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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1. Between the Jaws of the Crocodile: Setting Up a Research Idea

In 2018 I came across a text by ecofeminist author Val Plumwood while researching theory for my Master's Degree dissertation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.[1] My research dealt with the sociopolitics of bullfighting in Spain and Plumwood's essay was far from related to either the topic or the context, but it definitely enthralled me as a scholar interested in ecocriticism and antispeciesist theory, and as a vegan at both personal and political levels. The article is titled "Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey" (1995)[2] and it constitutes a reflection of Plumwood's own experience of surviving the attack of a saltwater crocodile at Kakadu National Park in Northern Australia, in February 1985.

Dismissing the recommendations of the park ranger, who warned her not to go on the main river channel because of the swift current and the presence of crocodiles, Plumwood ventured into the East Alligator Lagoon alone. Despite knowing that the riverbank was one of the crocodiles' favorite food-capturing places, and realizing that she was a solitary member of a species which is prey for saltwater crocodiles, Plumwood continued paddling towards the edge until she came across a crocodile swiftly converging on her path. When the crocodile attacked her canoe, the realization of being a "juicy, nourishing" body and an "edible, animal being" (10) whose vulnerability she was not properly aware of, struck Plumwood harder than ever, as did the predator. She tried to escape grabbing the branch of a paperbark tree, but, as she jumped heading for it, the crocodile also jumped heading for her flesh, gripping her groin and subjecting her to the so-called 'death-rolls'. Since the metabolism of crocodiles is not fit

[1] I was taking a Master's Degree in Applied Philosophy and my final dissertation (supervised by Dr. Marta Tafalla) was titled "Imaginando la sociedad post-antropocéntrica: un análisis de la necropolítica taurina en España desde los ecofeminismos y las posthumanidades".

[2] The article was first published in 1995, although I am quoting from a later version included in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, a collection of Plumwood's essays from 2012. The article here is titled "Meeting the Predator".

to endure long struggles, they get hold of their prey and swirl them in order to exhaust and drown them before devouring them. Plumwood finally escaped after three consecutive death rolls and managed to climb a mudbank, where, badly wounded, she crawled to safety and hoped to be found still alive. She was eventually rescued by the rangers and taken to a hospital in Darwin, where she spent a month in intensive care. Plumwood recovered from her injuries quite well and has published several texts reflecting on this event since then.

Besides the mentioned essay, published in 1995, Plumwood published a similar article called "Being Prey" in 1996 and, later on, a newer version of the text ("Meeting the Predator") was turned into the first chapter of the book *The Eye of the Crocodile* (2012). Plumwood's reflections upon her position as prey, the acknowledgment of her bodily vulnerability and the encounter with a predator which turned her into 'just food' strongly drew my attention, as a person who has been reflecting and changing her eating habits since 2014, the year I became a vegetarian. In April 2016 I decided to stop eating dairy and eggs, thus becoming vegan. That was only in terms of food consumption, since I had already replaced products which had been tested on animals (mainly cosmetics) for 'cruelty-free' options long before my dietary change, and I did not consume products (mainly clothes) made with wool, suede or leather, either. I have continued learning about the processes which involve nonhuman animals[3] in several industries, discovering more and more products which are made with animal parts (from lipstick to wine, candles or tattoo ink), and I have been

[3] Terminology is a complex issue here. Calling all species apart from humans 'animals' falls into anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism by separating the human from the rest of the animals, omitting the fact that humans belong to this kingdom as well. I am aware that 'nonhuman' risks reinforcing a binary between 'human' and 'everything else', as well as defining the other species in terms of their lack of humanity. This is why other terms such as 'more-than-human' or 'other-than-human' have been used in Critical Animal Studies and other related areas, although by separating the human from the rest of animals, I believe they are also at risk of restating the anthropocentric binary. A less anthropocentric approach could discuss animals in general, and then human animals in particular. However, 'nonhuman animal' is still the most widespread term in these areas. Most importantly, since my dissertation deals with the discursive separation between human and nonhuman (specifically on the basis of edibility), I am going to maintain this classification throughout the text, though I am fully aware of its limitations.

reflecting for years now about the reasons why so many people who would generally agree to oppose the cruelty inflicted upon animals will not give up consuming nonhuman animal flesh, that is: why carnism is so deeply embedded in our culture. Carnism is a term defined by Melanie Joy that stands for "the belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate" (2010: 20). Joy compares meat-eating with vegetarianism as discourses, arguing that whereas the latter is seen as an ideological choice, the former is seen as a given, or "the natural thing to do". This is because, according to her, "we eat animals without thinking about what we are doing and why, because the belief system that underlies this behavior is invisible" (20). I am particularly interested in studying how carnism (together with speciesism and anthropocentrism in general) is supported by, among other things, popular culture and the entertainment industry, which routinely portray nonhuman animals as food in uncritical, unwitting ways. In the middle of these reflections, as I have said, I came across Plumwood's texts about being turned into food for another animal.

One of my first thoughts was that Plumwood, as an ecofeminist interested in dismantling the culture-nature dualism which radically separated (some)[4] humans from the natural world, had been reckless in not recognizing that she was not so different from a kangaroo or a deer venturing into the crocodile-infested lagoon, since humans are potentially part of the saltwater crocodile diet together with wild boars, orangutans, dingoes, tigers, snakes, turtles or small sharks. Due to her position as an investigator in the Kakadu National Park and the value that she apparently gave to her curiosity above the interest that a crocodile would have in hunting her, Plumwood inevitably fell into the kind of human exceptionalism

[4] One of the key contributions of Ecofeminism, as well as other theoretical frameworks like Posthumanism or Critical Animal Studies, is that the discourses of anthropocentrism and speciesism, hand in hand with patriarchy, racism or ableism, have often paired nonhuman animals with some groups of humans (such as women, racialized people, or people with non-normative bodies), thus problematizing the idea that humans are always identified with culture. Some humans have, indeed, been repeatedly identified with nature instead, and an intersectional approach to speciesism should take this into account. For more on this, see Adams and Gruen (2014), Ko and Ko (2017) or Taylor (2017).

that she was fighting in her theorizations. In fact, she later recognized that she had gone much too far and had the chance to reflect upon her own responsibility in the attack:

> Of course, in some very remote and abstract way, I knew […] that humans were animals and were sometimes—very rarely—eaten like other animals. I knew I was food for crocodiles, that my body, like theirs, was made of meat. But then again in some very important way, I did not know it, absolutely rejected it. Somehow, the fact of being food for others had not seemed real, not in the way it did now, as I stood in my canoe in the beating rain staring down into the beautiful, gold-flecked eyes of the crocodile. Until that moment, I knew that I was food in the same remote, abstract way that I knew I was animal, was mortal. (10)

Human exceptionalism is the idea that human animals are, by means of an anthropocentric discourse, separated from the rest of the animal kingdom and different from nonhuman animals in such a way that our species gets a superior place in the scale of moral consideration and deserves special treatment (rights, for example) in comparison with the rest of the species who are thus positioned beneath them.[5] The upholding of this idea, together with anthropocentrism (the view of humans as the center and point of departure for epistemological, ethical and political reflections) and speciesism (the discrimination towards individuals on the basis of the species they belong to), are so profoundly enmeshed in our social being that even a person committed to the decentering of, precisely, these systems of thought, as Plumwood was, fell into these biases in the encounter with a predator.

In her own words, she wondered "why was I, as a critic of anthropocentrism over many years, able to harbour so many illusions about human apartness? Does this reveal my personal confusion or how deep the sense of human superiority and apartness runs in the dominant culture? Or both?" (14). The crocodile made Plumwood face the hard-to-swallow fact that the predator was definitely ignoring the alleged uniqueness, exceptionality and superiority of the human species and simply wanted to eat. From the point of view of human

[5] Charles Darwin's work on the species continuum undermined this idea, but it has endured through the centuries until the emergence of contemporary moral theory, a field in which several authors (Carruthers, 1992; Scruton, 1996; Cohen and Regan, 2001) have defended the uniqueness of humans from different perspectives, thus disregarding the calls for animal rights.

exceptionalism, what the crocodile was doing was absolutely aberrant. In Plumwood's words when the crocodile grabbed her leg:

> This was a strong sense, at the moment of being grabbed by those powerful jaws, that there was something profoundly and incredibly wrong in what was happening, some sort of mistaken identity. […] The world was not like that! The creature was breaking the rules, was totally mistaken, utterly wrong to think I could be reduced to food. As a human being, I was so much more than food. It was a denial of, an insult to all I was to reduce me to food. (11-12)

The mind-body dualism —also known as the Cartesian dualism after the work of René Descartes, one of the main Western philosophers who described in his text *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) the separation between mind and body as two distinct and separable entities— has divided the realm of the human (associated with the mind and the sphere of rationality) from that of nature and its naturalized inhabitants (associated with the body and the realm of irrationality). Such separation entails that whereas many nonhuman animals are considered as just (or little more than) food, humans are, as Plumwood states, "much more than food". In fact, they cannot be food at all: being eaten implies an inferiority of strength and resistance but also, more importantly, of value. The Cartesian system also establishes a hierarchy in the structure of the mind-body dualistic distinction, with the first positioned much above the latter. Within this cosmovision, the mind is related to reason, culture and the patriarchal construction of the realm of rationality as masculine. As Rod Giblett explains, "the concept/referent of nature has a gender politics. Nature has been feminized, and culture masculinized, in Western and other cultures. Culture has been construed and troped in masculine terms and nature in feminine ones in the Western patriarchal tradition" (2011: 29). On the other hand, the body is related to nature, the turmoil of biological functions and the feminized realm of irrationality and emotions.

Being predated, having one's body ripped apart, means being removed from the realm of the mind —that which defines the capital-lettered Human in Western traditional philosophy— and shifting all the attention towards the body: a human prey is turned into

'just' an embodied being in all its materiality, literally flesh and blood at the claws and teeth of another creature. This movement from being seen primarily as 'a body' rather than 'a mind' challenges both human exceptionalism (humans are not superior or different from nonhumans in the eyes of the predator) and the strict separation between mind and body (the allegedly rational, independent and individual subject of patriarchal thought is an illusion, and the vulnerability of embodiment and the need for relationality must be considered as essential aspects of our existence). As Plumwood states,

> Being food confronts one very starkly with the realities of embodiment, with our inclusion in the animal order as food, as flesh, our kinship with those we eat, with being part of the feast and not just some sort of spectator of it, like a disembodied eye filming somebody else's feast. We are the feast. This is a humbling and very disruptive experience. (15)

Humans are thus reminded of something that the patriarchal dualistic thinking, hand in hand with (both religious and secular) transcendence ideals, has tried to hide for so long: the body and its vulnerability. Analyzing the possibility of being eaten is thus extremely powerful for ecofeminist purposes because it engages in two key matters. Firstly, it repositions humans in the ecosystem and it challenges anthropocentrism; besides, through an empathetic thinking based on shared bodily vulnerability, it establishes a departure point for the weakening of speciesism and the consideration of other sentient animals as more than food. Secondly, it opens further conversations about the body, the vulnerability that stems from the possibility of being subjected to pain, illness, or death, and the importance of acknowledging this vulnerability in political terms and developing sociopolitical discourses on the basis of care.

This last issue has been explored in the feminist tradition of care ethics,[6] and more recently by Judith Butler in her books *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War, When is Life Grievable?* (2009). Butler argues that the need for recognition of characteristics like precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, or interdependency, which comes with embodiment (something that neoliberal accounts of individuality and self-sufficiency have disregarded) is the basis of a different understanding of our shared social lives. The acknowledgment of precariousness means recognizing that "life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life" and that "one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other" (2009: 14). As such, this recognition of shared precariousness "calls into question the ontology of individualism" (33) and reminds that "the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition. Its very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions, which means that in order to 'be', in the sense of 'persist', it must rely in what is outside itself" (33). Although Butler talks about human lives, she alludes to the ideological machine of anthropocentrism which prevents animal lives from being recognized as proper 'lives' (those which should be respected and protected), and she acknowledges that "precariousness as a shared condition of human life" is a condition that, indeed, "links human and non-human animals" (13).

It is from this shared human-nonhuman precariousness and vulnerability, and the fact that "there are no invulnerable bodies" (34) which are never at risk of experiencing injury, that this dissertation largely departs from. I am interested in exploring why stories in which

[6] Care ethics is a moral theory that places ethical relevance in the interdependency and relationships between subjects, rather than focusing on each subject independently of others. Whereas other moral theories aim at providing standard or universal ethical rules, the tradition of care ethics criticizes these attempts as biased and context-blind. The seminal text for care ethics is Carol Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982) and it has since then been developed by other feminist authors such as Josephine Donovan, who works at the intersection of care ethics and Animal Studies and who has edited several volumes with Carol Adams, including *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (1996) or *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader* (2007).

humans are eaten strike audiences as almost 'unnatural', whereas stories (and realities) where animals are eaten are normalized to such an extent that it is extremely difficult to realize that both human and nonhuman animals are sentient beings whose bodily injurability and suffering deserves (at least) ethical consideration. As I explain in the following pages, my study proves that the sociocultural advances of antispeciesism and post-anthropocentric reflections have had a huge impact on stories in which humans are the prey of other beings. These beings have changed from being represented as scary monsters to being depicted as creatures with their own interests and needs, and the representation of their human prey has shifted as well. My argument is that sociopolitical and ethical discourses about our relationship with nonhuman animals are the main explanation behind this evolution. Contemporary narratives, therefore, and this is my main thesis, often point at the idea that, while humans are "much more than food", as Plumwood said, nonhuman animals might be much more than that too.

1.2. Reflecting Upon Human-Eating Creatures Through Filmic Fictions

Luckily, we can reflect upon these matters without having to go through such a frightful event like the one Plumwood lived in Australia, thanks to fiction and its imagined scenarios. The part of Plumwood's text which most appealed to me as a vegan English Studies[7] scholar interested in literary and filmic text analysis (particularly interested, moreover, in science fiction and horror) was the following: "an understanding of ourselves as food is the subject of horror as well as humour. Horror movies and stories reflect this deep-seated dread of becoming food for other forms of life: horror is the wormy corpse, vampires sucking blood and sci-fi monsters trying to eat humans" (2012: 18). But how does this deep-seated dread

[7] Though it must be noted that this dissertation is framed specifically within American Studies, given its scope and its focus on US history and culture, as I explain in section 1.5. of this chapter.

match the also deep-seated assumptions about eating others? At a time when the ethical questioning of eating animals can hardly be overseen, how is this reflected in narratives where the food chain is reconsidered from a post-anthropocentric perspective? Michael Gilmour (2020) argues that "stories about hunters and the hunted not only give expression to our own susceptibilities, but often stimulate ethical reflection" (195). As he states, predator-prey stories

> speak to our deep-seated fears, reminding us of our own bodies' vulnerabilities and fragility. Our bodies also tear, break and bleed like those of hunted animals, and we too know what it is to be constantly wary of mortal dangers. At the same time, such stories reveal our capacity for violence, often in unsettling ways. Whereas animals kill other animals for food or in self-defence, humans often kill animals for reasons other than survival. (195)

Horror and science fiction (together with fantasy) are the two main genres in which these human-eating creatures —such as vampires, aliens, nonhuman animals, and others— dwell. I have chosen to deal with these two genres for two main reasons. The first one is that both are full of human-eating creatures which are the focus of my work. The second one is that my area of expertise focuses on horror and science fiction, and I am not as acquainted with fantasy as to be able to delve into its monsters as well. There is also a matter of length: exploring another genre would mean a higher corpus and probably a longer dissertation. But there is definitely room to continue exploring human-eating creatures (dragons, giants…) within fantasy for scholars in that field.

Horror and science fiction have often been read from feminist, Marxist or postcolonial perspectives, among others.[8] However, the antispeciesist perspective is quite new in comparison to the longer traditions of other critical approaches.[9] The works of Joan Gordon

[8] To mention some examples of these feminist, Marxist and postcolonial readings, respectively: Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), David McNally's *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (2011) and Gaia Giuliani's *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene. A Postcolonial Critique* (2021).

[9] Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood have identified a reluctance in including the antispeciesist perspective in literary and film studies. They explain that "few scholars seem willing to accept veganism as an increasingly prominent and productive mode of creative response to such a [climate] crisis" (2018: 7).

(the chapter "Animal Studies'" in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, 2009), Sherryl Vint (*Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* 2010), Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood (*Thinking Veganism in Literature and Culture. Towards a Vegan Theory*, 2018), or Margarita Carretero and José Marchena (*Cultural Representations of Other-than-Human Nature*, 2018) are all, as the publication years show, from this century. Nonetheless, they also show an increasing awareness about the speciesist bias in cultural analysis, and the growing interest in analyzing the representation of nonhuman animals, as well as our relationships with them, in fiction.[10]

Vint, one of the main scholars connecting Animal Studies with science fiction, argues that the choice of this genre as the ground to deal with the situation of nonhuman animals in contemporary times comes from the genre's special relation with alterity. For Vint, both science fiction and HAS (Human-Animal Studies)[11] "are concerned with the construction of alterity and what it means for subjects to be thus positioned as outsiders. Both take seriously the question of what it means to communicate with a being whose embodied, communicative, emotional and cultural life —perhaps even physical environment— is radically different from our own" (2010: 1). Through its long history of reflecting upon our species' relation to technology, alien creatures, the environment, or our own materiality, science fiction is located

[10] It should be noted that, although Gordon's text was published in 2009 (15 years ago), it was just a chapter in an edited collection about science fiction, and its topic was quite uncommon at the time. Gordon predicted that we could "expect increasing scholarship recognizing this symbiotic relationship" (339), referring to Animal Studies and science fiction. As foretold, works at this intersection have increased exponentially until the present moment, where there are more and more texts and scholars questioning speciesism and anthropocentrism through the analysis of literary and filmic narratives. In my own work during the last five years, I have also noted that a wider range of scholarly texts addressing anthropocentrism and speciesism within popular culture have appeared since I started researching these topics in 2019.

[11] HAS is an interdisciplinary field which deals with the interactions between human and nonhuman animals. However, this field includes studies which are not critical of speciesism, and in fact deal with such interactions from an anthropocentric perspective. For its part, AS (Animal Studies) is also an interdisciplinary field which mainly focuses on cultural constructions of 'the animal', so it is usually more related to social aspects than HAS might be. However, I prefer to use the term CAS (Critical Animal Studies), because this field specifically approaches analyses of human-nonhuman animal relations from a critical stance towards speciesism and anthropocentrism.

in a key position to explore questions of alterity.[12] Related to this idea of alterity, Otherness, mostly present in postcolonial theory, is a sociological concept that refers to the discursive construction by dominant social groups of oppressed groups as being different from them. In short, it is the process of delimitation and differentiation of 'us' and 'them' which often leads to social distancing, hierarchization and discrimination. For this division, arbitrary boundaries are established in binary ways and these boundaries, in turn, justify a differential treatment and attribution of rights to each section of the hierarchy.[13] Through stories about space travels or alien visits to the Earth, cloning, genetic modification, intelligent nonhuman animal species or sentient robots, science fiction can represent the consequences of social hierarchies and violence upon the body of the Other, be it human or nonhuman.

Like science fiction, horror and its monsters also hold a fruitful position to speak about social fears and anxieties, in connection with the collective circumstances of the context of its production.[14] Monsters can provide insight into social anxieties regarding gender, sexuality, race, nationality, or animality. How these anxieties are inserted into the monstrous body is

[12] For the sake of genre clarity, I am using the seminal definition of science fiction formulated by Darko Suvin in 1977: the foundation of the genre is cognitive estrangement, which must present a reality close enough to the audience's world to make them feel identified with it, as well as an estrangement produced by the 'novum' (a scientific innovation which allows this reality to be different from ours, and which is explained through the scientific discourse of the film —for example, the genetic engineering technology in *Jurassic Park*).

[13] Several authors within the field of Animal Ethics have warned that the divisions which are often established to justify the discrimination of nonhuman animals (such as the division between human and nonhuman animals based on human-biased ideas of rationality, language use, or physical features) might leave humans outside the sphere of protection that human exceptionalism allegedly provides (for example, in terms of rationality or language use, which some mentally-impaired humans or very young children might not be able to comply). At the same time, sociological studies have looked at the animalization of some oppressed populations in order to justify the discriminatory actions towards them (Jerolmack, 2008; Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011).

[14] To specify genre limits here as well, I am mainly using Robin Wood's 1979 definition of horror: a genre in which "normality is threatened by the monster" (2018: 83). Wood explains that he uses 'normality "in a strictly non evaluative sense to mean simply 'conformity to the dominant social norms'" (84). His definition, as he argues, might be "simple", but it provides three key variables: normality, the monster, and the relation between both. According to Wood, "it is the third variable, the relationship between normality and the monster, that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film. It, too, changes and develops, the development taking the form of a long process of clarification or revelation" (84). Through this definition, then, we can see the prominence of the monster and of the challenge to dominant social norms, which is an essential basis of this dissertation.

affected by its zeitgeist; consequently, carrying out a diachronic study of monster archetypes can shed light on the evolution of social structures, hierarchies, and resistances to them over time. My aim is thus to focus on the human-eating monster archetypes and on what the evolution in their filmic representations says about the presence and reception of antispeciesism in popular culture.

Departing from critical geopolitics and ecocriticism, Elena Dell'Agnese (2021) points out that the consumption of nonhuman animals and the discourse of carnism needs to be taken into account in the analysis of the representation of nature because "food is one of the principal modes of negotiating and representing the nature-culture relationship" (6). Dell'Agnese explains that "a green movie or a nature-writing book can […] convey a message inspired by the author's desire to protect the environment and at the same time be imbued with a discourse in which the human being is given a role of exceptionality in relation to the other components of the environment" (29), such as nonhuman animals. An ecocritical reading of fiction which takes into account anthropocentrism and speciesism might reveal the underlying discourses of human exceptionalism at the same time as it looks at how nonhuman characters are represented, influenced by the cultural context and discursive conditions of the time and place of its production. In this way, looking at the representation of food in popular texts sheds light on the discourse of carnonormativity (Freeman, 2014),[15] and on how food is used to represent sociocultural aspects. Specifically looking at fiction in which humans become the prey of other beings, as Sharon Sharp puts it, "meat-eating is estranged through the human fear of being consumed" (2021: 241). In this way, scenes where humans have to face their own edibility question the rationalization and naturalization of carnism.

[15] Discussing the representation of nonhuman animals and vegetarian characters in TV, Carrie P. Freeman uses the term "carnonormativity" in a similar way "to how the term 'heteronormative' describes the television environment in which heterosexuality is the dominant, default, or normalized sexual orientation" (16). She explains that TV fiction reflects this carnonormativity in that "the dominant way of viewing animals and food is through an anthropocentric and carnistic lens". This is also shown in the fact that "most people portrayed on television are assumed to be carnists by default unless proven otherwise" (4).

In this regard, Food Studies (intersected with Critical Animal Studies) is a key area to draw insight from. Besides the representation of nonhuman-animal-sourced food, fiction which reverses the usual state of things and turns humans into food has been looked at from different perspectives, and recent analysis from Food Studies and Ecocriticism have explored the social meanings intertwined in the representation of humans as prey. Jean Retzinger (2008) explains that "in its materiality, food forces attention to the body; in its many psychological and social meanings, food preferences and the rituals of eating help reveal the shadings of gender, class, ethnicity, power and community […] for food not only shapes our bodies, but it structures our lives" (370). Fabio Parasecoli (2008) argues that "our bodies, including our crucial relationship with food and ingestion, are represented in pop culture as a reflection of wider cultural, social, and political debates among various and diffused agencies, trying to influence the way we perceive ourselves and our world, and the way we operate in it" (5). Focusing on the representation of humans as food in stories about human-eating monsters, Parasecoli explains that

> [t]hese stories bother us because they show the fragility of what we consider as normality. […] Where do these unsettling fears come from? Why are we afraid of being killed and ingested? Why are we fascinated by characters that express their limitless hunger at all costs, to the point of dismembering and consuming human beings? Horror stories are mainstays in fiction: flesh-eating monsters and evil witches ready to cook us crowd our imagination from childhood. They cannot just be an instrument used by adults to impose discipline on their offspring; if this were the case, we could not fully explain why icons such as vampires, cannibals, and other monstrous characters have always been popular, and not only in Western cultures. (39)

Recent analyses since the second decade of the 21st century have focused on the perspective of these monsters, paying attention to their point of view, their agency and drives, and their voices. Examples of this are found in Vint's (2010) chapter "Always-Already Meat: The Human-Animal Boundary and Ethics", which deals with humans in the position of prey and challenges the slaughterhouse system and carnist ideology which these human-as-prey stories seek to reverse and criticize. Vint explains that "the ethics of who eats whom are central to the human-animal boundary and its ideological work. Key to this discourse is not

only the understanding that humans can prey on animals but that animals are somehow 'unnatural' if they reverse this relationship" (33). Another example of these analysis is found in Ralph Acampora's "Caring Cannibals and Human(e) Farming: Testing Contextual Edibility for Speciesism" (2014), which imagines a situation in which a community of apparently rational and ethical beings often prey upon other humans. He also makes use of William F. Nolan and George C. Johnston's novel *Logan's Run* (1967) and Richard Fleischer's film *Soylent Green* (1973),[16] which show, once again, that science fiction proves fruitful for philosophical discussions by providing scenarios which can be compared to current situations of oppression of nonhuman animals, like the factory farming industry.

Both in popular culture and in academic studies, we find ourselves at a point of increased concern towards the situation of nonhuman animals and the need to consider our food choices, while at the same time waves of reactionary discourses aim at re-establishing what Antonio Gramsci called 'common sense': a "conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man [sic] is developed" (1971: 419). In what concerns this dissertation, 'common sense' is established around the system characterized by the discourses of carnism and anthroparchy (Cudworth 2005), defined as a "system of power connecting anthropocentrism, patriarchate, animal exploitations, and capitalist domination of nature" (in Dell'Agnese, 2021: 43).

Following the Marxist work of Gramsci, historicizing 'common sense' through a diachronic relativism of what the term has implied throughout history (as well as synchronically, through social classes and groups), sheds light on how the meanings, implications and resistances to this commonsensical discourse are built and, in short, it

[16] *Logan's Run* depicts an apparently utopian society which is maintained by killing everyone who reaches the age of 30. It had a homonym filmic adaptation in 1976 by Michael Anderson. *Soylent Green* was based on Harry Harrison's 1966 novel *Make Room! Make Room!*. The novel (and the film) deals with overpopulation by turning humans into gruel.

demonstrates how it is not a 'natural' way of being but rather a construction of ideology maintained and fossilized through popular culture representations. This dissertation is thus inscribed at the turning point between the 'old world' of anthropocentric and speciesist perspectives and the increasing concern about antispeciesist discourses which the texts already cited from Critical Animal Studies, Vegan Studies and Ecofeminism have been pointing at for the last decades. Working within the area of English and American Studies, I explore these issues using the tools of textual analysis and upon the realization that culture (specifically, in this case, mainstream film and TV) interacts with ideological discourses by reflecting, reproducing, upholding or reacting against them.

1.3. What is a Monster?

Before I consider specific research questions, it is important to stop at the definition of 'monster' that I use throughout this dissertation, given the manifold meanings and implications that this word has, both in theoretical and popular realms. I am following Donna Haraway's characterization of monsters, cyborgs and other in-between creatures who "have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" (1991: 180). Haraway vindicates the symbolic power of these figures for gender, race or class liberation, since their liminal position challenges boundaries and clear divisions between categories. At the core of this concept of 'monster' lies, therefore, a questioning of stable, delimited and hierarchical ontological categories like 'Man' or 'Human'. The use of capital letters in these terms intends to refer to their nature as discursive constructions in patriarchal and anthropocentric contexts, in order to distinguish them from 'man' or 'human' in more general terms. The capitalized Man and Human are defined by specific features that are given by not only patriarchal and anthropocentric stances, but which also intersect with discourses of racism, ableism or class,

and this has been the main focus of criticism of Posthumanist scholars like Rosi Braidotti (2013) or Cary Wolfe (2010).

As Braidotti claims in *The Posthuman* (2013): "not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human" (1). Whereas she uses 'human' in lowercase, I want to make a clear distinction between the lowercase human as a merely scientific term,[17] and the capitalized Human as that which has not always discursively and socially included all members of Homo sapiens. This questioning of the Human lies at the core of the theoretical grounds of Posthumanism, as authors like Braidotti or Wolfe have developed. Braidotti explains that Posthumanism is influenced by, on the one hand, a "critique of the humanist ideal of 'Man' as the universal representative of the human", and, on the other hand, an "anti-anthropocentrism [that] criticizes species hierarchy and advances ecological justice" (2017: 9).

It should thus be clear by now that I am not using the concept of monster as a negative term. My use of 'monster' is not related to the 'unnaturalness' of the creatures, nor to whether they are real, imaginary, natural, artificial, or whether their behavior follows the customary lines defined by prescriptive structures (like ethology, in the case of nonhuman animals). My use is concerned with the way in which they pose a risk for the construction of the Human. It is relevant to point out that this risk is not just for the (lowercase) human (the risk of characters being killed and/or eaten, for example), but for the capitalized Human too: how do these monsters challenge stable categories and discourses about what is a human animal, what is a nonhuman animal, and what characteristics (such as edible/inedible) are applied to each? For instance, are the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* monstrous because of the scientific

[17] It must be pointed out, though, that scientific discourse is not free from social biases and it has in fact contributed to the development of discriminatory rhetorics such as racism, sexism or speciesism. Further insight into the role of scientific discourse in social structures is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is important to highlight that the 'human' in scientific terms has historically not been a given, natural, unbiased concept either.

enterprise which brought them to life, or because of the danger they pose for human characters? The first option would imply that monstrosity derives from unnaturalness: a monster is that which does not comply with the natural order of things. In this sense, a genetically-engineered dinosaur would be a monster, but a naturally-bred one from the Mesozoic era would not (even if they had lived together with humans and these had been part of their usual diet together with other smaller dinosaurs, which was never the case). The second option, monstrosity stemming from discursively putting the capitalized Humanity in jeopardy, is more theoretically-driven from postulates of posthumanism, casting doubt on the category of 'natural' and vindicating the monster as a critical tool to examine the Human.

The basis of this idea of the monster lies on the critical inquiry around the categories of normality, adequacy and normativity. This engages with Haraway's allegory of the cyborg, as commented before, and Margrit Shildrick's (2001) theory of the monster as a challenge to normative ontological standards and a rethinking of vulnerability. Shildrick explains that vulnerability is "held at bay lest it undermine the security of closure and self-sufficiency" (1). Recognizing oneself as vulnerable means acknowledging that one is open to pain, suffering and, ultimately, death, in relation to one's exteriority, including the others. This implies that the autonomous, individualistic subject that neoliberal anthropocentric patriarchy upholds is a construction which does not correspond to reality, as political reflections upon vulnerability (like Butler's, as it was mentioned before) have denounced.

Focusing on vulnerability brings the body back into the discussion, as opposed to a patriarchal view which upholds the disembodiment of an exclusionary, restricted and oppressive masculine subject, connecting the feminine realm with corporeality and corporeality with inferiority. Taking this into account, Shildrick's thesis is that, by focusing on monstrous bodies, we must not engage in an oppositional discourse of self vs. other, but rather consider that all bodies resist a final categorization. Rejecting a clear binary separation

of normal vs. monstrous leads to the rethinking of embodiment itself: "to valorise the monster, then, is to challenge the parameters of the subject as defined within logocentric discourse" (3). For Shildrick, the monster (each with its specific cultural and historical forms) has functioned as a scapegoat, "carrying the taint of all that must be excluded in order to secure the ideal of an untroubled social order" (3). In this sense, monsters are "deeply disturbing; neither good nor evil, inside nor outside, not self or other. On the contrary, they are always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject" (4).

Looking at horror and science fiction, Mark Fisher (2016) also connects the monstrous (or 'the weird', as he chooses to call it) with the questioning of stable categories. He argues that this is the case of H.P. Lovecraft's creatures, which burst into our known world through interaction, exchange or confrontation, disrupting a familiar situation. The presence of a weird identity or object means that "the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate" (15). If the weird is a presence which does not fit in, Fisher explains that 'the eerie' is a failure of absence, or a failure of presence: "the sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or if there is nothing present when there should be something" (61). The eerie has to do with the unknown and with alterity, as well as the possibility that the mystery entails forms of knowledge, subjectivity of perception which go beyond our common experience. He exemplifies the eerie with the final scene of the film *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin Schaffner, 1968), Daphne Du Maurier's story "The Birds" (included in her 1952 story collection *The*

Apple Tree and adapted to Alfred Hitchcock's homonymous film in 1963)[18] or Jonathan Glazer's film *Under the Skin* (2013)[19] —which is part of the corpus of this dissertation.

As several scholars studying the cultural representations of monsters —like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996), David Skal (2001) or Stephen Asma (2009)— have pointed out, the horrors portrayed in popular culture reflect the fears that a particular society has in relation to its own constitution: the dreads of cultural miscegenation, geopolitical and ideological invasion, loss of hegemonic power, failure of the regulatory apparatus of gender, advances of class struggle, technological breakthroughs, destabilization of social givens, or ecological concerns are represented in literary and filmic monster productions. Analyzing the presence of monsters in fin-de-siècle USA, Cohen (1996) explains that films like *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993, from the novel by Michael Crichton), *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Coppola, 1992), *Wolf* (Nichols, 1994), *Species* (Donaldson, 1995) or *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (Talalay, 1991), signal an anxiety which "manifests itself symptomatically as a cultural fascination with monsters—a fixation that is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens" (viii). This is especially relevant in the context of the US, which he defines as "a society that has created and commodified 'ambient fear'—a kind of total fear that saturates day-to-day living, prodding and silently antagonizing but never speaking its own name" (viii).[21]

[18] The eerie in Du Maurier's story lies in the capacity of reflective action of entities which, in our common experience, do not have it, such as the birds conspiring in order to kill the human population —and, for the purpose of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that they also eat them: in the story, when Nat goes to the neighbors' house to get some provisioning, he finds Jim's body, or "what was left of it" and later on, when he observes the birds not moving during the day, he remembers: "they were gorged with food. They had eaten their fill during the night. That was why they did not move this morning" (70). Fisher explains that, beyond the terror that the birds' attack provokes, the eerie lies in what is actually jeopardized by the birds' behavior: "the very structures of explanation that had previ-ously made sense of the world" (66).

[19] Adapted from Michel Faber's eponymous novel from 2000.

[21] Little did he know perhaps at that time how this commodified daily fear would reach its peak five years later, after September 11th, 2001.

Cohen argues that the monster body is "pure culture" (4): "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. […] A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read". Cohen reminds us that, etymologically, 'monstrum' stands for "'that which reveals,' 'that which warns'" (4). The monster also refuses classification: "they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration" (6), and this is where their dangerous nature lies, because it "threatens to smash distinctions" and "by refusing an easy compartmentalization of their monstrous contents, they demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" (6).

The monstrous body is an embodiment of difference, especially cultural, political, racial, economic and sexual. Cohen does not approach the monster from an antispeciesist perspective, but the monster also embodies difference in terms of the binary between humanity and animality. Like other scholars who work from an anthropocentric perspective, he might consider this binary in terms of animalized representations of race or gender, for instance, but not of nonhuman animals themselves. Cohen states that "the monster stands at the threshold […] of becoming", meaning that, even if we fight them and often defeat them, they always come back to ask us "how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them" (20). So why, and how, have we crafted the monsters which eat us in 21st century fiction, comparing them with previous representations, and what does this tell us in connection to food ethics, edibility and speciesism?

1.4. Research Questions and Monster Categories

My main research question is, therefore, the one that closed the previous section. How is the fictional representation of humans as edible prey, together with the depiction of their predators, the human-eating monsters, informed by contemporary antispeciesist discourses that are questioning customary eating habits (particularly, those which include nonhuman animals as food) and our speciesist and anthropocentric position in society? I analyze here how traditional depictions of human-eating creatures have evolved towards contemporary representations of these characters, taking into account critical perspectives like Ecofeminism, Critical Animal Studies or Posthumanism. These critical discourses are providing food for thought (never better said in this context) in terms of the ontological limits between humanity and animality, the relevance of shared embodiment, or the political potentialities of recognizing vulnerability (our own and the others'). These perspectives also consider the social implications of unwrapping the human-animal dualistic hierarchy if we aim at analyzing oppression from an intersectional perspective which identifies the entanglement of discriminations against both human and nonhuman groups.

In order to analyze this evolution I look at filmic texts from two different periods, separated by the turn of the 21st century. Although archetypal human-eating monsters like vampires, the boogeyman, wolves, snakes, witches, or early versions of what we could today call zombies have always appeared, throughout history, in oral narrations, children bedtime stories, fairy tales or epic poems, I focus on more recent representations because I am

interested in tracking the evolution since the beginning of this century.[22] The turning point in this sense are the terrorist attacks in New York and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001, due to their huge impact and significance in configuring not only global geopolitics, but also the cultural realm of the Western world, influenced by Hollywood and its tight connections with the security industry and the US Department of Defense. As I further explore through the dissertation, 9/11 heavily impacted the views, representation and reception of antispeciesist discourses and veganism, something which could be tracked through the mocking representations of some vegan characters in TV and film.[23]

The 21st century is a critical period for rethinking our relationships with nonhuman animals, mainly due to the development of animal rights movements and ethical discourses delving into the moral intricacies of our treatment towards them, including at the dinner table. In this sense, looking at filmic narratives in which humans are seen as food from the perspective of a nonhuman being who might potentially prey on them (like a vampire or an alien), might shed light on how antispeciesist and post-anthropocentric discourses are getting rooted into our cultural and ethico-political realms, and how they are represented —either in a positive, reinforcing light, or in a negative, reactionary one— on screen.

As my dissertation shows, influenced by these antispeciesist and post-anthropocentric rhetoric, human-eating monsters in popular filmic fictions of our century have turned into sympathetic, complex and interesting characters that audiences are invited to root for. As

[22] To contextualize the years previous to the end of the 20th century, it is interesting to note that the decades from the 1970s to the 1990s were marked by the raise of theories connected to the deconstruction of big narratives (such as postmodernism), as well as the increasing publication of texts dealing with nonhuman animal rights. In cultural terms, the 80s and 90s saw an increase in the fascination with the Halloween festivities, as well as the resurgence of horror and slasher films like *Scream* (Craven, 1996), marking much of the 90s aesthetics exemplified by US icons of the decade like Tim Burton, Winona Ryder or Angelina Jolie, with their black outfits, and their fascination with blood, tattoos, violence and death. These remarks are relevant in connection to Dina Khapaeva's (2017) analysis, which will be referenced later in this section; and they also mark the cultural context regarding the fascination with monsters.

[23] When discussing veganism as a cultural phenomenon and its cultural representation, I am also making reference to vegetarianism, since both depictions are often similar or interchangeable.

opposed to villainous characters whose mischiefs and cruelty was never justified (as in most of the 20th-century filmic adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or in the alien invasion filmic trend during the second half of the 20th century, such as John Carpenter's 1982 *The Thing*), 21st century film and TV fiction is full of nonhuman-animal predators whose life is spared at the end (despite the human deaths they might have caused), as well as loving vampires, appealing aliens or endearing zombies, as the case studies will show throughout this dissertation. Fred Botting explains that contemporary depictions of monsters reflect postmodernism's incredulity towards metanarratives in which "figures of authority are rendered suspect" (2002: 314). Botting also notes how

> monstrous figures are now less often terrifying objects of animosity expelled in the return to social and symbolic equilibrium. Instead, they retain a fascinating, attractive appeal: no longer objects of hate or fear, monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire, and self-recognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant monsters are rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying, persecutory, and inhuman shapes. (286)

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the sociocultural influences of such evolution in the Anglosphere. Although such influences are manifold and varied, and can be studied from a gender, race or class perspective, my main perspective is focused on species, looking at relevant aspects like the animalization of monsters and humans, the discursive construction of edibility and inedibility, food ethics, and the presence of antispeciesism itself in these narratives, in the shape of vegan characters or references to veganism. Regarding this turn-of-the-century evolution, Dina Khapaeva (2017) explains that before the 21st century, the role of monsters was "limited and secondary, as a source of horrors or marvels, a symbol of seductive evil or as a backhanded tribute to the triumph of good" (90), with human feelings being the prime focus. However, towards the end of the 20th century, she observed that "people were replaced by monsters as protagonists and narrators. Consequently, the target of the audience's identification underwent a systemic displacement" (90). Khapaeva focuses an important part of her analysis on monsters who do not just kill humans but also eat them:

> When these imaginary monsters not only kill human beings but also consume them as food, that act becomes a radical expression of disenchantment with humanity as an ultimate value. The act of murder alone is apparently deemed insufficient to articulate the denial of the unique value of human life: humans are to be degraded to the level of animals in the act of consumption. (19)

It is here where her anthropocentric bias is most visible through her whole argumentation. She considers that being eaten is "to be degraded to the level of animals", with nonhuman animal consumption remaining unquestioned. For her, the fact that monsters are given a voice and a space to develop their drives undermines the concept of humanity and, with it, the protection of human rights, even reaching the conclusion that contemporary monster narratives advocate for human torture and death. However, an affirmative, the posthumanist reading of these monsters which I offer here can shed light on a different direction.

In short, my thesis statement and main hypothesis to be explored can be summarized as follows: 21st century antispeciesist theory —as well as its sociocultural practices, like veganism— is shaping the way in which humans and the monsters who challenge their anthropocentric position (by placing them in the position of prey) are represented in filmic fiction. Whereas human-eating creatures used to be voiceless epitomes of evil, contemporary texts take an interest in depicting their subjectivities, interests and drives, although these often include chasing humans down. On the one hand, these representations set a challenge for the speciesist, anthropocentric defense of human exceptionalism and show the ways antispeciesist discourses are advancing progressive views about nonhuman animals, as well as the extent of their impact upon social values. On the other hand, reactionary views and opposition to the mainstreaming of vegan practices also find their repercussion in some representations of vegan characters as foolish, gullible or derisory.

It is also important to note that although some narratives show a positive representation of veganism or vegan characters, as well as some indications of a questioning of

anthropocentrism, this does not directly entail a generally progressive approach in terms of either gender, race, or even species. The mainstreaming of veganism has multiplied the references to it throughout contemporary fiction, but this is not always done through a critical analysis about interconnected conditions of oppression. This is the case of Catherine Hardwicke's 2008 film *Twilight* (adapted from Stephenie Meyer's eponymous 2005 novel), analyzed in chapter 3, and which mentions both vegetarianism and plant-based food (like tofu and veggie burgers) but still maintains a speciesist approach in the Cullens' preying on nonhuman animals (despite calling themselves vegetarians), at the same time that it upholds the patriarchal subtext of Meyer's literary saga.

1.5. Contextualization of the Main Sources: Relevant Remarks about the USA

This dissertation carries out a diachronic analysis of human-eating creatures from their representations at the end of the 20th century to contemporary productions in the 21st century. In this regard, the choice of texts should be contextualized. The corpus I have selected to investigate the evolution of these representations influenced by antispeciesist discourses is mainly composed of Anglophone filmic texts (including films and TV series) from the USA. There are several reasons for this: the continuous contact between human and nonhuman animal predators in this country, the cultural construction of the wilderness and hunting, the large prominence of meat consumption and its relevance in terms of identity, and, finally, the significance of the US cultural industry (especially through Hollywood) and the impact of its cultural and academic production on the rest of the (mainly Western) world.

Firstly, the choice of the US context is connected to the close relationship between humans and nature in the country, since many urbanized parts are next to wooded regions full

of wild fauna which come into contact with humans quite often.[24] Consequently, humans are sometimes subject to predation by bears, pumas, or sharks (often because people occupied their habitats first),[25] and this is frequently represented in films about these animals, more often than not with a distorted approach towards their behavior, as I show in chapter 2. Besides, studied from an ecofeminist perspective, these encounters, as well as wilderness in general, have often been deeply gendered, especially through the attribution of violence, the representation of the wilderness as a constant fierce battle, or the connection to ideas of dominion and possession (seen in discourses of hunting, for instance).[26] Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan called in 1995 for further feminist examination about the historical and cultural ascription of masculinity to the US wilderness, or to the natural world in general. They wondered why so many wildlife documentaries represented a "nearly pornographic parade of carnivorous violence", providing a "warped view of the natural world, where the vast majority of creatures are not carnivorous —do not eat and kill one another— and where caring, cooperation, and symbiosis are more prevalent than the 'red in tooth and claw'

[24] According to the National Wilderness Preservation System, 4.5% of the US land area are wilderness areas. This includes 806 listed protected areas which cover 452,798.73 km^2, out of a total land area of 9,147,590 km^2 (University of Montana).

[25] The Internet is full of videos gathering this type of encounters, with different outcomes (some of them are intended to be funny or cute, whereas the ones where humans are attacked are cumbersomely gruesome and scary). In 2022, for instance, a video of a brown bear getting into a convenience store and grabbing some candy went viral. The news reported it as a funny incident —"Bear Barges into California 7-Eleven to Enjoy a Late-Night Candy Bar Shopping Spree" (People, 2022)—, probably because no humans were hurt by the bear.

[26] Plumwood's encounter with the crocodile, for instance, was strongly gendered by some press. Matthew Calarco (2014) points out that the attack was "subjected to dominant phallocentric and anthropocentric narratives" in how some news reports exaggerated the crocodile's size, how they would suggest that the lagoon was no place for a woman, or how "the reports sought to sexualize the attack into the sadistic rape of a helpless woman by a vicious crocodile" (424). In fact, while she was being taken to hospital, the rescuers suggested they should go back to the river the following day and "shoot a random crocodile as an act of revenge" (424), reinforcing a patriarchal narrative of a chased woman, a savage monster, and a male hero.

behavior repeatedly served up in the media" (6).[27] The anthropocentric categorization of species, as ecofeminists have shown, is heavily influenced by gender discourses and patriarchal views on the constructs of masculinity and femininity, especially in their rhetoric connection with culture and nature, respectively.[28] It is thus relevant for my analyses to bear in mind that concepts like nature, predation, or vulnerability are deeply affected by gender stereotypes, both in filmic fictions and popular culture in general (including non-fictional genres like news reports or documentaries).

Also regarding gender, in order to study narratives of predation (which often include the hunting chase, as well as the subsequent activities of processing and consuming bodies), the influence of patriarchal rhetoric in the cultural construction of hunting must be highlighted. In their article "Animals, Women, and Weapons: Blurred Sexual Boundaries in the Discourse of Sport Hunting" (2004), Lori Baralt, Amy Fitzgerald and Linda Kalof argue that sport hunting is deeply gendered and, while the hunter is masculinized, nonhuman animals who are considered as prey are feminized.[29] Departing from a 2003 viral series of hoax videos called *Hunting for Bambi*, in which semi-naked women were hunted down by

[27] pattrice jones also criticizes the patriarchal subtext in popular depictions of nonhuman animals, developing connections between homophobia and the erasure of sexual diversity within nonhuman animals. She explains that pop culture, zoos and nature documentaries have presented nonhuman animals in a gendered and "relentlessly heterosexual" (2014: 131) way, in spite of the diversity of sexual activities in nonhuman animal social groups. She explains how heteronormativity and homophobia have been shaking hands with the locations of commodification of nonhuman animals for profit, like factory farms or labs, in order to control reproduction and therefore economic gains. As a scholar concerned with ecomasculinities, jones reminds us that the analysis of popular-culture representations of nonhuman animals in a gendered way is a key element not to be neglected —but often forgotten— in (eco)feminist studies.

[28] Besides Adams and Donovan, who are two seminal authors in the connection between Critical Animal Studies and Gender Studies, other scholars who work at this intersection include Marti Kheel (2008), Greta Gaard (2017) or Angélica Velasco (2017).

[29] These views draw largely from Carol Adams's foundational analysis about the masculinization of the (human) consumers and the feminization of the (nonhuman) consumed in the speciesist rhetoric about the objectification, commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990).

men with paintball guns,[30] Baralt, Fitzgerald and Kalof explain that, whereas *Hunting for Bambi* provoked general outcry, "distressing representations of hunting as a sexually charged activity are resilient popular culture images" (237). The authors explain that "in the U.S. cultural landscape, the language of hunting is a discourse of patriarchy. Hunters' attitudes and actions toward social and natural objects (weapons or hunted prey) are constructed by a combination of experiences and absorbed cultural messages that validate and exacerbate white male dominance and power" (239). Analyzing issues from the hunting magazine *Traditional Bowhunter* (issued between 1992 and 2003), the authors note the connections between the sexualization of hunting and the feminization of both nonhuman animals and weapons. Interestingly for this dissertation, they quote a hunter who called his bow Fat Lady, and who was worried about its deterioration: "you work for that one perfect bow —balanced, quiet, quick, smooth and reliable. Excitement grows as a beautiful lady takes form and promises you everything. And then, soon after the honeymoon, you come to discover she is either a vegetarian or wears crème facials and hair curlers at night" (Torges, 1997: 38, qtd. in Baralt *et al*., 2004: 244). Here not only is the bow feminized in terms both positive ("a beautiful lady") and negative (someone who wears hair curlers at night) but vegetarianism also seeps into the hunting narrative as something absolutely undesired, making the formerly beautiful lady turn into an unattractive, deceitful woman. This use of vegetarianism as a downgrading aspect is a key part of patriarchal subtexts which still permeate some contemporary filmic fictions in what I see as a reactionary view towards the advances of antispeciesism. This will be commented again in chapter 4.

Besides the gender aspect, it is also relevant to note that the USA has a strong relationship with the consumption of nonhuman animal bodies, especially cow- and pig-

[30] Although the creators ended up confirming they were fictional, the videos were presented as real, following the style of a reality show. They stated that the men hunting down the women (who only wore thongs and running shoes) had paid between 5,000 and 10,000 dollars to participate. The women were also allegedly paid (more if they did not get shot, but also if they did) (Mikkelson, 2003).

sourced meat, both in economic and identity terms. Marta Zaraska (2016) values the worth of the US meat industry in $186 billion dollars of annual sales and notes, thus, the powerful economic interests behind getting people hooked to meat and maintaining speciesist discourses that prevent the consumers from feeling guilty or empathetic towards nonhuman animals. Furthermore, as Laura Wright (2015) has analyzed, the cultural implications of meat in the USA were strengthened after 9/11, drawing a clear line between the national, acceptably-American way of eating and the 'suspicious' foreign diets. Given the connections between 'Americanness' and meat-eating (in the shape of beef-burger chain restaurants, chicken wings fast-food eateries, or family gatherings around barbecues), in contrast to the more widespread presence of plant-based foods like hummus or vegetable rice in the Middle East and Southern Asia, veganism became a component of Otherness in the dualistic discourse that was established in the sociopolitical realm after the Twin Towers fell down: "in the post-9/11 moment, the choice to be vegan meant to step outside of the confines of what constitutes an agreed-upon 'American' identity" (Wright, 2015: 138). I address the impact of 9/11 throughout this dissertation as a whole, since, as noted, it provides a key turning point for cultural analysis of Hollywood film and TV productions. The impact of the terrorist attacks on the representation of veganism (though the depiction of vegan characters as naïve, hypocrites, or even villains) will also be looked at, especially in chapter 3.[31]

Last but not least, the USA is a fundamental terrain to explore the spread and impact of animal-related discourses and its effects on mainstream contemporary culture. The USA has

[31] Dell'Agnese (2021) argues that "generally speaking, popular culture tends to represent vegan characters as 'killjoys' that ruin the pleasure of others by highlighting the unethical nature of their behavior" (175). Examples of popular vegetarian/vegan characters at the turn of the 20th century are Ellie Wood in *Legally Blonde* (Luketic, 2001), Phoebe from *Friends* (Crane and Kauffman, 1994-2004), or Lisa from *The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, 1989-). These characters, who are all young women, are represented as either silly and naïve, or as nagging know-it-alls. Lisa and Ellie belong to sardonic narratives which are critical of sociopolitical US discourses, so their depiction oscillates between being negative (recalling how most of their compatriots would see them: silly, posh, grumpy…) and positive (how the film and series creators actually see them: intelligent, empathetic…).

been prolific in both Animal Studies texts, as the birthplace of foundational texts by authors like Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*, 1975) or Tom Regan (*The Case for Animal Rights*, 1983), as well as subsequent key works by scholars such as Carol Adams (*The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 1990), Gary Francione (*Animals, Property and the Law*, 1995), or Cary Wolfe (*Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, 2003). Due to its hegemonic geopolitical presence and the magnitude of its cultural industry, the USA is also an important context to study the impact of dominant discourses upon filmic productions that are quickly globalized and extended throughout the globe. Hollywood has been called part of the US 'soft power', extending the 'American way of life' in the socialization of people all over the world (De Zoysa & Newman, 2002). The links between Hollywood, the security industry and the US Department of Defense have also been explored (Löfflmann 2013), confirming the crucial role of the US film industry not just for the country's self-image and national identity, but also, due to the US's pervasive presence worldwide, to the global discourses that shape shared political visions.[32]

The impact of this presence upon audiences cannot be overstated, and this is why I am dealing with (mostly) films and TV series which have had a relevant success in terms of box-office and cultural repercussion.[33] As reader-response criticism and reception theory scholars like Hans-Robert Jauss (1982) have stated, the reception of texts among consumers (that is, its popularity) is a key element of their analysis, and cultural products cannot be studied only through the sociohistorical conditions of its production or its formal aspects. The relevance of this reception in this dissertation will be acknowledged not only through the popularity of most of the chosen texts, but also through the referencing of comments and opinions in online

[32] This has often been done through science fiction narratives of alien invasions, for example, as Georg Löfflmann points out: "the evil Decepticons in the *Transformers* series, or the Aliens in *Battleship* and *Battle: Los Angeles*, all function as the ultimate despotic Other, against which the American geopolitical identity of freedom-loving heroism is displayed" (2013: 287).

[33] There are some primary sources that have not been box-office blockbusters, but which prove highly insightful regarding the cultural turn towards more sympathetic human-eating monsters that I am studying in this dissertation.

portals and news websites, looking at how watching some of the films or episodes of my selected corpus seems to have influenced —at least part of— the audience. Taking into account that textual productions often function as a mirror of social discourses, I want to analyze how these discourses related to animality are being represented in US and, by extension, Western culture,[34] and how the image that audiences get of some monsters can impact our social acceptance of these discourses and shape different interspecies visions.

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized around four main monster categories: nonhuman animals, vampires, aliens and zombies. The reason for this choice is that these four archetypal creatures are the main human-predating monsters in popular fiction: from the shark in *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) to Count Dracula in the several filmic adaptations of Stoker's novel, the aliens in *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996) or the Martians in *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005), as well as the zombies throughout George Romero's filmic Saga of the Dead, or the walkers in the TV series *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, 2010), these four types of monster have been present throughout decades of film and TV productions. With their ups and downs, they have proven successful and interesting for audiences, especially in connection to the sociopolitical contexts of their time (be that 9/11 or the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, for instance).

While there are other human-eating monsters in popular fiction (from deities to giants, mythical hybrids and legendary creatures like the Kraken, witches or demons), their representation as human-eating creatures has not been as extensive as that of my selected four

[34] Although the vast majority of my corpus consists of US blockbusters, other Anglophone productions will be taken into account due to the narratives they portray. An example of this are the films *Under the Skin* or *28 Days Later*, which are British.

types. Witches and dragons have also been present in film and TV fiction, but there are several reasons why they are not part of my corpus. First, although there are famous narratives where a witch or a dragon eats humans, this is not one of their main defining features, as it is the case with filmic nonhuman animal predators, vampires, aliens (I am aware that in this case there are many examples where they do not eat humans, as in Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*, but there are other relevant, emblematic cases in which they are, and these are the ones which will be studied) and zombies.

Secondly, witches and dragons are usually found in fantasy, which —as stated before— is not one of my chosen genres of study, so I will leave these aside for further scholarship that might be interested in studying their representations as predators. Last, I must mention here cannibals, and why they are also left out of this dissertation. The reason is that cannibals are human, and in order to study the representation of human-eating monsters as opposed to the discursive construction of the Human, these monsters must be nonhuman. Some examples of cannibalism will nonetheless be mentioned in some chapters (in the zombies one, for example) because of the relevance of their presence in the narrative, in connection to the nonhuman monsters of the film or TV series. Although the evolution in the representation of cannibals in contemporary fiction is in many ways similar to the changes and influences I am tracing in this dissertation —as Khapaeva (2017) has shown— they will also be left out.

After the introduction, chapter 2 deals with nonhuman animals. I first provide an overview of films which portray nonhuman animals (from sharks and crocodiles to bears and dogs) as enemies of the human characters, exploring the speciesist subtexts of the Natural Horror subgenre of the 1970s and 80s (the so-called 'Revenge of Nature' trend). I then move on to study the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* sagas as a paradigmatic example of the

difference in the representation of human-eating monsters before and after the 21st century.[35] Besides dinosaurs, the other two nonhuman-animal predators studied are bears (connecting their representation with the depiction of wilderness in the USA and its natural parks) and crocodiles (analyzing its symbolism and exploring the move from the nonhuman animal as a killable symbol towards a character who is allowed to survive). The main topic is therefore the evolution of these creatures from nameless, irrational monsters to individualized animals with whom the audience can, to a greater or lesser extent, empathize. This chapter critically reads Khapaeva's perspective about this evolution, which she stated first in *The Celebration of Death in Contemporary Culture* (2017) and later in *Man-Eating Monsters. Anthropocentrism in Popular Culture* (2020). Khapaeva argues that this change has to do with antihuman approaches which seek to undermine the value of human life and human rights in general by providing fictional spaces where humans are turned into prey. For her, this disdain for human life is not adequately criticized within the narrative and, instead, human-eating monsters are represented so as to identify with them more than with their human prey. However, using posthumanist and antispeciesist approaches, I argue that this evolution is not antihuman but rather posthuman, in the sense that it seeks to undermine anthropocentrism and explore new ways of relating to each other (both humans and nonhumans) in a fairer and more environmentally-respectful worldview.

Vampires are the protagonists of chapter 3. The first section explores the historical representation of vampires and their human prey, as well as examples of vampires who have refrained from consuming humans through different decades. Among archetypal human-eating monsters, vampires are the ones in whose narratives the presence of vegetarianism and

[35] In particular, the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* sagas run through the turn of the 20th century (from 1993 until 2022), which turns out very useful in order to analyze the evolution of the monsters. Given that they develop similar plots and characters (including the monsters), sagas that run through both centuries prove quite fruitful for diachronic analysis. This is also the case of Romero's Saga of the Dead, whose six films span through the years between 1968 and 2009.

vegan ethics as mainstream discourses can be noted the most, probably due to their status as rational creatures capable of moral reasoning, as opposed to other creatures, like zombies, who are mostly irrational. The presence of 'vegetarian' (with inverted commas because they do not drink human blood, but often do not hesitate to kill and prey on nonhuman animals instead) vampires is a common trope in vampire fiction, from Louis du Pointe du Lac in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) (and its 1994 filmic adaptation by Neil Jordan) to the Cullen family in the *Twilight* four-novel saga by Stephenie Meyer (2005-2008) and its filmic adaptations *Twilight* (Hardwicke, 2008), *New Moon* (Weitz, 2009), *Eclipse* (Slade, 2010) and *Breaking Dawn*, which was divided in two halves: *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* (Condon, 2011) and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* (Condon, 2012). This saga is analyzed due to its huge success and influence in the contemporary vampiric archetype, as well as the implications of its protagonists' 'vegetarianism'. The second main source which is studied in this chapter is the also hugely successful TV series *True Blood* (Ball, 2008-2014), where the presence of vegetarian vampires is key for the development of the plot.[36] The analysis of this series shows the intricacies between discourses around species and around human groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community or racialized people. Moreover, I pay special attention to one of the characters from the series, Amy Burley, given its depiction as a villainous vegan.

Chapter 4 focuses on alien predators, looking at the evolution of two filmic adaptations of H.G. Wells's 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds*, a seminal text regarding human-eating aliens —from post-9/11 film *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005), to the Anglo-French TV series adaptation *War of the Worlds* (Overman, 2019-2022). Besides these adaptations, the films *Under the Skin* (Glazer, 2013), and *Nope* (Peele, 2022) are also studied in relation to the positioning of human characters as food for the alien creatures. Regarding *Under the Skin*, the interconnections between gender, disability and species are the main points of study, while at

[36] Contrary to the Cullens, the term vegetarian does not have inverted commas here because the vampires in *True Blood* feed on a synthetic compound which imitates blood.

the same time structuring a criticism of Glazer's adaptation of Faber's novel for rendering the novel's narrative about species invisible. Regarding *Nope*, Jordan Peele's film is studied through the analysis of the speciesism embedded in the anthropocentric gaze, the reduction of alterity in the commodification of some bodies, and the implications in the reversal of the process of looking, objectifying, hunting and consuming the Other. Peele's cinema — including *Nope* as a climatic example of a critique of anthropocentrism, but also his previous films, *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019)— presents nonhuman animals (deer, rabbits, and, in *Nope*, horses and an 'alien animal') as key symbols for his narratives about Otherness and discrimination: these symbols and the critical subtexts in relation to speciesism and anthropocentrism are explored in this section.

