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Getting to the ‘Meat’ of the Matter:

An Exploration of Literary Genre, Identity Construction, and the Role
of Language in Shaping Anthropocentric Ideology through Don
LePan’s *Animals*

Pauline Chavez
sous la direction de
Frédéric Dumas



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*To the kind professors of Stendhal University Grenoble III, my family,
and my fiancé Olivier Bochetti whose love and support has made this
mémoire possible*

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.

-Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*

I think the claim that fiction can lead one to be more empathetic is, broadly speaking, quite true. The main mechanism through which this happens, it seems to me, is a narrative one

-Don LePan

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Biography of Don LePan

Don LePan was born in 1954 in Washington, D.C. and grew up in Ontario, Canada. He received his Bachelor of Arts at Carleton University, Canada, and his Master of Arts at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom. He worked for the Canadian branch of the Oxford University Press for a number of years, and in 1985, he founded Broadview Press which is an independent, academic publisher with several offices throughout Canada. Broadview Press is focused on the humanities and publishes a number of academic course texts each year, including *The Broadview Guide to Writing* which LePan co-authored. LePan was president of Broadview Press for twenty years, and was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters by Trent University, Canada for his contributions to Canadian publishing. In addition, LePan has produced various cityscape paintings and a few of which were featured in a March 2008 art exhibition in Brooklyn, New York. Although he enjoys painting, the majority of his creative focus has been reserved for writing. He is currently in the process of writing a new novel called *Bonbon*, which he says is related to the topic of human animal and nonhuman animals, but in a very different way than his novel *Animals* relates to the topic. LePan is the author of several nonfiction books, and *Animals* is his first novel. Originally published in Canada in 2009, *Animals* was published in the United States in 2010. For further interest in LePan's paintings and writings, his website donlepan.com, and his blog donlepan.blogspot.com, are available to the public, and he welcomes all comments, criticism, and correspondence.

Summary of *Animals*

This narrative takes place in the Western and Mid-Western region of the United States, and it is set in the near-future, after a time in which our abuses of factory farming and antibiotic use have led to mass extinctions of farmed animals. The gap between rich and poor has grown tremendously, and the poor can no longer afford proper medical treatment. Those within society who have disorders, disabilities, or handicaps are no longer considered to be “fully human”¹ and must undergo a diagnosis process which changes their “human” status to “mongrel.” Acquiring the identity of a “mongrel” means that you are no longer treated like human. Mongrels come to be used as pets, chattel, and eventually food. Similar to the present day factory farms and farm raised animals, many mongrels are brought into existence through forced-breeding and cloning techniques all for the purpose of killing them. The narrative centers around a young boy named Sam. Sam is deaf, but because his family could not afford proper medical attention, Sam’s inability to behave in the way expected of him has led to the belief that he is a mongrel and therefore “not fully human.” Sam is abandoned by his mother, and the Stinson family decides to take care of Sam as their pet mongrel. Naomi is the youngest in the Stinson family, and she believes that mongrels and humans are more alike than they are unlike. Naomi and Sam develop a very close relationship. Naomi teaches Sam how to read and to speak, and eventually, Naomi discovers that Sam cannot hear, but he is fully capable of communicating and understanding others. Unfortunately, when Naomi attempts to demonstrate this to her mother, her mother is not persuaded and becomes frightened about Naomi’s relationship with Sam. Naomi’s mother believes that mongrels and humans are two different species, and she forces this belief upon Naomi by giving Sam to a factory farm where he is slaughtered.

The key narrator, Broderick, is Sam’s biological brother. Broderick constantly interjects throughout Naomi’s narrative. He speaks from a position that is “many years later”; after the occurrences within Naomi’s narrative. Broderick speaks to the reader as if the reader were alien to the concept and use of factory farms within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through the usage of several footnotes and interjecting journal entries, Broderick de-familiarizes the reader’s present-day understanding of human treatment toward

¹ Double quotes will be used to signify language which alludes to a specific text i.e. when the author’s word choice is used rather than my own.

animals as pets and food because he is speaking about it historically. Broderick's footnotes also connect the reader's present to the treatment of chattel slaves in the reader's past. This creates a very intimate relationship between the reader's past and present, and by extension, their future. Broderick explains to the reader that eating mongrels, a product called *yurn*, becomes acceptable because the law became "interpreted in such a way as to define mongrels as animals, not as humans" (*Animals* 56). This statement then takes the reader to a footnote which says, "It is often imagined that the answer to a question such as what constitutes a human person is self-evident, and does not change over time. Yet even a moment's reflection shows this idea to be false. Americans living as chattel slaves held the status of less-than-fully-human animals, as did slaves in the colonies of Britain, France, Spain, and other European nations . . . Women have in many cultures been regarded as less than fully human by their male rulers . . . And, with more justification, many societies have regarded those born with various defects as thereby lacking fully human status" (*Animals* 56). At first glance, making such a jump to using humans with disabilities as chattel or food seems extreme and disgusting, but Broderick makes a clear connection to the remnants of the past still with us in the present: 'we'² determine what will be classified as 'human' or 'nonhuman,' a notion in flux used to benefit those who are 'human.' 'We' have determined that nonhuman animals are inferior to human animals³. 'We' have determined that this justifies an industry of endless killing and use of nonhuman animals as resources. 'We' have determined that these beings exist for the sole reason of serving 'us' rather than beings that exist for their own reasons. Broderick and Naomi's manuscripts refute this societal understanding of the power dynamics between human animals and nonhuman animals, and at the same time, their manuscripts shed light on paralleling socio-economic, racial, and gender power dynamics within the world of *Animals*.

² Single quotations will be used to draw attention to the cultural (mis)understandings, implications, and limitations of words such as 'human,' 'animal,' 'intelligence,' and so on.

³ The term 'human animal' and 'human' will be used interchangeably to avoid convoluted phrases.

Introduction

Don LePan's novel *Animals* seems like a huge leap concerning the societal and cultural practices of the not-so-distant-future, but as a work of science fiction, this device is used very particularly within the genre in order to criticize the author's "empirical" present. Yugoslavian academic and critic Darko Suvin has contributed numerous texts to the study of science fiction literature. His essay, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," elaborates upon the term *cognitive estrangement* within the works of science fiction, and this is a key concept linked to the understanding of Don LePan's *Animals*. In brief, "cognitive" refers to our perception of reality as it is influenced by a particular set of norms. The reality that we experience is shaped by a particular time, space, and culture. Therefore, 'reality' as we understand it is a concept in flux. It is not fixed. "Estrangement" refers to the process of making something which is familiar unfamiliar. Suvin says, "Science fiction concentrates on possible futures and their spatial equivalents, but it can deal with the present and the past as special cases of a possible historical sequence seen from an estranged point of view (by a figure from another time and/or space)" (Suvin 378). This is precisely what occurs within *Animals* as the character Broderick attempts to contextualize his present by way of historicizing the reader's present. As a result, the reader is distanced from their present and able to see their present with "detached eyes," from a different point of view; one more critical. Suvin says that the roots of the science fiction genre satirize or criticize society often in a "grotesque" way, and at the root, *Animals* is no different. We are led through a grotesque, dystopian world, one which is to be our future, where humans literally eat their fellow human beings. *How does this come to be* you might ask. What is at the heart of this criticism?

Simply speaking, it is not just the present, but also our own past which has led to the dystopian world within *Animals*. Madhu Dubey, Professor of English and African American

Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, published a critical essay titled, “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” which explains this intimate link between past and present which is emphasized within speculative fictions like *Animals*⁴. Speculative fiction has been defined as any fictional literary genre containing supernatural, fantastical, or futuristic elements which includes science fiction as one among many other genres. Dubey has catalogued a number of speculative fiction writers whose novels deal with explicit, and sometimes implicit, forms of slavery. Dubey claims that, since the 1970s, these writers have implemented a shift in their approach to history. By incorporating fantastical or futuristic elements into their narratives, these fiction writers are able to engage their readers in a new way of understanding history; one that proposes a bodily and emotional way of understanding rather than an ‘objective’ way of learning and understanding history. Through literary texts like *Animals*, this is an innovative way to engage with history and is what Dubey terms *embodied history* (Dubey 785). Such fictions imply a refusal of the standard and traditional way of understanding history as “a window through which the past ‘as it really was’ can be apprehended,” and rather we should see that type of approach as “an impediment to proper understanding of the past” (Dubey 784). When Dubey claims that our current understanding of history is actually an impediment to truly understanding it, it is implied that a change must be made to help facilitate a different way of engaging with the past, and by extension, the present. For Dubey, this is a literary one.

The diegetic world of *Animals* shares the reader’s “empirical” past and present. However, because it is set in the future, the point of view is an estranged one: our awaited future as determined by our present way of life. With terms such as “chattel,” “mongrel,” and “pet” used within the novel to identify individuals or groups of human beings, the analogy to present and past industry and institutionalization of enslavement is not hard to recognize.

⁴ Praise for *Animals*: “Margaret Atwood says that ‘speculative fictions could really happen.’ Apply her definitions to fellow Canadian Don LePan’s first novel, and it becomes clear why *Animals* is so disturbing: the monsters are all-too-recognizably human. *Animals* depicts a terrifying future not too many generations down the road” –*The Montreal Gazette* (*Animals*, cover page).

Broderick's character is constantly reminding the reader of their past, how this past has led to their present, and how their present will lead to this horrific future. What Dubey says is that the past does not stay in the past—history is not a linear line. There are remnants of our past, especially our shameful past, all around us. Perhaps slavery as it existed within the Western world has ended, but different forms of enslavement stemming from this past continue to exist today. LePan's novel implies that the attitudes and beliefs that allowed chattel slavery⁵ to exist, within the Western world, are not so different from the discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that allow privatized healthcare, education, housing, or slaughterhouses to exist today. In a society with scarce resources, like our own, being identified as a 'nonhuman' animal limits one's access to such resources—healthcare, education, housing—and within *Animals*, this literally means the difference between life and death as 'nonhuman animals' i.e. "mongrels," are completely stripped of their subjectivity, their agency, their mobility, and ultimately ending up as food for the 'human' animal. However, this process of constructing 'human' and 'nonhuman animal' identity is not a random one. Don LePan's novel *Animals* exemplifies the process of constructing and assigning 'human' and 'nonhuman' identity, the meanings that become attached to these identities, and the consequences for receiving such an identity. Through a clarification of the literary devices used within *Animals* as they relate to science fiction and speculative fiction, I will explore how 'human' and 'nonhuman' identity is constructed and assigned, the consequences for receiving such an identity, and the social and cultural practices which contribute to anthropocentric ideology within *Animals*.

⁵ "Chattel slavery is what most people have in mind when they think of the kind of slavery that existed in the United States before the Civil War, and that existed legally throughout many parts of the world as far back as recorded history. Slaves were actual property who could be bought, sold, traded or inherited. They might be abused, branded, bred, exploited or killed" ("Fight Slavery Now!").

Part I

To 'Parability' & Beyond: An Understanding of the Science Fiction Genre and Speculative Fiction in Relation to "Animals"

Cognitive Estrangement

Some readers tend to equate science fiction to other literary categories such as fantasy, but this does a disservice to the science fiction genre. A main characteristic of science fiction literature is what Darko Suvin terms *cognitive estrangement*, which refers to the process of making the familiar, or 'normative,' unfamiliar. Suvin says, "Science fiction sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to *cognitive glance*" (Suvin 375). Much of the time, we are so conditioned by what seems normal to us that we do not question or challenge this normality, even if this 'normalness' is harmful to us and our fellow human beings, nonhuman animals, or the environment. One way to create a questioning and re-evaluating response to these norms is through estrangement. In *Animals*, the character Broderick, as a "man of fact," dictates historical occurrences of his present social environment using documentary-type language. His 'factual' language is contrasted with the manuscript of Naomi, whose writing is described as "imaginative" and of which Broderick believes that "imagination matters a very great deal" and for this reason he has "placed [Naomi's] manuscript before you all" (*Animals* 35). In relation to Broderick's manuscript and multiple, interjecting footnotes, Suvin says "The effect of such factual reporting of fictions is one of confronting a set normative system—a Ptolemaic-type closed world picture⁶—with a point of view or glance implying a new set of norms; in literary theory, this is known as the attitude of *estrangement*" (Suvin 374). This different or 'strange' reporting of the reader's past and present forces the reader to observe their past and present with new, "detached eyes" which

⁶ Greek astronomer, mathematician, and geographer of the 2nd century A.D., Ptolemy believed that the earth was the fixed center of the universe and the 'heavenly bodies' moved around it.

allows readers to better see the injustices inherent in the particular norms of their society (Suvin 374).

German poet, playwright, and theatre director Bertolt Brecht described cognitive estrangement by saying that “a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (Suvin 374). This device is highly effective as a means of criticism or satire which functions as a reflection *on* rather than only being a reflection *of* the author’s reality⁷. To conclude upon this term, Suvin says, “*Science fiction is, then a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment*” (Suvin 375). Although the diegetic world of Don LePan’s novel is very similar to ours, it is still “an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” as it is set in the future in which a highly sophisticated industry of homicide has been developed and accepted within society. However, I have demonstrated here how this device is used to criticize particular aspects—cultural, social, economic, and political—of one’s society rather than simply entertaining childhood fantasies.

