

A Discussion of Speciesism and Cannibalism in Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh*

Cansu Özge Özmen

Department of English Language and Literature, Tekirdağ Namık Kemal
University Namık Kemal Kampüs cad. No: 1 59030 Tekirdağ, Türkiye
Email: cozmen@nku.edu.tr

Abstract This article explores the representation of cannibalism in a contemporary Argentinian novels and reveal how the motif is employed as one of humans' ultimate fears: to be treated like animals. As anthropocentric point of view inevitably enables speciesism, and since through similar hierarchical structures, humans justify their domination over each other through class stratification, the discriminatory discourses that perpetuate human aggression towards humans and animals do not stem from completely distinct psychological processes. Justification of violence, mass massacres, killing and exploiting animals, their transformation into normative human behavior requires the utilization of very similar defense mechanisms. *Tender is the Flesh* presents a world where animal meat becomes inedible after a pandemic and animal agriculture is transformed into a cannibalistic business. Humans who are raised for meat are called heads. Cannibalism and its maintenance, and the language used to refer to the practice are closely monitored by an autocratic government, and the cognitive dissonance people might experience as a result of their participation in a violent process is kept under control. The article provides a close reading of the novel by highlighting how cannibalism is rendered normal and natural through psychological mechanisms such as dehumanization, objectification, and deindividualization.

Keywords Critical Animal Studies; anthropocentrism; dehumanization; dystopia; Argentinian literature

Author **Cansu Özge Özmen** received her BA degree at Bilkent University, American Culture and Literature department. She got her MA degree in American Studies from the University of Heidelberg. On being awarded a PhD fellowship from the Intercultural Humanities department at Jacobs University Bremen, she wrote her dissertation on nineteenth century American travel narratives of the

Orient and received her PhD degree in Literature in February, 2010. She currently works as an Associate Professor at the Department of English and Literature at Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University. Her research interests include nineteenth century American travel literature, contemporary American fiction, Antinatalism, Ecocriticism, and Animal Studies.

Introduction

Critical Animal Studies is a relatively recent cultural theory and an effective tool to analyze fictional representations of human-non-human animal relationships. Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, the field also reappropriates theoretical concepts from other fields to better understand intersections between different kinds of oppression and explores ways to dismantle discourses that naturalize them. Through the textual analysis of a contemporary Argentinian novel, this article applies Critical Animal Studies framework to fiction while also utilizing results of various social psychological research about human perception of animals as a social group, how they determine the valuing and devaluing animals and their implications for human intergroup relationships. *Tender is the Flesh*, originally written in Spanish, was published in 2017, translated to English in 2020, and gained international recognition soon after. The plot revolves around a grief-stricken processing plant worker, Marcos Tejo, and introduces us to a cannibalistic society and the discursive foundations on which the society relies on to perpetuate violence against its outgroups.

Critical Animal Studies, as opposed to Human-Animal Studies, is a theory to action interdisciplinary field of Humanities and Social Sciences opposing the passivity of detached, disinterested academic work, challenging the insular nature of academia with the purpose of targeting “theory-for-theory’s sake, an academic disorder, which involves the severing of theory from ordinary meaning (or, often, meaning in any sense) and from action, practice, and politics, and the separation of scholarship from citizenship” (Best 33). Although animal rights and animal liberation movements preceded the birth of Critical Animal Studies by centuries, its official beginning as an “interdisciplinary...multidisciplinary intersectional and multi-movement approach for a total liberation field of study” (Nocella II et. al., *Introduction* xxii) is marked by the foundation of Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (now called Institute for Critical Animal Studies) in 2001. The field, in addition to working closely with animal rights activists also aims to promote intersectionalism and reveal the interconnected nature of various forms

of domination and exploitation. In other words, one of its central claims is that speciesism is closely related to other forms of discrimination against people.

