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Discriminating Spirits: Cultural Source Theory and the Human-Nonhuman Boundary

Introduction

One's social position can determine quality of life, longevity, cause of death, and treatment at the point of death. These patterns are not exclusive to humans, and researchers are beginning to investigate the relevance of nonhuman death in human society as well (DeMello, 2016; Johnston and Probyn-Rapsey, 2013). For many Nonhuman Animals,¹ both domesticated and free-living, how they live and die will be determined by their relationship to humans. Nonhuman Animals embody varying levels of prestige and sensibility based on their perceived utility to human economic systems as well as socially constructed notions of which species are thought too intelligent, awe-inspiring, or cute to kill (Cole and Stewart, 2014). A number of mechanisms are employed in this boundary work, including the use of euphemisms, segregation, and stereotypes (Plous, 2003). This article considers whether the spinning of spiritualism and supernatural meaning might function as another such mechanism.

The aforementioned study of nonhuman death focuses predominantly on institutions of killing (such as the social impacts of slaughtering or euthanasia), companion animal bereavement, or processes of consumption. In these cases, Nonhuman Animals are positioned as objects (such as commodities, food, pets, etc.) and little attention has been paid to the social construction of Nonhuman Animals *subjects* following death. Ghost stories are tantalizing in this regard. More than simple forms of entertainment, these stories reflect the meaning assigned to groups, relationships, and social problems. For instance, who enjoys the privilege to haunt? What issues are thought important enough to trigger a haunting? This article examines the possibility that the privilege to haunt is related to social recognition and distinction, and predicts that

¹ Nonhuman Animals as a demographic category have been capitalized as a measure of respect for their personhood.

Nonhuman Animals traditionally commodified as food, clothing, or labor are less likely to warrant remembering in ghost stories. Indeed, ghost stories most commonly pivot on a moment of injustice or tragedy in the transformation of a living being into a supernatural being, and a society that does not understand the killing of Nonhuman Animals in regular economic processes as an injustice or tragedy is not likely to conjure those species as wandering spirits in its storytelling.

Literature Review

Animals and Society

The study of Nonhuman Animals and society is an emerging field which emphasizes the pivotal role that nonhumans play in human families and relationships, work and economy, food and consumption, and other systems and institutions. Many sociologists consider the influence that nonhumans have on humans, thus maintaining the discipline's anthropocentric tradition (Bryant, 1979), but, more recently, the field of Critical Animal Studies has emphasized the (often negative) influence that humans have on other animals (Taylor and Twine, 2015). As Nonhuman Animals are predominantly classified as property rather than persons and are systematically commodified as a consequence, their experiences are most poignantly determined by human economic institutions. As animal law scholar Wise (2000) understands it, without personhood, "...one is invisible to civil law. One has no civil rights. One might as well be dead" (4). Nibert † (2003), a sociologist, furthers this point in arguing argues that ideological conditioning is key to the maintenance of this oppressive social structure.

Indeed, studies in media bias, childhood socialization, the stigmatization of anti-speciesist activism, and other efforts to normalize speciesism have documented the intentional efforts of the state, industries, and elite interests to control cultural common sense about

nonhuman subordination and human entitlement (Cole and Stewart, 2014; Freeman, 2009; Simon, 2013; Sorenson, 2016). This ideological conditioning is necessary to sanction the extreme violence inherent to speciesism, but it also serves to buttress human supremacy as a systemic matter. Nonhuman Animals are ideologically employed as points of comparison in the defining of human distinction and superiority (Cudworth, 2011; Taylor, 2012). Nonhuman Animals, in other words, act as an out-group that functions to legitimize human privilege. Ingold (2011) furthers that this dualism is a product of Western cultural thought which has separated humans from the natural world (including Nonhuman Animals) by exaggerating the degree to which humans can conceptualize themselves as separate themselves from the material world. For Ingold, this human/nonhuman difference is socially constructed and masks the extent to which human reality is sensually experienced such that humanity's imagination is perceived as objectively true.