Science Fiction, Myth, Fantasy, Fairy Tale, and Fable: What’s the Difference?

Returning to science fiction as a genre distinguished from other similar genres such as fantasy, I will briefly discuss these related fields to help clarify science fiction as a distinct genre among them. Suvin claims that the fantasy is a derivation of the tragic myth in which the empirical world of the tragic myth is “negatively oriented” toward the protagonist who is

⁷Suvin says, “After such delimitations, it is perhaps possible at least to indicate some differentiations within the concept of ‘cognitiveness’ or ‘cognition’. As used here, this term does not imply only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality. It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author’s environment. Such typical methodology of science fiction—from Lucian, More, Rabelais, Cyrano, and Swift to Wells, London, Zamiatin, and the last decades—is a critical one, often satirical, combining a belief in the potentialities of reason with methodical doubt in the most significant cases. The kinship of this cognitive critique with the philosophical basis of modern science is evident” (Suvin 377).

“destined to empirical failure by the nature of their world” (Suvin 377). Contrasting this is the fairy-tale, which Suvin says is a derivation of the “victorious hero-myth,” where the world is “positively orientated” toward the protagonist. According to Suvin, the heroic myth and fairy-tale is defined by the “hero’s triumph” (Suvin 377). Because of these conventions, the reader has pre-established notions of what to expect from each. In science fiction, the world is not ‘positively or negatively’ oriented toward the protagonist. There is no ‘contract’ with the reader of science fiction which guarantees, “in the physical laws of their worlds,” that the protagonist will succeed or fail (Suvin 378).

Relating these literary categories to the distinct characteristic within science fiction of cognitive estrangement, Suvin says:

The estrangement differentiates it from the ‘realistic’ literary mainstream of 18th to 20th century. The cognition differentiates it not only from myth, but also from fairy tale and the fantasy. The *fairy tale* also doubts the laws of the author’s empirical world . . . It does not use imagination as a means to understand the tendencies in reality, but as an end sufficient unto itself and cut off from the real contingencies . . . The wishfulfilling element is its strength and weakness . . . It just posits another world beside yours where some carpets do, magically, fly, and some paupers do, magically, become princes, and into which you cross purely by an act of faith and fancy. Anything is possible in a fairy tale, because a fairy tale is manifestly impossible (Suvin 375).

Unlike the myth, the fantasy, or the fairy-tale, this device of cognitive estrangement is very important within science fiction and demonstrates that science fiction does not create a world ‘where anything can happen,’ rather it creates a world which intelligently and philosophically reflects upon our own through the use of “imagination as a means to understand the tendencies in reality.” Science fiction “thus shares with the dominant literature of our civilization a mature approach analogous to that of modern science and philosophy” (Suvin 378). Accordingly, science fiction is situated and results from a specific place and time which is reflective of and reflects upon the “author’s empirical environment” (Suvin 373). However, unlike myth,

fairytale, and fantasy, the diegetic world of science fiction can “range through all times”⁸ in order to enhance the effect of cognitive estrangement.

Extrapolative and Analogical Models of Science Fiction

Darko Suvin poses two types of science fiction. The first is the *extrapolative model*. Like a fable, this is based on “direct, temporal extrapolation and centered on sociological (i.e. utopian and anti-utopian) modeling,” and eventually has come to involve “biology and cosmology” (Suvin 378:9). Suvin says, “Science fiction has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and—most important—a mapping of possible alternatives. This historical movement of science fiction can be envisaged as an enrichment of and shift from a basic direct or extrapolative model to an indirect or analogic model” (Suvin 378). This ‘warning of possible alternatives’ highlights another characteristic of science fiction which is that it tends to be “futurologically oriented,” sharing its values with that of the fable which also tries to teach a kind of moral lesson. Here, Suvin claims that science fiction is experiencing a shift from the explicit, overt extrapolative model which obviously makes reference to the author’s world, to an *analogic model* which is more subtle.

The analogic model is based on analogy rather than extrapolation. Characters do not have to explicitly reference the author’s world. Suvin says that we should see that there is a continuum containing these two models in which the extremes are “pure extrapolation” or “pure analogy,” but often one work encompasses elements of both (Suvin 379). In *Animals*, both of these models are felt. The elaborate descriptions of the American capitalist system, the gaps between rich and poor, the inaccessibility to healthcare and education, and the intensity of

⁸ “Furthermore, [science fiction] shares the omnitemporal horizons of such an approach [as modern science and philosophy]. The myth is located above time, the fairy-tale is a conventional grammatical past which is really outside of time, and the fantasy in the hero’s abnormally disturbed present . . . Science fiction can range through all times” (Suvin 378).

factory farming are undeniably influenced by and taken from the author's empirical world. At the same time, Sam's journey serves as an analogous one which represents the past plight of human beings as resources i.e. living property, such as slaves, the present plight of farmed animals, and the discrimination experienced by those deemed as mentally or sensorially 'disabled' within present society; all of which are social constructs. There is nothing in nature which claims that a living being is inherently superior or inferior to another living being. Such concepts only manifest themselves in the laws, texts, and attitudes of human beings.

Related to this analogic modeling is what Suvin calls *modern parables*⁹. Parables are short allegorical stories which are used to illustrate and teach a 'truth,' principle, or moral lesson. Similar to Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," which suggested that the poor Irish population in the early 1700s sell their children to the wealthy to be eaten, Swift's usage of satire mocks the heartlessness in social and political attitudes toward the under-privileged population of the day. LePan's novel functions similarly. Through various characters, especially Broderick, the reader is able to see and understand that the attitudes with which nonhuman animals are met today are the same as those within the diegetic world of the novel toward "mongrels." Bordering this is also our current understanding of 'disability' as a social construct. Douglas C. Baynton, who is a University of Iowa professor teaching in the American Sign Language Program, wrote an essay titled, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in America." This essay discusses how 'disability' has been used historically to justify unequal treatment whether the 'disability' is due to race, gender, sensory deprivation, physical abnormalities and so on. Because we have access to Sam's thoughts and feelings, he is given a voice when normally, given his circumstances, he would not have had one. This helps him to convey the awful mistreatment he receives from those within his society; a mistreatment which

⁹ "Similar to Swift, Voltaire, or Diderot, modern parables fuse new visions of the world with an applicability—usually satirical and grotesque—to the shortcomings of our workaday world" (Suvin 380).

is experienced by many but given visibility through Sam's narrative. As American author Toni Morrison would say, the reader's access to Sam's experience via Naomi's manuscript gives a voice to those "unspeakable things, [which go] unspoken" (Dubey 787).

Extending this notion of the parable slightly further, Madhu Dubey says that novels like *Animals* "present slavery not primarily as a historical reference point but rather as an actually existing reality in the present" (Dubey 799). Due to the peculiar realism of science fiction, novels like *Animals* "extrapolate and magnify current trends that are fostering novel practices of enslavement"; the most obvious being factory farming, but the authors that Dubey analyzes extend this to wage labor within a capitalist system which greatly restricts access to resources such as healthcare, education, and housing to many individuals within society (Dubey 799). Superficially, *Animals* is a novel about a world where humans eat humans, something we would find unthinkable, but not-so-subtly this kind of modern parable unveils a 'truth' about present-day society and culture in the Western world.

Animals functions as a text through which multiple 'extrapolated' features of Western society and multiple analogies to past and present relationships of oppressor and oppressed can be drawn. However, as a science fictional text, *Animals* is focalized through a "futurological" perspective. As the narrators are looking back at their past, the reader is given a glimpse of their own impending fate. The narrative, therefore, serves a speculative purpose—one which contemplates the present-day modes of production and cultural practices within Western society. LePan's vision of the future is undeniably a dystopian one, and Darko Suvin claims that such visions of "failure" call attention to our understandings and practices within present society. Suvin says, "Significant modern science fiction, with deeper and more lasting sources of enjoyment, also presupposes more complex and wider cognitions: it discusses primarily the political, psychological, anthropological use and effect of sciences, and philosophy of science,

and the becoming or failure of new realities as a result of it” (Suvin 381). The question is not *is advancement within the sciences good or bad* rather the question I am highlighting is for what use or purpose do we use scientific and technological advancements to serve. Current understandings regarding nonhuman animals dictate that they are feeble creatures without intelligence and unable to suffer in the same way ‘we’ do. Just a few decades ago, this understanding was reserved for women and enslaved African Americans. In accordance, ‘scientific’ efforts have created a hierarchal system in which nonhuman animals have been ranked, and human animals are at the top of the list. Taxonomy creates an implied level of inherent superiority and inferiority among living organisms. In addition, technological advancements in infrastructural efficiency i.e. means of production, and ‘scientific’ knowledge concerning advancements in genetics are put center-stage for re-examination within *Animals*. Through speculation, *Animals* alerts the reader to the potential ramifications of the misuse of such ‘knowledge’ and technology through the philosophical and ethical implications raised by the characters’ experiences within *Animals*¹⁰.

Related to Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction functions similarly in creating an imagination that posits that the past has not left us fully; especially those aspects in our history of which we are the most ashamed. The clearest example of this is Madhu Dubey’s essay, “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” in which she analyzes the effect of an “antihistorical” approach within literature to convey a “subjective” and “corporeal” experience of history which she terms *embodied history* (Dubey 785). Although Dubey’s main focus are novels which explicitly reference antebellum slavery in the United States, she also uses examples where these same authors posit new and emerging forms of slavery such as manual labor and class divisions within a capitalist system. Both types apply to *Animals*, which I will elaborate upon in a moment. The most salient point of this essay

¹⁰ We will further explore this notion in part II.

is that speculative fictions of slavery, through various, often supernatural, fantastical, or paranormal devices, create a lack of distance between the past and the present—one which becomes simultaneous. Dubey says, “If historical knowledge involves a distanced relation to a past that is no longer available as direct experience, the devices of return to slavery in [these] novels make possible an unmediated relation to the past as something that has not quite passed into the realm of history . . . to really know slavery in the novels is to know it subjectively, to know it as something other than the characteristically remote object of historical knowledge” (787). Within *Animals*, LePan creates a foreshortening of the past, present, and future which diminishes the distance between these temporal spaces. This perspective is achieved through characters who speak from an unknown time in the not-too-distant-future, and it is due to their historical references to the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries i.e. the reader’s past and present, which makes it possible to situate the temporal perspective of the narrators as being in the future. The reader sees that the society of the narrators is not drastically different from their own, and what the reader is most curious about is how a society which is representative of their own—as it shares the same history as theirs—has come to enslave and eat their fellow human beings.

Due to its title, *Animals*, its allusions and references to factory farming are quite explicit. Factory farming has its industrial roots in the reader’s recent past and present, and the term “pet mongrel” is used to describe human beings who are seen and treated as pet, nonhuman animals. This highlights the arbitrary line with which we ourselves draw between animals which we believe deserve our respect and kind treatment and animals which we believe do not. In this sense, the novel serves as an analogy to examine the suffering, cruelty, and loss of agency within the lives of farmed animals whose tropes are shared with the rhetoric used to describe antebellum slave society. Individuals within *Animals*, undergo a process whereby they are assigned the identity of a subhuman being, a mongrel, and in some cases it is possible to test the

genes of the individual to determine this. However identification based on physical features and observation alone is sufficient enough in this society to ‘diagnose’ an individual as a mongrel, and it is also the most cost-effective. This fosters an understanding of living beings which views some as superior or inferior; believed to be an inherent and fundamental trait which is inscribed in our genetic composition. Criticism against this logic is in accordance with social-science scholarship on slavery at the turn of the twentieth-first century.

An essay by Brian Wallis titled “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” criticizes the use of photography in nineteenth-century U.S. society to perpetuate the misconception that, based on physical features, it is possible to classify individuals according to their moral convictions and mental capabilities. Because of its apparent ‘evidentiary power,’ photography became associated with “the empiricist assumptions and methodological procedures of naturalism” (Green 3). David Green’s article, “Veins of Resemblance: Photography and Eugenics,” explains this by saying, “scientific naturalism assumed the existence of pure facts . . . but it also called for the methods of observation and analysis which were independent of the prejudices and interests of the observer and thus uncontaminated by the potential subjectivism of theory” (Green 3). The ‘truth effect’ associated with photography gave the photographic image a special function within the social sciences, such as anthropology, wherein “natural order of social structure and stratification was thought to be readily available in the evidence of the human body” (Green 6). It was for this reason that Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz, a renowned scientist in his day, photographed several nude slaves¹¹. The purpose of these daguerreotypes was to examine slaves in opposition to their white counterparts, and at the same time, to serve as the proof of polygenesis—that slaves were of a different biological origin of which subordination is an innate characteristic in such a species (Wallis 40). These specific photographic images were used to support racist institutions

¹¹ See appendix

and discriminatory treatment within the U.S. during the nineteenth century. The logic or understanding that it is possible to know something fundamental about an individual's internal, inherent genetic make-up, and by extension their intellectual or creative capabilities based on appearance, is one that we find appalling in the twenty-first century. However, it is one which was accepted previously and opens our eyes to the changeability of 'common sense' and accepted 'scientific' knowledge throughout time which leads us to realize that what we think we know is always a concept in flux; shaped and enforced by the 'evidences,' that we create and produce, often for the purpose of furthering specific agendas.