Speciesism strips animals of all intrinsic value to reduce them to instrumental value, to mere tools and objects whose cosmic purpose is to satisfy human purposes. Once humans defined animals as creatures devoid of reason, autonomy, and inherent value, they could use and abuse them without mercy or compassion. Various social elites then applied *the same speciesist discrimination model* to oppress other human beings. For once “rational” white, male, wealthy, privileged, propertied elites designated women, people of color, and other groups to be deficient in rationality, and thus in humanity, they declared them to be subhuman, “mere animals,” closer to nature and animality than to culture and humanity, and thus could be thrown to the dungeons of damnation where they could be exploited, enslaved, and slaughtered like animals. (Best et. al., *Introducing* 8)

With its holistic understanding of oppression, CAS aims to deconstruct binary oppositions advance a radical non-hierarchical politics, and claims that the liberation of animal, human and the earth liberation is inseparable (14). Social psychology has been one of the sub-disciplines that provided data for Animal Studies to fill in the knowledge to action gap. Human tendency towards othering, discrimination, and violence, unquestioning obedience to authority (as in the Milgram experiments) or brutality (as in the Stanford Prison Experiment) have long been subjects of fascinating and at times ethically debatable studies results of which were later popularized through literature and film. Social psychology’s main contribution to Critical Animal Studies has been to apply the results of some of these studies to human-animal relationships and conceptualize the unseen discursive mechanisms of legitimization of speciesism. In fact, the term speciesism was first used by an American psychologist in the 1970s and later popularized by Peter Singer. Richard D. Ryder claimed that “species,” like many socially constructed categories, is prone to change and cannot be precisely defined. Speciesism is the exclusion of a member of another species from the scope of ethics. He also coined “painism,” an altruistic theory which is based on the moral consideration of others in terms of their ability to experience pain and increasing “the individual happiness of all suffering creatures by...seeking to reduce their individual pains” (77). Mainstream animal rights theory is now similarly based on sentience, the ability to feel in general, pain as well as pleasure.

Another important term was coined by Melanie Joy, a social psychologist in her work analyzing how human beings rationalize cruelty and normalize discrimination against animals of different species. Carnism is an invisible ideology and a system “in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate” (30). Because it is invisible and entrenched, people are unaware of the extensive violence that accompanies the system or that they have a choice not to participate in that violence or to subject it to scrutiny. There are various cognitive processes people go through to normalize and naturalize their participation in violence towards animals. Joy writes about three of these mechanisms:

...objectification, deindividualization, and dichotomization. These defenses are actually normal psychological processes that become defensive distortions when used excessively, as they must be in order to keep carnism intact. And, unlike some other defenses, these mechanisms are more internal and less conscious and intentional; they are less about *what* we think than they are about *how* we think. (117)

Animals are objectified, mainly through language and later through how they are treated, like inanimate objects devoid of sentience. Deindividualization further distances animals from human beings, by being perceived as groups of objects rather than individuals with identities of their own. They are thought of as abstractions, numbers, and masses of things which makes it impossible for people to empathize with their suffering. Dichotomization is the basic human tendency to classify things into groups often in opposing terms. These classifications help people organize information but they also determine how they emotionally respond to the individuals categorized in these groups (122). One such classification is made between edible and inedible animals. This classification is not based on morally relevant criteria such as sentience or consciousness but had already been naturalized based on convenience, profitability, and efficiency.

Once an animal belongs to the “food” category, category-relevant attributes are more central (e.g., tastiness, tenderness, fattiness) and category-irrelevant attributes become less central. Importantly, because suffering is not food-relevant for most consumers, placing an animal in the food category may reduce its perceived capacity to suffer, helping to reduce dissonance. (Bastian & Loughan 281)

The arbitrariness of this particular classification can easily be discerned by its cultural relativity. What is considered a delicious rarity or a staple source of nutrition for one culture might disgust or shock another. This is one of the main reasons why Erica Fudge believes it is easier for the human psyche not to consume meat rather than to do so, since by doing the latter one increases the experience of dissonance and contradictions (52). Whether it is associated with virility, human dominion over nature, prosperity, and excess, or inadvertently legitimized through various cognitive processes, eating animals, and consuming dairy products have been part of human experience for a long time. Opposition to one or all of the practices exploitative of animals are as ancient as the practices themselves.