Finally, chapter 5 deals with zombies in connection to the reversal of monstrosity (the idea that humans are the truly monstrous villains of the narrative) that is a relevant part of 21st century monster fiction and, once again, in the evolution of the depiction of nonhuman monsters. I develop the concept of the post-undead, in contrast to the classical representation of the undead in zombie fiction. The post-undead refers to zombies which have had contemporary insights (such as empathy towards the nonhuman Other, or environmental concerns) embedded into their rotting bodies. This has had implications such as the presence of rationality in previously irrational monsters, as happens in the film *Warm Bodies* (Levine, 2013). To provide an overview about the evolution of this archetypal predator, the historical circumstances of the outset and development of the zombie are studied. Afterwards, this evolution is traced through the study of George Romero's saga of the dead, which unfolded from the end of the 60s until the first decade of the 21st century, so it proves fruitful to observe the changes in the zombie throughout the decades. Another foundational text for 21st-century zombie fiction is analyzed: the TV series *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, 2010-2022). In connection to the presence and relevance of food in post-apocalyptic narratives, as well as

the depiction of a human slaughterhouse, and the representation of vegetarian characters, *The Walking Dead* also proves insightful to analyze the infiltration of discourses around speciesism and anthropocentrism in contemporary culture. Other interesting productions to carry out such study are contemporary zombie films like the already-mentioned *Warm Bodies*, as well as *Zombieland: Double Tap* (Fleischer, 2019) or *Army of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2021), which are analyzed in connection to their mockery representation of veganism within their narratives.

CHAPTER 2. Nonhuman-Animal Predators: Interspecies Encounters

"Monster is a relative term. To a canary, a cat is a monster.
We're just used to being the cat"

Henry Wu, *Jurassic World*

2.1. Introduction: Animal Horror Film from the 1970s until Today

This chapter deals with the representations of predation, that is, of humans becoming potential food for other animals, with human exceptionalism put in jeopardy. My intention is to show how the representations of this predation process have evolved since the last decades of the 20th century, when animal horror cinema[37] became a successful mainstream trend in Hollywood, boosted by the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and backed by the revenge-of-nature cinema trend —with films such as *Frogs* (McCowan, 1972), *Orca: The Killer Whale* (Anderson, 1977), or *Piranha* (Dante, 1978), as it will be seen in subsequent sections. This trend conveyed environmental messages which criticized anthropogenic problems such as nuclear power, water contamination, or air pollution, as well as mass tourism and the disregard of nature for the sake of economic profit.

I will firstly provide an overview of nonhuman animal predators over the last decades of the 20th century, from the pioneering animal horror films until the release of the turning-point film for my analysis: *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993). From there, I will analyze the evolution of dinosaurs from this film throughout the subsequent films of the saga —*The Lost World* (Spielberg, 1997), *Jurassic Park III* (Johnston, 2001), *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow,

[37] Animal horror films are a subtype within natural horror, which features films where natural forces (animals, plants, or the environment) pose a threat to humans. Ecohorror is usually used for natural horror films which include mentions of environmental issues.

2015), *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (Bayona, 2018) and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (Trevorrow, 2022).[38] The next section will be concerned with bears, including the documentary film *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005) —the only nonfiction film included in my corpus, as it will be explained afterwards— and the fiction film *Backcountry* (MacDonald, 2014). The last animals whose presence in film will be analyzed are alligators, with *Alligator* (Teague, 1980) *Primeval* (Katleman, 2007) and *Crawl* (Aja, 2019) as main focus. The reasons for the choice of these animals and films will be provided further on.

This chapter is concerned with fiction films. This means that, with the exception of *Grizzly Man* (and other examples of documentaries that will be mentioned in connection to the anthropocentric gaze), it will include films which portray 'real' nonhuman animals, that is, members of species which exist —or have existed— in the natural world. Some of these animals are, however, distorted in the films through the enhancement of some characteristics (like a huge size or a voracious appetite for human flesh even when the species does not have a specific preference for humans and would mostly run away from them in real life), and some others have not actually had any contact with humans, as in the case of dinosaurs.[39]

2.1.1. "Who's Eating Whom?": Spurious Representations of the Nonhuman Animal as the Enemy

In June 1998 the magazine *Audubon* interviewed Peter Benchley (author of the 1974 bestselling novel *Jaws* which inspired Spielberg's film), and titled its cover: "Who's Eating

[38] A fourth film in the *Jurassic World* series —it is still unclear whether it is a sequel or a reboot— is expected to be released in 2025.

[39] Although humans and dinosaurs have not cohabited on Earth, the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* are included in this chapter because, although their existence from manipulated DNA is a matter of science-fictional imagination, they were actual nonhuman animals on this planet. Godzilla, on the other hand, is not included because, although the creature might have some things in common with those of *Jurassic Park* (it is a huge lizard brought to life by human activity who chases humans), it is not a real animal.

Whom?". Benchley answered explaining that, for every human being killed by a shark there were 10 million sharks killed by human beings;[40] he claimed then that he would not write his novel again in the same way, due to the wider knowledge about sharks and about "our position as the single most careless, voracious, omnivorous destroyer of life on Earth", which meant that "the notion of demonizing a fish" now stroke him as "insane" (56). Considering the material consequences of representation, Stacy Alaimo (2001) underwent a study of animal horror films in which, despite knowing that human activity was often a trigger of destruction and death of many habitats and species, humans were still represented as the endangered species, jeopardized by other nonhuman animals who were in turn demonized as destroyers. Alaimo believes that animal horror films "could be the single most significant genre for ecocriticism and green cultural studies" (279). She stresses the "cultural potency" of these films, signified in their widespread audience appeal, thus offering "stunning insights into how the arguments, images, and rhetoric of environmentalism have been received", and how they "shape contemporary responses to environmentalism" (280). More specifically, I am interested in analyzing how these films have shaped —and still shape— responses to speciesism and anthropocentrism.

Jaws is a perfect place to study the role of speciesist representation as epistemological violence. This term applies to filmic and literary works that produce a representation of a nonhuman animal, selecting, enhancing, changing or misunderstanding some of their features. In relation to cinema, Jennifer Ladino has called "speciesist camera" that which "sees animals through human eyes, distorting their behaviors with a social lens that is fraught with both ideological and generic expectations" (2013: 130). Akira M. Lippit (2000) has also called attention over this matter, explaining that the credits which state that 'no animal was

[40] As a link with the next chapter, focused on vampires, I want to add a similar quote that mirrors the problematization of consumption and the complexities of the dynamics between predator and prey in the 21st century with a quote from the vampiric TV series *True Blood*, uttered by the vampiric character Nan Flanagan: "Who's draining whom in America tonight?" (S1E9).

harmed in the making of this film', sanctioned by the American Humane Association, ignore, precisely, the epistemological violence which does inadvertently harm them.[41] As Katarina Gregersdotter, Niklas Hållén, and Johan Höglund (2015) explain, "this ethical dilemma is perhaps more central in animal horror cinema than in other forms of culture where animals are involved, since it represents animals in a way that is intended to provoke fear and suspense" (7), and this risks affecting people's attitudes towards certain species or the ecosystem they inhabit. These authors mention the negative impact that *Jaws* had on the endangered great white shark, as well as populations of sharks in general which have been decimated due to the scary (and mostly false) ideas that the film spread about them. In most animal horror cinema, nonhuman animals exist

> beyond the ethical, as do other familiar characters in horror cinema, such as zombies, monsters and psychopathic killers. The animal is hardwired to be a relentless predator, unable to show remorse or pity. Therefore, the only way for humans to protect themselves against the ferociousness of the animal is to respond to it by becoming as ferocious as the animal, and to kill it. (7)

The most dismal aspect of these stories is that, even when the narrative places the blame of the nonhuman animal's behavior on humans (due to environmental damage, pollution, scientific experiments or recklessness), nonhuman animals are still punished and, in general, ultimately killed. The animal thus becomes a symbol of nature's warning signs or admonitions, but it is never a being with a subjectivity of their own, and this is what claims about epistemological violence denounce: 'eliminating' a symbol means that the death of the animal is not a killing or an execution, but rather an erasure, an amendment of the right

[41] I want to clarify here that, although I understand Lippit's point about calling attention on this often invisibilized epistemological violence, the inclusion of these credits made an important difference in the treatment of nonhuman animals in film sets. The American Humane Association (AH) was founded in 1877 in order to ensure the safety and well-being of nonhuman animals in different contexts, but it became famous for becoming, in 1940, the monitoring body of the welfare of nonhuman animals in the sets of Hollywood films and other productions. The defining incident for this was the mistreatment of a horse in the set of the film *Jesse James* (King, 1939): the horse was made to run along the edge of a cliff, fell down 70 feet to the ground below, and was then put down because of the spinal fracture he suffered. In general, AH oversees the safety of animals, protects them (and the cast and crew members who interact with them) and reports on incidents which might happen on set.

course of things. At the end of these stories, humans are cautioned, order is re-established, and the nonhuman animal corpse, which is often destroyed in a spectacular way, reinforces the difference between those bodies that can lawfully be killed (the animal) and those that cannot (the human).[42]

Another of the key aspects to take into account in nonhuman animal predator narratives is that the animal never behaves as the actual animal would. In films where the animal is perceived as invading human territory, they are often anthropomorphized and provided with human features related to evil, revenge or generally unethical behavior in order to build a nonhuman antagonist. As we will see further on, this is a problematic perception, since many nonhuman animals who are seen as trespassing in real life actually belonged to such areas before people urbanized them without taking into account the local fauna. Gregersdotter and Hållén point out that the shark in *Jaws* is constructed in such a way "that it seems to kill for other reasons than sustenance and instinct gives it the quality of a classic film villain" (209). Interestingly, although the animal is provided with his own reasons and drives to act, they do not respond to the actual needs or desires of his species. The shark rather constitutes an empty signifier for cultural references, including sexual desire, the ruthlessness of Hollywood

[42] In relation to this, I recommend watching Brett Mill's intervention in the 2022 Animals in the American Popular Imagination Conference, titled "*Jaws*, from the shark's point of view", where he interprets an imagined monologue of the film's shark. In this monologue, the animal mourns the representation that cinema has made of him, misinterpreting and ignoring his actual way of experiencing the world (Research, 2022).

industry, the Vietnam War,[43] or the Watergate scandal, as some scholars have argued (Heath, 1985).

The embodiment of evil in animals also depends to a large extent on their physical appearance and the further they are from mammals, that is, from us and from the domesticated animals that we more readily accept in our moral sphere of consideration. As the analysis of the evolution of monstrous representation of animals shows, physical appearance and deviation from what we consider 'cute' or 'empathizable' still play a key role in the depiction of animals as evil. Shark films, for instance, have barely changed their representation since *Jaws*: these animals are still violent, horrifying forces of nature which aim at devouring humans and most often die at the end of the films. The only notable exception is *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), which shows vegetarian sharks who have committed to considering other fish "friends, not food" —although it should be taken into account, of course, that this is an animated children's film, and not a horror film.[44] Crocodiles and snakes usually endure the same fate. Mammals, however, have experienced more empathy in recent animal horror films, as the evolution of human-eating bears illustrates (as

[43] The Vietnam War was an armed conflict in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia which took place from 1955 to 1975 between North Vietnam (supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist countries) and South Vietnam (supported by the USA and its allies). The war was met with huge public aversion in the USA, and it provoked a crisis of confidence that affected the country throughout the 70s decade. For Robin Wood, the great period of the US horror film was precisely the Watergate/Vietnam War era, since "the genre required a moment of ideological crisis for its full significance to emerge" (2003: 118). The cultural impact of the war in the USA was represented in film both directly, with dozens of films about the war, but also indirectly, in what have been read as subtexts of films like *Jaws*, following the film's depiction of political unrest and overall danger for the citizens enacted by the authorities' decisions taken in order to ensure their own profit.

[44] As an example of this still-maligned representation, Carter Soles's analysis of the 2016 shark film *The Shallows* shows how this film "echoes *Jaws* in its unforgiving attitude toward white sharks. Both films stage a battle with a monstrously exaggerated shark and spare no time for animal rights sentiments" (2021: 258). However, a recent film which achieved the number one position worldwide on Netflix, *Under Paris* (Gens, 2024), points in a possibly different direction. In the film, a giant shark and her offspring take the River Seine while the Mayor refuses to cancel the pre-Olympic Games triathlon that will take place in Paris (echoing the Mayor's recklessness in *Jaws*). At the end, the sharks manage to conquer the city and the rivers in other major cities as well.

we will see in section 2.3.).[45] Generally non-cute animals, like dinosaurs, have been made more cute in contemporary fiction to be portrayed as sympathetic and easy to empathize with, as the example of Blue in the *Jurassic World* saga shows.

Before delving into the analysis of dinosaurs, bears, and crocodiles, the next section provides an overview of the revenge of nature trend of the 1970s in order to contextualize the analysis of the representation of human-eating animals in film.

2.1.2. Environmental Concerns and the Revenge of Nature Film Trend of the 70s

King Kong (Cooper & Schoedsack, 1933), the first successful animal horror film, provided the pioneering archetype for films about contact between human and nonhuman animals. With the contraposition of New York and Skull Island, the film reproduces the culture-nature clash by which the giant gorilla jeopardizes the stability of civilization, represented by the Empire State Building and the heroine Ann Darrow.[46] Although the 1940s paid more attention to supernatural monsters like werewolves or vampires, animal horror cinema was developed with films like *The Devil Bat* (Yarborough, 1940), *The Black Cat* (Rogell, 1941), or *Cat People* (Tourneur, 1942). The 50s decade saw the release of Atomic Age science fiction films like *Them!* (Douglas, 1954), with huge mutant ants created after the detonation of the first atomic bomb test, or *Tarantula!* (Arnold, 1955), portraying a giant spider which was the result of scientific experiments looking for a way to feed humans

[45] Another relevant example of this evolution in Hollywood mainstream film is the *Planet of the Apes* recent prequels, which I have not included in my corpus because apes do not eat humans, but which portrays an evolution in monstrosity, villainy and empathy that is very similar to some of the films I analyze, like *Jurassic World*.

[46] In Peter Jackson's 2005 *King Kong*, Kong is still represented as a threat, but the sympathy that Darrow feels for him is much more evident than in the 1933 version, where she is mostly scared of him. The scene when Kong falls from the Empire State makes an essential narrative use of the gaze between the woman and the gorilla (whose eyes are much more heartwarming than in the first version, not just because of the obvious special effects improvements, but also because of their design), as well as a slow motion fall to enhance sympathy and grief in the audience.

rapidly. Another important nonhuman-animal-attack film was *The Naked Jungle* (Haskin, 1954), which also included ants whose power was not the result of any mutation or human activity, but rather of their joining forces to attack a South American plantation owned by an American man (played by macho icon Charlton Heston).

A decade later, *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963), based on Daphne du Maurier's 1952 homonymous short story, established the archetypal horror of nonhuman-animal attacks on human populations, reinforced after the huge success of the film and its acknowledged relevance according to the US Library of Congress, which included it in its National Film Registry in 2016.[47] After the mentioned precursors, *The Birds* inaugurated the natural-disaster cinema in which the unanswered question of 'why' this disaster happens is as unsettling as the catastrophe itself. Besides, in a key difference with previous animal-attack films, in *The Birds* the animals are not exterminated at the end, nor are humans presented as triumphant over the natural world: the birds are still there when the attacks end and the film finishes with anguish rather than relief. Another important difference was that it did not present monstrous animals (like huge gorillas, insects or sharks, which can actually be scary in real life), but rather common nonhuman animals which we might encounter on a daily basis.

In a chapter about the nonhuman animals of the horror cinema in the 70s, Michael Fuchs (2018) quotes Carolyn Merchant, who observes that this decade "became known as the environmental decade, as well as the era of environmental regulation, a period in which increasing numbers of laws were passed to improve the environment" (2002: 181). This environmental decade was full of nonhuman animals which increasingly preyed on human beings and thus enacted what seemed to be "a just and necessary animal revenge", in the words of Gregersdotter, Hållén, and Höglund (2015: 10). They explain that "this was a time of upsurge for animal right activism, vegetarianism became a popular diet and organisations

[47] The NFR adds up to 25 films every year which are chosen for its cultural, historical or aesthetical significance, in order to raise awareness about their preservation for the US film heritage.

such as Greenpeace were established, [which] testifies to the growing awareness that the way people live their lives has consequences" (32).[48]

Fuchs also connects the release of *The Birds* with the success of Rachel Carson's pioneering book *Silent Spring* in 1962, which denounced the pollution of air, water and land as being human-made, with horrendous consequences for the natural world and, consequently, human society as well.[49] The idea of nature taking revenge against humans shaped the cinema of the following decade, when not only nonhuman animals were in charge of representing this vengeful nature, but also vegetal life, as in the British film *The Day of the Triffids* (Sekely & Francis, 1963, based on John Wyndham's novel) —in which alien plants brought to Earth in a meteor shower prey on both human and nonhuman animals— or, later, the low-budget parody *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* (De Bello, 1978) whose title is quite straightforward about its plot, and which included references to key revenge-of-nature films like *The Birds* or *Jaws*.[50]

After *The Birds*, the revenge of nature trend peaked in the 70s. Films within this trend often presented nonhuman animals with horrifying enhanced characteristics as a result of human wrongdoings to the environment, as well as hapless scientific experiments, which

[48] Greenpeace is an independent worldwide campaigning network, founded by a group of environmental activists in 1971 in Vancouver, Canada.

[49] Carson's book had this title because she was initially concerned about the decline in bird populations due to the overuse of pesticides (which she called a silencing of birds because of their numerous deaths), which led her to study this impact in more depth. *Silent Spring* has had an important presence in popular culture too, including literature and film/TV, being featured in Liu Cixin's science fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem* (2008) —as well as in its 2024 TV series adaptation, *3-Body Problem*—, and in the episode "Bobby, It's Cold Outside" from *The Simpsons* (S31E10), in which the book is burned by conservative US TV channel Fox News.

[50] For an analysis of depictions of vegetal monsters which jeopardize human life, see *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (Keetley and Tenga (eds.), 2019).

turned them into dangerous, blood-thirsty predators.[51] Examples of these animals in this decade included frogs and other swamp animals in *Frogs* (McCowan, 1972), rabbits in *Night of the Lepus* (Claxton, 1972), snakes in *Sssssss* (Kowalski, 1973), octopuses in *Tentacles* (Assonitis, 1977), rats, chickens and wasps in *The Food of the Gods* (Gordon, 1976), dogs in *The Pack* (Clouse, 1977), wild animals such as vultures and pumas from a National Park in *Day of the Animals* (Girdler, 1977), orcas in *Orca: The Killer Whale* (Anderson, 1977), tarantulas in *Kingdom of the Spiders* (Cardos, 1977), piranhas in *Piranha* (Dante, 1978), bees in *The Swarm* (Allen, 1978), or bats in *Nightwing* (Hiller, 1979). Whereas *The Birds* constituted the cornerstone of nonhuman-animal-induced horror in the 60s, *Jaws* became the main film of the 70s in this regard, providing a long-lasting monster archetype for cinematic oeuvres (not only in the monster design, but also regarding camerawork and soundtrack aspects).

This type of films, which Fuchs (2018) describes as those in which humans venture into nature and encounter wild animals, "(re-)integrate human beings into the food chain, thereby questioning human exceptionalism" (178). However, Fuchs points out that these films often "reduce animal representations to mere vehicles for understanding the human" (178). The animals "emerge as nature's tools to restore order and the 'natural' balance on the planet", and "this self-healing mechanism relieves humanity of ecological accountability" (178), therefore impairing the call to action in order to repair anthropogenic wrongdoings. Along the same lines, Alaimo (2001) is also critical of some animal horror films because they imply that "natural creatures become the threat against which humans must defend themselves and from

[51] These were the key antecedents of the peak science-gone-wrong film two decades later: Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. The criticism of corporate greed over human wellbeing also had important precedents. A year after *Jaws*, another film marketed as "*Jaws* with claws" was released: *Grizzly* (Girdler, 1976) presented a prehistoric human-eating bear which terrorized and devoured campers in a US national park, whose leaders refused to close it to holidaymakers (just like Amity Island's beach and, later on, the dinosaur amusement park in the first and second sagas following *Jurassic Park*) based on the financial losses that securing the areas would bring about. *Grizzly* will be mentioned again in 2.3. in relation to bear films.

which they must distance themselves", and these films often "culminate in myths of triumphant transcendence, […] particularly pernicious in that it applauds anthropocentric delusions of grandeur and the smug denial that humans are inextricably part of the nature we blithely destroy" (292).

These criticisms point out the need for an antispeciesist, post-anthropocentric perspective in film analysis, since anthropocentrism has soaked most narratives about the environment. *Orca* (Anderson, 1977) stands out as a relevant example in this sense, because it initiated a trend of 'personal' revenge by the animals (as opposed to *Jaws*'s shark, who did not enact any kind of personal revenge, but only insatiable and ruthless hunger). In the film, the male orca —whose female companion and their child— have been killed by Captain Nolan focuses on taking revenge on him. This made *Orca* a turning point in animal horror cinema for providing the nonhuman animal with individual and specific drives. On the one hand, the orca is killed at the end of the film, which reinforces human exceptionalism in the fact that the animal killer must be ultimately punished. On the other hand, the fact that Nolan had killed his family makes the orca's thirst for blood more understandable for the audience, and thus leads to the development of empathy (which was not suggested in *Jaws* in any way towards the shark). This idea that the animal predator's actions might be understandable and even sometimes worthy of empathy from the audience is a key aspect of 21st century nonhuman-animal-predator films, of which this 70s film appears to be a forerunner.

2.1.3. The 90s: Nature Strikes Back

The revenge of nature trend waned in the 80s, being more and more infrequent and giving way to the serial killer trend and the first films of the *Alien* saga (*Alien*, Scott, 1979; *Aliens*, Cameron, 1986) and *Predator* (McTiernan, 1987), which would continue in the 90s

and in the following century. However, the revenge of nature subgenre came back in the 90s, due to, on the one hand, the renewed interest in environmental matters within US society and, on the other hand, the special effects and CGI (computer-generated image) technological advances in the film industry, which accompanied (and sometimes replaced) animatronic robots and stop motion animation. The 90s continued the trend of animal horror films with environmental messages, also including aspects related to animal cruelty and antispeciesist concerns, as in *Shakma* (Parks & Logan, 1990), a slasher film whose protagonist is a baboon previously used in laboratory tests; *Man's Best Friend* (Lafia, 1993), where a genetically-mutated dog is set free from the lab where he was being experimented on and starts attacking people; or *Ticks* (Randel, 1993), in which ticks which had been affected by an illegal marihuana production process attack a group of campers.[52] This second wave of animal horror cinema produced films like a remake of 1978 *Piranha* with the same title (Levy, 1995); *The Beast* (Bleckner, 1996) —based on a 1991 novel by Peter Benchley—; *Anaconda* (Llosa, 1997);[53] *Bats* (Morneau, 1999); or *Deep Blue Sea* (Harlin, 1999). Apart from *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*, another genetically-engineered dinosaur saga was released (with much less success, truth be told): *Carnosaur* (Simon, 1993), *Carnosaur 2* (Morneau, 1995) and *Carnosaur 3: Primal Species* (Winfrey, 1996).

Jurassic Park (1993) was "the film that ushered in the digital era by creating a 'possible world', rather than simply a technical spectacle" (Gregersdotter, Hållén & Höglund, 2015: 34). These authors point out that CGI developments did not just mean an improvement of

[52] These films show that animal-rights issues and environmental concerns were already present during the 90s decade, but it must be noted that these examples in particular are minor films (in some cases, like *Ticks*, they were released on home video formats, skipping their theatrical release), as opposed to contemporary films depicting such concerns with constitute huge blockbusters, like the *Jurassic World* saga.

[53] *Anaconda*'s slogan in the advertising posters ("When You Can't Breath you Can't Scream") brought to mind the famous sentence used in the promotional campaign of *Alien* (Scott, 1979) ("In Space No One Can Hear You Scream"), pointing to the intertextuality between horror films of the end of the 20th century and the common appeal to audiences by evoking asphyxiating images about being relentlessly predated by a monster.

films themselves, but also “a step forward from an ethical perspective. Regardless of how well animal actors are treated by some professionals, the risk of psychological stress, injuries and deaths will never reach zero as long as animals are used in the entertainment business” (34). It must also be noted that “while CGI and other digital technologies have made animals on the screen look more realistic, it has also made them less real in the sense that they can be made to behave as an animal actor could not be made to do” (35). However, if anthropomorphizing is handled with care, these authors believe that "the increasing sophistication of CGI technology of course also makes it possible to portray animals in ways that invite us to rethink our relation to them, and to create scenarios that make us aware of the risks of anthropogenic environmental change” (35).

The human-eating animal trend was continued during the first decade of the 21st century, with examples like *Eight Legged Freaks* (Elkayem, 2002), with huge spiders created after being exposed to toxic waste; *Open Water* (Kentis, 2003), where a couple of divers await death in a shark-infested sea; or *The Last Winter* (Fessenden, 2006), which introduces ghostly caribous and moose in northern Alaska which start attacking the workers of an oil company drilling the area, among references to climate change and the melting of permafrost. Further animal horror films in the second and third decades of the 21st century have included animals from all kingdoms, with varied ranges of audience success: examples from the last few years include *Cocaine Bear* (Banks, 2023), *Slotherhouse* (Goodhue, 2023), or *Under Paris* (Gens, 2024). The TV series *Zoo* (Appelbaum, Nemec, Pinkner and Rosenberg, 2015), adapted from the 2012 homonymous novel by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge, ran from 2015 to 2017 presenting a world where all nonhuman animals start attacking humans. The reason for this strange behavior is eventually found in the biotech company which manufactured animal feed that caused mutations in the animals, leading them to develop extraordinary abilities such as interspecies communication and human-like intelligence,

through which they decide to team up and take revenge against the centuries of exploitation from the part of humans.[54]

Although this introduction shows that there are films about virtually every nonhuman animal species, I have chosen to deal with three particular species due to their relevance for the US context. Firstly, I have chosen to focus on dinosaurs due to the dazzling impact that the *Jurassic Park* saga had for monster films in Hollywood. I focus on the evolution between both sagas, analyzing how the representation of the dinosaurs changed throughout the six films and how they constitute an illustrative representation of the evolution of monsters hand in hand with antispeciesist discourses during the 21st century.

Secondly, I have chosen bears because —together with eagles and coyotes— they are a powerful symbol of the US natural world, particularly in connection with its forests and National Parks, as well as with the idea of the untamed and untamable wilderness. In this section, I include the only non-fiction film in this dissertation, *Grizzly Man*, because of its relevance concerning different attitudes towards the natural world represented by Herzog and the ill-fated documentary protagonist Timothy Treadwell. Under the light of such attitudes and discourses, I also analyze a fictional film produced in the 21st century: *Backcountry* (MacDonald, 2014). This is a Canadian film, but I have included it, firstly, because Canada and the US share a similar natural environment and views about nature and animals and, secondly, because this film was generally well-received, whereas other films where bears were depicted as monstrous —like *Grizzly Park* (Skull, 2008) or *Into the Grizzly Maze* (Hackl, 2015)— had a negative reception or a limited release, which might point to the

[54] Despite the seemingly critical message of the series (the opening's voiceover says "we've domesticated animals, locked them up, killed them for sport. But what if, all across the globe, the animals decided, no more? What if they finally decided to fight back?", the show included live animals in their production, something which PETA criticized in the media with the message: "Some shows hold more than an audience captive. CBS: Use CGI to free all animals from 'Zoo'". For an analysis of the series within this framework, see Sharon's Sharp chapter "*Zoo*. Television Ecohorror On and Off the Screen" (2021).

growing indifference of audiences towards films where nonhuman animals are still portrayed as unrealistic blood-thirsty beasts.[55]

Thirdly, I have chosen crocodiles and alligators because they are also very present both within the US natural landscape and its popular culture. The latter is specially marked by the famous urban legend of blind albino alligators living in the New York sewers (according to the narrative, because they were flushed down a household toilet when they were babies), which is the basis of the 20th-century film of this section, *Alligator* (Teague, 1980). The 21st-century examples are *Primeval* (Katleman, 2007) and *Crawl* (Aja, 2019). The choice of these two animal species is also important regarding the differences in their physical aspect (this is also be seen with the different design of dinosaurs in the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* sagas), and how audiences react to predators when they are mammals (bears), who are generally considered beautiful and cute,[56] and when they are reptiles (crocodiles), who are rather regarded as ugly and monstrous. Although I focus on these three animal species, other species (sharks, wolves, apes…) are mentioned along this chapter, as well as scholarly works that have engaged in the analysis of their representation in film, so that readers who might want to explore different animal species can do so through those texts.

[55] Another recent film that was positively received, both in box-office and review terms, was the animal horror comedy *Cocaine Bear* (Banks, 2023), in which a bear finds cocaine bales lost by a drug trafficker in a National Park and starts savagely attacking campers. In spite of the bloody attacks, the bear is ultimately depicted as a protecting mother of her cubs; they survive at the end, whereas the drug lord who wants to find her and the cocaine bales dies.

[56] Bears are considered as such because of their furry, fluffy appearance, as well as their transformation into cuddly stuffed toys. The famous Teddy Bears are named after former President Theodore Roosevelt, who allegedly refused to shoot a bear, after which a New York's toy shop created the stuffed toy which they called "Teddy's bear". Bears were also characters of children's stories, ranging from the 19th-century English fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" to the cartoon bear Yogi from Hanna-Barbera studios 1961 *The Yogi Bear Show*, who lives in the fictional Jellystone Park (a reference to real-life Yellowstone Park) and steals campers' baskets while running away from the park's ranger.

2.2. Dinosaurs: From Enmity to Empathy

The release of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* in 1993 changed the perception of monstrosity and monster films for the years to come, as the director's own *Jaws* had fixed the previous paradigm. Before delving into the analysis of the films, it is important to provide a summary of their plots in order to follow the discussion with more ease.

In *Jurassic Park*, millionaire philanthropist John Hammond, the owner of bioengineering company InGen, has financed a scientific research project which has managed to extract dinosaur DNA from the blood of mosquitoes fossilized in amber who had bitten the dinosaurs a million years ago. From the recovered DNA, and DNA from other species (such as frogs) to make up more the missing genes, the scientific team had bred different species of dinosaurs. Hammond intends to create a thematic park on Isla Nublar, in Costa Rica, which the general public can visit to observe the animals, in an experience which would be a combination of a visit to a zoo and a safari. In order to test the park's viability (and to ease the concerns of the park's promoters about its safety), Hammond invites paleontologists Alan Grant and Ellie Sattler, mathematician Ian Malcolm, the promoters' lawyer Donald Gennaro, and Hammond's grandchildren, Tim and Lex Murphy, to spend a weekend visiting the place. However, the safety measures taken to control the animals eventually fail. The computer programmer in charge of the park security, Dennis Nedry, is bribed by BioSyn, InGen's business rival, to break through the park's security system and steal the dinosaurs' embryos, so as to replicate the science behind them. With dinosaurs running amok, the park's visitors must try to survive and reach the park's control center to restore the electrical system and see another day.

In *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (from now on, *The Lost World*),[57] the existence of a second island with dinosaurs, Isla Sorna, is unveiled when a family docks their sailboat there and are attacked by a pack of small dinosaurs at the beach. The controversy unleashed by this event leads Peter Ludlow, Hammond's nephew, to take control of InGen. He sets up a hunters' team that travel to Isla Sorna to retrieve the dinosaurs and bring them to the USA to exhibit them in the San Diego zoo. At the same time, Hammond recruits Malcolm again to join paleontologist Sarah Harding, photographer Nick Van Owen and mechanic Edie Carr in order to draft a report about the need to keep the dinosaurs on the island, away from humans. When Ludlow and his team manage to catch a Tyrannosaurus Rex's calf, the two T-Rex parents start chasing the team. The male T-Rex and his calf are finally embarked on a ship to the US mainland, but they are eventually sent back to Isla Sorna, where the family finally reunites. The final scene shows Hammond on TV warning that these creatures should be left alone on the island without any human intervention.[58]

The last installment of the first saga, *Jurassic Park III*, goes back to Isla Sorna. When a parachuting experience goes wrong and a child, Eric Kirby, is lost on the island, his parents, Paul and Amanda Kirby, trick Alan Grant and his assistant Billy Brennan into going to the island. The Kirbys pretend they just want to fly over it, since Grant categorically refuses to set foot on these islands again, but all end up landing there in order to look for Eric. While they try to get out of the island alive, the characters discover that a pack of velociraptors is

[57] *The Lost World* is also the title of Crichton's second (and last) novel about the dinosaur park, on which this film is based. Novel and film take place on Isla Sorna and the plot and characters are rather similar. Malcolm, Harding and Carr also have to escape the T-Rexes because they have taken one of their infants who has a broken leg. However, the part where the T-Rexes are taken to San Diego is new in the film and, whereas Ludlow and his men are the film villains, in the novel it is geneticist Lewis Dodgson and his cronies who want to steal dinosaur embryos for Biosyn, InGen's direct competitor. In the novel, Dodgson dies at the end. This character appears briefly in the film *Jurassic Park*, where he pays Nedry to steal the embryos. He does not appear again until *Dominion*, where he is the CEO of Biosyn and he runs the research facility in the Dolomites.

[58] Jonathan Romney has called *The Lost World* the "closest Spielberg has yet come to making his own Vietnam film" with his use of "Vietnam iconography" like the overconfident US military entering a territory and being beaten by an indigenous force, as well as Hammond's final presidential-like TV intervention calling a new policy of non-intervention (in Brereton, 2005: 79-80).

chasing them because, as they eventually find out, Billy had stolen some of their eggs in order to finance his paleontological research with Grant. The group (or, at least, most of it) gets to escape after a tense encounter with the velociraptors —a key interspecies encounter that will be discussed later.

The second saga starts with *Jurassic World*, in which the original park on Isla Nublar is reopened. The adult protagonists are Owen Grady, a Navy veteran and ethologist in charge of the velociraptors pack, and Claire Dearing, the park's operation manager and the aunt of Zach and Gray, two brothers who are visiting Jurassic World for the weekend. If Jurassic Park was a mixture between a zoo and a safari, Jurassic World closely resembles parks like SeaWorld,[59] with their marine dinosaurs enclosed in giant pools, or Disneyland, with their flamboyant shows and widespread dinosaur merchandising throughout the park's shopping streets. And just like its predecessor, Jurassic World fails again when the park's star attraction, the transgenic dinosaur Indominus Rex, breaks free from her enclosure. Claire and Owen set out to look for her nephews while they and the rest of the visitors try to survive the chaos. Owen is helped by the velociraptors' pack, with whom he has a special connection — especially with Blue, one of the female raptors, a key character both in the saga and in my analysis.

In the second film, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (from now on, *Fallen Kingdom*) the dinosaurs have (again) been left on the island without any human presence. However, one of the islands' volcanoes threatens to erupt at any moment, and some animal rights organizations (including Claire's Dinosaur Protection Group) campaign for the rescue of the dinosaurs who remain there. For that, Sir Benjamin Lockwood, Hammond's former partner, and his aide Ellie Mills, recruit Claire, Owen, and two new characters (Franklin, one of the

[59] SeaWorld is a US marine-mammal theme park chain with headquarters in Orlando (Florida) which was opened in 1964. The parks are a mixture of oceanariums and roller-coaster parks, and they have been subject of public criticism over the years, with accusations of animal abuse.

park's former technicians, and Zia, a paleo-veterinarian) to go to the island and rescue them. However, Mills's real objectives are soon revealed: they do not want to send the dinosaurs to an animal sanctuary, but rather auction them at Lockwood's manor to millionaires and warlords, selling them as pets, research subjects, or weapons. At the same time, Dr. Henry Wu (the leading scientist behind the original park's development) has created a new, more dangerous transgenic dinosaur, a mixture between the Indominus Rex and the velociraptor: the Indoraptor. At the auction, Owen, Claire, and Maisie (Lockwood's granddaughter, who is revealed to have been cloned from her deceased mother)[60] release the caged dinosaurs in the mansion. At the end of the film, Maisie has the chance to let the dinosaurs die in the basement (where a lethal gas is being released), or to open the doors for them to survive, which would mean that they would be able to run free on the US mainland. She finally decides to do it, unleashing the events of the third film of the saga.

In *Jurassic World: Dominion* (from now on, *Dominion*), the dinosaurs freely roam the Earth and coexist with humans. This has consequences which range from accidents caused by human and dinosaur closeness (which appear on news reports similar to real-life puma or bear attacks) to the development of a black market which sells dinosaurs illegally. At the same time, Biosyn Genetics wants to establish a sanctuary for dinosaurs in the Dolomite mountains in Italy, while using them for genomics research with pharmaceutical applications. Owen and Claire are now living with Maisie in Sierra Nevada (California), trying to keep her safe from people who might be interested in analyzing her (allegedly) cloned nature. She is eventually kidnapped, together with Blue's daughter Beta, and Owen and Claire embark on a mission to save them. At the same time, Dr. Ellie Sattler and Dr. Alan Grant from the original saga appear again to study a plague of locusts which is decimating crops at a vertiginous rate.

[60] In *Jurassic World: Dominion*, the story reveals that Maisie was created by Charlotte using her own DNA, but the girl is not actually a clone created in a lab: she was rather born from her mother. However, her clone identity is relevant within the discourse of *Fallen Kingdom*, so this analysis still holds true.

They discover that the locusts have been created with prehistoric DNA, and are genetically manufactured so that the only crops they do not wipe out are those grown with Biosyn seeds. Raising suspicions about this, Sattler and Malcolm go to the Dolomites Biosyn center, where Maisie and Beta have been taken, which also leads Owen and Claire there. The group finally discovers that Dodgson, far from having well-intentioned objectives, is using genetic technology through the work of Dr. Wu to affect the world's food supply. At the end, Dodgson dies —in a similar way to Nedry's death in *Jurassic Park*—, the protagonists survive and the United Nations declares the Dolomites an international protected sanctuary for dinosaurs.

2.2.1. The Evolution of Dinosaurs at the Turn of the Century

Jurassic Park revolves around topics that had been dealt with in previous animal horror films, like nature's punishment for human arrogance, but it also introduced key issues that would become central in 21st-century monster fiction. One of them is the allusion to a character's vegetarianism. Although in *Jurassic Park* the vegetarianism of Lex Murphy (Hammond's granddaughter) is conveyed in a short comment that, apparently, has not much relevance for the plot, it lays the idea of the reversal of consumption that is at the core of the saga. As opposed to the normative consumption order within the setup of human exceptionalism, which states that humans might consume nonhuman animals, but never the other way round, Lex upholds the idea that humans might refuse to eat animals, within a narrative in which animals engage in eating humans.

Dealing with Lex's vegetarianism, Kenn Fisher (2014) argues that the film —as well as the novel— grants computers (the facilitators of the genetic-engineering processes that brings dinosaurs back to life) God-like abilities; since humans are placed closer to technology in the

hierarchy (set further from nature, where dinosaurs are located, therefore supposedly under the control of computers and humans), this grants people God-like qualities as well. It is important, then, that Lex (a vegetarian young girl) is the one who saves the protagonists by using the computers in their favor —not to control the dinosaurs, as Hammond and his team had previously tried to do, but rather to solve the situation created by the corporative scientists. For Fisher, this may suggest that the next generations

> could very likely become more concerned with the rights of our co-inhabitants on this small planet. Lex gives us hope that perhaps the Chain of Being is actually more like a Circle of Being; the closer we get to godliness (or technological advance), the closer we get to ethically treating the animals who share the planet with us. (322)

In fact, Fisher's conclusion is also that, after the Isla Nublar adventure when humans become the helpless prey of bigger predators, audiences might come to "the realization that we would prefer not to be eaten if we were in the same situation, [which] means that a vegetarian lifestyle is actually a pretty reasonable concept" (309). Lex is, besides, related the other girl character who is key for the post-anthropocentric turn of the saga: Maisie Lockwood.

I focus next on the representation of dinosaurs throughout the first saga. The evolution of carnivorous dinosaurs (mainly, the T-Rex and the velociraptors) from irrational, ruthless predators to more empathetic creatures whose drives and desires spectators could understand happened throughout the three films of the first saga. Although the definitive posthuman, interspecies change took place with the release of the second trilogy —in which (some) dinosaurs and humans are closer and they cooperate and communicate together, as in the case of Owen and Blue— the shift in the representation of the predator (mainly the T-Rex in *The Lost World*, and the velociraptors in *Jurassic Park III*) changed in essential ways from the first to the third film.

Jurassic Park portrayed the moral dilemma represented by Malcolm's statement in the film, regarding genetic engineering: "your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should". The main topic in the first film is

therefore the misuse of science without any kind of moral limits or respect towards the forces of nature, which, as Malcolm also explains, always manage to "find a way". The scientific arrogance of Dr. Wu and Hammond leads them to think that to ensure safety it would be enough to modify the dinosaurs' DNA so that they are all females and therefore cannot breed, or remove the lysine from their DNA to make them dependent on humans to be able to survive. This strategy ends up being useless due to, precisely, other genetic modifications, like completing the dinosaur DNA with that of frogs (a species able to change their reproductive systems in single-sex situations to breed), or to environmental adaptations (in *The Lost World*, Sarah Harding explains that the dinosaurs have managed to overcome their lysine deficiency by eating more lysine-rich food from the island).

Although the T-Rex, as well as the velociraptors, are still mainly represented as blood-thirsty monsters whose main drive is hunting humans down, the actual evil in the film is, ultimately, the misuse of science and human greed; the dinosaurs themselves are not blamed for being carnivorous. There are two instances in the film when viewers can slightly sympathize with the animals, and that is when they eat annoying human characters. In the first of these scenes, the T-Rex breaks free from her enclosure when the despicable Nedry shuts down the electrical systems of the park to steal the embryos. The huge dinosaur attacks the cars where siblings Tim and Lex are trapped, but Malcolm and Grant try to attract her attention with a flare bomb, drawing her towards the toilet where Gennaro, the lawyer representing the park investors, is hiding. Since the sympathies towards Gennaro had been decreasing throughout the film (he expressed that he wanted to charge thousands of dollars for the park tickets, even though Hammond wanted the park to be available to all kinds of audiences, and he had abandoned the children to their own fate as soon as he saw the T-Rex), the scene is almost comical, enhanced by the fact that Gennaro is sitting on a toilet bowl when he is devoured by the dinosaur. The second scene involves Nedry. Trying to escape, he

comes across a Dilophosaurus, which he underestimates, musing mockingly “no wonder you are extinct”. Shortly after, the Dilophosaurus blinds Nedry with her poison and devours him in his car. Again, viewers do not particularly sympathize with the dinosaur, but Nedry’s patronizing dislike turns the scene into a kind of vengeful relief for the audience.

When the dinosaurs are chasing the children or the main adult ‘good’ characters, however, these scenes are not fun anymore. The velociraptors try to hunt Sattler, Tim and Lex, and they manage to kill Robert Muldoon, the park ranger and expert in the InGen velociraptors. Muldoon is described as a vicious, misogynistic and cynical man in the novel (in which he survives the island disaster), but he is a much more beloved character in the film, dying as a hero when his actions allow Sattler to go into the shed and restore the electrical systems. Muldoon is killed by the velociraptors, who then chase the remaining humans through the island’s visitor center. The humans only survive because the T-Rex unexpectedly appears and kills the raptors, allowing the survivors to reach the jeep and leave. It must be noted that the dinosaurs are represented so as to entice sympathy in a specific hierarchy which is dependent on how much danger they pose for the good humans: herbivores are presented as cute and vulnerable, minor carnivores are treated carefully, the T-Rex is represented as both a monster and a victim of InGen which cannot help but follow her ancestral predator instincts, whereas the velociraptors are depicted as purely evil monsters — also because of their superior intelligence— who do not deserve the slight deference that is conferred to the T-Rex, who survives the whole incident.

The Lost World continues in this direction. Here, the T-Rexes are represented as parents concerned with their child’s well-being and not so much with hunting humans down. The raptors, however, are still the unsympathetic evil creatures who chase the protagonists and whose death unregrettable death is even represented as a triumph (one of them is impaled after a fall from a roof, for example). Harding states at the beginning of the film that:

> I'm trying to change a hundred-years entrenched dogma: dinosaurs were characterized very early on as vicious lizards. There is a great deal of resistance to the idea of them as nurturing parents. Robert Burke said the T-Rex was a rogue who would abandon his young at the earliest opportunity. I know I can prove otherwise.

So she does: the film revolves around the endeavor of the T-Rexes to rescue and protect their calf, first captured by poachers and then by Harding and Van Owen in order to fix his broken leg. The tyrannosaur family survives at the end, even after they devour humans and nonhumans alike (including some of the good characters) and wreak havoc on the island and also in mainland San Diego. *The Lost World* thus initiates the paradigm shift in the character of the T-Rex: those who were represented in the first film as blood-thirsty monsters now become loving parents who, in the end, just want to live on their own with their progeny. Although they prey on people (even eating one of the heroes, Eddie Carr, in a gruesome scene where he is dismembered by both dinosaurs), the film portrays them in a more sympathetic light as a family who is facing Ludlow's greed, the true villain.

However, this does not signify an all-encompassing evolution, and we can find two relevant examples of speciesism and anthropocentrism in the film. Firstly, as I stated before, even though the T-Rexes are represented in a different, more complex way, velociraptors are still purely evil creatures who chase and try to eat the human characters. Secondly, *The Lost World* seems to take a halfway position between environmentalist and hunting discourses with the opposition between the characters of Nick Van Owen and Roland Tembo. Van Owen, a member of ecologist organization Earth First, shows a great deal of concern about the well-being of dinosaurs and strongly criticizes the poachers hired by Ludlow to hunt them. Tembo is an experienced hunter who is looking for his final challenge in Isla Sorna. Despite being a violent, cynical and arrogant man, Tembo is actually depicted as an appealing character who ultimately deserves the respect of an environmentalist and animal-rights defender like Van Owen. In a dialogue between them, Van Owen asks him:

> Van Owen: You seem like you have a strand of common sense. What the hell are you doing here?

> Tembo: Somewhere on this island is the greatest predator that ever lived. The second greatest predator must take him down.
> […]
> Van Owen: The animal exists on the planet for the first time in hundreds of millions of years and the only way you can express yourself is by killing.
> Tembo: Remember that chap about 20 years ago? I forgot his name. He climbed Everest without any oxygen. Came down nearly dead. When they asked him, "So why did you go up there to die?", he said, "I didn't. I went up there to live".

In this exchange Van Owen shows his respect for Tembo's common sense, although Van Owen belongs to an organization which Tembo had called "criminal". Tembo's intervention, closing the brief debate, provides him with the opportunity to justify his actions before Van Owen and also before the audience, who see the discourse of hunting sustained upon the idea of a primal fight between the human and the animal which is allegedly at the core of life itself. These arguments that revolve around sacrifice, danger and death are also used to discursively sustain other activities that rely on speciesist violence, like bullfighting, but fail to see the necropolitics involved in the process: humans make use of anthropocentrism to create life (which becomes materially real in the *Jurassic Park* saga because of the genetic manipulation to de-extinct species and force them to live in a completely different time and space under human control) and let die, through the genetic processes of Wu and Hammond and, in *The Lost World*, through hunting as well.[61]

In another interaction with Van Owen, Tembo mocks the ecologist's criticism. When Tembo asserts that his point of view is that "predators do not hunt when they are not hungry", Van Owen replies: "no, only humans do it". Tembo then states derisively: "Oh, you are

[61] 'Necropolitics' is a term coined by political theorist Achille Mbembe (2019), referring to the way in which some sociopolitical discourses, like racism, dictate how some people might live and some people must die. Drawing from Foucauldian theory on biopolitics (Foucault, 1976), Mbembe's concept converges with political theorizations like Butler's discussion on precarious lives (2004) to explain how political structures and neoliberal regimes maintain some people in states in-between life and death. Some authors have applied this concept to the situation of nonhuman animals: Dinesh J. Wadiwel (2015), for instance, connects the techniques and logics of colonialism and slavery with the violence towards nonhuman animals through the "understanding of the way in which sites of intense violence may be separated and contained from spaces of apparent undisturbed peaceability; and how it is that these two forms of radically distinct existence —war and peace— should sit side by side and thrive off each other without apparent contradiction" (91). These "sites of intense violence" include slaughterhouses, laboratories and entertainment facilities where humans manage the life and death of the nonhuman.

breaking our hearts!". Although cold and cynical, Tembo is also portrayed as a noble and compassionate man, who cares about Harding when he sees blood on her jacket, and when he mourns the death of Ajay Sidhu, a member of the expedition devoured by the velociraptors. Despite the first dialogue maintained with Van Owen, the ecologist removes the ammunition from Tembo's bag so that he cannot kill the T-Rex and he is forced to use tranquilizer darts, which ultimately makes the ecologist's welfarist objectives win over the hunter's discourse and desires. At the end of the film, Tembo survives and rejects working in Jurassic Park because he has "spent enough time in the company of death". This might indicate that the experience on Isla Sorna has made him abandon the idea of hunting altogether, but the character does not appear anymore in the saga.[62] Tembo also makes several allusions to humans as food: he asks Ludlow whether he wants to establish a camp or a "buffet", and he calls the expedition a "movable feast". This shows that he is aware of the potentiality of humans as food for dinosaurs, which locates him away from the representation of human exceptionalism that Ludlow embodies, as someone who cannot conceive the idea that humans might be the ones being predated, and consequently acts ruthlessly towards dinosaurs and nature in general.

In *The Lost World*, the most speciesist discourse is in fact held by Ludlow, not Tembo: "an extinct animal which was brought to life has no rights. It exists because we've made it, we patented it, we own it". Ludlow thus sees the dinosaurs as manufactured, patented corporate creations, over which the company has the right to maintain complete power — even, as Foucault stated, 'to make live and let die'— rather than sentient living beings. At the end of the film. Hammond expresses his regret about the creation and development of his park, and he states:

[62] Tembo's character finds a continuation in the second saga in Vic Hoskins, who is also a hunter. However, the post-anthropocentric evolution from the first to the second saga turns the hunter character into a despicable, villainous man (as opposed to Tembo, who was not described as a villain but rather an anti-hero).

> It is absolutely imperative that we work with the Costa Rican department of biological preserves to establish a set of rules for the preservation and isolation of that island. These creatures require our absence to survive, not our help. And if we could only step aside and trust in nature, life will find a way.

This change in Hammond from a businessman to a defender of returning the dinosaurs to the island and keeping them away from people and their greed anticipates the animal rights discourses that soak the second saga. Before turning to Trevorrow's and Bayona's films, I will consider the last release of the first saga, which also functions as a bridge between the animal-related discourses of the 20th-century saga and the ones of the 21st-century films.

In *Jurassic Park III*, velociraptors enjoy a similar position as the T-Rexes in *The Lost World*. They are still presented as dangerous predators, but they are provided with language (an idea crafted for the narrative, since there is no actual paleontological proof of the vocal tract of raptors) and their villainy is connected to the protection of their young. In the film, Billy Brennan, Grant's assistant, steals a pair of raptor eggs in order to sell them afterwards to fund their digging activities, and the raptors chase the group through the island to get the eggs back. It is a very similar situation to the T-Rexes in *The Lost World*, whose attacks are motivated by the need to protect their young, and not so much to feed (as in *Jurassic Park*), something which proves that the image of velociraptors had changed in less than a decade. The previously intelligent but cruel creatures are now able not only of communicating and caring for their young, but also of calibrating justice towards humans: although the raptors kill several humans, in the scene where Grant gives them their eggs back, the raptors can discern that it was not a proper theft but a 'mistake' and they spare the lives of Grant and his group. By showing the dinosaurs as a protective family (even suggesting a parallelism with the Kirbys in their attempts to protect their young), *Jurassic Park III* also paved the way for the post-anthropocentric, sympathetic representation in *Jurassic World*, to which I now turn.

2.2.2. A Posthumanist Approach to the Anthropocene: *Jurassic World*

For Khapaeva (2020), the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* franchise "demonstrates when and in what ways the commodified antihumanism has penetrated popular culture" (24). Talking about Crichton's novel (and extending it to the 1993 film), she explains that it "focuses on human characters, heroes and antiheroes, and does not display any sentimental attitudes to dinosaurs", which are "shown as extremely dangerous beasts" and "never described in a way intended to provoke the reader's sympathy" (25). As I showed in the previous section, in the first saga dinosaurs were mostly an 'excuse' to criticize the scientific team of the park. However, for Khapaeva, "the decomposition of the human-centered perspective began in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1997) [which] centers on the theme of animal preservation, which clearly reflects the growing political resonance of the animal rights movement during this decade" (26). For Khapaeva, *Jurassic Park III* "calls into question another important premise of anthropocentrism: the idea that humans are unique among the living creatures because they evolved into an intelligent species" (26). This is illustrated by Grant's belief that velociraptors lived in socially-sophisticated groups and that they could have become the dominant species if their evolution had not been interrupted by the meteorite that eradicated them.

I agree with Khapaeva (though with very different conclusions) that this perspective shift culminated in the most recent releases. She points out that *Jurassic World* "sets a new paradigm for the relations between people and man-eating [sic] monsters" (27). In fact, the film's trailer states: "it's not about control; it's about relationships based on respect". The film portrays velociraptors as intelligent (as the previous installments did, albeit showing a malevolent kind of intelligence, as compared with the sensible kind portrayed here), loyal and communicative. One of the main dinosaurs of the film, the newly created Indominous Rex, "who eats humans and other dinosaurs alike and 'kills for sport', is a monster only because

[…] she was raised in captivity and in horrible conditions by exploitative humans" (Khapaeva, 2020: 27), so her monstrous condition is somehow justified. The velociraptor Blue, who ends up saving Owen's and Claire's lives by killing the Indominous Rex with the T-Rex's help, is shown as being able to reason, communicate with humans, discern between good and bad and feel empathy. The relationship between Owen (who is an animal cognition expert rather than a paleontologist, implying the more active role of dinosaurs in his work), and Blue is, in his own words, "based on mutual respect".

This entails a movement towards what Khapaeva would call a disdain for human life —if one understands human life as unquestionably located above all other species— but which, for me, represents the posthuman, post-anthropocentric discourses that soak 21st-century fiction thanks to the advancements in antispeciesism and animal right movements. Dinosaurs are no longer props but rather sentient beings, and the heroes of the film want to learn about them instead of ruling over them. We should not lose sight of the fact that this film still deals with an amusement park with caged animals, or of the fact that Owen is the alpha of the velociraptors' pack —also entailing problematic gender dynamics that have been discussed by McHugh (2018) or Schneider (2019)—, so this is not an antispeciesist film. However, Trevorrow's film does illustrate quite clearly the evolution of human-eating monsters influenced by antispeciesist discourses in our times, setting the stage for the development of the post-anthropocentric narratives in *Fallen Kingdom* and *Dominion*.

This is also the first time that the dinosaurs have proper names, and the criticism of anthropocentric arrogance is more than evident. In another scene, Dr. Wu quips that "monster is a relative term, to a canary a cat is a monster. We're just used to being the cat". This displaces us from the top of the food chain where human exceptionalism had placed us. The discourse of animal rights is referenced when Hoskins, who comes from the military field and wants to weaponize the dinosaurs, claims that "extinct animals have no rights" —echoing

Ludlow's words in *The Lost World*—, to which Owen replies that "they're not extinct anymore", implying that, as living sentient beings, their interests should be taken into account. The film has a different ending from its predecessors, which focused on humans leaving the island and their feelings about their experience. Here, the movie closes with the T-Rex roaring at the top of the island, in a display of dominance and warning about a possible forthcoming dinosaur reign.

The narrative of this film can be read from two different perspectives, which might be summarized as anthropocentric (based on unquestioned and uncritical speciesist assumptions) and post-anthropocentric (critically questioning speciesism and Humanism). Khapaeva's analysis is representative of the first approach, since she takes for granted the moral hierarchy of species (and thus, human exceptionalism) and the reification of dinosaurs for human ends. From this view, killing a human is an unquestionably evil action undertaken by a monstrous being who must be defeated, so that the anthropocentric state of things can be somehow restored. Human wrongdoings, on the other hand, even when they mean killing others (especially nonhuman beings), are seen as a more complex issue in the best case and as unimportant in the worst. Khapaeva leaves the objectification, killing and consumption of nonhuman animals unquestioned in her analysis, which remains deeply speciesist and anthropocentric.

On the other hand, an affirmative vision of monsters sheds light on a different direction from which the film can be analyzed instead. The posthumanist analyses of Braidotti (2013) or Wolfe (2010) have suggested that 'Human' (capitalized to mark the fact that we are not talking about the whole human species, but rather an anthropocentric and exclusionary social construction, as I mentioned in Chapter 1) has not always included all Homo sapiens. Braidotti (2013) sees posthumanism not as an anti-human stance, as Khapaeva does, but rather as a questioning of the Subject of classical philosophy which lies at the roots of

oppressive systems while it erects itself as the summum of objectivity and righteousness. Braidotti explains that the posthuman criticism of Humanism relies upon the assumption that "the human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination" (26). N. Katherine Hayles addressed the distinction between anti-human and posthuman in similar terms: "the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human" (1999: 286). This capitalized 'Human' is thus not a descriptive but a prescriptive concept, which throughout history has not been applied to all people, excluding racialized, feminized or socially disadvantaged subjects. These subjects have been rendered as less than human and brought closer to the realm of the nonhuman, in order to lessen their claims to be included in the circle of moral consideration.

Departing from this idea, Khapaeva's refusal to address monstrous characters and their needs belongs (perhaps unwillingly) to a restrictive Humanist tradition of keeping not only imaginary monsters and actual nonhuman animals, but also animalized human populations, out of the picture of the moral community. Conversely, seeing monsters in Haraway's sense as promising allies can teach us how to widen political communities and how to overcome the restrictive concept of the Human, in the pursuit of societies which are less oppressive, less based on closed identities but rather on political affinities —"related not by blood but by choice", as Haraway says (1991: 155) — and, in short, more livable through the imagination of post-anthropocentric futures. However insightful Khapaeva's analysis may be, I would argue that she applies a speciesist, anthropocentric lens which still privileges human exceptionalism and has no regard for nonhuman interests. Her criticism of postmodernism and animal rights movements for being anti-human is inaccurate, since it is mistaking humans (that is, the whole Homo sapiens species) for the Human with a capital letter which is the object of postmodern and posthumanist criticism.

The critical analysis of this Human figure entails rethinking species borders as well, since these limits have traditionally been used to constrain the meaning of Human, narrowing it down to such an extent that it has left some people out too. This is why Posthumanism should align with antispeciesism in order not to replicate the same exclusionary borders in the name of human liberation: as long as arbitrary borders set the grounds for moral consideration, human groups are at risk of being compared with nonhuman animals and thus treated in unethical ways, as some Posthumanists and Ecofeminists concerned with antispeciesism have long been pointing out. Reading *Jurassic World* from a posthumanist perspective means acknowledging that the Human that the park stands for is a fragile construction, subject to the vulnerabilities of its own flesh. This Human, which is "used to being the cat", as Dr. Wu said, stands for the idea that humans will always be not just at the top of the food chain, but also in charge of the world's natural resources and the other creatures. Conversely, the film shows how this idea is deeply wrong and places human species within its actual position: in the enmeshment of lives on the planet, with vulnerable bodies that need to be accurately protected (though not unrealistically sanctified over the other animals), and with the capacity of empathy and thus of ecological and antispeciesist awareness.

2.2.3. Companion Species and Empathy in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*

The events in *Jurassic World* continue in *Fallen Kingdom*. The film opens with a debate on whether dinosaurs should be rescued from Isla Nublar, where a volcano is about to erupt, and taken care of by humans, since they were the ones who brought them to life and placed them there. The BBC news that covers the demonstrations calls it "an animal rights issue of our time". Bayona's film provides a more profound depiction of Blue's character,

who is described as belonging to "the second most intelligent species on the planet", while also displaying human traits like empathy or the capacity of bonding: Khapaeva reckons that "although she is shown killing people, she is viewed as heroic" (2020: 28). As I explained in the previous section, Owen and Claire are recruited by Lockwood to go back to the island to rescue the dinosaurs, together with a group of mercenaries hired by Eli Mills, who, as we soon learn, is only interested in recovering dinosaurs in order to sell them for military purposes. The 'recovered' dinosaurs are transferred to the dungeons of Lockwood's mansion and afterwards displayed in cages in an auction where military high officials bid millions for them.

At the same time, we meet Maisie, Lockwood's 10-year-old granddaughter who, as the narrative unfolds, is revealed to be a clone created by Lockwood.[63] Maisie is a cyborg in Haraway's terms, as are the dinosaurs, too: they become hybrid, liminal creatures, which challenge the certainties of Western ontology. As such, the girl's narrative runs in parallel to that of the dinosaurs, with explicit comparisons made during the film. The most evident one occurs when she has the red button to open the dinosaurs' cages at her disposal. Leaving the dinosaurs in the dungeons' cages would mean their horrible death by asphyxia due to a poisonous air filtration, but pushing the button would mean unlocking them and setting them free in the city. Maisie finally pushes the button justifying herself: "I had to. They are alive, like me". This "like me" implies not only their shared sentience but also their shared condition as clones: for Maisie, if dinosaurs are left to die because they are 'monsters', then what ethical stance would protect her in their place? This scene is a clear example of the debates that 21st-century monster fiction raises around interspecies empathy.