Animal Death and Dying

The acknowledgement of death and victimhood is a “cultural and national phenomenon,” with subjectivity reserved for privileged groups and invisibility sentenced to those who enjoyed little cultural status, especially those who have been exploited in nation-building efforts (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013, p. 365). Such conditions have disadvantaged the social recognition of Nonhuman Animals. Indeed, as Nibert (2003) has identified, the social construction of animal categories generally correlates with a society's economic mode of production. The statuses subsequently assigned to Nonhuman Animals will not only impact the quality of their life but also their death and its social meaning.

In premodern agricultural societies, nonhumans were treated as conduits to the spiritual realm, a belief that frequently led to their ritual sacrifice for means of protection or appeasement

(Mason 1993). In the medieval years, the bodies of animals might be stuffed into walls, stairwells, or chimneys to ward off evil spirits. Sometimes, it was acknowledged that nonhumans could become vengeful spirits and retaliate against human oppressors. Human societies frequently associated Nonhuman Animals with the natural world, and this association extended to include the supernatural world as well. Indeed, Nonhuman Animals were thought especially vulnerable to demonic possession or association (Serpell, 2002). The shift to capitalism, however, would reduce nonhuman persons to objectified commodities. Animal death took on little more meaning beyond its economic value to humans. Although scientific inquiry was frequently fueled by capitalist interests as well, it did foster through scientific research an understanding that humans and other animals shared fundamental bodily functions, the capacity for pain included, such that their quality of life and death became a point of social concern.

These scientific revelations were bolstered by a growing appreciation for social welfare that was increasingly inclusive of Nonhuman Animals. By the 1700s, the right for animals to be free of pain and suffering became a point of contention, as did the belief that some species might deserve freedom from human use or consumption. Animal welfare organizations became a regular feature of Western social life by the mid-19th century, as did the institution of petkeeping, which, along with scientific ideas of shared bodily functions and humane values of shared need for welfare, raised the status of Nonhuman Animals in the cultural imagination (Ryder, 1989). Likewise, vegetarianism (the rejection of animal corpses from the diet) enjoyed some popularity in the 19th century (Shprintzen, 2013), humane education programs which challenged the hurting and killing of Nonhuman Animals were commonplace in schools and churches (Davis, 2016), and pet cemeteries were erected to memorialized departed companion animals (Kean, 2013). Encouraged by these cultural advancements, religious leaders and their adherents of the 18th and

19th century grappled with the possibility that nonhumans might even possess souls (Massaro, 2016).

Although increased attention to nonhuman death challenged objectification, historian Hilda Kean (2013) emphasizes that the practice of memorializing deceased nonhumans was anthropocentric given its focus on human grief. Furthermore, this memorialization was (and is) frequently reserved for companion animals. More commonly, the death of farmed animals, particularly those used for food, goes unnoticed. Agricultural practices reinforced by “ag gag” laws prohibiting the documentation of animal killing for the purposes of public awareness is in no small part responsible for this obscurity (Martin, 2014), and this is only aggravated by geographic segregation of agricultural facilities (Harfeld et al., 2016) and the deconstruction, repackaging, and euphemistic labeling of animal corpses (Kunst and Hohle, 2016). In those cases that nonhumans’ killing does garner attention, it is frequently humorized. Indeed, the capitalist system’s individualistic and competition-minded ideologies invite the derision of those who are perceived as weak, powerless, and defeated (Nibert, 2003).

Animals in the Afterlife

The general disregard for the oppression of marginalized groups under the modern capitalist state was recognized in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1994), whereby those disregarded are conceptualized as “haunts” and their oppression ghostly in its threadbare visibility that lurks in the social consciousness. Derrida’s capitalist ghost story lends support to the economically-driven anthroparchal ignorance to Nonhuman Animal death and dying. Yet, when considering actual representations of nonhuman ghosts beyond the metaphorical that Derrida describes, a more profound invisibility can be identified. Ghost stories—their recording, telling, sharing, hearing, reading, and remembering—act as symbolic interactions through which the cultural