Speciesism, Social Psychology and Literature

Literary representations of animal abuse, particularly from nineteenth century on aimed to highlight the moral implications of inhumane treatment of animals. Vivisection, use of feathers and fur, mistreatment of horses, and cattle were some of the concerns nineteenth century authors dealt with in their essays and fiction. Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), Margaret Saunders' *Beautiful Joe* (1893), Mark Twain's *A Dog's Tale* (1903), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Loveliness: A Story* (1899), and to a certain extent Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) questioned how natural and necessary animal abuse was and forced the readers to come to terms with their lack of compassion towards animals. A 2016 study on the influence of literary fiction on people's attitudes towards animal welfare proves that reading literary fiction about animal abuse can indeed modify people's opinions and behaviors towards animals and promote animal welfare. By the 20th and 21st centuries, "a canon of meat texts" (McCorry & McMiller 14) had already emerged as more scientific evidence linked natural disasters and climate change to animal agriculture as well as animal agriculture-related deforestation.

Post-apocalyptic novels also featured an inversion of human supremacy after global ecological disasters and their belated awareness of the necessity for a sustainable lifestyle, and a much less destructive existence in order to survive as a species. Many such works used the nature's vengeance motif to articulate the irreversibility of human's treatment of their habitat and its inhabitants. An ethical and narrow view of anthropocentrism is closely related to ethical discussions about the environment, the valuation of the natural world, and determine how people live in relation to that world. The belief that humans intrinsically are the sole ethical agents and possessors of moral value in the world is the cause of short-sightedness about the consequences of their actions and the interconnected nature of ecological

issues. The novel this research focuses on implies similar concerns about human environment but accentuates the transience and arbitrariness of human-animal divide which is easily and haphazardly transformed into a human-human divide under extraordinary but seemingly inevitable circumstances.

Agustina Bazterrica in her second novel portrays a post-pandemic world where all animals are culled in order to prevent the spread of the virus including companion animals such as cats and dogs and animals kept in zoos and laboratories. Animal agriculture is replaced by human agriculture through abduction and breeding of members of vulnerable groups such as immigrants and indigenous populations and eventually cannibalism is sanctioned by the government to provide a substitute for the animal meat market. The language used to refer to the process is strictly regulated. Human meat is called special meat or head; the unaltered, non-modified humans are called FGPs (First Generation Pure); the radical shift from carnism to cannibalism, the “transition”. Despite no significant cognitive and emotional differences between humans who consume them and the heads who are slaughtered, a new class system emerges to normalize the transition to cannibalism.

Throughout the novel there is a continuous play between two potential justifications for the Transition. On one hand, there is the fact that a virus has made animal meat toxic and inedible. Industrial production of human meat serves to prevent people who crave meat from causing social unrest. On the other hand, there is a theory, as in the passage above, that the virus is merely a pretext for an anti-overpopulation social intervention. (Hendrichs 186)

In addition to the consumers of human flesh and the humans transformed into product, there is another socio-economic class of people living in absolute poverty, called the scavengers who live on the meat discarded by the slaughterhouses. Special meat can be purchased and raised at home as domestic head and be consumed alive but cannot be used as cheap labor or enslaved. Violators are sent to the slaughterhouse which further obscures the boundary between who is considered abject and who is considered worthy of life. Heads’ vocal cords are removed so as to render them silent; females are artificially inseminated and their limbs are cut off to make milking more convenient. Babies are separated from their mothers at birth just like calves in the dairy industry, mothers are sent to the slaughterhouse once they are past ideal reproductive age. Humans are now hunted, tested on, eaten; sex trafficking involves eating sex workers for an additional fee and any protest is violently crushed. The plot revolves around Marcos Tejo, a slaughterhouse worker

who guides the reader through a processing plant, a game reserve, a former zoo, a laboratory where vivisection on humans is performed, and a butcher shop.