[63] It should be remembered that in *Dominion* the story reveals that Maisie was in fact Charlotte's biological daughter, but I will still analyze her character construction as a clone (at least in this film, in which nor the characters nor the audience know yet that she was not actually cloned) because it is highly relevant in her parallelisms with the dinosaurs and, therefore, the rapprochement that the narrative establishes between both species, human and dinosaur.

The film finishes with an open ending, with the dinosaurs running amok towards the populated areas surrounding Lockwood's manor in Northern California. Maisie's decision means, as Malcolm's voice-over announces at the end of the film, that "humans and dinosaurs are now gonna be forced to coexist. These creatures were here before we existed, and if we're not careful they're gonna be here after. We'll have to adjust to new threats we can't imagine. We enter a new era". This new era is a post-anthropocentric juncture in which humans will be forced to relocate in the species hierarchy and give up privileges on the basis of species that they formerly had. Khapaeva's reading of the film is that, "now, not only are the man-eating [sic] monsters considered to have rights, but they also have their rights to trump human rights since humans will likely pay for the dinosaurs' freedom by becoming their object of predation" (2020: 28).

However, the ending of the film is not a violent, gory apocalypse where dinosaurs start devouring humans, and the last scenes show dinosaurs and humans sharing some spaces, like the ocean (as in fact we already do with some nonhuman animal predators). The final conclusion is not that humans will become extinct at the claws of raptors, but rather that both will have to learn to cohabit, becoming what Haraway calls companion species (2007). A post-anthropocentric and posthumanist vision requires a redefinition of our relationships with nonhuman animals, starting with consumption. Whereas the ending of *Fallen Kingdom* is ridden with uncertainty around the idea of how humans and dinosaurs will be able to coexist, *Dominion* provides some possibilities for this coexistence (sanctuaries, restricted areas, advice for interspecies encounters, etc.). In the end, *Fallen Kingdom* reminds us that we are in fact already surrounded by predators, and that the idea of human exceptionalism is an anthropocentric fantasy. Humans (especially those who live close to predators, as in Australia or the USA) have already learned how to cohabit with species like bears, sharks, pumas or crocodiles, and part of this learning is necessarily connected to an unlearning of

anthropocentrism: humans can indeed be prey, and we must acknowledge our situation as part of the trophic chain and our bodily vulnerability if we want to avoid deadly encounters. Positioning ourselves as inedible is what may lead us to swim in areas where it is known that crocodiles or sharks live, or to venture ourselves in forests inhabited by bears or wolves, unaware of relevant information about these species' behavioral patterns.

2.2.4. Are We Post-Anthropocentric Yet?: Speciesist Traces in *Jurassic World: Dominion*

Dominion takes place, as a voiceover on a news report says at the beginning of the film, three decades since the events of *Jurassic Park* (in the 1990s), which would locate the narrative in contemporary times (the 2020s). After the release of the dinosaurs on the mainland which we witnessed in *Fallen Kingdom*, humans face a new reality: sharing the world with these creatures. Echoing the beginning of Bayona's film, *Dominion* starts with a TV news program reporting thirty-seven deaths in dinosaur-related events. If the previous film showed the danger faced by dinosaurs on Isla Nublar, this one shows the danger faced by humans now. In this way, the film confronts us with a new perspective: humans must learn how to "live safely among" other creatures in order to survive. While many of the large predators were captured, the remaining ones established themselves at Big Rock National Park in Northern California —which recalls the role of National Parks and wilderness areas in the North-American imagination about the wilderness and films like *Grizzly* (Girdler, 1976), *Day of the Animals* (Girdler, 1977), *Nightwing* (Hiller, 1979) or *Backcountry* (MacDonald, 2014).

At the same time, dinosaurs are being sold in a global black market that authorities try to dismantle by, among other things, granting the collection rights to Biosyn Genetics.

Dodgson, Biosyn's CEO, argues that "dinosaurs can teach us more about ourselves": he has ostensibly established a sanctuary in the Dolomite Mountains in Italy in order to study their immune system for pharmaceutical goals. However, as the film unveils, Dodgson is revealed to be actually developing huge transgenic locusts, which feed on all crops grown out of seeds other than Biosyn's, to take control of the world's food supply. The film focuses to a large extent on food-related problems (modified seeds, climate change, lack of biodiversity, nourishment sourcing, food engineering, animal welfare…), a matter which was not present in the previous releases. At Franklin's new job, a co-worker tells him that humans "are not gonna be around for much longer anyway. These locusts in Nebraska are about to wrap it up. They are eating the corn, wheat… basically, all our food and our food's food". Nonhuman animals are here directly referred to as "our food", although the danger is focused on human beings' well-being. In this sentence, it seems that removing nourishment sources from nonhuman animals is only important insofar as it would affect human lives.

Along the same lines, Ellie Sattler, who returns to the saga hand in hand with Alan Grant, is now an agriscientist studying the impact of industrial farming on the environment. She is called to analyze the locusts' phenomenon and comes to the conclusion that "we're three meals away from anarchy" if Biosyn is not stopped. She explains to Grant that the locusts are decimating crops and that "if they keep going there will be no grain to feed chickens, cattle… the entire food chain will collapse". Sattler refers to bovine animals as "cattle", so her remarks remain within the same anthropocentric sphere like Franklin's coworker, who called them "our food". Besides, Trevorrow does not improve his previous film's sexist gender discourse. There is a scene in which Owen is trying to hunt dinosaurs down in order to take them to a safe place. When he tries to appease the dinosaur, as if trying to make them understand that this is good for them, the scene is placed in parallel to another scene in which Claire is trying to persuade Maisie to do what she and Owen believe is best

(to stay at home, trying not to be seen). Here, within a narrative that implies that the presence of dinosaurs on Earth has forced humans to reorganize their activities, the concurrent scenes of Owen and Claire recall clearly-defined hunter and carer gendered roles.

Maisie has been secretly adopted by Claire and Owen so that Biosyn cannot find her. The discourse behind this family is as haphazard as the perspective towards nonhuman animals in this film. Although they seem to behave like a family related by kin rather than by blood, as Haraway would say, its gender roles bring it close to a normative family. When Maisie discovers that she is no clone but Charlotte's biological daughter, she exclaims "so I have a mother", which leaves Claire out of this categorization and downplays the family unit they had formed. By failing to endorse non-normative families, as well as by failing to acknowledge the role of speciesism and anthropocentrism in the destruction of life on Earth, *Dominion* falls in its advancement of an actually progressive view and, instead, risks reinforcing some aspects of the gender and species traditional hierarchies.

Concerning the presence of animal-rights discourses which were so openly brought to the forefront in the previous film, here the narrative finds itself influenced by antispeciesist movements as well. At the beginning of the film, Claire and Zia break into a livestock facility, Saw Ridge Cattle Company in Nevada. Zia is recording the operation and comments: "we are inside the illegal breeding facility. The children are kept in cages to keep the costs down, it's medieval". Further in the film, when Claire and Owen are in Malta following Maisie's trail, they enter an illegal dinosaur market where some of the animals are being used for illegal fights, as dogs and cocks are in real life. After some events unleash chaos in the market, Owen and one of Biosyn's hitmen, Delacourt, end up fighting in the arena, providing another scene where humans are placed in the animals' position enacting an underlying criticism of animal fighting activities. When Sattler and Grant reach the

Dolomites' sanctuary, they find Ian Malcolm giving a lecture entitled "The Ethics of Genetic Power", in which he states:

> Human beings have no more right to safety or liberty than any other creature on this planet. We not only lack dominion over nature, we're subordinated to it […]. According to you, the solution is genetic power, but that same power could devastate the food supply, create new diseases, alter the climate even further… unforeseen consequences occur. And every time, every single time, we all act surprised, because deep down I don't think any of us actually believed that these dangers are real. In order to instigate revolutionary change, we must transform human consciousness.

As with Sattler's concern about locusts and the food chain, here current discourses about food and the human impact on the environment impregnate the script. Malcolm calls attention to the fact that humans are not 'special' in that they do not deserve "more right to safety or liberty than any other creature", and that they are subordinated to nature and not the other way round, as anthropocentric, human exceptionalist discourses have often sustained. He brings climate change and the development of new diseases into his discussion, as well as shortages in food supply —matters related to animal farming to a large extent, although he does not mention so—, and it is important that the highlights how humanity has often refused to believe that these challenges were actually real, recalling negationist discourses about human impact on the environment. Malcolm also accuses Dodgson of carelessly "racing towards the extinction of our species", making this man a representative of destructive economic greed. Finally, his last sentence represents the general tone of the film: we must transform human consciousness in order not just to protect the dinosaurs but also —and most importantly, since the film keeps humans over many species, like those described as "cattle" or "food"— ourselves.

Arguably, Trevorrow's film maintains a welfarist approach to nonhuman animals and cannot help but be influenced by contemporary antispeciesist discourses in its rejection of the 'ego' model with human beings on top of the natural elements and its embracement of the 'eco' model, with human beings among the rest of the natural elements. However, it still represents humans at the top of this enmeshment of beings, as the film remains speciesist. On

the one hand, humans are located at the same level as valued nonhuman animals: dinosaurs. As opposed to the first saga, it is noteworthy that here dinosaurs are never killed by humans (in fact, only the Giganotosaurus dies, and it is at the claws of the T-Rex and the Therizinosaurus when fighting for the sanctuary's apex predator position). They are rather scared away with taser guns. The animals which are killed are the locusts: in order to burn the evidence of his environmental crime, Dodgson incinerates the room which contains the huge insects in Biosyn. The scene is intended to make us feel pity for the insects and to show Dodgson as a true villain. In fact, the audience is led to see him as an equivalent character to Nedry in *Jurassic Park*, since he dies in the same way: underestimating nature and nonhuman creatures, and being killed and devoured by Dilophosaurus as he tries to escape the havoc he has wrought.

On the other hand, as we have seen, bovine animals are still referred to as "cattle" and "food". Besides, Malcolm, in spite of his lecture, is comically used to loosen Owen's post-anthropocentric stance towards dinosaurs. He mocks Owen's explanation about what he calls the "human-animal bond based on mutual respect" by talking about how his dog tried to mate with his leg. Malcolm also laughs at the fact that Maisie has given Beta a name. Looking at Malcolm's attitude towards the characters who are more respectful towards dinosaurs, it is easy to see how Trevorrow's film falls short of its post-anthropocentric endeavor. The lack of understanding of the aims of animal rights groups and antispeciesism provides the narrative and some characters (like Malcolm) with a haphazard discourse regarding human and nonhuman animals in the biosphere.

The film makes efforts, however, to appeal to species guilt in relation to climate change and food crises, and to question the idea that humans are the undisputed sovereign species on the planet. When the Giganotosaurus, the Therizinosaurus and the T-Rex are fighting to death at the end of the film, Grant urges the others to escape towards the helicopter claiming that

"this isn't about us", and this summarizes one of the main aims of the film: de-centering the capitalized Human that people like Dodgson represent. The film ends with Biosyn's valley being declared a global sanctuary by UN decree, where "the animals will live there free, safe from the outside world", as Hammond had wanted at the end of *The Lost World*. We see a T-Rex family roaring in the forests. Right afterwards, Owen releases Beta in the woods with Blue. Although both velociraptors quickly disappear, Blue comes back to look at Owen in the eyes as if thanking him: human and dinosaur collaborate and communicate. Over the last scenes, showing dinosaurs and wild animals living together, we hear the voice of Charlotte (from a tape she made when she was alive):

> Life on earth has existed for hundreds of millions of years, and dinosaurs were only a part of that, and we're an even smaller part of that. They really put us in perspective. The idea that life on earth existed 65 million years ago is humbling. We act like we're alone here but we're not. We're part of a fragile system made up of all living things. If we're going to survive, we have to trust each other. Depend on each other. Coexist.

Although it could seem that the film advocates for a cohabitation of humans and dinosaurs, it still maintains the species divide by leaving the farmed animals' condition unquestioned. Breeding farms are depicted critically when victims are triceratops, but actual farmed animals are still referred to as cattle and food. As much as the film allows antispeciesism to soak its narrative, the references to animals as food and the mockery of posthuman stances by one of its heroes leaves the questioning of the species boundary unattended. However, the emphasis on companion species, food conundrums and welfarist positions towards (some) animals follows the line established by *Jurassic World* and *Fallen Kingdom* (and *The Lost World* and *Jurassic Park III* before them) in calling anthropocentrism into question, and bringing environmental messages to the forefront.

2.3. Bears: Discourses of Nature, Gender and Animality in Films Set in National Parks

2.3.1. Representations of Nature and North-America in Fiction and Nonfiction Films

Although this chapter is mainly concerned with fictional accounts of nonhuman animal predators, I take here a brief look at how the discourses of nature have been built in the case of the documentary genre, since it has a large impact upon the discursive construction of the nonhuman world that ultimately shapes fiction too. In particular, Werner Herzog's 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man* has become a classic in documentary and US studies, and it displays attitudes to nature that are relevant for this dissertation and this section in particular.

The natural world documentary genre concerned with nonhuman animals has often been criticized for their anthropomorphizing and the projection of social values onto the animals. As Stella Bruzzi puts it, a documentary is "a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other" (2010: 15).[64] Since documentaries allegedly depict reality as it is, it may be difficult to find the underlying assumptions being exerted upon the representation of the appearing reality, whose naturalness is presented as "nonideological" (Chris, 2006: xviii). This can be seen in the case of the French documentary *March of the Penguins* (Jacquet, 2005), which won the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 2006 and was internationally acclaimed.[65] Alexa Weik von Mossner (2018) sees *March of the Penguins* as one of the most notorious examples of anthropomorphization, framing the social life of penguins within the human nuclear family setup. Besides, we need to bear in mind what Frans de Waal (2001) has called the "bambification" of animals at play: a representation which neglects their actual cognitive and affective characteristics and depicts a

[64] For a deeper examination of the tensions between representation and reality that characterize documentary films in general, see the work of Stella Bruzzi (2010). For documentary films featuring nonhuman animals in particular, see the work of Cynthia Chris (2006).
[65] Incidentally, it was screened together with *Grizzly Man* at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival.

romanticized view of their behavior.[66] In relation to *March of the Penguins*, Weik von Mossner explains that this documentary shows "how easy it is for humans to get emotional about animals that seem to behave like (idealized) humans" (169).

Cynthia Chris (2006) has analyzed wildlife documentary films, unveiling the concealment of the films' own mediation in the nature images they present. By hiding, or minimizing, the human presence in the films, they aim at inviting the audience to feel that these are unmediated scenes of nature, "even as the very act of nature spectatorship underscores its distance and unfamiliarity" (71). In this sense, both *March of the Penguins* and *Grizzly Man* develop narratives about nature "that are simultaneously about human culture […] draw[ing] lessons about humanity from nonhuman animals" (Ladino, 2009: 55). This is what Chris calls the "zoomorphic framework, in which knowledge about animals is used to explain the human" (x). Chris argues that "the wildlife genre provides an illusory picture of a pleasurably ordered, harmonious, resilient natural world; that is, the comforting image of an eternal, 'natural', depoliticized and heterotopically whole world. Such an image offers respite from real-world fears and hostilities" (202). This is relevant for the discussion about *Grizzly Man*, since Herzog is especially keen on dismantling the idea of a romanticized nature. For him, nature has an "overwhelming indifference" to humanity, as he comments in the voiceover of his film. I will come back to this idea later on.

Let us narrow down the focus now to the documentary film subgenre which depicts predator-prey scenes. A recurrent meme on the Internet shows two pictures of the same person; one shows the person crying and the other one shows the person smiling happily. The caption in the first one reads "watching a bear eat a fish in a fish documentary", while the

[66] This also happens in fiction films like *Flipper* (Shapiro, 1996) —which was a remake of a previous homonymous film (Clark, 1963) which, in turn, began a TV series of the same name that ran from 1964 until 1967— which established the idea that dolphins living in captivity in sea parks, or acting in TV shows and films are happy because the shape of their mouths recalls a human smile. Images of 'smiling' dolphins still abound on the Internet and several products, from T-shirts to greeting cards.

other one reads “watching a bear eat a fish in a bear documentary”. This meme points at how our targeted empathy as audiences is shaped by the narrative that surrounds the predation scene. In relation to this, some authors suggest that an empathetic response might arise from our awareness of our shared embodiment and vulnerability in the face of danger. Regarding another popular French documentary *Winged Migration* (Cluzaud, Debats & Perrin, 2001), Bart Welling (2014) comments on a scene which shows a bird with a broken wing on an African beach, being chased by hungry crabs: “[h]umans share enough innate dispositions with birds—such as the fear of being eaten—to justify the observation that the terror we may experience on viewing this scene is grounded in biology, and not simply a by-product of certain cultural anxieties” (86). This means that the birds do not have to be anthropomorphized in order for viewers to experience an empathic response: being (however unconsciously) aware of our potential edibility produces “affective processes of emotional contagion." (Weik von Mossner, 2018: 173).

If seeing the hunting of another sentient being might raise this empathetic response, seeing a fellow human being preyed upon entails more complex matters in relation to responsibility (is it the nonhuman predators’ fault, or are they just acting following their nature? Is it the humans’ responsibility to know about the other animals and exercise caution when they are around them?), empathy (do we only empathize with humans, or can we understand some reasons —especially anthropogenic-based reasons, such as habitat invasion— why some nonhuman predators may act violently towards people?) and retribution (is the human being sanctioned for reckless, anthropocentric behavior? How do

we react towards ideas of justice that state that the animal should be punished —in general, killed— after they take a human's life?).[67]

Wild landscapes like Natural Parks, jungles, forests or rivers provide a different perspective from the scenario than urban locations for animal horror films. Whereas the latter involves an animal invading human landscapes,[68] in the former it is humans who trespass the animal territory, as shown in films like *Grizzly* (Girdler, 1976), *Congo* (Marshall, 1995), *Anaconda* (Llosa, 1997) or *The Grey* (Carnahan, 2011). Johan Höglund (2015) argues that "what both types of film have in common is the notion that the border that separates the animal from the human world is dangerously porous and that when violated it must quickly be re-erected. Predatory animals and humans cannot exist alongside each other" (224).[69] Concerning bears, besides looking at the discourse around nature built in the documentary genre, I will also look at their representation in fictional films —which might be based on real-life events— where humans enter wild territory, with the main example being *Backcountry* (MacDonald, 2014).

[67] We might remember here Plumwood's case, in which the crocodile did nothing atypical, and it was Plumwood who recklessly ventured into his habitat. The press which covered the incident framed the story as if the crocodile had done something evil and, in fact, the animal (it is unclear whether the one who had attacked her or just another crocodile who lives in the lagoon) was hunted down and killed.

[68] Although this should be problematized as well, based on the fact that humans have been increasingly occupying natural habitats, displacing some of their nonhuman inhabitants, which often produces unwanted encounters between species when some animals refuse to readily move away. This is the case of liminal animals, as Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka explain in their book *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011).

[69] Höglund adds a third category of films, which includes those taking place in liminal spaces shared by both human and nonhuman animals. According to him, in these films the audience is invited to realize that humans are an animal species among many others, navigating interspecies co-existence. Under this light, Höglund analyzes the recent reboot prequels of the *Planet of the Apes* saga. Höglund argues about the *Planet of the Apes* reboot "that these recent films eschew the allegorical dimension that informs the first generation of films in favour of a more direct engagement with human/animal concerns" (225) —a similar analysis can be applied to the *Jurassic World* films, by the way.

2.3.2. "Animals rule. Timothy conquered": *Grizzly Man*

Grizzly Man collects the footage recorded by Timothy Treadwell, an amateur environmentalist, documentalist and bear enthusiast mostly in the thirteenth summer that he spent at Katmai National Park in Alaska. That summer, as in the two previous ones, Treadwell took his girlfriend Amie Huguenard with him, and they camped in regions inhabited by grizzly bears, coming dangerously close to them on several occasions. In October 2003, both were still in the park, at a time when bears usually aim at accumulating as much fat as they can before hibernating. In that particular year, the lack of rain had made the bears' usual prey, salmon, quite scarce, so they were more nervous and aggressive towards potential sources of food. Besides, Treadwell apparently knew the bears of the region well (he had names for each of them, and some had, to some extent, become used to their presence), but in October most of them had started their hibernation and new, unknown bears had arrived looking for food. Ultimately, one of them killed and ate Treadwell and Huguenard.

The camera which they used to record more than one hundred hours of bear footage even recorded the sound of the deadly attack (the lens cap was still on, so there was no image recorded). This sound is described in Herzog's documentary, but it is never played. Herzog's film is an ensemble of Treadwell and Huguenard's footage, intermingled with interviews with friends, bear experts and people who were in contact with their remains, as well as Herzog's own comments. What is interesting in this documentary is precisely the contrast between Treadwell's sentimentalist view of nature and bears and Herzog's harsh comments on that view, which are made more manifest towards the end. Commentaries by other people in the film are also relevant to observe how the discourses of nature, animality and humanity were developed around *Grizzly Man*'s events.

Treadwell introduces himself as a natural-world hero and a kind of savior for the grizzlies. He presents a wide egotism and actually sees himself as a kind of special person that the bears have accepted, something which, as he is keen to make sure at all times, is not bestowed upon many people. He calls himself a "kind warrior", a "samurai", someone "so formidable, so fearless of death, so strong, that he will win". At some point in the recording, he states: "I have no idea if there's a God. But if there's a God, God would be very, very... pleased with me. If he could just watch me here, how much I love them, how much I adore them, how respectful I am to them. How I am one of them". This indicates Treadwell's own view of himself as a kind of godly creature set among nature to guide and protect the bears. His love for bears and his desire to defend them, which could be (and indeed has been) considered an antispeciesist stance,[70] is not enough to overcome his own anthropocentrism (Herzog states that Treadwell had created a story with "himself as the central character", not the bears), nourished by human exceptionalism. Treadwell wants to live among bears but, although he knows that he might be chopped into pieces, he cannot conceptualize his own body as potential food because he still sees himself (and Huguenard) as special, much more than flesh —hence his reckless attitude.

He is, however, fully aware that bears are dangerous animals and that, if he commits mistakes, "they will decapitate me, they will chop me into bits and pieces", although he repeats several times that he does not commit such mistakes because he has been accepted

[70] Jennifer Ladino interprets *Grizzly Man* as a narrative with "an approach to the natural world that is deeply infused with human ideals of love […] bringing love to nature —and imagining nature loving us in return" (2009: 56). For Ladino, this exploration of the possibility of interspecies love might help in articulating an environmental ethic that respects the worth of nonhuman animals. For my part, I align myself more with Chris's criticism of the generalized anthropocentrism of wildlife films, and I do not believe these films have generally been able to analyze their own anthropocentric ways of representation, and much less to change them. An illustration of this is the worldwide famous, Oscar-winning documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020), in which South African filmmaker Craig Foster allegedly 'befriends' an octopus, which is a strikingly evident case of anthropomorphism. In the words of Kayleigh Donaldson, this documentary shows that ""we desperately want to believe that animals like this can sense our love and reciprocate in some manner because that seems to be the primary way that humans communicate with the wild" (online).

into the bears' world. Herzog's filmic narrative runs in a way in which we often see Treadwell discussing the possibility of his own death at the claws of a bear: while the Treadwell we see is unaware of how his own life would end, spectators witness these statements knowing that they will become real. In the end, he says, "I would never, ever kill a bear in defense of my own life" and although this is what actually happens (neither Treadwell nor Huguenard carried any weapons). We are also told that the bear that killed them was ultimately chased and killed, so, in a way, Treadwell did go to the "bears' home" and provoked the death of one of them, as well as his own and Huguenard's.

Treadwell acknowledges bears as "the most dangerous animal on the face of the Earth", but argues that "they have been misunderstood", implying that only he understands them and they are thus not dangerous for him. Treadwell extends this idea of himself to the treatment that women bestow on him, which problematically links women to the natural world. He wonders "why girls don't wanna be with me for a long time, because I have really a nice personality. I'm fun. I'm very, very good in the... You're not supposed to say that when you're a guy. But I know I am. They know I am". Treadwell seems to be as proud of his abilities with bears as with women, and his statements about them are similar in his boast that he knows how to deal with both bears and women and his claim that he is performing well with both (behaviorally, with the former, and sexually, with the latter). He even insinuates that he might be attracted to one of the animals: "and I'll tell you something. If Saturn was a female human… I can just see how beautiful she is as a bear. I've always called her the Michelle Pfeiffer of bears out here".

Regarding his relationship with the natural world, Treadwell saw himself as an almost divine "caretaker" of nature, and "a miracle": "I love them with all my heart. I will protect them. I will die for them, but I will not die at their claws and paws. I will fight. I will be strong. I'll be one of them. I will be... the master". The ending of his intervention has a strong

significance. Whereas he seems to want to become one more within the bear group, being accepted as one of their kind, the last sentence reveals the actual anthropocentrism that Treadwell epitomized: he did not just want to be one of them, he wanted to "master" them. His idea of himself as a God-sent protector brought him to confrontation with the National Park Service, with whom he was unsparingly critical:

> I came here and protected the animals as best I could. In fact, I'm the only protection for these animals out here. The government flying over a total of two times in two months. How dare they! How dare they challenge me! How dare they smear me with their campaigns! How dare they, when they do not look after these animals, and I come here in peace and in love, neutral in respect. I will continue to do this. I will fight them. I will be an American dissident if I need be. There's a patriotic time going on right now, but as far as this fucking government's concerned, fuck you, motherfucking Park Service! […] Animals rule. Timothy conquered. Fuck you, Park Service!

Treadwell's attitude towards the bears is initially marked by an enactment of heroic masculinity connected to the image of a primal world. Through such an image, Treadwell represents the classical, Rooseveltian figure of the white American explorer venturing into the wild. However, as the footage continues, the gender attributes of his attitude are increasingly problematized in that he becomes sentimental, insecure (he calls himself "passive" and "bit of a patsy") and expresses his wish to have been homosexual ("I always wished I was gay", he states), in a display of volatile masculinity that Sara Martín (2023) reads as queer: "Treadwell attempted to combine the patriarchal discourse about the manly warriors in the wilderness with his perception of himself as a soft man (and in that alternative sense, queer)" (162). What seems to complicate the evaluation of his gender performance as both a manly explorer and a sentimental, loving caretaker for bears is that this recovering alcoholic seems to play "the role of chivalrous protector to restore his lost enjoyment of life and his brittle masculinity" (Martín, 162). Whereas traditional masculinity is associated with being emotionless and uncaring, Treadwell appears to be almost in love with nature. Ladino argues the film might be interpreted as a tragic story in which Treadwell's "(self-declared) inability to form successful love relationships with women is part of what propels him to

Alaska, where his unrequited love for the grizzly bears ultimately gets him killed. In this interpretation, love —a failed heterosexuality reinvented as a romance with nature— is destroyed by a ruthless, emotionless natural world" (2009: 71).

Herzog explains that "Treadwell saw himself as the guardian of this land and stylized himself as Prince Valiant, fighting the bad guys with their schemes to do harm to the bears". What he missed, however, is the nature of bears themselves. Sam Egli, a helicopter pilot, states in the film that he believed Treadwell was acting "like he was working with people wearing bear costumes out there instead of wild animals". Although he believed that Treadwell meant well, Egli is astonished that "Treadwell thought these bears were big, scary-looking, harmless creatures that he could go up and pet and sing to —and they would bond". Other people criticized Treadwell on the basis of his environmental views. One decries him as a "stereotypical environmentalist. Just as long as the donations keep coming, furthering the antihuman eco-religion as a noble cause, who cares about reality?" A comment from a hate letter reads that "a bear diet consists of liberals and Dems and wacko environmentalists that think the spotted owl is the most important thing in the world. We need to somehow drastically increase the number of bears in America, especially in such key spots as the Berkeley campus".

These statements make clear that Treadwell's attitude and story arose two kinds of criticisms. On the one hand, people like Herzog, who believed that Treadwell was not interested in learning about bears, nature, or in his place in the ecological world, but rather in building a romanticized view of it with himself at the top. Tellingly, Herzog greatly differs with Treadwell: "he seemed to ignore the fact that in nature there are predators. I believe the common denominator of the universe is not harmony, but chaos, hostility and murder". Whereas Treadwell idealistically thought to see "kinship" Herzog sees "only the overwhelming indifference of nature […] and this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored

interest in food". On the other hand, conservative views used Treadwell's case to criticize environmental and animal-rights movements as "antihuman" or pseudo-religious discourses, which should be censored, if necessary, violently.

Another point of interest in Treadwell's case is his racial and ethnic identity. As a white US man, the narrative he builds around nature and bears is completely oblivious of native populations who have actually lived among bears for centuries. A member of one of these communities, the curator of the Kodiak's Alutiiq Museum Dr. Sven Haakanson, explains in the film that Treadwell and Huguenard "died because he tried to be a bear. He tried to act like a bear, and for us on the island, you don't do that. You don't invade on their territory". Haakanson states that this was "the ultimate act of disrespecting the bear and what the bear represents" and that, although Treadwell thought he was protecting the bears, he was actually doing them more damage "because when you habituate bears to humans, they think all humans are safe. […] If I look at it from my culture, Timothy Treadwell crossed a boundary that we have lived with for years. It's an unspoken boundary, an unknown boundary. But when we know we've crossed it, we pay the price".

The price Treadwell and Huguenard paid was, indeed, extremely high. The forensic doctor who saw their bodies notes that "what I had were body parts. Just the visual input of seeing a detached human being before my eyes makes my heart race, makes the hair stand up on the back of my head". Their remains were part of a "detached human being", and we might say that Treadwell's story detaches the capitalized Human as well. Believing himself to be not only above his fellow species but also above nature itself, as if climbing upon bears to reach a divine position, Treadwell unveiled the risks of human exceptionalism. Herzog understands how his story "is not so much a look at wild nature as it is an insight into ourselves, our nature", although I would not say our 'nature' but rather our (deeply anthropocentric) culture.

Halfway between Treadwell's view of the bears, whom he saw as loving animals in need of his caregiving, and Herzog's vision of nature as brutally indifferent, the question remains, as Ladino asks: "how are the animals represented, not in terms of gender, but in terms of species?" (2009: 60). Departing from Laura Mulvey's 1975 seminal work about the male gaze in cinematic representation, Ladino studies the speciesist camera which "privileges an anthropocentric, often androcentric, way of seeing whereby nonhuman animals are depicted as humans see and understand them and often, perhaps more problematically, simply as humans" (60). Ladino, however, sees a positive potential in this —often inadvertently— ideological camera work:

> Speciesist representations of nonhuman animals also contain the potential to foster empathy [b]y breaking down the human-animal binary, these films remind us of our own animality while humanizing other animal species. This breakdown, I argue, encourages affective connections between spectators and their cinematic counterparts. In particular, […] witnessing a human's sincere attempt to approach nature with love, as in *Grizzly Man*, invites spectators to imagine species categories as fluid and overlapping. (61)

I do not side with Ladino's view of love as an affective power to enforce interspecies respect, though. She falls into the same anthropocentric vision that Treadwell had, since she sees the foxes appreciating Treadwell's presence, coming across as playful or even loyal to him, and she even believes the bears "seem to tolerate him" (74). Applying terms like playful, loyal or tolerant to wild animals strikes me as remarkably anthropomorphizing, which is especially surprising in an analysis about speciesist representation. An ideologically stereotyped or even prejudiced representation could, however unintentionally, provide a positive response, but the assertion that speciesist representations may foster some kind of antispeciesist or post-anthropocentric empathy seems incoherent and unrealistic though I grant that Ladino addresses the potential criticisms to her view for being "overly optimistic" just some lines after the states these ideas.

I side instead with Chris's opinion (which Ladino quickly dismisses) that Treadwell's film footage "says more about his desperate (and eventually fatal) alienation, his yearning to

jump species, to become one with the bears, than about the bears themselves" (205). While agreeing with Chris, I also share Herzog's viewpoint of nature as a radical Other whom some humans like Treadwell often approach from a deeply anthropocentric stance which they often mask as love or admiration (as it was the case in both Plumwood's experience in Australia and in *My Octopus Teacher*). Although it is true that many fiction and nonfiction films present nonhuman animals as being aggressive, ruthless and often evil predators —who more than often deserve some kind of revenge on the part of humans (at least to restate the usual order of things with humans on top of the trophic chain), this is not the case of Herzog's work in *Grizzly Man*. I believe Herzog only reiterates that bears are not, indeed, teddy bears, and that the human exceptionalism that often concludes in human deaths can take many shapes, be that recklessness, pride, or love.

2.3.3. Liminal Species and Human Invasion: *Backcountry*

In *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011) Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka develop a political theory regarding nonhuman animals, focusing on how we should interact and cohabit with other species. The part of their theorization that is of interest here is concerned with what they call liminal animal denizens. They argue that, whereas domesticated animals should be granted the category of co-citizens, and animal groups in the wild should be considered in similar terms as sovereign nations, there is a third category that is not usually examined: wild animals that live among humans, either in the heart of the city (squirrels, raccoons, rats, mice…) or in suburban areas (deer, coyotes, foxes…) —in short, a wide variety of non-domesticated species that have adapted to human environments.

Whereas bears are generally considered as wild species, the expansion of urban areas and the control over huge natural areas like National Parks have often brought humans and

bears together. A short time ago, in 2021, a video of a bear and two cubs entering a woman's backyard in Bradbury (California) went viral because, after the house's dogs tried to attack the bears, the woman ran towards the huge bear and pushed her over the wall, trying to protect her dogs (TODAY, 2021). In September 2022, another video showed a brown bear entering a 7-Eleven shop in Olympic Valley (California) and stealing some candy bars before the amused look of the shop assistant (SWNS, 2022). The Internet is full of similar videos of human-bear interactions, showing that the borders between wild and liminal animals are increasingly becoming more blurred in the case of some wild species. Donaldson and Kymlicka describe liminal animals as those with an

> in-between status, neither wilderness animals nor domesticated animals. Sometimes they live amongst us because humans have encroached on or encircled their traditional habitat, leaving them no choice but to adapt as best they can to human settlement. But in other cases, wild animals actively seek out areas of human settlement, which may offer greater food sources, shelter, and protection. (2011: 407)

Although they mainly consider bears within their theory of wild animals, Donaldson and Kymlicka also talk about liminal bears in contrast to wild bears (this also depends on the bear subspecies), especially in the US, due to the bears' occupation of several urban spaces, often due to human activity upon their natural habitats (for example, fishing, which leaves bears with fewer food sources). On the other hand, humans often share leisure spaces with bears, especially in National Parks and forests, and both species have learned to deal with each other's presence (for instance, delimiting the bears' breeding areas so that humans do

not approach them and pose all of them in danger, or installing exterior food cages to prevent bears from entering people's campers).[71]

Donaldson and Kymlicka explain that "liminal animals are often stigmatized as aliens or invaders who wrongly trespass on human territory, and who have no right to be there. And as a result, whenever conflicts arise with humans, we feel entitled to get rid of them" (408). But what happens when humans enter wild territory rather than animals trespass into urban space? It is not my intention here to present both spaces as clearly delimited areas that belong to either human or nonhuman animals. Although humans usually consider urban areas theirs, the truth is that other animal species also belong in these areas, in some cases having inhabited them before humans. However, it is interesting to consider how, whereas these animals have adapted to human behaviors and do not usually engage in reckless actions that could end up in their deaths, humans have often done that, and the reason underlying this attitude is human exceptionalism. As we have seen, the idea that humans are somewhat special and deserve a superior place in the natural world leads to the impossibility of conceiving humans as mere flesh. This idea led Plumwood to take the canoe alone in the Kakadu National Park, and it led Treadwell to camp in bear territory at Katmai National Park. And throughout the history of animal horror films, it has led hundreds of fictional characters to face gruesome deaths for not considering their own vulnerability. Let us consider this in the film *Backcountry*, which is also relevant for this discussion because the human-eating bear survives.

[71] Bear attacks (as alligators, as it will be seen in the next section) are actually rare. Black bear attacks outnumber any other type of bear attacks (including grizzlies), but this is due to the higher number of black bears in US territory (in fact, they tend to be less aggressive than grizzlies). Most of the attacks have happened in National Parks —especially in Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park—, near camping sites, due to the bears having become accustomed to humans and often breaking into campsites (or houses) in order to get food. Expert on bear attacks Stephen Herrero (2018) has reported that during the 1990s three people were killed a year in the USA and Canada, compared to the 30 to 50 people killed every year by dogs. Between 1900 and 2016, there were 158 fatal bear attacks in North America (61 in Canada and 97 in the USA). From the US figures, 71 were caused by wild bears, and 27 by captive bears (Crockett, 2016).

Backcountry presents a couple, Jen and Alex, who leave Toronto to spend a weekend at a Provincial Park, canoeing and hiking.[72] As the film begins, we see them driving from a crowded highway to an increasingly wilder area until they reach the park. This route establishes a move from a clearly-urban setting that the couple abandons to enter a natural space. Moreover, along the route we witness their couple dynamics: Jen reads a magazine test to 'rate' her boyfriend, arguing that Alex is quite proud and always gets his way. To counterbalance this, Alex states that he knows how to light a fire without matches: in order to re-establish his value as a partner, he makes reference to an ability for survival in a pre-modern environment. As the film unfolds, we see how Alex reinforces his masculinity through this kind of primal activities within nature that, nevertheless, will not save his life — due to, precisely, other actions that also work to reinforce his patriarchal masculinity. As they reach the information office, Alex refuses to take a map arguing that he knows the park well. Any fan of survival films will know by now that this is Alex's death sentence.[73] What is also relevant here is that the ability to orient oneself has traditionally been a basic pillar for this idea of the man who is able to survive without any kind of help, apart from his strength and intellect, so this action is deeply gendered.[74] Shortly after, Alex laughs at Jen's protection

[72] The film is based on the real events experienced by campers Mark Jordan and Jacqueline Perry, who were attacked by a bear in Missinaibi Lake Provincial Park, in the North of Chapleau (Ontario) in 2005. Interestingly, it was actually Mark who survived the event, whereas Jacqueline died (CBC News, 2005).

[73] This idea is the basis of many gags when men refuse to ask for directions and end up lost, often with female characters being exasperated at their behavior. At the same time as being able to survive without external help reinforces this masculinity, not taking control of the situation and being led by the male character —and complaining afterwards— also contributes to building the femininity of these kinds of sexist characters.

[74] This is shown in another 20th-century human-eating bear film, the survival thriller *The Edge* (Tamahori, 1997). This film holds a deeply anthropocentric and patriarchal nature which abstracts both nonhuman animals (in this case, the bear) and women in order to represent a patriarchal fight between two men, Charles and Bob, and the reinforcement of the heroic, rational, and stoic masculinity of the first. Both men are stranded in a National Park after a plane crash and they must find their way back while a hungry grizzly tries to hunt them down. In this film, the bear (as an epitome of the natural world which defies Charles) dies at the hands of Charles. This division between films where the animal monster dies or survives is a key difference between 20th and 21st century animal horror films, as it will be seen with the case of alligators as well.

measurements, like a pepper spray to chase bears away, or carrying a flare bomb, both of which will later help her survive.

Another key scene regarding these gendered behaviors happens when they camp in the forest and come across a park guide, Brad. As soon as Alex sees Jen talking to Brad —with a close-up view of his catch, a set of fish—, he drops the wood that he had been collecting with a big noise, in order to make himself visible and to disrupt their conversation. That he does so through dropping the wood and not through his voice is not casual, and it adds up to Alex's identification of his own position as a man (and as Jen's boyfriend) through his use and mastery of nature. Jen ends up inviting Brad to have dinner with them, and the tension increases as Brad challenges Alex. Alex feels undermined by his lack of a 'proper' job —as opposed to Jen, who is a lawyer—, and he is notably uncomfortable as the evening unfolds.

In relation to food, when Brad asks if they have any garnish to eat with the trout, Alex states he would like the vegetables, but Brad replies: "you know, Alex? Let's eat the potatoes", again challenging his position and, moreover, rejecting his preference for a traditionally feminized food source (vegetables) and reiterating his choice of a more 'masculine' and 'primal' meal (roasted potatoes).[75] The reinforcement of territorial masculinity continues as Brad stands up to urinate right next to them. The scene shows the urine stream before the disgusted look of Alex, who is clearly upset not just at the revulsion at the proximity of Brad's urine to their food, but also because within *Backcountry*'s narrative discourse, Brad is marking territory in their camp, imitating nonhuman animals' territorial behaviors. When Alex reports that they want to spend a relaxing couple of days, Brad sarcastically quips "you're really grabbing life by the balls, right Alex?" and goes on: "if I had a beautiful woman here like Jen, I'd want to take her to some spots that were not on the tourist trail". Tension escalates until Brad and Alex face each other in an extremely uneasy

[75] For an analysis of the feminization and masculinization of different types of food, see Adams (1990).

conversation, after which Brad leaves, not before he takes Jen's underwear from the floor, again defying Alex in an animalized way (first through urine demarcation, then through sexual insinuations towards Jen). Brad's defiance leads Alex to feel the need to reinforce his masculinity: he immediately grabs a beer can and takes a sip. Alex's behavior afterwards is focused on affirming his dominion over the park's natural setting. Even when he sees a bear's footprint, he does not tell Jen and continues through the path because showing concern and turning back would entail his feminization.

Eventually the pair get lost and Alex confesses that he has not known where they were for quite a long time. Moreover, he has left Jen's phone in the car on purpose so that she would not miss any part of the 'natural experience' by looking at a screen, so they can not call for help. Jen gets angry, calls him a loser, and Alex tells her that he did all that because he wanted to propose to her. They decide to camp and continue walking in the morning. Some hours later, when they wake up in their tent, Alex sees a huge black bear outside. The bear then attacks their tent, hurts both of them, and finally drags Alex outside and eats him alive. The scene is rather gruesome, but the camerawork does not engage in any heroic shots: the scene, like the film in general, is shot in a documentary style so that the scenes seem real rather than part of an action film. We can see the bear's bloody mouth in a realistic way — not as a gory monster but rather as an animal who has just eaten— and Alex's dismembered body in an uncomfortable but uncannily 'uneventful' situation. There is no music that contributes to the tension: only the sounds of Alex's screams, the bear's roars, the tearing of flesh and Jen's gasps. When Jen manages to escape, she sees Alex's body, which recalls a previous scene which showed the dismembered body of a deer who had presumably been attacked by a bear. The human and nonhuman bodies are thus equated as food for a predator. The ending sees Jen surviving and reaching the visitor's center, where she faints. The film seems to claim that Alex's enactment of patriarchal masculinity killed him. The bear survives

and, although the scene is extremely unsettling, the animal is not portrayed as a monster as it was in films like *Grizzly* or *The Edge*, but rather as a creature whose habitat was invaded by humans who were not aware enough of their own embodiment.

It is unclear whether MacDonald had Timothy Treadwell and *Grizzly Man* in mind when shooting this film (I have not found any interview where he refers to Herzog's film), but we might assume, given the notoriety of Treadwell and Huguenard's unfortunate end, that *Backcountry*'s director was familiar with it. Taking into account that MacDonald shifted the actual survivor (the man) and the victim (the woman), I see this film as a possible homage to Amy Huguenard, intertwined with a criticism of patriarchal anthropocentric views upon nature.

2.4. Alligators: From Expendable Symbols to Monsters who Survive

2.4.1. Crocodilian Species and US Symbolism

Although they can appear similar to the untrained eye, crocodiles and alligators constitute different species. They belong to the order Crocodilia, which appeared in the Late Cretaceous and which includes, besides crocodiles and alligators, caimans and gharials. In terms of their relationship with humans as their prey, they are apex predators which cause hundreds of human deaths per year, mostly caused by the Nile crocodile, possibly the largest human predator among wild animals, and the saltwater crocodile, both of whom kill more people than the rest of the crocodilians combined worldwide;[76] at the same time, humans constitute their biggest threat for hunting, poaching, and habitat-destructive activities. Most fatal attacks happen in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, New Guinea, Australia and the

[76] It is difficult to assert the exact number of deaths because many of the areas where these animals live are remote, impoverished, or politically unstable, making it more difficult to report or to study.

Solomon Islands (where the Nile crocodile and the saltwater crocodile live), with other areas in North, Central and South America or West Africa reporting fewer deaths.

Alligators are the most common crocodilian species living in the USA, especially in Florida, due to the weather conditions, where they cohabit with the American crocodile and the spectacled caiman. Lynne Kelly (2006) explains that alligators are less aggressive than the Nile or the saltwater crocodile, but the growth of human population in the Everglades area in Florida has brought alligators and people closer, therefore increasing the risk of attacks. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission explains that "alligators are naturally afraid of humans, but they lose that fear when people feed them. At least one of the alligators that caused a human fatality was fed by humans prior to the attack. By tossing food scraps to alligators, people actually teach the reptiles to associate people with food" (in Kelly, 2006: 186-187). In short, the fatality of alligators in the USA is related to their status as a liminal species rather than to their predatory nature, as would be the case of their crocodile counterparts.[77]

Alligators have become an important cultural symbol in the USA, especially in the areas of Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi, which have made it their state reptile.[78] The University of Florida sports team has been nicknamed 'Gators' since 1911, and their mascots are Albert and Alberta Gator. Besides, their annual football bowl game, held in Jacksonville, is called the Gator Bowl. But the alligators' symbolism is not exclusive to wetland areas: San Francisco State University also chose this animal as its mascot. In a letter asking the school

[77] Alligator's fatal attacks have all happened in the South (mostly in Florida), where they live in the wetlands and tidal marshes. Although there are an estimated 1.3 million alligators in Florida, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, attacks are quite rare (in fact, the probability of a resident being badly injured by an alligator is 1 in 2.4 million). Between 1948 and 2016, around 23 people were killed by Florida alligators, whereas 373 people were bitten in that time span, with different degrees of severity (McLaughlin *et al*., 2016).

[78] State reptiles are a state symbol (as are flags, seals, food, or sports) that some US states have chosen on the grounds of sharing admirable features with them. The most famous of them might be the timber rattlesnake, associated with American independence and American values of liberty and individualism. In current times, the timber rattlesnake features in the Gadsden flag, connected to right-libertarianism and far-right movements.

for a mascot, a student said: “it is strong and we hope our teams have strength. It is well-built and is steadfast, steadily moving toward its goal” (San Francisco State University, 2009).

Alligators also feature in the cultural imaginary of New York for a reason other than sports and steadfastness. Around the 1920s and 1930s, reports of sightings of alligators in the city —which are extremely rare— led to the development of one of the most famous urban legends featuring animals: the sewers alligators (there is even an Alligators in the Sewers Day in Manhattan, held on February 9th). The legend was initiated from the selling of alligator hatchlings in Florida to New York tourists, who would then bring the babies home and, getting tired (or scared), would then flush them down the toilet. Although it has now been stated that, even if this was real, alligators could not survive in the sewers due to the low temperatures and the presence of bacteria, the legend says that these hatchlings eventually grew huge, due to the unusual diet of rats and debris, and reproduced in the sewers, with some accounts even arguing that they became mutant beasts from exposure to waste.[79]

2.4.2. *Alligator*: the Animal as a Symbol

One of the most famous and important references to the sewers alligators was Lewis Teague’s film *Alligator* (1980). At the beginning of the film, we see an alligator spectacle in Florida, attended by young Marisa and her parents. One of the workers slips and is grabbed by one of the animals. After he is assisted by his colleagues, the show entertainer says: “we promised you gator wrassling, folks, and sometimes gators win”. Although this could have been a foreboding of the survival of the protagonist alligator, it rather constitutes a caution for

[79] However rare, there have been real accounts of crocodiles found in sewers in Paris, New York and Florida. In 1984, a Nile crocodile later named Eleanor was found in the sewers of Paris and transferred to a zoo and then to an aquarium in Vannes, where she died in 2022. In 2010, a baby crocodile was found in the Sewers in Queens, though scientists argue that it could not have survived to an older age due to the underground conditions. Finally, some alligators have been found in Florida sewers, where these animals often find refuge and food.

the public (both in the alligator show and in the film audience): we are treating nonhuman animals as commodities, and they might strike back. Craig Ian Mann (2015) explains that the film is an "important indictment of capitalist America", with Ramon, the protagonist alligator, being "an avenger of those oppressed by the establishment" (111). He argues that

> *Alligator* is a horror film about cycles of violence; it sees Ramon emerge from the sewers and eat his way to the top of the social food chain, only to be forced back underground. The final importance of *Alligator* is that it transforms the cyclical nature of urban legends into a metaphor for the plight of the social underclass, doomed under the capitalist system to repeat periodic cycles of oppression and revolt. (111)

In relation to the film, Mark Bould states that "like all good monsters, the alligator returns to destroy its creators" (2009: 39). In this way, the individual animal called Ramon is turned into a symbol for the disenfranchised. Ramon is a "vengeful and quite literal incarnation of the underclass [whose] ethnicised name just serves to further distance the alligator from the White Anglo-Saxon mainstream" (Mann, 2015: 113). *Alligator* distances itself from the revenge of nature subgenre in that it becomes a symbol of the ascent of the lower classes in the social ladder in order to end the peace of the wealthy, rather than a punishment for anthropogenic natural disasters. There is a scene where a man is arrested for trying to sell alligator hatchlings, in which he shouts "this is an attack on the free enterprise system, communist!", which reinforces the incarnation of *Alligator* as a critique of capitalism and a deregulated market at the expense of people's protection.

Alligator depicts hatchlings at several scenes of the film, especially at the beginning and at the end. These babies are bred in captivity and sold to families, some of whom later throw them away. The scene when Ramon is taken from his terrarium and flushed down the toilet is quite moving. The camera follows the baby through the pipes, while he is trying to survive in the stream. He is finally dumped in the sewers, stranded and forsaken. The film holds a critical position against another type of animal abuse: that of laboratories which, provided with stray dogs to carry out their experiments, then kill them and carelessly dispose of their bodies. It is precisely these experiments that makes Ramon grow so large: the dogs

are injected with hormones and then thrown into the sewers —infringing the regulations for disposal of experimentation material which the laboratory scientist claims to be strictly following— and Ramon feeds on them, reaching a length of eleven meters. David Madison, the protagonist policeman, is seen buying and keeping a dog at home, and agreeing that dogs are "cute" and you "kind of get attached to them". One of his previous dogs had been grabbed in the street, which we can assume was done by the laboratory's thug. The contrast between David's dog, who is well taken care of, and the dogs in the laboratory, contributes to the dichotomy between good, animal-respecting characters, and the evil animal-abusers, who end up being killed by Ramon. There is even a reference to livestock animals from the evil characters (that is, the laboratory workers and the politicians who team up with them, like the Mayor), since their experiments have the objective of enlarging and fattening farmed animals. In this way, the denunciation of animal abuse extends to slaughterhouses, laboratories and the entertainment and pet industry.

Although this denunciation and the human elite's guilt are clear within the film's discourse, Ramon is not allowed to survive. Whereas an alternative ending could have seen Ramon moved to a natural environment, or a protected reserve, the 1980s zeitgeist was not yet ready to allow the monstrous animal to survive. The film maintains the commodification of actual nonhuman animals that previous vengeful-animals productions like *Orca* constituted. As discussed in section 2.1, Ramon is deprived of his subjectivity as a sentient being who has been captured from his home, then flushed down a toilet, and who has had to survive in the sewers, in order to turn him into a symbol for human narratives and about humans. Although the film's discourse identifies with what Ramon incarnates (lower classes taking revenge on elites), Ramon is not granted any empathy or salvation whatsoever, as he is murdered at the end of the film. This shows how the animal is not seen as who he is, but only

as what he represents, in an anthropocentric reification of his body. Ramon is present, but only as a metaphor, while as an individual with his own subjectivity he is absent.

2.4.3. 21st-Century Crocodile Films: The Monster Survives

If we compare *Alligator* with more recent crocodilian films, the perspective becomes slightly less anthropocentric, in the sense that the animals are granted a subjectivity and interests of their own, and are not employed as mere metaphors of human issues. After *Eaten Alive* (1976), Tobe Hooper released his second crocodile film in 2000: *Crocodile*. In a plot which brings to mind *Jurassic Park III*, a group of teenagers hide a crocodile's egg in one of the protagonist's bags, which unleashes the crocodile mother's rage. The film becomes a hunt of the teenagers by the furious mother, who kills them one by one, with the exception of those who had nothing to do with the theft, and who give the egg back to her at the end. The crocodile and the hatchling survive too.

In 2007, Michael Katleman released *Primeval*. The film was inspired by real-life crocodile Gustave, famous for having killed around 300 people in Central Africa, especially around the banks of Ruzizi River and Lake Tanganyika. The film is set in Burundi, where a group of US journalists travel to film and capture the huge crocodile. The group comes across a warlord called Little Gustave and his militia, who later try to kill them after they record an execution by Little Gustave's men. The film is an expendable production with notable sexist, homophobic and racist references. Aviva Masters, who is the only woman in the group, sees her sexual life been repeatedly referred to, especially in connection to Roger, their boss, who then turns out to be gay. Besides, Burundi and their inhabitants, as well as Africa in general, are depicted as an uncivilized, rural place full of either sadistic warlords or superstitious,

uncultured people, which must be escaped from (which Jojo, a Burundian native who desperately wants to go to the US, represents).

Patrice Faye, the herpetologist who gave Gustave his name, complained that *Primeval* is "an insult to purists and herpetologists but, above all, an insult to Burundi. It shows the country in a bad light, and the people of Burundi are made out to be savages, barbarians, thieves, and murderers" (in McRae, 2008). Peter Hartlaub called the film a mixture between *Anaconda* and *Hotel Rwanda* which "failed miserably" (2007). For Hartlaub, the film "tries to show the horrors of genocide in Africa, then makes a point to kill off almost every African character in increasingly horrible ways". Although the perspective of the film is centered around the male US protagonists, and we could expect the huge crocodile to be slaughtered at the end in a display of man vs. nature trope that this cinematic trend usually depicts, Gustave survives at the end. Moreover, the film references several discourses critical of anthropocentrism, and humans are compared to meat on several occasions. I believe, however, that these discourses are a clear consequence of their time and its contemporaneous post-anthropocentric critiques rather than a conscious nonhuman-animal defense.

The film begins with Gustave dragging and dismembering Catherine Andrews, a Western investigator in Burundi. We are then taken to a news agency in the US, where the news about her death are being shown on TV as Tim Manfrey and his boss Roger discuss a piece of news that Tim released but turned out to be false. Roger mentions Andrews, to which Tim replies: "the one who was served for lunch?". This is the first reference to humans as meals in the film. Due to Tim's precarious position now in the agency, he is forced to go to Burundi to not just cover the news about Gustave, but also to hunt him down. He counts on the help of Masters, an expert in animal-related news, who tries to convince him that "this is a primal story: man against nature, life against death". In this quote, Gustave is turned into the symbol for the natural world, a creature that represents the relentless, cruel and irrational

nature that “man” [sic] is supposed to fight against in order to restore order, rationality and the usual food hierarchy, of which ‘man’ must always be at the top.

Once in Burundi, Tim, Aviva and videographer Steven meet herpetologist Matt Collins, who carries most of the nonhuman-animals defender discourse in the film. He does not want the crocodile to be hurt, as does the guide and hunter Jacob:

> Matt: I started this expedition to save Gustave from people like you. It’s a wonder there are any crocs left.
> Jacob: You may be grateful for my skills. We’re after a man-eater.
> Matt: There are more than enough human beings on this planet. The crocodile is exceptional, a creature of far greater value.
> Jacob: You don’t seem stupid, so you must be insane.

Matt explains that crocodiles have not changed much since the Triassic era: “why should they? They’re the best-designed killing machines on the planet. Apart from Homo sapiens”. This quote is heir to the anthropocentric guilt that was the main message of the revenge of nature trend during the 70s and 80s, in which humans were described as the most potent killing element in the planet, yet the nonhuman animal, who seemed to be exonerated of any evil because of his hunger, is ultimately killed (as it happened in *Jaws* and *Alligator*). Once they reach the village where Gustave was seen for the last time, the men are welcomed by a group of people who offer them food. When one asks what it is, Jacob replies in Swahili “all meat is meat”, which foreshadows the position of humans as flesh.

When Gustave attacks the camp, one of Little Gustave’s soldiers is trying to rape Aviva, which Gustave thwarts by sweeping the tent away and eating the soldier. This scene contributes to making Gustave more empathizable for the audience and can even provide the crocodile with a consciousness for justice, since he, of all people, preys upon the rapist and lets Aviva escape. Although he also kills innocent people —such as a child who enters the river in order to retrieve his doll—, the tent scene brings Gustave closer to the audience through his punishment of a sexual abuser.

Later on, when the group is seeking the first-aid kit for the wounded, Gustave attacks them, killing Jacob. After the attack, one of the characters expresses that he feels like "a steak in Queen Latifah's plate", in a body-shaming, fat-phobic comment that constitutes another reference to humans as meat awaiting their moment of being eaten. After another attack by Gustave, Tim talks to Aviva, recalling how Matt had reported that crocodiles often feed on carrion, and they realize that the dead bodies from the Burundian civil war had provided Gustave with his gigantic size and also with his taste for human flesh. The crocodile is excused for his behavior towards humans, and it is humanity —as a species, without making any distinction of class, race or nationality— who receives all the blame for the crocodile's actions, ultimately caused by human wrongdoings.

At the end of the film, some of the protagonists (Tim, Aviva and Jojo, as well as the dog Wiley) survive, as does Gustave. This film portrays the crocodile as another type of revenge of nature creature unrelated to environmental issues, but as a kind of punishment for human warfare actions. Humans are to blame for the monstrosity of Gustave, who is not punished and actually continues hunting people down, as the end credits state. The film suggests that it is not the huge crocodile who is a monster, but rather the people who promote and take part in armed conflicts. Although Gustave is still treated as a symbol, his survival at the end of the film, despite having killed so many people, including some of the innocent protagonists, points to the deference with which the animal is treated, a consideration that was not granted upon Ramon before.

Another recent and rather successful crocodile film, *Crawl* (Aja, 2019), presents the university student and swimmer Haley going to check on her dad at his house in Florida after warnings of a hurricane advise everybody to leave the area and take shelter. She finds him unconscious in the crawl area of the house, which is getting overridden by alligators as the hurricane produces massive flooding. Haley, her dog Sugar and her dad Dave eventually

manage to escape the house, but other human characters die (the state troopers Wayne and Pete, who go to the house to save them), and the protagonists' body integrity is compromised too, with Dave losing an arm to an alligator.

Although the alligators in this film are not regarded with sympathy, they eventually expel the humans from their former home —in fact, an interesting slogan which foresees the film's discourse is found in its theatrical poster, which reads "they were here first"— and there are no scenes of humanity triumphing over the beasts in anthropocentric depictions of strength, revenge, or dominance. In fact, the director Alexander Aja stated that other possible endings for the film included the main characters being eaten by the alligators, or Sugar being fed off to the alligators by Haley and Dave to save themselves, or even Sugar himself sacrificing his life in order to save the humans —which would have probably been, at least in terms of a dog's 'self-sacrifice', one of the most anthropocentric depictions of anthropomorphism in film history. However, the film's team decided to eventually choose the happy ending to elicit positive responses from the audience after the film's distressing events.

What is interesting about *Crawl* is that it illustrates 21st-century animal horror film perfectly, as a flagship narrative of the Anthropocene. As opposed to *Alligator*, or other 21st century films like *Primeval* or *Crocodile*, here there is not a single monster predating on the humans, but rather a large group of them who arouse the feeling of an all-encompassing, inescapable and daunting threat. The representation of monsters as swarms or multitudes —as happens with the zombie horde, as it will be seen in chapter 5— is related to a signature understanding of danger of the Anthropocene, influenced by the actual threat of such a global-scale issue as climate change. As Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles state, in contemporary ecohorror films, the problems are "the result of broader forces, represented not only as mad scientists, creatures, or animal attacks but also as far-reaching events or processes such as pollution, species extinction, or extreme weather" (2021: 2). In this way,

many of these films place the animal attacks in the context of climate change-related situations, such as the hurricane and flooding in *Crawl*.[80]

Monsters' agency in the 21st-century is often represented not attached to a single emblematic individual (as the shark in *Jaws*) but rather to an indistinct, overflowing threat whose monsters "are often only symptoms of a threat that exceeds their scale" (Tidwell and Soles, 2021: 11). The alligators managing to 'keep' the place (though unwantedly, since their aim was not to take control of the house, and they are actually victims of the hurricane too, with water having moved them from their usual habitats to the urban area— while humans have to escape reveals to audiences "the horror of knowing we live on a terraformed planet, one not terraformed for our benefit" (3). This realization displaces the anthropocentric belief that the Earth (or more specifically, urban areas) is mainly our home, with the other species being dislodged, controlled or even killed, and it brings to the forefront our proximity to other animals (including predators) and thus our vulnerability, which is often omitted through the discourses of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism.