meaning of death and dying is manufactured and solidified. By eliminating Nonhuman Animals from these stories, their cultural unimportance is underscored. Observes one scholar of modernist literature, “Deprived of ghosts, *living* animals have been reduced to phantoms, spectralised; they *have* no ghosts because they are ghosts already” (2010, p. 711). Humanity’s almost exclusive access to haunting begets the objectification of other animals given that ghostliness requires an element of subjectivity. Subjectivity is necessary in order to experience inequality and for it to be considered legitimate. In their interviews with people who had experienced a ghostly encounter, for instance, Waskul and Waskul (2016) found that most of the ghosts reported were not described as having distinctly human characteristics but were nonetheless presumed to be the spirit of a deceased human. This, they explain, “[. . .] may be more a product of the application of stock cultural knowledge than anything directly related to the uncanny experience itself” (140). Humanity becomes the symbolic default.

The postulation that ghosts manifest in relation to their cultural context has been termed the cultural source theory. David Hufford (1982), a scholar of medical studies and behavioral sciences, actually expounded cultural source theory as a counterargument to his own theory that paranormal experiences could *not* be simplistically reduced to culture. Although there are a variety of psychological, experiential, and physiological explanations offered to rationalize the persistent belief in ghosts (Houran and Lange, 2001), sociologists, however, are primarily interested in their cultural function. Paranormal believers understand ghosts as “proofs of the existence of individual personality after death” and “symbols or tokens of immortality for their percipients” (Finucane, 1984, p. 222), such that demographics that are consistently underrepresented in ghost stories could be reasonably assumed to lack in personhood. Indeed, Davies (2007) defines ghosts as the “manifestation of the souls of the dead before the living” (p.

2) but emphasizes the contentiousness of such a definition given that some question whether or not Nonhuman Animals can possess souls. Certainly, nonhumans *are* sometimes reported to haunt, such that the definition of “ghost” could simply refer to the apparition of a once living person. Furthermore, as Davies emphasizes, a secularization of ghosts has occurred since the Enlightenment such that ghosts are now believed to be “imprints on the atmosphere, residual energy forces left behind by those who died while in a violent emotional state” (p. 246) rather than lost or wandering souls.

Even in this secular framework, the exclusion of Nonhuman Animals is compelling. The violent state within which most Nonhuman Animals depart life is unmistakable and yet their deaths remain unremarkable. Humans today are far more likely to recognize nonhuman personhood with regard to their sentience, consciousness, and subjective awareness as well as the harm and suffering that their death entails (Hall, 2011; [Wise, 2000](#)), even those [working who work](#) in animal agricultural and slaughterhouse facilities (Wilkie, 2010). This suggests that cultural products play an important role in aligning this increased awareness to Nonhuman Animal personhood with the ever-expanding economic exploitation and killing of other animals. Ghost stories, I argue, are particularly relevant in this cultural negotiation given their ability to manipulate narratives of death and dying to support prevailing norms.

Methods

Cultural source theory supposes ghosts to be rooted in culture rather than delusion, social psychology, or deviance. When applied to study of Nonhuman Animals and society, it is worth considering how the absence of nonhuman ghosts in human culture reflects their intense oppression. I posit that ghost stories act as cultural conduits in the ideological maintenance of social structures, and the representation (or lack thereof) of Nonhuman Animals in these

narratives illuminates the presence of anthroparchal social relations. Nibert (2003) furthers that ideology and culture, both products of a society's economic mode of production, maintain systems of species inequality by naturalizing and normalizing them. This study considers how ghost stories serve the ideological and cultural function of maintaining the human/nonhuman boundary. I suggest that ghost stories function to minimize nonhuman personhood (defined here as their subjective capacity to experience ~~satisfaction~~ ~~pleasure~~ or suffering and to have that capacity socially recognized) to the effect of underscoring human distinctiveness.

To this end, I opted to conduct a qualitative content analysis of ghost anthologies. Sociologists researching the cultural meaning of ghosts have employed ethnographic interviews with witnesses (Waskul and Waskul, 2016), surveys to ascertain public attitudes and knowledges, content analyses of case collections (such as the actual reports provided by individuals who believe they have experienced a paranormal encounter), and even participant observation studies (whereby sociologists take part in "ghost hunts") (McClenon, 2001). While these methodologies have their merits, it remains the case that ghost stories, which are readily available and rich with symbolic meaning and cultural cues, offer a suitable option. Content analysis is also appropriate given the scantiness of existing research in the topic area. With so little work done in the intersections of species and spectrality, an analysis of anthologies allows for a grounded, inductive methodology from which conceptual themes may emerge.