In literary accounts, cannibalism has long been used as a symbol, traditionally to symbolize savagery, moral degradation or desperation. It is usually represented as a radical act of a marginal group either as an expression of a religious ritual, a gratuitous act of cruelty, or a desperate move for survival. Some fairy tales where cannibalism is used as a motif are usually set in times of famine. “Since the Renaissance, and as recently as the nineteenth century the cannibalism taboo was mobilized to allow civilized peoples to delineate themselves from their barbaric neighbours, commonly in situations of colonial contact” (West 237). Accusation of cannibalism justified the exploitation of the colonized by denying them their humanity and legitimized the way the colonizers defined themselves as civilized and superior. Conversely, in what is categorized as a dystopian setting, albeit uncannily reminiscent of contemporary society, dehumanization or animalization targets vulnerable groups and transforms them into meat to be consumed. Dehumanizing sentient human beings creates a widespread cognitive dissonance repressed by censorship and manipulation. This in turn breeds a knowledge to action gap, since there is no evidential reason why the heads are considered to be lacking similar cognitive and emotional lives as their consumers. After the transition, when cannibalism becomes habitual and widespread, cultural normativity “ultimately protect[s] people from feelings of dissonance associated with morally troublesome action” (Bastian & Loughan 283).

Kimberly Costello presented an interspecies model of prejudice based on three studies on laypeople, children, and children and parents respectively. The studies confirmed that animalistic dehumanization of other species is closely related to outgroup dehumanization of people and reducing the human-animal divide should reduce intergroup prejudices and preference for social hierarchy and inequality. Although people tend to refuse the correlation between their speciesist attitudes and their outgroup prejudices, the results “established the human-animal divide as a meaningful dehumanization precursor” (iii). As human-animal divide is an empirical predictor of dehumanization of outgroups, Bazterrica’s account of the transition is not as radical a shift as one might initially expect.

Extreme intergroup violence is incited and sustained through description of the outgroup member in animalistic terms, as deficient in “culture, self-restraint, moral sensibility, and cognitive capacity”, as a savage who “has brutish appetites for violence and sex, is impulsive and prone to criminality, and can tolerate unusual amounts of pain” (Haslam 252). Thus, if speciesism, discrimination based on

membership to a particular species was not the normative approach to interspecies relationships, animalistic dehumanization of people would not lead to degrading human beings and legitimizing violence directed towards them. On a similar note, in *Tender is the Flesh*, after attempts at finding a cure for the virus prove unsuccessful, the government starts a full-scale extermination process of animals, before vulnerable outgroup members are abducted and eaten. “He wants to erase the distant images, the memories that persist. The piles of cats and dogs burned alive. A scratch meant death. The smell of burned meat lingered for weeks. He remembers the groups in yellow protective suits that scoured the neighborhoods at night, killing and burning every animal that crossed their paths” (Bazterrica, 9). Marcos’s memory of killing his two dogs, and their lingering spiritual presence continues to haunt him as he continues to be an integral part of dehumanization and slaughtering of heads. Only after animals are exterminated as a cautious but brutal measure of self-defence, it becomes acceptable to move up in the ladder of social hierarchy and render outgroup members as undeserving of life by transforming them into mere meat.

Groups of people had started killing others and eating them in secret. The press documented a case of two unemployed Bolivians who had been attacked, dismembered, and barbecued by a group of neighbors. When he read the news, he shuddered. It was the first public scandal of its kind and instilled the idea in society that in the end, meat is meat, it doesn’t matter where it’s from. (9)

In 1973, Herbert C. Kelman writes about three interrelated processes that make sanctioned mass massacres possible without any moral restraint on the part of the perpetrators of violence. These are authorization, routinization, and dehumanization. Authorization usually replaces and surmounts normal moral principles, and when they no longer operate, explicit orders and tacit approvals encourage people to act on their prejudice or passionate hatred. “An important corollary of the basic structure of the authority situation is that the individual does not see himself as personally responsible for the consequences of his actions”, he is no longer a “personal agent, but merely an extension of the authority” (39). Although Marcos suspects the virus was part of a governmental conspiracy to control population growth, poverty, and crime, and media manipulated people into believing cannibalism was the only viable option to stay alive, and refuses to eat “special meat” himself, his involvement in the process evokes more disgust than guilt. When he exercises his agency, it is to rape a First Generation Pure female and impregnate her in order to compensate for