This vulnerability is also emphasized by the ubiquitous threat of climate change and its effects. *Crawl* is, in this sense, a worthy successor of the revenge-of-nature trend of the 1970s, with the animal symbolizing a larger issue which is ultimately brought about by human activity. While not an antispeciesist film in any sense, *Crawl* stands in opposition to the 1970s and 80s animal horror trend, however, in that animals are not killed at the end in a case of anthropocentric revenge, as it happened in *Jaws* or *Alligator*. Endings like *Crawl*'s, in which uncertainty and the lack of human triumph over nature play a key role (despite the possible individual triumph, in the form of successful escape, of some human characters), are also typical of contemporary ecohorror. Simon C. Estok argues that uncertainty and its threats

[80] Another popular contemporary film which portrays swarm-like nonhuman animals in such climate-change contexts is *Sharknado* (Ferrante, 2013), whose title is quite straightforward about its plot.

is "the life-blood of ecophobia" (2019: 476).[81] In films where the monsters survive, or where the main monster dies but the ending shows another creature who has survived (for example, a similar monster, or the main monster's offspring, as in Miner's 1999 crocodile film's *Lake Placid*), uncertainty and unavoidability play a key role in the feeling of being witnesses to a hopeless plight that is reminiscent of the feelings aroused by climate change. This is, on the one hand, a clear illustration of the influence of environmentalist discourses —and, in its sparing of the nonhuman animals' lives, the influence of antispeciesism too—, but it can turn out to be detrimental for the actual responses to environmental crises. Tidwell and Soles warn that ecohorror, in fact, might risk reinforcing apprehensive responses to the nonhuman realm, or even enhancing a feeling of hopelessness that deactivates any call to action in environmental terms.

2.5. Conclusions

Looking at successful films that feature relevant animal species for US popular culture, (like dinosaurs, bears, and crocodiles) is enlightening for comparing the different representation of these species in, on the one hand, 20th century films, and, on the other, their 21st century counterparts. Whereas films from the 20th century often depicted the nonhuman animal as a monster who —despite being exonerated for their mischiefs, since the blame was mainly placed on the humans' actions—, were ineluctably killed at the end, films from the 21st century develop more sympathetic visions which usually had the animal killer surviving

[81] Ecophobia is different from eco-fear in that the first is an irrational, unwarranted and misguided fear of the natural world that is often aroused by mainstream products out of a will to stimulate audience's interest by appealing to morbidity and dread. As such, it is connected to other social 'phobias' like homophobia or xenophobia —Estok (2018) even argues that, considering its negative effects in the real world, it might be considered as hate speech. Eco-fear, on the other hand, is a rational fear of justified threats related to the natural world and, as such, if accurately represented in film, might turn out productive in their warnings about anthropogenic problems.

at the end. All in all, the films analyzed in this chapter show that post-anthropocentric and antispeciesist concerns, together with the awareness about environmental crises, are clearly impregnating contemporary animal horror films.

However, there is still a species divide in many of these films, which seem to uplift some nonhuman animal species (like dinosaurs) while keeping others still under human exploitation. At the same time, the fact that a narrative seems to have been —rather positively— influenced by antispeciesist and environmentalist progressive stances does not entail an overall progressive view, since many of these films still maintain sexist or racist rhetorics, safeguarding patriarchal or colonial worldviews. Let us keep this in mind as we move on to the next chapter, since vampiric narratives have proven to develop similar dynamics: whereas they display progressive instances in some aspects, they still maintain traditional or conservative discourses in other dimensions.

CHAPTER 3. Vampire Predators: The Presence of Veganism in Vampire Fiction

"He looks at you as if you're something to eat"

Mike Newton, *Twilight*

3.1. Introduction: Vampires and Human Prey throughout the Centuries

Nina Auerbach asserted in 1995 that "every generation creates and embraces" (vii) its own vampire. Accordingly, every generation's vampire has its own feeding habits, which reflect sociocultural tenets of its time. As abundant and relevant figures in popular culture, vampires have been built upon collective meanings which give sense to their main traits, intertwined in the worlds of sexuality, feeding and death. As such, they provide prolific indicators of the significance of matters connected to gender, race, class and species within the contexts of their creation. The three first analytical categories have been used extensively to explore vampiric narratives, reading the vampire through the concepts of patriarchal power, queer sexuality, colonial Otherness, or the extraction of surplus value. Their view as a species, however, has been rather overlooked despite the relevance that feeding and predation (two concepts impregnated with our own perception of what we consider edible and inedible), as well as with moral justifications of food hierarchies) have in vampiric fiction.[82]

[82] Here I am referring to the category of species from perspectives which are critical of Anthropocentrism and speciesism. The notion of 'species' within vampire fiction has been considered in some studies, but mostly to explore whether vampires constitute a different one from humans or not, and the implications this has in terms of gender or race, for instance. In my analysis, I make reference to species in connection to the discussion around nonhuman animals' oppression, which is the exploration which, I argue, has been mostly disregarded in comparison to other analyses.

Classical 20th-century studies of vampires in both literary and filmic narratives have generally chosen the lenses of Feminist and Queer Studies (Halberstam, 1995), psychoanalysis (Bentley, 1988), Marxism (Moretti, 1982) or postcolonialism (Stavick, 1996; Zlotnick, 1996). More recent analyses have also taken over from the perspectives of gender (Williamson, 2005; Pender, 2016), race (Onishi, 2013; Hudson, 2017), and class (McNally, 2011), and more critical approaches have been incorporated as contemporary scholarship has developed them. These include topics which range from urban landscapes (Piatti-Farnell, 2013), religion (Clements, 2011), or ecocriticism (Dungan, 2020). This latter kind of works, which are concerned with the environment and how discourses around climate change and the Anthropocene are inserted into fiction, often include reflections about the ethics of food, especially in connection to the impact of meat consumption on the climate crisis. This approach eventually entails the mention of nonhuman animals which are considered as food. Besides, when contemporary vampires are analyzed, the 21st-century trend of vegetarian vampires necessarily brings vegetarianism/veganism to the forefront. However, it is still uncommon to find scholarly works which focus on vampires from an antispeciesist perspective. Engaging with fiction from the lenses of antispeciesism would mean looking at the discursive construction of species, the implications in the representation of humanity and non-humanity, the depiction of nonhuman animals in the narrative, or how the predation and feeding processes might be mirroring our food cultures. My intention is to consider these issues looking at the 'ethical vampire' archetype developed in the 21st century, since its feeding values are relevant to the discussion of animal rights, vegetarianism/veganism and how these debates are reflected upon popular culture and what influence they exert on audiences.

I am departing from the idea of food as a nuclear part of culture developed by Food Studies scholars like Parasecoli (2008), who argues that the table is a battlefield where social,

political and cultural shared meanings are represented and disputed. The representation of humans as food for monsters, as it has been seen in previous chapters, has shifted throughout the history of literary and filmic fiction, ranging from children's bedtime stories, existentialist Romantic nightmares, horror films where predation is represented as a fight between absolute goodness and villainy, and, in the 21st century, a rise of less blatant narratives where the frontiers between good and evil are more blurred and monsters have discursive spaces to defend themselves. Vampire films clearly illustrate this shift, with examples of this evolution from the end of the 20th century and the 21st century such as *Nadja* (Almereyda, 1994), *Twilight* (Hardwicke, 2008), *Byzantium* (Jordan, 2012), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jarmusch, 2013), *Dracula Untold* (Shore, 2014), or *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Amirpour, 2014).

In this chapter, I first articulate an introduction about the eating habits of vampires, which have been evolving since the canonical literary characters that are the basis for the contemporary filmic creatures which will be the main focus of my analysis. Taking into account the first legends and literary works throughout Europe, as well as the cinematic vampires from the 20th century, I will provide examples of fiction which illustrate how the vampires' consumption of blood and the cultural implications of this feeding habit have been changing in the last centuries. From irrational, evil and powerful predators, vampires have evolved towards troubled creatures with —to a greater or lesser extent— a capacity for ethical reflection, vulnerable characters subjected to illness, or heart-warming cartoons whom children would like to befriend. As we will see, some of the characters are illustrative of this evolution and constitute predecessors for the contemporary ethical vampires, like Edward Cullen or Bill Compton. They will be explored through the analysis of their respective vampiric universes: firstly, Catherine Hardwicke's 2008 filmic adaptation of Stephenie Meyer's novel *Twilight* (2005), which shifted vampiric fiction and provided vampires with a

new vegetarian ethic; and, secondly, Alan Ball's TV series *True Blood* (2008-2014),[83] in which the politics of vegetarianism and veganism reached its peak representation during the first decade of the century. Other relevant films and TV series are mentioned throughout the chapter in connection to the evolution of vampiric predation and feeding.

3.1.1. What is a Vampire? From Local Legends to the Enlightenment

It is difficult to locate a fixed origin of the vampire in a specific context, since the early vampiric figure is constituted by an amalgam of legends with common features, such as their feeding from human fluids —mainly blood, but also milk—, or their non-living nature, which comprised different ways of being 'undead'. In Europe, a wide variety of superstitions with different local names, such as the *upir* in Russia, the *strigoi* and the *moroi* in Romania, or the *vrykolakas* in Greece, appeared throughout the South-eastern area of the continent, and were later transferred to Western Europe, where in nations such as France the interest about these creatures had been increasing during the 17th century. These superstitions became paradoxically more common during the 18th century despite the advances in scientific developments (including perfectioned anatomical drawings of the cardiovascular system, as well as tentative treatments like blood inoculations or the extensive use of bloodletting)[84] and the replacement of spiritual explanations of the natural world for lay ones.

Vampiric legends were collected by authors like the Benedictine monk Augustin Calmet (1746), who wrote an extensive study of supernatural creatures, *Dissertations sur les*

[83] Adapted from Charlaine Harris's *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* novel series (2001-2013). Harris's saga encompasses 13 novels: *Dead Until Dark* (2001), *Living Dead in Dallas* (2002), *Club Dead* (2003), *Dead to the World* (2004), *Dead as a Doornail* (2005), *Definitely Dead* (2006), *All Together Dead* (2007), *From Dead to Worse* (2008), *Dead and Gone* (2009), *Dead in the Family* (2010), *Dead Reckoning* (2011), *Deadlocked* (2012) and *Dead Ever After* (2013). After the TV series success, it was renamed as the *True Blood Series*.

[84] Bloodletting consisted in the extraction of blood from an ill patient in order to treat different conditions. They were mainly performed by barbers or surgeons, employing tools like syringes or scarificators, and often leeches, a parasitic worm which feeds on the blood of their hosts.

apparitions des anges, des démons & des esprits et sur les revenans et vampires de Hongrie, de Boheme, de Moravie & de Silesie (1746), which included an anthology of alleged vampiric apparitions and established their two common fundamental traits —their resurrection and thirst for blood—, unifying and popularizing the figure as a revived predator. In 1764, an entry on vampires appeared in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, where he used the vampire as an umbrella metaphor for all the wrongs he saw in the world, including religion, usury, or profiteering. Before Karl Marx claimed that capital was vampire-like, living only by sucking living labor, in his 1867 magnum opus *Das Kapital*, Voltaire had also explained that religious and usurer institutions fed on the blood of people through their corrupt structures. As in Marx's case, as well as further Marxist authors, Voltaire alluded to vampiric feeding as a representation of social ills, inaugurating the trend of using the character and its thirst in a metaphorical way.

3.1.2. Romantic Vampires and European Fiction

The interest in vampires increased in the 19th century in Europe due to the Romantic appetite for the mysterious and the horrific as a cultural reaction to the Enlightenment's rationalism. The characters in vogue at this time were cultivated spirits driven by their emotions, and the vampire fit well in that description. The vampiric creatures of this period were mainly Orientalized, seductive and troubled beings who fed on the blood of deceived humans, as in Gottfried August Bűrger's poem "Lenore" (1774), or Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), and "Christabel" (1816). The vampire-like character, Geraldine, in "Christabel" illustrates how the relevance and impact of these trends made them last throughout the whole 19th century, influencing later important works like Sheridan Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1872). The feeding ways of these vampires

were treacherous and dimmed, veiling connotations of homosexual desire and, as such, constituting a reflection of the fears of their time: in particular, the Victorian anxieties around unrestrained and aggressive female sexuality (Clements, 2011).

The century witnessed the publication of several works which incorporated folkloric traditions and legends, characters which became archetypical (also in terms of the characteristics of their feeding processes), and texts which often kept a dialogue with one another. In England, John Polidori published the short story "The Vampyre" in 1819. Inspired by Lord Byron (and wrongly attributed to him), it became the first vampire story in English prose and it inspired subsequent publications (especially short stories) throughout Europe, by authors like Charles Nodier, Guy de Maupassant, or Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoi. Reaching the peak of this tradition at the end of the century, Bram Stoker published *Dracula* in 1897. Besides, between 1845 and 1847, the series of penny dreadfuls titled *Varney the Vampire*, created by James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest, conquered the public with the adventures of a vampire whose features (the fangs, the two round tiny wounds left in his victims' neck, his hypnotic powers or his otherworldly strength) would settle the Victorian archetype. Varney also showed early traits that would be taken over by contemporary vampires, such as the ability to survive in daylight or the indifference to garlic and crosses.[85] More importantly, he was a forerunner of the archetype of the sympathetic vampire: he still preyed on humans, but also felt mournful about it. This troubled feeling was generally absent during 20th-century film and TV, which focused on the vampire as an evil antagonist of the human, although with notable exceptions like Countess Zaleska in the film *Dracula's Daughter* (Hillyer, 1936), Barnabas Collins in the TV series *Dark Shadows*

[85] Despite the ubiquitous idea that traditional vampires' inability to survive in the daylight is one of their fundamental features, it should be remembered that Dracula could walk under the sun. Victoria Nelson (2012) points out that "the sun as destroyer of vampires was a twist added in twentieth-century movie versions" (123). Specifically, it appeared in *Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie Des Grauens* (Murnau, 1922).

(Curtis, 1966-1971), or Louis de Pointe du Lac in Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994, based on Anne Rice's 1976 eponymous novel.). Troubled vampires would have to wait to reach their peak until the end of the century.

3.1.3. 20th-Century Cinematic Vampires: the Diversification of an Archetype

Once the 20th century began, the literary manifestations of the vampire were joined by cinematic works, usually inspired in plays. From the German film *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, (Murnau, 1922), an illegal adaptation of *Dracula*, to the Universal's *Dracula* film series which began with *Dracula* (Browning, 1931), to Terence Fisher's Hammersmith Studios *Dracula* (1958), as well as dozens of films which included Stoker's character until the end of the century, vampires featured characteristics similar to the villain's, although directors adapted them to their sociocultural contexts. As David Remartínez states in his compendium of vampires through the lenses of pop culture, "until the 70s, all vampires resembled Count Dracula" (2021: 31, my translation). The date for this change of the vampiric character coincides with the beginning of the approaches centered around the rights of nonhuman animals, including the appearance of the Oxford Group in the 60s, whose common idea was to develop a theory of moral philosophy concerning nonhuman animals; or the publication of *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975), the foundational text which would configure the trend of antispeciesism within philosophical theory and other areas like

literature, cinema, and popular culture.[87] Vampires, who had until that moment found a nemesis in the rectitude and rationality of a man like Abraham Van Helsing from *Dracula* — representing the capitalized Subject that postmodernity theories from the last decades of the 20th century aimed at deconstructing— would see their dietary habits and their position as Others analyzed and altered within this sociocultural juncture.

At the end of the 20th century, the vampire was turned into characters as diverse as the Count Von Count of *Sesame Street*'s (Ganz Cooney & Morissette, 1969), who taught math to children from the 4th season of the series (1972) onward; Ozzy Osbourne, leader of the heavy metal band Black Sabbath, who imitated the aesthetics of vampirism in their shows; or an ice cream called 'Dracula' created by the Spanish brand Frigo in 1977, which was black outside, like the Count's cape, and red as blood inside. As Remartínez argues, the vampire underwent a transformation influenced by pop culture: it was stripped of its classical characteristics, decontextualized and turned into a commodified element with radically different meanings. At the same time, vampires were established as cult characters by Anne Rice's best-selling saga *The Vampire Chronicles*, which began with *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and was followed by twelve other volumes and two filmic adaptations —the blockbuster *Interview with the Vampire* (Jordan, 1992), and the less-successful *Queen of the Damned* (Rymer, 2002). Rice carved her Lestat de Lioncourt from the Romantic vampiric archetype of Polidori's Lord Ruthven: cultivated, attractive, and ruthlessly cruel. On the opposite side, his rival Louis de Pointe du Lac incarnated another Romantic ideal: that of the beautiful young

[87] The influence of antispeciesist theory, as I stated in the introduction, is my point of departure for this cultural change, but other scholars suggest other theoretical contributions that, in their view, shaped the new representations of the vampire at the end of the 20th century. Susan Chaplin (2017), for instance, connects what she calls the "postmillennial vampire" to René Girard's (2005) theory of sacrifice. Emma Somogyi and Mark Ryan (2013), on their part, believe that the shift from evil to kind vampires had to do with filmic attempts to appeal to youth culture, introducing attractive, young and rebellious vampires, as in *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, 1987). I believe these are insufficient explanations, however, for the huge cultural shift that impacted monsters in general and vampires in particular, as well as the major presence that food issues and food ethics had in these 21st-century narratives. For me, this shift is necessarily connected to a questioning of anthropocentrism and the species divide, which leads to challenging notions of edibility/inedibility and food hierarchies.

man tormented by his destiny. Louis is bitterly anguished when he commits to the vampiric feeding expectations and is always troubled by his condition. In fact, he starts his vampiric life preying on nonhuman animals (anticipating the 21st-century 'vegetarian' characters), although he eventually surrenders to his cravings for human blood.

The process of 'popculturation' and reification of the vampire culminated in more films from the 80s like *Fright Night* (Holland, 1985), *Near Dark* (Bigelow, 1987), or *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, 1987), in which vampires are younger, appear to be prey at the same time as hunters, and often were characters of comedy as well as horror.[88] The British animated TV series for children *Count Duckula* (Cosgrove and Hall, 1988) introduced a vegetarian vampire duck whose reincarnation, as stated in the opening credits, "did not run according to plan": ketchup was used instead of blood, which caused the vampire duck to crave salads rather than people. The decade's changes were not totally ubiquitous, however, and ethical and 'vegetarian' vampires would have to wait until the next century to be the predominant cultural archetype. Although vampires became nicer characters in the figures of Count Von Count or Louis de Pointe du Lac, there were other equally successful filmic products which still portrayed the vampire as the evil villain it used to be. One of the most significant was the immensely popular TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997-2003), whose teen protagonist fights vampires and other creatures to keep her town safe.

The 80s suffered a blood-related crisis which was more pressing than vampirism: the AIDS epidemic. The anxiety about contamination had an impact on this subgenre of fiction in which blood has such an important role, and the vampires of this period are often portrayed as ill and vulnerable because of blood infections, while also becoming, in some narratives, a potential cure for disease. These kinder, often powerless or helpless creatures constituted a

[88] Still, comedy vampire productions usually present the fanged character as a wicked villain who often manages to get their human victim, as in *Love at First Bite* (Dragoti, 1979) or *Vampire's Kiss* (Bierman, 1989).

link between the 20th and 21st centuries, moving from the wicked, unbeatable antagonist towards the ethical vampire.[90] Within this trend, the once immortal and unassailable creatures now were depicted as vulnerable to destruction, which produced narratives where vampires were subject to protection, even as a kind of endangered species.[91] These ill vampires pointed to renewed directions in the representation of the monsters and their prey: the archetype of the empathetic and vulnerable vampire became increasingly common and vampires and humans came closer in their relationships, communication and capacities for reciprocal sympathy; the former absolute villain was becoming less of a threat and more of a fellow citizen.

Nonetheless, as a counterpart of these stories of vulnerability and interspecies empathy, horror came back avidly in the last decade of the 20th century. David Skal (1993) argues that this was influenced by three releases from 1991: Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*, Jonathan Demme's film *The Silence of the Lambs* (based on 1988 Thomas Harris's homonymous novel), and James Cameron's film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Despite their violent behavior, Patrick Bateman, Hannibal Lecter and the Terminator became pop figures whose reception by audiences went beyond being mere criminals which the public wanted to

[90] Although not a filmic example, a relevant work in this sense is Poppy Z. Brite's 1992 novel *Lost Souls*. See Chaplin (2017) for a detailed analysis of Brite's novel in connection to the 1980s and 1990s AIDS crisis, and how this text contributed to the kind and vulnerable vampire archetype. Chaplin's chapter, besides, sets this novel as an anticipation of *True Blood*'s depiction of blood as a commodity.

[91] Ken Gelder (2012) has also noted that contemporary vampires are often portrayed as endangered species rather than individual predators, as it was the case in traditional representations. This idea of vulnerable vampires who might be subject to protective measures would be taken over in the following century in *True Blood*, mirroring political legislation around LGBTIQ+ rights. The trend of vulnerability has continued in recent films, exchanging AIDS for more contemporary concerns, like social marginalization, poverty and violence. This includes the film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Amirpour, 2014), portraying a female vampire in what seems to be Iran, who lives in a poverty-stricken context and takes revenge of men who abuse other women; the TV series *Vampires* (Jonquet, 2020), where racialized vampires try to survive poverty and exclusion in the suburbs of Paris, whereas rich white vampires control their community in the city; or the film *My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell it To* (Cuartas, 2020), where two siblings try to keep their younger brother alive despite his strange illness which can only be combated through the drinking of human blood. Here, the two siblings kill and drain innocent people, but the sad and tender atmosphere leads the audience to empathize with both the vampire boy and his doomed family.

see defeated. This type of monsters would influence the 21st century anti-heroes who earned the affection of audiences despite their essentially evil nature or immoral behaviors.[93]

As Remartínez puts it, "suddenly, the screen showed points of view which were unconceivable for the ethical conventions of our society" (58, my translation). These shifted points of views towards villainous characters were also a defining characteristic for vampiric fiction in the new century. Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) took this idea to its peak: while presenting a film as a supposedly faithful adaptation of Stoker's work (as stated in its title), Coppola and the scriptwriter James V. Hart introduced the topic of immortal love which is not present in the novel. He portrayed the Count as both a sanguinary human-eating creature, but also a sensitive man who wanted to take revenge for the suicide of his beloved. Like Mina at the end of the film, the audience seemed, if not to justify his crimes, at least to understand why Dracula acted the way he did, and perhaps forgive him in the name of romance.

At the end of the century, the absolute villainy of the Othered monster was no longer embraced by audiences, who preferred narratives which turned monstrosity and wickedness upside down and showed the other perspective of creatures which, while apparently being so antagonistic from humans, also showed us a part of our culture which we had not been so keen to confront. This included our ways of consumption and our relationship towards our inferiorized 'prey': nonhuman animals.

[93] This also included TV series characters like the mafia leader Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*; Chase, 1999-2007), the serial killer Dexter Morgan (*Dexter*; Manos Jr., 2006-2013), the drug-dealer Walter White (*Breaking Bad*; Gilligan, 2008-2013), the violent mugger Omar Little (*The Wire*; Simon, 2000-2008), or the devil himself (*Lucifer*; Kapinos, 2016-2021).

3.1.4. 21st-Century's Cultural Theories around the Vampire's Diet

As we have seen, in general terms, the vampire's feeding habits have been analyzed as metaphors of gender, class or race due to its significance in terms of power enforcement, subjugation and incorporation. Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2013) has explored aspects that had not been so commonly looked at in the previous body of work regarding vampire fiction, including genetics, corporeality, technologies, rituals or geography. However, the scholarly analyses of the implications of the predation process as a mirror of our actual eating habits are still few, partly due to the lower interest in the oppression of nonhuman animals which we use as food (compared the oppression of human groups).

Regarding consumption, Food Studies has become a theoretical approach of interest, though, as it has been seen in previous sections, it does not always imply an antispeciesist approach that calls the consumption of nonhuman animals into question. Within this area, vampires have been analyzed at the intersection of food and colonialism by Stephen Arata (1990), J.E.D Stavick (1996) and Susan Zlotnick (1996). These authors identify Dracula as an exotic invader of the West coming in from the East, a view which challenges the status quo in the colonizer West, and which must be defeated by the Victorians in order to restore their power.[94] Stavick argues that Dracula jeopardizes the patriarchal structure of imperial England by threatening to turn English people (especially women) into their prey:

> When Dracula invades England and overpowers the dominating patriarchal system by biting and claiming the women, consuming their blood, and colonizing the land, the Victorian men, who are accustomed to being the consumers, must recognize that they have become the consumed commodity of Dracula colonization. […] England has […] become the colonized by the "Other," in the form of Dracula. England—Western culture—must overpower and destroy Dracula in order to occupy the highest level of the meat hierarchy: consumer of Others. (24)

[94] In relation to exoticism, it is relevant to point out Isabel C. Pinedo's 1997 theory about horror film cultural reception. Pinedo explains that Count Dracula illustrated the kind of exotic horror that was customary in monster film up until the 1960s (classical Hollywood villains before that decade came from places outside the USA, including Transylvania, Egypt or Paris). After Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), horror was brought back home, embodied in the 70s and 80s next-door serial killers (such as Michael Myers, Leatherface, or Freddy Krueger) from the slasher film trend. Vampires after this era also moved from Central Europe to the USA.

We must note in this account the importance of consuming Others and of the meat hierarchy. Stavick locates his analysis of *Dracula* in the theoretical realm of carnophallogocentrism described by Jacques Derrida (1995) as one of the basis of the patriarchal structure.[95] According to this, the conflict between Count Dracula and Jonathan Harker and his colleagues is not a fight of evil against good, but rather a struggle for patriarchal and colonial power. Stavick points out that both Dracula and Harker "consume creatures for their own sustenance and power; both are carnivores. The trouble —or conflict— between Harker and his friends, and Count Dracula is that Dracula consumes at a 'higher', taboo level of carnivorousness than do Harker and the other Victorians" (23). This taboo is the consumption of humans, which is beyond the scope of accepted carnivorism for the Victorians because it implies turning them into the consumable commodities.

Stavick's and Zlotnick's analyses are forerunners of more recent works connecting *Dracula* and other vampiric narratives with Food Studies and Critical Animal Studies, such as Parasecoli's *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture* (2008), Laura Wright's *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror* (2015), or Carol Senf's chapter "Blue Books, Baedekers, Cookbooks, and the Monsters in the Mirror: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (2019). Regarding vampires in particular, Parasecoli places value on their disruption of boundaries and the relationality of their feeding needs, which constitute key elements of the posthuman readings of vampiric fiction. Wright, as it will be seen in the next section, delves into the history of vegetarianism and veganism as both an identity category and a cultural practice, in order to analyze how it has been represented within Western culture in general and in post-9/11 US culture in particular. Senf, on her part, has focused on the

[95] Derrida established logocentrism as one of the basis of Western culture, that is, the predominant place of reason and rationality in philosophical thought. Later, he added the relevance of 'meat' in reference to the sacrificial hierarchical structure that posed humans over the rest of the animals and the natural world, based on human exceptionalism (precisely due to the allegedly-exclusive possession of rationality by human beings).

discriminatory species discourse which underlies the predatory nature of Stoker's character, concluding that "Dracula's willingness to treat humans as livestock confronts me with the uncomfortable realization that, while I don't want to be eaten, I still consume meat even if I neither hunt it or [sic] look into its eyes" (80). Departing from these ideas, I will now analyze particular instances of predation upon humans and vegetarian/vegan discourses in two successful 21st-century vampiric narratives: the *Twilight* saga and the series *True Blood*.

3.2. *Twilight*: Vegetarianism and Patriarchal Ecomasculinities

3.2.1. The Success and Influence of the Cullens

As we have seen, before the novels in the saga created by Meyer (*Twilight*, 2005; *New Moon*, 2006; *Eclipse*, 2007; and *Breaking Dawn*, 2008),[96] vampires were seldom considered as empathetic beings able to restrain from their blood-thirsty instincts and kind vampires like Louis de Pointe du Lac were examples which did not establish a mainstream trend. Although the end of the 20st century witnessed some attempts to rethink the villainy of the vampire, the success of TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997-2003) at the turn of the 21st century proved that spectators were still keen to witness a human fighting against the forces of darkness, and were not so interested in taking the vampires' point of view into consideration. The only vampire with whom spectators could identify in the show was Angel, who had been cursed and was not able to feed off humans, and lived in isolation from the rest of the human-eating evil vampires. *Buffy* had a striking success, even becoming, as of 2012, the most studied filmic production within academic contexts (Lametti *et al.* 2012), even

[96] The saga had a later novella and two novels also written by Meyer: *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010), which focused on the character of one of *Eclipse*'s 'neofit' vampires; *Life and Death: Twilight Reimagined* (2015), a gender-swapped version of *Twilight* with the characters of Beau Swan and Edythe Cullen, a human boy and a female vampire; and *Midnight Sun* (2020), which was also a retelling of *Twilight*, this time told from the perspective of Edward instead of Bella's.

before other influential works like the *Alien* film saga, the TV series *The Simpsons* (Groening, 1989-present) or the film *The Matrix* (the Wachowskis, 1999).[97] However, *Buffy* was, together with the film *Van Helsing* (Sommers, 2004), the last in the trend of successful productions where vampires were villains to be ruthlessly killed.[98]

From 2005 on, a different kind of vampire was shaped by the characters of Meyer's saga which dominated the early 21st-century's representation of these creatures. Recovering the archetype of the sympathetic vampire which appeared in the 19th century with Varney and which continued with singular characters like Barnabas Collins or Louis de Pointe du Lac, *Twilight* functioned as *Varney the Vampire* in setting some of the defining features of the period's character. If Varney gave the 19th century literary vampire its fangs or its supernatural powers, the Cullens provided them with the 'vegetarian' ethics which took over our century. Meyer's saga was an astonishing success: the four main books won several awards[99] and they were on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for Children's Series Books for more than 235 weeks. As of 2021, the books had sold more than 160 million copies worldwide and had been translated into 49 different languages (Vandenburgh, 2021). The

[97] Due to the amount of scholarly works about Whedon's series, there is even an academic field called Buffy Studies or Buffyology with its own journal (*Slayage: The Online Journal of Buffy Studies*).

[98] Another 21st-century US production which showed evil vampires (here their blood-thirsty nature was a product of a viral outbreak) was *The Strain* (del Toro & Hogan, 2014-2017), based on Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan's homonymous novel from 2009 (followed by the sequels *The Fall* in 2010 and *The Night Eternal* in 2011). Although both the novels and the TV series obtained generally positive reviews, the cultural impact in comparison to *Twilight* or *True Blood* has not been nearly as significant. Other Anglophone Western productions with a protagonist who was in charge of defeating evil vampires (in this case, turning them back to humans) were the Canadian TV series *Van Helsing* (LaBute, 2016), which, although it had five seasons, did not have the impact of ethical-vampire productions either; or the film *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (Bekmambetov, 2012), where the former US president was entrusted to eliminate amoral vampires, which was a box-office and review disappointment. A more recent failed example is the series *V Wars* (Laurin & Davis, 2020), where climate change provokes the release of a virus which turns humans into vampires and potentially leads to a vampire-human war. It was canceled by Netflix after one season. These cases suggest that post-*Twilight* audiences have had a close contact with ethical vampires and are perhaps not so interested in seeing them through the former lens of wicked antagonists anymore.

[99] Including the 2008 British Book Award for Children's Book of the Year for *Breaking Dawn*, or the 2009 Kids' Choice Award for Favorite Book, granted to the whole saga.

filmic adaptations grossed over $3.4 billion worldwide and beat records set by other successful sagas like *Harry Potter*.[100]

Meyer created a universe where some vampires reject feeding off humans and, given their biological need to survive on some kind of blood, decide to hunt nonhuman animals instead. Edward Cullen, a vampire, and Bella Swan, a human, engage in a romantic relationship and must face the problems caused by the vampires who do not want to give up on human blood.[101] The success of the saga and its filmic adaptations was such that subsequent vampires also joined the trend of 'vampiric vegetarianism', that is, the abstention from human blood, either replacing it with nonhuman blood as in the TV series *The Vampire Diaries* (Williamson, 2009) and *Vampires* (Jonquet, 2020); blood from hospital blood banks as in the film *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jarmusch, 2013); or synthetic replacements as in *True Blood* (Ball, 2008). Some contemporary vampiric universes are built so that vampires do not need blood to survive anymore, or that they can feed off humans without necessarily killing them (vampires in *True Blood* can feed from —willing or not— humans without killing them, and, moreover, this often brings pleasure to both parts). The 21st-century vampire, or "mainstreaming vampire", as Somogyi and Ryan (2013) label it, is in this way one that "passes as human, chooses to make morally sound decisions, becomes an upstanding assimilated citizen, works in the community, and aspires to be a husband to mortal women" (197).

[100] Specifically, *New Moon* broke records for advanced ticket sales, even causing some theaters to add extra showings, and beat a record set the same summer by *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Yates, 2009).

[101] Whether vampires are human or a different species depends on the narrative world created in each vampire story. Since the question entails matters as different as whether they have souls, whether they are supernatural and therefore not human, whether their condition is just a mutation in a still-human body, etc., it is too complex a question to be answered here. However, for the sake of clarity, I will use both terms as if humans and vampires were different species —as opposed to treating vampires as 'mutated' or 'sick' humans'—, because I am interested in analyzing their representation in opposition to the construction of humanity in connection to the rhetoric division of species.

Meyer's vampires and the successive members of their species which appeared afterwards shared something that classical vampires radically lacked: kindness. As such, and following the lead of 20th-century characters like Count von Count, they also influenced the production of cartoon vampires for both adult and young audiences, who refrain from human blood too. These creatures had the chance to justify their behaviors and express their drives before audiences who would thus find it easier to sympathize with them, one of the characteristics of post-*Twilight* vampiric fiction. One example is Marceline, the Vampire Queen of the cartoon series *Adventure Time* (Ward, 2010), who does not consume blood: she feeds off the color red. In the song "House Hunting" from the episode S1E12 ("Evicted!"), Marceline states: "I'm not mean. I'm a thousand years old, and I just lost track of my moral code". This assertion is inserted in the shift of vampiric characters from creatures without any moral sense which audiences would despise, towards beings who, even when they claim not to have a 'moral code', are kind and cute, which makes empathizing easier for the audience.

Another successful cartoon production was *Hotel Transylvania* (Tartakovsky, 2012), in which Count Dracula owns a hotel for monsters where he also raises his daughter Mavis. All the monstrous characters (including classical horror characters like Frankenstein's monster, the Invisible Man, or the Mummy) are depicted as lovely and heart-warming: we soon learn that Dracula built the hotel fearing the humans' persecution of monsters, which caused the death of his beloved wife, Mavis's mother. The film was a box-office success, exceeding the expectations of its own production company and leading to two sequels which overtook its success, *Hotel Transylvania 2* (Tartakovsky, 2015) and *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation* (Tartakovsky, 2018). The latest release, *Hotel Transylvania: Transformania* (Drymon & Kluska, 2022) was less successful, partly due to complications from the Covid pandemic Delta variant in the US and partly, probably, to the exhaustion of the franchise.

In *Monster High* (Sander, 2010), an online cartoon series based on the homonymous dolls created by Mattel, Dracula's daughter Draculaura is a vegan vampire who even has hematophobia, that is, fear of blood. Mattel vice-president of design Kiyomi Haverly confirmed that "she's a vegan. She's turned off by meat. Girls could really relate to that because that's part of what they're thinking of these days" (in Ulaby, 2013). These examples show how *Twilight* shifted vampire fiction towards kinder characters and expressed the need for developing more complex stories behind the villains, both in adult, young adult and children fiction.[102] Besides, they also show the relevance of consumption and the presence of veganism in their contemporary narratives.

3.2.2. The Vegetarian Subtext in *Twilight*

Although Meyer developed the abstention from blood in all the novels of her saga, the vegetarian subtext reached its peak in Hardwicke's 2008 film adaptation of the first novel.[103] The opening scene of *Twilight* shows a rainy forest while we hear Bella's voice: "I'd never given much thought to how I would die". Right after, the camera takes an unknown point of

[102] This interest in rethinking villains also affected other classical characters like Maleficent, from Disney film *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi *et al*., 1959), based on Charles Perrault 1697 fairy tale "La Belle au bois dormant". The live-action film *Maleficent* (Stromberg, 2014) saw the formerly-evil witch turned into a fairy who had been hurt by a man and eventually becomes a friend and a mother figure to princess Aurora. Other rethinking-classical-villainy films followed, like *Cruella* (Gillespie, 2021), based on the character from Disney film *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Reitherman *et al*., 1961) (which was in turn based on Dodie Smith's 1956 novel *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*). *Maleficent* portrayed issues about environmental concern and ecofeminism, and *Cruella* included an awareness message about the adoption of stray dogs in its final credits. Although they are not human-eating monsters (moreover, Cruella is human), both villains could be connected to my work in their illustration of the rising concerns around the environment and the situation of nonhuman animals, as well as the new perspective towards previously evil characters.

[103] Although the rest of the filmic saga also provides fertile ground to explore the intricacies of gender, species and vampirism (especially in terms of the construction of the character of Bella and her daughter Renesmee, who is a hybrid that challenges the purity of vampirism epitomized in the Volturis family), Hardwicke's film is the one where the presence of vegetarianism is more explicit. Being the first installment of the saga, it is the most important in terms of setting the vampires' vegetarian ethics. This (as well as length and scope constraints) is why the rest of the films are not analyzed in this dissertation.

view and starts running through the branches as if it was chasing something. The object of the hunt finally appears: a deer. The camera chases it frantically until the predator (that is, the viewers) get it. There is a flash of white light while we hear Bella saying "but dying in the place of someone I love seems like a good way to go"; then the light shows Bella's face while she is picking her things up to leave Arizona, where she lives with her mother Renée.

This first scene is revealing of what *Twilight*'s narrative will unfold. Bella's voice overlaps with the deer racing for survival, and her wish to voluntarily give up her life for someone she loves is stated while we witness the deer's death (and while we, as viewers, enforce it, since the camera places us in the predator's position). As it is seen in the remainder of the film, Bella shows that she would give herself up for her mother (at the end of the film the evil vampires trick her into thinking that they have got Renée and that Bella must surrender in order to save her), but also for her lover: indeed, she will end up giving up her life as she knows it to become a vampire in *Breaking Dawn*.

At the same time, as potential prey for vampires, Bella is in the same position as the deer: both human and nonhuman animals are merged here on the basis of their embodied aliveness and the beating blood system which provides food for other creatures. The deer scene is not the only time when Bella is compared to prey and food in the narrative. James, Victoria and Laurent, the vampiric villains from the first to the third installments, often use expressions like "let's not play with our food" or "you brought a snack" in reference to Bella and humans in general. One of the key moral matters portrayed in the film, as in the novel, is whether vampires are morally justified in their desire to eat humans as part of their dietary expectations or if humans should be allowed to live, and what implications this has for several other questions, ranging from animal ethics to abortion.

As opposed to the novel, which does not make reference to the issue, in the film Bella is a vegetarian. At the bar where she has lunch with her dad, we see her ordering a "garden

burger", the brand name of a US company which sells vegan and vegetarian burgers. To reinforce her vegetarianism/veganism, she also tells her dad to "cut back on steak" and, later on, orders a spinach salad and mushroom ravioli in other restaurant scenes. At the bar, there is a cameo of Meyer, to whom the waitress addresses with "here's your veggie plate, Stephenie". The vegetarianism of both Bella and Meyer is not casual, and could be seem to constitute the link between the Cullens' ethical position about not preying on humans (located at the top of their 'natural' food choices, either because of biology or because of social expectations) and the humans' position about not consuming nonhuman animals (also located at the top of our so-called 'natural' food choices, deeply embedded in social customs).

At some point in the film, Edward's asserts that feeding off nonhuman animal blood "is like a human only living on tofu. It keeps you strong but you're never fully satisfied". Sophie Dungan has analyzed the statement in this terms:

> The analogy holds insofar as both animal blood and tofu are substitutes for the source of food that, respectively, vampires and humans are normally thought to depend on. […] In both instances, living and undead disengage from the hegemony of carnonormative and human blood drinking cultures respectively and seek nourishment from a source seen to be lower on their food chain. (2020: 43)

Twilight thus establishes a difference between good and evil vampires based on their dietary choices. Whereas the Cullens see humans as equals and actively decide not to feed off them, the antagonistic trio, together with the Volturis,[104] see humans as food, inferior to them and therefore have no trouble in deceiving, killing and even torturing them. Dungan explains that the Cullens' ethical decision "speaks to a desire to rethink typical relations between species that previously related to each other only as predator and prey (humans for vampires; animals for humans)" (49) and that, in turn, "their animal blood diet responds to the concerns and questions raised by the Anthropocene: the need to eat and therefore live and act in better, less

[104] The Volturis are an aristocratic vampire family who rule the vampire world, enforcing their laws and punishments (for example, if a vampire reveals the secret of their species' existence) from their castle in Italy. They are key characters in *New Moon* and *Breaking Dawn*.

destructive ways with the 'other'" (49). Also, the Cullens are very careful not to disturb the ecological balance of the area where they live, which is a way of remaining unnoticed by humans, but which Dungan also reads as "mindful eating practices" with a "sense of obligation to the natural world and its ecosystems not seen in earlier texts" (49). Through the Cullens, Meyer inaugurates a new kind of vampire which, for Dungan, represents the predator archetype of the Anthropocene.

In contrast to the positive reading that Dungan makes of the Cullens' vegetarianism, another perspective can be considered through Carol Adams's concept of the absent referent. In her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), she explained that nonhuman animals were made absent through butchering in three aspects: the literal (they are absent because they are dead), the definitional (through the language change which turns the actual animal into food, either through the use of the singular to make reference to millions of beings, or through the change of words which happens in some languages, like English —'lamb' or 'pork' become abstract terms instead of the actual numbers of lambs and pigs hidden behind those words), and the metaphorical (in which nonhuman animals are used to describe people's experiences without acknowledging theirs). In Adams's words,

> The animals have become absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else's existence or fate. […] The absent referent is both there and not there. It is there through inference, but its meaningfulness reflects only upon what it refers to because the originating, literal, experience that contributes the meaning is not there. We fail to accord this absent referent its own existence. (1990: 67)

In *Twilight*, the deer of the opening scene becomes a metaphor for Bella's position. As we witness, the deer is actually hunted down, as are the other nonhuman animals that the Cullens kill for survival to avoid hunting humans. However, as it was seen before, the Cullens call themselves vegetarians. Edward tells Bella: "I don't want to be a monster. In my family we think of ourselves as vegetarian because *we only survive on the blood of animals*" (my italics). Later on, Carlisle (Edward's vampiric 'father', who turned him into a vampire) introduces the family members and explains that "Jasper is our newest vegetarian, it's a bit

hard for him". Nonetheless, the Cullens stand for the actual opposite of vegetarianism since they only consume nonhuman animals.

My analysis of their use of the term considers their 'vegetarianism' as perverse, especially in its connection with Adams's absent referent. By defining their consumption of nonhuman animals as vegetarian, the sentient bodies of the actual animals they consume are rendered invisible and utilized for narrative aims, without acknowledging the actual bodies of the deer, foxes or bears which die at the fangs of the vampires, nor the ethical problems derived from it. Whereas in other contemporary vampiric stories vampires feed on synthetic blood or blood banks in hospitals (which would be a better equivalent to vegetarianism or, indeed, veganism), the Cullens are actually consuming sentient beings and this is not sufficiently explored within the narrative, which thus remains speciesist in its differentiation of human and nonhuman animals in the moral scale.

The second implication of the use of 'vegetarian' by the Cullens is, nonetheless, positive. Through calling themselves vegetarians, the vampires' decision calls upon us to take a similar kind of position if we translate their food habits to ours: humans are to vampires as nonhuman animals are to humans. By descending one step lower in their social dietary customs, vampires feed off nonhuman animals, whereas humans feed off plants. Through the portrayal of Bella as a vegetarian, Hardwick's film brings Bella and Edward together at a deeper level. On the one hand, Edward embodies the ethical vampire, who wants to make more ethical dietary choices in order to either not feel as a monster, maintain a respectful relationship towards their human neighbors, or save himself from eternal punishment. On the other hand, Bella embodies the ethical human in what concerns her food consumption: again, depending on how we read her characterization, this could be due to her moral compass, her ecological concerns, or even her potential eating disorders, as it has also been suggested (Dunn, 2018).

Jean Kazez (2009) agrees that Edward and Bella's decisions regarding food in the film come from a similar ethical source. It must be noted that in *Twilight*, as opposed to the synthetic replacement possibility in *True Blood* (which will be explored in the next section), vampires do not have any other source to feed on apart from living beings. Therefore, Edward's eating of nonhuman animals is not exactly analogous to Bella's potential eating of meat since she can abstain from it and he cannot. This is important when Bella becomes a vampire in the last film: she must give up her human vegetarianism and commit to the Cullens' 'vegetarian' lifestyle preying on nonhuman animals. Although the intrinsic value of a deer does not change, the implications of eating others for survival and eating others by choice are morally different. Hardwick's *Twilight* thus portrays the vampire as a contradictory monster, joining both the positive and negative implications analyzed in the previous lines and remaining an open space to observe its potential as such a disruptive creature.

3.2.3. Gender Implications of the Vampire's Diet: Vampiric Ecomasculinities

Either explicitly or metaphorically, vampires have always been connected to sex, desire and passion, as well as to socially-considered deviant sexual behaviors like homosexuality or polygamy. In contrast, Meyer's saga erases their lustful promiscuity and reproduces her vampire hero as a pseudo-Victorian man of righteousness, integrity and self-restriction in what concerns his desire for his girlfriend Bella —that is to say, he is depicted as a gentleman. Edward must restrain himself, firstly, from the desire to feed off her, which is so strong that he calls her his "brand of heroin". Secondly, he tries to resist the desire to have sex with her, which he refuses until they are married (which happens in *Breaking Dawn*), reinforcing his gentlemanly attitude. Even then, Meyer punishes her heroes for finally

surrendering to their sexual desire: the first night they sleep together, Bella wakes up covered in bruises, due to the superior strength that Edward has. The second time, she gets pregnant in an extremely-high-risk gestation process of a hybrid baby, Renesmee (a rare possibility which happened because Bella was still human). Edward then suggests an abortion to protect Bella, but she categorically refuses. This has a pro-life reading which feminist readers have criticized (Ames, 2010).[105] Together with this anti-abortion stance, feminist scholars like Rebecca Housel (2009), Anna Silver (2010) or Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2012) have also criticized the relationship between Edward and Bella as abusive, unequal and upholding traditional gender roles, like female passivity and male protectiveness.

These readings are right in their description of the romantic relationship in the *Twilight* saga as deeply patriarchal. In connection with my own analysis about vegan subtexts in contemporary film, it is important to note that a work that seems to advance antispeciesist views (although it might not even be that case, as it was suggested before in relation to the Cullen's use of the word 'vegetarian' and the preservation of the species moral scale in that they do not seem to have any ethical problem in hunting down nonhuman animals) does not necessarily entail an overall progressive stance. The inclusion of environmental or vegan concerns in the narrative does not automatically mean that the discourse of a story has a critical position towards oppression, neither of nonhuman animals nor of humans, so it can remain a speciesist, patriarchal, racist or ableist narrative in spite of including seemingly 'modern' aspects (like veganism) within traditional monsters.

The third main character in the *Twilight* saga, Jacob Black (who belongs to a family of werewolves, the Quileutes, a natural enemy of vampires), is also in love with Bella and is

[105] Meyer belongs to the Mormon Church (which enforces the law of chastity) and she has acknowledged that her faith has influenced her work in explicit ways, like not including smoking or drinking scenes, and not-so-explicit ones, such as the virtuosity of sexual abstinence and spiritual purity and kindness. Although the Mormon Church does not prohibit abortion in the cases of high risk for the mother, Meyer has refused to give her opinions on abortion when questioned in interviews.

thus Edward's main rival and opposite. Jacob tries to convince Bella that he is the best romantic option, arguing that she deserves a more 'normal' life than the one Edward could give her. If we consider that Jacob is also a fantastic creature and not a human like Bella, his view of a 'normal' life is connected to the fact that humans are not the potential food of werewolves.[106] In this way, sexuality and predation become enmeshed in the romantic aspect, since Jacob only accepts that Bella has chosen Edward when she is turned into a vampire and can, therefore, no longer be with him, since their natures repel each other. Furthermore, by becoming a vampire (and thus a predator herself), Bella stops being in a relationship with his own predator (Edward), something that Jacob had reiteratively opposed on the basis of it being dangerous for her. The belonging to one or another species (human/vampire) is thus revealed as a key aspect in the romantic trio and Bella's choice is only ultimately respected by Jacob when she overcomes the limit of her own humanity and when she stops being a potential meal for Edward.

Commenting also on gender and predation, Dungan (2020) notes that the Cullens' definition of their vegetarianism has to do with their yielding of their 'natural' predator position in favor of a non-normative way of life. The male Cullens —Edward, his 'father' Carlisle, and his 'brothers' Jasper and Emmett— give up the patriarchal constitution of male vampires as seductive, deceptive and violent blood-thirsty creatures who crave young, beautiful (and usually female) flesh. This has an impact on the representation of their masculinities and their sexuality both in the saga's narrative and in the audiences' reception.

Edward's abstention from human blood, as well as the fact that he shines when exposed to the light, has made him the object of sexist and homophobic puns among the general public, who have referred to him as a 'gay' or 'fake' vampire. This 'fake' nature could be due

[106] At least, within *Twilight*'s universe. Traditional werewolf lore usually states that they become irrational creatures when they are transformed by the action of the moon, and they are violent, hungry predators who might kill and partially eat humans. However, they can eat other things and their insatiable hunger for people is not a key characteristic, as it is in the case of vampires.

to the avoidance of human blood, but I believe the gendered and sexual reading of the character also adds to his 'falsity'. A quick search in the memesphere (a field dominated by patriarchal men) delivers results such as images of two men kissing with the caption "Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*". Another meme shows a picture of Nosferatu from Murnau's film with the caption "I Want to Suck Your Blood" next to a picture of Edward with the caption "I Want to Suck Your Cock". A different photo montage places Edward in the scenario of the film *The Chronicles of Narnia: the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Adamson, 2005) stating "Edward is in Narnia. Why? Because He's that Deep in the Closet"'. Departing from the gendered meanings attributed to vampiric 'vegetarianism', these kind vampires are interesting characters to analyze from the perspective of ecomasculinities.

This theoretical field started with Mark Allister's *Eco-Man: New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature* (2004), and it focuses on alternative gendered constructions of masculinity which subvert the hegemonic patriarchal identity that violently opposes the also gendered, interrelated concepts of femininity and nature. Ecomasculinities' scholars have identified the power of fictional male characters in helping young children to internalize the mandates of patriarchal masculinity, and they struggle to denounce such representations while at the same time promoting other characters who "pave the way for the construction of new masculinities and new relations between men and nature" (Brandt and Cenamor, 2019: ix). Although Edward's masculinity generally upholds traditional gender and family values, it is also true that his feeding habits and the influence they have had upon those of subsequent vampires are subversive of the traditional connection between masculinity and meat,[107] a point proved by the audiences' questioning of his heterosexuality. The ensuing 'vegetarian' male vampires also faced similar harassment coming from patriarchal vampiric characters: Bill Compton, from *True Blood*, is repeatedly called a 'pussy' by other vampires for refusing

[107] For scholars who have explored this connection, see Adams (1990), Heinz and Lee (1998) or Sobal (2005).

to drink from humans, for example. These alternative vegan/vegetarian vampires increasingly included concerns about the environment too: Bill tells her vampire-daughter Jessica to recycle in "Nothing but the Blood" (S2E1), and Adam, from the film *Only Lovers Left Alive*, is sorely concerned about the humans' mistreatment and contamination of rivers, lakes and the sea.

As it was pointed out in the introduction of this chapter, gender and sexuality have always been key elements in the construction of the vampire. As ecofeminist scholars have shown, the critical analysis of our relationships with nonhuman animals and the natural world has also greatly influenced our views upon gender. If we observe the relevance of meat consumption in the development of hegemonic constructions of patriarchal masculinity, it is quite conspicuous that vegan discourses must interact with feminism. Gender analysis has become an essential tool within contemporary antispeciesist and ecocritical scholarship, and its critical insights are thus visible in fiction which deals with these discourses. Taking these ideas together, it is easy to see how the archetype of the vegan vampire has had a large impact in the gendered construction of both the vampires and their human prey. If gender and species go hand in hand in the categorization of contemporary monsters, the antispeciesist perspective necessarily plays a role in shaping these 'renewed' monsters. How this role is played, however, is neither straightforward nor unambiguous or uncomplicated.

Even if it can be agreed that Edward fits an ecomasculinity pattern, due to the character's problematization of meat-eating (in this case, 'meat' stands for 'human blood', because it would be the equivalent of the humans' consumption of nonhuman animal flesh) and the impact that this has on the audience's perception of his masculinity (illustrated by the Internet popular puns about his sexual orientation), he is still a male vampire upholding patriarchal values. Although it is true that the Cullens' dietary decisions are interesting in terms of an ecocritical perspective concerned with references to environmentalism and the

protection of habitats, as well as the questioning of their food chain, *Twilight* still stands as a mainstream patriarchal narrative which safeguards traditional gender and family values; its views on abortion and the romanticization of an unequal heterosexual relationships cannot be overlooked just because the Cullens claim to be vegetarian.

This tug of war between what might come across as a progressive representation of monstrosity (in the case of vampires: giving up on human blood, being thoughtful and respectful towards humans, challenging the connection between masculinity and meat-eating…) and what still safeguards hierarchical patterns in terms of both gender and species (let us remember the Cullens *do consume* nonhuman animals, an action that problematizes their own use of the term 'vegetarian', as I argued in the previous section) is a key characteristic notably present in 21st-century human-eating monster cinema. As long as antispeciesism and veganism are still contested issues (either due to the industrial complex which profits from nonhuman animal exploitation, or due to the antispeciesist movements' insufficient results in the cultural arena), it seems their presence in contemporary popular film will remain ambiguous and complex. An intersectional effort in joining together the critical perspectives on gender and species (as well as other analytical categories like race or class) can shed light on a righteous representation of the idea that nonhuman animals might have the right not to be considered as *just* food (quoting Plumwood's sentence), in the same way as human animals do.

3.3. *True Blood*: Social Exclusion and the Rhetoric of Species

3.3.1. Social Exclusion, Homophobia and Species Discrimination

True Blood is a TV series created by Alan Ball, broadcast from 2008 until 2014. It consisted of seven yearly seasons and it obtained great success, significantly influencing 21st-

century vampire fiction.[108] Its plot follows the small city of Bon Temps in Louisiana in contemporary times, though society is different there: vampires have outed themselves and live more or less peacefully among humans. This is due to the existence of 'Tru Blood', a drink which replaces real blood and can be considered truly vegan, since it does not come from any living being but is rather synthesized in laboratories (although its composition is never fully explained, it might be assumed to be synthesized regular human blood; that is, it does not come from harming anyone). Vampires can buy it at supermarkets and bars, and this prevents them from hunting humans. In *True Blood*'s universe, biting humans does not kill or directly transform them into vampires, but is actually pleasurable for both parts, so it is common to see humans wanting to be bitten by vampires, often during sexual intercourse. At the same time, vampire blood is also consumed by some humans as a drug called V.

The main problem with vampires in the series is ideological rather than an issue of predation, survival and the dialectics of hero/monster (as would be *Dracula*'s case). While some humans want to peacefully cohabit with vampires, another part of the population despises them and the 'fangbangers' (people who support and often have sex and/or intimate relationships with vampires), criticizing them for being unnatural and undermining America's identity. These discourses are often intertwined with religious ideals, the idea of Americanness and the upholding of the traditional US heterosexual (human) family, and they are supported by cult-like religious associations like the Fellowship of the Sun, which spreads

[108] *True Blood* reached 6.8 million spectators per week in November 2008 and became HBO's most popular series since *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*. It won several awards, including the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Casting for a Drama Series, the Golden Globe Award for Anna Paquin (Sookie) and a Golden Globe nomination for Best TV Series in the Drama section. The whole show also got the American Film Institute Award in 2009 as "One of the 10 Best TV Programs" and was chosen the "Favorite TV Obsession" at the 36th People's Choice Awards. In terms of criticism, the show altogether obtained good reviews and has been declared the eighth highest rated show for the first ten years of the film review site IMBd (2002–2012). *True Blood*'s success, like that of *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, contributed greatly to the representation and reception of the ethical vampire.

an anti-vampire discourse which is reminiscent of misogynistic and anti-LGBTIQ+ hate discourses in real life.[109]

The main characters of the show are Sookie Stackhouse, a waitress who can read minds (although she appears as human in the show, she eventually finds out that she is, in fact, a fairy) and who starts dating Bill Compton, an attractive, stoic vampire who stands for the harmonious coexistence between humans and vampires; Sam Merlotte, Sookie's boss who is also a shapeshifter and can freely turn into nonhuman animals; Tara Thornton, Sookie's best friend; Eric Northman, a vampire who runs the vampire bar Fangtasia and who eventually becomes a love interest for Sookie as well; and Jason Stackhouse, Sookie's brother, a silly young man who is often manipulated by other people, whether they are her girlfriend during the first season, Amy Burley (who will be analyzed in the next section), or the Fellowship of the Sun, which fools him into joining them in their crusade against vampires.

The first season of *True Blood* presents the public debate between the Vampire League and religious organizations connected to American Republicans regarding whether vampires should be granted the same rights as humans. The first episode of the series shows the American Vampire League's leader, Nan Flanagan, defending the rights of her community to live among humans now that synthetic blood is consumed by every member of her community and there is no need to hurt anyone. In "The First Taste" (S1E2), we learn that they already have rights like voting. A reverend on TV asserts "we never should have given them the vote and legitimized their unholy existence. The American people need to know these are creatures of sin, demons!", despite the claims by the TV presenter who reminds him that polls "show consistently growing support for vampire rights". The acceptance of

[109] The show includes references to messages against vampires which are replicas of real messages against the LGBTIQ+ community, such as "God Hates Fangs" (a replica of "God Hates Fags" sign held by the homophobic Westboro Baptist Church in their protests), or the reference to "coming out of the coffin", which replicates the "coming out of the closet" within LGBTIQ+-related discourses.

vampires thus merges with ideas of impiety and Otherness in contrast to 'real' American people.

These ideas are also at play in what concerns race and sexual orientation. In "Escape from Dragon House" (S1E4), Sookie overhears a man at the Merlotte thinking "dead folks, niggas and regular folk all living together. If God wanted it like this he would have made us look the same. It ain't good". Vampire-hating groups often express their disregard for the LGBTIQ+ community, as in "Sparks Fly Out" (S1E5), when a group of men laughs as Merlotte's chef, Lafayette (who is homosexual and visibly makes use of queer codes), saying that the burger he cooked for them "might have AIDS". Besides the obvious affront, AIDS is a powerful discursive tool in the analysis of vampire fiction through a gender and queer lens (as it was explained in the introduction of this chapter): the parallelism drawn between vampirism and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome entails the image of contaminated blood being transmitted from bodily fluids. Besides, the discriminatory discourses that followed the worldwide discovery of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s linked the illness to sexual promiscuity, poverty and drug dependence (due to the possibility of transmission through the shared use of hypodermic needles) and not obeying gender mandates (especially in what concerns homosexual sex). This discriminatory rhetoric reached the point of having Pope John Paul II oppose the use of condoms to prevent the spread of the illness, and televangelist conservative Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell stating that "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals, it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals" (in Reed, 2007).

This intermingling of illness, religion, punishment and impropriety, together with the homophobia of televangelists is represented through the discriminatory rhetoric against vampires in *True Blood*, where they are said to threaten American life and the nuclear family.

In “The Fourth Man in the Fire” (S1E8), Steve Newlin, the leader of the Fellowship of the Sun, states on TV that:

> While the wing nuts on the left keep pushing their so-called vampire rights legislation, I’m more concerned with basic human rights. The right for our sons and daughters to go to school without fear of molestation by a bloodthirsty predator in the playground or in the classroom. Someone has got to take a stand for public safety over permissiveness and immorality. (S1E8)

These discourses are shaped against the contemporaneous struggle for LGBTIQ+ rights in some US states, particularly in defense of gay marriage: the apparent concern about children playing in the playground with bloodthirsty predators mirrors the concern that real-life conservatives feel about children being indoctrinated by LGBTIQ+ persons, who would allegedly try to convince them of taking immoral and permissive stands in joining their ‘un-American’ way of life.

In “To Love Is to Bury” (S1E11), another reverend appearing on TV reproduces the same kind of discourse, including anti-immigration tenets, while talking about the possibility of extending marriage rights to vampires: “Equal rights for vampires? I don’t think so. Many of them are foreign immigrants, taking our jobs and our women. And their very blood turns our children into addicts, drug dealers and homosexuals. No vampire, and none of these vampire-loving deviants deserve any rights at all”. In this way, the religious, right-wing discourse projects their hatred of immigrants and the LGBTIQ+ community onto the figure of the vampire for being a threat to the US way of life and its continuity, symbolized in children.

Reading these narratives from an antispeciesist approach, it is relevant to note that anti-immigration discourses have historically been often shaped in relation to speciesist claims, as shown by studies which connect the relevance of nonhuman animals like birds in the construction of immigration as a social problem (Fine & Christoforides, 1991), or the connection between the discourse of “problem animals” like pigeons or rats with racist and xenophobic discourses (Jerolmack, 2008). The discriminatory rhetoric against vampires is built from the real-life discriminatory discourses of homophobia, racism and speciesism.