As LePan reminds us of this forgotten history—how people of the past were placed in or taken out of these constructed 'human' and 'nonhuman' classifications—his attention toward the factory farm industry undoubtedly parallels our past use of chattel slavery. In *Animals*, Broderick, a character whose voice becomes merged with Don LePan's voice at the end of the novel under the title "Author's Afterword," and who we can say is a character through which LePan himself speaks, says, "People for the most part forget history; I hope that those who remember it will forgive me these sometimes lengthy interpolations, for I do think it important for people now to see against a larger canvas what has happened" (*Animals* 31). As this character is speaking to the reader from a point in the future, the text serves as a warning: if you forget your past, you are doomed to repeat it. Not only are you doomed to repeat it, but you are unable to see that it envelopes your present. Without being able to see this, one is unarguably blind against resisting or challenging it.

Broderick's character explicitly makes connections to the reader's past and present by offering countless historical information and footnotes to support and draw further connections and relationships between multiple forms of oppression such as human and nonhuman animal chattel slavery, gender discrimination, disproportions between rich and poor in capitalist

societies, and discrimination based on individuals with ‘disabilities.’ Because Broderick speaks and describes the reader’s history and present from a different point in time, and therefore a point of view which differs from our own, he is able to de-familiarize the reader’s past and present through estrangement as mentioned previously. Through this technique, the reader can see their past and present through “detached eyes”; new eyes which are able to see things they could not see when fully immersed within their present society. Through a medium such as literature, such devices can have a powerful effect in evoking change within the individual and by extension society¹².

Literature allows for the creative power of the imagination to develop; for one to be able to imagine and create a shared perspective with a character. This concept is essential to LePan’s *Animals*, and he defines it in the author’s afterword as “moral imagination: the power to imagine ourselves in the place of another being” (*Animals* 160). To LePan, this is crucial in creating compassion and sympathy for all beings on this planet who suffer from oppression, i.e. loss of agency which I define as determination and choice over one’s life. If this “moral imagination” is realized, it will “modify or change our own actions in the light of that imaginative experience” (*Animals* 160:161). LePan applies this imaginative experience throughout his novel, and as we feel Sam’s experience as a human being who has lost his agency and is subjected to demeaning, and at the end, cruel behavior, we also see his story as one which is analogous to the plight of other oppressed beings such as farmed animals. Within the novel, the factory farming industry has its roots in chattel slavery. The notion of living property had already been well-developed, and so the immergence of factory farming did not occur within a vacuum. This is what is meant by the past is still with us in the present. Because Broderick

¹² *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair is such a novel. In a 2009 interview, LePan said this about *The Jungle*, “. . . *The Jungle* on the ill-treatment of workers in slaughterhouses in the early twentieth century—all those novels helped to effect concrete change in a particular area in which humans had been doing horrific things. They also enlisted empathy on the part of the reader in support of change. In each case readers are led (through the plotting as much as the characterization, I would argue) to feel for characters who are either victims of or crusaders against the horrific practice that needs to be changed” (Macedo).

shows the reader similarities rather than differences between the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the reader begins to make these larger connections between the relationship between past, present, and future.

Part II

Identity Formation: Construction, Causes, and Consequences within “Animals”

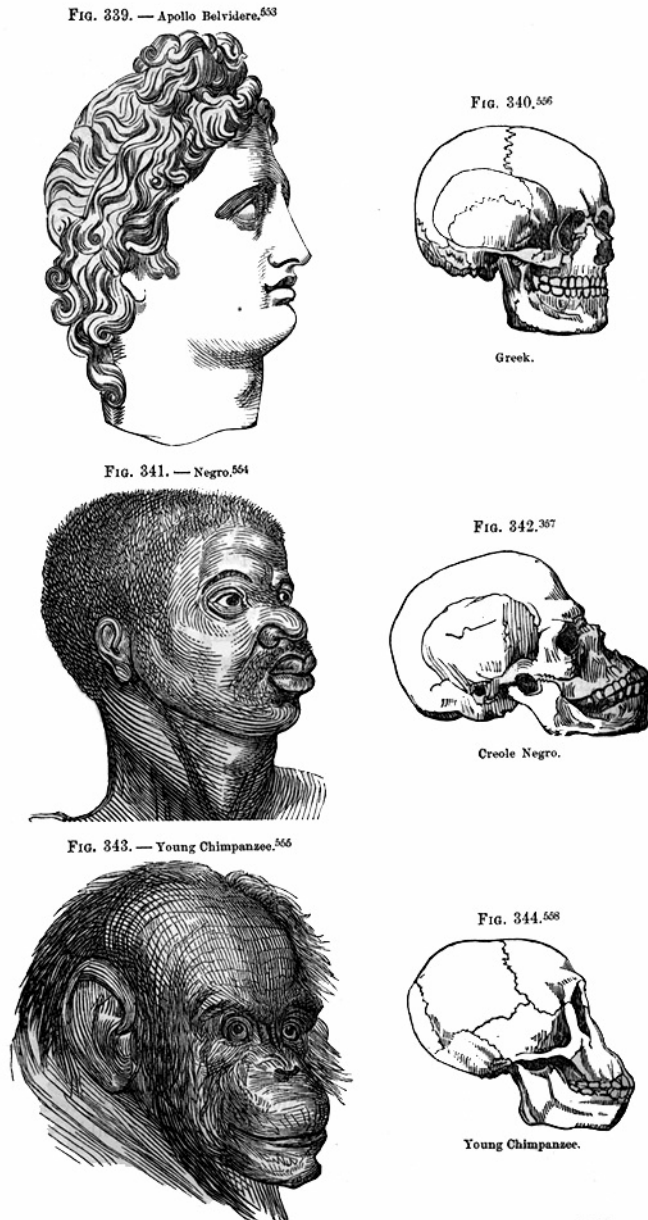
Broderick, a character more than one-hundred years in the future, educates the reader on their own recent past. He seems to know a great deal more than the average person today—certainly more than the average American—about the history of the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first century. Broderick’s manuscript maps out the historical conditions which have led to detrimental consequences in the future. Broderick says, “People for the most part forget history” (*Animals*, 31). It seems to be Broderick’s job to remind us and unveil as much information as he can to the reader to help them contextualize the present conditions occurring within Broderick’s world. Broderick goes into great detail explaining the logic behind diagnosing and identifying particular individuals as sub-human, or mongrels, and the social and historical factors which influence this. In divulging such a grotesque, futuristic world to us, Don LePan criticizes the past and present of Western cultures, specifically the United States. Linked to capitalism, enslavement, profits, and privilege, individuals within our society, whether human animal or nonhuman animal, are assigned particular identities for particular reasons. It is not a random nor an objective process. Identity is something which is always in flux; serving different purposes at different times within different cultures. Within *Animals*, we will now explore how the identity of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ is constructed and maintained, the social causes which influence this, and the consequences for being assigned either identity.

* * *

The more we learn about the earth's environment, its ecosystems, and the creatures who live here, the more we see the absurdity in the concept of ranking species against one another

-Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*

[Image 1]



* * *

'Scientific' Knowledge: Friend or Foe?

The narrative begins with the thoughts of Sam: “I am not cute, I am not a pet, I am not a mongrel. I am a child, that’s all” (*Animals* 3). Obviously a being capable of intelligible thinking, Sam is rejecting an identity which has been imposed upon him. We are not yet sure what has come to pass for him to think such a thing nor what is meant exactly by the term *mongrel*. Explained by Broderick, this term is often associated with a dog that is not a purebred, and this is likely the first connotation that comes to mind when reading. However, the term *mongrel* has a very particular history within this diegetic world, and it also reflects a very real history within our own world. Broderick explains this etymology:

The word *mongrel* as it is used today is itself something of an etymological mongrel. It partakes in the primary meaning we give to it nowadays both of its own centuries-old etymological history and of that of the word *mongo*, coincidentally related to it both in sound and in denotation. Not all that long ago—as recently as the first half of the twenty-first century—*mongrel* was primarily used to refer to dog or other domestic animal that was not a purebred, though it could also be used as an adjective to refer to almost any strange or unlikely genetic mixture. Not in those days, but not all that long before, no more than a few decades earlier, *mongo* (or the variant *mongoid*) was a very precise term for a certain sort of defective, a subclass of what we would now call a mongrel. That coinage originated when James Langford Peak published his “Inquiry Into the Ethnic Element of Idiocy” in 1870; he quite rightly observed the degree to which the creatures he was describing, though born to Caucasian parents, resembled the peoples of the Mongo River region of North Africa. *Mongan idiocy* was the name he gave it. The category of *mongrel* is nowadays much broader, of course, embracing literally dozens of the old ‘micro’ categories of defective; from one angle it is simply a red herring nowadays to make any direct association of *mongrel* with *mongo* or *mongoid*. But there is a historical connection, and I am among those who find the result telling if one tries to trace that. Surprisingly few people are aware of how the narrow old categories came to be replaced by the broader and more comprehensive ones that reflect our modern understanding of proper taxonomy (*Animals* 26).

In order to fully appreciate this passage, one has to be familiar with the obvious reference being made here to the British doctor John Langdon Down whose name appears as “James Langford Peak” within this passage. Down is most famous for his observations in characterizing and diagnosing individuals with Down’s Syndrome—a physical and mental condition resulting from

the presence of an additional chromosome. Within *Animals*, this condition is referred to as “Peake’s Syndrome,” and the biological basis for the disease is also due to the presence of an additional chromosome. This information allows the reader to understand and make a link to the known neurological and genetic conditions which have been diagnosed within our present. Like Peake, Down published an article titled “Observations on the Ethnic Classification of Idiots” in 1866 in which he theorizes the possibility of classifying certain conditions on the basis of ethnic characteristics. Peake’s article, “Inquiry Into the Ethnic Element of Idiocy” in 1870, parallels that of John Langdon Down, and therefore serves as an obvious allusion to Down’s research. Terms such as *mongo* and *mongoid* parallel Down’s usage of the terms *mongolism* and *mongoloid* when referring to someone with this type of trisomy, and these terms were commonly used until fairly recently.

To associate ethnic, physical characteristics with biological abnormalities is very dangerous because it promotes notions of genetic impurity on the basis of physical identification. Sam is a victim of this process as what can be defined as “mongrel” has become so broad that it can include anyone on the basis of having or lacking a specific appearance or behavior for any reason. This can extend in multiple directions so as to exclude and include certain types of individuals within society¹³. However, LePan’s focus within *Animals* is on those individuals of past and present Western culture who are affected by forms of enslavement through the misconception of inherent superiority and inferiority of living beings. In Sam’s world, ‘scientific’ knowledge has been used to further such misconceptions, and LePan’s implication is that it is not so different from the reader’s world. In a moment, we will look at the actual document produced by Down, but before we do, let us continue to examine the implications of this passage.

¹³ As Michel Foucault’s work within *Madness and Civilization* (1965) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978) have shown us in regards to society’s stigmatization of homosexuality and ‘insanity’ and the exclusion of those individuals who are identified as such during the Middle Ages until the end of the 18-century for the former and since the Victorian era for the latter within Western culture.

There is an obvious relationship here to the idea of genetic ‘impurity,’ and therefore the idea of genetic ‘purity,’ as manifested through physical features. The passage says that *mongrel* is used to describe “any domestic animal that was not a purebred” or “any strange or unlikely genetic mixture.” This is a strong implication toward the advocacy of eugenics—improving the gene pool by allowing some and discouraging others to reproduce. Broderick himself does not necessarily agree with controlled breeding as his name has become synonymous with “chattel-rights welfare” and “chattel-rights advocate,” he believes in the rights of mongrels who are used as chattel in the factory farms (*Animals* 131).¹⁴ Because Broderick is exposing this information to the reader, it can be seen as a chance to examine and rebuke such kinds of ‘scientific’ information that have been used in creating and perpetuating specific discriminatory social practices. Broderick is not advocating any kind of ‘truth’ within Peake’s research. The passage continues by saying, “the creatures [Peake] was describing, though born to Caucasian parents, resembled the peoples of the Mongo River region of North Africa.” By tying genetic “defects” to ethnic i.e. physical features, it implies that there is something fundamentally ‘wrong’ with an individual based on how they look. Broderick adds, “When Peake identified these creatures he saw them as a subspecies; they were understood not to be human . . . Not only did they look different; they typically had far lower levels of intelligence. If they could speak at all it tended to be largely gibberish” (*Animals* 26). Similar to any colonizer upon meeting the native inhabitants, when sound is uttered but not understood between two beings, it is considered ‘gibberish,’ and when sound is not understood between two species, such as a dog’s bark to a human ear, it is considered ‘noise’; both utterances are assumed to be bereft of meaning. It is difficult to imagine that people could believe this, or that a figure such as Peake could become an accredited scientist, but LePan’s fiction points to the actual events of our history, within Western culture, upon which these elements within his novel are based. The passage even says, “there is a historical connection, and I am among those who find the result telling if one tries to

¹⁴ Broderick says, “we should continue to object to the cruel excesses of intensive farming” (*Animals* 31)

trace that.” Taking up the narrator’s proposal to research this history, I found John Langdon Down’s original text, “Observations on the Ethnic Classification of Idiots” published in 1866.