Sampling Strategy

This sample consists of anthologies as they provide manageable units of analysis in the form of short stories. Data collection was conducted via Amazon, the world's leading online bookseller. The first 20 anthologies of ghost stories (located by a key term search of "ghost anthologies" and ranked by relevance) were accessed through my university's interlibrary loan

service. Books given top priority on Amazon's online catalog are those that are the highest rated in terms of popularity and sales which is a reasonable measure of their cultural resonance.

American books dominated the sampling process given Amazon's search algorithm that favors domestic products. However, some books published in the United Kingdom did surface in the sample, and many anthologies included stories set in various parts of the world (although most stories were set in North America and the United Kingdom).

Regional books (such as *Ghosts of the Rocky Mountains*) were excluded to avoid bias. Although further research to ascertain regional differences would be interesting, it would necessitate a significant expansion of the sample and it would likely be difficult to find multiple authors for each region in order to create a robust sample. Self-published books and Kindle books were eliminated as my university library was unable to procure them. The sample was also stratified by date due to Amazon's bias in favor of recent publications. I did not expect this to be problematic given that Finucane (1984) identifies the Victorian era as the origin of the modern conceptualization of ghosts, and, as was discussed above, this period also coincides with a modern conceptualization of Nonhuman Animals.

Coding Strategy

The coding scheme developed for this study (Table 1) is based on Evans' (2001) ghost classification in which ghosts may be revenant, haunts (spirits that never left the plane of the living), crisis apparitions, phantasms of the living, or doppelgangers. I expanded this classification and adapted it to Nonhuman Animals such that ghosts were also categorized by species, their relationship to humans, and presence of personhood (that is, whether or not they are described as being persons in their own right as opposed to existing only as an object or representation). Stories of living Nonhuman Animals who were either possessed by living

humans or were transfigurations of living humans were excluded as they were not dead.

Likewise, stories featuring frightening beasts were excluded unless the story explicitly described the monster as in some way spectral. To measure human relationships with other animals, any ties between the nonhuman ghost and humans were noted. I also coded for the spirits' disposition and the overall tone of the story as relative to the nonhuman (was it, for instance, complimentary, demeaning, or dismissive).

Insert Table 1 here

Some traditional stories reappeared across the anthologies. These were counted individually so as to accurately represent the frequency of nonhuman narratives. A handful of stories contained more than one nonhuman spirit. Rather than code each individual separately, the dominant character only was coded. Lastly, Nonhuman Animals make appearances elsewhere in the stories to set the story's mood (such as nervously stomping horses), but this study seeks to highlight those nonhumans who have been granted spectral personhood (defined as possessing some degree of individuality, rationality, and social recognition). As such, only stories which featured nonhuman *ghosts* were coded.

Results

Demographics

A total of twenty anthologies ranging from 1973 to 2017 were examined by myself in a purposive qualitative content analysis. Of the 615 total units (individual stories), 67 featured a nonhuman spirit (Table 2). Nonhuman ghosts were somewhat uncommon in the sample. The largest representation was 31.3%, but 1/5th of the anthologies sampled contained no nonhuman ghosts at all. The average frequency for all books sampled was 10.3%; that is, about one in ten ghost stories in this sample feature a nonhuman spirit. Children's books were **far-slightly** more

likely to feature nonhuman ghosts with a 13% frequency compared to a frequency of 8.9% in general reader anthologies.

