic coming-out discourse of the trending homonormative movement, or the decentring of the heteronormative within its own heterosexual construct, the same but “tacit” condition is that animality be cast as the contrastive notion to be sacrificed for reconfiguring and resolving humanist problems.

2.6. *The zombie pharmakos: love and sacrifice*

“The Second Rising will happen if the First Risen is sacrificed” (Season 2, Episode 6), declares an emotional Maxine, the newly elected MP, to the people of Roarton. Earlier, she had brutally stabbed Amy in the heart, believing her to be the sacrificial lamb of the prophecy. Maxine wishes, but fails, to bring her dead younger brother back to life. In a separate scene, Simon jumps in front of Kieren to block a non-lethal gunshot. He releases the sacrificial knife from his grip, a weapon he initially meant but hesitated to use on Kieren whom he believes to be the First Risen.

Maxine and Simon are two new characters of the second season deployed to set the sacrificial guillotine in motion. Despite having different motivations and backgrounds, one a political leader and the other the disciple of an occult group, they share the same goal of tracking down and sacrificing the First Risen, the first zombie to emerge from its grave during the First Rising. Whether for personal or religious reasons, love and sacrifice are necessarily intertwined. When Maxine blatantly murders Amy, and threatens later to “leav[e] no stone unturned” (Season 2, Episode 6) in killing every PDS sufferer who could be the First Risen, she becomes not just a criminal, but a psychotic and irrational extremist. She turns into a monstrous human with a pitiable story, driven by her deep familial love for her brother to the extreme act of murder, sacrificing the innocent. Even the humans find this level of violence against the PDS sufferers morally unacceptable. “She’s tapped” (Season 2, Episode 6), comments a HVF member who strikes her with a Taser from behind when she strides towards a PDS sufferer in the crowd with a pair of scissors. In being portrayed as the “new” monster, deflecting monstrosity

away from the PDS sufferers, Maxine thus fails to justify her sacrificial crusade, however moving her personal tragedy may be.

Maxine sees Amy, as well as other PDS sufferers who are potentially the First Risen, as simply a sacrificial object for resurrecting her beloved brother. The dilemma for Simon, however, is that his beloved Kieren is the sacrificial object itself. Earlier, Simon had already played the sacrificial role himself (refer back to fig. 11), where he was a guinea pig subjected to vivisection for finding a cure to the PDS condition. The sacrificial discourse of animality is thus already inscribed in the character. In choosing love over his religious mission at the pivotal moment, Simon does not reenact his own fate on Kieren; instead, he sees Kieren as his “human” lover proper, rather than an objectified sacrificial lamb for his religious convictions. Simon *sacrifices* sacrifice, something that the human scientists fail to do for him when they experiment unethically on him. This act of sacrificing sacrifice humanises Simon in contrast to the monstrified Maxine. What is even more ennobling about this abdication is that he is willing to risk his life in taking the bullet for Kieren. Maxine’s inhuman sacrifice thus pales in comparison to Simon’s heroic sacrifice, even though both acts are motivated by love.

The themes of love and sacrifice share a similar synergy in *Warm Bodies*. As a rom-com, *Warm Bodies* is a combination of the romantic tropes in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. R, a Corpse, falls in love at first sight with the human Julie during a hunt. He takes her back to an empty airplane he owns, “imprisoning” her for a few days, just as the Beast does Belle in his castle, and lies to her that it is not safe to leave when in fact he is keeping her for his own sake. Realising that she misses

home, he then sacrifices his selfish desires and releases her. When he later receives news that her life is in danger, he sneaks into the human fortress at his own peril to warn her, replicating the iconic balcony scene where the infatuated but unwelcome Romeo trespasses upon the Capulet property to find Juliet. Eventually, in a near-death encounter, R sacrificially uses his body to protect Julie when they jump off from a great height into a pool. Moved by his selfless act, Julie kisses R and the latter undergoes rehumanisation on the spot, reminiscent of the magical moment when the curse is lifted from the Beast by Belle's reciprocated love.

All seems well with these humanised portrayals of romantic relationship, what with the humanist themes of love and sacrifice interweaving, until, of course, it is remembered that these relationships are essentially of a cross-species nature. Love and sacrifice then take on a completely different register. In order for romance to be comfortably taken to its fruitful resolution, where the taboo overtones of necrophilia and bestiality are diffused, the monster in love needs to be rehumanised. In other words, the nonhuman monster in this *humanised* romance must be sacrificed to give way to a “pure” *human* romance—“pure” on the level of species. Although violence may be an integral aspect of the sacrificial acts involved in the pursuit of romantic love, the more sinister but repressed violence of sacrifice is actually inflicted on the nonhuman other. Romantic love is thus also necessarily a *love for* speciesist sacrifice in upholding this anthropocentric ideal.