“Observations on the Ethnic Classification of Idiots” documents Down’s ‘scientific’ observations of individuals affected by a specific kind of chromosome disorder which he ties to the physical features of Mongolian people. His article elaborates upon what he classifies as the ‘Mongolian type of idiocy’:

The number of idiots who arrange themselves around the Mongolian type is so great, and they present such a close resemblance to one another in mental power, that I shall describe an idiot member of this racial division, selected from the large number that have fallen under my observation.

The hair is not black, as in the real Mongol, but of a brownish colour, straight and scanty. The face is flat and broad, and destitute of prominence. The cheeks are roundish, and extended laterally. The eyes are obliquely placed, and the internal canthi more than normally distant from one another. The palpebral fissure is very narrow. The forehead is wrinkled transversely from the constant assistance which the levatores palpebrarum derive from the occipito-frontalis muscle in the opening of the eyes. The lips are large and thick with transverse fissures. The tongue is long, thick, and is much roughened. The nose is small. The skin has a slight dirty yellowish tinge, and is deficient in elasticity, giving the appearance of being too large for the body (Down).

Down’s psychological usage of “idiocy,” “idiot,” and “imbecile” throughout his text is no longer in use today because it is greatly offensive. It is likely that his usage of these terms refers to ‘mental retardation’ and individuals whose intelligence quotient has been assessed unusually low. Here, Down ties “racial” features to “mental power.” He clearly relates those individuals who are under his observations, and who have a chromosome disorder, with a race of people whose only ties to this condition exist in the opinion of Down. By writing, publishing, and presenting his observations as a kind of ‘scientific fact,’ Down has created a scientific narrative based more on biased opinion than fact. His terms *mongolism* and *mongoloid* to describe Down’s syndrome only recently stopped to be used. This kind of terminology is heavily weighted in ethnic and cultural bias and has no place within the field of science. The alarming

aspect of this is that which LePan's novel demonstrates: this kind of use of 'scientific' knowledge to discriminate against some and assign privilege to others based on physical features has not really left our culture today.

Down's descriptive style of physical features, as seen within the passage above, is imitated within *Animals* as Broderick attempts to categorize the physical features of the stereotypical "mongrel." Broderick says:

Sometimes it would have that half-vacant look in the eyes that's such a common characteristic of mongrels; in that case it was certainly easy to tell. Various physical abnormalities could also be reliable indicators. Oftentimes you'd get a distinctive short stature—typically with a somewhat compressed torso, and legs disproportionately long, and a long face, with elongated forehead and jaw—though that was not the only characteristic physical type for mongrels. Sometimes the most salient feature was rounded eyes, unusually far apart and set far forward, making for a disconcertingly inquisitive appearance. Of course lack of verbal ability was very frequently a tip-off. It didn't take a lot of expertise; that was the fact of the matter. Any human could tell a sub-human when he saw one; it was not rocket science (*Animals* 6).

Broderick's description is reminiscent of his scientific predecessors such as Peake (Down)—particularly the description of the "rounded eyes, unusually far apart and set far forward" and "the distinctive short stature—typically with a somewhat compressed torso, and legs disproportionately long." Within Down's text, these features are described as the eyes being "obliquely placed" and the individual giving "the appearance of being too large for the body" because the physical features appear to be disproportionate as described in LePan's text. This mocks the reader's past and calls attention to the 'scientific' texts of the reader's present. With little awareness of the past and present narratives used to advocate the inherent superiority of some beings over others, the more likely it is that the diegetic world within *Animals* will one day be our own. LePan goes to great lengths to communicate and emphasize how 'scientific' knowledge can affect and produce discriminatory social practices.

Within LePan's text, he mocks the pseudo-scientific reasoning and observations associated with Down's text by saying, "Any human could tell a sub-human when he saw one; it was not rocket science." Such features as "that half-vacant look in the eyes," a "short-stature," or "lack of verbal ability" are not conclusive proof or a solid indication of an individual's neurology nor their mental capabilities. However, LePan's novel credits this type of reasoning, which is a very real type of reasoning used within our history and what Broderick refers to when he says "rhetoric belied reality"¹⁵, as a major factor for allowing conditions to exist where individuals 'diagnose' other individuals as 'human' or 'non/sub-human' purely based on physical appearance alone. As we will see, this 'scientific' knowledge is thrust upon some but not all.

It is not only Down's syndrome masked as "Peake's Syndrome," which becomes a basis for categorizing a mongrel within *Animals*. Wilson's disease—an inherited disorder that causes too much copper to accumulate within an individual's internal organs and eventually attacks the nervous system—is masked as "Wilson's Disorder." A third malady used to identify a mongrel is Asperger's syndrome—which is a form of autism characterized by impaired social interaction—and this is masked as "Gyberger's syndrome." These three diseases are highlighted as partial criteria for which mongrels are identified, but throughout the years, the once narrow category of mongrel has extended exponentially to filter society and place many in confinement.

In the first passage of part II, Broderick's description of the etymology of the term *mongrel* ends by him saying, "Surprisingly few people are aware of how the narrow old categories came to be replaced by the broader and more comprehensive ones that reflect our modern understanding of proper taxonomy" (*Animals* 26). This passage alerts the reader to the

¹⁵ Broderick says, "The rhetoric of the natural pervaded discussions of food too—and for that matter, discussions of topics such as human disability. But here again rhetoric belied reality; with farm animals and with the groups that we now class together as mongrels, twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Western civilization went to unnatural extremes . . . Mongrels in the nineteenth century were not subjected to unnatural cruelty, to systematic mistreat and crammed into factory farms as they are now" (*Animals* 26).

irony within the narrator's voice. Throughout the novel, Broderick establishes the mutability of "proper taxonomy" throughout his past which is simultaneously the reader's past and present. Broderick has emphasized that our 'scientific' and ethical understandings change because they are at the mercy of 'human' error and biased opinion. By extension, the reader is being asked to critically re-examine the texts and narratives that are produced, and by which we live, because such 'scientific discoveries' do not occur within a vacuum and are affected as well as affect a specific infrastructural and cultural system. Now we will examine the not-so-random process by which beings are assigned these 'biological' identities and the social consequences corresponding to human and nonhuman animal identities within *Animals*.

Constructing Mongrel Identity and Its Relation to External Factors

Sam is identified as a mongrel. Naomi elaborates upon this for the reader, "There's something wrong with him. You can see it,' [people] would say, 'he's not right in the head. If he was, he'd be talking by now—whole sentences, not just words' . . . 'Maybe he's a mongrel. They're not just made, you know. A person can give birth to one. And they sometimes look the same as humans . . . Look at his forehead now; a lot of them have that sort of flat little forehead, don't they? And the eyes, so far apart'" (*Animals* 4). For the majority of people within *Animals*, inaccessibility to proper healthcare has created a lot of misinformation about certain 'disabilities' which are common to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ Sam was born deaf, and because his family is poor, he was never able to see a doctor to properly diagnose this. Naomi describes Sam's experience within his family before he understands that some individuals can hear and speak whereas others cannot. Naomi says, "watching their mouths

¹⁶ Broderick elaborates upon this notion: "People used to say that it would be absurd to imagine a deaf person being mistaken for a mongrel. But I'd hazard it's no more surprising than a white person being mistaken for a black person if they have a dark complexion, or if they blacked up their skin. And that has certainly happened often enough—people not looking beyond one salient feature . . . That just seems to be the way humans work. So what can I say about deaf people and mongrels? The fact is it *did* happen. It happens still, and not all that infrequently, either . . . And then there's the fact that even then *mongrel* was becoming such a broad category; no matter what people say, it wasn't as straightforward as it once might have been to pick out a mongrel on appearance alone" (*Animals* 23).

move, watching their fingers do things in response to the others' moving mouths, and knowing nothing, understanding nothing. [Sam] started a habit then of ceaseless babble to compete, to get attention, to make them do things in response to his moving mouth. Perhaps that is always what it is like to be deaf, before you know what deaf is" (*Animals* 3). One of the things that appall the reader so much about Sam's particular case is that we understand that deafness does not affect one's cognitive abilities. Sam is treated differently because he cannot perform in the way expected of him. Characteristics such as not being able to speak "properly" become associated with not being able to "think properly" (*Animals* 27). This asks us to also re-evaluate where we draw the line with both human and nonhuman animals. We favor those who can perform in a specific way, often in the way which is reflective of the way in which we ourselves perform, and we shun others who cannot. However, this may not reflect at all their cognitive abilities or what we acknowledge as 'intelligence'. Rather, all it demonstrates to us is how well a human or nonhuman animal can perform a specific behavior expected of them.¹⁷ In addition, we see deafness or blindness as a 'disability', but through other literary texts like H.G. Wells' short story, "Country of the Blind,"¹⁸ we are asked to redefine what is or should be considered a 'disability.'

Within *Animals*, Sam's case is just one of a variety of others that are affected by the labeling of mongrels. Broderick implies that this label targets certain individuals while excluding others. He says, "If you notice, it seems never to happen that a deaf child in a well-off family ends up being mistaken for a mongrel" (*Animals* 24). The lower-class status of Sam's family is established at the beginning of the narrative, but this is the first explicit remark made

¹⁷ Unfortunately, there are documented instances of bias in testing 'intelligence' such as the literacy tests which promoted and perpetuated the disenfranchisement of black voters in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries (Cornell). Likewise, 'intelligence-testing' is still administered to human and nonhuman animals. For the former, this can determine access to education, and for the latter, this can determine access to kind treatment.

¹⁸ The protagonist, Nunez, is a mountaineer who falls down the side of a mountain and 'discovers' a valley whose inhabitants are blind. Believing himself to be superior to them because of his sight, Nunez soon discovers that the ability of sight is not an inherently superior trait, but rather it limits and shapes his understanding of the world.

by either narrator which ties Sam's socio-economic status to his 'biological' status. This relationship is essential to understanding the process of being assigned a mongrel identity. Broderick says, "You might think that some effort would have gone into diagnosis to ensure that those being relabeled *mongrel* or *chattel*, rather than human, were being accurately classified. The fact was, though, that diagnosis was an area where thoroughness was noticeably lacking" (*Animals* 6:7). The reason why "thoroughness was noticeably lacking" was not simply due to "human error"¹⁹, rather it was due to the costliness of the process.²⁰

By identifying more and more individuals as nonhuman, less and less care, attention, and resources can be given to those who "have less already" (*Animals* 11). School funding becomes cut off on the basis that some "areas" are having fewer "fully human" children. Broderick explains this reasoning toward providing and prohibiting access to resources:

Understandably enough, it was the middle-class parents who got the tax breaks—and those who were outright wealthy. Many in government and in the media were quite open about the reasons: *We want to give the strongest incentives to the people who can be the best parents, who can raise their children under the most advantageous conditions*, they would say. Much less was offered to those who had less already, who would not be able in any case to offer their children much in the way of the finer things in life (*Animals* 11).

It is a vicious cycle which feeds itself. Like our world, it is the classic rhetoric pertaining to 'the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.' Similar to Swift's "A Modest Proposal," the objective language used to describe such horrible societal conditions helps to point out the heartlessness with which society operates. The reader is naturally in favor of helping to improve

¹⁹ Broderick describes those working within the repositories which are mongrel care facilities. He says, "And the repositories, starved of funds as they had been, the staffs overworked, worn down—how often did they have the inclination, let alone the resources, to send a creature for all the tests? Easier to make the assumption . . . That's just how things happened, there's no more to it than that. Human error, people slipping through the cracks—when has it not gone on?" (*Animals* 24).

²⁰ Broderick says, "the fact was that with what were reported to be significant nutritional shortages and with medical resources so scarce, it seemed to be to everyone's advantage to keep to a minimum the number of humans suffering from conditions that were expensive to treat. Deformed creatures who not long before would have led a prolonged if hardly pleasant existence at vast public expense were now allowed to expire quietly early in life. And many who would in an earlier age have been classified as suffering from one or another of a long list of abnormalities were more and more frequently lumped in with the class of mongrels and chattels. (It had long been acknowledged that the twentieth- and early twenty-first-century practice of treating several varieties of mongrels as fully fledged humans was as ruinously expensive as it was psychologically painful.)" (*Animals* 25).

Sam's conditions, as it is his story we are following, and when given the larger picture of intersecting factors of oppression, such as his socio-economic status and inability to hear, the reader is able to turn a critical and sympathetic eye toward their own society. Through what LePan calls *moral imagination*, the reader is able to imagine themselves within the life of each of characters within *Animals* and within its diegetic world—a world which is reflective of and reflects upon our own.

The Consequences of Mongrel Identity and the Attitudes and Practices That Maintain It

Now that I have demonstrated the relatively easiness with which one is “diagnosed” as being a mongrel, I will examine the consequences of this identity. Since the world of *Animals* is one with scarce resources, like our own, certain beings are allowed access to these resources whereas others are not. When one is assigned the identity of a mongrel, one is no longer allowed to live for their own reasons but for the reasons of someone else. Mongrels are stripped of their entire agency and must exist for the benefit of another being—a ‘human’ being. Those who are not ‘human’ lose their agency and mobility. *They cannot do but are done to.*²¹ The enforcement of this identity is achieved through negation. What it means to be ‘human’ in this diegetic world, as well as our own, is only through opposition of what is deemed ‘nonhuman’²², and is therefore not a “self-evident,” inherent, nor exceptional trait and changes depending on social, political, and cultural contexts. We see this when Broderick explains the justification used in producing, selling, and consuming the product *yurn* which is mongrel meat. He says:

It is often imagined that the answer to a question such as what constitutes a human person is self-evident, and does not change over time. Yet even a moment's reflection shows this idea to be false. Americans living as chattel slaves held the status of less-than-human animals . . . many societies of one race have regarded the members of certain other races as nonhuman animals . . . women have in

²¹In the article, “The War on Compassion,” Carol Adams states, “Animals are killed daily for *being* rather than *doing* . . . with animals, humans are the ones who do the ‘doing to’ . . . When someone says, *I was treated like an animal*, they mean, *I was reduced to literal existence. I could not do, I was done to,*” (Adams 7).