Insert Table 2 here

Most nonhuman ghosts in this sample were represented as dogs, cats, and horses (Table 1). Indeed, almost one in five (19.4%) nonhuman haunters were canine. Insects (10.4%) and dangerous free-living species such as wolves and hyenas (11.9%) were moderately common. The least represented species were those categorized as livestock (such as pigs, cows, and goats) at 7.5%, those categorized as innocuous free-living species (such as otters and deers) at 5.9%, and those categorized as exotic pets (namely monkeys and parrots) at 7.5%. Spectral monsters (nonhumans of mixed or uncertain species) were also infrequent at just 4.5%. Although outside the scope of my student and not formally analyzed, living Nonhuman Animals did frequently appear as clairvoyants and auguries to alert humans to impending danger.²

Most of these spirits qualified as the typical “haunter” (spirits who have never left) at 47.7%, while 25.3% were revenants (spirits who have returned). Nine percent of spirits were classified as crisis apparitions; these were mostly pets who appear when humans are in danger and in need of assistance. Two cases could be classified as phantasms of the living, but doppelgangers, the final ghostly category developed by Evans (2001), did not surface in the sample. Furthermore, I found it necessary to expand Evans’ classification system to include evil entities based on Serpell’s (2002) observation that Nonhuman Animals are often seen as demonic associates. Thirteen percent of nonhuman ghosts in my sample existed as a result of curses or demonic presence.

² More subtly, they appeared frequently as food, clothing, or transportation.

Most of these nonhuman ghosts haunted general outdoor spaces, such as about town (17.9%), the countryside (rural spaces utilized by humans) (21%), and the wilderness (rural, uncultivated spaces in which humans were largely absent) (22.4%). Another 22.4% were reported in the domestic sphere; these were mostly species demarked as pets, although there were cases of a snake and a horse haunting indoors. The remaining spirits lingered amid specialized public spaces such as battlefields, businesses, cemeteries, and churches.

Personhood

I have defined personhood as the demonstration of consciousness, awareness, and capacity for having been harmed by death. The results of this analysis do hint at some cognitive complexity among nonhuman spirits. Regardless of species or location, malevolence was a persistent theme. Over half of the spirits coded (56.7%) exhibited a violent disposition. Thirteen percent, mostly horses and some dogs (all of whom were accompanied by human spirits), exhibited a vacant disposition (generally as a result of their being present only as objects of a human use). Seven percent were described as annoying, but another seven percent were described as helpful. Lonesome spirits and happy spirits each comprised 4% of the sample.

Thirty-seven percent of the specters were, in fact, not granted personhood by the author (which would be indicated by the presence of a name, emotions, independent decision-making, individual agency, self-awareness, and so on), and nearly half of these were horses. Many horses, for instance, existed only as spectral accompaniments to human spirits. Well over half (56.7%) of the nonhumans in this study were objectified in being referred to as an “it.” Limited personhood for nonhuman subjects is also evidenced in the large amount of transfiguration in the sample. A full 27% of the spirits were actually humans using nonhuman bodies as vessels. Most transfigured human spirits took the form of free-living animals such as wolves or otters. Only

five took the form of a domesticate such as a cat, dog, or pig. Nonhuman personhood and agency is also undermined in the high frequency of hauntings (32.8%) in which the nonhuman spirit accompanies a human spirit as an instrument of some type, usually fulfilling a speciesist function such as pulling a stage coach or carrying a rider. Indeed, almost half of those spirits accompanied by a human were horses.

Human-Nonhuman Relations

Nearly a third of nonhuman spirits in this sample (30%) appeared to enact vengeance either for their own death or the death of their human guardian (and sometimes both). About one fourth (25.4%) haunted simply to torment their human audience. Twelve percent haunted out of desire for human company (all of these ghosts were those of dogs, cats, or horses). About one in ten (10.4%) haunted to forewarn their audience of impending danger. Another 7.5% haunted in order to teach their human audience a moral lesson. For instance, W. W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw" (2015) features the haunted severed hand of a monkey that grants wishes to its owner, all of which backfire as a lesson in the dangers of greed.

Only 13.4% of the spirits coded were described in complimentary terms, but about one in five (19.4%) did describe the spirit sympathetically. Twelve percent of nonhuman ghosts were described in explicitly demeaning ways, while 16.4% were described in dismissive terms in such a manner that could be said to undermine personhood. The remaining 39% were primarily described as dangerous or threatening entities to be wary of.