The ultimate sacrifice of the nonhuman other comes in the literalisation of the rehumanisation mythology—Amy and R literally become human again. At the close of *Warm Bodies*, Julie kisses R and his eyes turn colour (refer to

fig. 23). She pleads with her father and the soldiers not to fire at R, saying: “Please, Dad! Look at him. He’s different. He’s . . . Bleeding. He’s bleeding, Dad. Corpses don’t bleed! Oh, God. You’re alive. He’s alive!” On hearing that R is bleeding, Julie’s father and the soldiers lower their guns, recognising that they are now facing a human—or rehumanised Corpse—and not a Corpse. In *Flesh*, Amy is declared to have lost too much blood after being stabbed by Maxine right after the former begins to feel her heartbeat. Upon further

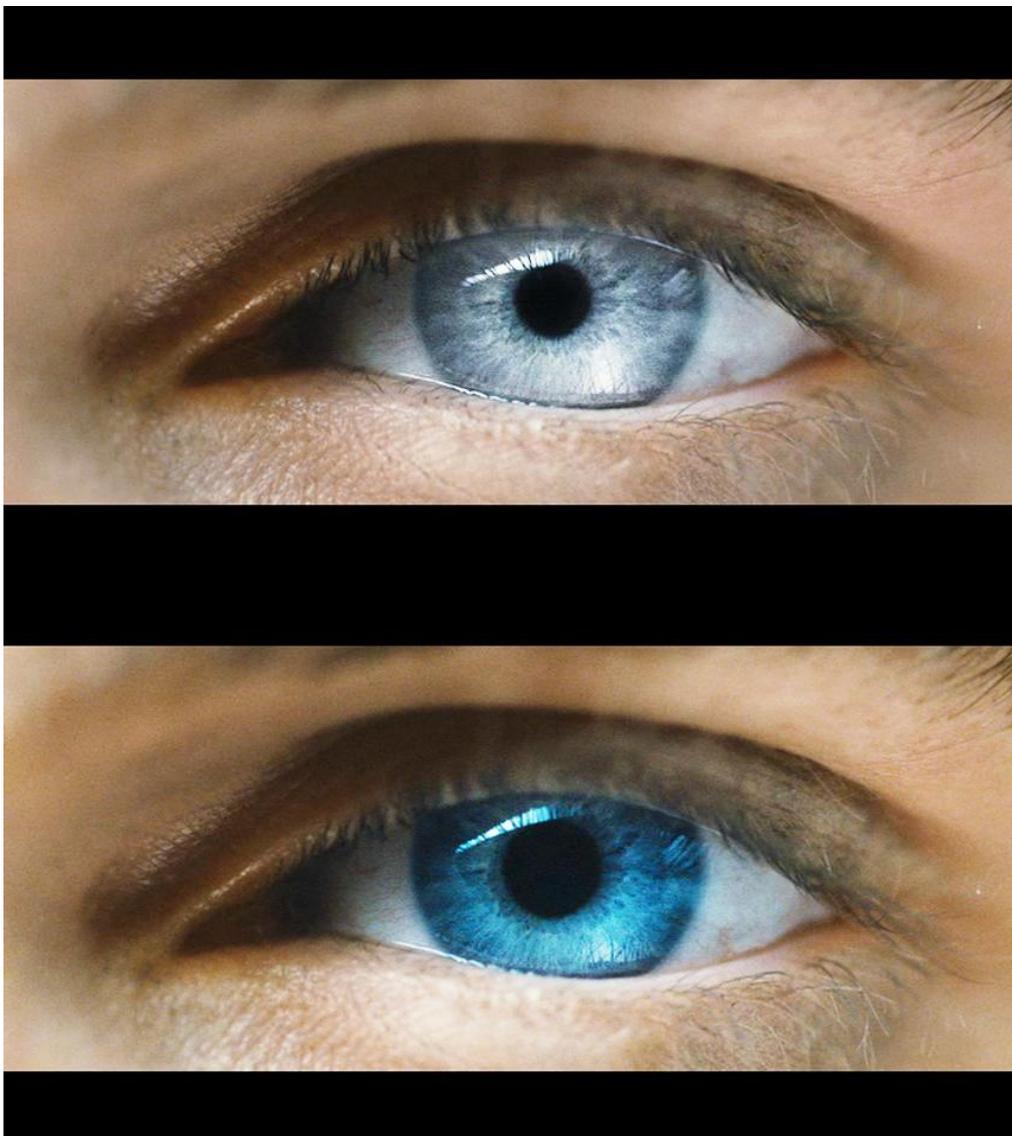


Fig. 23. Screenshots from *Warm Bodies*. After Julie kisses R, the latter experiences the biological transformation of rehumanisation where his eye colour changes and pupils dilate.