When Jason is attracted by the Fellowship of the Sun, he reproduces the cult's discourse as he is asked to perform an encounter with a vampire defender. He claims that "if you're gonna give them all the rights that normal people have, then how am I supposed to protect my sweet little girl from any vampire who wants to just fly in and marry her?". Again, the discourse of 'normality' and the need to protect children are used to mask hate against immigrants who might want to marry US women. Significantly, Jason grabs the pole of a US flag and breaks it to create a stake. Jason's personality as a gullible, impressionable young man makes him easy prey: in his case, not of a human-eating monster, but rather of evil humans. Besides the Fellowship of the Sun, Jason falls into the clutches of Amy Burley, a character who will be considered in the next section in connection to food ethics.

3.3.2. The Depiction of a Vegan Character at the Beginning of the Century: Amy Burley

In "Burning House of Love" (S1E7), Jason meets Amy Burley at Fangtasia, Eric Northman's vampire bar, while he is looking for a V dealer. As stated before, V is a compound of vampire blood that produces a hallucinatory, pleasant effect in humans. Using V together, Amy and Jason fall in love immediately. Amy is presented as a hippie, with her celebration of James Lovelock's Gaia,[110] whose magnificence she claims to be able to reach through the use of V. Jason is completely enthralled by her and they start a relationship mainly based on their shared addiction. In the next episode, Amy explains to Jason that she

[110] Lovelock was an English scientist who proposed the hypothesis of Gaia in the 1960s. He argued that the Earth worked as a self-regulating system where living and non-living elements interact together in a complex system that could be understood as a single organism. Lovelock warned against global warming and climate change, and how this would affect the Earth ecosystem's balance. His theory was criticized for being understood as a teleological proposal, something that Lovelock claimed against. In popular culture, Gaia was popularized through Gaianism, a spiritual belief connected to New Age movements, which understood the Earth as a superorganism to be veneered and honored. Although the idea of Gaia also influenced environmental movements (including deep ecology) and green politics, it is interesting to note that both ideas —Gaia and environmentalism— do not necessarily go hand in hand (in fact, Lovelock was a supporter of nuclear power and some chemical pollutants).

"only eats organic" and that, in her mindset: "everyone has to eat, right? We're all links on the universal food chain. Squirrel eats nuts, snake eats squirrel, 'gator eats snake. And we can eat pretty much anything we want. It's the circle of life". Amy seems to believe that the Earth is a huge organism where the circle of life dominates, but she does not acknowledge that humans eat and are also eaten in this circle (either while they are alive, as in the cases of predation by alligators or snakes; or when they are dead, nourishing the ground where nuts would grow out of their tree). This would resemble more the actual circle of life and not a 'line' of life which ends with humans eating "pretty much anything we want", as she describes it.

Amy holds cliché environmentalist discourses but is, nonetheless, unveiled as a psychopath who does not feel any empathy whatsoever and even kidnaps a vampire, Eddie, to have an endless supply of V. We do not know Eddie's actual age, but he looks like a middle-aged man who, as we learn afterwards, wanted to become a vampire to be able to live his homosexuality in a freer way, but who ended up living a quite boring life alone. Amy convinces Jason to lock Eddie in their basement using a silver chain and proceeds to extract his blood. She explains to Jason that they "have to thank the vampire for this gift" (ignoring that this gift is being violently extracted from him) and, when Jason shows doubts about their behavior, she replies that "he is not a person, Jason", enacting the politics of personhood bestowal as a prelude to granting ethical consideration, as happens with nonhuman animals too.[111] Amy acts with violence, cruelty and sadism. When Eddie calls her out for her actions,

[111] The *Great Ape Project*, promulgated by Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri, has tried to grant great apes and other nonhuman animals like elephants or dolphins with the category of personhood in order to protect their rights. While this is an interesting move in terms of considering the potential width of the category of 'person' (it should be taken into account that there have been other 'nonhuman persons' before, like the category of juridical person acknowledged to corporations, and which implies that they can legally hold people's rights like suing, entering into contracts, or owning property), it still holds an speciesist view denounced by scholars like Frans de Waal or Marc Bekoff for maintaining a species hierarchy —as well as anthropocentrism, for keeping 'personhood' as the distinctive characteristic for enjoying moral consideration— instead of questioning the basis for this different attribution of rights (Segarra, 2022).

she angrily replies: “Don’t you dare get morally superior on me. I’m an organic vegan and my carbon footprint is minuscule”. In the end, Amy pierces Eddie with a stake, killing him and leaving Jason horrified, as he had started empathizing with the captive vampire and wondering whether Amy was right in her hatred of vampires. Jason ends up forgiving her, although their romance does not last much longer, since the mysterious serial killer who is the focus of the first season ends up killing her.[112]

It is significant that Amy is represented as a self-defined “organic vegan” with a “minuscule” carbon footprint, while she is indeed feeding off another being whom she considers inferior, or, at least, not human (she repeatedly tells Jason that vampires are not people), which allows her to treat him with cruelty for her own pleasure. Amy represents the alleged hypocrisy and sheer nonsense that vegans were, and often are, accused of: she claims to be vegan and environmentally-conscious, but she engages in cruelty to satisfy her wish to access her own image of ‘Gaia’ through another being’s blood. Her representation as a hippie psycho can be understood as a discursive attack against vegans, following the argument stating that vegans tend to egocentrically believe they are behaving correctly whereas they participate in other (often non-related) cruel commercial activities. Why is *True Blood* so interested in making Amy an “organic vegan”? Whereas she could have just wanted to kidnap Eddie to have her supply of V, the narrative makes an effort to provide us with her ideology in repeated ways and to present her as a contradictory, manipulative and hypocritical character. Will Potter (2011) has produced an extensive analysis of how environmental and vegetarian/vegan activists were repressed and charged with terrorism during the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Along the same lines, Laura Wright (2015) has shown how the first decade of the 21st century produced an anti-vegan and anti-vegetarian

[112] René Lenier, who was supposed to be one of Jason’s best friends, is revealed to be the murderer of season 1. He hates women who slept with vampires and killed some of them. When Jason tells him that Amy is a V addict, and that she could possibly be also engaging in intercourse with vampires (although she was not), René decides to kill her too.

discourse which was a direct consequence of 9/11, a moment which produced a hyper-vigilant and binary discourse highly suspect of any non-American practices.

Previously, the last decades of the 20th century had witnessed an increase in attention towards vegetarianism and veganism due to several reasons, like the development of the Internet, which contributed to the spread of information about these movements; or the founding of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in 1980, which mainstreamed veganism and spread it (not unproblematically)[113] through the media and advertising industries. During the 80s decade, as Karen and Michael Iacobbo (2004) explain, "sales of beef slumped" and "ethnic cuisine, traditionally prepared with vegetables or grains, and a much smaller portion of meat than Americans were typically accustomed to, or none at all, started to increase in demand" (196). This multiculturalist moment in the US increased the interest in non-Western dishes, like sushi. At the end of the decade, John Robbins (1987) linked meat consumption with environmental damage. The 90s decade continued this trend, with more scientific support for vegan diets as healthier than animal-based ones. Feminist Studies joined in and Carol Adams published *The Sexual Politics of Meat* in 1990, which inspired feminist and ecofeminist works advocating for antispeciesism and veganism for the subsequent decades. In 1995, the release of the children's film about a piglet, *Babe* by Chris Noonan (adapted from Dick King-Smith's 1983 novel *The Sheep-Pig*) produced an increase of vegetarianism in the USA and other countries (Wright, 2015); tellingly its main actor, James Cromwell, became vegan during the filming. The same year, the episode "Lisa the Vegetarian" (S7E5), from *The Simpsons*, aired and then won the Environmental Media Award and the Genesis Award in 1996, awarded to works which hold an environmental and animal-concerned message, respectively.

[113] PETA has repeatedly been criticized for their use of patriarchal and racist campaigns in their defense of nonhuman animals. Following the strategy of what has been termed as 'shockvertising', PETA has used naked models, violent images of women being butchered, fatphobic messages, as well as polemic references to domestic violence, autism or the Holocaust.

However, with the arrival of the new century, the aftermath of 9/11 saw veganism become a suspicious and untrustworthy lifestyle choice. The ultranationalist American backlash which followed the attacks had meat (especially red meat) as one of its backbones. Food was hoisted as a key part of national identity, and barbeques and BigMacs were positioned against Middle-Eastern-related food (often plant-based, such as couscous or hummus). The Muslim cultural avoidance of pig meat produced a suspicion of vegan diets, which were constructed and represented as un-American. As Wright states, "nation, religion, and diet all functioned as the criteria by which we posited our difference —our very humanity— from the animality of our attackers" (111). Wright continues explaining that, according to this logic,

> we ate like Americans, and they ate according to the dictates of Islam [...]. We are humans. They are animals. The logic that enables the division of identities into binary oppositions also enables the dehumanization, exploitation, colonization and destruction of the subordinate term in the dualism, as is evidenced by the sharp rise in hate crimes against Muslims after 9/11. (2015: 111)

Moreover, a discourse which identifies Muslims with animals requires that nonhuman animals remain abused and oppressed, so that the rhetorical device of parallelism can be applied to Muslims who, following this logic, would deserve the same treatment as nonhuman animals —as evidenced in the tortures applied in Abu Ghraib prison, for instance. The identification discourse required that nonhuman animals were not to be seen at this moment as worthy of rights or empathy, because that would disrupt the justification of the abuse upon specific people on the basis of their animalization. As Wright explains, "the literal and figurative treatment of prisoners (and, for that matter, anyone presumed to be Muslim) as animals reinforces the species divide that ethical veganism, ecofeminism, posthumanism, and critical animal studies in different ways all seek to challenge" (114). This increased the difficulties to raise awareness about antispeciesism and the discursive species divide. This anti-vegan discourse of suspicion spread to the rest of the world: in 2009, for example, the UK secret services put under investigation thousands of passengers who chose a

vegetarian meal during any flight from or to the UK —together with other 'red flags' like booking an over-wing seat, having a history of buying plane tickets and not showing up, or a record of trips to the Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan or Iraq (Lewis, 2010).

Amy Burley was created during the decades of this backlash against veganism. Whereas Sookie is an empathetic, sensible good American who eats meat (as she is unable to make the connection between her disgust at vampires killing people and humans killing animals for food), Amy is a psychopath who has no empathy whatsoever, and she is a vegan. Following the contemporaneous anti-vegan rhetoric that *True Blood* replicates (in spite of the food issues that the series, perhaps unconsciously, raises), she is 'lawfully' killed at the end of the season, having been characterized as a dangerous, uncontrollable, hypocritical bad American who abuses their fellow vampire citizens. In this case, as opposed to *Twilight*, a narrative which sustains progressive views in terms of gender and sexuality, as well as race, fails to advance similarly progressive views on veganism too. The series does not manage to follow the line of argument suggested by its vegan vampires, and is therefore unable to extend its overall progressive claims to the consumption of nonhuman animals.

3.3.3. Antihumanist Allegations around Contemporary Vampires

Whereas antispeciesist and post-anthropocentric analyses of contemporary popular culture place value on the evolution of empathetic and sympathizable human-eating monsters in general, and vampires in particular, Khapaeva's perspective, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, argues that this evolution entails an antihumanist stance. In her view, this would not constitute an appraisal of nonhuman animal lives, but rather a devaluation of human life. With similar conclusions as the ones in her analysis of dinosaurs in the *Jurassic World* saga, Khapaeva also studied the evolution of vampires at the turn of the 21st century in

her book *The Celebration of Death in Contemporary Culture* (2017). In opposition to the cruel, unpleasant and dangerous antagonists that Lord Ruthven, Carmilla, or Count Dracula constituted for their human narrator counterparts, as well as those who appeared in most 19th and 20th-century vampire cinema, the vampires in later filmic life often take the role of narrators to tell the story from their predator perspective.

Khapaeva explains that the role of classical vampires used to be "limited and secondary, as a source of horrors and marvels, a symbol of seductive evil or a backhanded tribute to the triumph of good", in stories where human feelings, and not those of nonhuman monsters, were the main focus: "this pattern persisted in vampire narratives from the mid-18th century until the late 1970s to mid-1980s, at which point people were replaced by monsters as protagonists and narrators. Consequently, the target of the audience's identification underwent a seismic displacement" (2017: 90). At the same time, whereas traditional vampire narratives established a clear-cut ontological gap between vampires and humans (Stoker, for instance, presented Dracula as being closer to nonhuman animals like lizards, enhancing the revulsion they provoked on the audience), contemporary vampires are closing the ontological fracture that classical monstrosity established.

Susan Chaplin (2017) agrees that "it is commonly accepted that the vampire has become increasingly 'human' over the course of the last few decades, moving from the monstrous predators of Bram Stoker […] to the tortured, sympathetic and often highly romanticised hero-vampires of contemporary culture" (3). Rather than the abject and frightening Other that Dracula used to be, 21st-century vampires are now beautiful and kind. Depending on the narrative, vampires' nature is presented in ways that range from sick or mutated humans to a whole different species but, whatever the case is, they have become closer to humans in both their nature and their habits. This contemporary proximity of humans to monsters, and the loathing with which some (often evil) vampires treat humans as

sub-creatures who can be mocked, hurt or killed, leads Khapaeva to state that "for the first time in the history of Western civilization, people are routinely thought of and represented in fiction simply as food for other species", and "the monsters that feed on humans incur no disgust or moral reproach". Humans, as "inferior allies, cherished pets, or barely tolerated mistresses […] simply belong to an inferior species and there is nothing questionable about putting that species on the menu" (102).

However, if we analyze most contemporary vampire fiction, there is more than often a questioning about eating humans, and the disdain towards human lives is rarely justified in these narratives. It is true that vampires have evolved towards more complex creatures who are now able to give their perspectives besides that of human narrators, but the most popular narratives have vampires oppose the harm done to people. In the TV series *The Vampire Diaries* (Williamson, 2009-2017), for example, the good vampiric character, Stefan Salvatore, fights his evil brother Damon over his consumption of humans: "they are people, Damon. She is not a puppet, she does not exist for your amusement, for you to feed on whenever you want to" (S1E3). In *Only Lovers Left Alive*, after Eve's sister Ava feeds from a human, killing him, Eve quarrels with her saying "we're in the twenty-first century!". In "Timebomb" (S2E8) from *True Blood*, Godric, a millennium-old vampire who is in charge of the Dallas vampire community, and a very respected member of their kind, says: "let's be honest; we're frightening. After thousands of years we haven't evolved. We're cruel, brutal, more predatory. I don't see the danger in treating humans as equals. The Fellowship of the Sun arose because we never did so". Godric thus excuses the religious cult who indoctrinates people to hate and kill vampires because he understands that humans might be scared of them, since they deserve equal treatment and a peaceful existence.

The third season of *True Blood* revolves around the appearance of the vampire King of Louisiana (in the vampiric hierarchy of the series, there is a High Authority which governs

them all, followed by Kings of the regions and then Sheriffs of local communities), Russell Edgington. In "Everything is Broken" (S3E9), after his husband is killed in a settling of scores, Edgington decides to take revenge on the entire Vampire League, who were seeking to ratify the amendment of equal rights, by murdering a TV host live and stating the following speech for the audience:

> We are nothing like you. We are immortal. Because we drink the true blood. Blood who is living, organic and human. And that is the truth the AVL [American Vampire League] wishes to conceal from you. Because let's face it, eating people is a tough sell these days, so they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA [Vampire Rights Amendment]. But make no mistakes. Mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals. We will eat you, and after we'll eat your children. (S3E9)

Edgington represents the classical vampire who thinks of himself as superior to humans, who were either food or slaves for his kind, but his agenda is brought down in the end, and sympathetic vampires win the political battle: Edgington is ultimately killed and the ethical vampires survive his attempts to wage war between humans and vampires. Bill Compton's and Eric Northman's exhibits of vampiric empathy can also be seen in the Cullens from *Twilight*, Adam and Eve from *Only Lovers Left Alive*, and most other protagonists of contemporary vampire fiction. The dismissal of nonhuman animals' lives is certainly being brought to the forefront, but the value of human life is not being erased in exchange for it as Khapaeva dreaded. Whereas there are vampiric characters who despise humans, these are usually villains who are eventually defeated by the vampiric heroes —who not only respect but often love humans. The diachronic study of vampires in film and TV therefore shows that the politics of feeding, food ethics, and the discriminatory practices enacted on the mainstream assumptions about who eats whom are strongly relevant for the discussion of the impact of antispeciesist discourse within contemporary culture.

3.4. Conclusions

This chapter has looked at two of the main vampiric fictions of the 21st century, exploring the politics of consumption and the representation of vegetarian/vegan identities within the narrative. The study of contemporary vampire fiction is specially insightful in their development of the character of the vegetarian vampire, and it has been very influential in the mainstreaming of vegan characters in narratives that, more often than not, are not antispeciesist in any way, This leads to misleading representations of vegan characters as either evil (like Amy Burley) or naïve (as it will be seen in chapter 5 about zombie predators). It is relevant to note, in this sense, that contemporary allusions to veganism in mainstream film seem to sway between attempts to question anthropocentrism and speciesism and simplistic views that present veganism as a gullible, deluded dietary option often personified in silly or evil characters. This shows how the mere reference to veganism in a narrative does not entail progressive views on the matter of food and animal ethics, and it might point to the fact that veganism —as opposed to feminism, for instance, which has become a largely accepted discourse in mainstream culture in the last decades— is still seen as a potential easy pun to sprinkle some humor amidst blood and corpses in monster films.

Monsters are yet again a headlight to help us see the trends that are thriving within the social realm, the directions they take, the intersections they establish with other liberation projects, and the reaction they face from the patriarchal, racist and speciesist status quo. The narratives analyzed in this chapter also point to the complexity and the ambiguity of the references to veganism in contemporary culture. Vegan practices and identities are not straightforwardly connected to antispeciesist ideas in fiction, and are sometimes used in depictions that leave the actual questioning of human food ethics aside. What is clear is that while most works dealing with interpretations of vampire fiction still place their main focus

on gender, race or class, the category of species and antispeciesism as an analytical approach must be taken into account and must be considered in serious terms in further analyses.

CHAPTER 4. Alien Predators: the Shocking Horror of Being Predated

"They came here for us, to harvest us"

Radio broadcaster, *Signs*

4.1. Introduction: Alien Contacts

4.1.1. The Alien as Enemy: Film Politics in the 20th Century

Alien-invasion films can broadly be divided into those in which aliens have benign intentions —either out of curiosity (as in Denis Villeneuve's 2016 *Arrival*), desire to warn earthlings (as in Robert Wise's 1951 *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and its homonymous remake by Scott Derrickson from 2008) or because they got lost on our planet (as in Steven Spielberg's 1982 *E.T.*)— and those where aliens have malicious purposes. The latter type has been more fruitful and, despite the fame of some films from the first group (*E.T.* held the record of highest-grossing film at the time, surpassing another space film, George Lucas's 1977 *Star Wars*), the evil-alien-invasion films are more numerous. They include some of Hollywood's best-known and highest-grossing blockbusters like *Transformers* (Bay, 2007),[114] *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996) —the second highest-grossing film at the

[114] Although it is fair to say that besides the evil aliens (the Decepticons), the *Transformers* saga also includes benevolent aliens: the Transformers themselves.

time after *Jurassic Park—*, *Men in Black 3* (Sonnenfeld, 2012), or *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005).[115]

The tradition of hostile alien invasions in Hollywood cinema cannot be understood without looking at the history of US war propaganda against its long-standing political enemies: the Soviet Union, Japan, and the Middle East.[116] As Melvin E. Matthews Jr. observes, "science fiction was a Hollywood staple during the Cold War, when anxieties about Communist subversion and nuclear war gave rise to stories of extraterrestrials and radiationsired mutations" (2007: 3). This enactment of menace and danger from an outside force that threatens to destroy not just our embodied selves but also everything which the Western way of life stands for (liberty, free speech, individualism…) is represented in films from the 1950s such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956), where an alien species creeps into California in the shape of giant pods able to replicate humans, though with the difference of being devoid of any emotion.[117]

The social context of the 1950s popularized the combination of scientific advancements and the fascination about the future, which merged in science fiction films. The Atomic Era that normalized nuclear testing presented atomic energy as a futuristic positive advancement, scientists like Albert Einstein were raised to the status of celebrities, the Cold War enhanced the public's interest in rocket technology, and there was an increase in the 'flying saucer' scare in which people from all over the US swore to be seeing unidentified flying objects

[115] The list can be checked on websites like IMDb (2022). Although they often include invasions by alien species, I am not including superhero films here because they constitute a different subgenre from human-alien contact films and, as such, they operate under distinct narrative and discursive patterns. More specifically, the fact that superheroes are ontologically often between human and nonhuman beings (either a different species, a human with special powers, or a deity, among other options) means that the constructions of the human and nonhuman Others have different specificities within the superhero subgenre and would require an analysis of its own.

[116] For an exploration of the representation of US enemies in film, including (but not reduced to) aliens, see Sherman (2014).

[117] Several critics have read it as an allegory about the loss of personal autonomy and individualism in communist societies. The Soviet Union had recently formed the Warsaw Pact and was moving forward in the space race, so the menace that the Soviet Union represented for the US was becoming well established during these years.

(UFOs).[118] Matthews (2007) gives credit to the flying-saucer phenomenon for having triggered films such as *The Thing from Another World* (Nyby, 1951). In terms of characters, "the heroes of '50s science fiction films are military men or FBI agents who […] shoot first and ask questions later when confronting aliens, even if the latter are friendly. […] Scientists were villains because they blocked the defenders of America by protecting the alien menace" (19). The conclusion provided by films like *The Thing from Another World* and *The War of the Worlds* (Haskin, 1953, based on H.G. Wells's 1898 novel of the same title) was that "alien invaders can't be appeased, only destroyed" (31) and that whoever suggested empathizing with the invaders was an enemy too.[119] Regarding the construction of their evil nature, these aliens were not anthropophagic, and their intentions differed from those related to feeding. In general, their ill intentions were related to the conquest and invasion of Earth.

The alien-invasion films of the 60s and 70s also displayed a higher predominance of hostile creatures until the release of *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* in 1982, which provided the most famous example of a harmless, gentle alien in film. Still, although some affectionate and benign aliens followed E.T. (as in Matthew Robbins's *Batteries not Included* from 1987, or the 1987 film by British director Peter Wollen *Friendship's Death*), most aliens —the box-office biggest hits— had wicked intentions. Among these there were motives related to colonization, parasitic reproduction, and, most importantly for this dissertation, feeding. When thinking about alien predators —especially in the 70s and 80s— it is quite plain that

[118] In 1947, a U.S. Army Air Forces balloon —supposedly intended to spy Soviet atomic tests— crashed near Roswell, in New Mexico. Initial speculation about the debris originated by the crash aroused myths about flying saucers, although interest in the case decreased in the years that followed. In the 70s, ufologists brought back the case to start diverse UFO-related conspiracy theories linked to affairs like alien autopsies performed by the U.S. government, the reverse engineering of extraterrestrial technology, and others.

[119] Although, as Matthews points out, not every alien from the 50s Hollywood cinema was hostile, as seen in Wise's 1951 *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, where the extraterrestrial Klaatu appears to deliver a peace message. This film shows early sympathy for aliens when protagonist Helen Benson suggests that maybe this spaceman is not a threat: "maybe he is afraid […]. After all, he was shot the minute he landed here". However, it failed to become a model for subsequent alien films, since evil aliens were more successful in the box office, as well as being more in tune with the political mood of the time.

the first alien creatures that come to mind are the Xenomorph from Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and its sequels —*Aliens* (Cameron, 1986), *Alien 3* (Fincher, 1992), *Alien Resurrection* (Jeunet, 1997), *Prometheus* (Scott, 2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (Scott, 2017);[120] as well as the Predator/Yautja from the original John McTiernan's film *Predator* (1987) and its sequels — *Predator 2* (Hopkins, 1990), *Predators* (Antal, 2010), *The Predator* (Black, 2018) and *Prey* (Trachtenberg, 2022). However, although the relationship between these alien creatures and humans is essentially one of predation, it is equally true that none of these species consume humans. They do not feed off them, but rather hunt and kill them, either for reproductive purposes (as the Xenomorph) or because of their trophy-hunting nature (as the Predator). This is why, although they are mentioned throughout the chapter due to their relevance, I do not include an exhaustive analysis of them.

Before the 21st century, films like *Independence Day* or *Mars Attacks!* (Burton, 1996), which have become important cultural references when it comes to aliens in Hollywood, showed that the alien as an enemy was still alive and well. Richard Corliss's article about *Independence Day* gathers the words of another film director, Paul Verhoeven, about the film:

> The US is desperately in search of an enemy […] The communists were the enemy, and the Nazis before them, but now that wonderful enemy everyone can fight has been lost. Alien sci-fi films give us a terrifying enemy that's politically correct. They're bad. They're evil. And they're not even human. (in Corliss, 1996: online)[121]

[120] A new sequel is about to be released as I finish writing this dissertation: *Alien: Romulus* (Álvarez, 2024).

[121] It is interesting to note that, opposed to Verhoeven's stance upholding the value of humans in the face of monstrous aliens, Dean Devlin (producer and screenwriter of *Independence Day*) explained in the comments of the DVD that the aliens "are not good guys, they are not bad guys. They do not like us, they do not hate us. They are simply the new tenants and we are the cockroaches. And they want the bugs cleaned out". From Devlin's perspective, the film might suggest the 'downgrading' of humans when a superior species comes to Earth, which would bring people closer to nonhuman animals (specifically in his own terms, 'cockroaches') and the aliens closer to humans ('the tenants'). Although of course the film's discourse does not support Devlin's statement, but rather the superiority of not the human species in general (and more specifically that of the US, as seen in the US President's discourse), it is interesting to see that the questioning of the species hierarchy even pervaded the reflections of the film's screenwriter.

However, what does this last sentence imply if we consider that several human groups (often oppressed by the US imperialistic military drives) have been deprived of the 'human' category itself, as Posthumanist Theory has criticized in the last decades? In this regard, it is interesting to explore the symbolic construction of the alien and how it affected the discrimination of subaltern groups (including nonhuman animals). My own analysis looks at the ways in which a more empathetic view on extraterrestrials (even when they feed off humans) might provide insight into the development of the criticism of arbitrary moral hierarchies, discursive discrimination and material oppression of the Other.

4.1.2. The Alien as Other: Familiarity and Feeding Habits

The space to explore Otherness, as well as to deconstruct expected social norms in relation to feeding (among many other topics), is a fruitful one in alien narratives. The possibility of facing a society which has not been touched by humans and may thus function in radically different ways, and the process of understanding how that society works through a post-anthropocentric lens is a prolific terrain where many aspects which are taken for granted as natural givens come to light as social constructs. This is the case of the episode "To Serve Man" from the TV series *The Twilight Zone* (S3E24), in which an alien species, the Kanamits, land on Earth with the alleged intention of providing humanitarian aid. They leave a book whose title the cryptographers decipher as *To Serve Man*, rapidly assuming the meaning of 'serve' as that of 'working for someone'. However, one of the cryptographers finally understands that the volume is actually a cookbook, with 'serve' meaning 'to dish up'; the Kanamits' intentions are to take as many humans to their planet as they can to consume them. The disregard of the latter meaning of 'serve' shows the human-exceptionalist incredulity towards the possibility of humans being eaten.

As Jean Retzinger pointed out in her 2008 essay "Speculative Visions and Imaginary Meals: Food and the Environment in (Post-Apocalyptic) Science Fiction Films", eating scenes are often used in unfamiliar situations or uncanny settings to anchor the spectators (and sometimes the characters) to the reality that we know. In Tobe Hooper's *Invaders from Mars* (1986), the signs that some people have been abducted by Martians (who, incidentally, eat some people, although the actual reason they come to our planet is because the NASA fired rockets to Mars, which they interpret as a declaration of war) are shown in their changes in behavior, which include odd eating habits like eating burnt or raw food, or whole animals like frogs. At the same time, different ways of eating can be used to represent dichotomic ways of being in the world. Considering that the presence of food in film is intertwined with shared meanings around gender, nation, or class, when two often-opposed dietary habits are clearly stated in a narrative, it often works to widen difference, often with connotations of good and evil.

An example of this is found in the alien-invasion film *Signs* (Shyamalan, 2002), where strange crop circles start to appear around the world, anticipating the presence of hostile aliens. Graham and his family (his brother Merrill, his son Morgan, and his daughter Bo) have their corn fields damaged by these circles and must try to survive the invasion by confining themselves in their house. At one point in the film, the children show interest in aliens and start reading a book which speculates that aliens "are probably vegetarians, because they would have realized the benefits of such a diet". Later, when they are already locked at home, Merrill suggests having some sandwiches for dinner, but Graham decides to have a huge meal with everything they crave: spaghetti for Bo, French toast and mashed potatoes for Morgan, chicken teriyaki for Merrill; Graham himself finally declares "I'm going to have a cheeseburger with bacon. Extra bacon". The insistence upon the amount and the type of food (in which nonhuman animal bodies are very present) works "as an anchor in

an altered world", while it "connects us to others both directly, through shared meals, and culturally, through shared 'tastes'" (Retzinger, 2008: 370). By having a huge dinner together instead of rushing to swallow some simple sandwiches, Graham intends to keep the family together and avoid panic, maintaining their usual ways in the face of apocalypse. However, this also works to raise Graham in opposition to these allegedly vegetarian aliens. While vegetarianism is associated with the unknown and the odd, spaghetti (with minced meat), chicken and cheeseburger with extra bacon ties the family to the reassuring and familiar space of the US way of life. *Signs* is also interesting for this analysis because towards the end of the film, a man announces on the radio that he believes "they didn't come here for our planet. This is a raid, they came for us, to harvest us". This would mean that either the book was wrong, and they are not vegetarians, or that they do not consider humans as animals but rather as vegetables or some other non-sentient matter. The use of 'harvesting' instead of 'farming' seems to point to the second option, and this verb is often used in alien-invasion films, such as *Independence Day* (where aliens are called 'harvesters'), or in *Jupiter Ascending* (the Wachowskis, 2015), where the concept 'harvesting organism' is also employed. Comparing humans to vegetable organisms might work to establish the aliens' superiority over our species, showing that humans are not even considered as inferior bodies (as nonhuman animals are in the speciesist moral scale) but directly as a non-sentient crop to be collected.

When aliens feed off humans, they do so in different ways. Some of them extract their life force, taking away years of their lives, as in the TV series *Stargate Atlantis* (Wright & Cooper, 2004-2009), in which the Wraith feed from humans' energy while these humans visibly age in seconds. Others feed on their blood in vampiric-like ways, as in *Lifeforce* (Hooper, 1985) or *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005). In other cases, they literally ingest them through a digestive system, as in *Nope* (Peele, 2022). The reaction to these feeding

habits of both audiences and characters is varied and it has undergone relevant differences over the years. As opposed to the radical wickedness of alien invaders like those in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Alien*, or *Lifeforce*, the reception of some 21st-century products has proven to be more concerned with the comparison that human-eating aliens force us to establish with our own consumption of nonhuman animals. As an example of this, the official magazine of *Stargate Atlantis* interviewed one of its actors, Christopher Heyerdahl, in 2009, and asked him about his views on what the Wraith did to humans, to which he replied:

> Human beings are only on top of the food chain because we've got the stick, and for no other reason. [...] It's not that [the Wraith] are wiping out the galaxy. The only problem is that they eat humans, who are very loud. That's why sharks are being killed, that's why tigers are being killed. Because they eat us. We want to live forever; we want to wipe out anything that's a threat to us. (*Titan Magazines*, 2009, qtd. in Budde, 2014: 137)

This points to the questioning of speciesist assumptions around the food chain and the disgust at the dietary habits of fictional creatures when humans are part of their menu, whereas the human-nonhuman animal dynamics within the anthropocentric food chain remains untouched. Another actress from the show, Torri Higginson, relates the fact that the Wraith eat humans to the fact that "humans eat animals'" (in Budde, 2014: 138). However, Larissa Budde also points out that the series is "strongest in suggesting the problems, rather than in explicitly addressing them" (138). Therefore, we can see an influence of antispeciesist discourses which call into question the species hierarchy and the anthropocentric food chain, rather than a deep understanding (and a resulting critique) of the links between human-eating aliens and the consumption of nonhuman animals by humans.

4.1.3. The Alien as Embodied Difference: SF and Disability Studies

Through the spectacularizing of their differences, the suspension of their corporeal autonomy, or the enforcement of medical procedures on their bodies, Disability Studies and Critical Animal Studies scholars have woven intersections between the oppression of

nonhuman animals and disabled people based on the social enforcement of the bodily 'normalcy' ideal. As Mian Osumi summarizes it in her article "Building Bridges Between Critical Disability and Critical Animal Studies", "because these groups deviate from the socially defined 'normal,' they have traditionally been treated as problems to eradicate or exploit, rather than individuals to respect" (2022: online). Studies within Critical Animal Studies and related areas with an awareness about Disability Theory shed light on the ways in which the former has often incurred in discrimination towards disabled individuals, including renowned scholars like Peter Singer or Gary Francione.[122] At the same time, conversations on disability should also be aware of potential speciesist stances, such as those which see animality as an insult and try to build their claims upon the drastic separation between (disabled) people and nonhuman animals. By asserting that disabled people are entitled to rights on the basis of not being like animals, some Disability Liberation movements' claims reinforce the idea that animals are outside the scope of any moral consideration. As Sunaura Taylor puts it:

> There has been an urgent need among dehumanized populations (including disabled people) to challenge animalization and claim humanity. As urgent and understandable as these challenges are, it is important to ask how we can reconcile the brutal reality of human animalization with the concurrent need to challenge the devaluing of animals and even acknowledge our own animality. (Taylor, 2017: 27)

The intersection between Critical Animal Studies and Disability Studies has found in science fiction and horror (the genres where monsters and freaks, two terms which are

[122] In his book *Practical Ethics*, Singer applies utilitarian ethics (in short, the belief that the most ethical choice is that which provides the greatest good for the largest number of individuals) to the question of whether infanticide of disabled children (and he does not just talk about conditions incompatible with life itself but also others, like hemophilia or Down syndrome) is morally correct — and he concludes that "killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a [rational, autonomous, self-aware] person. Very often it is not wrong at all" (2011: 167). For a criticism of the ways in which Singer has contributed to the upkeep of ableist ideas, see Sunaura Taylor's book *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017). This book constitutes an enriching introduction to the intersection between Animal and Disability Liberation movements. In the case of Francione, some Disability Scholars have denounced as ableist his term 'moral schizophrenia' to refer to the suffering inflicted by some humans upon nonhuman animals (Nocella *et al*., 2017).

critically used in both areas, dwell) a fruitful terrain to explore their ideas.[123] In particular, science-fiction narratives have been often explored from the perspective of disability in connection to bodily enhancement, prosthetics, or abnormal/nonhuman bodies.[124] In the last regard, alien bodies provide useful grounds to study notions of normalcy, empathy and vulnerability in several ways. In general, the connections between alien fiction, Critical Animal Studies and Disability Theory focus on the parallels between abnormal bodies, the understanding of difference from an anthropocentric and ableist point of view, and the approach to vulnerability in narratives where illness, violence towards subaltern Others and interspecies contacts are at play. This is explored in depth in the following sections in connection to Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013) and the *War of the Worlds* TV series (2019).

4.1.4. The Alien as Nonhuman: The Design of Aliens

Exploring the connections between human-alien contact films and the relevance of the species divide in the representation of aliens, it is interesting to see how the design of extraterrestrial beings often relies on the bodies of nonhuman animals. This can work to reinforce speciesist and anthropocentric stances, which in turn influence the construction of human exceptionalism and the narratives where humans are eaten by aliens. More than often, speciesist aesthetic assumptions are at play when decisions about the aspect of aliens must be

[123] In literary terms, Anelise Farris has studied H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as a posthumanist novel which deals with the permeability of borders between human and nonhuman, with a positive call for inclusivity. Other examples include the fiction of Margaret Atwood —her 1969 novel *The Edible Woman*, for instance— and Han Kang's 2007 novel *The Vegetarian*, which have been studied under the light of mad, queer, crip or abnormal identities in connection to food choices by Chloë Taylor (2020).

[124] Leigha McReynolds, for instance, has analyzed how the prosthetic alien body of Jake Sully in *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), who is in a wheelchair in his human form and gets to walk and run when he is in his Na'vi shape, allows him to empathize with the alien viewpoint. From a Disability Studies perspective, *Avatar* is relevant since "Jake is the hero of the movie because of his ability to form prosthetic relationships—he embraces amborg status and modifies his body, privileging a new body that is defined by mutual interdependence (over the power of the autonomous self)" (122).

made. Depending on whether aliens are benevolent and heartwarming (as E.T.) or lethal and scary (as the Xenomorph), physical features are added to enhance their goodwill or their villainy. Big, clear eyes, for instance, are typical of the first (including E.T., but also the alien 'prawns' in Neill Blomkamp's 2009 *District 9*). Evil aliens, on the other hand, usually have a darker gaze, which is more difficult to meet by the audience, as the Xenomorph —designed by Hans Ruedi Giger, who won an Oscar in 1980 for his work in *Alien*—, who does not even have visible eyes, or the harvesters in *Independence Day*.

Besides characteristics such as size and gaze, in general, alien beings have been designed imitating the aspect of insects (in the cases where the aliens have an exoskeleton, a seemingly hard shell, or emaciated-looking wings) or of amphibians and reptiles (in the cases where they show a tender, wet-looking skin).[125] There are very few examples of alien design where they are intended to look like mammals or birds.[126] The idea behind the choice of these types of animals might be related to their unfamiliarity (humans are more used to cohabiting with mammals or birds, in general, together with the fact that we are also mammals, and so the other animal classes work better as Others), as well as the fear and disgust they arise in many people —people tend to see insects, reptiles and amphibians as less aesthetically pleasing than other types of animals, and it is estimated that 6% of humans suffer from some form of entomophobia (Billson, 2021). In an article in *The Guardian*, Anne Billson

[125] In some 21st-century alien invaders' films, their design has also been modeled from robots and machines, probably due to the social concern around machines' domination in different realms. The presence of robots/artificial intelligence devices in such private spheres as the home, with the development of domotics (and the alleged risks that this can pose for our security, mainly in terms of data), and the overall use of robotic/AI machinery in warfare have provoked that the collective imagination about evil machines is increasingly noted in the design of alien enemies in films like *Battle: Los Angeles* (Liebesman, 2011), *Oblivion* (Kosinski, 2013) or *The 5th Wave* (Blakeson, 2016).

[126] An exception is the film *Attack the Block* (Cornish, 2011), in which the aliens who try to invade a council estate in South London are hairy quadrupeds that look like monkeys, even though they have no visible eyes and their mouths have a radioactive-looking blue color. Another example of aliens crafted from mammals are the Ewoks from the *Star Wars* saga, who look like teddy bears (they are intended to look cute and they do not pose any danger for humans, though).

comments on the presence of insects in horror and science fiction, wondering what it is that makes audiences shiver:

> Perhaps because they are hard to anthropomorphise […] With their bug eyes and exoskeletons, insects already look semi-alien, so it's little wonder that film-makers regularly depict our planet attacked by creepy-crawlies from outer space or alternative dimensions, […] The Xenomorph in the *Alien* franchise exhibits insect characteristics (an egg-laying queen, parasitic behaviour, metamorphic life cycles), and the Martians in *Quatermass and the Pit*, at first mistaken for the devil, are glimpsed in atavistic memory clips hopping around like giant locusts. (Billson, 2021: online)

Insectoid aliens have populated the big screen since the beginning of alien films: Georges Méliès's 1902 film *A Trip to the Moon* already described the Selenites as insect-like. The *Alien* saga portrays an undoubtedly-insectoid creature —in fact, Hudson states in the sequel *Aliens* that their mission is "a bug hunt".[127] In recent alien blockbusters many extraterrestrials are also insectoid: Ryan Church, a visual designer who works for Lucasfilm, and has taken part in the design of films in the *Star Wars* saga, as well as *Star Trek Into Darkness* (Abrams, 2013), *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) or *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005), has explained that his work stems from an early fascination with insects as an amateur entomologist (in *Entomology Today*, 2018). For Budde, "the images of the predatory insect and its social structure the hive are often employed to convey different relationships between humans and their other-than-human surroundings" (2014: 125). In her view, the insect aesthetics of the aliens equate them to inhumanity and non-humanity, thus making an ethical statement that ultimately justifies their destruction. At the same time, "the organic other-than-human is equated with a hostile and chaotic other that threatens to devour the isolated human,

[127] In a blog post of the Bruce Museum of Arts and Science from Greenwich (Connecticut), entomologist Matt Frye explains that the *Alien*'s Xenomorph similarities to insects range from the cocoons, which lie dormant until they sense a potential host nearby (as flea larvae do); the maturation process inside a host (as the Strepsiptera insects, who find their way into other insects in order to breed); and even the chest-bursting (many wasp species look for arthropods which they parasite until the cocoons burst out, either from inside or outside the host). The tarantula hawk is an insect whose predatory behavior looks like that of the Xenomorph: it paralyzes tarantulas with their venom and drags them to their nest, where they will lay their eggs on the abdomen of the spiders. When the eggs burst, they do so in a similar way to that of the alien coming out of Kane's chest: burrowing their way out. Other similarities of the Xenomorphs with insects include the hive formation, the relevance of the female, or the acidity of their blood (*Science*, 2017).

and elements that constitute the insect and the hive are conveyed as distinctly gendered" (126).[128]

In terms of design, Budde also points out that, interestingly, both in the *Alien* saga and in *Stargate Atlantis*, the fangs of the creatures are exaggerated "though neither of them actually needs to masticate solid food" (139), which suggests that teeth, bites and the tearing of the physical body are key parts in the imagination of the frightful Other. The relationship between these insect-like monsters and their hunger for human flesh is also interesting in connection to the fact that, although the West is not so used to their consumption (despite attempts by different campaigns, often launched in the name of environmentalism), 80% of the world's population eats insects like crickets or flies (Godwin, 2021). This consumption is increasingly being publicized as environmentally friendly due to the lower ecological impact that their farming has in relation to that of other nonhuman animals, like bovines. It is therefore interesting to see how insects are still demonized and portrayed in film as frightening and —what is more important for a critical antispeciesist reading— evil, while in real life they are being turned into commodities for human meals. As I commented in Chapter 2 in relation to the villainization of sharks in films, while they are being massively hunted down in real life, filmic depictions —of insects, or of insectoid aliens— have a huge impact upon the actual lives of nonhuman animals, as well as on the species divide between edible (insects, sharks, or other animals) and inedible (humans).

In connection with this (in)edibility, this chapter deals with three different narratives where humans are eaten by alien forms of life. The construction of the alien enemy's body does not, in the cases studied in this chapter, rely so much on the bodies of nonhuman animals (some look human, and the last one looks like a UFO, as it will be seen afterwards). This might point to a contemporary resistance to evilize the aesthetic features of some

[128] This recalls the reading in terms of gender that Barbara Creed did of Scott's *Alien* in her seminal text *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993).

nonhuman animals, as it was commonplace in 20th century depictions; alternatively, it may also point out, as I mentioned before, to the fact that humans are now more concerned with their daily contact with robots and AI rather than with nonhuman animals, and so the representations of alien villains are now more related to these machine-like Others. Whereas I have so far mentioned narratives in which humans are chased and preyed upon without being used as food, the films (and a TV series) that are part of this chapter are stories in which aliens feed off humans by extracting their fluids (in the versions of *The War of the Worlds*), by hunting and processing them as meat (*Under the Skin*), or by sucking/abducing and ingesting them (*Nope*). The symbolic and material implications of the hunt, the slaughterhouse, and the predation chase are looked at, together with relevant discussions of interspecies sympathy and vulnerability, as well as the ideological impact of seeing power relations reversed, with a more powerful entity turning humans into commodities for alien feeding and enjoyment.

4.2. *War of the Worlds*: From Imperialism and 9/11 to the Anthropocene

4.2.1. Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*: The Evil Alien

Several film critics have linked Steven Spielberg's 2005 version of H.G. Wells's 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds* to the terrorist attacks in New York and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001. Jason Vest's 2006 review of the film, for instance, stated that Spielberg and his screenwriters Josh Friedman and David Koepp

> re-imagined Wells's apocalyptic story for an American audience still recovering from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and the continuing violence of postwar Iraq. The result is a film that dares to criticize, subtly but surely, the patriotic fervor that has characterized the United States in recent years. (Vest, 2006: 67)

9/11 was too close in the US imagination in 2005 for the film's dust-covered images of shock, confusion and disorientation not to bring the terrorist attacks to the mind of the viewers, which Vent describes as an "unmistakable" parallel (68).[129] Besides, the US imperialist attack against Iraq, started in 2003, was contemporaneous to the film and, consequently, the discourse on the War on Terror soaked war films at the time.[130] However, as Grist also notes, Spielberg does not rely on a glorification of the American military, who are rather displayed as "unthinking and callous" (69), nor of the US itself: the film "render[s] the USA less the world's greatest superpower than a version of war-torn Europe during or subsequent to the Second World War" (69). In fact, he points out that Spielberg had stated that he wanted the film to show something that the US had never suffered before: the American refugee experience. This would align the film with Wells's original subtext, in which he also criticized British imperialism by placing Britain on the position of the attacked. This original subtext criticizing imperialism is also referenced at the beginning of the film, when Mary Ann, Ray's wife and the mother of his children Robbie and Rachel, says that Robbie has to do some homework about the French occupation of Algeria.

Although some commentators have described the aliens in the film as insect-like (Vest, 2006), I would argue that their design also relies heavily on amphibian animals, especially due to their hairless, wet-looking skin and the shape of their legs, which recalls the shape of the tripods they drive, but also frogs' fingers. It should be remembered that Wells's Martians were described as rounded heads with tentacles, whereas Spielberg's aliens are indebted to

[129] Leighton Grist summarizes some of the film's scenes that imitate 9/11 events: "an unexpected assault on an urban area, and the resultant frantic terror; the dust-covered appearance of the film's protagonist, Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise), after the attack; the airliner that crashes into the house of Ray's ex-wife; and the shots of people holding messages and placards concerning and of boards covered with notes regarding and photographs of missing loved ones" (2009: 69). Besides, Grist recalls an interview where Spielberg explained that after 9/11 the film "began to make more sense to me", that "it could be a tremendous emotional story" and "have some kind of current relevance" (76).

[130] For further insights on the connection between Hollywood and the Pentagon in connection to the endorsement of the War on Terror and, in general, the US army and its national security policy, see Matthew Alford and Tom Secker' s *National Security Cinema: The Shocking New Evidence of Government Control in Hollywood* (2017).

previous filmic representations of extraterrestrials, such as *Independence Day*, which also portrayed aliens as closer to amphibians in their shiny skin and soggy, tender-looking bodies. As I commented in the introduction of this chapter, this choice in design is intended to increase the disgust, revulsion, and fright that the aliens should provoke in the audience, making them the undisputed villains of the film.

Besides their appearance, their villainy is shown through the tripods' killer laser beams, but also in their ways of feeding. The aliens in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* feed off humans in the same way as they did in Wells's novel: by piercing them with a long thin tube which comes from the aliens' spaceships and drains the human's blood.[131] This vampire-like way of feeding, which Spielberg's film masterfully depicts as a horrifying nightmarish image, is what Wells described as follows: "they did not eat, much less digest. Instead, they took the fresh, living blood of other creatures, and injected it into their own veins. [...] Blood obtained from a still living animal, in most cases from a human being, was run directly by means of a little pipette into the recipient canal" (2017: 198). However, whereas Wells compared the aliens' feeding habits with our species' own consumption of nonhuman animals —"the bare idea of this is no doubt horribly repulsive to us, but at the same time I think that we should remember how repulsive our carnivorous habits would seem to an intelligent rabbit" (198)—, Spielberg's film erased any kind of link between positioning humans as food for superior beings and the placement of nonhuman animals as food for humans. Besides the blood extraction, the humans who are captured in the spaceship cages are digested by the vessel. One of the most thrilling scenes of the film, when Rachel and Ray are captured by the aliens, shows Ray about to be 'eaten' by the spaceship: he is sucked into the esophagus-looking

[131] It is relevant to note that Stoker's *Dracula* was published in 1897, while Wells was publishing his work (which he had started writing in 1895) in a serialized format in *Pearson's Magazine* (UK) and *Cosmopolitan* (USA), before it was published as a full novel in 1898. As R.J. Dingley (1991) explains, both Stoker's and Wells's novels share common aspects like the invasion of England by an foreign/alien force that feeds off humans' blood, as well as their vulnerability to daily deterrents (garlic and bacteria).

duct, but the rest of the people in the cage hold him and manage to get him out, not before Ray activates a hand grenade inside the spaceship's tract, which makes the tripod explode, liberating the humans. This scene shows the human's victory over the human-eating creature in the precise moment of ingestion, in a spectacular scene of refusal to be reduced to merely food.

Fourteen years after Spielberg's version, Wells's novel was adapted again, in this case as a TV series which departs from the alien-invasion situation of the novel to entirely move away from it (including a time-travel narrative that turns *War of the Worlds* into a completely different story). Even though consumption is not the main focus in the series, I still want to analyze it here for being a renewed version of Wells's story, deeply influenced by the discourses of the Anthropocene, environmentalism, veganism and interspecies empathy. In fact, I would argue that the series retrieves something from the novel that was omitted in Spielberg's film: the questioning of anthropocentrism.

4.2.2. Overman's *War of the Worlds* TV Series: Human-Alien Empathy through Shared Vulnerability

War of the Worlds, co-produced by Fox Network Group (US) and Studio Canal (France), is a TV series created and written by Howard Overman and directed by Gilles Coulier and Richard Clark. Although its production shifts between the United States and Europe (France and the United Kingdom), it is relevant to look at it due to its illustration of the contemporary depictions of human-eating monsters that have been analyzed throughout this dissertation. The TV series consists of three seasons (released in 2019, 2021 and 2022, respectively) with eight episodes each. It starts in the same way as Wells's novel (although set in contemporary Europe, specifically in France and the UK), but differs from it at several

points, especially as the seasons unfold. The first episode presents an alien invasion, in which, due to a magnetic signal cast by their spaceship, humans who are not underground, underwater, or inside metal spaces like elevators, die of fulminant strokes. The survivors try to gather amidst general chaos, while collecting as much information about the alien invaders as they can.

These aliens have the shape of robotic quadrupeds, reminiscent of the lethal robots of *Black Mirror*'s episode "Metalhead" (Slade, 2017), which were at the same time influenced by Boston Dynamics's "BigDog" military robots.[132] These robotic-looking aliens feed off humans in a similar way to the Martians in Spielberg's film, piercing them with a needle that comes from their body. The main human characters are Bill, a neuroscientist who is trying to understand the aliens' behavior and motivations; Catherine, an astronomer who was investigating the alien signal and who is also trying to find their weaknesses in order to survive; Sarah, whose daughter Emily is blind but can mysteriously recover her sight when she is close to the aliens (losing it again when they move away); Kariem, a refugee who entered England illegally; and Sacha, a French boy trying to escape with her mother Chloe and Sarah's husband, Jonathan. Sacha and Emily can apparently bond with both the aliens and with each other, despite the distance between them (as well as the fact that they had never seen each other).

The first scene of the first episode already establishes the moral question on whether humanity should lawfully complain about an alien attack when human groups have been attacking, subjugating, and killing countless human and nonhuman beings: "they wanted to wipe us from the face of the Earth, but we kept asking ourselves, why? After all the centuries of mindless cruelty, maybe we shouldn't have been surprised. Are we really so different?"

[132] These robots were created in 2005 to work as carriers of military equipment in areas that could not be easily reachable by car. However, the project was discontinued in 2015 due to the loud noises it made. A quieter model was released in 2019, but it was shelved too because it could carry much less weight.

Firstly, the reference to the centuries of human cruelty connects this adaptation to Wells's original text, which stated early in the novel:

> And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit? (Wells, 2017: 10)

Secondly, the last question recalls the possible similarities between the aliens' actions and the humans', which is constant throughout the series, especially as regards Emily. In S1E4, Noah (Chloe's brother) tries to answer Jonathan's question "have you [sic] any idea why they want to kill us?" by saying: "maybe for the same reasons we kill each other. Maybe they enjoy it". Whereas most of the characters are scared and feel revengeful towards the aliens, trying to find a way not just to survive but also to defeat them, Emily shares an interspecies bond with them which leads her to try to understand their actions. After the group becomes aware of her connection with the aliens, Bill tries to investigate it and asks Emily: "you said that they want to live. What does that mean?". Emily replies: "doesn't everything?". Exasperated, Bill insists that he needs her to help him, to which Emily answers: "help you to kill them". Bill replies "well, they want to wipe us out. They've killed billions of people. They killed my son" and Emily asks him: "do you think we're different to them? Ask Kariem what happened to his family. We kill all the time". In S1E6, Emily reinforces again the idea that aliens might not be evil, but rather that "they want to live, they're scared of dying".

Regarding whether the aliens have killed other nonhuman species,[133] in S1E7 Sacha wonders "why don't they kill animals? They only kill humans", to which Jonathan replies "I

[133] In alien-invasion and apocalyptic films in general, the other animals seem to suddenly disappear from the face of the Earth, which appears completely empty. If we consider that we are surrounded by many nonhuman animals who would probably thrive in the absence of humans who often control their populations, it would be fair to think that in an apocalyptic scenario where most humans have disappeared, the setting would be filled with animals such as birds, dogs, deer, rats… However, in most apocalyptic films this is not the case, and nonhuman animals just disappear from sight, without any explanation about it in the plot.

don't know, maybe animals aren't a threat to them". Sacha responds: "Maybe they're vegans? And they don't like the way we treat other species, so…". The reference to veganism is relevant in two aspects. Firstly, because it reveals the rooting of the concept in contemporary popular culture. The fact that they do not use the better-known concept of 'vegetarians' highlights the fact that veganism is so expanded these days that the concept can be introduced in a TV series with no further explanation about its meaning, implying that it is by now supposed to be known by the general public. Secondly, Sacha's suggestion is highly insightful: by showing that aliens are only concerned about human beings as threats, the series reflects the idea that humans have become a problem for the environment and the other species, which might be grounds for punishment. Whereas nonhuman animals might indeed be a threat to them, the aliens never appear facing a bear, an eagle, or wolves, who could be roaming around looking for prey.

The idea of punishment against human wrongdoings recalls the revenge of nature cinematic trend of the 1970s which I analyzed in chapter 1. In the case of *War of the Worlds*, through Emily and Sacha's remarks —importantly, the ones who have the bond with the aliens—, the topic of humans being punished for their species pride is brought to the forefront, especially concerning current issues such as war, refugee crises, and environmental damage (including harm upon nonhuman animals). In the second season (S2E1), Sacha makes another comment which downsizes human exceptionalism. When he and Jonathan see a human corpse partly eaten, Sacha says "it is no difference eating a burger". When Jonathan argues that "eating a person is not the same as eating a burger", Sacha replies "it is to a dog". This short interaction relativizes the alleged sanctity of human flesh (furthermore, of an already-dead human body) over the rest of sentient species, which works to anchor the questioning of anthropocentrism that pervades the TV series' account of interspecies clash.

Catherine eventually discovers that they might have in fact attracted the aliens towards Earth by trying to project signals into space, and that the displacement of an antenna array may have caused their spaceship to crash. In S1E7, Catherine wonders: "what if they're like birds? Their ship crashing into the mountain when we moved the array… What if it's because we moved the array? […] Birds harness the quantum properties of their cells. It's how they fly in perfect formation, it's how they navigate. What if it's the same for them?". Colonel Mokrani asks her what this would have to do with moving the array, and Catherine explains: "I think the array caused the ship to crash. […] If their cells are connected on a quantum level, they feel what each other feels at exactly the same time. Even if they're apart. The low frequency waves we picked up, I think that's what connects them. It enables them to see". Despite their attempt at empathy towards the aliens who have apparently crashed because of human actions, Catherine and Mokrani are still concerned with finding their weak points in order to destroy them. In her research about the aliens, Catherine considers them "crippled" (S2E1), which connects them to Emily and to the discussion of crippled aliens through the framework of Disability Studies that was described in the introduction to this chapter (and which will also be seen in relation to *Under the Skin* in the next section).

The second season reveals more about the aliens. Besides those who look like robotic 'dogs', the only ones seen in the first season, the series presents others who look like humans, with the only difference of having a circle tattooed on their wrists. A flashback allows us to see that the aliens' planet was dying, and they were looking for another place to live, in another reference to environmental disasters and their consequences, in terms of population displacement and conflicts. This aim at making Earth their home connects them to Wells's aliens, as well as to those in Spielberg's adaptation, who were already terraforming Earth through the red weeds, making it more suitable for their physiology. However, whereas the conclusion in Wells's text —and in Spielberg's film— is that humanity survives out or pure

luck (the aliens are defeated by Earth's bacteria), in the TV series a group of humans want to develop a virus to kill all alien invaders.

This tension between aliens and humans, given the way in which both species are generally trying to kill each other—as opposed to the 'robotic dogs', the human-like aliens of the second season do not feed off humans—provides room to explore notions of empathy and vulnerability. While factions from both enemy groups are violent and unsympathetic towards the other species, there are characters who suggest the possibility of interspecies coexistence. Emily, who had already been shown to have a connection with them, gets inside a spaceship and finds a human-looking alien with the same tattoo as hers. After touching him, Emily gets a glimpse of their home planet, where she witnesses a kind of mortuary rite and corpses thrown into a river: it looks as if all the alien population was dying, and the survivors had managed to escape to find another home. Seeing aliens in a human shape, as well as observing their abandoned planet and their concerns for survival, enhances the possibility of empathy for Emily, despite the destruction and death that their vessels bring to Earth. We can already see a key difference between this version and Spielberg's film, since the 2005 version did not provide any insight into the aliens' motives or the conditions under which they acted.

Like Emily in the human group, there are aliens who vindicate another way of dealing with the human population. In S2E2, an injured alien called Micah tries to get to Catherine's lab and provides her with a notebook with information about the aliens, apparently trying to establish some kind of communication with her in pursuit of a peaceful interaction between both groups. Later, the aliens attack the base, and Micah has a short conversation with his brother, who asks him: "why did you have to do this?". He replies: "there has to be another way", but his brother states that "there is no other way, it is us or them" and then kills Micah for having revealed important data about them. Similarly, another alien called Isla shows feelings towards the humans, especially human babies. In S2E7, she talks to another of the

aliens and says “we tell ourselves we are different to them. I’m not sure I see the difference anymore”. This realization of her own sympathy will lead her to turn the violent alien group away in order to help the humans to find a solution for the situation.

After the human group discovers that Emily’s connection with the aliens takes place at a genetic level in some mysterious way, Bill considers experimenting on her to try to find a virus to kill the aliens. During her months in the alien vessel, Emily is told that Bill is responsible for the aliens’ suffering and that he is trying to find a biological weapon to “slaughter” them (S2E1), and that she has to help them by killing him. Once back in the human group, Emily tries to attack Bill but fails, and, seeing her as a danger, Bill decides to carry out his research on her body, making her sick and studying her blood. Emily is thus reduced to an experimenting subject, equated to both the aliens and to laboratory animals: in both cases, a nonhuman creature who is rendered as inferior in moral terms. This is another stance where the limits between human and nonhuman (both in terms of alienness and animality) are blurred, providing important queries around ethics, interspecies relationality, disability, and vulnerability.

Towards the end of the second season it is revealed that the invaders are not actually alien, but human: in a butterfly-effect turn of events, we see Sacha and Emily (who is now pregnant) being put in a spaceship and send to another planet by the alien group, because they have discovered that she is infected with the virus that could kill them all. Catherine and Bill then reach the conclusion that they are the “Adam and Eve of the alien race” and that “they look like us because they are us, from the future” (S2E7): being infected, Emily and Sacha’s descendants decide to come back to Earth traveling through time and land in their past, triggering the events of the first episode. Although the references to veganism, nonhuman animals and species guilt are still relevant after this turn of events, it is also true that revealing the aliens to be human erases the potentiality of discussing interspecies ethics. Empathy

towards the Other is now not rooted in shared vulnerability, embodiment or willful understanding of their sentience, but rather on their belonging to the same species as the earthlings, which returns to an upholding of human exceptionalism: their moral relevance is held now on the basis of being human —the conceptual arbitrariness is thus highlighted, since they are the exact same creatures before and after they discover the truth, though their importance in ethical terms seems to change.

As in my analysis of nonhuman animals and vampires in the previous chapters, this contemporary version of *The War of the Worlds* novel combines two aspects of 21st century human-eating monster fiction. On the one hand, the presence of environmentalist messages and references to the Anthropocene, influenced by interspecies ethics brought about by antispeciesist movements. On the other hand, the final realization that anthropocentrism and speciesism are still too rooted in our collective cultural arena, and these seemingly ecologically aware productions still fall into the upkeep of the human species over the others.

4.3. *Under the Skin*: The Inversion of Consumption and the Gendering of the Hunt

4.3.1. The Inversion of Consumption in Faber's Novel

Glazer's 2013 film *Under the Skin* is loosely based on Michel Faber's homonymous novel, published in 2000. Before delving into the analysis of the filmic adaptation, it is relevant to see the species discourse embedded in the novel in order to better understand my discussion of the film. The novel introduces Isserley, a young woman driving through the roads of Scotland, picking up hitchhiking men whom she then drugs and takes to a hidden facility which harbors a slaughterhouse for humans (who are called 'vodsels' by the alien

species, who in turn refer to themselves as 'human').[134] Isserley, who is actually an alien who has undergone surgery to look like a woman, subtly interrogates the men who enter her car in order to know if they have close connections that would miss them in case she takes them to the slaughterhouse. In the cases where men are socially isolated individuals, she poisons them with a needle hidden in the car seat. Once in the slaughterhouse, they have their tongues and genitals removed and they are caged in dreadful conditions —they are "shaved, castrated, intestinally modified, [and] chemically purified" (Faber, 2000: 103). After a fattening process, they are slaughtered in the same way nonhuman animals are in the meat industry, then packed and shipped to the aliens' home planet as tasty delicacies.