the loss of his infant son who died soon after he was born, Ency one of the former operators at the processing plant Marcos works at, is the only person in the novel, who is consumed by the awareness of the horrid consequences of his actions and one day decides to set the heads free by cutting off the chains of the resting cages. Ency urges the heads to escape, as they are about to be slaughtered, but having been raised in captivity, the heads do not comply, as they are dazed and confused about their circumstances. Ency implores them: “You are not animals. They are going to kill you. Run. You need to escape” (Bazterrica 63). Upon being fired, Ency kills himself without being able to save a single head or interrupt the brutal work in any meaningful manner. Ency’s failure to make the transition from carnism¹ to cannibalism² causes him to become ostracized but despite his awareness of the societal injustice, he uses the same moral exclusion mechanism when referring to animals.

The second process Kelman refers to is routinization which transform mass massacres into “routine, mechanical, highly programmed operations” (46). Initially, like authorization, routinization frees the perpetrator of his agency, then through mechanization the perpetrator is focused on the distinct operational work he is assigned to and is exempted from facing the consequences of his actions and coming to terms with its meaning. Both on an organizational and individual level, to their advantage, the actors are alienated from their work. “As they become habituated to their assignment in a supportive organizational context, they come to treat it more and more as if it were a normal job in which one can take pride, hope to achieve success, and engage in collaborative effort” (47). As Marcos takes two applicants on a tour of the processing plant to determine whether they are fit for a job, they go through the unloading yard, where the human excrement is collected to be made into manure, human hair is shaved in order to be sold, the resting cages where the heads rest for a day before being slaughtered because meat of a stressed head is tough, box sector where the heads are stunned with a club before being killed, slaughter sector, the slitting room, the offal room, where the heads are gutted, and the cutting room where the bodies are cut into pieces. Operators in each sector have a specific task and as a result the responsibility of the act of killing is diffused. The meticulous way the tasks are performed serves efficiency and profit rather than a consideration for the well-being of the victims. The language borrowed from animal agriculture

1 Melanie Joy’s term for the “vast mythology surrounding meat” which is related to what she calls “the three Ns of Justification: eating meat is *normal*, *natural*, and *necessary*” (96).

2 Considered to be a ritual and social institution as opposed to anthropophagy, the act of eating human meat.

also helps disguise the true meaning of their work. “The euphemisms allow them to differentiate these actions from ordinary killing and destruction... The moral revulsion that the ordinary labels would arouse can be more readily suppressed and the enterprise can proceed on its routine course” (48).

In her work *Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams describes how victims of animal agriculture are rendered invisible first “through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. Our culture further mystifies the term ‘meat’ with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine” (66). She argues that animals become “absent referents” in three ways. The first one is in order for people to consume them, they should already be dead, which is the literal manner in which they are made absent. The second way is through euphemisms like calling baby animals veal or sheep, mutton. The third way is describing human experiences through using animal metaphors as in “feeling like a piece of meat” when one becomes a target of violence. Since meat is dead flesh deprived of all feeling, it is impossible to share an experience with meat (66-67).

In addition, animals people consume are mostly raised, bred, and slaughtered outside of the residential areas, behind closed doors, shielding them from the reality of mass massacre. Commercials and advertisements of meat and dairy products use humane washing and present the public with animals peacefully grazing on meadows and mothers breastfeeding their babies both of which are implausible ways for the overwhelming majority of the meat and dairy companies to operate. In the novel, Marcos is wary of the many euphemisms enforced by the government and the society to prevent people from questioning the moral implications of killing human beings for food. “His brain warns him that there are words that cover up the world. There are words that are convenient, hygienic. Legal... The words carry the weight necessary to mold us, to suppress all questioning” (Bazterrica 7). Yet the notion of the absent referent in animal agriculture has become shockingly inverted in the nameless dystopian society of the novel. Building a cold room, keeping a domestic head at home (preferably a First Generation Pure), relying on the bestselling cookbook called *Death by a Thousand Cuts*¹ are considered trendy and a symbol for high socio-economic status. Therefore, the act of killing becomes a familial ritual through which members learn about the intricacies of cutting a head into pieces and eating her and in the meantime, trying to keep her alive as long as possible to ensure freshness. Invoking a similar sentiment, hunting facilities offer paying off the debts of celebrities who surrender themselves to the grounds for five days during which time the wealthy elite try to hunt them down. If they are