examination, the doctor finds that "her pupils have changed" (Season 2, Episode 6), just like in the case of R. The changes in the eyes and the capacity to bleed mark the complete transformation of the rehumanised zombie, ideologically signalling a biological transition from one species to another, namely from the animalistic zombie to the "pure" human.

Indeed, Gothic rehumanisation foregrounds nonhuman animality as an undesirable trait in the pursuit of humanist ideals. In one comedic scene, Amy requests that Philip perform "mercy killing" (Season 2, Episode 5), or as Germanà terms it, "sacrificially assisted suicide," (65) on her to avoid the possibility of reverting to her animalistic self: "I don't want to live as a rabid, going around killing people without a thought in my head. That's no kind of life [. . .] Once I turn, I turn for good and then I'm stuck. Stuck like that for ever. It's a fate worse than death. That's why I need you to put me down before I go rabid" (Season 2, Episode 5). Despite being a vivacious, "PDS and proud" (Season 1, Episode 2) character, Amy only embraces the human aspects of the treated PDS condition, the regained humanity, but fears rabidity to the point that she would rather die a humanised PDS sufferer than be a rotter.

Besides her personal aversion to the rabid state, Amy's PDS animality is also deployed to reinstate the anthropocentric institution of legality. At the end of the attempted suicide scene, just before Philip is about to drive a screwdriver into her head, she starts to feel the raindrops, regaining physical sensation: "I can feel the rain. I can . . . I can feel it, Philip [. . .] I'm feeling again. I'm . . . I'm not turning rabid" (Season 2, Episode 5). Because Amy eventually dies a human, she makes a *criminal* of Maxine. *Flesh* begins its

first season with the initial "noncriminal putting to death" of Maggie Burton and ends in the second season with this unambiguously "criminal" murder of Amy. By fully rehumanising Amy just before the point of murder, removing the zombie species out of her, the narrative allows for the full force of justice to be felt for the loss of the *human* Amy. Maxine Martin, towards the end, then receives her legal punishment in the form of imprisonment, while Bill in the first season almost goes scot-free for two murders (Maggie Burton and his son Rick), until he is shot down in a vigilante act. The reinscription of the human allows justice, otherwise lacking in the initial "noncriminal putting to death," to be reinstalled in the series because the victim is now a human. The narrative of justice, however, is only possible with the concomitant abandonment of the zombie species. This substitution reinforces the fact that the zombie-animal is not a subject of the law and that it can be sacrificed with near impunity. Gothic rehumanisation thus enacts symbolic violence on the nonhuman other, but this violence is ideologically overshadowed by the humanist narratives, that is, the literal violence of the murder of a human and the overriding narrative of legal justice. Although justice is once again rendered to the human and order restored to humanity, they are achieved at the expense of the nonhuman zombie, following the speciesist logic on the need to sacrifice the nonhuman animal for anthropocentric interests.

Warm Bodies also shows equal, if not greater, enthusiasm in wanting to purge animality from its humanist core through the narrative of Gothic rehumanisation. The process begins for R in the scene where he first encounters Julie. Later, during their escape from the Corpse-infested airport, Julie holds R's hand to walk through a throng of Corpses. Stupefied, the

Corpses look on without any sign of aggression. A large-scale rehumanisation occurs shortly after among the Corpses when, in a parallel mise-en-scène, they see a picture of a couple holding hands and start regaining memories of their past human relationships (refer to fig. 24). Inspired by their love, they follow R and Julie to warn them about the Boneys hunting the two of them down for “start[ing] something,” that is, a love revolution that is rehumanising the rest of the Corpses and hence jeopardising the Boney population. The



Fig. 24. Screenshots from *Warm Bodies*. The Corpses witness Julie and R holding hands initially, before seeing a picture of a similar scene elsewhere shortly after, triggering the process of rehumanisation in them where they start to regain memories of their love relationships from their human past.