Ablach Farm,[135] as the body-processing facility is called, constitutes a liminal space between life and death, an in-between location where men —they are not interested in women, probably because of their usually-smaller size— are deprived of their humanity as we understand it. The predator species removes their bodily integrity, their original shape and their future. Ablach Farm houses a process of intensive farming that mirrors what happens in actual slaughterhouses, with daily acts of violence and torture which provoke fear and pain in the nonhuman animals confined inside, something which has been abundantly proven by activists in undercover operations around the world.

The customary invisibility of slaughterhouses constitutes another connection between them and the farm, explicitly in the hiding of Ablach Farm and the intense secrecy with which it operates. Isserley and her kind do not really believe that what they are doing is morally wrong in any way, but they are aware that kidnapping and murdering these beings should be done in secret so that they can continue their commercial activities without the

[134] Faber has lived most of his life in Australia and Scotland and writes in English, but he was born in the Netherlands. In Dutch, 'voedsel' means 'food'.
[135] Matthew Calarco has written that, in comments on a draft of his chapter analyzing *Under the Skin*, "Seán McCorry helpfully notes that 'ablach' is Scots for 'an insignificant person' and that it derives from Scottish Gaelic for 'a mangled carcass'—a fitting name for the manner in which the vodsels are seen and handled by the human workers" (2019: 210).

intervention of human authorities. As Kirsty Dunn (2016) points out, "the violent realities of industrial slaughter must be hidden to 'legitimize' and perpetuate animal killing on the exponential scale that is needed to satisfy profiteers and meet the public demand for meat and other animal products" (150) and that, given this secrecy, when we want to show the inside of factory farms to the general public, we must do it through the work of someone else. Besides activists breaking into slaughterhouse enclosures, in terms of cultural products *Under the Skin* also provides that opportunity. Dunn explains that

> Faber replaces the human hunter, worker, and consumer with an extra-terrestrial species; and the consumable 'animal' with humans themselves—a literary device that illuminates many hidden and problematic aspects of Western meat production and consumption. By pulling back the curtain on the factory farm and 'disassembly' line, and revealing the ways in which physical and linguistic distance serve to hide these aspects of meat production, Faber exposes some harsh realities that for so long have remained 'off the table' for discussion. (151)

Although Faber has stated that he did not intend the novel to be an "argument for anything" (in Adams, 2002: online), his text is certainly saturated with ethical concerns regarding the righteousness of developing the same slaughtering system with other sentient beings. Faber has stated that he is not a vegetarian, but he believes that there is a clear problem in the way in which people consume meat without "wanting to take moral responsibility for how it's produced. Animals can be cruelly treated and even genetically turned into monsters, as long as it all happens in secret and the result is disguised in a neat supermarket package" (in Adams), a view which has a strong resonance in his novel.

4.3.2. Glazer's Neglect of the Species Aspect of the Novel

In his filmic adaptation, Glazer decided to focus on Isserley's transformation and her troubled identity as a human woman.[136] The film was critically acclaimed, highlighting

[136] In the film, the alien protagonist does not have any name. However, for the sake of clarity, I will still refer to this character as Isserley, as in the novel.

Glazer's direction, Scarlett Johansson's acting, and Mica Levi's score. Its aesthetic features and parts of the plot have been connected to alien science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956), *Them!* (Douglas, 1954) or *Quatermass and the Pit* (Baker, 1967) by David Roche (2017). However, to me it rather recalls other cinematic works from the late 20th century such as *Lifeforce* (Hooper, 1985), about alien vampires who arrive on Earth in a US space shuttle which found them while exploring the Halley comet. *Lifeforce* also deals to some extent with consumption, since these alien vampires feed off the energy of human earthlings, and I believe it works as a predecessor for *Under the Skin* because the main alien also takes a beautiful human female shape in order to merge with humanity and attract men to feed off them. As she says,

> our bodies are unimportant. As you and your men approached in your ship, we changed them for you. We entered your minds and found there new bodies. I took my shape from your mind. I took your language. I became the woman I found there, in your deepest thoughts, your deepest needs. I am the feminine in your mind.

This implies the reversal of the patriarchal gaze which consumes female bodies, exerting symbolic violence upon them: the alien in *Lifeforce* (which is called Space Girl) takes advantage of this gaze to enforce violence and the literal consumption of the male bodies, just as Isserley does. More significantly, in another scene of *Lifeforce* the alien takes another female shape (unlike Isserley, who always has the same human shape because she has been surgically modified, the alien here can shift her shape voluntarily), and approaches a man in a car in the countryside, forerunning the predatory use of the van images of *Under the Skin*. The men chasing her wonder what she is doing, and they discover that she is trying to attract her prey (a "healthy man") by getting in his car and "pulling her skirt over her knees", letting the man put "his hand on her leg". Like Isserley, this female alien also uses a heteronormative attractive body image to attract her prey.

Glazer's film was awarded several accolades, especially from critics' associations, and was called the film of the year and the decade by several publications (including being ranked

61st on the BBC's 100 Greatest Films of the 21st Century list). However, it was a box-office failure, grossing around half the amount of its budget. This could be due to the slow pace and unhurried rhythm of the film, which relies on beautifully shot melancholic scenes and a daunting score, at the expense of a more cohesive storyline. What is relevant for my discussion, nonetheless, is Glazer's choice to make Isserley's gender identity the core of the story, leaving the slaughterhouse narrative aside. In the film, Isserley still hunts clueless men and brings them to a disturbing house, but the scene where they are processed shows them entering an ethereal void space which resembles a black lagoon, trying to reach a naked Isserley, and then being gulped by the watery darkness until they disappear. As they wistfully drown, there are images of their skin being removed from their bodies, but these are highly dreamlike. The only reference to the slaughterhouse processing of the novel is an image of a conveyor belt covered with bloody flesh, although it is not clear where this flesh comes from, unless one has read the novel.

The choice of turning the disturbing slaughterhouse scenes of the novel —which even describe the processing plant and the mutilation of a man— into this ethereal, almost metaphoric space which could be better read in terms of gender rather than species is a problematic one for me. Along similar lines, Luke Hortle and Hannah Stark believe that "the film does emphasize and extend the novel's central preoccupations: the relationship between hunting and sexuality; the politics of consumption; the complex ways in which the construction of gender and the treatment of women in patriarchal society reveal a deep, violent, and ugly misogyny" (2018: 6), but "does not engage with consumption through a critique of industrial farming or meat eating" (6). Vint also argues that the novel deals with "the way sexual pursuit and predation are linked, but its focus moves from gender difference to species difference" (2015: 2). However, the film chooses to remain oblivious of the latter.

Removing the clear species discourse of the literary text to discuss another topic falls for me into what Adams (1990) criticized through the concept of the absent referent. The absent referent works in several ways, but it ultimately refers to rendering nonhuman animals' suffering invisible for the sake of anthropocentric concerns. Within the speciesist system which is continually hiding violence towards nonhuman animals, either literally or through discursive devices, the absent referent is also about rendering stories with a species-based critique unimportant and transforming them into species-blind narratives. For comparison, let us imagine using Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Colour Purple* (which deals with the experience of an African-American teenage girl in Southern United States at the beginning of the 20th century, enduring patriarchal and racial violence) to make a film that leaves Celie's story aside and focus on any other topic (for example, a gender and race-blind account of social class). This would be criticized as a privileged appropriation of experience, which I believe is what is at stake in Glazer's adaptation.

In turn, Hortle and Stark are right to state about the film that it "echoes the novel's constant and unsettling slippages between hunter and hunted, predator and prey" (8). Despite the erasure of the slaughterhouse critique, the film engages in a similar questioning of the clear boundaries between human and nonhuman through the figure of the alien. However, the ending portrays the punishment of the female alien hunter in turning her into the 'prey' of a male human (a logger whose attitude imitates that of Isserley when she preyed upon men at the beginning of the film, engaging her in conversation and trying to find out if she is alone) which, incidentally, does not happen like this in the novel. Hortle and Stark believe that the film shares similarities with the rape-and-revenge cinematic trend, since Isserley (the sexual predator) is violently punished —also in overt sexual undertones, given the attempt of the man to assault her and the fact that he ultimately 'strips' her literally of her skin. In this regard, they argue that the film maintains clear differences in representations of sexual

violence towards male and female bodies: whereas Isserley's predation is portrayed in a non-realistic, ethereal chiaroscuro space which even "invite[s] the viewer to take pleasure in these scenes" (8), the scenes in the forest where Isserley is assaulted are much more realistic and "recognizable", besides the fact that "the logger's pronounced gum-chewing and calm demeanor create the chilling effect that for him this is a mundane activity. The attempted rape of the alien, and her murder, take place firmly in our world" (8). In another key difference between the novel and the film, Faber has Isserley decide to kill herself, partially because she has been harmed in a car accident and her torn body might reveal her alienness, and partially because of the guilt that the acknowledgment of her shared embodiment and vulnerability with humans elicits. In contrast, the film has Isserley being murdered by a man and then burnt alive, after which her ashes join the landscape in a problematic merging of women and nature. Hortle and Stark's conclusion is that

> both the film and the novel of *Under the Skin* reveal the shocking misogyny at the heart of patriarchal culture and the intersectional nature of the oppression of women and of the nonhuman. This is exemplified in the conclusions of both texts, which reveal that neither the world of the film nor the novel can accommodate women or nonhuman others as embodied by the alien. (9)

However, there are key differences between novel and film in terms of, on the one hand, Isserley's female agency when facing patriarchal violence and, on the other hand, the parallelism drawn between the consumption of nonhuman animals in real life and of humans in the novel and the film. Although both texts share the inability of patriarchy and speciesism to provide space for the Other, Glazer's circumvention of the slaughterhouse space prevents the film from questioning anthropocentrism and speciesism, in what could have been an intersectional critique hand in hand with the criticism of patriarchal ideas about the gendered nature of hunting and consumption. The next section is concerned, precisely, with gender discourses embedded in the alien predator's body.

4.3.3. Fear of the (Female) Predator: Gender and Disability in the Alien Body

Fear of consumption is deeply gendered in both the novel and the film, where the human-hunting alien is not only female but also feminized according to the patriarchal male gaze: in the novel, it is said that the aliens design Isserley's surgery following bodies from magazine models; in the film, she is played by Scarlett Johansson, who has often been subjected to eroticized narratives in mass media, as the 'title' of Sexiest Woman Alive granted (twice) by the US magazine *Esquire* (aimed at a male audience) illustrates. The fact that the hunter is female and the prey is male is relevant for the discussion of both the novel and the film in terms of gender. Hunting has traditionally been coded as a masculinized activity which relies on patriarchal assumptions about activity/passivity, hunter/hunted, and predator/prey, as ecofeminist scholars like Marti Kheel (1995), Brian Luke (1998) or Jon Littlefield (2010) have explored. These dichotomies share discursive traits with the patriarchal ideas of male heterosexuality and desire, flirtation and ultimate sexual intercourse. Kheel (1995) has gathered different arguments in defense of hunting which matched this activity with, first, patriarchal masculinity, and second, the full status as a human being (and more particularly, as a man).[137] Adams (1990) has also shown the shared traits in patriarchal imagery between the violence (either symbolic or actual) towards eroticized female bodies and meat-eating, also pointing to the fact that carnivorous animals often provide a paradigm for male behavior within discourses about nature and the wild. Therefore, as Hortle and Stark (2018) put it, "in bringing sex and meat together, *Under the Skin* inverts the common

[137] Deep ecology theorists like Paul Shepard, for instance, argued that "the male of the species is genetically programmed to pursue, attack and kill for food. To the extent that men do not do so they are not fully human" (1973: 122-23). Aldo Leopold, considered one of the founding fathers of modern environmental ethics, wilderness conservationism and holistic ethics in relation to land, claimed that "the man who does not like to see, hunt, photograph or otherwise outwit birds and animals is hardly normal. He is supercivilized, and I for one do not know how to deal with him" (1966: 227). Theodore Roosevelt stated that hunting "cultivates the vigorous manliness for the lack of which a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone" (1893: viii).

feminization of meat and gendering of consumption in which, according to Adams, the woman's body is like a cut of meat to be consumed by the heterosexual male appetite" (3).

In analyzing both the novel and the film, Hortle and Stark take an intersectional approach to analyze patriarchy and anthropocentrism in Glazer's adaptation as mutually-reinforcing systems, believing that considering both hypotext and hypertext together enables a study of the gendered binary constructions of categories like human and nonhuman, man and woman and, I would add, predator and prey. Both texts evince the deep instability of such ontological categories, disturbing their security and unveiling the constructed nature of concepts like the able body, gender, or consumption. For these authors, "the novel openly plays with ideas of predacity and vulnerability, by pitting two competing versions of the predator against each other within the confines of Isserley's car: the alien and the heterosexual male" (5). Whereas Isserley's alien hunt is sexualized, the sexual desire of hitchhikers towards her is animalized: one of the men thinks that his sexual desire is a "force of nature" and the "law of the fucking jungle" (Faber, 2000: 36). As Kheel's analysis of hunting discourses from an ecofeminist perspective suggested, such discourses often link hunting to the sexual urge, implying that both are a natural, primeval, and elementary drive which cannot and should not be repressed, but rather reckoned with and managed through self-control and prowess. With this in mind, placing the (female) hunter on the other side of the dyad, with the male "force of nature" in the position of prey, subverts the notions inserted on the sexist, speciesist rhetoric of hunting.

Disability also plays a key role in the construction of the predator body since "through Isserley, the feminized and disabled body is imagined as alien, false, malignant, and inanimate" (Hortle and Stark, 2018: 3). She embodies "two popular extremes of the gendered feminine body" (3), as one of the hitchhikers asserts in the novel: "Half Baywatch babe, half little old lady" (Faber, 2000: 13). In the film, the ethics and aesthetics of the 'monstrous' and

the social views on deformity and monstrosity are called into question in a scene in which Isserley picks up a man with a disfigured face (caused by neurofibromatosis, a condition in which non-cancerous tumors grown on the face, altering its shape) in the streets.[138] Just like this man does not know her real alien appearance, she does not see anything strange in him, since her alienness probably leads her to consider his physical appearance as simply another type of human face. Roche (2017) points out that the alien "chats him up exactly as she does the other men, enquiring about his loneliness and complimenting him on his soft hands, suggesting that he has just as much sexual potential as her previous victims" (52), and this is probably why Pearson, a militant against deformity prejudices, plays the role of the deformed man —in Roche's words, "because the film recognizes the sexuality of all human beings" (52). The narrative does not imply that Isserley feels sympathy for the deformed man because she is also monstrous, but rather that from her alien perspective, he is as normatively human as the others. On the one hand, if we consider the novel's narrative, this might point to the fact that she is only concerned with humans as flesh, so their normalcy/deformity is irrelevant as long as they can consume them. On the other hand, it also points to human aesthetic conventions as the problem: it is spectators who see something wrong in the deformed man, and who might feel challenged when confronted with an alien being who does not partake in these conventions. As in many science-fiction and horror films, the question remains: who is

[138] 'Disfigured' is the preferred term by actor Adam Pearson, who plays the role, although Lieke Hettinga (2016) points out the problems of such word: 'disfigure' means to shatter the figure, as 'deformed' implies tear the form of something, so the question remains, what figure, and what form, are we upholding? The use of these terms, although defended by some members of the collectives affected by such conditions, might be maintaining the same normative concept of the human and its expected body shape. Also in relation to terminology, it might seem debatable whether Pearson is 'disabled', since his body is fully functional and his non-normativity is connected to aesthetic appearance rather than to bodily disability. However, 'disability' is defined by the World Health Organization as a state that "results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, […] with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes […] and limited social support" (World Health Organization, 2020). With neurofibromatosis being a congenital syndrome whose effects produce negative outcomes on your daily activities (for example, in the interaction with other people), and with stigma and exclusion playing an important role in these negative outcomes, Pearson's condition might well be studied from the lenses of Disability Studies, as the analysis of Hettinga shows.

actually monstrous? The monster reveals itself as subjective, since "neither character is 'monstrous' to each other but are both potentially so to the viewer" (Roche, 2017: 53).

Hettinga (2016) also explores this scene within the framework of Disability Studies. The encounter between the alien and the man functions as a turning point in the film, since Isserley takes him to the house where the other men were slaughtered but lets him escape at the last moment, which triggers her need to escape from her employers too, trying to fit in her environment as a 'normal' human. This encounter happens just after she has suffered an attempted attack by a group of men who try to get inside her van, hitting the windows and shouting at her. The alien has witnessed how the gendered body she uses to attract her prey is also potentially subjected to patriarchal violence in the society where she has landed. Hettinga interprets the scene with the disfigured man "as a moment of recognition: both subjects know what it means for your body to be excluded by society, to the point of always being at risk of violence. By encountering a form of marginalized embodiment, she recognizes her own subject position in the human world for the first time" (23).

In this way, as it happened with Emily and the aliens in *War of the Worlds*, alienness and disability are connected at the intersection between normalcy, embodiment, and vulnerability. After Isserley takes him and the audience presumes he is going to be consumed too, the alien lets him go. Taking into account that, as Disability Studies scholar Alison Kafer (2013) explains, ableism ideologies in society tend to see disabled bodies as having no future, and the future as having no disabled bodies, Hettinga sees Glazer's film as undoing these assumptions and providing the re-insertion of the disfigured man in society as "a political statement on what kinds of bodies we can consider as belonging to the human landscape" (28). The encounter between the characters played by Johansson and Pearson, and the decision to let this particular man escape and come back to society "defamiliarize how we look at bodies and thereby enable encounters that sustain non-normative bodies, ideally

translating new ways of looking at bodies on the screen to the encounters between bodies on the street" (Hettinga, 2016: 29). However, as much as I can agree with Hettinga's and Roche's analysis of the film in terms of Disability Studies, and their sustainment of the film's challenging of normative preconditions of the human, as I stated in the previous section, the fact that Glazer decided to erase the nonhuman animal experience which was key in the novel is quite problematic. Furthermore, if we consider the theoretical intersections carried out by antispeciesist Disability Studies scholars like Taylor (2017), we can see how the possibility of widening the discussion around the oppression of non-normative bodies in terms of gender, ability and species (and how all these categories intersect) has been neglected due to Glazer's omission of the species aspect.

4.4. The Alien Animal in *Nope*: A Critique of Speciesist Shows

4.4.1. An Alien in the Society of Spectacle: Commodifying the Other

After the huge success of *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019), two horror films concerned with a race-based critique of the racist and exploitative traits at the heart of US culture, Jordan Peele ventured into science fiction horror with *Nope*, released in 2022. The film is set in Agua Dulce, California, where the Haywood family own a ranch with horses who are used on films. At the beginning of the film, as Otis Jr. (OJ) and his father Otis Sr. stand looking at the sky, small objects start falling down; one of them (a coin) hits Otis Sr. in his eye and kills him. The scene is uncanny and mysterious, but in a rationalizing attempt, Otis and the audience are led to believe the objects may have fallen from a plane. Six months later, Otis and his sister Em are working in a commercial when one of their horses, Lucky, reacts violently to the elements (like the flashing light, the chaotic sound, or the frantic movement

of people) of the set.[139] They are fired, and OJ decides to sell some of the horses to Ricky Jupe Park, the owner of a Wild West-themed park called Jupiter's Claim and a former child actor.

At the same time, the Haywoods notice a strange cloud which has not moved in weeks, and they finally find out that it is the hiding place of a huge round, flying-saucer-looking creature which they initially presume to be a UFO. The UFO seems to feed by sucking living beings (like horses) from the ground and then expelling the inorganic matter that it cannot apparently digest. OJ realizes that this might have been what happened in the moment of his father's death, and that the coin came from the UFO's digestion of another person. OJ and Em decide to take footage from the UFO to sell it for profit, joining forces with Angel Torres, the employee of a technology store who helps them with the surveillance equipment, and with Antlers Holst, a famous documentary cinematographer. After he witnesses the flying saucer ingesting people alive, OJ realizes that it is not actually a UFO, but rather a territorial and predatory alien creature (which is nicknamed Jean Jacket after a horse by the Haywoods) which preys on whoever looks at it. After understanding that they must try to avoid its gaze, OJ draws a plan to be able to record it. In the end, OJ, Em and Angel survive and Em gets to shoot a picture of the alien before an explosion of a balloon near it makes it go away —it remains unclear whether the explosion killed it.

Nope mixes science fiction and horror in a Western scenario, playing with the expectations of the alien-invasion genre (suggesting that the huge round thing is a UFO, for instance, and that its alien passengers will be met at some point and, probably, defeated) in order to then move the film to the monster genre (it is not a spaceship, but rather a huge devouring creature). As one of its key topics is spectacle, the film has been read by cultural

[139] The fact that the set is for a commercial is relevant for this analysis in relation to the society of spectacle (Debord, 1967), since the advertising industry also plays a key role in the commercialization of experience and the primacy of (to some extent fictional) images over reality.

commentators and researchers, like M. Keith Booker (2022), through the lens of French philosopher Guy Debord's text *La Société du Spectacle* (1967, published in English as *Society of the Spectacle* in 1970). Debord argued that the Western world had become codified in terms of absolute commodification and of the primacy of exchange value over use value in Marxist terms. As Booker points out,

> almost all of the characters in *Nope* are engaged in creating (and monetizing) show business spectacles in one way or another, from the Haywoods' training of show business animals to Holst's shooting of films and commercials, to the Wild West show of the Parks. Even Torres, a clerk and technician in a retail store, works with technologies that help people to display themselves or to surveil others electronically. (2022: online)

In Gerrick Kennedy's interview with Peele and Keke Palmer (who plays Em), Peele explained that the 2020 lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic inspired the film to him, first because being confined at home he wanted to do a film about the sky, and second because, as he says, "we were going through so much. […] So much of what this world was experiencing was this overload of spectacle, and kind of a low point of our addiction to spectacle" (Kennedy, 2022: online). In fact, Peele explains that the villain of the film is, for him, "something that everyone has in common—everyone's relationship to the spectacle". Besides the narrative itself, spectacle is made explicit in Park's discourse: "every Friday for the past six months, my family and I have borne witness to an absolute spectacle. We are being surveilled by an alien species I call 'The Viewers'". Park has indeed organized a show in Jupiter's Claim in which he attracts Jean Jacket by feeding horses to it while the audience eagerly cheers and claps. Eventually, the creature ends up sucking and swallowing the whole audience. As Booker reads it, "apparently Park believes he has reached an agreement with the aliens aboard a UFO to appear at his show every Friday; it further appears that he has arranged to placate the aliens by sacrificing horses to them" (2022: online). This shows, on the one hand, Park's huge anthropocentric arrogance and, on the other hand, the presence of the commodification of nonhuman beings (both alien and animal) and the subsequent punishment that arrogant humans get for it. In the face of such human attitudes, both aliens

and nonhuman animals rebel, forcing the humans to either adapt to their interspecies encounter or risk dying after being eaten.

4.4.2. Exploitation, Violence and Nonhuman Insurrection

Nope has two narrative times which circle around the character of Park. The earlier moment recalls his childhood as a child actor, when he took part in a TV show called *Gordy's Home*, about a family who lived with a pet chimpanzee called Gordy. Park's memories show an event in the filming set, when the lighting and the general hustle of the shooting led the chimpanzee performer playing Gordy to violently attack the actors and film crew, killing and crippling some of them in a bloody scene. Park hides under a table and Gordy reaches a hand to him under the table, but the chimpanzee is finally shot to death when the police arrive. Park is then shown in the present time, making money from both his theme park and also the morbidity around the events of *Gordy's Home*: he hides a small museum in his office, containing props from the sitcom which include a blood-stained shoe from the fateful day. Park says about this event that the producers tried to bury it but that it became "a spectacle. People are obsessed", which points again to the criticism made about how everything (even tragedy and human and nonhuman crippling and death) is turned into entertainment commodities for the sake of economic profit.

In the present-time theme park, Park also tries to 'tame' the supposed UFO which has appeared in the area, by feeding it horses. He seems to believe that this has subdued the creature and has made him able to lure it out in front of Jupiter's Claim's audience. Finally, however, Jean Jacket appears and devours him and everyone sitting in the public, in an unsettling scene that makes clear it is not actually a UFO or any kind of machine whatsoever, but rather an organic creature with a digestive system that is fully revealed as it swallows the

audience. A tender, supple tract which looks like an esophagus ingests the people, who are later 'digested' as the alien evacuates over the Haywoods' house blood rain with occasional undigested objects like jewelry, coins, or keys.

The other key topic in the film is exploitation. Park's attitude when trying to tame the alien is connected to his experience with Gordy. In both instances, a nonhuman creature was treated as a spectacle commodity. Besides, in comparing Park and OJ (who also uses nonhuman animals in his work with horses), Park believes that nonhuman animals work for him, and not with him. Gordy spared his life because of the innocence of his childhood, but Park does not seem to have learnt anything from that experience as he intends to tame the alien just like the sitcom crew wanted to tame Gordy. Park's intentions to make the alien perform in front of a crowd recalls theme parks with nonhuman animals, like the infamous Sea World,[140] or the manifold zoological parks, circuses and fairs around the world which make nonhuman animals act in unnatural ways for them in front of an audience. It is important to notice that in the scene where the alien sucks all the audience in, the only survivor (besides OJ and Em, who manage to hide before the alien vacuums everyone into its digestive tract)[141] is Lucky, the horse.

[140] As I mentioned in chapter 2, SeaWorld underwent a huge controversy in the 2010 decade after former workers denounced the cruelty with which animals were treated there (so much so that many of them were medicated to overcome stress and depression). Many different animals (belugas, sharks, polar bears, dolphins, penguins…) died after a short span of time in the park. Gabriela Cowperthwaite's 2013 documentary *Blackfish* about Tilikum, an orca who killed several trainers in the parks where he was captive, also contributed greatly to the criticism towards SeaWorld. As of 2023, SeaWorld still has orcas and other animals, and has not changed its actions, perhaps due to the huge revenues it still gets from visitors (Miller, 2023).

[141] Other scholars analyzing the film, such as Ryan Juliano (2023) have connected this scene with the image of a uterine tract, suggesting the resemblance of Jean Jacket to a womb following the work of Creed (1993) and her theory of the monstrous feminine in horror film. To me, however, it is more revealing to see it as an esophagus which swallows its prey.

4.4.3. Looking Away: The Anthropocentric Gaze

OJ's long relationship with horses allows him to understand nonhuman creatures from a post-anthropocentric perspective. As opposed to Park, who despite his previous experience, intends to reduce the alien to a commodity for spectacle, OJ quickly understands the untamed predatory nature of Jean Jacket, together with the fact that it preys upon those who meet its gaze. He also clearly understands that humans are part of its potential prey: when the team is wondering how they can bait and attract the alien into the open, OJ says: "ring the dinner bell". The issue of looking and being looked at is pervasive throughout the narrative in the huge presence of cameras and film equipment, the name Park gives to the supposed aliens inside what he thinks is a UFO (the Viewers), and the determination of the Haywoods, Torres and Holst to capture the alien not as a creature to display (as Park did) but rater in a fixed image, to be looked at over and over again. Moreover, Brooker (2022) points out the presence of eyes in the film as well: the 'eye-see-you' signals between OJ and Emerald; the T-shirt worn by Em which features a pop-eyed wolf; the fact that Otis Sr. dies because his eye is destroyed; the mention of bands like Third Eye Blind; or, in terms of casting, the choice of Daniel Kaluuya (who plays OJ), who —besides being Peele's favorite actor (he performed the main role in *Get Out*)— possesses remarkably large and expressive eyes. Writing for *The New York Times*, Roslyn Sulcas pointed out how (especially after *Get Out* and its famous theatrical posters displaying Kaluuya's face) his "huge, tear-spilling eyes have imprinted themselves on our collective consciousness" (2018: online).

Besides the comment on postmodern society, surveillance and images, the gaze (and the eye) is relevant in Critical Animal Studies through the reflections of poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. In his text *L'Animal que Donc Je Suis* (2006, in English *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, published in 2008), he addresses matters such as the establishment of the difference between human and nonhuman animals from an

anthropocentric stance which provides the human with an advantageous, singular position whereas the rest of species are placed under the umbrella term of 'animal', disregarding their multiplicity, range of differences among them and their singularity as either species or as individual beings. The gaze has a prominent place in his analysis. He departs from a situation in which his cat was looking at him as he left the shower, naked and vulnerable to the gaze of the other, and he reflects upon the subject-object relationship inserted in that reciprocal look. Derrida points out that the Western philosophical tradition has always looked at animals to observe their behavior, study them, or to try to communicate with them, but it has hardly ever considered the possibility that the animal was looking back (and thus engaging in their own analyses and thoughts about us). This would make us the object of the relation, which is a rather destabilizing idea for human exceptionalism. Derrida argued that the animal gaze signaled the border "from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself" (12), which refers to the anthropocentric stance from which the Human establishes itself as the subject which looks upon (and often looks down on) the rest of the animals. However, when the human is looked at, the vantage point of the subject is disrupted, becoming an observed object, which is deeply relevant to *Nope*'s narrative.

The aversion that the alien has towards anyone who looks into its eye or tries to meet its gaze, shown in the fact that they immediately become its prey, is foreseen early in the film when OJ is at the film set with his horse, Lucky. Although the film crew have been warned about not looking Lucky in the eye because he might get nervous, one of the workers places a mirror in front of him, which causes Lucky to react violently due to the fear his own eye's reflection causes on him. Knowing about horses' behavior, this is what allows OJ to realize that in order to escape from the alien's voracity, they must also avoid its gaze.[142] To reinforce

[142] It must be noted here that when I say 'gaze' I am referring to looking at the alien directly, since in *Nope* this creature has the shape of a flying saucer and we cannot see its eyes (nor can we be sure it has them, anyway).

OJ's theory, we see Jean Jacket eating Park's show's audience, who had clearly been looking at it as a spectacle commodity; as well as Holst, the cinematographer, who, despite knowing that he should try to avoid the alien's gaze, seems to be willing to give his own life for the perfect shot.

The fact that the human characters call Jean Jacket an 'animal' is objectionable, given that, if the creature is extraterrestrial, then the terrestrial category of 'animal' would not really apply. If we take into account Derrida's criticism about the anthropocentric and epistemologically-egocentric use of the term 'animal' for any creature who does not belong to our species, the parallelisms established between Jean Jacket, Gordy and Lucky in the film suggest that the three of them embody the Other whom humans think they are able to conceptualize, understand, and ultimately tame and use as commodities. Gordy and Lucky are examples of how an anthropocentric treatment of animals can go terribly wrong. Their fictional selves represent real incidents with nonhuman animals whose behavior is not fully considered and therefore provoked damage, suffering and even death to both human and nonhumans.[143]

4.4.4. Animal Symbols in Peele's Cinema

Nonhuman animals as symbols populate Peele's cinema. In *Get Out*, Chris and Rose hit a deer with their car while they were going to her parents' house. While Rose is only concerned with the possible damage to the car, the moaning of the dying animal attracts

[143] I am thinking about the people who swim in beaches where there are warnings about sharks and end up being attacked by them because their predatory behavior was not considered; predators like crocodiles or lions who are confined in zoos or circuses and attack the humans who work with them, or those who visit the enclosures; or, in more domestic settings, the vast amount of people who cohabit with apparently-harmless animals like dogs or cats but who, due to their human counterparts not taking into account their psychological needs, attack them in ways which vary in severity (from superficial wounds to death). The human-exceptionalist idea that humans can never be food plays an important role in this attitude.

Chris's attention. Again, the expressive eyes of Kaluuya try to meet the eyes of the wounded deer. Later in the film, a deer's head is seen displayed on the Armitages' wall. When the Armitage family is revealed to be part of a group of white supremacists who perform experiments on black people, the deer prefigures Chris's destiny: he has been wounded and 'hunted down' by Rose in order to be taken, prepared and displayed as a hunting trophy for a white-supremacist audience at their house. The parallelism is clearer when we see Dean, Rose's father, vehemently arguing that all deer should die. This might come across as strange for audiences, given the zeal with which Dean makes his statement, but if the old slur 'buck' is considered, Dean's attitude makes more sense within the context of the film. 'Buck' refers to a male deer, but it was also used in the 19th century as a racist slur for black men who were seen as violent or unruly. In the end, Chris kills Dean impaling him with the deer's antlers on the wall, which points to Dean's final destruction through the metaphoric symbol of his racist hate.

In *Us*, rabbits are used as symbols of the Tethered, a group of genetic clones created in a government's experiment to control the population. While the originals lived a 'normal' life on the surface, the Tethered were imprisoned when the experiment failed —due to the realization that they could successfully clone the physical part of a person, but not their souls—, and later abandoned in underground research facilities. Given that rabbits are commonly used in laboratory experiments, it made sense to establish a parallelism between them and the Tethered. For Peele, however, the rabbits in *Us* signify the metaphor of Easter that the film constitutes: "the story is a dark Easter of sorts. Red is the Messiah who is rising from the hole that she was left for dead" (in Polowy, 2019: online).[144] He explains his use of

[144] The rabbits are symbolically quite prolific in the film: they also point to the entrance to the unknown, as in Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which is exactly what Adelaide does in *Us*: going down the 'burrow' in Santa Cruz beach. At an aesthetic level, Peele also brought together the shape of rabbits' ears and scissors, which are both very relevant in the film (Sinha-Roy, 2018).

animals in these terms: “the deer I used in *Get Out* and the rabbits I used here, you know, woodland animals where there is something wild and unbridled behind their eyes, but there is also a distinct lack of what makes a human” (in Polowy). These statements, together with the declaration that he is afraid of rabbits and that they look like sociopaths to him (Abad-Santos, 2019), indicates that Peele has not really questioned his own speciesist assumptions about animals (in fact, despite their symbolic relevance and the parallelisms established between them and the underclass, rabbits are used as food for the Tethered in *Us*, and there is no comment on that). As in the revenge of nature trend, Peele fails into the speciesism of just using nonhuman animals as symbols, ignoring their subjectivity and their moral relevance as individuals.

The treatment of animality in *Nope* is, however, more complex. Rather than just metaphors, the assumption that humans can grasp the nonhuman animal experience and extract knowledge from it from an anthropocentric perspective (especially when the aim is to dominate, commodify and harness the nonhuman) is what lies at the core of the film, hand in hand with the critique of spectacle. Booker reads it as the postmodern artificiality of culture triumphing over nature: “the humans of *Nope* have attempted to tame all of the film’s ‘animals’ and to incorporate them into the spectacle. Yet these animals—and nature as a whole—stubbornly retain their own material reality, however foreign that reality is to the spectacle” (online).

4.5. Conclusions

In all three of the case studies of this chapter, despite not fulfilling completely non-anthropocentric narratives (in the case of the film *Under the Skin*, moreover, it falls into a deeply anthropocentric viewpoint with the removal of the slaughterhouse narrative from the

novel), the fact that nonhuman animals' experiences and the issue of interspecies contact and respect have such a significant presence in the narratives —together with other aspects like the mentioning of veganism, or the reference to animal exploitation shows— points to a rather positive outcome in terms of the permeation of antispeciesist discourses in contemporary popular culture. Contemporary alien contact films often gruelingly represent the violence of this contact for both the humans and the nonhumans, while also emphasizing that this violence not only lies in being predated, but also in being anthropomorphized or conceptualized within a restrictive, anthropocentric framework. As Margrit Shildrick puts it,

> the greater violence would be to assume that the particularity of the other is within our grasp, that the place of the other is fully accountable from the 'outside'. The issue, then, is one not only of contesting the epistemological and ontological boundaries of bodies of knowledge and bodies of matter, but of reconfiguring the ethics of relationship. (2003: 161)

Taking this idea about epistemological violence and the exploration of the ethical possibilities of relating with the Other, I think these examples reinvigorate Vint's (2010) assertion about science fiction —and I would also add horror— in relation to these genres' special relation with alterity. Both genres are deeply concerned with the construction of alterity and the possibilities of contact and communication with a being whose worldview and experience is so radically different from us. This radical difference —which should be acknowledged, not disregarded, nor omitted— is true for both aliens and nonhuman animals, and narratives like the ones studied in this chapter show ways of establishing this interspecies or interplanetary contact in ways that challenge anthropocentrism and its dangerous hierarchies.

CHAPTER 5. Zombie Predators: Environmental Concerns and the Post-Undead

"You're either the butcher or the cattle"

Gareth, *The Walking Dead*

5.1. Introduction: Cinematic Monsters

5.1.1. The Folkloric Origin of the Zombie

The last chapter of this dissertation deals with the zombie. As opposed to other undead creatures, the contemporary zombie is a reanimated body (there might be different causes for this reanimation, from magic rites to radiation or mutations) which has lost its former consciousness and personality, and wanders around, moved by its hunger for living flesh. It is thus very different from the vampire, who is still conscious and rational —be that rationality kind or evil. Another term that is often conflated with the zombie is the ghoul: both are often used interchangeably throughout much zombie bibliography.[145] However, the ghoul is, in strict terms, a necrophagous creature which resembles a demon-like being created by some sort of black magic. It originated in Arabic folklore, where, as Ahmed K. Al-Rawi (2009) explains, there were different and sometimes contradictory descriptions.[146] Ghouls are not completely unconscious, but rather have a feral, basic intelligence, and they wander around

[145] Some of the referenced scholars in this chapter, in fact, make this indistinct use between zombie and ghoul, and I have kept the terms intact in direct quotations, although I advise readers to bear in mind that they are not synonyms although these authors might use them as such.

[146] The term entered Western culture through the French translation of *Arabian Nights*, in which Antoine Galland "took liberties with the Arabic ghoul by representing it as a fearful creature feasting on corpses in cemeteries" (Al-Rawi, 2009: 291).

cemeteries since they are attracted to dead flesh. Zombies, however (at least the creatures that film director George Romero conceptualized in the 1960s, which set the basis for the monsters we know today), move out of pure instinct and hunger for living human flesh; regardless of the origin of their transformation into undead walkers, they used to be human.

This chapter will first look at the history of the zombie, which is to be found in the colonial periods of Haiti and the (mis)representation of religious practices of voodoo. The origins of the zombie, before Romero popularized the monster we are used to nowadays, are to be found in Africa and the Caribbean, through the historical process known as the Middle Passage, part of the history of plunder, slavery and exploitation that characterized the imperialistic world order between the 16th and the 19th centuries. More specifically, zombie folklore started in Haiti, where the word 'zombie' makes reference to a victim of voodoo magic,[147] a sort of hypnosis process where the person loses all consciousness and free-will, and responds solely to the voodoo master's intentions.[148]

Haiti is nowadays a country located on the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. The island was originally inhabited by the Taíno people, and the first Europeans settlers arrived in 1492, during Christopher Columbus's first journey overseas. The island was made part of the Spanish Empire, but its potential as a trading and refueling area for ships caused piracy and buccaneering to spread, especially encouraged by

[147] There are many theories about the origin of the word 'zombie', including the Angolan Kimbundu language's word *nzúmbe*, which means ghost or spirit, the West Indian *jumbie* for 'ghost', the African Bonda *zumbi* or the Arawak Indians' *zemis* for the soul of a dead person). However, how the current monsters came to be known as such is not clear, since the first zombies (as Romero himself acknowledged) were related to undead slaves of Haitian voodoo, not to the flesh-craving living dead. In fact, despite being the most common concept for audiences, many landmark zombie productions never use this word, including Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (where they are called 'ghouls') or Frank Darabont's TV series *The Walking Dead* (which uses several names for them, but never 'zombie').

[148] Voodoo states that there are individuals called *bokor* who might hurt others, even causing their death and then using their docile bodies as they wish. In terms of food studies, it is interesting to note that the only way to make zombies come back to their senses, according to the Haitian tradition, was to feed them salt: "this will lead the zombies to attack the bokor who created them or to return to their place of burial for their final death" (Ginalis, 2015: online).

France. Spanish and French hostilities settled when the western part of the island —that is, today's Haiti— was given to the French in 1697, who renamed it Saint-Domingue. They kept their rule until the Haitian Revolution in 1791, which culminated in the independence of the country in 1804, becoming the only successful slave-lead revolution in history. This revolution was allegedly initiated in Bwa Kayiman with a voodoo ceremony. Although there have been doubts about the actual role of voodoo in the revolution, it seems to be "hard to believe that Vodou did not play a vital role for the individuals living through the revolutionary war of independence" (Thylefors, 2009: 81-82). After its independence, Haiti was occupied again by the USA in 1915, until 1934. This occupation was led by US businesses which had an interest in the economic activities of Haiti, and was followed by several revolts by the local population who were then repressed and punished, leading to human rights violations, concentration camps, forced labor, racial segregation and a persecution of the Haitian Voodoo religion, which saw its association with wickedness reinforced, something that deeply permeated popular culture.

Voodoo, or vodou, was the result of a syncretic process within the African diaspora in Haiti between the 16th and 19th centuries. It joined several traditional religions of West and Central Africa with Catholicism. Despite its complexity and its actual rites and beliefs, voodoo has been deemed one of the most slandered religions in the world, often being misrepresented in culture (including in the first stage of zombie film, as it will be seen in the next section) and associated with sorcery and mischief. According to James Russell, the interest in voodoo, together with the allegations of cannibalism and abomination that went with it, "was also a rather crude attempt to attempt to justify the American occupation of the island, [and] the zombie played an important role in this, since it was a monster whose alleged existence could be cited as proof of Haitian savagery, occultism and perhaps even Satanism" (2014: 17). Along these lines, the anthropologist Wade Davis also wrote that the

early references to Haitian voodoo "conveyed an important message to the American public: any country where such abominations took place could find its salvation only through military occupation" (1988: 73). The first stage of zombie cinema was, therefore, deeply connected to colonial discourses and imperialist exploitation.

5.1.2. The First Stage: Colonial Roots

A key difference between the zombie and other classic Gothic monsters like the vampire, the mummy or the ghost is that the zombie has no literary reference that links the original folklore with its representation in film. Besides the historical roots seen in the previous section, zombies as fictional characters are the only Gothic monster that is purely cinematic, passing directly from folklore to screen. Russell explains that "the zombie is the most modern of monsters, a twentieth-century interloper whose first fully fledged appearance in the English speaking world dates back to the publication of *The Magic Island*, William Seabrook's groundbreaking study of Haiti, in 1929" (2014: 7).[149] Furthermore, as Kyle M. Bishop points out, the zombie is a fundamentally "American creation", without a "primal narrative that established and codified its qualities or behaviors" (2010: 13). Lacking these codified characteristics that other monsters have received from their Gothic literary tradition, cinema and the cultural influences that the industry of Hollywood has reflected over the years (ranging from imperialism and terrorism to environmentalism) played a key role in establishing the shape and behavior of the undead. The filmic presence of the zombie is

[149] Seabrook's text constitutes the first "fully fledged appearance", but before that, the journalist and amateur anthropologist Lafcadio Hearn, who had traveled to Martinique to study local customs in the Caribbean, where he came across the term *corps cadavres*, published "The Country of the ComersBack" in 1889 in *Harper's Magazine*. This became the zombie's debut appearance in the English-speaking world. The term "zombie" was first recorded in The Oxford English Dictionary in 1819.

usually organized in three stages: the colonial zombie (1930s-1960s), the slow zombie (1960s-2000s), and the ravaging zombie (2000s-today).

The colonial zombie film tradition spanned from the release of the first zombie film, Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), to Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).[150] During these 36 years, the zombie became so popular in early 20th-century cinema because, according to Ann Kordas, it "represented a white fantasy figure: a docile (black) labor force that would never revolt, never demanded better working conditions, were insensitive to pain, and that could work day and night devoted entirely to carrying out the wishes of the zombie master" (2011: 20-21). In its first filmic appearance, as it was seen in the previous section, the zombie was strongly intertwined with Haiti and the colonial context of the Caribbean.[151] The connection between zombies, Haiti and voodoo is clearly seen in *White Zombie*, in which Bela Lugosi plays a voodoo master who makes plantation workers act following his will. According to Russell, *White Zombie* succeeded in the 1930s USA because of the 1929 economic burst: "a dead worker resurrected as a slave into a hellish afterlife of endless toil […] was the perfect monster for the age" (23). Besides, Phillip McReynolds explains that

> the immediate context of *White Zombie* is the United States' military occupation of Haiti from 1914 to 1934, a context that goes unmentioned in the film. During the occupation, the Marines reinstituted the practice of conscripted forced labor called corvée, which reminded the Haitians of the loss of sovereignty in the institution of slavery under the plantation system. Thus the imagery of the Haitian zombies laboring in Legendre's sugar mill serves as a double image for both colonial slavery and neocolonial labor conditions. (2015: 153)

Films like Halperin's, together with George Terwilliger's *Ouanga* (1936), or Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) —which makes use of the colonial zombie and a

[150] Technically, the first film ever made where the dead arose from their graves was the French silent film *J'Accuse* (Gance, 1919), an anti-war film where soldiers who died in the battlefield of World War I appeared in front of their relatives and then went back to their rest. However, these undead are closer to a dreamlike vision than to a group of reanimated people who lose their self-awareness or turn into flesh-eaters.

[151] Although the second wave of zombie films left aside the colonial aspects of the genre, recent films have tried to recover this dimension in several ways, as in the French *Zombi Child* (Bonello, 2019), which takes place in Haitian plantations, or the British *The Girl with All the Gifts* (McCarthy, 2016), based on the homonymous novel by Mike Carey (2014), which does not specifically refer to Haiti or the plantations, but makes race an essential component of its story.

reinterpretation of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre* to tell the story of a Voodoo priest who sets his victims in a catatonic, zombie-like state—, had "more to do with folklore, ethnography, and imperialist paranoia than […] with the strictly supernatural" (Bishop, 2010: 19). Their structure followed more closely the model established by the Golden Age Gothic films such as *Dracula* (Browning, 1931) or *Frankenstein* (Whale, 1931), in which a single villain jeopardized the safety of a helpless female character. Playing with racial dichotomies and imperialist anxieties about the Haitians' alleged savagery and wickedness, such films proved highly useful for the colonial ideological machinery. A few decades later, however, a film director from The Bronx turned zombie film history upside down after reading Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend*.[152]

5.1.3. The Second Stage: Romero's Saga of the Dead

Romero inaugurated the second stage of zombie film, which Peter Dendle (2001) has called the Golden Age of the zombie. After the colonial zombie of the 30s and 40s, the undead would have to wait until the end of the 1960s to see audiences rush to watch them on screen. Russell wonders whether the disappearance of the zombies after the 40s "was a result of this uncomfortable association between the zombie and death. In a period when death itself was transformed from being personal and individual into an event of global apocalypse, movies about the dead rising up against the living fell out of favour" (2014: 51). With the release of *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968, Romero established a new paradigm that would leave the Haitian tradition of the zombie and the colonial references aside for years to come. In fact, Romero stated that he had not drawn inspiration from previous zombie films, but rather from Matheson's novel —as well as from its first film adaptation, *The Last Man on*

[152] Which was later adapted to the big screen three times as *The Last Man on Earth* (Ragona and Salkow, 1964), *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971), and *I Am Legend* (Lawrence, 2007).

Earth (Ragona and Salkow, 1964). This explains why the undead creatures in Romero's film are not called zombies: he believed zombies to be related to the films from the 30s about colonialism and slavery. *Night of the Living Dead* established a pivotal moment for the contemporary zombie, adapting the concepts about exploitation to its contemporary context in the USA: the Vietnam war, political corruption and social unrest, as well as the unbridled consumerism which alienated people from sociopolitical problems. Apart from initiating the zombie horde type, the film also set the starting point for narratives about besieged humans whose behavior turns out to be more dangerous and unpredictable than that of zombies, once survival becomes the main priority, above the social contract and morality. By obliterating the colonial aspect, Romero's film also brought horror back home: Hollywood horror films before *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) had mostly located the origins of horror far from the USA.[153] In *Night of the Living Dead*, siblings Barbara and Johnny are driving through a cemetery in Pennsylvania when they encounter what appears to be slow, confused human beings, but are soon revealed to be corpses that have risen from the graves due to the radiation coming from a space probe that exploded in the Earth's atmosphere.[154]

The zombie craze that followed this film disposed almost entirely of the puppet zombie linked to the Haitian tradition. Turned into a completely different monster, cinematic zombies lost their legacy of colonialism to become symbols of consumerism and servitude under

[153] As I mentioned in the vampires chapter, Universal classic monsters like Dracula and Frankenstein came from Central Europe, the Mummy from Egypt, the Wolf Man from Wales, and the Phantom of the Opera from Paris, to name but a few. However, Hitchcock, who was himself English, started the trend of focusing on villains who perform mischief in the heart of the USA, and this became an essential feature of horror films in the 1970s and 1980s, the decades dominated by slasher psycho-killers like Leatherface from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hopper, 1974) or Michael Myers from *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978).

[154] It is relevant to note that Romero's film was partially heir to the Atomic Age films from the 50s, ridden with huge monsters produced by radiation such as *Them!* (Douglas, 1954), and alien invasions which mirrored the tensions of the Cold War, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956). Besides, the science fiction monster films that replaced the Universal Gothic monsters entailed, for zombie films, a move from the issues of voodoo and colonial anxiety to the fears of brainwashing and apocalypse that were in vogue in the 50s amidst threats of fifth columnists, brainwashing techniques applied to war prisoners, and nuclear destruction.

capitalism (signified in the shopping mall scenario, especially after the second release of Romero's saga, *Dawn of the Dead*). This new zombie established the characteristics that we can all recognize nowadays: their slow pace, the infectious nature of their bite (those who are bitten become zombies themselves), and their hunger for human flesh. Even though the image of the flesh-eating zombie hordes is a common trope today, it had not been seen previous to 1968. As McReynolds puts it, "because it is undead, the voodoo zombie does not have to eat. The Romero zombie by contrast, though also undead, is driven by its desire to consume. In this way the cannibalism (or, more properly anthrophagism, since zombies don't eat other zombies, only humans)" (157). By presenting humans as potential flesh for monsters, Romero depicted "human flesh to be nothing more than meat, aligning human beings unapologetically with stockyard animals and game" (Bishop, 2010: 133). The identification of human flesh with nonhuman animals became cumbersomely real in the fact that the 'flesh' depicted in *Night of the Living Dead*, which zombies grab and devour, were actually nonhuman animal entrails taken from a Pittsburgh butcher.

In *Night of the Living Dead* humans are potential food and zombies are scary monsters not to be pitied. This was still the case in the second release in 1978 (*Dawn of the Dead*), but it evolved from the third (*Day of the Dead*, in 1985) onwards and throughout the 21st-century films of the saga, which will be explored in section 5.2. *Dawn of the Dead* established another common trope of the subgenre: the zombie-ridden mall scenario. Departing from the situation in *Night of the Living Dead*, with zombies having spread through the Earth, humans are trying to stay alive among the hordes of the undead. Its protagonists, Peter, Francine, Stephen and Roger, end up in a shopping mall in Philadelphia and decide to stay there, given the ease to get food and medicines among the post-apocalyptic havoc. However, zombies eventually break into it and they must find a way to escape.

The film has been repeatedly associated with representations of sheer consumerism: "all the [zombies] do is take, and what they take is food. Therefore, while the voodoo-based zombies of the 1930s and '40s largely represent the slaves of a colonial society, *Dawn of the Dead*'s 'mall zombies' function as an exaggeration of the late capitalist bourgeoisie: blind consumption" (Bishop, 2010: 139). *Dawn of the Dead*'s narrative establishes, on the one hand, a steep division between zombies as predators and humans as prey. A scientist on TV explains:

> They are not cannibals. Cannibalism in the true sense of the word implies an intraspecies activity. These creatures cannot be considered humans, they prey on humans, they do not prey on each other. That's the difference. They attack and they feed only on warm human flesh. Intelligence? Seemingly little or no reasoning power. What basic skills remain are more remembered behaviors from normal life. There are reports of these creatures using tools, but […] even animals could adopt the basic use of tools in this manner. These creatures are nothing but pure motorized instinct. We must not be lulled by the concept that these are our family members or our friends: they are not, they would not respond to such emotions, they must be destroyed on sight!

This discourse places zombies outside the ontological sphere of humanity. Besides, it separates humans from animals on the basis of intelligence and tool use ("even animals could adopt the basic use of tools"), and then moves on to state that zombies are below nonhuman animals ("nothing but pure motorized instinct"), and must thus be treated with no empathy whatsoever. The discourse of the film thus makes no concessions to the possibility of sympathetic zombies: they are monsters to be feared and killed. However, towards the end of the film, Peter answers Francine's question "what are they?" saying: "they're us, that's all. There's no more room in hell". Peter thus suggests that humanity is doomed; by saying "they are us", he does not downsize the fear and aversion that characters feel towards zombies, but he does weaken the position of humans as the safeguarded protagonists of the apocalypse: humanity will end up as food for monsters (as the scientist on TV says: "they won't run out of food while we're still alive") and, if not, they will end up in hell anyway.

Although one of the most popular music videos at the end of the 20th century, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (Landis, 1983), showed zombies dancing alongside the King of Pop,

Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), released around the same time, was a box-office failure. This might have been due to the fact that, as Joseph Maddrey explains, "audiences in the carefree, consumer-friendly 1980s apparently did not feel the need for such a serious examination of personal and societal values" (2004: 129). In fact, parodic productions like *Return of the Living Dead* (O'Bannon, 1985) attracted more interest among the public —in fact, after *Day of the Dead* Romero would have to wait until the 21st century to release new films for his Saga of the Dead.[155] *Day of the Dead* already pointed to a sympathetic representation of the zombie that would be replicated in the 21st century, especially throughout the 2010s decade, as it will be discussed later. It also introduced the image of the military forces as the actual villains of the film: violent, unsympathetic and cruel, Captain Rhodes and his men constantly object to the scientific experiments carried out by Doctor Logan upon the zombies in a hidden bunker facility in the Everglades. Rhodes exhibits a violent, misogynistic attitude towards Dr. Sarah Bowman, who is also a scientist investigating the causes of the zombie outbreak. Logan is nicknamed 'Frankenstein' because of his experiments with zombies, whom he dissects and connects to electrical machines to be able to understand how their (un)dead bodies are working. Logan is convinced that zombies can be reeducated, since they are able to remember actions from their past lives, like shaving.

Bub is a zombie who is kept chained by Logan in order to carry out behavioral experiments: he is not violent, nor is he driven by irrational hunger. In fact, we see him being calm and obliging around Logan, as if he was being domesticated through some sort of Pavlovian training. Bub even appears taking Logan's hand without biting him, in a rather fraternal moment emphasized by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony playing on Bub's

[155] It must be taken into account that the 1980s and 1990s were the decades dominated by psycho-killer franchises and the slasher subgenre within Hollywood horror film. Romero did try to find studios willing to back him in his new ideas for his saga, but that did not happen until *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002) brought the zombie back from its grave again, turning them into mainstream blockbuster material. After the renaissance established by *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002), Romero was finally supported by Universal in his fourth film of the saga, *Land of the Dead* (2005).

headphones. Up until then, zombies from the saga did not have any names, as it has also been the case in further zombie productions (apart from the characters whose names audiences knew from when they were alive, obviously).[156] Bishop thinks that the film "dramatically changes the role of the zombie forever, establishing the creatures as not only victims of an unexplainable curse but also tragic figures capable of learning and limited evolution" (174). Another key idea developed by Romero —picked up afterwards in *28 Days Later*— is that humans (and more specifically, the military) are the actual barbarians, which contributes to the shifting of monstrosity from zombies (who are here presented as helpless and often victims to human cruelty) to evil humans. In *Day of the Dead*, Rhode eventually kills Logan, who has been feeding dead soldiers to Bub as a way of 'treating' him for having learnt some tricks. In the end however, 'Frankenstein' is avenged by his monsters: led by Bub, the zombies pursue Rhodes's men and kill them. Rhodes himself is killed by Bub (with a gunshot, since he had managed to remember and repeat past actions) and then eaten by the zombies. At the end of the film, it is not just the good humans (Sarah, John and Bill) who survive, but also the large group of zombies and, more importantly, Bub, signaling an important difference with previous evil-zombie films and foreseeing further 21st-century productions which would spare some of the main zombie characters' lives.

5.1.4. The Third Stage: The Fast, Ravaging Zombie

The genre kept a low-profile throughout the 1990s, but then saw a dramatic rise in numbers again after the terrorist attacks in New York and the Pentagon, which led to the rise

[156] In relation to the naming of monsters, I would like to recall chapter 2 of this dissertation, where I also highlighted the fact that the *Jurassic World*'s dinosaurs have names, as opposed to their predecessors in *Jurassic Park*. Naming creatures brings them closer to the possibility of sympathy.

of a post-9/11 'zombie renaissance'.[157] This third stage of the zombie film was characterized by the fast, ravaging zombie, whose main intention was not just feeding but also destroying and annihilating humans as violently and bloodily as it was feasible.[158] This fast zombie trend started with Danny Boyle's 2002 British film *28 Days Later*,[159] and continued with many films where scientific wrongdoings and the spread of viruses were essential for the outbreak origins. For Russell, the fast zombie echoes "a proxy for the jihadists who haunt Western society's paranoid nightmares. They're driven by hatred for us. They cannot be reasoned with, placated or calmed" (153). As a monster which mirrors its zeitgeist, the contemporary presence of zombies in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives like the TV series *The Last of Us* (Druckmann and Mazin, 2023) or films like *World War Z* (Forster, 2013, based on Max Brooks's 2006 homonymous novel) also point to an interest in depicting a pessimism exacerbated by economic recession, the weaknesses of left-wing parties and the rise of far-right parties worldwide, as well as pandemics. The zombie apocalypse comes in handy in this sense because it represents an end of the world brought about by humans —either through military or scientific wrongdoings—, and where governmental powers prove useless to

[157] The website *Zombie Movie Data-Base* (which is not available anymore) showed an increase in zombie films in the first decade of the 21st century, with 41 titles in 2008 alone, as Bishop references (2010: 10). The popularity of the zombie in those years could also be noted in the presence of two zombie films in the Sundance Film Festival in 2006 (*Fido*) and 2007 (*The Signal*). Russell acknowledges that in 2000, when he started researching zombie films for his *Book of the Dead: the Complete History of Zombie Cinema*, "nobody really cared about zombies. They were the great unwashed of horror cinema, low-rent and disreputable". However, "by the time the original edition of *Book of the Dead* was published by FAB Press in October 2005, things were already changing" and in 2014, "almost a decade later, Z-culture is now a phenomenon, spanning movies, novels, comics and videogames" (2014: 6).

[158] This difference between the slow and the fast zombie was mocked by Romero in *Diary of the Dead* (2007). At the beginning of the film, when a group of film students are recording a horror film in the forest, a character who is wearing a mummy costume runs after a girl, and a student who acts as director says: "dead things don't go fast, you're a corpse, for Christ's sake!".

[159] In fact, some fans have argued against the consideration of Boyle's work as a zombie film, since the creatures are fast and alive (they are infected with a rage virus, not reanimated). In my view, it fits in the zombie genre due to the presence of unconscious human beings who crave for human flesh and whose bite turns more people into flesh eaters. Moreover, given the origins of the zombie, it cannot be argued that all zombies are necessarily dead people who have been reanimated. The common points in zombies seem to be the unawareness of their predating behavior and their insatiable drive to eat living humans.

control the situation and restore the previous world order. As Mark Fisher noted, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (2009: 1), and zombies bring about the kind of inexorable apocalyptic context that the audiences see around them daily, with news reports about climate change, pandemics, or conservative political measures that entail the feeling of gloom which soaks contemporary zombie fiction.

This third stage was initiated by the filmic adaptation of Capcom's 1996 videogame *Biohazard*, *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002), as well as *28 Days Later*. Given their release year, it would be easy to think that they were deeply influenced by the events of 9/11 but, as Russell points out, it would be inaccurate to believe that the attacks re-started the zombie boom, since both films were already in production before the terrorist attacks. However, in his words: "it did put fuel in its tank, changing the course zombie cinema would take forever" (148). Following Tony Magistrale's idea that fiction acts as "nothing less than a barometer for measuring an era's cultural anxieties" (2005: xiii), Bishop argues that "from the beginning of the War on Terror that followed 9/11, the popular culture produced in the United States has been colored by the fear of possible terrorist attacks and the grim realization that people are not as safe and secure as they might have once thought" (9). Given zombie fiction's common scenarios of destruction, shock and horror —which recall the real footage of the hours which followed the attacks—, as well as its usual exploration of the idea that a deadly threat might be hidden among appearingly common human beings (and even our closed and loved ones), zombie film might be one of the most culturally resonant fictions at the beginning of the 21st century.