1 Named after *lingchi*, an old form of Chinese torture meaning lingering death.

hunted down, they are feasted on, their flesh prepared in the most exclusive manner possible, each part of their body devoured by a group of wealthy businesspeople, all men, with seemingly no qualms about their actions. In Bazterrica's account of cannibalism, the referent becomes disturbingly present. Absent referents are supposed to be "disembodied entities, beings whom we never touch, hear, or see" (Adams, *Neither* 125). However, although heads are unrecognizable by the time they reach the butcher shop or the table, their presence is unable to foster any moral scrutiny, either.

Adams provides another concept borrowed from American philosopher Willard Quine to illustrate the deindividualization, particularly of animals raised in factory farming for human consumption. It comes as a surprise to most people who grew up in cities to learn that cows, sheep, or chickens have distinct personalities even though they readily accept that each dog is indeed a unique individual. This cognitive dissonance, resulting from a speciesist worldview, hinders people from coming to rational conclusions about members of different species. Animalistic dehumanization of an outgroup would not automatically legitimize mass massacre if speciesism or interspecies prejudice did not systematically widen the human-animal divide to begin with. What Quine, and later Adams call "mass term" refers to "things like water or colors; no matter how much you have of it, or what type of container it is in, water is still water. You can add a bucket of water to a pool of water without changing it at all. Objects referred to by mass terms have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity" (5).

Deindividualization of victims of mass massacre is a prerequisite for dissociation from the ethical repercussions of denying them unique identities and moral worth and adopting a Cartesian view of animals or applying the Cartesian view of animals to human beings in *Tender is the Flesh*. Heads are slightly complex mechanisms, mere numbers in a registry without first and last names. They are gendered, allowed distinctions in age, health and genetic status only because these distinctions determine how and to what extent they can be exploited and their market value. "The existence of *meat* as a mass term naturalizes the eating of animals, so that consumers do not think "I am now interacting with an animal" but instead consider themselves making choices about food" (103). The only people with names who can be eaten are those who volunteer to be for religious reasons or risk their lives to pay off their debts, whose bodies stolen from funeral homes or people abducted off the streets after curfew. Attributing heads unique identities or naming them would render the artificial and enforced boundaries between the consumers and the consumed obsolete. Therefore, it is forbidden.

Differentiation between the consumer and the consumed is as arbitrary as it is with human-animal divide. Animals are different enough from us so we can kill and consume them, but they are similar enough so that we can run scientific experiments on them and later apply the results to humans. Similarly, in the novel, it is illegal to eat anyone with a first and a last name presumably because names signify uniqueness, but once they volunteer themselves to be eaten, the shared kinship disappears and they are transformed into products. On the other hand, the compartmentalization similar to the notion of “doublethink” in George Orwell’s *1984* occurs frequently in the novel, and has become an ingrained part of denying heads moral value. When the scavengers attack a truck full of heads in front of the processing plant and start slaughtering them, the only person worthy of grief is the driver of the truck because unlike the heads, he has a name, an identity, and a family. On a visit to a breeding center, Marcos accompanies El Gringo, the head of the center, on a tour with a prospective buyer. They come across the workers doing a barbecue for a celebration.