rehumanising Corpses thus march towards the human fortress, knowing the risks involved, in the name of love; more precisely, they march towards a beacon of hope to regain their lost humanity as defined by love, while the humans defend theirs from within. In a potential clash with the Corpses, the human soldiers rush to the scene only to find that the Corpses are already trying to fight off the Boneys that have infiltrated the “sacred” human city. It is a fight *of* and *for* humanity. When one of the soldiers asks “Who the hell do we shoot?”, one of the Corpses, M, slides a battered Boney over to them and replies with a friendly “hi,” establishing his remotely mutual humanness with the soldiers. An alliance is thereafter forged between the humans and Corpses against their common enemy—the purely animalistic Boneys. In the final voiceover, R calls this alliance a “really good bonding experience for [the Corpses] and the humans [and that] once [they] joined forces, the [Boneys] didn’t stand a chance.” The merging of the rehumanising Corpses and the humans to ward off the Boneys thus becomes a metaphor for the concentration of humanity attempting to erase its other half, that of nonhuman animality.

Parental love is also implicated in this discourse of animality. When Kieren’s mum Sue declares that she “would love [Kieren] with all her heart even if [he] came back as a goldfish” (Season 1, Episode 3), there is no doubt about her genuine maternal love; but her casual analogy does raise the question of the *true* extent to which she embraces Kieren’s species otherness. Rick’s mum Janet also speaks about how she has come to accept her son’s species otherness during a sharing session:

I’m ashamed to admit it, but when Rick came back I was scared of him. Scared of me own flesh and blood. The way Vicar

Oddie put it, they're all supposed to be possessed by the devil himself. Demons in disguise. I haven't found that at all. My handsome man's back. He's different. He's a bit different looking, but he's still the same, deep down. You know I know that. My Ricky, he's a good boy. (Season 1, Episode 3)

“I haven't found that at all”; indeed, neither mother has witnessed the specifically animalistic side of their PDS sons. It is under humanormative conditions—suppressed cannibalism and humanised visages—that they welcome back their sons. The completeness of parental love is, however, confirmed in the last episode of the series where Kieren's father Steve confronts a rabid Kieren who has been forced-fed Blue Oblivion. Steve walks right up to him with complete faith that Kieren is able to fight back his cannibalistic desire:

He's not going to hurt anyone. He knows me. He knows me.
He's fighting it. He's not gone. I know he's in there. I've got to believe you can hear me, Kier. I know we haven't seen eye to eye lately. That doesn't mean I don't love you, no matter what you are. I was wrong but I know now. I won't let'em take you away. You're my son. (Season 2, Episode 6)

This is also the moment where the allegorical coding of zombieness and homosexuality kicks in again as a form of closure to allow a reading of Steve finally accepting Kieren's species *and* sexual otherness. But more importantly, this incident enshrines an ideal form of parental love. In being non-speciesist, Steve shows his parental love to be *unconditional*. Non-speciesism in this

narrow sense is thus merely used as a fictionalised condition for expressing the humanist ideal of unconditional parental love.

The perennial anthropocentric theme of romantic love seems to be the motivation behind the literal rehumanisation of the nonhuman zombies. Just like in *Warm Bodies*, where love revitalises R to turn him back into a human, Kieren and Amy are the only two characters in *Flesh* to have found love and shown signs of being rehumanised. Jem (Kieren's sister), on the other hand, has a fleeting relationship with Gary and does not find love; in fact, her desperate need to conquer her irrational fear of the PDS sufferer leads her to mistakenly kill Henry Lonsdale who, ironically a PDS sufferer, has repeatedly expressed likings for her. As discussed, the ignoble aspect of this romantic love is, however, that it is predicated on the sacrifice of the nonhuman other. As Wolfe argues, "the full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal'" (43); *human* romance, one of the most sustained humanist enterprises in the history of mankind, is thus not only the driving force behind this transcendental project of rehumanising the zombie, but also the driving force behind the inevitable sacrifice of the nonhuman species.