The reactions of human viewers to the nonhuman spirits is evidence to further tension. Fifteen percent of the time, humans shot at the nonhuman ghost (most of these stories were American in origin). Another 12% of the stories described humans attempting to destroy the spirit in other ways, such as by burning or burying. Mostly, humans retreated from the spirit

(30%), although 12% engaged the spirit in some way (such as riding them or chatting with them). Annoyance was another common reaction (10.4%).

Nonhuman spirits were also quite negative and violent in their engagement with humans. In about one third of the cases (31.3%), the spirits were able to scare or terrify their human audience. In 9% of the cases, they managed to inconvenience their audience in some way, such as by causing a string of bad luck or stealing property. Eighteen percent of the ghosts were more impactful and created some sort of significant physical or emotional harm that was life-threatening. One third of the nonhuman ghosts in this sample actually killed at least one human. Only five of the stories coded featured a spirit that was primarily positive in impact, for instance, one who was helpful or entertaining.

Discussion

A Place for Other Animals in Cultural Source Theory

In *Animal Ghosts*, author Elliott O'Donnell insists that the betrayal of Nonhuman Animals exploited as pets, draft, and food is obvious cause for haunting despite mainstream culture's disavowal of such possibility: "[. . .] you say, these innocent unoffending—and, I say, martyred—animals are to have no future, no compensation. Monstrous! Absurd! It is an effrontery to common sense, philosophy—anything, everything. It is a damned lie, damned bigotry, damned nonsense" (1913, pp. vi-vii). Contemporary author Kim Sheridan mirrors this concern in a preface addressed to "skeptics": "I contend that, in regard to animals having souls, that the time is now. This truth has been a long time in coming" (2003, p. xiii). For these authors, the anthropocentrism of ghostly narratives is such a potent commonality that it becomes the primary impetus for their work. My analysis of ghost anthologies generally lends support for this invisibility of nonhuman spirits in the cultural lexicon. While about one in every ten stories I

analyzed featured a nonhuman spirit, nine out of ten did not. Of the 10.3% of stories in the sample that were inclusive of nonhumans, many of those spirits were supporting characters, background characters, or vessels for human spirits. The overall omission defies the logic of haunting, given that Nonhuman Animals, be they living, dying, or dead, far outnumber human animals.

Cultural source theory posits that the nature of ghosts and ghostly sightings is determined by culture, but it has been criticized as too simplistic an explanation for the social-psychological complexities of supernatural experiences (Hufford, 1982). Yet, Nonhuman Animals appear so infrequently in ghost stories in spite of living and dying so much *more* frequently, culture must be key to the experiences recorded in this sample. Accepting that humans and other animals share similar biological processes such that both groups, from a secular perspective, meet the same end at the point of death, it is only culture that can explain the preponderance of human hauntings in ghost narratives. Humans grant themselves social distinction among mammals, and the privilege to haunt acts as one of several characteristics in support of human exceptionalism.

Indeed, evidence for the cultural source of ghosts is also found in the disproportionate representation of dogs, cats, and horses in ghost stories. These species have greater proximity to human society and are thus more culturally “visible” (Cole and Stewart, 2014; Wilkie, 2010). It is highly unlikely that dogs and pigs are biologically distinct ~~in their hypothetical~~ in their experience of the afterlife. Instead, what makes dogs and pigs unique with regard to their death and dying is primarily their relationship to human society. In general, Nonhuman Animals are an extremely marginalized group. Their limited representation in narratives about death, dying, and the afterlife is thus linked to humanity’s limited ability (or willingness) to sense the presence or personhood of other animals. Hufford’s criticism of cultural source theory is an anthropocentric

one which presumes all persons to enjoy similar cultural visibility and opportunity to haunt. By centering species in the sociological analysis of ghosts, the integral role that culture plays becomes clearer.