The smell of barbecue is in the air. They go to the rest area, where the farmhands are roasting a rack of meat on a cross. El Gringo explains to Egmont that they’ve been preparing it since eight in the morning, “So it melts in your mouth,” and that the guys are actually about to eat a kid. ‘It’s the most tender kind of meat, there’s only just a little, because a kid doesn’t weigh as much as a calf. We’re celebrating because one of the farmhands became a father,’ he explains. ‘Want a sandwich?’ (Bazterrica 24)

The prospective buyer enjoys his sandwich, but because Marcos stopped eating special meat since his own son died, he refuses. Both the head of the center and the visitor are surprised since the tenderest of special meat is extremely expensive. Marcos is the only character in the novel whose cognitive dissonance about the treatment of heads makes uncomfortable enough to refuse doublethink and digress from what is considered normative behavior. He exhibits enough awareness to reject norm internalization but is too exasperated to motivate change in others or explicitly oppose the cannibalistic system in place. The irony naturally stems from the act of killing and eating a child to celebrate the birth of another. Farmhands, as well as the society as a whole, normalize the process through holding onto two conflicting thoughts: humans are sentient beings, worthy of moral consideration and a birthday celebration and that they are devoid of unique human traits, lack morally relevant characteristics and are edible.

Haslam's third process that enables people to commit atrocities is dehumanization. Haslam proposes two types of dehumanization and defines animalistic dehumanization as denying uniquely human attributes to others and mechanistic dehumanization as denying them human nature and treating them like automata (256). It is possible for a group to apply both types of dehumanization to an outgroup. Kelman however defines humanness as related to identity and community. A human with an identity is an individual with agency, a human with a community is perceived as a member of a network of individuals who care for one another. The two constitutes individual worth (48-49). Therefore, his loss would be a personal loss. In other words, dehumanized humans or animals are addressed by mass terms like "cattle" or "gooks" or in the novel, "heads" to erase their identity and exclude them from the community of the perpetrator of violence. Kelman also adds that the victimizer is also gradually dehumanized because he is no longer using his agency to make independent decisions nor is he able to retain his sense of empathy for his community. "As he gradually discards personal responsibility and human empathy, he loses his capacity to act as a moral being" (52).

This distancing, ensuing alienation, and dehumanization is revealed through Marcos's familial relationships in the novel. After the loss of their infant son, his wife moves back to her mother's and the couple's relationship is limited to stunted dialogues on the phone, both parties are detached and reserved. Marcos's father has been traumatized by the transition from carnism to cannibalism and lives in a nursing home after being diagnosed with senile dementia. Although Marcos claims the only reason he continues to stomach his job is to support his father's care, he hardly ever visits him. Estranged from his sister, Marcos despises her for following societal trends and being obsessed with upward social mobility despite being an integral part of the systematic mass massacre himself. He forms what seems like a genuine relationship on his part with an FPG female who is gifted to him. He names her Jasmine, teaches her to live at home, watch TV, sleep in a bed, use cutlery, dance, take a shower, but once she gives birth to their baby, he instantly kills and slaughters her without hesitation. Despite being highly critical of the head of the laboratory which tested on animals, disgusted with the elite hunting and eating human beings, through his experiences he became a dehumanized machine following orders losing his moral restraints against murder. His wife who cannot have biological children of her own, being a midwife, helps Jasmine give birth to Jasmine and Marcos's son and cannot help but recognize Jasmine as more than a head. "She had the human look of a domesticated animal" she comments, after Marcos kills Jasmine. But Jasmine's loss nonetheless does not register as a personal

loss which would be possible if she was assigned an identity and a connection to a community. Instead, his wife regrets Marcos's decision to kill her, because Jasmine could be used to make more babies for them, used as a breeding stock.

Conclusion

Through textual analysis of *Tender is the Flesh*, a novel about a cannibalistic society, the article revealed the overlapping psychological mechanisms behind violence against humans and oppression of non-human animals. The novel is conveniently structured to introduce to reader to the inner workings of a system by using a grief-stricken processing plant worker called Marcos Tejo as a protagonist who commutes to various establishments such as a slaughterhouse, game reserve, and laboratory where he makes deals to provide the processing plant with heads to kill, hunt or experiment on. Heads, who are humans, some of which are genetically modified to grow faster replaced animals in this new society which went through a transition from carnism to cannibalism. The language used to refer to the new system is closely monitored and censored by the government. Various psychological mechanisms are used by the society to normalize the transition to cannibalism and to reduce the resulting cognitive dissonance the members might experience due to the violent nature of the system, the maintenance of which they contribute by consuming human products.