Gothic rehumanisation is thus *speciesist* sacrifice. Derrida's concept of the *pharmakos* in "Plato's Pharmacy" provides an apt image on the essence of this sacrificial ritual:

The (rite of the) *pharmakos* was a purification of this sort of old. If a calamity overtook the city by the wrath of God, whether it were famine or pestilence or any other mischief, they led forth as though to a sacrifice the most unsightly of them all as a purification and a remedy to the suffering city. They set the

sacrifice in the appointed place, and gave him cheese with their hands and a barley cake and figs, and seven times they smote him with leeks and wild figs and other wild plants. Finally they burnt him with fire with the wood of wild trees and scattered the ashes into the sea and to the winds, for a purification, as I said, of the suffering city. (133)

In ancient Greece, the *pharmakoi* were fed and allowed to parasite the majority, before being turned into objects of sacrifice to perform the ritual of purifying “the suffering city.” In truth, they were the ones being parasited on. They were in fact methodically fed—as with the animals in factory farming—to be parasited on, or sacrificed, to deal with the crises of humanity, metaphorised as the “suffering city.” In this regard, the human fortress of *Warm Bodies* serves as an apt metaphor for the ontological state of humanity (refer to fig. 25); heavily fortified, weaponised, and defensive to the point of

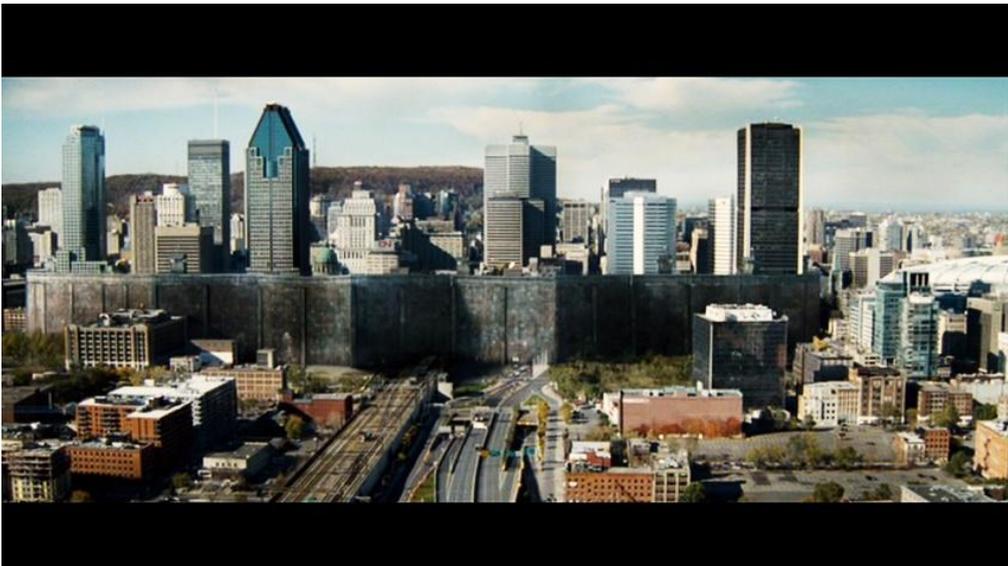


Fig. 25. Screenshot from *Warm Bodies*. An aerial, extreme long shot of the fortified home base in the middle of the city where the remaining humans hole up. The rest of the city outside these walls is either desolate or overrun by the Corpses and Boneyes.

being destructive to the threatening nonhuman other. Derrida explains this defence mechanism, stating that

The city's body *proper* thus reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts, gives back to itself the word that links it with itself within the confines of the agora, by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of the evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it. Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless *constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside. These parasites were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense. 'The Athenians regularly maintained a number of degraded and useless beings at the public expense; and when any calamity, such as plague, drought, or famine, befell the city, they sacrificed two of these outcasts as scapegoats.' [emphasis in the original] (133)

In being first rehumanised, Amy and R are thus offered ritualistically as the zombie *pharmakoi* or "scapegoats" for the symbolic purification of humanity in order to achieve ontological transcendence. The *pharmakos*, Derrida argues, is taken to be "the *evil* and the *outside* [where] the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city [. . .] are the two major senses of the character and of the ritual" (130). In this sacrificial rite, the *pharmakos* is not only made the "scapegoat," but also necessarily constructed as the

monstrous “evil” in opposition to the “good” humans. Sacrificial violence is thus the complete disavowal of the other half in a binaristically conceived relationship. When Gothic rehumanisation performs the *pharmakos* mythology, it symbolically purifies the human body and ontology, where all traces of animality are disavowed and expunged from within. In essence, human-animal and human-zombie relationships are similar as the zombie-animal ultimately plays the role of the *pharmakos* in service of the human species.