Things Unseen: Nonhuman Animals as Subjects and Objects

Vegan social scientists (Cole and Stewart, 2014; Cudworth, 2011; Freeman, 2009; Nibert, 2003; Simon, 2013; Sorenson, 2016; Taylor, 2012) have observed the cultural erasure of nonhuman death and dying in education, politics, media, marketing, and other social institutions. This analysis demonstrates that personhood denied to other animals in their lifetime extends into their symbolic *after*-lifetime. Critical Animal Studies argues that the stripping of nonhuman personhood is a critical element in the maintenance of an exploitative system. Although 63% of the Nonhuman Animals haunting the sample could be said to demonstrate evidence of personhood, objectification remained a primary theme. For instance, over half of the ghosts were referred to as an “it.” Assigning the pronoun “it” works to figuratively relegating persons into things. Furthermore, a failure to assign gender might also be interpreted as a means of objectification given that, in a deeply gendered society, gender assignment is entangled with personhood.

Although many nonhuman spirits were assigned characteristics that might be said to evidence personhood in demonstrating agency, self-awareness, intention, and so on, many of the personhood characteristics that were represented could also be said to underscore their object status. For instance, over half of the spirits were described as violent in personality and over half were haunting to enact to torment or punish. Dominant groups regularly apply violent typologies as evidence to the animal-like, uncivilized nature of marginalized groups. Taylor (2017) has observed this process at work against disabled persons and other animals, for instance. The same

has also been observed of Nonhuman Animals and African Americans (Johnson, 2017).

Likewise, that only a third of the units analyzed described nonhuman specters in complimentary or sympathetic terms, but more than a third described them in *wary* terms suggests an attempt to otherize. Over half of the ghost stories coded in this sample feature nonhuman spirits who seriously harm or even kill human audience members as well. Marginalized groups are more easily otherized should they be culturally understood to be cognitively inferior and physically threatening.

In addition to these symbolic attempts to objectify, the literal objectification of other animals was common in the sample. Nibert (2003) argues that humanity's relationship with other animals is shaped by the economic mode of production. Thus, in a capitalist society, those animals who are most commodified become the most objectified and least culturally acknowledged. As this study demonstrates, commodification interferes with cultural remembering. The most commodified species (those treated as "livestock" or "game") were the least represented in the sample. Furthermore, more than one in four nonhuman spirits were not actually nonhuman but were instead vessels for human spirits. Most of the nonhumans employed for this purpose were free-living species who retain a sort of totem status that likely flags them as more appropriate for human reincarnation. Their cultural status, too, is tied to their utility to humans. Finally, this study only examined and analyzed the nature of nonhuman *spirits*, but the prevalence of living Nonhuman Animals used as auxiliaries to human awareness suggests another variance of nonhuman objectification which aligns with the erasure of nonhumans from the spiritual realm. For instance, dogs and horses were regularly employed in stories as "seeing" guide animals. They often assisted human characters within the stories and the stories' readers in sensing supernatural presences.

Ghosts and Boundary-Making

This presumed ability for Nonhuman Animals to detect the paranormal is one key component in the boundary-making between humans and other animals. Not only do they supposedly possess a sense of awareness thought inaccessible to humans, but this sense firmly links them to the dark, unknowable, and mysterious world of the beasts. This boundary work surfaced as a prominent, if unacknowledged theme in the sample. In *Ghost Stories of Pets and Animals*, Zenko observes that Nonhuman Animals “[. . .] represent the unknown, the wilderness, the nonhuman forces of our dreams—and our nightmares” (2004, p. 7). Modernist literature which emerged from the transitional era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, employed nonhuman ghosts purely in the metaphorical sense. As such, Ellmann (2010) observes that, “When these creatures do return from death they tend to take the form of bodies without spirits, as opposed to spirits without flesh” (p. 708). As a symbol of cultural change and social tension, Nonhuman Animals exist primarily as literary objects. Much of the stories examined in this study were developed in the upheaval of the modern era, suggesting that Western society’s transition from a traditionalist, rural lifestyle to one of urbanity and industry could account for the lack of Nonhuman Animals in ghost stories as well as the metaphorical quality assigned to those that *do* surface.