After the release of *28 Days Later* (which grossed $82 million worldwide, from a budget of just $8 million), as well as a previous trend of zombie videogames that had proven successful, Hollywood tried to take advantage of the renewed zombie interest. *Resident Evil* (2002) resulted in a mixture of science fiction and horror where the protagonist, the iconic

Alice played by Milla Jovovich, a character especially created for the film who does not appear in the game, fights infected members of an evil corporation inside a high-security underground chamber.[162] The film had six more sequels released between 2004 and 2021. During the first decade of the century, remakes of Romero's films were produced —*Dawn of the Dead* (Snyder, 2004), *Night of the Living Dead 3D* (Broadstreet, 2006), and *Day of the Dead* (Miner, 2008)—, and Romero himself directed sequels to his own saga —*Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2008), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009). The renaissance had been fully established by then: *The New York Times* journalist Warren St. John called zombies "the post-millennial ghoul of the moment", saying that "once again, they're everywhere" (2006: online). This context gave way to the release in 2010 of the successful TV series *The Walking Dead* adapted by Frank Darabont from the eponymous comic book series by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore and Charlie Adlard (2003-2019), whose cultural significance and success will be explored further in this chapter.

5.2. Romero's 21st Century Saga of the Dead: Sympathy for the Zombie

5.2.1. The Concept of the Post-Undead

In terms of their evolution over the years, Bishop argues that zombies have not undergone the same kind of changes that other supernatural creatures like vampires have: while these monsters are, to a greater or lesser extent, conscious and rational, zombies remain

[162] Videogames and their film/TV adaptations have continued to play a key role in the development of the zombie in the 21st century. One of the latest and most successful examples is the release, 21 years after the first *Resident Evil* film, of Craig Mazin and Neil Druckmann adaptation of *The Last of Us*, a videogame developed by Naughty Dog in 2013. The homonymous TV series was released by HBO in 2023, and its success proved that the undead were very much alive, rising interest among audiences and providing fruitful ground for looking into societal concerns of their time. In this case, the series is compelling for contemporary audiences through the way in which several aspects resonate with our own experience after the Covid-19 pandemic. Mutated viruses/fungi are familiar concepts for us by now, and the series insists on the correlation between climate change, food and pandemics.

creatures without any capacity for emotions or logical reasoning. In fact, and along the same lines of the evolution explored in this dissertation, Bishop explains that

> in recent years, traditional supernatural monsters have become sympathetic protagonists and misunderstood heroes, such as […] the vampires in Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles" (1976–2003) or Meyer's *Twilight* series, and characters on television such as Angel and Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and *Angel* (1999–2004). Without dramatic alterations to the zombie's essential identity, such a re-casting of the walking dead seems to remain an illogical impossibility for creators of zombie tales and films. (2010: 20)

However, in spite of the difference that he establishes between these monsters in terms of their transformation into sympathetic beings, Bishop also acknowledges that "recent developments in the subgenre have begun to bestow more personality, subjectivity, and even humanity upon the zombies" (158), as Bub illustrated in *Day of the Dead*. Bishop suggests (contradicting his previous statement) that "over the course of forty years, the cinematic depictions of zombies, as with vampires, have drifted from monsters audiences should fear and loath to creatures they should sympathize with and even root for" (196). This is confirmed by recent examples of zombie fiction which presents undead creatures as, on the one hand, able to reason and communicate —as in the film *The Girl will All the Gifts* (McCarthy, 2016) or the TV series *Santa Clarita Diet* (Fresco, 2017)— and, on the other hand, being sympathetic, affectionate and heartwarming —as in the films *Warm Bodies* (Levine, 2013, based in Isaac Marion's homonymous novel) or *Maggie* (Hobson, 2015). These examples point to a new understanding of the zombie that I call the post-undead.

Whereas the zombie film since Romero presented the undead as monsters to be ruthlessly killed for the sake of the humans' survival, as the decades have gone by, zombie films have often chosen to focus on the cruelty of humans in a post-apocalyptic situation in which the social contract has been suspended. The idea that zombies might not actually be the most dangerous creatures walking the ravaged earth, and that humans instead are the actual threat has been developed throughout contemporary zombie fiction, from *28 Days Later* (where the military are far more cruel than the rage-infected humans, especially because of

their awareness about their actions) to *The Walking Dead* (which features humans who engage in cannibalism, torture, gratuitous cruelty and cold-blood murder). This reversal of monstrosity points to a reassessment of good vs evil and human vs monster that is key in 21st century fiction, as I have argued in other monster examples.

Furthermore, the sociopolitics and ethics of food are key in the post-apocalyptic scenarios that the zombie hordes provoke. On the one hand, humans see themselves reduced to flesh for ravenous zombies, raising once again the question of how the difference between morally-edible and morally-non-edible bodies is constructed (both in fiction and in our actual social practices). On the other hand, food scarcity and the breakage of the chains of production and distribution force humans to look for food, in desperate attempts to calm their hunger that often mirrors the zombies' rampant search for flesh.

If traditional zombies are often referred to as 'the undead', my use of the term 'post-undead' makes reference to the newest kind of zombie creature that challenges the customary image of such a monster. The undead are generally characterized by their mindless, brute and feral behavior and, as such, they are killed by the hundreds with little or no remorse on the part of humans. Since they are either dead or sick/infected, defeating and killing them off is the key for humans' survival: it is either them or us. The post-undead, however, posits a different scenario. Firstly, they are not characterized by the same features as the undead: they are often (either partially or fully) rational, thoughtful and sometimes even friendly. Colin (from *Colin*, Price, 2008), R (from *Warm Bodies*), Maggie (from *Maggie*), Sheila (from *Santa Clarita Diet*) and Melanie (from *The Girl with All the Gifts*) are heartwarming, intelligent and sensible creatures despite their undead/infected nature and their cravings for human flesh. The situation they foster is thus very different from the 'us vs them' scenario of previous film trends. Here, there is the possibility of communication, collaboration and coexistence. Although in various ways, these zombies are able to either manage their hunger, select their

food sources, and, in general, control their previously-unmanageable zombie instincts. These situations of human and monster contact in which the creatures' monstrosity is made more complex, fits perfectly in the trend of sympathetic monsters that other creatures like nonhuman animals, vampires and aliens have illustrated throughout the 21st century.

David McNally explains in *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (2011) that zombie-related "tales disturb the naturalization of capitalism —both of its social relations and the senses of property, propriety and personhood that accompany it— by insisting that something strange, indeed life-threatening, is at work in our world" (5). Although he focuses on labor in his Marxist perspective on zombies and vampires, I would like to adapt his following quote to my own antispeciesist analysis of the same monsters:

> market-forces constitute horrifying aspects of a strange and bewildering world that represents itself as normal, natural, unchangeable. For this reason, fantastic genres, be they literary or folkloric, can occasionally carry a disruptively critical charge, offering a kind of grotesque realism that 'mimics the 'absurdity' of capitalist modernity' the better to expose it. (McNally, 2011: 7)

If we think about the carnonormative system upheld by anthropocentrism and speciesism, we might argue in a similar way that the alleged normalcy and naturality of carnism can also be uncovered, identified and deconstructed through narratives that disrupt this normalcy, offering a "grotesque realism" that "mimics" the "absurdity" (or rather, the cruelty) of carnism in order to "expose it". In this sense, when McNally states that "critical theory thus needs an alliance with the fantastic" (7), I would add that antispeciesist theory needs a similar alliance with the "fantastic" too.[164] I agree with McNally that these narratives should be read "as a necessarily coded form of subversive knowledge whose decoding promises radical insights and transformative energies" (7) in both a Marxist and an antispeciesist sense.

[164] McNally uses the term "fantastic" in a wide sense to refer to fiction portraying nonhuman monsters, since he is dealing with horror and science fiction narratives. Thus my use of this word here to make reference to his quote, although I am aware that this is not the usual genre terminology that I am using in this dissertation.

From an antispeciesist point of view, the post-undead raises issues about the separation between human and nonhuman. Russell claims that the zombie is a "harbinger of doom", since "its very existence hints at the possibility of a world that cannot be contained within the limits of human understanding, a world in which these binary oppositions no longer stand fixed" (8). What used to be a definite line between monster and human is not so clear-cut anymore. Posthumanist and post-anthropocentric remarks have called the construction of the Human into question, at the same time as they have taken into consideration the discursive constructions of the Other. The monster and the animal, as key components of creatures like zombies, have often gone from being evil, irrational and killable beings to becoming sensible and often sensitive creatures whose aims and drives are to be taken into consideration rather than obliterated. As stated before, food aspects play a prominent role in zombie fiction since, besides zombies being human-eating monsters, their post-apocalyptic contexts raise a lot of food-related issues too, including food taboos, cannibalism, and vegetarianism. As it was the case with other human-eating-monster fiction like vampires and aliens, vegetarianism and veganism have also made their way into zombie narratives, as films like *Zombieland: Double Tap* (Fleischer, 2019), *Warm Bodies* or *Army of the Dead* (Snyder, 2021) illustrate. I will come back to them in section 5.4. Before them, the films from Romero's saga that were released in the 21st century will be analyzed, observing the relevant differences with the 20th-century films that preceded them, and assessing how they might advance ideas which are relevant for my discussion of contemporary monster fiction.

5.2.2. *Land of the Dead*: Rooting for the Zombie Horde

Land of the Dead is the fourth release of Romero's Saga of the Dead. As the first film from the franchise released in the 21st century, it features elements which are characteristic of

contemporary monster fiction. One of these elements is the depiction of previously-evil monsters as more sympathetic creatures who are deserving of the audiences' sympathetic understanding. If *Day of the Dead* introduced a kind zombie, Bub, who was able to remember some parts of his previous life as a living human and perform some actions, like shaving, in a rudimentary way, the zombies in *Land of the Dead* expand this evolution from Bub's individual ability to think logically to a new form of social organization in which they aim at retaking provisions and facilities from the living.

As it is common in Romero's zombie films, the social commentary in *Land of the Dead* is loud and clear. Despite the years that passed between its release and the previous film in 1985, the chronology of events in the Saga of the Dead is supposed to be the same for all the films. The zombie outset is narrated in both *Night of the Living Dead* and in *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and the subsequent outcomes of the zombie apocalypse are the scenario of *Dawn of the Dead*, *Land of the Dead* and *Survival of the Dead*. Despite incoherences related to the different levels of technology in the films from the two different centuries, Romero places all the films of his saga within the same universe and time span. *Land of the Dead* presents society once the zombie apocalypse has taken place and humans have started to reorganize. Within an overt class struggle narrative framework, we see a post-apocalyptic Pittsburgh, where the rich are living in a skyscraper called Fiddler's Green, led by a sort of feudal lord called Paul Kaufman. The rest of the population live in the streets of the city, which has been fortified to keep zombies away. The rich enjoy a luxurious life in Fiddler's Green, which is equipped with restaurants and even a sumptuous shopping mall (reinforcing the importance of this scenario in zombie film) where they can imagine the zombie apocalypse never happened and they are still able to choose a lavish watch from a shop window. Meanwhile, the poor try to survive malnutrition and disease in the city slums, and to

avoid Kaufman's henchmen, who chase anyone who tries to organize the people to fight the unfair organization of resources.

These resources are retrieved from zombie-ridden areas with the Dead Reckoning, a military tank-like vehicle equipped with weapons and commanded by Riley Denbo and his team, including his friend Charlie and Cholo, a man who wishes to get access to Fiddler's Green in exchange for his services. When Kaufman denies this access to him, Cholo hijacks the Dead Reckoning and threatens to shoot its missiles to Fiddler's Green. Riley, who had been arrested for helping Slack (a prostitute who had been sentenced to death by Kaufman for helping the city's rebels) is offered redemption if he stops Cholo and gives Kaufman the vehicle back.

At the same time, we see the zombies being organized by Big Daddy, a black man who used to be a gas station worker and who has retained memories from his past life, as well as a desire to break down the city walls and take revenge for all the humans' incursions in their areas, which entailed many zombies' deaths. In this film, as opposed to previous zombie fiction, Big Daddy feels sympathy for their fellow zombies, and he is not indifferent to the deaths inflicted on them by the unsympathetic humans. At the end of the film, the zombies manage to enter the city, Big Daddy kills Kaufman, and Riley, Charlie and Slack retrieve the Dead Reckoning and set off towards Canada.

An interesting take on *Land of the Dead* is the realization that human society (at least, the one which was set up in Pittsburgh) is eventually taken over by a new nonhuman community, and this is presented as part of its happy ending: the villains are defeated, the human heroes manage to survive and escape among fireworks, and the zombie characters — who are not considered among the villains anymore— also get their fair share. McReynolds (2015) relates this ending with Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*, in the sense that the

monstrous society comes to replace the human one, instead of having humans unequivocally triumphing over the nonhuman monsters.[165]

Big Daddy is the key character in the film, both in general and more specifically for my 21st-century monster analysis. He is "a zombie who has regained the power of thought and speech —albeit limited— [and] has jumped several steps up the living dead evolutionary ladder" (Russell, 2014: 144). For Russell, Big Daddy is a revolutionary leading the zombie uprising, teaching them how to rudimentarily communicate and to relearn tool use: "Romero styles this uprising in keeping with the rest of the series' racial undertones. Big Daddy is like a zombified Black Panther, a civil rights revolutionary who leads this living dead underclass on a riot against the Establishment" (144).

Although *Day of the Dead* had already aroused the audiences' empathy towards Bub, this is definitely the first film in Romero's saga that asks us, explicitly and clearly, to root for the zombie horde. If audiences' sympathies were invited to support Bub and not Captain Rhodes, here we are unambiguously compelled to feel relief when Big Daddy sets fire to the gasoline he had previously poured into Kaufman's car —let us remember he was a gas station employee when he was alive, so the relearning of tool use is key in this moment. The concept of the evolved zombie might come across as "antithetical to the generic protocols of the subgenre" (Bishop, 2010: 159) but, for some authors, the film's zombies are part of the post-millennial climate. In the Anthropocene, an era which is culturally characterized by the

[165] Matheson's post-apocalyptic novel portrays a mixture of zombies and vampires (creatures who were formerly humans, transformed by the action of a bacterial pandemic) who attempt to prey on the —apparently— last human alive, Robert Neville. It constituted a cornerstone in our understanding of monstrosity and humanity, and set a precedent for contemporary narratives where the human's position as immaculate hero, the enactment of good, an indisputable protagonist and successful survivor against the forces of evil, are questioned. Firstly, *I Am Legend* turns the heroes/villain relationship upside down: instead of a group of heroes fighting a single monster (as in Stoker's *Dracula*), here a group of monsters harass a single human. Secondly, the novel's ending shifted the dichotomy between hero/monster and survivor/defeated: finally understanding that Neville is the last example of an already-disappeared species, and that the new kind now rules the earth, he decides to commit suicide. Neville also acknowledges that the aversion that the new species feels towards him is understandable, since he had also been scared of the unknown and different. Monsters are thus excused for their monstrous behavior, and the human is defeated.

questioning of human activity and the straightforward link between 'human' and 'goodwill', and between 'monster' and 'villain', humans are "not necessarily humane […] but neither are the zombies necessarily monstrous" (Bishop 2010: 159). In fact, they are closer to heroes than to irrational monsters.

Russell recalls the consequences of 9/11 for the film's production. The film's script was written before the attacks, and had to be altered after them, since some scenes involved helicopter crashes and skyscrapers and could turn out objectionable. Since the film had to be reworked in the aftermath of 9/11, the War on Terror context inevitably soaked the narrative too. The fact that Cholo is an immigrant whose desire to become part of the elite was frustrated by those in charge, which turned him into a terrorist jeopardizing the established order (threatening, moreover, with the destruction of an essential skyscraper in the heart of the city), had strong resonances with its context. In Russell's words,

> *Land of the Dead* stands as one of the first major blockbuster productions to openly criticise Bush's war record. Presenting Kaufman as a composite of George W. Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Romero makes his criticism of the regime more than transparent. After Cholo steals Dead Reckoning and threatens to destroy Fiddler's Green, Kaufman growls "we don't negotiate with terrorists" in an echo of that now famous presidential line. Cholo's response is equally fraught with real-world analogy: "I'm gonna do a jihad on his ass." (2014: 145)

Bearing in mind this feasible parallelism between Kaufman and Bush, then, and the relationship between the War on Terror and the interests in oil in the Middle East by the US corporations, the fact that Kaufman dies when Big Daddy sets fire to the gasoline that surrounds and soaks him is therefore quite blatant. For Russel, though, Romero poses the question of "who is the real terrorist?": "Cholo, who's threatening to destroy the city? The zombies; who, as Riley realises, are just looking for a place to call home? Or Kaufman and his cronies, who've brought this situation upon themselves as a result of their inhumane treatment of both the living and the ghouls?" (146).

The film's beginning and ending work in a circular way. At the beginning —which shows a decaying restaurant sign which reads EATS, forecasting the presence of predation in

the narrative— Riley observes Big Daddy and other zombies performing repeated actions that they apparently remember from their previous lives. Riley's partner says "they are trying to be us", to which Riley replies "no, they used to be us". His partner then argues that "there is a big difference between us and them: they are dead, it is like they are pretending to be alive". Riley then wonders: "is not that what we are doing? Pretending to be alive?". Such a question brings humans and zombies closer early in the film. Instead of establishing a clear division between good (human) characters and evil (zombie) ones, the film's hero shows traits of empathy towards the zombies, as well as apathy towards their current human conditions under Kaufman's rule. A bit further in the film, when Riley is talking to Mulligan, the man who tries to organize the people against Kaufman, Mulligan says: "he did not build that place, he just took it over, kept the best for himself and left us with a slum to live in. But if there were enough of us, if only we would join up, we could make this a fit place to live in". This speech could as well be uttered by Big Daddy, since their aims at taking revenge from the rich who benefit from robbing the lower classes (be them humans or zombies) are very similar. Mulligan concludes: "together we would be unstoppable", which is the same claim that Big Daddy would state to his fellow zombies if he could speak. An unstoppable group is also what zombies ultimately prove to be once they organize to attack the city.

The audience's empathy is worked through the presentation of zombies as, on the one hand, beings who are able to feel and think —however primitive these actions might be— and, on the other hand, as objects for human entertainment in cruel, sadistic ways. In the scene in which Riley and Charlie meet Slack, she has been thrown to a caged arena inside a bar with two zombies who try to eat her. The design of the scene recalls nonhuman animal fights which are enforced by people who gamble on them: animals like dogs or cocks are trained through abusive and violent actions in order to increase their aggressiveness and the violence of their reactions, and are then put together in enclosed spaces to kill each other. In

the bar scene, both Slack and the zombies are equated to nonhuman animals in that they are caged and forced to fight out of (survival or predation, respectively) instinct. Again, it is not the two zombies who attack Slack the ones who are presented as villains to the audience: it is rather Kaufman and his henchmen, who have enforced this situation for both the living and the undead. The circular narrative of human empathy towards the zombies is completed at the end. While Mulligan stays in the city and Riley and his group leave towards Canada, Big Daddy and the surviving zombies are allowed to roam around the city and Riley prevents his team from shooting them down, arguing "they are just looking for a place to go, same as us". The monsters are spared and the ending suggests hope and new beginnings once the (human) villains have been defeated.

5.2.3. *Diary of the Dead*: Found Footage and Media Criticism

Two years after *Land of the Dead*, Romero released *Diary of the Dead* (2007), which joined the trend of the found-footage horror that was popularized by *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999) at the end of the 20th century. This subgenre is characterized by the filming and editing of the film as if it had been recorded by the cameras of the characters in the story, which would later be 'found' and presented to the audience in a sort of pseudo-documentary format. Some of the common cinematographic techniques used in the found footage are the unsteady camera work and the naturalistic acting, since the actors are supposed to be experiencing the events in real time. Although *The Blair Witch Project* was the most famous found footage film —even raising questions about whether the film's footage was real or not (Fletcher, 2024), a concern powered by a smart marketing campaign which included missing posters featuring the actors of the film, or a faux documentary, *Curse of the Blair Witch*, released by the same directors, allegedly exploring the case—, it was not the first one. The Italian film *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato, 1980) was the first film which

used this technique, faking the presentation of the retrieved recordings of a documentary crew who had come into contact with some cannibal tribes in the Amazon rainforest. After *The Blair Witch Project*, the subgenre was continued by other relevant films like *Paranormal Activity* (Peli, 2007), *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008) or the Spanish zombie film *REC* (Balagueró and Plaza, 2007). If we see the release years of these films, it is easy to see why Romero would jump on the trend which was in style in 2007.

Romero was also interested in criticizing the use that the population was making of their phone cameras, acting as reporters and uploading videos —whether real or fake— to the Internet in a matter of seconds. The events of 9/11 also played a key role in this regard. The immediacy and unexpectedness of the attacks in the middle of the city —at a time when mobile phones with video cameras were already in vogue— provoked a reaction of bystanders who quickly turned into real-time reporters. Pedestrians took out their phones and recorded and photographed the havoc in the streets, the people running in a panic, and the smoke and debris covering the area. Such images became so powerfully enshrined in our collective memory that their influence on disaster cinema was noted for years to come —even forcing the alteration of some film scenes for being too reminiscent of the 9/11 images, as it happened in the previously-mentioned *Land of the Dead*.[166] Besides, in *Diary of the Dead*, the contemporary anxiety about concerns like climate change or terrorism is noted when one of the characters says: "we hear this sort of thing everyday, we get hurricanes 'cause the planet's getting too hot. And terrorists, they're gonna drop a dirty bomb on the white house or on your house, and somebody's gonna put some germ in your water or in your mailbox".

Diary of the Dead presents the events of the zombie outbreak that had been seen in *Night of the Living Dead* through the camera of a group of film students from the University

[166] But also of non-horror films like Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* (Sanders and DeBlois, 2002), which included a scene with a plane crashing into city buildings and was changed to a spaceship flying through the mountains (Renfro, 2019)

of Pittsburgh. As they see some amateur footage —which was, according to Debra, the narrator, never broadcast, implying some kind of media cover-up of the events— of zombies attacking people on the Internet, the group sets off in a camper towards Pennsylvania, where Debra's family lives. They find several people along the way, including an Amish man who helps them, a group of former National Guards reconverted into smugglers, and a different group of National Guards who rob them and forbid them from recording. Towards the end of the film, they reach the house of another student, Ridley, only to discover that he has been bitten as well. At the end, almost everybody in the group of students dies (including Jason, the main character recording the events) and only Debra, Tony and their Professor survive, taking shelter in Ridley's panic room. The last scene of the film shows Debra watching some footage from Jason, in which a pair of hunters are shooting zombies who have been tied or hung to be used as shooting targets, and she says: "are we worth saving? You tell me".

For Russell, "*Diary* is easily the most misanthropic film in the series" (159). Debra's last utterance runs in this direction, reinforcing the idea —quite common in the zombie subgenre, and more so in the 21st century— that zombies might not be the villains of the story. Although the conflation of humans and food is not one of the main points of the story —besides a moment in which a character says "out there, we're lunch"—, its removal of humans from the heroic position of saviors and survivors of the apocalypse partakes of the posthumanist approach to zombie fiction that questions the humans' own attitudes, as well as the role we play in the Anthropocene. As it is common in Romero's zombie fiction, the film does not spare criticism for the media, the government, or the military. As Dale Knickerbocker puts it, the contemporary zombies "attack not only humans, but [also] metaphorically humanism and the values it espouses: reason, technoscience, anthropocentrism, and human exceptionalism" (2015: 73). The next film in the Saga of the

Dead reiterates the criticism of patriarchy and belligerence, and the presence of food and nonhuman animals becomes more relevant than in *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead*.

5.2.4. *Survival of the Dead*: Can we Teach Zombies to Eat Well?

Survival of the Dead was released in 2010, and it is the sixth and last installment of Romero's saga. Recalling the Western genre,[167] the film presents the fictional Plum Island, where two Irish rivaling clans fight over how to deal with the zombie infection. On the one hand, Patrick O'Flynn advocates for killing the undead. On the other hand, Seamus Muldoon tries to protect the infected, keeping them at bay until a cure is found. The Muldoons eventually expel O'Flynn and his men from the island, with O'Flynn's daughter Janet staying there. O'Flynn later joins a National Guard group (who are the same ones who appeared in *Diary of the Dead* and robbed the film students in their camper) and comes back to the island in order to regain control of it. They find out that Muldoon has been capturing and chaining zombies, trying to, as Muldoon says, "get these things to learn to eat something other than us". They have tried to feed them nonhuman animals like rabbits, squirrels or pigs, but apparently this has not worked so far. Muldoon's hopes are set in Jane, Janet's twin sister, who has turned into a zombie but maintains certain abilities from her past, such as being able to ride her horse. Towards the end of the film, Janet approaches her sister believing that she can recognize her and will therefore not hurt her, but Jane bites Janet in the hand. Amongst the wreak unleashed by the release of some of the chained zombies, Janet sees Jane finally biting a chunk off the horse's flesh, and, before she completely turns into a zombie, she rushes to tell her father that Muldoon was right and it has become apparently possible for

[167] Rusell points out that Romero was "a long-time fan of John Ford and Howard Hawks", which is seen in how he "sneaks in farmhouses, assorted gunslingers, a corral and even a horse that's ridden across the open fields by a zombie" (198) in the film.

zombies to get used to nonhuman animal flesh, which would entail the possibility of human and zombie coexistence. However, before she can break the news, O'Flynn shoots her daughter to prevent her from becoming a zombie. The ending shows the zombified O'Flynn and Muldoon shooting at each other over a huge full moon, in a typical image of a Western gun duel, showcasing an everlasting confrontation, oblivious of the prospects of peace.

The possibility of empathy and coexistence between zombies and humans, personified in the two O'Flynn sisters —with Jane finally eating nonhuman animal flesh, and Janet rushing to tell everybody that a different post-apocalyptic situation is feasible—, is overrun by the patriarchs' fight over the dominion of the land and the political decisions governing Plum Island's society. Patriarchy and war thus win over empathy and community at the end of the film. However, *Survival of the Dead* did not enjoy an overall audience approval, being commonly considered the weakest film of Romero's saga (Hoover, 2014). Among other criticisms related to the film's quality, Russell provides a reason for this: "as zombies became big business, from *Zombieland* (2009) to *The Walking Dead* TV show (2010-), Romero's intimate, low-key apocalypses no longer resonated. In the multiplex, redneck survivalists weren't the enemy —they were the heroes of zombie culture as it gatecrashed the mainstream" (198).

What is interesting for my analysis of monster films is, needless to say, the fact that *Survival of the Dead* is probably the film of the saga that more directly addresses the issue of food. Whereas the zombies in previous films had been depicted as hordes —in a more or less sympathetic light— whose consumption of human flesh was taken for granted, here the authorities of Plum Island (at least, the Muldoons) understand that the issue of predation is the main problem for human-zombie coexistence. By trying to teach the zombies to 'eat well', the Muldoons attempt to overcome the wide division between human and monster in order to turn both into fellow compatriots: under Muldoon's vision, the rejection of feeding

off one's traditional nourishment sources and learning to obtain nourishment from other more ethical sources is what may lead to a more sympathetic, respectful community. The fact that they want to feed nonhuman animals (like horses) to zombies falls into the same speciesist hierarchy that *Twilight* also exerted, failing to extend sympathy to the bodies of nonhuman animals. In any case, from an ecofeminist perspective it is rather telling to see how Muldoon's possibility of building community on the basis of changing eating habits —which proves to be feasible when Janet witnesses her zombie sister eating the horse— is erased by the mayhem created by narrowed points of view (like O'Flynn's, who assumes since the very beginning of the film that zombies' behavior can never be changed) and the patriarchal fight which echoes ludicrous warfare and meaningless conflict. Romero's last film of his saga seems to point out that on an island where two patriarchs (even with different worldviews) fight for control, the possibility of empathy finds it hard to take root.

5.3. The Walking Dead: Meanings of Food in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

This section focuses on *The Walking Dead*, one of the most successful TV series of the 21st century, based on the eponymous comic series by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore and Charlie Adlard (2003-2019). It was adapted to TV by Frank Darabont, a film director and scriptwriter with a brilliant career adapting Stephen King's novels to the big screen: he directed *The Shawshank Redemption* in 1994, *The Green Mile* in 1999, and *The Mist* in 2007. On Halloween's night in 2010, *The Walking Dead* premiered to 5.35 million viewers, making it one of the largest debuts in cable history (Porter, 2022). It also became, by far, the biggest series debut that AMC had had up to that point. According to Nielsen Media Research, a company that measures media audiences, the series was the most commented one on social media between 2016 and 2017 (O'Dell, 2017). The whole series was nominated for several

awards, including the Primetime Emmy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, the Saturn Awards or the People's Choice Awards. Furthermore, two spinoffs and several made-for-TV films set in *The Walking Dead*'s universe have been released in the last few years.[168]

The series begins with its main character, sheriff Rick Grimes, waking up from a coma (caused by a shot during crossfire) in a zombie-infested hospital in Georgia, USA. Once he manages to leave, he realizes that the world he knew before he was shot no longer exists. Grimes encounters other survivors, who manage to cope with the zombie apocalypse by scavenging, stealing and organizing some precarious societies. Some of these survivors are friendly, whereas others will become sworn enemies among the rubble and the hordes of the so-called 'walkers' (as stated before, *The Walking Dead* is one of the zombie narratives that never use the word 'zombie'). In this regard, Kirkman, the scriptwriter of the original comic books, explained that in the particular universe of *The Walking Dead*, the word 'zombie' simply did not exist. In a 2016 interview with Conan O'Brien, Kirkman stated that the characters did not know what a zombie was before the apocalypse: "*The Walking Dead* takes place in a universe where zombie fiction does not exist. No one inside *The Walking Dead* has seen a Romero movie, so they can not get the rules from that" (in ZombDay, 2016). By leaving the word 'zombie' aside, the comic books and the show forced their characters to figure out what was happening and how to face it through a trial and error process. Besides, this also allowed the narrative world's creators (both in the comic books and the series) to develop their own rules about the undead.

[168] These spin-offs include *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015), *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020), *Tales of the Walking Dead* (2022), *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon* (2023), *The Walking Dead: Dead City* (2023), and *The Walking Dead: The Ones Who Live* (2024).

5.3.1. Food Ethics in the Post-Apocalypse

The Walking Dead's narrative is permanently soaked with tensions related to food, either because the human survivors are potentially food for zombies —as well as other humans, as best illustrated in season 4 with Terminus, which will be discussed afterwards—, or because of the problems that arise regarding their own nourishment (scarcity, food taboos, disgust…). In "Seed" (S3E1), for example, they enter a house where they expect to find food, but all they can see is dog food cans. Carl tries to open one but his father, Rick, takes it from him and throws it away, suggesting that they have not reached the point of breaking the disgust boundary yet. However, as the seasons advance, the survivors go far beyond eating processed food not meant for humans: at some point, they eat dogs (S5E10) and other nonhuman animals like snakes or worms.

Analyzing the representation of food in popular culture, and how characters deal with socially-acceptable or despicable sources of nourishment, Parasecoli' states that "pop culture uses eating and ingestion to naturalize and make acceptable different visions of what a human being is" (2008: 12). This ontology of the human is fundamental in post-apocalyptic fiction (either with or without zombies roaming around), characterized by the collapse of sociopolitical structures and moral codes. Fear, scarcity and danger shape the interpersonal behavior of the characters, who must face several moral dilemmas while the world as they knew it breaks down. In these scenarios, food is frightfully present through its disappearance: the availability that middle and upper-class characters took for granted before the apocalypse is no longer real, supermarkets are chillingly empty, people fight and kill over a few rusty cans, and when no food is left, all bodies risk becoming meat.

In this way, "the table —and eating in general— becomes an arena where cultural, social, and political struggles find visible expression" (Parasecoli, 2008: 63). Besides, "the body itself becomes relative and arbitrary, […] in environments where there is not necessarily

a hierarchy among living beings" (79), or rather, that the hierarchy is established on different grounds (for example, who is stronger, or who holds more weapons and rules over more facilities in order to survive). Human-consumption scenes in the series, as well as in other post-apocalyptic fiction —in films like *Soylent Green* (Fleischer, 1973), *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005) or *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009)— are among the most disturbing, audience-chilling moments of such already-frightening narratives. On the one hand, scenes where humans are eaten are upsetting because they challenge species separation and downgrade humans to the place that 'edible' nonhuman animals traditionally occupy in our hierarchies.[169] On the other hand, these scenes remove the ease and reassurance that previously-established food cultures provided. By removing some humans from the meal-sharing event (and the role of consumers) and making them part of the menu, human-consumption scenes unsettlingly challenge these previously-assumed communities.

The presence of food in post-apocalyptic narratives is not just revealing as regards unfamiliar ways of eating (like feeding off humans). On the contrary, familiar customs and behaviors in relation to feeding are also relevant in these narrative contexts because they help anchor previously assumed concepts such as humanity, normalcy and hierarchy. In general, scenes of shared meals when food is scarce work to reinforce the image of community and the goodness of the characters: "meals connect those who share them, confirming their identities as individuals and as social groups, all while excluding those who do not participate in them" (Parasecoli, 2008: 60). This is why scenes where *The Walking Dead*'s group share meals together are mostly presented as appealing, whereas scenes where a character refuses to join in or even leaves the gathering are uncomfortable. Along the same lines as Parasecoli, Retzinger also believes that "the act of sharing food serves as a sign of shared humanity. The

[169] I am using the term 'edible' nonhuman animals not as a fixed ontological category but rather as a description of the species that are socially considered as consumable bodies (in the West, this would include pigs, cows, fish, chickens…), as opposed to nonhuman animals in general, which would include species that do not qualify in this perception (such as dogs, parakeets or dolphins).

more meager and sparse the food, the more poignant these scenes of cooperation and communal meals become" (2008: 379). However, in order to work as such, the food shared needs to be ethically acceptable in the audience's world. Scenes of communal meals where the dish includes human flesh (as in S5E2, in which a group of cannibals from Terminus roast and eat another character's leg) do not work in the same reassuring way, and they are far from being presented or perceived as signs of humanity, but rather the opposite. Reassurance and easiness work well when conventionality is at play.

Unfamiliarity of food, conversely, often takes place when hunger is at stake. Retzinger explains that "when hunger takes a literal rather than metaphorical form, it propels actions that serve to define what it is to be human or to be inhuman. Food (and water) scarcity leads both to brutality and kindness" (378). Focusing on each character's decision on whether to choose violence or collaboration, Retzinger deems as 'human' those who take part in "scenes of generosity and nurturing that take place over food" (378) and 'inhuman' those who choose violence. However, I consider this use of 'inhuman' quite problematic, since it is the same species (humans) who take part in both violent and generous acts. Believing humanity lies only in generous acts of sharing and taking care of others, while deeming 'inhuman' acts of cruelty or violence is a rather naïve take at imagining how humans would act in the post-apocalypse. Besides, this separation between human/inhuman does not work if we think about characters like Rick, who is the hero of the series and incurs in both heroic and savage, brutal acts which contribute to the complexity and interest of the character, exploring how fear, threat and pain affect humans' moral compass in such extreme situations. I believe that, concerning *The Walking Dead*, it is more enriching to delve into the discursive separation between human/nonhuman —bearing in mind that 'nonhuman' is used to define some humans too (for example, when they are eaten, as in Terminus)— rather than establishing a

difference between human/inhuman in terms of ethical choices, including consumption. In this regard, the next section focuses on the already-mentioned scenario of Terminus.

5.3.2. Human and Zombie Predators: Terminus as a Slaughterhouse

Terminus is a location that appears first as an imagined oasis, a promised land if not at the end of the rainbow, at least of the railway; and then as a nightmarish place where humans are downgraded to mere flesh. In season 4, Rick's group are homeless after the confrontation with the Governor and the loss of the prison, which they had turned into a safe home.[170] They face extreme conditions, of which hunger and thirst are often more acute than the presence of the undead around them. At some point in their route seeking refuge, they come across a big sign that gives direction to reach, as the sign reads, "Terminus. Sanctuary for all. Community for all. Those who arrive, survive". The sign indicates the direction towards the apparently safe place. Besides, the group receives some radio signals from Terminus, which also indicate that this community is open to receiving new members, who will be welcomed and protected. After some debate among the group about whether Terminus might be a trap, they split in two. The first group (Abraham, Bob, Eugene, Glenn, Tara, Rosita, Maggie and Sasha) reach Terminus before the others, but we do not get to see what happens there until the second group (Rick, Michonne, Daryl and Carl) arrive afterwards.

[170] To provide a brief summary of how things reached this point in the narrative, during the first seasons of the series Rick's group is focused on trying to find a relatively safe place to live. In the first season, they travel to the CDC (Center for Disease Control) to try to find out if there is a cure and other survivors. In the second season they come across Hershel's farm, which they make their home until a group of walkers forces them to leave. In season three, they find an abandoned prison, which they also turn into a home. At the same time, Michonne and Andrea, two characters from Rick's group, discover Woodbury, a fortified city ruled by the Governor, a seemingly charming man who ends up becoming Rick's sworn enemy, ultimately attacking them and forcing them, again, to leave. After the events at Terminus, Rick's group find their ultimate home in Alexandria, which they inhabit and protect almost until the end of the series.

Before this happens, other events at the end of the fourth season anticipate the problems the group will face in season 5, and it does so through the conflation of a prey nonhuman animal with the soon-to-be-prey humans. In "A" (S4E16), Rick goes with Carl to check if any animal has fallen in the traps they had set, and they find a rabbit. Rick tells Carl to see the funnel-shaped trail on the ground, and tells him: "that's where you want to set the noose. So you hide it with leaves. Then you put sticks all around it so any animals going by have to run this way right into the trap". This uncannily resembles what the group itself is doing: following the trail "right into the trap", which is Terminus. In the same episode, the specter of cannibalism haunts the group when Rick, Michonne, Daryl and Carl are attacked by The Claimers, a violent group of survivors. Armed against Rick's group, who apparently stand no chance against them, one of the Claimers threatens to sexually attack Carl, and the Claimers' leader, Joe, tells Rick that he will have to witness their friends and family being raped and murdered before he dies. Rick then turns around and bites off Joe's neck (although he spits the flesh and blood and does not swallow it), killing him and causing confusion, which allows the group to beat the Claimers. This moment is crucial for the series, not just because of the anticipation of cannibalism, but also because it marks Rick's breakdown within the series' discourse: Rick's once flawless morality starts to crumble and his decisions start to be doubted by both the group and the audience —although it must be noted that he is never presented as a villain, nor as an anti-hero. After the encounter with the Claimers, Rick tells Daryl that what he did to Joe is "ain't all of it, but that's me", suggesting that his humanity is being shattered, and he is becoming closer to the monsters (either zombies or cannibals), making visible the porous borders between human, nonhuman and monstrous in the series main protagonist.[171]

[171] Besides, in the universe of *The Walking Dead*, the unexplained mutation that humans have suffered means that everybody will become a zombie once they die (whether they have been bitten or not),

Finally, in "Us" (S4E15), this second group is welcomed at Terminus under a bright sunlight, among flower beds below the windowsills, and with a nice woman offering them some meat she is cooking on the patio. At some point, however, Rick notices that one of the Terminians is wearing Glenn's watch, and suspects that something might be wrong. Rick's group pull out their weapons and demand to know where their friends are. After a gunfire chase, they are captured and locked in old train cars, together with the first group. During the chase, human remains are displayed in brief shots that look like a butcher shop. Before the episode (and the season) ends, the cannibalism of the Terminians is already hinted at. But it is in the first episode of the fifth season where the functioning of Terminus as a slaughterhouse is fully shown. Rick, Glenn, Daryl and Bob are taken to the processing plant with other prisoners. They are placed over a trough in order to have their throats sliced and their blood drained before presumably becoming food. Such a scene is strikingly similar to a nonhuman-animal slaughterhouse, not just because of the way humans are butchered, but also because the people who do it wear plastic coats to avoid blood stains, resembling those of slaughterhouse workers. According to Kelly Doyle (2019), "what appears as abject horror in a fictional universe in which humans are routinely processed for meat is, after all, reality for many domestic animals" (107).

In "No Sanctuary" (S5E1), the boundary between human and nonhuman animals collapses, "invit[ing] viewers to consider the ways humans subjugate other species to horror and death to appease our palates, and in an arbitrary fashion" (Doyle, 2019: 107).[172] In a similar division between 'lovable' and 'unlovable' nonhuman animals (dogs and pigs, for instance), the slaughterhouse scene at Terminus does not see any protagonist slaughtered,

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something which adds up to the weak separation between human and monster, suggesting that the first will always, eventually, become the latter.

[172] It is relevant to note in this regard that Terminus was the name of the god who protected boundaries in Roman religion, and for whom sacrifices were made to sanctify the stones used in frontiers and limits. Here, 'boundaries' are related to the separation that Terminians establish between them and the humans they consume, recalling the boundaries that are established between human and nonhuman animals in real life.

only other unnamed people who were trapped before them ("lesser" deaths, as Doyle puts it), and with whom the audience had not established any emotional connection. It remains an interesting question whether the slaughtering of one of the protagonists would have had a stronger impact on the audience's views on slaughtering nonhuman animals, given the potentially larger emotional impact of the scene.

What is known is that Norman Reedus (who plays Daryl) became vegetarian after working on the Terminus scenes (MTV, 2014). Besides, sources from the cast told reporters that the gruesome scenes in which zombies ate human flesh had made a large part of the cast and crew become vegetarians, thus making evident a link between seeing the consumption of humans in fiction and the actual consumption of nonhumans in the audience's (or the cast and crew's) real lives. This source also declared to the *Daily Star* that around 80% of the menu offered by the catering services was meat-free, since "after watching 'Walkers' realistically look as though they are consuming bloody human flesh or seeing heads and other body parts sliced off, no one was touching the red meat or even chicken that was on offer" (Parker, 2014). A user in the website Reddit expressed under the title "Spoiler alert: how *The Walking Dead* has made me want to become a vegetarian":

> Episode 5x1 of *The Walking Dead*, 'No Sanctuary', depicts people being tied up, bashed on the back of the head, and then having their throats slit and thrown forward to bleed out into a trough. I started to cry and thought 'how can I be okay with this happening to animals? […] I feel sick thinking about eating meat'. (Reddit, 2014)

In the end, Rick's group escapes thanks to Carol, who had been hiding all along and manages to fire a propane tank, producing an explosion that allows the zombies to roam freely across Terminus, wreaking havoc. Some of the Terminians die and the place itself is destroyed as Rick and the others leave. However, part of the Terminus group (who call themselves the Hunters and are led by Gareth) survives and comes back again in "Strangers" (S5E2), kidnapping Bob and eating his leg. The Terminus group's actions reinforce the ideas proposed by posthumanists like Wolfe (2013) or Braidotti (2013), who argue that the

discursive structure of anthropocentrism and speciesism does not just discriminate other species against, but also those humans who are animalized. Besides, the fact that Bob is African American (as opposed to Gareth and his group, who are white), reinforces this relationship between subjects (humans, white people, predators) and objects (nonhuman animals, racialized people, prey). Doyle believes that

> the Terminian's behavior reiterates something important: that rather than being a fixed an essentialist term, "the human" is an arbitrarily defined figure that is changeable, and thus not so essential or fixed after all. "Being human," in Gareth's terms, transforms from helping others to becoming a "superior being" that views its others as lesser beings for consumption and systemically goes about doing so. This is in sharp contrast to how the show's protagonists think of being human. What becomes clear is that the goal-posts of anthropocentrism can be changed to serve the interests of some humans to the detriment of others on the basis of race, sex, or species. (2019: 106)

Becoming food for others is horrifying not just because of the death or mutilation implied, but also because it involves a complete dismantling of what we believe we are, as Plumwood's experience with the crocodile showed. This rejection of the idea of humans as food is linked to human exceptionalism, which upholds that our species has a superior place in the scale of moral consideration and deserves special treatment (the attribution of inedibility, for example). In Bishop's words, "zombies, both by being fundamentally dead bodies and by reducing their human prey to mere meat and sustenance, challenge the viewer's conception of humanity and independence" (131). Going one step forward, *The Walking Dead* presents their zombies as horrifying creatures but then introduces the Terminus group as the extreme horror which leaves zombies as almost inoffensive creatures who are, in fact, key to save Rick's group from the cannibals.

By turning human exceptionalism upside down, the cannibals at Terminus turn some humans into food, and other humans (themselves) into predators. The line between nonhuman animal, zombie and human is thus blurred, and the separation between human and nonhuman animal on the basis of rationality or morality does not stand so firmly anymore. In Terminus, humans are forced to take the place that nonhuman animals used to occupy in the pre-

apocalyptic society (and in the audience's society as well), and the justification for doing so is not easy to reject. In "Four Walls and a Roof" (S5E3), Gareth says: "I know that you've been out there, but I can see it. You don't know what it is to be hungry", a statement that will be recalled by Rick's group when their starvation makes them edge the limits of cannibalism by transgressing the moral boundary of eating something that they would previously consider inedible, like dogs' flesh.[173]

The placement of humans in the position of slaughtered nonhuman animals contributes to questioning anthropocentrism and speciesism, and more specifically, carnism (the discursive system that normalizes the consumption of meat and which usually remains invisible until vegetarian and vegan practices are brought to the table). In short, placing humans in the place of prey animals reveals the anthropocentric and speciesist fear of the risk of being treated like nonhuman animals. The Terminus group divides people into butchers and cattle and this works in the same way as speciesism does: "cannibalism is justified by arbitrarily marking those from other groups as lesser beings. Notably, this rationale is a central tenet of anthropocentrism, which sets a particular vision of human being at the pinnacle of a hierarchy that is then poised to consume or exploit its others in various ways" (Doyle, 2019: 106).

In spite of the complex narrative surrounding meat, animality and humanity between the 4th and 5th seasons of *The Walking Dead*, it is equally true that the series does not follow its logical conclusions surrounding the questioning of anthropocentrism, speciesism and

[173] The speciesist hierarchy that separates nonhuman animals in categories like 'edible', 'lovable' or 'wearable' is knocked down in order to mark the fall of cultural notions about right and wrong. Given that pets are regarded with the highest moral consideration among nonhuman animals, the breakage of the pet-eating taboo means going a step closer to eating fellow humans. This is highlighted even further when the group is eating the dogs, unable to look at each other, and one of them, Noah, refuses to join the dinner and sits alone, ghastly looking at a dog collar in a puddle of blood. The uneasiness that the group feels when eating the dogs suggests that they are wondering how much time they have left (that is, how many days without 'acceptable' food) before they continue violating moral boundaries. Furthermore, in this scene Gabriel, the priest, burns his clerical collar, defeated at the moral transgression they are engaging in.

carnism. Its protagonists keep engaging in scenes of meal sharing, hunting and scavenging at the cost of nonhuman animal lives, and such actions remain unaddressed, as if the light shed by the events at Terminus had swerved towards a strengthening of human exceptionalism and not towards a more complex analysis of bodily vulnerability, empathy and responsibility towards the Other. That being said, there is a secondary character in the series that deserves attention in this regard due to his vegetarianism and the impact he has on another key character. They will be the focus of the next section.

5.3.3. Vegetarianism in *The Walking Dead*: Morgan and Eastman

Morgan Jones is the first living human whom Rick meets in "Days Gone Bye" (S1E1) after he wakes up in the hospital. Morgan and his son Duane live in a semi-fortified house, protected by boards which prevent walkers from seeing the light inside. It is Morgan who explains the basics of the apocalypse to Rick: that if he gets bitten, he will run a fever that will ultimately kill him and turn him into a walker ("One thing I do know, don't you get bit. Bites kill. The fever burns you out. But then after a while... You come back"). Morgan also explains that walkers are not people anymore, but predators who get more active after dark and try to eat human bodies; that they have to be put down in a specific way ("they're dead. Except for something in the brain. That's why it's gotta be the head"); and that sound attracts them. Later that night, Morgan tells Rick that one of the walkers lurking outside the house is his former wife and Duane's mother. When Rick decides to go to Atlanta to find his family, Morgan decides that he and Duane will follow him after a few days, and they agree to communicate over a walkie-talkie. When Rick leaves, Morgan tells him: "They may not seem like much one at a time. But in a group, all riled up and hungry? Man, you watch your ass".

The relevance of Morgan as the person who not only outlines the post-apocalyptic scenario for Rick, but who also facilitates his survival in the first hours of confusion after leaving the hospital, makes him one of the most important characters of *The Walking Dead*.[174] He does not appear again until season 3, when he comes across Rick and Michonne in King County. He tells Rick that Duane has died, which has driven him almost to the point of insanity, and later refuses to join Rick's group at the prison because he does not want to witness more deaths. Morgan then returns in season 5, following some clues that would lead him to Rick again. In "Conquer" (S5E16), we see Morgan using his signature wooden staff against some robbers, but it is unclear when and how he learned to use it. After he saves Daryl and Aaron from a group of walkers, Morgan is taken to Alexandria with the rest of the group. There, Morgan decides to become fully part of their group until the end of season 8, when he decides to continue living alone again.

In an episode of season 6 part of Morgan's recent past before he reaches Alexandria is explained. In "Here's not Here" (S6E4), a man called Eastman finds Morgan on his property and welcomes him (offering him some falafel, which stands out as plant-based food in a ravaged world where we have got used to seeing human and nonhuman flesh all the time), but Morgan —suffering from PTSD after Duane's death— shoots him. Eastman knocks him down with his staff (hinting at the idea that he might have been Morgan's master in the use of his weapon) and locks him in a cell inside his house. In the next few days, Eastman tries to appease Morgan, but he does not seem to easily see reason. Patiently, Eastman slowly gains Morgan's trust and eventually gives him a staff, teaching him the art of Aikido and instructing him about his ideas around peacemaking and the rejection of violence.

[174] Morgan's key role as a secondary character of the series is also shown by the fact that he is the only character that appears in the series' sequel/prequel, *Fear the Walking Dead* (Erickson & Kirkman, 2015-2023) as a crossover with the original show. The Walking Dead Wiki points out several other facts that highlight his relevance: he is the only character (apart from Rick, despite his disappearance in season 9) who appeared in the series' pilot and is still alive. Besides, he is the first character who calls the undead 'walkers' and also the first character who is seen killing one of them. This website also points out the fact that he is implied to be a vegetarian.

Among other aspects, this rejection of violence and cruelty entails vegetarianism. During dinner, Eastman explains to Morgan: "I've come to believe that all life is precious. That's why we're having oatmeal burgers". He also tells him that he gets milk from his goat Tabitha, and makes some cheese with it.[175] He is not a vegan (he states: "where there's life, there's potential. I've been a vegetarian for a while now. I was afraid that damn goat was gonna make me a vegan. I don't kill, but I'm not giving up on chocolate any time soon"), but his worldview around peace and nonviolence is definitely crossed by food, as his statements around the dinner table show. Regarding hurting other beings, Eastman tells Morgan that "we're not built to kill. We don't have claws, fangs or armor. Vets, they came back with PTSD, that didn't happen because we're comfortable with killing. We're not. We can't be. We feel. We're connected". His insistence on the vulnerable and empathetic nature of people deeply affects Morgan, who swears he will not kill a human being again (something that will cause him trouble in the 7th and 8th seasons, during the war against the Saviors). In connection with this, although it is not explicitly stated, we might assume that Morgan decides to give up on nonhuman animal flesh as well: in "The Well" (S7E2), Morgan is at a dining hall with other characters and, among a conversation about Aikido and the decision not to kill anyone, one of them points out that Morgan only eats vegetables at dinner.

Besides Eastman's references to chocolate and oatmeal burgers, the narrative in S6E4 is deeply permeated with food tensions as well. As in many other episodes, and despite not being the main focus, food is a key element in the story. When Eastman tells Morgan the story of his family (murdered by a man called Crighton Dallas Wilton, who was Eastman's former psychiatric patient, after he professionally resolved not to grant Wilton's prison

[175] Tabitha is actually as important in Morgan's recovery from his PTSD as Eastman was. Despite Eastman's first attempts to talk to Morgan, he decides to stay in the (unlocked) cell. But at one point when Eastman is out of the house, Morgan hears zombies around and Tabitha bleating desperately. He eventually runs out of the cell, kills the zombies and rescues Tabitha, and this stands as the first step towards his redemption. The nonhuman animal of the episode not just almost made Eastman a vegan, but also showed Morgan the path towards empathy and mercy. Here, compassion is woven around an interspecies encounter which ultimately has an important impact on food choices too.

parole), he recounts that he went after Wilton and locked him in the same cell where he locked Morgan, and then starved him to death. In spite of all the ways in which Eastman could have killed Wilton, he decided to do so by removing food sustenance until his body could not take it. This might be understood as a way of torturing him (it took him 47 days to die) instead of granting him a quick death, but Eastman's relation to food goes hand in hand with his relationship with Wilton, and should thus be considered as part of the episode discursive construction —more so, in the context of the series, in which food is an acutely (though often overlooked) aspect. Through Wilton's starvation, Eastman discovers that his revenge does not bring him the peace he had expected, and comes to the key realization for his character (and then Morgan's) that all life is precious, even for a man like Wilton. This realization extends to nonhuman life, since he decides to stop eating nonhuman animals.

The importance of Eastman on Morgan and thus on the development of the series (more since the former appears in just one episode),[176] together with the insistence on food and vegetarianism in relation to his character can be read as a positive sign of the impact of antispeciesism and the cultural meanings of vegetarianism/veganism in relation to notions of peacemaking, empathy and nonviolence, which become more meaningful in a post-apocalyptic context like *The Walking Dead*'s. This kind of scenarios often promotes the law of the strongest and the survival of the fittest. This is not only seen in the case of villains (who are often villains precisely because of their endurance and commitment to the law of the jungle and the disregard of the possibility of rebuilding the shattered social contract), but also with kind main characters who often have to make difficult decisions in terms of ethics (leaving people behind, murdering others or, in connection with the main concern of this dissertation, breaking food taboos, as was seen in section 5.3.1.). Thus, the insertion of a

[176] The relevance of Eastman is also noted in some reviews of the episode. In the technology-centered website *Gizmodo*, which also reviews cinema and TV, Rob Bricken analyzed the episode noting that it "revealed the most important character in the entirety of *The Walking Dead* may have been a pudgy, amateur cheesemaker" (2015: online).

character like Eastman within this context, despite his brief appearance, turns out to be fairly striking and contributes to the relevance of antispeciesism and veganism as meaningful aspects in the development of contemporary human-eating monster narratives.

However, this positive view of veganism is not over-encompassing within all 21st-century monster fiction, as it has been seen in other examples of vegetarian/vegan characters in this dissertation. The next section will analyze other contemporary narratives which also make veganism present, but in a rather mocking way, which emerges as an interesting point to reveal resistances to the advance and progression of antispeciesism.

5.4. References to Veganism in 21st Century Zombie Films

5.4.1. Environmentalism and Posthumanism in 21st-Century Zombie Film

In *Night of the Living Dead*, the origin of the pandemic that unleashes the zombie apocalypse is found in a space probe that returns to Earth from Venus, producing some kind of unknown radiation that makes the dead rise from their graves. The specific reasons for and the functioning of the zombification process of dead people is not explained, though. However, in the post-millennial zombie film, there is usually a concrete cause, and, more importantly, that cause is anthropogenic. Either through failed scientific experiments (as in *World War Z*, where the cause of the outbreak is an unsuccessful cure for cancer), climate change (as in *The Last of Us*, in which the fungal spores which produce the zombification spread through the human body because of the rise of global temperature), or food consumption (as in Ruben Fleischer's 2009 film *Zombieland*, which will be explored in the lines that follow), contemporary zombie fiction reflects the discourse of the Anthropocene which highlights humanity's strong impact on the planet.

As opposed to other visions (mentioned in section 5.1.4.) which related zombie fiction with terrorism or with political unrest, McReynolds believes that the cinematic trope of the fast zombie rather signifies "a fear of contagion occurring under deterritorialization, abject masses swarming over borders and laying waste to the countryside by sheer force of numbers. It reflects the fear of powerlessness and lack of agency that appear to be part of the posthuman condition in the age of the Anthropocene" (2014: 150). As such, "post-millennial zombie pictures are fast zombie pictures because they depict human beings like forces of nature" (161), thus linking contemporary zombies directly with environmental issues.[177]

Taking into account the relevance of food in either environmental terms and in post-apocalyptic narratives (as it was seen in the analysis of *The Walking Dead*), it is important to pay attention to the presence of food in zombie outbreaks in 21st century zombie films. For instance, Fleischer's zomedy (or zom-com, as the zombie comedy films are known) *Zombieland* introduces Columbus, a university student traveling from Texas to Ohio to try to find his parents in the middle of a zombie apocalypse, who explains that "it's been two months since patient zero took a bite of a contaminated burger". Later in the film, when recalling the first zombie attack he suffered, Columbus says:

> that was my first brush with the plague of the 21st century. Remember mad cow disease? Well, mad cow became mad person, became mad zombie. It's a fast-acting virus that left

[177] A film like *World War Z*, for instance, shows waves of zombies washing over a wall in Jerusalem, mirroring ocean waves washing over land. Echoing what Susan Sontag argued in her 1966 essay "The Imagination of Disaster", many of these films replicate the idea that "in climate change humanity faces an existential crisis of such great proportions that the only rational thing to do is to suspend all other conflicts and concerns" (164). In the same way, the zombie apocalypse entails such a crisis that the Israeli government in the film suspends attacks on Palestine and even lets them inside their walls (which, eventually, provokes that zombie hordes can break in, which has relevant political resonances about migration and war conflict resolution).

> you with a swollen brain, a raging fever, it made you hateful, violent… and gave you a really, really bad case of the munchies.[178]

In its description of the virus outbreak, as well as the fast-pace of its zombies, *Zombieland* is indebted as a comedy counterpart to *28 Days Later*. Concern about mad-cow disease and its transmission to humans was significant during the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, with the first known death from vJCD having happened in 1995 and the ban on UK beef being lifted in 2006. Moreover, other viral outbreaks besides BSE were causing global anxiety at the time.[179]

In the context of the worldwide concern about such viruses,[180] and the news about animal-rights activists who were relentlessly fighting against animal testing and the situation of nonhuman animals in laboratories, Boyle and Alex Garland (the scriptwriter of *28 Days Later*) placed the origin of the rage virus outbreak in a group of infected chimpanzees who were freed from the Cambridge Primate Research Centre by a group called Animal Freedom Front. Such name inevitably recalls the actual Animal Liberation Front, an international, non-violent direct action group originated in the U.K. which fights cruelty against animals, and

[178] Mad-cow disease was the name given to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), a disease suffered by cows destined to be consumed, with the first case identified in the UK in 1986. The origin of the disease was found in the feeding of meat and bone meal (MBM) to cows. MBM was obtained through the leftovers of the slaughtering process, including carcasses of animals who might have been injured or sick through the continued use of antibiotics or hormones, among others. These animals developed lesions in the brain that caused physical and mental malfunctioning, and ultimately, death. The disease could be (and indeed, was) transmitted to humans who consumed that meat, resulting in the so-called Variant Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease (vCJD), which involved psychiatric problems, behavioral changes, and pain, with an average life expectancy following the onset of symptoms of 13 months. Given the symptomatology and the speed of the disease, it is easy to see why some films from the first decade of the 21st century connected real cases of mad-cow disease with zombies — besides other monsters like nonhuman animals, as in the case of the infected birds in *Kaw* (Wilson, 2006).

[179] Most significantly, the Ebola virus, and the SARS-CoV-1 (the first one before the recent SARS-CoV-2 strain, which caused the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019), which spread across 29 counties and caused at least 774 deaths worldwide between 2002 and 2004. Coronaviruses are zoonotic diseases, meaning that they can jump from nonhuman animals to people, and both strain outbreaks have been related by experts to Chinese wholesale markets where live animals were sold (Mahdy, Younis and Ewaida, 2020).

[180] The viral outbreak narrative also worked well because viruses work in a similar way to zombie infections: the virus cells 'attack' and take over healthy cells, which are then forced to reproduce and spread the infection unless an antidote is administered. Both in the cases of zombies and viruses, although it sometimes implies the death of the infected, most often the virus (as the zombie) is more interested in surviving by changing the subject, not killing it.

who are worldwide known for their removal of animals from laboratories, as well as the damaging of related facilities and the operating of sanctuaries for the rescued animals. As Potter (2011) showed, the turn of the 20th century, heavily influenced by the events of 9/11, was a critical moment for the animal rights movement, which had intermittently been deemed as eco-terrorists since the 1970s, and whose harassment and destabilization reached a tipping point during the first years of the 21st century, including FBI crusades, incarceration of activists and an important smear campaign amidst the public opinion through references in cultural products. *28 Days Later* belongs to the latter, positioning the AFF as eco-terrorists stupid enough not to investigate beforehand the kind of research facilities they were getting into, as well as to ignore the scientists' warnings not to free the infected chimpanzees. Within the narrative of *28 Days Later*, animal rights activists —not the scientists researching the virus on live animals, nor people consuming infected nonhuman animals, which would be closer to the actual origins of the SARS and Ebola viruses that the film's outbreak description relies on— are blamed for the apocalyptic situation ravishing the world.

In recent zombie fiction, the meanings and limits of humanity have become another important discursive focus in the narrative. Questions around the ethical and political dimensions of the human (especially, when contrasted with the nonhuman, be that animals or the environment) have been key elements in the second and third decades of the 21st century. Discussions around global warming, climate change, nonhuman animal rights, and food consumption have been developing in the last years with increased and earnest strength, soaking policy making, political discourses, popular culture, and public debates. The idea that humans may not need to eat meat has problematized our position within the discursively-constructed food chain, destabilizing previous assumptions about what is to be eaten, and what is not. This has, as I have been analyzing, impacted fiction in which humans are the prey of other beings, and the response offered by these productions is often that, if we are to

accept that nonhuman animals can be eaten for a number of (arbitrary) reasons, these same reasons may also apply when we become the potential main dish.