Indeed, there is no love for the sacrificial zombie-animal, and by love we mean *care* for the nonhuman other. In his final voiceover narration, R expresses a complete lack of remorse in killing the Boneys: “I wish I could say we cured the Boneys with love, but really, we just straight up killed them all. It sounds kind of messed up, but no one felt too bad about it. They were too far gone to change.” While the comedic tone of this statement attempts to downplay the violence of eradicating nonhuman otherness, it nonetheless very accurately reflects mankind’s indifference—or *care*-lessness—towards such violence in reality. For even on a metatextual level, the zombie allegory performs the sacrificial ceremony of giving way to the narrative of Gothic rehumanisation. The discourse of species has been used and discarded, objectified as a subordinate literary device for serving humanist discourses such as resolving characters' interior and interpersonal conflicts, and bringing relationships to fruition. In this sense, these parasitic discourses of the human have also performed an epistemic “noncriminal putting to death” of the species discourse by sacrificing and therefore suppressing it. Whether on the

literal, symbolic, or epistemological level, the nonhuman species is eaten through and through by the insatiable human(ist) appetite.

3. Ethics of “Eating Well” and Gothic Sacrifice of the Nonhuman Other

Recent zombie narratives have caught on to the discourse of assimilationism in dealing with certain social others, reflecting the socio-political shifts in the human rights movement of the Western scene. The traditionally monstrous zombie is now portrayed in a much more sympathetic light, where it is being rehumanised and reintegrated into the human community. *Flesh* begins with this premise, where the treated PDS sufferers return to their homes against a tense backdrop of xenophobia. *Warm Bodies*, on the other hand, ends with it: “The humans began to accept us, connect with us, teach us. This was the key to the cure.” The cure—indeed, zombieness is portrayed as a pathology that needs to be rectified. By association, this rhetoric pathologises the social otherness that zombieness is meant to be a metaphor for, which in turn reaffirms the normative centre as the “proper” site into which the previously monstrous social otherness is incorporated.

But a more insidious problem with Gothic rehumanisation lies in its implicit support of the institution of speciesism in various ways. In both texts, three distinct camps can be discerned but it is always the “animalised animal” and the animalistic aspects of the liminal PDS sufferer or Corpse that are being suppressed in order to restore humanity. The rehumanised zombie, whose cannibalistic desire is suppressed in *Flesh*, is manipulated dietarily to deflect monstrosity to the animalistic rabid rotter. Gothic vegetarianism and carnivorism reinstall the nonhuman animal at the base of the food chain, keeping the literal and figurative sacrificial “lamb” as the default food on the

dining table. In turn, this secures the position of the human as the eater, and not a food-thing to be eaten, within the species order.

Beyond the material level, institutionalised speciesism produces what Wolfe calls the “sacrificial symbolic econom[y]” (113) that allows humans to treat other fellow humans abusively using this logic of the animal. The obvious example is social oppression, where dehumanisation or animalisation tactics are used between two human subjects. The less obvious, though more cleverly disguised, is the seemingly opposite operation, that of social assimilationism, where the hitherto oppressed social other is being integrated into the dominant centre. Just like their oppressive counterparts, assimilationist regimes, though premised on the *inclusion* of certain *human* types, are found to actually perform the same exclusionary sacrifice of the nonhuman animal. In the context of a heteronormative environment, a heterosexual but cross-species relationship between a human and zombie is condemned, evoking taboo overtones of necrophilia and bestiality. Similarly, the regime of homonormativity that operates under the name of social inclusion is found to discriminate against the nonhuman zombieness of the gay zombie character. These regimes are thus revealed to be deeply speciesist as they stem from the long-standing anthropocentric tradition of excluding the nonhuman animal for the ontological transcendence of the human species. Gothic rehumanisation is thus as problematic as social assimilationism because both operations, whether explicitly *or* implicitly, follow the same speciesist logic of sacrificing the nonhuman other. Aesthetic representations mirroring problematic socio-political trends thus become an ethical concern that needs to be rigorously examined as well.

While assimilationist tactics bring about real social benefits to many individuals, they also leave other problems intact, or more precisely, *repressed*. Social hybridity emerging out of assimilationism may be a source of celebratory hope, but it is nonetheless a beacon of humanist hope purchased at the expense of the animal. It is a simultaneous but paradoxical celebration of the triumphant anthropocentrism and repressed speciesism of new *human* hybrid identities. One could even go so far as to say that *all* forms of anthropocentric assimilationism, old and new, are predicated on this sacrificial regime of speciesism if humanity continues to position itself against an oversimplified conception of the nonhuman animal.