²² To use the language of Edward Said, this refers to the imposed identity of the animalize ‘other’: to say that ‘we’ are human is to say that ‘we’ are separate from nature; ‘we’ are not like the ‘other’ which is animal or animal-like (Chavez 2).

many cultures been regarded as less than fully human by their male rulers . . . many societies have regarded those born with various defects as thereby lacking fully human status (*Animals* 56).

As I said above, ‘humanness’ is not an inherent, exceptional trait but it is made so in order to justify the dominance of one being over another. When a being is stripped of their ‘humanness’, they are simultaneously stripped of their subjectivity, their agency, and they undergo a process of objectification, what American writer Carol J. Adams calls *thingification*, and ‘things’ do not need nor do they deserve the same treatment as ‘us.’ The connections that Broderick makes to past, and perhaps present, discriminatory practices based on race, gender, and physical ‘deformities’ alert the reader’s understanding to the falsehood of constructed hierarchies as it was once written into law²³ that a slave is the sole property of a master or a woman is the sole property of her father or husband. When such hierarchies are created, they construct a very real effect within society which says that ‘they’ are a means of benefitting ‘us,’ and to act accordingly is to perpetuate the misconception that ‘they’ are just “passive objects whose only role in life is to serve the ‘human’ enterprise” (“The War on Compassion” 7).

Within *Animals*, in order to prolong this falsehood, measures must be taken to treat those who are identified as ‘nonhuman’ differently than those are ‘human’. Sam’s status as ‘human’ began to come into question once he reached the age in which a child “should” be talking, and when his status officially changed to mongrel, he was treated differently in order to separate him further “from the realm of the human” (*Animals* 10). Naomi says, “Sam would always remember the day they took away his knife and fork . . . One by one the other human things went too” (*Animals* 7:8). By taking away “the other human things” from Sam, Sam’s identity as a mongrel is reinforced. Additional efforts were made to emphasize Sam’s new-found mongrel status. Not only could he no longer “eat with the others or in the same way as the others,” nor

²³ Such is also the case in the world of *Animals*. Naomi says, “The law didn’t always follow what was right, Naomi knew that from learning in history class of the old laws about slavery and about women, but it was another thing to know it like this” (*Animals* 145).

the same food²⁴ as the others, he was also forced to sleep separately from the others and dress differently from the others (*Animals* 8). Naomi explains:

They started dressing him in the bright, coarse wool coveralls that you'd see mongrels wearing everywhere. There would be no need for underwear, not anymore, and it would often be a week or ten days before they'd think to put the old coverall in the wash and give him a fresh one. When they did launder his things—his one thing, to be accurate about it—they wouldn't wash what he wore with the others' clothes; it would be a 'special load' and their mother would wrinkle up her nose and smile good-humoredly as she held the coverall at arm's length between finger and thumb before dropping it into the machine (*Animals* 9).

Suddenly Sam's very essence and being is tainted with impurity because his status has changed from "human" to "mongrel." This type of treatment toward Sam perpetuates the misconception that he is a thing-other-than-human, and as he is bathed less and less, it creates a break out of sores on his body "and that too made him less and less human" (*Animals* 9).

Sam comes from a family with a low socio-economic background, and Sam's mother, Tammy, is forced to abandon Sam because she can no longer provide for her four human children in addition to a mongrel. At this point, she goes to where the neighborhood "started to change," and this is where the Stinson family lives. Naomi is the child of Zayne and Carrie Stinson, a couple who "had made a lot of money on that very change, as a matter of fact, buying up properties when prices were still low, and then turning a tidy profit unloading them as gentrification²⁵ had spread to 12th, 11th, and 10th street as well . . . in fact there were no mongrels at all along the entire block" (*Animals* 18). This creates a connection between the separation of lower-class and upper-class individuals and the separation of 'human' and 'nonhuman' individuals within *Animals*. When Naomi's family adopts Sam as their pet

²⁴ Mongrels had to eat "mongrel food" which is essentially the equivalent of our present-day pet food. This helps to maintain separation between the two identity categories and attempts to blend these categories are met with disgust: desperate and without money, Sam's mother becomes very ill from eating "tainted mongrel food"; food which is seen as unfit for humans but a sufficient source of sustenance for mongrels and as a consequence, "more than a few still remember the story of the woman who ate pet food" (*Animals* 13).

²⁵ Gentrification: the buying and renovation of houses and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, thus improving property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gentrification?s=t>).

mongrel, he is treated as such, but perhaps if Sam had been born within the Stinson family this would not have been the case. None the less, this is case, and the young Naomi, like most children, is opposed to the discriminatory mistreatment of mongrels. Naomi says, “Mongrels could feel all right . . . maybe more than some humans . . . and there were thoughts inside them too, thousands of thoughts . . . Maybe they could even talk, talk *properly*, maybe if you really tried—because no one *did* ever try, not really (*Animals* 64). Naomi’s use of the word “properly” is indicative of a mongrel being able to speak in the established, standard way of speaking as defined by society—one which is recognized and accepted within their present culture. Naomi believes this to be possible as she sees the similarities between ‘humans’ and ‘mongrels’.

When Naomi attempts to demonstrate these similarities to her mother, Carrie, Naomi is met with the strong and harsh attitudes reflective of their society. When Naomi is ten years old, she tells her parents that the whole family should stop eating ‘meat’ produced by the mongrel chattel farms because she believes that it is wrong to treat a living being with cruelty by restricting their agency and mobility and confining them to small cages. Carrie’s response to this justifies the mistreatment of nonhuman animals on the grounds that they are “dumb” and have less intelligence than a toddler, and Naomi responds by saying, “but Mommy, we don’t eat toddlers” (*Animals* 71). However, because a toddler “has the potential to be richly, fully human, to become a Shakespeare, a Georgia O’Keeffe, a Virginia Woolf” then that means that “a human life is worth more than a non-human one” because “a toddler has the potential to grow into something [that has] skills, logic, [and] grammar,” (*Animals* 71). This is the same logic used to justify providing those who are already “well-off” with resources by limiting resources to those who “have less already”²⁶. However, it is precisely this type of system that creates and perpetuates a particular ‘truth’ as Naomi says, “for sure some mongrels could say some things as

²⁶ I remind us of an earlier quote: “Understandably enough, it was the middle-class parents who got the tax break—and those who were outright wealthy. Many in government and in the media were quite open about the reasons: *We want to give the strongest incentives to the people who can be the best parents, who can raise their children under the most advantageous conditions*, they would say. Much less was offered to those who had less already, who would not be able in any case to offer their children much in the way of the finer things in life” (*Animals* 11).

well as understand things, they were sort of animals but sort of like humans too. They just hadn't been taught to do things: maybe she could be a teacher" (*Animals* 65). 'Humans' are made to believe that 'nonhumans' do not possess any useful and valuable potential which would put them on par with the 'human species'. Because 'nonhuman' beings' access to resources are greatly limited, and they are confined to small spaces, they are never able to realize their full potential. In addition, only 'humans' find "exclusively human"²⁷ qualities and skills as something worth admiring, so it becomes nearly impossible to penetrate this vicious circle, and sadly, Naomi is not able to affect a changed perspective within her society. However, the manuscript which is put forward to the reader is her attempt at affecting a change in consciousness.

Related to Madhu Dubey's essay, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery," Dubey speaks of "forced illiteracy" being used to solidify a "slave's status" within speculative fictions of slavery. Reflective of the period of slavery in the U.S., pet and chattel mongrels are not given access to educational resources as it is believed that they do not possess the 'potential' to read, and in this way, mongrel illiteracy reinforces itself. On a more coherent level, dispossessing 'nonhumans' of 'human' qualities and skills, such as reading, suppresses any potential threat or challenge to current social and economic practices. If mongrels learn to read, then they might want possession over their own lives, and therefore not work for free on the chattel farms before being slaughtered for their 'meat'²⁸, and this would greatly diminish the current profits being made by corporate farming. Unfortunately for Sam, it is such disruptive behavior within the factory farm

²⁷ According to Marjorie Spiegel, "we have made those characteristics which are claimed to be *exclusively human attributes* the requirements for moral consideration" (Spiegel 23).

²⁸ Broderick says, "Once it had been established that a chattel was not a human person, however, it proved impossible to claim on any legal grounds that it should be paid as a person. That a chattel would be harvested after a set number of productive years did not in essence make it any different from a machine that might do the same work over the same period and be sold at the end of it" (*Animals* 86).

which causes him to be sent to the “killing pen” early i.e. before Naomi and Zayne can rescue him (*Animals* 145).

However, there is not just this obvious form of mongrel slavery within *Animals*. LePan goes to great lengths to smoothly and intelligently weave socio-economic factors into the narrative which are reflective of our own. Just as the reader develops sympathy for Sam, and by extension the plight of all mongrels, the reader also develops sympathy for the lower-class individuals who appear to be pawns in a capitalistic system that cares more about profit than people. Sam’s mother loves him very much and is shown to be constantly struggling with low-paying job after low-paying job, and eventually she is forced to move to one of the “border towns” where work is cheap but available. The individual lives of the low-paid employees within the factory farms are presented to the reader in a sympathetic manner as they are shown as individuals who are struggling just like the mongrels. These workers do not wish any particular ill-will toward the mongrels in the factory farms, but they must perform their jobs—in a society where work is becoming more and more scarce due to mechanization and slave labor—in order to be paid and survive themselves.

Rose is the secretary of Canfield, the factory farm where Carrie takes Sam after she becomes concerned with the close relationship developing between Naomi and Sam²⁹, and she attempts to help Zayne and Naomi find Sam although it is contrary to what her boss, Mr. Givens, has told her to do. Later, a conversation between Rose and her husband Jessie is shown to the reader. Rose says, “You know, Jesse, sometimes I wonder about some of the stuff we do out there, sometimes I think it wouldn’t hurt us to not eat any of that stuff ourselves . . . sometimes I wonder if it’s not good, what we’re doing to the animals and all, sometimes I think

²⁹ Naomi asserts that Sam is just as much ‘human’ as they are, and she attempts to demonstrate to her mother that Sam is deaf but fully capable of reading and speaking. However, Carrie denies any truth in this and takes Sam to the factory farm.

it's just wrong" (Animals 143). Both Rose and her husband have a low socio-economic class status with jobs offering no pensions, and they are forced to work beyond the legal age of retirement. However, her statement clearly shows that even though she is forced to participate within the factory farm, she does not like it nor does she agree with the philosophical implications of turning living beings into senseless organism that do not feel pain and suffering.

Sam's care-taker in Canfield, Sandie, is not an under-paid worker, but she does understand that she is helping the company to make profits. However, she is conflicted because simultaneously she is helping to improve the health³⁰, not so much the living conditions³¹, of the mongrels within factory farms. Naomi describes Sandie's thoughts and her situation. She says, "And once in a while, once in a long while, there would be a chattel like Sam that could understand everything she said and could say things back. When that happened Sandie found it would make her think not, *What a special one this is*, but *Through this one I can feel something of what all of them must be feeling, all of them have hearts and minds, and I must never, never forget that*" (Animals 123). This passage is important because it also reminds the reader that Sam's story is just one of many other mongrels. His story also serves as an analogy which highlights not only the plight of present-day farmed animals but various past and present beings affected by different types of discrimination. Sandie is very compassionate toward the mongrels, and unlike others, she speaks to them because she believes that some of them can understand at least a little of what she is saying, so she is very pleased to see that Sam can understand her very well. She speaks to him about Canfield by saying:

³⁰ Sandie is in charge of preventing and treating diseases and bacterial infections that are caused by "all the feces, all that muck getting mixed in with the dirt, so the least little cut or scrape on the ball of the foot or between the toes or whatever, with any of that you get infection, you get fungi as well as bacteria, foot rot can go on and on for months. If it were a human they'd amputate but here . . ." (Animals 123).

³¹ Naomi describes Sam's first experience in the factory farm, "He could not escape the smell, it was everywhere, it got into everything. It was old sweat, it was rot, it was pee, but mostly it was [feces], you could see the turds bulging out as an animal squatted, most of it going through the grate [of the cage] usually, but always bits sticking to the skin around, bits flicking off on the ground, sometimes hard, sometimes drippy, and the smell—he couldn't bear it, he couldn't" (Animals 120).

It's not nice, none of it is nice, not any of it. Everybody tells me I have a good job, and I guess I do, I can't complain about the pay, it's evenings and nights mostly but I get extra for that, and even the smell I sort of got used to after the first six weeks or so. And I'm doing something that might make things a little better for some of you. Because of what I'm doing they might catch an outbreak in time to do something. I know it's only because of the profits really that they hire people like me, it costs them if they lose animals before they can be harvested, but to me it's different, I *am* helping too, I know that. It's just that I can't, that one person can't . . . (she pauses) . . . I'm sorry" and then she is forced to move on (*Animals* 123:124).