The binary oppositions which Critical Animal Studies aims to deconstruct is similarly constructed in the society represented in the novel and they are laid bare by exploring the processes through which the human-animal divide assumes the form of human-human divide and how these divides are represented in the novel. After the introduction of terminology used to clarify how human-animal divide is established and justify such as speciesism, carnism, the absent referent, and mass term, the discussion moves on to psychological mechanisms that enable and perpetuate human-human divide and violence against those considered to be outgroup members. The most instrumental model to understand how violence against humans and animals intersect is the Interspecies Model of Prejudice presented by Kimberly Costello to prove the interconnectedness of prejudice against humans and animals. The model helps us explain that the fictional transition from carnism to cannibalism is a much smoother transition than the reader might expect. Among other significant mechanisms exemplified by the characters' behaviors in the novel are the processes defined by Herbert C. Kelman to explain the sanctioning of mass massacres. In addition to mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization, and deindividualization which are amply demonstrated in the novel, Kelman's two

processes of authorization, and routinization are discussed to manifest how the seemingly radical shift in the society is internalized by its members.

Bazterrica's second novel self-professedly, partially but not solely is a critique of the meat industry (*The Irish Times* para. 5) and it shocks the reader into coming to terms with the moral consequences of their actions concerning the victims of their choices. It also is a microcosm of modern society that symbolically devours its members by violence, exploitation, and discrimination. Additionally, it provides ample opportunity for scholars of literature to use Critical Animal Studies and Social Psychology research to apply original frameworks to analyze how socially constructed divides are represented in contemporary fiction.

Works Cited

- Adams, Carol J. *Neither man nor beast*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Adams, Carol J. *The sexual politics of meat*. NY: Continuum, 2010.
- Bazterrica, Agustina. "I Have Always Believed That in Our Capitalist, Consumerist Society, We Devour Each Other." *The Irish Times*, 2020.
- Bazterrica, Agustina. *Tender is the Flesh*. NY: Scribner, 2020.
- Best, Steve. "The Rise of Critical Animal studies: Putting Theory into Action and Animal Liberation in Higher Education." *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2010, pp. 9-53.
- Best, Steve, Nocella II, A.J., Kahn, R., Gigliotti, C. & Kemmerer, L. "Introducing Critical Animal Studies." *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2007, pp. 4-5.
- Brock, Bastian and Steve Loughan. "Resolving the Meat-Paradox: A Motivational Account of Morally Troublesome Behavior and Its Maintenance." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2017, pp. 278-299.
- Costello, Kimberly. *Determinants and Consequences of Dehumanization: An Interspecies Model of Prejudice*. PhD dissertation, Brock University, 2012.
- Fudge, Erica. "Why It's Easy Being a Vegetarian." *Textual Practice*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2010, pp. 149-166.
- Joy, Melanie. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*. San Francisco: Conari Press, 2010.
- Haslam, Nick. "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2006, pp. 252-264.
- Hendrichs, Kaspar. "Solving a Crisis with a Crisis: *Tender is the Flesh* by Agustina Bazterrica." *Leiden Elective Academic Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 183-189.
- Kelman, Herbert C. "Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers." *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1973, pp. 25-61.
- McCorry, Séan and John Miller. (Eds). *Literature and Meat Since 1900*. Sheffield: Palgrave Mac-

millan, 2019.

Nocella II, Anthony J., John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka. "Introduction: The Emergence of Critical Animal Studies: The Rise of Intersectional Animal Liberation." *Counterpoints*, vol. 448, 2014, pp. xix-xxxvi.

Ryder, Richard D. *Speciesism, Painism and Happiness: A Morality for the Twenty-first Century*. Exeter: Societas, 2017.

West, Russell. "Abject Cannibalism: Antropophagic Poetics in Conrad, White, and Tennant-Towards a Critique of Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection." *The Abject of Desire: The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, edited by Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller. Amsterdam: Genus, 2007, pp. 235-255.