The animal is thus not only eaten for itself, sacrificed for our food industry, but also digested in our alimentary tract for the nourishment of our bodies and being, before it is being expelled to the periphery of the unwanted as waste. In the same vein, the species discourse is also milked of its usefulness for the nourishment of humanist discourses before it is being *aesthetically* discarded through Gothic rehumanisation. In *Flesh*, the species discourse recodes human otherness to serve as an “off-site” to reopen and resolve the coming-out narratives of queer sexualities, namely that of closeted homosexuality and cross-species heterosexuality. Kieren is thus able to express his homosexual identity through his metaphorical zombie skin, while Phillip espouses a questionable brand of liberal egalitarianism through his queer cross-species heterosexuality. Species otherness thus plays the subservient role of being a metaphorical surrogate for *human* sexual otherness within the textual hierarchy.

Towards the end, the PDS sufferer and Corpse are literally *and* literarily rehumanised, beginning with Amy and R. In retrenching the species discourse at the final point, the audience's "somasochistic" indulgence in the nonhuman aspects of these liminal beings may be delayed and disavowed as "animalistic" and thus "perverse" (Wolfe 118). This final gesture then operates as "what Lacoue-Labarthe calls a 'theatricalisation'" that allows the audience to "enjoy the [PDS] animality while seeming to contain it in the realm of the aesthetic" (qtd. in Wolfe 118). Like a wave of the wand, the magic show is over and the humanist order is restored. In fact, in the final episode of *Being Human*, Gothic rehumanisation takes on this specifically supernatural register as the vampire, werewolf, and ghost are magically turned back into human after breaking the curse of the devil. As Wolfe argues in his analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs*, the "genius of the domestication of Lecter, and hence, of the viewer's 'enjoyment' generally, is that it cagily allows us to embrace and disavow [animality] all at once" (118). Indeed, the ambivalent tension in the middle portions of the narrative thus becomes a temporary source of motivation and enjoyment for the audience who is assured of a cathartic purging of nonhuman animality and a restoration of humanity at the end of the journey.

It seems then that the Gothic genre is an essentially and necessarily speciesist platform for working out humanist anxieties over the human-nonhuman divide, as well as for indulging the somasochistic pleasure of working these anxieties out from the safe distance of an aesthetic medium. Gothic rehumanisation adds another layer to this sense of self-delusion and illusion of humanist purity *and* immunity. This cycle repeats itself as the

Gothic genre relentlessly searches for its new horror target for constructing monstrosity. In an egalitarian human-human intersubjective set-up, monstrosity appears to disappear along the humanist plane, but it is actually being displaced on to the human-nonhuman divide of the species plane, such that the nonhuman animal is now posited as the repressed monster. The switching of discursive terrain to support the anthropocentric construction of liberal egalitarianism helps to conceal the exclusionary speciesist sacrifices involved. Žižek captures this mode of sacrificial repression succinctly:

The subject “is” only insofar as the Thing (the Kantian Thing in itself as well as the Freudian impossible-incestuous object, *das Ding*) is sacrificed, “primordially repressed” . . . This “primordial repression” introduces a fundamental imbalance in the universe: the symbolically structured universe we live in is organised around a void, an impossibility (the inaccessibility of the Thing itself) [. . .] Therein [. . .] consists the ambiguity of the Enlightenment; the transcendence of the Enlightenment subject is shadowed by “a fundamental prohibition to probe too deeply into the obscure origins, which betrays a fear that by doing so, one might uncover something monstrous.” (qtd. in Wolfe 43)

Indeed, the anthropocentric empire is built on carcasses, eaten, discarded, and buried out of sight and mind. If the history of mankind is a *continual* history of humanist atrocities of the myriad *-isms*, it is also because it has never had the clarity of what fundamentally enables them; that is, the institution of nonhuman speciesism, which, ironically repressed, by virtue of the material

and symbolic rituals of eating in human cultures, repeatedly enacts the Freudian haunting of the “return of the repressed” on human(ist) history.