This helps to demonstrate Sandie's internal conflict towards helping mongrels within factory farms because she feels terrible that these horrific conditions exist only for profit's sake. She seems frustrated because she is unable to justify the entire system to Sam, and she is at a loss of words because she understands that there is no real justification, at least not one that would make Sam agree to give up his life. She ends by simply saying that she is sorry, and this demonstrates the powerlessness felt by the individual workers.

The last employee I will mention is Ellison. He is hired to operate the machine that kills mongrels—the final stage of their existence within the factory farms. For Ellison, his plan is to work at Canfield for the summer because he would like to save some money for a bigger apartment after finding out that his girlfriend is pregnant. Because of this, he is forced into a job which is emotionally and psychologically draining. The reader is upset that Ellison allows Sam to be slaughtered, but at the same time, the reader can empathize with Ellison's position. The final scene of the narrative describes Ellison's point of view when operating the slaughter machine. The text says, "with most of [the mongrels] you could see if you looked that they had seen what was coming and you could see how much it scared them, it was better not to look but if you did you could see what they saw, and in the next moment there was pleading in their eyes . . . You could imagine so many things if you looked in a creature's eyes . . . it was better to look away. The night was cold, suddenly very cold, and still such a long line, still such a very long line" (*Animals* 151). Ellison too can see that the mongrels are not simply senseless beings willing to part with their lives. Unfortunately, because Ellison sees himself as only a temporary

worker in need of money for a larger apartment, he releases himself from any responsibility he has in perpetuated an industry with which he does not fully agree.

We see that he makes a conscious effort to deny his empathy toward the mongrels in order to further his own existence, and once he leaves his temporary position at Canfield, the experience will be ‘out of sight and out of mind’; a condition that we all suffer from as the “open secret”³² of factory farming and slaughterhouses continues through a conscious effort to ignore it. Ellison’s character reflects our own denial of our participatory roles in an economic and social system of which we do not necessarily agree with nor desire to perpetuate. However, workers like Ellison do perpetuate such a society, and within *Animals*, this demonstrates that ‘enslavement,’ lack of agency and mobility, is explicitly reserved for the ‘nonhuman animal’ but also subtly imposed upon—but not limited to—the lower-class individual. Ellison must detach himself from his ‘humanity’ in order to perform such horrific and repetitive tasks upon a being which is reflective of his own situation. This helps to demonstrate LePan’s implication that there is a larger, more complicated, multi-layered mechanism at work when it comes to who receives a specific identity which completely restricts one’s agency and mobility and who remains under the illusion that they have complete agency and mobility.

It’s a Mongrel-Eat-Mongrel World

According to Broderick, “the development of the whole industry of chattel farming . . . quite naturally intensified” (*Animals* 30). Alluding to our current implementation of factory farming within the Western world, Broderick says, “the chattel farms became more and more sophisticated, with productivity reaching levels that could hardly have been imagined when the industry had been in its infancy” (*Animals* 69). This strengthens Mohandas K. Gandhi’s claim that “the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are

³² Broderick says, “The truth of what went on in the intensive farms of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries may have been an open secret, but it *was* largely kept secret” (*Animals* 33).

treated”³³ in which the moral beliefs of a culture are woven into the very fabric of its structure³⁴. Observing the way in which ‘humans’ treat ‘nonhumans’ demonstrates more about the philosophical and moral beliefs of ‘humans’ than it does about the ‘inferiority’ of ‘nonhuman’ life forms. Carol Adams observes this through meat eating in her book, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Adams maps out the historical and cultural significance of meat eating, and she claims, “In many ways, gender inequality is built into the species inequality that meat eating proclaims, because for most cultures obtaining meat was performed by men. Meat was a valuable economic commodity; those who controlled this commodity achieved power. If men were the hunters, then the control of this economic resource was in their hands” (Adams 45). Adams links *speciesism*, the discrimination of a being based on species, with sexism. She continues her claim by also linking speciesism to racism. Adams says that second-class citizens eat “second-class food” within hierarchical societies, therefore “the hierarchy of meat protein reinforces a hierarchy of race, class, and sex” as meat eating becomes associated with multiple power dynamics (Adams 40). It becomes undeniable then to insist that meat eating is purely an innocent act because it simultaneously reinforces multiple hierarchical structures.

Within *Animals*, those who produce and consume mongrel meat are those who have the power and authority within society. Due to excessive and exhaustive farming practices to heighten efficiency, mass extinctions of farmed animals and genetically engineered farm products have created a nutritional crisis. Broderick says, “it did not take much of a nudge to tip public opinion into an acceptance of the appropriateness of considering a mongrel-centered solution to the perceived nutrition problem” (*Animals* 54). During the beginning stages of producing and consuming mongrel meat, which is called *yurn*, the access to it was determined

³³ “Encyclopedia Britannica Advocacy for Animals”

³⁴Extending this, Carol Adams maintains that advertisements also reflect a society’s cultural structure. She says, “Advertisements are never only about the product they are promoting. They are about how our culture is structured, what we believe about ourselves and others” (*The Pornography of Meat* 14).

by money. Broderick says, “Not surprisingly, it was among the better-off that the new way of doing things began—particularly among the gourmands, those who valued exquisite taste above all” (*Animals* 55). Yurn was first made available to the wealthy³⁵, and its consumption increased. Broderick says, “People who had tasted yurn once at an elegant dinner party or exclusive function at a club wanted to make a donation themselves—a donation that would ensure themselves a quarter- or a half-side of their own. It quickly became *de rigueur* in stylish circles to add at least a yurn appetizer to the menu for any catered event. And some high-end restaurants were willing to pay almost any price for the finest cuts” (*Animals* 58). As its popularity increased, so did the methods of producing mongrel meat as mongrels were cloned, crammed, and overcrowded into factory farms in order to lower the prices of yurn, and therefore making mongrel meat available to a larger demographic.

This demonstrates the power dynamics indicated by those who become ‘meat’ and those who have access to ‘meat’ within *Animals*. As I have shown, like our own world, the world within *Animals* is a complex one with interlocking systems of oppression. In creating a grotesque, dystopian future, LePan refers the reader to several similar aspects within their own past and present, and by emphasizing these power relationships of oppressor and oppressed, he alerts the reader to the potential new forms and levels of extremity they can reach in the future. In addition, by presenting the reader with a dystopian vision of the future, which is actually a thinly veiled vision of the present, the reader is better able to become aware and to criticize the economic, social, political, and cultural system of their own present. We have seen how several different aspects both textual, as with the ‘scientific’ texts presented, and cultural operate and contribute to past, present, and potentially future existing forms of power dynamics—all existing for specific reasons, under specific conditions, to perpetuate specific agendas and all of which

³⁵ Broderick says, “[the price of] Yurn was above that charged for caviar . . . Perhaps the only historical parallel on the price side had been the \$500-per-pound prices (equivalent to almost \$5,000 per pound in today’s money) that Kobe beef had commanded in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (*Animals* 59).

are ‘human’-made. As long as humans exist, there will undeniably be human constructs; both physical and ideological. LePan’s text helps to demonstrate the detrimental potential of these constructs, and his text ends by imposing a moral³⁶. LePan suggests that the reader become more mindful of the arbitrary line drawn by society “between animals that deserve our respect and good will (wild animals and pets), and animals that we permit to be subjected to tortuous lives before we eat them” (*Animals* 160). For those readers who are able to draw this arbitrary line quite easily, he says that perhaps “one uniquely human quality is the power to exercise a moral imagination” to be able to imagine ourselves in the lives of others in order to become more sympathetic to the life around us (*Animals* 160). LePan advocates a change in our behavior as a society and our practices within that society. His suggestion is that the future is likely to look more and more bleak for human animals, nonhuman animals, and the environment unless we begin to affect change now. His method is through a narrative one, but I maintain that this change begins by better understanding and unveiling some of the more ‘invisible’³⁷ processes that perpetuates discrimination and privilege.

³⁶ This is a characteristic of fables and parables. Refer to Part I which links fables and parables to science fiction literature.

³⁷ As we will see in part III, this refers to that which is all around us, yet not often realized.

Part III

“Animals,” It’s not Just Another Buzz Word: The Role of Language and Social Practice in Shaping Anthropocentric Ideology

Don LePan’s *Animals* reflects upon the past and present construction of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ identities within Western culture and the possible new shapes it could take within the future. Understanding and deconstructing the ideology inherent in such profit-driven systems of living, like in the U.S., is crucial in order to move towards a change which would push us toward a less discriminatory equilibrium between human animals, nonhuman animals, and the environment. Not only is it required for the preservation of the human species, it also perpetuates misconceptions of inherent superiority, and by extension inferiority, regarding our fellow human beings as well as the multitude of living beings with whom we share this planet. In part III, we will briefly explore the ideological implications of anthropocentrism presented within *Animals* as it relates to the dialectic of oppressor/oppressed relationships of our fellow human animals based on gender and race. Whereas part II has demonstrated this intimate relationship through the lens of Don LePan’s *Animals*, part III will deconstruct how this relationship is made possible. A limited amount of historic and theoretical background will be provided in order to bring our attention to the essential role that language plays in creating and perpetuating ‘false narratives of reality’ (Isfahani-Hammond).

Social Practice and Language as Shaping Forces

According to American philosopher Judith Butler, when it comes to human animals, identity is not inherent but constructed and produced. She refers to identity as being “performative” because “it is not what one is but what one does” (Culler 103). However, each individual is born into a specific place and time in which larger cultural and social forces are at

work. According to Cornell University professor Jonathan Culler, author of several texts on literary theory and criticism, Butler believes that “the fundamental categories of identity are cultural and social productions . . . they create the effect of the natural and by imposing norms they threaten to exclude those who don’t conform” (Culler 102:103). Judith Butler’s focus is on gender and the “performativity” of one’s gender role through repeated acts. Her work stresses the construction and production of identity because identity is not “self-evident,”³⁸ and it is under the pretense of possessing an identity that is a “natural,” inherent one.

American writer Marjorie Spiegel applies this act of performance to ‘nonhuman animals’ in her book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, which highlights the similarities between the beliefs, treatment, and rhetoric concerning human slaves and nonhuman animals today. Spiegel says, “For what does someone’s ability to speak French, drive a car, see in the dark, do algebraic equations, or use a tool, have to do with whether or not it is acceptable or just to enslave, torture, or in some other way inflict cruelty upon them?” (Spiegel 27). As Spiegel suggests, often the attributes used to determine ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ identity are arbitrary, and of course, “favorably”³⁹ judged according to aspects which are assumed to be distinctly ‘human’. Related to Butler, the identity imposed upon an individual is not an innocent act but one that can justify the exclusion, inclusion, enslavement, or agency of a being. Spiegel says, “All life on earth is inextricably bound together in a web of mutual interdependence. Within that web, each species of animals has a niche for which it is more or less adapted, and attributes which others lack. It is only an anthropocentric⁴⁰ world view which makes qualities

³⁸ (*Animals* 56)

³⁹ Spiegel says, “Lichtenberg made it clear that he thought it foolish to unfavorably judge another creature by human standards. Equally foolish was it to believe that human attributes were any more or less remarkable than those special to another species. ‘The most accomplished monkey,’ observed Lichtenberg, ‘cannot draw a monkey, this too only man can do; just as it is also only man who regards his ability to do this as a distinct merit.’ It is only human arrogance that is able to find beauty and perfection exclusively in those things human. ‘Just as foolish,’ continued Lichtenberg, ‘as it must look to a crab when it sees a man walk forward’” (Spiegel 23:24).

⁴⁰ Anthropocentric: 1. considering human beings as the most significant entity of the universe 2. interpreting or regarding the world in terms of human values and experiences (Merriam-Webster).

possessed by humans to be those by which all other species are measured” (Spiegel 22:23). As we have seen within *Animals* and through historical references provided, great efforts are made to exclude ‘human’ traits from, or hinder access to “human things”⁴¹ for, specific individuals in order to reinforce an imposed ‘nonhuman’ identity. As it is difficult for a monkey to draw a picture of a monkey the way a human can easily do, it does not take much effort to “nudge public opinion”⁴² in the direction of believing that a monkey is “dumb”, inferior, and “less important than a human life” (*Animals* 71). However, to convince people on the basis of gender, race, or cognitive ability that an individual is not “fully human”⁴³ takes a little more conscious social and cultural effort such as depriving education, healthcare, proper housing—something which is present within America’s past and which remains all too familiar today.

The basis of this identity process can be observed at the very foundation of language itself. It can be traced back to the very notion of ‘the sign’ as a construction. Every minute of every day we speak and think in signs. ‘A sign’ is what Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure refers to as the relationship between a signifier, which is a sound or image, a signified, which is the concept that is provoked by the presentation of a sound or image, and a referent, which is the actual thing being referred to. For example, “C-A-T” is an image used to refer to the concept of a ‘cat’, and the referent is the being as it exists in real-life which we call a ‘cat’. There is nothing in nature nor in law which forces us to use the term ‘cat’ to refer to a cat, and therefore this relationship between the signifier, the signified, and the referent is an arbitrary one—one that has no natural, inherent meaning or value but only the meaning which is constructed (Palmer).