Taking into account the presence of environmental and animal-related issues that were already pointed at in *28 Days Later* or *Zombieland* in the first decade of the 21st century, I will now turn to more recent films which also make reference to these issues, mainly through the mentioning of veganism. They are also examples (especially *Warm Bodies* and *Army of the Dead*) of the post-undead which I defined in 5.2.1., since the zombies in these films have evolved in several ways towards beings with an increased rationality or awareness about their world.

5.4.2. Romantic Zombies: *Warm Bodies*

Some recent zombie productions seem to have taken over from vampire representations and have tried to depict zombies in a more sympathetic (and sometimes romantic) light, including films like *Warm Bodies* or *Maggie*, and TV series like *iZombie* (Thomas and Ruggiero-Wright, 2015), in which a zombified woman helps a police detective to solve crimes by eating the brains of victims, which allows her to see glimpses of their past, or *Santa Clarita Diet*, in which real estate agent Sheila becomes a zombie, maintaining all her human characteristics apart from the fact that she needs to eat human flesh, although she carefully selects her victims among patriarchal, misogynistic men. This is perhaps an indication that, as Bishop suggested, we are already in the "next step in the evolution of this highly specially subgenre [that] will likely literalize the metaphor, presenting narratives in which the zombies tell their own stories, acting as true protagonists and even heroes" (2010: 196).

Warm Bodies follows the lead of vampire narratives which develop a romantic relationship between a kind, endearing and attractive monster and a young sympathetic woman. *Warm Bodies* takes elements from classic romance stories like Shakespeare's 1597 play *Romeo and Juliet* (including a scene where Julie is on a balcony and R talks to her from the ground, and also their names: he is R because he just remembers his name started with that letter, and her name clearly recalls Juliet). In this romantic comedy, an apocalyptic plague has turned humankind into zombies in the lapse of eight years, whereas the remaining human survivors live inside a wall to protect themselves.[181] Zombies are also rotting corpses walking around, but R falls in love with a human girl, Julie, and tries to get her to love him back. R is a young man who from the beginning reproduces the insecurities and concerns which are typical of the teenage years (he wonders: "what's wrong with me? I just want to connect. Why can't I connect with people? Oh, right, it's because I'm dead"). Throughout the film, accompanied by songs like Bruce Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" or The Black Keys' "Lonely Boy", their forbidden love story results in a cure for the zombies, which allows them to cohabit with humans again.

In *Warm Bodies*, zombies are seen in a more positive light because there are other villains who make them seem less bad: the 'boneys' —which establishes another kind of hierarchy of villainy in which zombies are not the worst ones, which allows them to more up the moral scale. They do not look human anymore, but rather resemble slim skeletons with dark mouths who move fast and only groan threateningly. R explains:

> they call these guys 'boneys', they don't bother us much but they'll eat anything with a heartbeat. I mean, I will too, but at least I'm conflicted about it. We all become them some day, at some point we just give up I guess, we lose our hope, after that there's no turning back.

[181] The apocalyptic origin is not explained, although R says: "I've had a hard time piecing together how this whole apocalypse thing happened, could have been chemical warfare, or an airborne virus, or a radioactive outbreak monkey. It doesn't really matter, this is what we are now". The chemical warfare, virus and radioactive monkey references might intend to allude to films from the zombie pantheon like *28 Days Later* or *Resident Evil*.

The presence of the boneys in this film, which stand for hunger and predation in its most pure and extreme form, moves zombies down the monstrous scale, therefore being closer to humans. When R says, "I will [eat humans] too, but at least I'm conflicted about it", he and the other zombies who are eventually cured too come closer to 21st century monsters like vampires, who are haunted by their need to consume humans and try to fight it. At some point, R says: "I don't wanna be this way, I'm lonely, I'm lost".

Clearly, the narrative of *Warm Bodies* tries to arouse empathy for the zombies from the audience. Whereas traditional zombie stories do not show any pity when they are shot in their heads, here we are able to hear R's musings: "even though we can't communicate, we do share a similar taste in food. Traveling in packs just kind of makes sense, especially when everyone and their grandmother is trying to shoot you in the head all the time". When the film introduces the human survivors beyond the wall, audiences are already acquainted with R and the other zombies, so the warning from Colonel Grigio (Julie's father) is received with caution. Grigio reminds people that "corpses look human: they are not. They do not think, they do not bleed, whether they were your mother or your best friend, they are beyond your help. They are uncaring, unfeeling, incapable of remorse". By placing this discourse after the introduction of R and his thoughts, audiences may guess that this might not be absolutely true, which shatters previous conceptions of the zombie as a ruthless monster.

Zombies can speak, first by uttering a few words like 'hungry' or 'city', though, as the film develops, they start to assemble longer sentences. This brings them closer to humans by giving them the chance to communicate. Regarding consumption, when R eats Julie's boyfriend he thinks: "I'm not proud of this. In fact, I would appreciate it if you might look away for a moment here. I don't like hurting people, but this is the world now. The new hunger is a very powerful thing". This turns zombie predation on humans into a matter of hunger, inescapability and remorse (like vampires), not of irrational, thoughtless predation

(like traditional zombies). Following this lead, Julie asks R: "do you have to eat people? Or you'll die?". When he replies affirmatively, she states: "but you didn't eat me, you rescued me. […] It must be hard being stuck in there, you know, I can see you trying. You try so much harder than any human in my city. You're a good person, R". Julie's reaction to R as she also falls in love with him reinforces the feeling of sympathy towards the zombie.

When Julie manages to go back to her home beyond the wall, she tries to convince her father of what she has seen: that the dead "are coming back to life", in some inexplicable way "they're changing" and "they're somehow curing themselves". Grigio replies: "no, you know what is happening, Julie? What's happening is everyday there are more of them and less of us. They are not curing themselves. We're their food source. They are not becoming vegan, okay? They don't eat broccoli. They eat brains". Through Grigio's reference to veganism, the possibility of a 'vegan' monster is ridiculed and those humans who believe that cohabitation is possible are therefore mocked as naïve or gullible. In a similar way, the discourse of carnism often aims at reinforcing the gullibility implied in being vegan, as if giving up nonhuman animal products necessarily entailed the thought that predators might do the same towards humans.[182] By alluding to veganism and broccoli, Grigio aims at ridiculing the naivety of Julie in believing zombies could eventually refrain from eating us.

However, within the film's discourse, Grigio is presented as an unreasonable, stubborn man who will not listen to reason (even with it being presented before his eyes, as R is), and who chooses brute violence before any possibility for sympathy. At the end, Grigio has to accept the reality that zombies are actually curing themselves through love (Julie explains that "she triggered something in [R] and that must have sparked something in all of them").

[182] A common argument against vegans is that apex predators like lions would not give up on us, so the argument goes that we should not give up on the animals we eat either. Of course, this is not a logical conclusion: people who give up on nonhuman animal products do not do so because of any kind of 'agreement' by which animals do not eat each other, including lions not eating us if presented with the chance. Vegans often do so because it is understood that, as moral subjects, people are able to make ethical decisions, whereas nonhuman animals, as moral objects, are often not capable of making such reasoning and, thus, choices.

This character stands as a counterpart to the male characters Tallahassee (from *Zombieland*) and Scott (from *Army of the Dead)*, which will be analyzed in the next section in relation to their references to veganism too. At the end of *Warm Bodies*, when Grigio sees R bleeding from a gunshot wound, he and the other humans put their weapons down. Joining forces now, zombies are placed in between life (humans) and death (boneys), as it also happens with 'good' vampires. Like Romeo and Juliet, whose forbidden love managed to get the Montagues and the Capulets to overcome their deadly rivalry, zombies get back to life and manage to cohabit with people because of R and Julie's love.

However, the boneys' are not spared. R says: "I wish I could say we cured the boneys with love, but really we just straight up killed them all. It sounds kind of messed up, but no one felt too bad about it. They were too far gone to change. It was actually a really good bonding experience for us and the humans". Although the post-undead representations of zombies in *Warm Bodies*, as well as the depiction of Grigio (who wants to straightforwardly kill zombies and mocks Julie's empathy for being naïve) as an unreasonable man, might be positive points in the post-anthropocentric narrative of the film, the establishment of yet another hierarchy between the 'good' zombies and the 'bad' ones risks reinforcing anthropocentrism again. R and his zombie friends are good because they are slowly coming back to being human (the epitome of goodness according to this rhetoric), while the fast, ravaging zombies are still kept as Others and destroyed —in fact, the kindliness of R and the others comes at the expense of the boney's extreme villainization. This can be seen as a kind of domestication and anthropomorphization of the monster in order to be accepted into human society. Again, the contemporary representation of monsters is complex and ambiguous: while they are portrayed under a more sympathetic light, this sympathy also risks veiling an anthropocentric comeback to traditional hierarchies and worldviews.

5.4.3. Mocking Veganism: *Zombieland: Double Tap* and *Army of the Dead*

Zombieland: Double Tap is the 2019 sequel of *Zombieland*. In the first film, Columbus met a group of survivors (the wry macho Tallahassee, clever con artist Wichita and her young sister, Little Rock) who tried to stay alive in a post-apocalyptic US after an outbreak of mad-cow disease. The group is still together, ten years later, in *Zombieland: Double Tap*. When Wichita and Little Rock leave the nest for different reasons (Little Rock longs for more independence, and Wichita is scared away by Columbus when he proposes to her), Tallahassee and Columbus set off on a new journey in order to find a new home.

Along the way, they discover that zombies have mutated, and they are now divided into what they call 'homers' (the dumb kind) and T-800 (named after the protagonist of James Cameron's 1984 *Terminator* film), a mutant variant which are "stronger, deadlier, and tougher to kill", as Columbus says. He adds that "they were the apex predator. Top of the food chain. Single-minded and relentless, like their name said, once they locked on to a target, T-800 stopped at nothing to devour their prey". Through the use of concepts like 'apex predator' and 'prey', Columbus makes use of the reference framework for nonhuman-animal hunting processes, meaning that these zombies were somehow superior to human beings within the food chain: they are the eaters, and humans are the food. However, in the same scene in which Columbus explains this, Tallahassee repeatedly shoots a T-800 and ultimately crushes his head with his boot, in a display of dominance that hints at the still-superior position of the (male) human over the nonhuman (and animalized) monster. This contributes to the overall anthropocentric discourse of the film. As opposed to *Warm Bodies*, in *Zombieland: Double Tap* there is no room for empathy towards the monster. In a fairly sentimental moment of the film (in which Columbus has to take the decision to kill another character, Madison, who has apparently been infected), Wichita says: "if you love something, you should shoot it in the face, so that it does not become a flesh-eating monster".

Madison is a girl that Columbus meets by chance at a shopping mall —again, a reference to the quintessential zombie film's scenario. Thinking that she is a zombie, Columbus tries to shoot her. Madison defends herself noting that the furry hood of her jacket is fake fur, as if this pointed to her intrinsic goodwill. She then says "you thought I was a zombie? Oh my god no, I don't even eat meat, I'm a vegetarian. Vegan, actually". Madison is a posh blonde girl dressed in pink and high heels, who carries many suitcases with clothes around, and whose behavior is extremely caricatured. She is completely silly, dim-witted, naïve and annoying, does not know how to defend herself and the only thing she does throughout the film is squeal and giggle. Making her a vegan contributes to her depiction as an ingenuous, simple-minded young woman. As in *Warm Bodies*, where Grigio mocked the idea of 'vegan zombies', here the film does not only mock the idea of someone choosing not to kill nonhuman animals, but the whole idea of pacifism as well.

In a different scene, Wichita tells Columbus and Tallahassee that Little Rock has met a boy (whom they call Berkeley, because he studied there) and has gone with him to a place called Babylon, which seems to be a safe shelter. When Wichita describes this boy, Tallahassee gets madly upset and complains: "she's dating a musician! […] Yeah, I could be overreacting… I'm sorry, you're right, go ahead". But when Wichita replies "and he's a pacifist. He has survived on a strict policy of conflict avoidance, like Gandhi", he loses his mind and screams "no! Fucking straps sandals, wheat germ, fucking vegetables!". As with Madison, the depiction of Berkeley (the mockery of this faculty being also relevant in this sense, since it has often been stereotyped as a 'hippy' and 'tree-huggers' campus) as a pacifist, musician, vegetable-eater and sandal-wearer contrasts with the performatively violent, cynical and sardonic masculinity of Tallahassee. As a zomedy, the film does not only mock some tenets of survival and post-apocalyptic fiction, but also the prospects, in contemporary zombie film, of peace and cohabitation with monsters. This mockery replicates

some patriarchal, anthropocentric stances in that it upholds Tallahassee's hardened and derisive personality and downgrades the gullibility of Little Rock and Berkeley.

Army of the Dead follows a similar line. The film narrates an incursion in a zombie-infested Las Vegas by a group who want to retrieve a safe box with 200 million dollars from a casino. The city has been quarantined due to the infection, so the group has to break through the military and then the zombie territory. As it is customary in Snyder films, *Army of the Dead* is a not-too-deep, action-packed film ridden with muscular characters (ex-wrestler and actor Dave Bautista playing the main character, Scott), explosions and frenzy among blockbuster-cliché gags. What is interesting for this dissertation is that zombies have evolved up to the character of the post-undead through, on the one hand, the development of a social structure and, on the other hand, the ability to get pregnant, which is perhaps the extreme point of the post-undead representations in physical terms: the possibility of creating (undead) life within a dead body.

Those who have been bitten by the original zombie in Las Vegas, Zeus, become a different strand of monster: they are faster and more intelligent, and they are known as Alphas. They even reach the point of rationality: they are able to communicate with humans. This exchange is usually a sacrifice in return for letting people into their territory. Lilly, a smuggler who escorts the team through the city, warns them: "they'll know we're here. They won't care as long as we play by their rules. If we wanna go further, we have to make a trade. […] An offering to show our subservience". When a member of the team, Maria, asks her to explain herself, Lilly observes that the Alphas are not like the ones that "move and eat". She goes on: "they're smarter, they're faster, they're organised. Straight out of your fucking nightmares. You all keep talking about this city like it's their prison. It's not: it's their kingdom". Among these Alphas, Zeus and the Queen are the couple in charge. They hunt the human prey and they take them to the Olympus Casino, where they are eaten and turned into

zombies. Whereas these zombies are presented as scarily calculating and dangerous, humans are again portrayed as the greater evil: Tanaka, the man who hires the team to get the money has secretly hired another mercenary to get the Queen's head, which he wants to use to create more zombies with warfare ends. At the same time, the zombie couple is able to not only think and communicate, but also to feel affection. The Queen is pregnant, and Zeus is seen in a lovingly attitude towards her bump. When she is killed by Tanaka's hitman, Zeus mourns and cries the death of both his partner and his unborn zombie baby.

Whereas *Army of the Dead* contributes to the development of the post-undead tradition, especially in terms of their reasoning and loving abilities, it differs from positive representations of vegetarianism/veganism and joins the viewpoint of *Zombieland: Double Tap* by making reference to veganism in a dismissive way. At first, Scott's reference to veganism seems sympathetic. He is talking with his daughter Kate about the food truck he would like to have:

> Scott: What do you think about tofu?
> Kate: What?
> Scott: Tofu, my next food truck. I was thinking I can make anything out of tofu: tofu burgers, tofu fries, tofu milkshake, tofu cheesecake… I don't know what that is. Tofu cheesecake, I don't know. I thought maybe, since everyone's going vegan, you know. Humans are figuring out they're not at the top of the food chain. What do you think?
> Kate: Yeah, it's… it's okay.

This short exchange seems meaningful in connection with a positive representation of a plant-based food like tofu. With the sentence "humans are figuring out they're not at the top of the food chain", it seems like Scott is making a claim about how this realization might lead to the idea that nonhuman animals may not like becoming 'meat' as much as humans do not either. However, at the end of the film, when Scott approaches the moment of his death (he has been bitten and Kate must shoot him), he says: "it's got to be lobster rolls, you know, the food truck. 'Cause everybody loves a goddamn lobster roll, right?". By replacing the possibility of tofu burgers with lobster rolls, Scott puts nonhuman animal flesh back into the menu and into the customary food chain.

Whereas zombie predation's enforcement of the potentiality of our own edibility could have entailed a rethinking of human consumption of the beings that have been deemed as edible, Scott's final words do not follow this line. Instead, he chooses to restate the anthropocentric position where humans are (mostly) inedible, but they can eat and consume others. The risk of becoming food does not work here to reinforce empathy, but rather to bolster human exceptionalism and a speciesist, anthropocentric position that, as in *Zombieland: Double Tap*, struggles to maintain the hierarchy where the human is always on top of the nonhuman (both monsters and nonhuman animals). These two films are stark examples of how the representation of veganism (either through vegan characters or vegetable food) is still volatile terrain, being often subjected to anthropocentric and patriarchal subtexts that ultimately represent this food ethics as naïve.

5.4. Conclusions

Just like vampires have been mostly analyzed from a gender and sexuality perspective, and aliens have been looked at from a postcolonial and/or sociopolitical lenses focusing on the discursive construction of the Other as an enemy, zombies have been mostly studied as metaphors of either colonialism and slavery (in films from the first wave of zombie fiction), capitalism and consumerism (in films from the second stage), and terrorism, environmentalism and posthumanism (in films from the third trend). As with vampires and aliens, my choice of analytical lens is also the dialectics of food, consumption, and the constructed separation of species that are at play in the predator-prey narrative within zombie films. Furthermore, in the same way as the characters of Amy in *True Blood* or the Cullens in *Twilight*, as seen in previous chapters, contemporary zombie fiction provides several references to vegetarianism and veganism amidst a climate of humans-as-potential-food

within their respective narratives. These vegan characters (like Eastman in *The Walking Dead*) and the references to plant-based food (like tofu in *Army of the Dead*) have been looked at taking into account contemporary antispeciesist discourses, studying the varied progressive or reactionary views they advance, depending on the case.

The cases of study that this chapter have dealt with demonstrate that, although it is true that the zombie might be the human-eating monster that has undergone the slightest evolution in terms of empathy (due to its mostly irrational nature) it is also true that food-related issues and the questioning of species divisions has left a mark in the genre as well. Whereas the 20th-century zombies were irrational rotting bodies to be killed by the hundreds (except in the cases where humans could recognize a former fellow in the walking corpse, in which case the zombie was killed with somewhat more respect), in 21st-century zombie fiction it has been increasingly common to find sympathetic, or even rational and, in some cases, loving, zombies.

Conclusions and Further Research

This dissertation has looked at narratives within the time span between the late 20th century and the 21st in which humans are predated and turned into (either potential or actual) food for monsters (nonhuman animals, vampires, aliens, and zombies). My intention was to analyze the impact of antispeciesist issues that call into question the food hierarchies and the discursive construction of some bodies as edible and others as nonedible, which constitutes a cornerstone of carnism (the hidden ideology behind the choice to eat meat). My final conclusions are that all the case studies analyzed in this dissertation suggest that antispeciesist, post-anthropocentrism and environmentalism all play a key role in contemporary human-eating monster fiction. Before stating the final conclusions and some further research trends, I will provide a summary of the dissertation in order to wrap up these pages.

The nonhuman animals chapter has looked at the representation of some animal species since the 20th century until contemporary depictions. In the last century, the animal horror trend known as the revenge of nature embedded environmental concerns and anthropogenic problems, and the subsequent punishment for humans in the body of nonhuman animals, such as the shark in *Jaws* or the alligator in *Alligator*. Towards the end of the century, animal horror films witnessed a reinvigoration, with the release of several films which included evil nonhuman animals, who more than often died at the end. Even though these animals saw their violent behaviors excused for being actual victims of humans (due to scientific experiments, for instance), their lives were not spared at the end. Their human-killing actions, as well as their voracity and the fact that they had crossed the boundary of eating human flesh —a boundary strictly defended by human exceptionalism— meant that they had to receive an ultimate punishment (that is, death) at the end of the narrative.

In the 21st century, however, animal horror films paid attention to the possibility of empathy and respect towards the nonhuman animal's life. As illustrated through the evolution of dinosaurs in the films of the *Jurassic Park* saga, the animals' interests and actions were increasingly taken into consideration by the film's characters —which ultimately showed the change of perspective of the films' creators. Dinosaurs experienced an evolution in their representation as frightening monsters to be killed without any further contemplation towards a depiction of them as being intelligent and sympathetic creatures whose welfare mattered. This more sympathetic, post-Anthropocentric representation reached its peak in the 21st century *Jurassic World* saga, in which velociraptors definitely stopped being seen as ruthless monsters and became humans' allies, communicating and collaborating together. The last installment of the saga, moreover, brought to the forefront issues of anthropogenic damage, food-related concerns, and animal-cruelty matters which included dinosaur exploitation in farms or illegal fights, but which failed to extend its critique to other nonhuman animals, such as those that the film still sees as 'cattle'.

The change in consideration of animals which were previously seen as evil monsters was also relevant in bear films. Whereas films from the previous century, such as *Grizzly* or *The Edge* portrayed bears as enemies to be ruthlessly defeated, in 21st century bear films, these animals's subjectivities are much more respected and, in the end, they often survive —which is not always the case for some human characters whom they attack and often eat. Bear films —including fiction and nonfiction narratives— have been useful in order to look at the representations of the North American wilderness in terms of gender and species which is developed in films set in National Parks. Actual readings of nature in real settings and events have been analyzed in the case study of *Grizzly Man*. Afterwards, a comparison between 20th century films and more recent ones, like *Backcountry*, show that antispeciesist and

environmentalist discourses have deeply influenced the understanding of humans' place in nature, especially when they enter wild territory inhabited by potential predators.

Finally, the study of crocodile films from the two centuries points in a similar direction. The survivability of the animal monster has been one of the key factors to analyze this evolution, as it was the case with dinosaurs and bears. Here, films from the 20th century like *Alligator* finally destroy (often in a spectacular way) the nonhuman animal, but films from our century like *Crocodile*, *Primeval*, or *Crawl* see their animals survive at the end. Whereas *Primeval* follows the revenge of nature trend in punishing humans for their warfare activities (although falling into a deeply sexist and racist narrative), *Crawl* shows very clearly the influence of environmentally-concerned discourses in its construction of the nonhuman threat.

The vampire chapter has looked at the way in which contemporary fiction about vampires have evolved in comparison with classical representations of the character, including aspects of their diet. From the human-eating evil creatures of the first half of the century, vampires acquired different nuances in the second half, influenced by pop culture and social movements. The last decades of the 20th century motivated the rise of a new vampiric type: the vulnerable, loving, sympathetic and thoughtful creature. Both the traits of vulnerability and kindness would influence the 21st-century vampire, carved from the characters of Meyer's literary saga *Twilight*. The Cullens put an end to the vampire villain and provided new grounds from which to analyze the character, especially in terms of predation. The vampires' 'vegetarianism' was reproduced over the most popular vampiric productions of the century, including the successful series *True Blood*, which contributed to setting the vegetarian vampire in stone.

Twilight thus changed vampires at the core of one of its most defining characteristics: feeding. Feminist and antispeciesist perspectives shaped this evolution, with contemporary

vampires embodying several of our century's tensions surrounding the discourses of veganism, antispeciesism, ecofeminism and ecomasculinities. However, what my study of the Cullen's preferred form of predation has shown is that the presence of discourses of vegetarianism/veganism does not directly entail an actually critical post-anthropocentric or antispeciesist perspective. Neither does it advance progressive views in terms of other analytical categories that are often interdependent on the discursive construction of species, such as gender or race. In fact, *Twilight* shows how the word 'vegetarian' itself can be twisted in order to leave nonhuman animals out of the sphere of moral consideration again. Whereas the Cullens' consumption of nonhuman animals is used as an equivalent to humans' consumption of plant-based food (thus raising questions about our own eating ethics), Adams's concept of the absent referent helps in analyzing how this 'vampiric vegetarianism' contributes to the invisibilization of the objectification and consumption of nonhuman animals. At the same time, a feminist perspective sheds light on the ways in which the Cullens' challenging of the traditional vampiric diet might destabilize patriarchal notions of masculinity, but it also points to the traditional gender values that the saga still upholds, including the safeguard of the nuclear family, pro-life stances, and patriarchal gender roles in the romantic relationship between Edward and Bella.

True Blood, on its part, plays with the representation of vampirism as a source of discrimination and a target of hate-speech in the post-9/11 USA, drawing parallelisms between vampires and socially-discriminated people like LGBTIQ+ communities or immigrants, whom US conservatives and religious leaders constantly attack. From an antispeciesist perspective, this is interesting in its disclosure of the discursive links between the categories of gender, sexuality, race, nationality and species, which are intermingled in discriminatory rhetorics in order to settle a strong basis for oppression. Focusing on the representation of vegetarianism/veganism, *True Blood* presents Amy Burley as a hypocritical,

evil vegan who feeds on unwilling vampires, and her depiction illustrates how veganism was rhetorically turned into a suspicious, un-American lifestyle choice after 9/11. This kind of representation of vegan characters leaves little room for a thoughtful consideration of veganism within narratives where humans are prey, a reflection that could lead to the possibility of empathy between hunted and consumed sentient beings, be them human or nonhuman.

The alien chapter has analyzed three extraterrestrial predator narratives which fit the discourse of 21st century monster fiction that this dissertation maintains. These narratives include key concerns about the Anthropocene and the interrelations between species with a questioning of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism at their core. As opposed to the nonhuman animal chapter, where the confrontation between species was literal, here the Others are imaginary creatures from outer space. As it happened with vampires, the symbolic construction of such unreal creatures is soaked with social ideas around gender, class, nationality, ableness and species. By making humans their prey —and their potential food—, the three filmic productions discussed raise questions about what bodies are rendered edible and inedible in our societies, and what are the moral justifications of such divisions.

In the 2019 TV series version of Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, humans are confronted with human-looking aliens who make them face their wrongdoings as a species. Compared to Spielberg's 2005 version, the aliens are portrayed under a far more empathetic light, and their drives and needs are considered together with those of the humans. Whereas some of the alien characters are portrayed as caring and sympathetic, some of the human characters are described as cruel and spiteful, which contributes to the complexity of the rhetoric dualism of human-good and alien-evil which were characteristic in most of earlier alien-invasion fiction. At the same time, the splattered references to nonhuman animals and veganism throughout the episodes stress that the narrative discourse is aware of the

comparisons that can be raised between humans being prey and nonhuman animals being commodified in real life in industrial farming.

With *Under the Skin* (both the novel and its filmic adaptation), the concepts of gender, sexuality, ableness and species can be analyzed in relation to their use in the construction of an alien body. Whereas the novel emphasized an antispeciesist, post-anthropocentric criticism by dealing with the possibility of reversing positions in the slaughterhouse system (humans as the commodified bodies turned into flesh, and a different species neglecting their sentience through a rhetoric that places arbitrary limits of moral consideration), the film chooses to ignore the reference to nonhuman animals and focuses instead on a gender perspective. The fact that Isserley is a female predator who only hunts men has been analyzed from an ecofeminist lens which considers the gendered discourses of hunting, pointing to how the film (and the novel before it) dismantle these patriarchal notions by, again, a reversal in the customary situations. Here, men are hunted by an alien who makes use of a normative female body seen through the patriarchal gaze, which challenges traditional discourses about hunting, which connect hunters to patriarchal masculinity, and the prey to the realm of the feminine. As enriching as the connection between this gender aspect and the novel's critique about the commodification of nonhuman animals could have been, Glazer's decision to leave out the latter is a problematic one, in that it maintains speciesism as a second-class matter that can be circumvented to deal with something else instead.

Next, the discussion of *Nope* has been approached through the critiques about the society of spectacle, and more specifically about turning nonhuman animals into commodities for consumption and entertainment; as well as Derrida's insights into the ethical implications of considering the nonhuman animals' gaze. Whereas nonhuman animals have been present throughout Peele's cinema as symbols (as the deer in *Get Out* and the rabbits in *Us*), here animality holds a more interesting position. Rather than just symbols for human situations,

animality is here a character and a topic on its own, explored in the stories of Gordy the chimpanzee, Lucky the horse, and Jean Jacket the alien creature. On the one hand, Jean Jacket illustrates a violent reaction to the attempt at commodification that people like Park wanted to impose on it, turning it into a spectacle object. On the other hand, the relationship between OJ and Jean Jacket, illustrative of the relevance of meeting the Other's gaze as a precondition for interspecies empathy, shows how a partial rejection of the anthropocentric position (which upholds the human as an observing subject, but never as an observed object) allows OJ to survive the alien's appetite.

Finally, the zombies chapter has provided an overview of zombie film throughout the tree stages of its history; namely, the colonial zombie, the slow zombie, and the fast zombie. The folkloric roots of this creature, which lacks any fundamental literary tradition, are found in the Haitian traditions of voodoo, and these were represented in the first wave of zombie films. The slow zombie, initiated by Romero's landmark film *Night of the Living Dead*, reigned during the time span between the late 60s and the 70s, although it waned towards the end of the century. The post-9/11 renaissance, initiated by videogames adaptations like *Resident Evil* and the fast zombie inaugural work, *28 Days Later*, increasingly included concerns about contemporary issues, such as terrorism, environmental problems, or pandemics. Such issues were maintained throughout the century and until our days, incorporating different discourses about food and consumption into their narratives.

The 21st century films of Romero's Saga of the Dead were studied in contrast to the 20th century films, illustrating how concerns about environmentalism and food soaked into their narratives. At the same time, some of the zombie characters in these films were represented in a more sympathetic light, enacting what I call the post-undead. The TV series *The Walking Dead* has also been looked at, especially focusing on the episodes where the tensions about food in its post-apocalyptic context are more relevant. These tensions include the

transgression of food taboos out of hunger, the cannibalism of some characters (which puts humans in the position of nonhuman animals in slaughterhouses and raises interesting concerns in connection to the construction of humanity and nonhumanity), and the vegetarianism of others.

Finally, I have looked at the representation of vegan characters and some caricatured references to veganism in recent zombie films such as *Zombieland: Double Tap* or *Army of the Dead*. As in the case of Amy Burley in the vampires chapter, these simplistic representations point to the contradictory discourses of some contemporary mainstream fiction. Whereas the concerns around environmental damage, food shortages, or pandemics are made visible in the narrative, the awareness about the role of anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism and speciesism in these issues is often mocked in these films, and empathy is treated as a delusional possibility when confronting monsters.

My conclusions are, then, that antispeciesism had turned into a predominant discourse that permeates contemporary fiction —whether film's developers are aware of that or not— and, as such, the antispeciesist and ecocritical frameworks of analysis are essential tools to look at current monster fiction, especially in those where consumption and interspecies contact are main issues. As it also usually happens with other critical frameworks, like feminism, mainstream film can not generally be expected to reflect these critical discourses in all the necessary depth, understanding and complexity that they would require. This often leads to narratives which end up being contradictory in that they sustain environmentally-concerned narratives, or even some which seem to respect the nonhuman experience, but which eventually fall into some kind of anthropocentrism, either because some nonhuman species are still unquestionably commodified (as food, for instance), or because the monsters are only considered under the moral sphere when they act in accordance to humans' expectations and needs. All in all, I want to see the positive part, which points to the

relevance of such necessary discourses in popular culture —taking into account that they were not even taken into consideration some decades ago—, even if ecocritical antispeciesist and post-anthropocentric readings should be carried out in order to unveil inconsistencies or discriminatory rhetorics within the narratives.

In terms of further research, I have realized that there is a wide terrain to be explored in connection to humans-as-prey narratives. Firstly, each of my chapters could have been a dissertation of its own, were I to consider more films and TV series —not to mention literary works—, or to delve into more aspects that had to be left aside for space constraints. Secondly, I have left aside other monster categories: some, because they belonged to other genres, like fantasy, and some because they constitute monsters which did not fit into my corpus of 'main nonhuman human-eating monsters'. In this way, many creatures, including witches, giants, dragons, cannibals, ghosts, or deities have been omitted, and there is room for a lot of analysis in there.

My work could have been analyzed in terms of the sociopolitical discourses (beyond environmentalism or antispeciesism) that these monster narratives represent. In this sense, I was also interested in the idea stated by Somogyi and Ryan about the monster as "a polymorphous figure which represents or embodies social, cultural and personal fears, typically functions not only as a threat to protagonists, but as a disruption to the normative social order within the narrative" (2013: 199). Departing from this idea, and considering that many successful contemporary (human-eating) monsters are no longer a threat, nor a disruption to the social order (in fact, they often try to pass as assimilated members of the society), what does this tell us with regard to normative social orders, and how they are contested (or left uncontested) by cultural products? This question could be analyzed through ideas like the potential of mainstream culture to enact progressive or reactionary discourses (or reactionary discourses hidden by progressive ones), or the commodification of critical

approaches (like antispeciesism, but also others like feminism or antiracism). Of course, my dissertation limits did not allow me to delve into that, although I did point out the problematics of representing progressive discourses without developing an actual critical reflection behind them.

In terms of other concepts that could have been the main focus of the analysis of human-eating monsters (instead of food or species), I believe that romantic love is also an interesting one to depart from, given its pervasiveness in contemporary monster fiction. From *Twilight* to *Warm Bodies*, romantic relationships between monsters and humans are feasible now, and they enact relevant implications that range from vulnerability or empathy to inequality in male-female relationships (it should be taken into account that these stories often present a male monster and a female human) that would be highly interesting to analyze from a gender perspective. In terms of sexuality, the conflation between gender, love, predation and sex (which is especially conspicuous in vampire fiction) is an important matter of analysis as well.

Besides love, fear and its sociopolitical implications, as well as the horror genre's use of it in order to raise awareness about certain issues is also a relevant issue to be analyzed in this kind of films. Whereas fear has often been dismissed by individualistic assertions of masculinity or anthropocentrism (I do think both Plumwood and Treadwell should have been more scared before entering the predators' territory), an appeal to value this emotion might have useful outcomes and might encourage feelings of empathy (if we realize nonhuman animals feel fear like us), a downsizing of human exceptionalism (if we come to the realization that we can, indeed, be harmed), and ultimately a call for action (if we take seriously threats like climate change and its consequences). Here I am reminded of climate activist Greta Thunberg's discourse at the World Economic Forum in 2019, where she stated: "I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic, I want you to feel the fear I feel every

day. And then I want you to act, I want you to act as if you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house was on fire, because it is". Tidwell and Soles argued that "this call for a negative affective response to climate change highlights the power of fear to create change. Fear is not simply a reflection of deep-seated hatred. Sometimes it is justified and necessary" (2021: 13).

I believe this justified and necessary fear is ultimately what I am also pointing at when bringing these human-eating monster narratives to the forefront, by saying: this might happen —maybe not the encounter with a vampire or an alien, but definitely one with a bear or an alligator—, and it is scary. This feeling of fear should lead us to think, on the one hand, that we should take nature seriously and develop a serious critique of the concept of human exceptionalism; and, on the other hand, that we should become aware of the shared embodiment and sentience of both human and nonhuman animals, and consider whether our daily actions, such as food consumption, align with our knowledge and our values.

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A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night. Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour, script by Ana Lily Amirpour. Vice Films & Kino Lorber, 2014.
A Trip to the Moon. Directed by Georges Méliès, script by Georges Méliès. Star Film Company, 1902.
Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter. Directed by Timur Bekmambetov, script by Seth Grahame-Smith. 20th Century Fox, 2012.
Alien. Directed by Ridley Scott, script by Dan O'Bannon. 20th Century Fox, 1979.
Alien 3. Directed by David Fincher, script by David Giler, Walter Hill and Larry Ferguson. 20th Century Fox, 1992.
Alien: Covenant. Directed by Ridley Scott, script by John Logan and Dante Harper. 20th Century Fox, 2017.
Alien Resurrection. Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, script by Joss Whedon. 20th Century Fox, 1997.
Alien: Romulus. Directed by Fede Álvarez, script by Fede Álvarez and Rodo Sayagues. 20th Century Studios, 2024.
Aliens. Directed by James Cameron, script by James Cameron. 20th Century Fox, 1986.
Alligator. Directed by Lewis Teague, script by John Sayles. Group 1 Films, 1980.
Anaconda. Directed by Luis Llosa, script by Hans Bauer, Jim Cash and Jack Epps Jr. Sony Pictures Releasing, 1997.
Army of the Dead. Directed by Zack Snyder, script by Zack Snyder, Shay Hatten and Joby Harold. Netflix, 2021.
Arrival. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, script by Eric Heisserer. Paramount Pictures, 2016.
Attack of the Killer Tomatoes. Directed by John DeBello, script by John DeBello, Costa Dillon and Stephen Peace. NAI Entertainment, 1978.
Attack the Block. Directed by Joe Cornish, script by Joe Cornish. Optimum Releasing, 2011.
Avatar. Directed by James Cameron, script by James Cameron. 20th Century Fox, 2009.
Babe. Directed by Chris Noonan, script by George Miller and Chris Noonan. Universal Pictures, 1995.

Backcountry. Directed by Adam MacDonald, script by Adam MacDonald. IFC Midnight, 2014.
Bats. Directed by Louis Morneau, script by John Logan. Destination Films, 1999.
Batteries Not Included. Directed by Matthew Robbins, script by Brad Bird, Matthew Robbins, Brent Maddock and S.S. Wilson. Universal Pictures, 1987.
Battle: Los Angeles. Directed by Jonathan Liebesman, script by Chris Bertolini. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2011.
Blackfish. Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite, script by Gabriela Cowperthwaite, Eli Despres and Tim Zimmermann. Magnolia Pictures, 2013.
Bram Stoker's Dracula. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, script by James V. Hart. Columbia Pictures, 1992.
Byzantium. Directed by Neil Jordan, script by Moira Buffini. StudioCanal & IFC Films, 2012.
Cannibal Holocaust. Directed by Ruggero Deodato, script by Gianfranco Clerici. United Artists Europa, 1980.
Carnosaur. Directed by Adam Simon, script by Adam Simon. New Horizon Pictures, 1993.
Carnosaur 2. Directed by Louis Morneau, script by Michael Palmer. New Horizons, 1995.
Carnosaur 3: Primal Species. Directed by Jonathan Winfrey, New Horizons, 1996.
Cat People. Directed by Jacques Tourneur, script by DeWitt Bodeen. RKO Radio Pictures, 1942.
Cloverfield. Directed by Matt Reeves, script by Drew Goddard. Paramount Pictures, 2008.
Cocaine Bear. Directed by Elizabeth Banks, script by JImmy Warden. Universal Pictures, 2023.
Colin. Directed by Marc Price, script by Marc Price. Netflix, 2008.
Congo. Directed by Frank Marshall, script by John Patrick Shanley. Paramount Pictures, 1995.
Crawl. Directed by Alexander Aja, script by Michael Rasmussen and Shawn Rasmussen. Paramount Pictures, 2019.
Cruella. Directed by Craig Gillespie, script by Dana Fox and Tony McNamara. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2021.
Crocodile. Directed by Tobe Hooper, script by Michael D. Weiss, Adam Gierasch and Jace Anderson. Lions Gate, 2000.
Dawn of the Dead. Directed by Zack Snyder, script by James Gunn. Universal Pictures, 2004.
Dawn of the Dead. Directed by George A. Romero, script by George A. Romero. United Film Distribution Company, 1978.
Day of the Animals. Directed by William Girdler, script by William W. Norton and Eleanor E. Norton. Film Ventures International and Warner Bros., 1977.
Deep Blue Sea. Directed by Renny Harlin, script by Duncan Kennedy, Donna Powers and Wayne Powers. Warner Bros., 1999.
District 9. Directed by Neill Blomkamp, script by Neill Blomkamp and Terri Tatchell. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2009.
Dracula. Directed by Tod Browning, script by Garrett Fort. Universal, 1931.
Dracula. Directed by Terence Fisher, script by Jimmy Sangster. Hammer, 1958.
Dracula's Daughter. Directed by Lambert Hillyer, script by Garrett Fort. Universal Pictures, 1936.
Dracula Untold. Directed by Gary Shore, script by Matt Sazama & Burk Sharpless. Universal Pictures, 2014.
Eaten Alive. Directed by Tobe Hooper, script by Kim Henkel, Alvin L. Fast and Mardi Rustam. Virgo International Pictures, 1976.

Eight Legged Freaks. Directed by Ellory Elkayem, script by Jesse Alexander and Ellory Elkayem. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2002.
E.T. Directed by Steven Spielberg, script by Melissa Mathison. Universal Pictures, 1982.
Fido. Directed by Andrew Currie, script by Dennis Heaton, Robert Chomiak and Andrew Currie. Lions Gate Entertainment, 2006.
Finding Nemo. Directed by Andrew Stanton, script by Andrew Stanton, Bob Peterson and David Reynolds. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 2003.
Flipper. Directed by Alan Shapiro, script by Alan Shapiro. Universal Pictures, 1996.
Flipper. Directed by James B. Clark, script by Arthur Weiss. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1963.
Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale, script by Francis Edward Faragoh and Garrett Fort. Universal Pictures, 1931.
Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare Directed by Rachel Talalay, script by Michael de Luca and Rachel Talalay. New Line Cinema, 1991.
Friendship's Death. Directed by Peter Wollen, script by Peter Wollen. British Film Institute, 1987.
Fright Night. Directed by Tom Holland, script by Tom Holland. Columbia Pictures, 1985.
Frogs. Directed by George McCowan, script by Robert Hutchison and Robert Blees. American International Pictures, 1972.
Get Out. Directed by Jordan Peele, script by Jordan Peele. Universal Pictures, 2017.
Grizzly. Directed by William Girdler, script by Harvey Flaxman and David Sheldon. Film Ventures International and Columbia Pictures, 1976.
Grizzly Man. Directed by Werner Herzog, script by Werner Herzog. Lions Gate Films, 2005.
Grizzly Park. Directed by Tom Skull, American World Pictures, 2008.
Halloween. Directed by John Carpenter, script by John Carpenter and Debra Hill. Compass International Pictures, 1978.
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince . Directed by David Yates, script by Steve Kloves. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2009.
Hotel Transylvania. Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2012.
Hotel Transylvania 2. Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2015.
Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation. Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2018.
Hotel Transylvania: Transformania. Directed by Derek Drymon and Jennifer Kluska, Amazon Studios, 2022.
I Am Legend. Directed by Francis Lawrence, script by Mark Protosevich and Akiva Goldsman. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2007.
I Walked with a Zombie. Directed by Jacques Tourneur, script by Curt Siodmak and Ardel Wray. RKO Radio Pictures, 1943.
Independence Day. Directed by Roland Emmerich, script by Dean Devin and Roland Emmerich. 20th Century Fox, 1996.
Interview with the Vampire. Directed by Neil Jordan, script by Anne Rice. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1994.
Into the Grizzly Maze. Directed by David Hackl, script by Guy Moshe and Jack Reher. Destination Films, 2015.
Invaders from Mars. Directed by Tobe Hooper, script by Dan O'Bannon and Don Jakoby. Cannon Film Distributors, 1986.
Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Directed by Don Siegel, script by Daniel Mainwaring. Allied Artists Pictures, 1956.
J'Accuse. Directed by Abel Gance, script by Abel Gance. Pathé Frères, 1919.
Jaws. Directed by Steven Spielberg, script by Universal Pictures, 1975.
Jesse James. Directed by Henry King, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1939.

Jupiter Ascending. Directed by Lana Wachowski and Lily Wachowski, script by Lana Wachowski and Lily Wachowski. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015.
Jurassic Park. Directed by Steven Spielberg, script by Michael Crichton and David Koepp. Universal Pictures, 1993.
Jurassic Park III. Directed by Joe Johnston, script by Alexander Payne, Jim Taylor and Peter Buchman. Universal Pictures, 2001.
Jurassic World. Directed by Colin Trevorrow, script by Colin Trevorrow, Derek Connolly, Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver. Universal Pictures, 2015.
Jurassic World: Dominion. Directed by Colin Trevorrow, script by Emily Carmichael and Colin Trevorrow. Universal Pictures, 2022.
Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom. Directed by Juan Antonio Bayona, script by Colin Trevorrow and Derek Connolly. Universal Pictures, 2018.
Kaw. Directed by Sheldon Wilson, script by Benjamin Sztajnkrycer. Syfy, 2006.
King Kong. Directed by Peter Jackson, script by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Peter Jackson. Universal Pictures and WingNut Films, 2005.
King Kong. Directed by Merian Caldwell Cooper and Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack, script by James Creelman and Ruth Rose. RKO Radio Pictures, 1933.
Kingdom of the Spiders. Directed by John Cardos, script by Alan Caillou and Richard Robinson. Dimension Pictures, 1977.
Lake Placid. Directed by Steve Miner, script by David E. Kelley. 20th Century Fox, 1999.
Land of the Dead. Directed by George A. Romero, script by George A. Romero. Universal Pictures, 2005.
Legally Blonde. Directed by Robert Luketic, script by Karen McCullah and Kirsten Smith. MGM, 2001.
Lifeforce. Directed by Tobe Hooper, script by Dan O'Bannon and Don Jakoby. Cannon Film Distributors, 1985.
Lilo & Stitch. Directed by Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois, script by Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Inc., 2002.
Logan's Run. Directed by Michael Anderson, script by David Zelag Goodman. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1976.
Love at First Bite. Directed by Stan Dragoti, script by Robert Kaufman. American International Pictures, 1979.
Maggie. Directed by Henry Hobson, script by John Scott 3. Lionsgate Films, Roadside Attractions, 2015.
Maleficent. Directed by Robert Stromberg, script by Linda Woolverton. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2014.
Man's Best Friend. Directed by John Lafia, script by John Lafia. New Line Cinema, 1993.
March of the Penguins. Directed by Luc Jacquet, script by Luc Jacquet. Buena Vista International France, 2005.
Mars Attacks! Directed by Tim Burton, script by Jonathan Gems. Warner Bros., 1996.
Men in Black 3. Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, script by Etan Cohen. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2012.
My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell It To. Directed by Jonathan Cuartas, script by Jonathan Cuartas. Dark Sky Films, 2020.
My Octopus Teacher. Directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed, script by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. Netflix, 2020.
Nadja. Directed by Michael Almereyda, script by Michael Almereyda. October Films, 1994.
Near Dark. Directed by Kathryn Bigelow, script by Eric Red & Kathryn Bigelow. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1987.

Night of the Lepus. Directed by William Francis Claxton, script by Don Holliday and Gene R. Kearney. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1972.
Night of the Living Dead. Directed by George A. Romero, script by George A. Romero and John A. Russo. Walter Reade, 1968.
Night of the Living Dead 3D. Directed by Jeff Broadstreet, script by George A. Romero and John A. Russo. Lux Digital Pictures, 2006.
Nightwing. Directed by Arthur Hiller, script by Martin Cruz Smith, Steve Shagan and Bud Shrake. Columbia Pictures, 1979.
Nope. Directed by Jordan Peele, script by Jordan Peele. Universal Pictures, 2022.
Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie Des Grauens. Directed by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, script by Henrik Galeen. Kino Lorber, 1922.
Oblivion. Directed by Joseph Kosinski, script by Joseph Kosinski, Michael Arndt and Karl Gajdusek. Universal Pictures, 2013.
One Hundred and One Dalmatians. Directed by Wolfgang Reitherman *et al.*, script by Bill Peet. Buena Vista Distribution, 1961.
Only Lovers Left Alive. Directed by Jim Jarmusch, script by Jim Jarmusch. Sony Pictures Classics, 2013.
Open Water. Directed by Chris Kentis, script by Chris Kentis, Lions Gate Films, 2003.
Orca: The Killer Whale. Directed by Michael Anderson, script by Luciano Vincenzoni and Sergio Donati. Paramount Pictures, 1977.
Ouanga. Directed by George Terwilliger, script by George Terwilliger. J.H. Hoffberg Company, 1936.
Paranormal Activity. Directed by Oren Peli, script by Oren Peli. Paramount Pictures, 2007.
Piranha. Directed by Joe Dante, script by John Sayles. New World Pictures, 1978.
Piranha. Directed by Scott P. Levy, script by Alex Simon. Concorde Pictures, 1995.
Planet of the Apes. Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, script by Michael Wilson and Rod Serling. 20th Century Fox, 1968.
Predator. Directed by John McTiernan, script by Jim Thomas and John Thomas. 20th Century Fox, 1987.
Predator 2. Directed by Stephen Hopkins, script by Jim Thomas and John Thomas. 20th Century Fox, 1990.
Predators. Directed by Nimród Amtal, script by Alex Litvak and Michael Finch. 20th Century Fox, 2010.
Prey. Directed by Dan Trachtenberg, Hulu, 2022.
Primeval. Directed by Michael Katleman, script by John Brancato and Michael Ferris. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 2007.
Prometheus. Directed by Ridley Scott, script by Jon Spaihts and Damon Lindelof. 20th Century Fox, 2012.
Psycho. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, script by Joseph Stefano. Paramount Pictures, 1960.
Quatermass and the Pit. Directed by Roy Ward Baker, script by Nigel Kneale. 20th Century Fox, 1967.
Queen of the Damned. Directed by Michael Rymer, script by Scott Abbott & Michael Petroni. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2002.
REC. Directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, script by Paco Plaza, Luis A. Berdejo and Jaume Balagueró. Filmax, 2007.
Resident Evil. Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson, script by by Paul W. S. Anderson. Screen Gems, 2002.
Return of the Living Dead . Directed by Dan O'Bannon, script by Dan O'Bannon. Orion Pictures, 1985.
Scream. Directed by Wes Craven, script by Kevin Williamson. Dimension Films, 1996.

Shakma. Directed by Hugh Parks and Tom Logan, script by Roger Engle. Castle Hill Productions and Quest Entertainment, 1990.
Sharknado. Directed by Anthony C. Ferrante, script by Thunder Levin. The Asylum, 2013.
Signs. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan, script by M. Night Shyamalan. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 2002.
Sleeping Beauty. Directed by Clyde Geronimi *et al*., script by Penner, E. *et al*. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959.
Slotherhouse. Directed by Matthew Goodhue, Gravitas Ventures, 2023.
Soylent Green. Directed by Richard Fleischer, script by Stanley R. Greenberg. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973.
Species. Directed by Roger Donaldson, script by Dennis Feldman. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995.
Sssssss. Directed by Bernard Louis Kowalski, script by Hal Dresner and Daniel C. Striepeke. Universal Pictures, 1973.
Star Trek Into Darkness. Directed by J.J. Abrams, script by Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman and Damon Lindelof. Paramount Pictures, 2013.
Survival of the Dead. Directed by George A. Romero, script by George A. Romero. E1 Entertainment Canada, 2009.
Star Wars. Directed by George Lucas, script by George Lucas. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1977.
Tarantula! Directed by Jack Arnold, script by Robert M. Fresco and Martin Berkeley. Universal-International, 1955.
Tentacles. Directed by Ovidio Gabriel Assonitis, script by Steven W. Carabatsos, Tito Carpi and Jerome Max. Euro International Films, American International Pictures and 20th Century Fox, 1977.
Terminator. Directed by James Cameron, script by Harlan Ellison, James Cameron and Gale Anne Hurd. Orion Pictures, 1984.
Terminator 2: Judgment Day. Directed by James Cameron, script by James Cameron & William Wisher. TriStar Pictures, 1991.
The 5th Wave. Directed by J Blakeson, script by Susannah Grant, Akiva Goldsman and Jeff Pinkner. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2016.
The Beast. Directed by Jeff Bleckner, script by J. B. White. Timeless Media Group, 1996.
The Birds. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, script by Evan Hunter. Universal Pictures, 1963.
The Black Cat. Directed by Albert S. Rogell, script by Robert Lees, Frederic I. Rinaldo, Eric Taylor and Robert Neville. Universal Pictures Company, Inc., 1941.
The Blair Witch Project . Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, script by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. Summit Entertainment, 1999.
The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Directed by Andrew Adamson, script by Peacock *et al*. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 2005.
The Day of the Triffids. Directed by Steve Sekely and Freddie Francis, script by Bernard Gordon and Philip Yordan. Rank Organisation, 1963.
The Day the Earth Stood Still. Directed by Scott Derrickson, script by David Scarpa. 20th Century Fox, 2008.
The Day the Earth Stood Still. Directed by Robert Wise, script by Edmund H. North. 20th Century Fox, 1951.
The Devil Bat. Directed by Jean Yarborough, script by John Thomas Neville. Producers Releasing Corporation, 1940.
The Edge. Directed by Lee Tamahori, script by David Mamet. 20th Century Fox, 1997.
The Food of the Gods. Directed by Bert Ira Gordon, script by Bert Ira Gordon. American International Pictures, 1976.

The Girl with All the Gifts. Directed by Colm McCarthy, script by Mike Carey. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016.
The Green Mile. Directed by Frank Darabont, script by Frank Darabont. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.
The Grey. Directed by Joe Carnahan, script by Joe Carnahan and Ian MacKenzie Jeffers. Open Road Films, 2011.
The Last Man on Earth. Directed by Sidney Salkow and Ubaldo B. Ragona, script by Logan Swanson and William F. Leicester. American International Pictures, 1964.
The Last Winter. Directed by Larry Fessenden, script by Larry Fessenden and Robert Leaver. IFC Films, 2006.
The Lost Boys. Directed by Joel Schumacher, script by Janice Fischer, James Jeremias & Jeffrey Boam. Warner Bros., 1987.
The Lost World: Jurassic Park. Directed by Steven Spielberg, script by David Koepp. Universal Pictures, 1997.
The Matrix. Directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, Warner Bros., 1999.
The Mist. Directed by Frank Darabont, script by Frank Darabont. The Weinstein Company, 2007.
The Naked Jungle. Directed by Byron Haskin, script by Ranald MacDougall, Ben Maddow and Philip Yordan. Paramount Pictures, 1954.
The Omega Man. Directed by Boris Sagal, script by John William Corrington and Joyce H. Corrington. Walter Seltzer Productions, 1971.
The Pack. Directed by Robert Clouse, script by Robert Clouse and David Fisher. Warner Bros., 1977.
The Predator. Directed by Shane Black, script by Fred Dekker and Shane Black. 20th Century Fox, 2018.
The Road. Directed by John Hillcoat, script by John Penhall. Dimension Films, 2009.
The Shallows. Directed by Jaume Collet-Serra, script by Anthony Jaswinski. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2016.
The Shawshank Redemption. Directed by Frank Darabont, script by Frank Darabont. Columbia Pictures, 1994.
The Signal. Directed by David Bruckner et al., script by David Bruckner, Dan Bush and Jacob Gentry. Magnolia Pictures, 2007.
The Silence of the Lambs. Directed by Jonathan Demme, script by Ted Tally. Orion Pictures, 1991.
The Swarm. Directed by Irwin Allen, script by Stirling Silliphant. Warner Bros., 1978.
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre . Directed by Tobe Hooper, script by Kim Henkel and Tobe Hooper. Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974.
The Thing. Directed by John Carpenter, script by Bill Lancaster. Universal Pictures, 1982.
The Thing from Another World. Directed by Christian Nyby, script by Charles Lederer. RKO Radio Pictures, 1951.
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 1. Directed by Bill Condon, script by Melissa Rosenberg. Summit Entertainment, 2011.
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 2. Directed by Bill Condon, script by Melissa Rosenberg. Summit Entertainment, 2012.
The Twilight Saga: Eclipse. Directed by David Slade, script by Melissa Rosenberg. Summit Entertainment, 2010.
The Twilight Saga: New Moon. Directed by Chris Weitz, script by Melissa Rosenberg. Summit Entertainment, 2009.
The War of the Worlds. Directed by Byron Haskin, script by Barré Lyndon. Paramount Pictures, 1953.

Them! Directed by Gordon Douglas, script by Ted Sherdeman and Russell Hughes. Warner Bros., 1954.
Ticks. Directed by Tony Randel, script by Brent V. Friedman. Republic Pictures, 1993.
Transformers. Directed by Michael Bay, script by Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman. Paramount Pictures, 2007.
Twilight. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke, script by Melissa Rosenberg. Summit Entertainment, 2008.
Under Paris. Directed by Xavier Gens, script by Yannick Dahan, Maud Heywang, Xavier Gens, Yaël Langmann and Olivier Torres. Netflix, 2024.
Under the Skin. Directed by Jonathan Glazer, script by Walter Campbell and Jonathan Glazer.. StudioCanal and A24 Films, 2013.
Us. Directed by Jordan Peele, script by Jordan Peele. Universal Pictures, 2019.
Vampire's Kiss. Directed by Robert Bierman, script by Joseph Minion. Hemdale Film Corporation, 1989.
Van Helsing. Directed by Stephen Sommers, script by Stephen Sommers. Universal Pictures, 2004.
War of the Worlds. Directed by Steven Spielberg, script by Josh Friedman and David Koepp. Paramount Pictures and DreamWorks Pictures, 2005.
Warm Bodies. Directed by Jonathan Levine, script by Jonathan Levine. Summit Entertainment, 2013.
White Zombie. Directed by Victor Halperin, script by Garnett Weston. United Artists Corporation, 1932.
Winged Migration. Directed by Jacques Perrin *et al*., script by Jean Dorst and Jacques Perrin. BAC Films, 2001.
Wolf. Directed by Mike Nichols, script by Jim Harrison and Wesley Strick. Columbia Pictures, 1994.
World War Z. Directed by Marc Forster, script by Matthew Michael Carnahan, Damon Lindelof and Drew Goddard. Paramount Pictures, 2013.
Zombi Child. Directed by Bertrand Bonello, script by Bertrand Bonello. Ad Vitam, 2019.
Zombieland. Directed by Ruben Fleischer, script by Paul Wernick and Rhett Reese. Columbia Pictures, 2009.
Zombieland: Double Tap. Directed by Ruben Fleischer, script by Rhett Reese, Paul Wernick and David Callaham. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2019.

TV Series

Applebaum, Josh, André Nemec, Jeff Pinkner and Scott Rosenberg, creators. *Zoo*. CBS, 2015.
Ball, Alan, creator. *True Blood*. HBO, 2008.
Benioff, David, Daniel B. Weiss and Alexander Woo, creators. *3-Body Problem*. Netflix, 2024.
Chase, David, creator. *The Sopranos*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 1999.
Cosgrove, Brian, and Mark Hall, creators. *Count Duckula*. Thames Television & Nickelodeon, 1988.
Crane, David and Marta Kauffman, creators. *Friends*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 1994.
Curtis, Dan, creator. *Dark Shadows*. ABC, 1966.
Darabont, Frank, creator. *The Walking Dead*. AMC, 2010.

Druckmann, Neil and Craig Mazin, creators. *The Last of Us*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2023.
del Toro, Guillermo, and Chuck Hogan, creators. *The Strain*. FX, 2014.
Fresco, Victor, creator. *Santa Clarita Diet*. Netflix, 2017.
Ganz Cooney, Joan, and Lloyd Morrisett, creators. *Sesame Street*. Sesame Workshop, 1969.
Gilligan, Vince, creator. *Breaking Bad*. Sony Pictures Television, 2008.
Gimple, Scott M. and Channing Powell, creators. *Tales of the Walking Dead*. AMC, 2022.
Gimple, Scott M., Danai Gurira and Andrew Lincoln, creators. *The Walking Dead: The Ones Who Live*. AMC, 2024.
Gimple, Scott M. and Matthew Negrete, creators. *The Walking Dead: World Beyond*. AMC, 2020.
Groening, Matt, creator. *The Simpsons*. Fox, 1989.
Hanna, William and Joseph Barbera, creators. *The Yogi Bear Show*. Syndicated, 1961.
Jonquet, Thierry, creator. *Vampires*. Netflix, 2020.
Jorné, Eli, creator. *The Walking Dead: Dead City*. AMC, 2023.
Kapinos, Tom, creator. *Lucifer*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2016.
Kirkman, Robert and Dave Erickson, creators. *Fear The Walking Dead*. AMC, 2015.
LaBute, Neil, creator. *Van Helsing*. Echo Lake Entertainment & Dynamic Television Nomadic Pictures, 2016.
Laurin, William, and Glenn Davis, creators. *V Wars*. Netflix, 2020.
Manos Jr., James, creator. *Dexter*. CBS Television Distribution, 2006.
Overman, Howard, creator. *War of the Worlds*. Canal+, Fox and Star, 2019.
Sander, Garrett, creator. *Monster High*. Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.
Simon, David, creator. *The Wire*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2000.
Thomas, Rob, and Diane Ruggiero-Wright, creators. *iZombie*. The CW, 2015.
Ward, Pendleton, creator. *Adventure Time*. Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2010.
Whedon, Joss, creator. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. 20th Television, 1997.
Williamson, Kevin, creator. *The Vampire Diaries*. CBS Television Distribution, 2009.
Wright, Brad, and Robert C. Cooper, creators. *Stargate Atlantis*. Syfy, 2004.
Zabel, David, creator. *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon*. AMC, 2023.

TV Episodes

"A." *The Walking Dead*, written by Scott Gimple and Angela Kang, directed by Michelle MacLaren, AMC, 2014.
"Bobby, It's Cold Outside." *The Simpsons*, written by John Frink and Jeff Westbrook, directed by Steven Dean Moore, Fox, 2019.
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"Conquer." *The Walking Dead*, written by Scott Gimple and Seth Hoffman, directed by Greg Nicotero, AMC, 2015.
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