While the humanisation of the nonhuman monster undeniably serves an anthropocentric purpose, it is tempting to conclude that the final gesture of the full *re*humanisation of the nonhuman other, a pushing of the mythological limit of the sympathetic monster to its absolute end by returning the creature to its Edenic origin, is a complete purification of all traces of animality contaminating the ontological category of the human. The “human” end product, the rehumanised monster, however, leaves a nagging, bitter aftertaste, for the ambivalent intermediary narratives of *Warm Bodies* and *Flesh* have already painstakingly proven to us that the category of the human is *always already* contaminated. Wolfe argues that

what horror suggests for ideology critique, then, is that the ideological “point” of fictions may not lie exclusively with the reimposition of ideological norms in the fiction’s ending, but rather may concern its complicated and contradictory middle, where identificatory energies are released and invested [. . .] energies aroused in the aesthetic experience of contradictory identifications are not fully recoupable by any ideological closure but rather continue, like, Lecter himself, to circulate in disguise on some other scene” (98-9)

Gothic rehumanisation as a restoration of the lost purity of the ontological status of humanity is thus a pure illusion, for what it reveals is its very ambivalent, symbiotic relationship with animality, where the latter is in humanity, and humanity is very much in animality itself. As Petsche argues,

“there can be no human nature or subjectivity that stands above or apart from animality precisely because animality is much more complex than humans have allowed in the first place, and, furthermore, human beings are part of this complex ‘multiplicity’” (103). Mitchell also argues for the plurality of the animal, stating that

The reduction of the complex plurality of animals to a singular generality underwrites the poverty of humanism that thinks it has grounded itself in a human essence, a stable species identity to be secured by its contrast with animality. Heidegger’s human hand versus the animal’s claw, Freud’s human eye versus the animal’s nose, the Enlightenment’s human rationality versus the animal’s mechanical reflexes—all these tropes of difference are [. . .] understandable and inevitable efforts to define and affirm the species identity of human beings. But the claim to humanity and human rights will never succeed until it has reckoned with the irreducible plurality and otherness of nonhuman and posthuman life forms, including those that (like ourselves) wear a human face. (xii)

Ultimately, the texts perform the carnivalesque function of drawing attention to the deconstructive journey of the narrative, rather than placing too much meaning on the ending in its restoration of the problematic status quo. In doing so, it reveals that the ending is more a naturalised, rather than a “natural” ending, and that even though Gothic rehumanisation remains essentially speciesist, these texts should not be dismissed completely for they have

diligently complicated the human-nonhuman divide mid-way to shatter the illusion of a wholesome closure.

The question remains: how then does one “eat well?” It is not about whoever has the *right* to eat, because as Derrida argues in “Eating Well,” the maxim is that “[every]one must eat well” (115) and attention should be placed instead on *how* to eat well:

The infinitely metonymical question on the subject of “one must eat well” must be nourishing not only for me, for a “self,” which, given its limits, would thus eat badly, it must be *shared*, as you might put it, and not only in language. “One must eat well” does not mean above all taking in and grasping in itself, but *learning* and *giving* to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat. One never eats entirely on one’s own: this constitutes the rule underlying the statement, “One must eat well.” It is a rule offering infinite hospitality. (“Eating Well” 115)

In this sense, Gothic rehumanisation seems to constitute a form of “eating badly” because this aesthetic device nourishes only the humanist “self,” and gives nothing in return to the nonhuman other to “eat.” Gothic vegetarianism and the PDS sufferer’s suppressed cannibalism are also examples of “eating badly” because these diets suppress the eater’s natural desires, resulting in violent outbursts of repressed energies. A way that the Gothic genre can *begin* to “eat well” can be seen in the final season of *True Blood* where it explores the idea of a symbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman other. Faced with a diseased breed of rabid vampires going on a bloodthirsty rampage, the human and healthy vampires of Bon Temps devise a buddy

system where each human is paired up with a vampire. In this relationship, the human has to feed the vampire a small dose of his or her blood enough for bare sustenance in return for protection from the Hep V vampires. While this begins as a promising premise, it quickly reveals itself to replicate the same speciesist structure as *Warm Bodies* and *Flesh* where a third animalistic party—here, the diseased, bloodthirsty vampires—is the readily available sacrifice. Nonetheless, the lack of a need to blindly follow the Gothic trend of rehumanising the nonhuman monster in this series—even having a cross-species marriage scene in the final episode—signals a growing respect for the nonhuman otherness *as it is*, without altering or diminishing it. While the Gothic may be a space for enacting the old ways of recuperating humanity, it can also be a space that envisions and acknowledges the symbiotic co-existence of human and nonhuman, such as in the case of *True Blood*, without have to erase each other. As Angela Carter says, “we live in Gothic times” (122); Gothic monsters are becoming so common and familiar to us we have to adopt new *ethical* strategies of co-existing with nonhuman otherness and reevaluating the very idea of humanity itself on posthuman grounds.

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