⁴¹ (*Animals* 8)

⁴² (*Animals* 54)

⁴³ (*Animals* 56)

British literary theorist and critic Terry Eagleton expands upon this in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* when discussing the changes in thought and practice toward the approach of analyzing literary texts. He says, “It was not possible any longer to see reality simply as something 'out there', a fixed order of things which language merely reflected . . . Reality was not reflected by language but produced by it: it was a particular way of carving up the world which was deeply dependent on the sign-systems we had at our command, or more precisely which had us at theirs” (Eagleton 94). This understanding of the relationship between language and reality is what leads French philosopher Jacques Derrida to claim that narratives produce reality; not vice versa (Isfahani-Hammond). ‘Narratives’ in this sense are not simply the stories which are reserved for books and films. Narratives, outside of that context, refer to accounts, experiences, constructed sequences of which we believe to be true or false and which consequently create and reinforce a very real effect within our social and cultural lives. Suffice to say, our perception of ‘reality’ and ‘common sense’ is always in flux and produced and reinforced through the narratives we create—especially so-called ‘scientific’ or ‘objective’ ones. Eagleton reduces common sense—which holds that the meaning of something is obvious and never changing—to nothing more than the effect of a structure (Eagleton 94). He says, “At different times common sense has dictated burning witches, hanging sheep-stealers and avoiding Jews for fear of fatal infection” (Eagleton 94). Today, common sense dictates that a nonhuman animal is inferior to a human animal, and because of this, it is acceptable to force-breed and slaughter living beings at an alarming rate to be of service to the human animal population. Supported and sustained by the arbitrary tests we create and administer in order to determine ‘intelligence’ among human and nonhuman animals, we tend to over-look the bias already inherent in such a thing. These mechanisms are very important because, according to American author and activist Carol Adams, these kinds of instruments create and perpetuate specific

narratives—ultimately determining who become the “someones” and who become the “somethings” within society⁴⁴.

The Absent Referent

Within her book *A Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams discusses the term *absent referent*. This term is critical to understanding the role that language⁴⁵ plays in influencing and perpetuating our social and cultural practices. Adams says:

Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent as *animals* for meat to exist. Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. Animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. Our culture further mystifies the term 'meat' with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine. Language thus contributes even further to animals' absences. While the cultural meanings of meat and meat eating shift historically [such as meat being associated with power], one essential part of meat's meaning is static: One does not eat meat without the death of an animal. Live animals are thus the absent referents in the concept of meat. The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present (Adams 51).

Here, Adams elaborates upon the process of dissociating an individual being from their life, their death, and the fragmented, packaged portion of 'meat' sold at the super market. In the cover page of her book, *A Pornography of Meat*, Adams displays a quote by writer Melinda Vadas which says, “Meat is like pornography: before it was someone's fun, it was someone's life.” Through this process, individuals lose their subjectivity and come to be seen as objects rather than beings. Using “mass terms”⁴⁶ like 'meat' further removes the subjectivity of the individual because it erases individuality. We see this in *Animals* as 'nonhuman animals' are

⁴⁴ Adams, Carol. “The War on Compassion.”

⁴⁵ We will limit our focus to the English language, specifically within the United States.

⁴⁶ Adams says, “In our culture, 'meat' operates as a mass term defining entire species of nonhumans. Objects referred to by mass terms have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity. When humans turn a nonhuman into 'meat,' someone who has a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no distinctiveness, no uniqueness, no individuality (*Antennae* pp. 6).

renamed “mongrels” and used to produce “yurn.” Broderick says, “Of course the product was not called *mongrel* or *mongrel meat*. Just as in the old days people had distanced themselves from the animals they were eating by calling a cow *beef* and a pig *pork*, so too did they find other names for mongrel meat” (Animals 55:56). Inflicting cruelty upon the lives of individuals is facilitated by detaching the individual from their subjectivity and their uniqueness. Carol Adams goes into great detail about how this process is applied to both nonhuman animals and women. In *A Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams says, “Not only is our language male-centered, it is human-centered as well . . . Language distances us further from animals by naming them as objects, as ‘its’ . . . Just as the generic ‘he’ erases female presence, the generic ‘it’ erases the living, breathing nature of the animals and reifies their object status” (Adams 75). The language we use is reflective of our societal and cultural structures, but at the same time, language is the tool used to create and reinforce such structures. This is what influenced Jacques Derrida to coin the term *carnophallogocentrism*.

Carnophallogocentrism: What’s That?

As stated previously, humans create systems of hierarchy based on arbitrary features and abilities. Jacques Derrida’s use of the term *carnophallogocentrism* demonstrates such hierarchies. I will briefly and concisely elaborate. The fact that the term ends in *centrism* alerts us to the centeredness and privilege being assigned to its prefixes. *Carno* refers to meat eating, *phallo* refers to male, and *logo* refers to speech. This came as a result of Derrida’s extension of the term *logocentrism* which refers to our ideas of speech, as opposed to writing, being central to language⁴⁷. To Derrida, there is a constructed relationship between presence and absence which becomes assigned to the preceding dialectical relationships. I will demonstrate:

⁴⁷ For further discussion about Derrida’s use of absence and presence in relation to language use, I refer you to *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Writing and Différance* (1978).

<u>Presence</u>	<u>Absence</u>
center	periphery
reason	imagination
human	nonhuman
male	female
speech	writing

This relationship does not exist in nature as inherently superior or inferior, but it has been made so. The column of ‘presence’ signifies that which is given visibility, made ‘present,’ taking center-stage, given privilege, and the column of ‘absence’ are those things which are not given visibility, pushed to the periphery, and not given privilege. Derrida has coined this term in order to highlight the interrelationship and interconnection between the above, and within his work, he suggests a re-examination of our reasoning and classification systems because in nature there is no ‘center’ and therefore no ‘periphery’ where living beings or particular concepts are swept aside. That which we have pushed to the periphery, and for Spiegel this includes race too⁴⁸, needs to be given serious moral and intellectual consideration. According to Derrida, we must deconstruct prescribed ways of thinking and become aware that no one concept is inherently subordinate to another concept. This is what he means by “de-centering” because believing that a specific concept holds a center position forces other concepts into the periphery, and this hinders our ability to be fully comprehensive of all concepts (Phillips).

In a 2002 interview called “Derrida on Animals,” Derrida says that by creating two categories between everything which is ‘human’ and everything which is ‘nonhuman,’ is a “violent” act (Derrida). This has an enormous impact on our perception of reality and therefore our practices within reality—it is what allows such a thing as a massive industry of factory farming and slaughterhouses to exist. Derrida says:

⁴⁸ In relation to Derrida, Spiegel extends this in/visibility to race by implying that ‘white’ is associated with presence and ‘nonwhite’ is associated with absence.

When one says, ‘animals,’ one has already started to not understand anything, and has started to enclose the animal into a cage . . . and to say, ‘animal,’ and put them all into one category—both the monkey and the ant—is a very violent gesture. To put all living things that aren’t human into one category is, first of all, a stupid gesture—theoretically ridiculous—and partakes in the very real violence that humans exercise towards animals. That leads to slaughterhouses, their industrial treatment, their consumption. All this violence towards animals is engendered in this conceptual simplification which allows one to say ‘animals’ in general There are very few other philosophers who don’t give into this prejudice against animals—practically none. That’s not to say that the discourse is homogenous, but on the whole, most partake in a forceful presupposition, a prejudice against the animal. Writers are different—I’m talking about philosophers (Derrida).

Here, Derrida demonstrates language’s effect in producing and perpetuating our prejudices against nonhuman animals. We privilege the ‘human’ concept, but we restrict privilege from the ‘nonhuman’ concept. Derrida’s focus on philosophical discourse emphasizes the previous mention of absence and presence being associated with specific concepts. Derrida alerts us to the dangers which stem from such misconceptions i.e. all life forms on this planet are divided into that which is human and that which is not human. As he asserts, this is a “theoretically ridiculous” understanding of reality, but unfortunately, it is an all-too-common one. However, as he also stresses, writers are different in this regard, and Don LePan’s novel *Animals* has certainly provided us plenty of *food* for thought concerning ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ categories.

Conclusion

We have seen how science fiction employs specific literary devices which set it apart from other literary categories such as fantasy and fairy-tale. Within science fiction, there are no pre-established conventions regarding the diegetic world being ‘negatively’ or ‘positively’ oriented toward the protagonist. It is not a world where ‘anything can happen and does,’ but one which is analogous to our understanding and use of modern science and philosophy (Suvin 378). Science fiction explores the possibilities of new realities as a result of the successes or failures in our use of science and our philosophical understandings. Science fiction uses the imagination to understand our tendencies in reality often turning a critical eye toward society. One unique characteristic of science fiction which facilitates this is the use of *cognitive estrangement*. This device creates diegetic worlds which at first glance appear unrecognizable and yet remain strangely familiar. This allows the author to present a new, often critical, perspective of reality. This perspective is reflective *of* as well as reflects *upon* our own society (Suvin 377). We have seen this throughout our exploration of Don LePan’s *Animals*.

Consequently, a broader category that science fiction often falls into is speculative fiction; fictions which propose an alternative experience to the reader’s empirical reality. Within “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” Madhu Dubey focuses on the element of time, and the simultaneity with which the characters of speculative fictions of slavery experience the past and present. Within Don LePan’s novel *Animals*, Broderick is constantly interjecting with footnotes and passages to demonstrate the intimate relationship between past and present in order to reveal that they are more alike than they are unlike. Broderick’s focus is that of past and present forms of slavery and the institutionalization of this dominance and subjugation. The reader also experiences the simultaneity of past and present as Broderick and Naomi’s manuscripts are

blended together—the narrative of Naomi’s manuscript takes place several years before Broderick’s.

Dubey maintains that since the 1970s, speculative fictions of slavery have returned to the past of slavery as a type of social protest which rejects traditional understandings of history and historiography (Dubey 780). Dubey’s conclusion is that authors of such fictions challenge the traditional way of approaching and understanding the past. Approaching history as a linear line which simply leads to the present is no longer an acceptable or an intelligent way of understanding the past. Rather, this understanding is one which impedes proper understanding of it. Through fiction, we can experience a ‘bodily,’ emotional, and therefore subjective understanding of the past which Dubey calls *embodied history*; one which she believes to be a more effective understanding than the objective approach of memorizing dates and events. Related to this, Don LePan believes that such fictions can help us to develop a *moral imagination* in which we will be able to imagine ourselves in the lives of others. LePan’s novel is far more complicated than the debate over whether or not eating meat is ‘bad.’ Rather, the question becomes: is it acceptable to allow a social, economic, and cultural system to exist which creates such huge discrepancies between those beings who have agency, mobility, and privilege, and those who do not? According to Marjorie Spiegel, author of *The Dreaded Comparison*, “the only qualification individuals should need to make it wrong for us to dominate their lives is that they *possess* life, that they are alive. All these other questions of abilities and attributes can fill philosophy books, but are for these issues, irrelevant” (Spiegel 27). Moral imagination then becomes imperative in helping us exercise empathy and foster positive change between and for human animals, nonhuman animals, and the environment.

As implied, LePan’s text is one which asserts that the discriminatory remnants of the past still remain with us today. Through our examination of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ identity

construction within and outside of *Animals*, we have seen how both ‘scientific’ texts and social practices produce and reinforce such identities and misconceptions about inherent inferiority and superiority. Mentioned in part I, Brian Wallis’ essay, “Black Bodies, White Science,” is one of many critical texts which serves to highlight the constructedness of identity. When observing the slave daguerreotypes of Louis Agassiz which were used to ‘scientifically’ prove that slaves are of a different species than the white, ‘human’ population, Wallis says, “Fascinating and disturbing, these pictures raise compelling questions about the construction of—and the social investments in—the categories of ‘race,’ ‘science,’ ‘photography,’ and ‘the museum,’” (Wallis 40). As I have shown in part II, such identities which become synonymous with privilege such as ‘human,’ and other identities which become synonymous with the restriction of privilege such as ‘nonhuman,’ serve particular agendas and do not occur randomly.

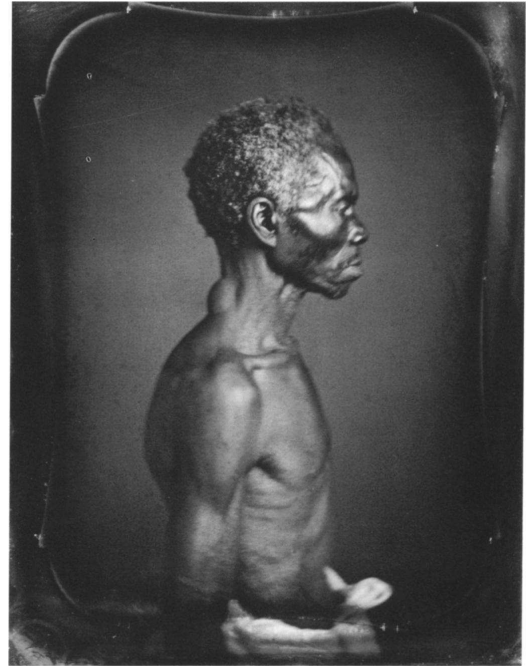
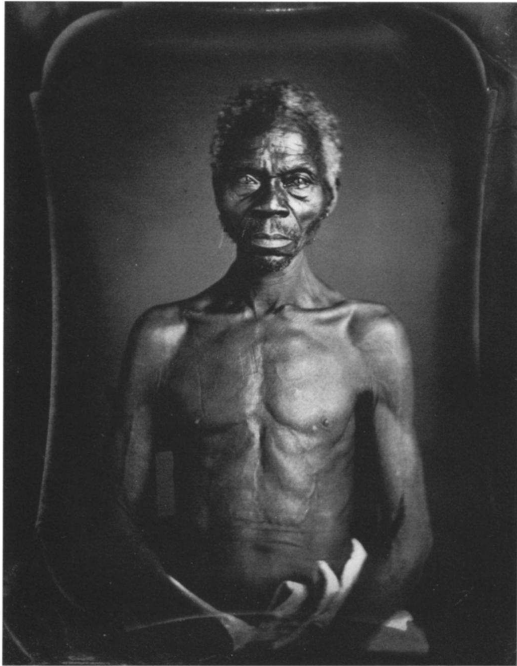
In Part III, we have seen that the power dynamics of a given society are even reflected within language itself; a powerful vehicle for perpetuating ‘narratives of reality.’ It is a misconception that language simply and innocently reflects reality. The moment we make an utterance, there are already particular denotations and numerous connotations which vary from culture to culture, and our conceptualization of the utterance is limited and particularly shaped. This conceptualization is influenced by the specific time, place, and culture that we live in and is not fixed. Carol Adams displays a quote from the animal right’s advocacy pamphlet *Animals’ Agenda* which says, “Language is a powerful tool. The words we choose do more than name or describe things; they assign status and value. Be careful, then, how you choose words that refer to non-human animals, for you may be using expressions that maintain prejudices against them . . . Liberate your language, for it’s an important step in liberating all animals!” (Adams 76). Such a statement extends to the words we choose when referring to our fellow human beings. As we have examined through Carol Adams’ use of the term *absent referent* and Jacques Derrida’s use of term the *carnophallogocentrism*, language is a powerful instrument for

producing and reinforcing misconceived beliefs about anthropocentric ideology and the misconception that any organism, and therefore any concept, is inherently inferiority and superiority. As Madhu Dubey says, this type of understanding is actually an impediment and hinders our ability to be fully comprehensive of all concepts (Phillips).

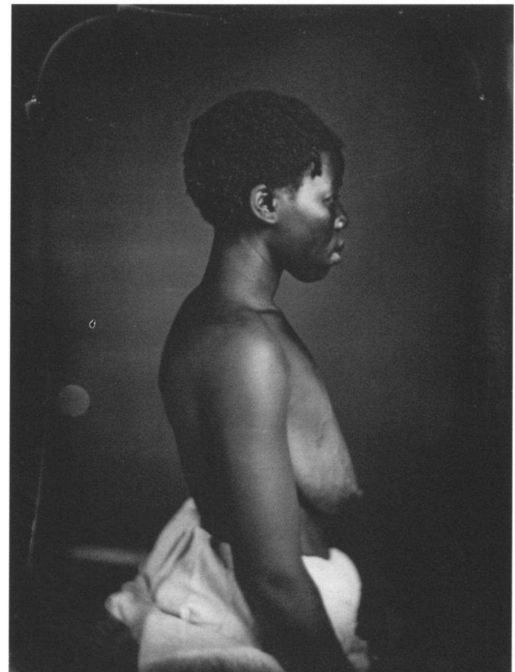
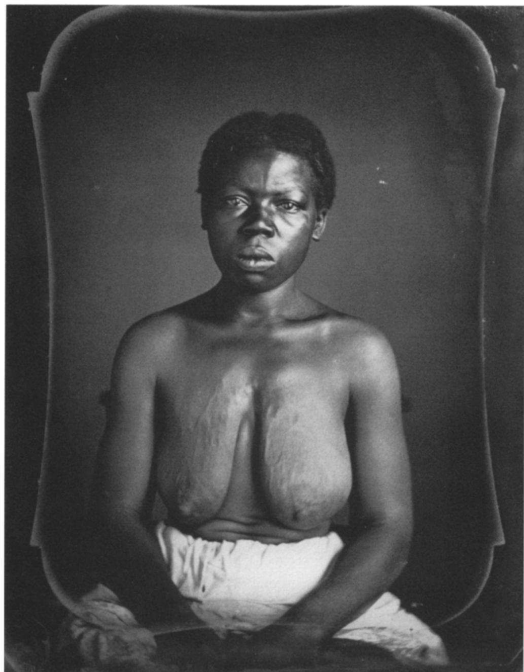
Through Don LePan's novel *Animals*, we have explored numerous ramifications of the diegetic world proposed. By enlightening the reader on how 'human' and 'nonhuman' identity is constructed within *Animals*, and the access to or restriction of privilege that becomes assigned to each identity, LePan highlights the fact that this process is reflective of the reader's own reality. By bringing these aspects to the attention of the reader, LePan implies a re-examination of the society we live in and the practices within it. As we follow Sam's story, we develop a fondness for him which forces us to question why he must be treated differently. We empathize with his struggle. LePan's narrative functions as an analogous one which helps the reader to extend this empathy to all those like Sam—human and nonhuman animal, past and present.

Appendix

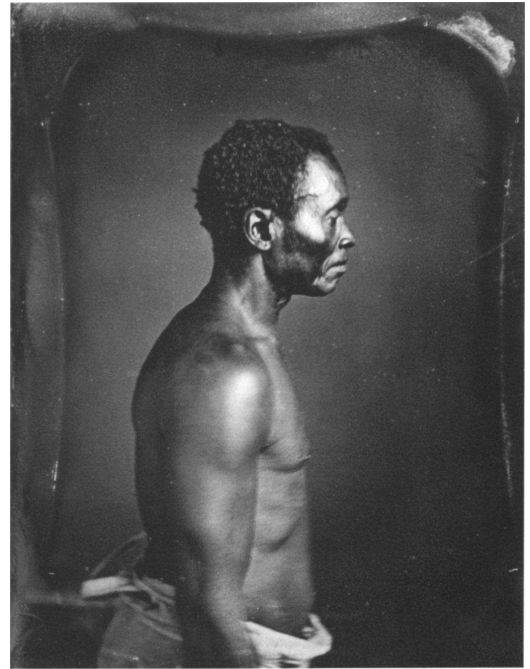
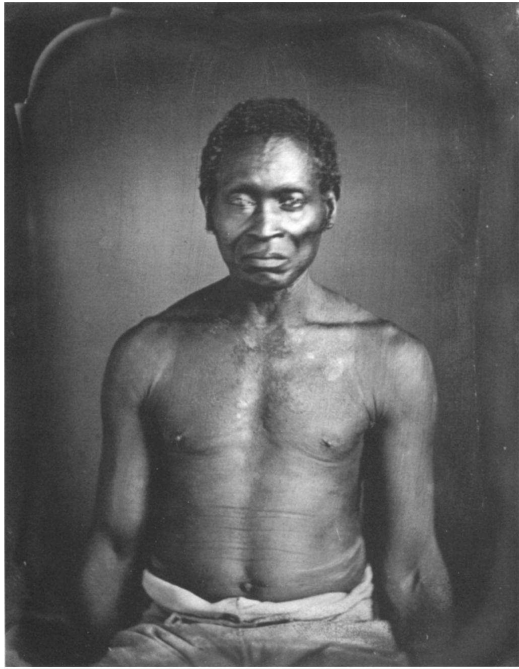
Louis Agassiz's Daguerreotypes:



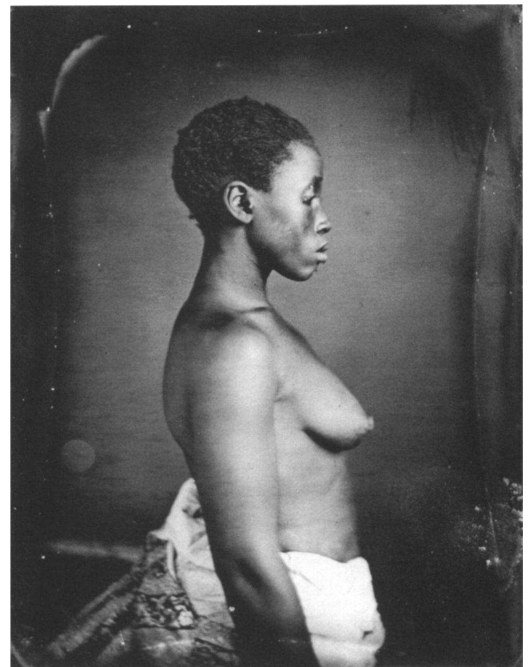
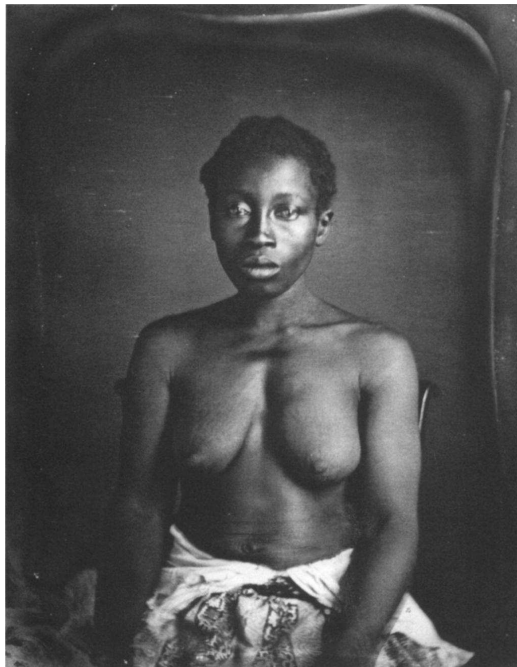
"Renty, Congo. Plantation of B. F. Taylor, Esq." Daguerreotype taken by J. T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.



"Drana, country born, daughter of Jack Guinea. Plantation of B. F. Taylor, Esq." Daguerreotype taken by J. T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Peabody Museum, Harvard University



"Fassena (carpenter), Mandingo. Plantation of Col. Wade Hampton, near Columbia, S.C." Daguerreotypeta kenb y J. T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Peabody Museum, Harvard University



"Delia, country born of African parents, daughter of Renty, Congo." Daguerreotype taken by J. T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Peabody Museum, Harvard University

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Images

- [Image 1] "The Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania" "Biology of Race Panel," 27 Oct 2011. 1 Apr 2012. <<http://www.philomathean.org/2011/10/biology-of-race-panel/>>

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MOTS CLES: Don LePan, humain, non-humain, animaux, construction d'identités, anthropocentrisme

RESUME

Ce mémoire se concentre sur la construction des notions identitaires d'« humain » et d'« animal » dans le roman *Animals* de Don LePan. Il analyse comment ce texte de science-fiction utilise les conventions et les outils littéraires de ce genre pour explorer ce sujet en profondeur. En introduisant des écrivains tels Darko Suvin ou Madhi Dubey, le roman est examiné comme un texte critiquant la société occidentale moderne depuis un point de vue inattendu—en établissant un lien entre le traitement systématique des « animaux non-humains » et le traitement systématique des « animaux humains » selon leur race, leur genre, ou leur classe socio-économique. Ce travail insiste sur le fait que les systèmes de discrimination passés, présents et futurs, se fondent tous sur un principe constitutif : la construction d'une identité « humaine » et d'une identité « animale » et d'une relation particulière, codifiée, entre ces groupes, afin d'administrer et de restreindre les privilèges. Au travers de ce mémoire, le roman de Don LePan est présenté à la fois comme une réflexion sur la société occidentale moderne dans son ensemble, et comme un reflet dystopique de l'agriculture de masse organisée par le système capitaliste. Pour alimenter cette perspective, ce travail introduit en parallèle les écrits de Carol J. Adams, Marjorie Spiegel, et Jacques Derrida, afin de mettre en avant les processus qui, selon eux, produisent et maintiennent les oppressions systématiques basées sur la race, le sexe, ou la classe socio-économique des individus.

KEYWORDS: Don LePan, human-nonhuman, animals, constructed identity, anthropocentrism

ABSTRACT

This mémoire focuses on the constructed notions of human and nonhuman animal identities within Don LePan's novel *Animals*. As a text of science fiction, the tropes and conventions of this literary genre are explored in relation to *Animals*. Citing scholars such as Darko Suvin and Madhu Dubey, *Animals* is examined as a text which criticizes present-day Western society from an estranged point of view by linking the systematic mistreatment of nonhuman animals to the systematic mistreatment of human animals based on race, gender, or socio-economic class. Past, present, and future systems of discrimination are shown to share an intimate link in which identity of and relationship between human and nonhuman animals are constructed in order to assign and restrict privilege. LePan's novel is shown to be reflective of as well as reflecting upon modern Western society and its capitalistic use of factory farming. Extending this, the works of Carol J. Adams, Marjorie Spiegel, and Jacques Derrida are explored in order to unveil the processes which produce and maintain systematic oppression based on race, gender, socio-economic class, or species.

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1. Ce travail est le fruit d'un travail personnel et constitue un document original.
2. Je sais que prétendre être l'auteur d'un travail écrit par une autre personne est une pratique sévèrement sanctionnée par la loi.
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5. Les écrits sur lesquels je m'appuie dans ce mémoire sont systématiquement référencés selon un système de renvoi bibliographique clair et précis.

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