Although “primitive” cultures were far more liberal in their recognition of nonhuman spirits, this connection was gradually eradicated as modernizing societies embarked on a project of civilization which entailed the demarcation of boundaries between humans and other animals (Ellmann, 2010). Stories sometimes featured Nonhuman Animals as manipulative, dangerous, and untrustworthy such that the uncivilized, nonhuman realm from which they emerge contrasts sharply with the realm of humans. “Deer Woman,” for instance, is a story sampled in this study

which features a demonic deer spirit who periodically emerges from the forest in the form of a Native American maiden to lure male warriors away from their villages only to kill them (San Souci, 1997). By way of another example, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (Irving, 2015 [1820]) features a headless Hessian soldier astride a fearsome equine spirit. The horse and rider haunt the parameters of a remote New England village, terrorizing those who stray too far from the safety of town.

Indeed, Nonhuman Animals existed in many narratives sampled in this study, not to illustrate their *own* personhood, but to metaphorically sharpen the parameters of *human* personhood and human society. Stories such as “Tailypo” (San Souci, 1987), “Forest Ghosts” (San Souci, 1997), and “The White Wolf” (Schwartz, 1981) feature monstrous nonhuman spirits who represent the dangerous unknown of the uncivilized wilderness, punishing humans who take too many liberties with free-living nonhuman communities. In each case, human settlers “hunting” in their newly occupied territory face retribution in becoming prey themselves. Although such stories could be said to represent a lesson in the wrongs of speciesism, more likely, their value lies in their metaphorical representation of the wilderness standing in opposition to civilization.

That most nonhuman ghosts in this study haunted the outdoors (towns, countrysides, and wilderness) also speaks to the otherization of Nonhuman Animals from the more civilized domestic sphere. Yet, even nonhumans in the domestic sphere can sometimes represent the bewitching and dangerous unknown of the nonhuman realm. As was often the case in stories set in the wilderness, humans enacting violence on Nonhuman Animals in the home frequently receive their comeuppance as well. For instance, a story authored by Edgar Allan Poe features a man who tortured and killed the household cat, only to be driven to accidentally kill his wife by

the maddening presence of the cat's ghost: "Beneath the pressure of torments such as these the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts" (Poe, 2015 [1843], p. 12). Regardless of setting, therefore, the spirits of Nonhuman Animals become evidence as to the consequences of crossing outside the boundary of human exceptionalism, a reversion to base animality, chaos, and destruction. Indeed, their very presence warns of the permeability of this cultural barrier.

Ellmann (2010) hypothesizes that companion species are more likely to be represented as ghosts based on their utility in delineating the selfhood of the humans with whom they are associated. Indeed, dogs, cats, and horses constituted nearly half of the specter sample in this study. Not only are these species more likely to be culturally detected by humans given their proximity to human living spaces, but these species are more culturally available for metaphorical purposes. Specifically, they come to represent a civilized society. The lack of "livestock" spirits in this study could also relate to this civilizing trend. Vegan historian Jim Mason (1993) theorizes that the project of civilization and the symbolic construction of humanness has relied on the removal of Nonhuman Animals from sacred ritual. In earlier societies, Nonhuman Animals categorized as food were sacrificed in sacred spaces after which point their bodies would be shared and consumed in the community. Today, the religious element has been removed from speciesist food production, such that Nonhuman Animals have been cordoned off from human habitats, religions, and cultural awareness. With nonhuman death thus detached, their potential for an afterlife has been largely ignored by modern religious institutions and fails to register in popular depictions of life after death. This may also relate to the higher prevalence of nonhuman ghosts in children's stories, presuming that these stories are intended to entertain and socialize. On one hand, the concept of nonhuman subjectivity is

thought to be rather irrational and perhaps more appropriate for the triviality of children's literature, while, on the other, Nonhuman Animals are commonly employed metaphorical tools used to teach children cultural ideas about human exceptionalism (Cole and Stewart, 2014).

Regardless of their metaphorical relevance, the demographic profile of nonhuman spirits in this sample supports that popular culture continues to differentiate humans from other animals even in death. Nonhumans in Ellmann's analysis of modernist literature tend to be "[. . .] thicker, heavier, and smellier than human ghosts [. . .]" (p. 715). Although my own analysis did not compare human and nonhuman spirits, the high frequency of negative and demeaning narratives seems to support Ellmann's observations. Instead of employing nonhuman spirithood to emphasize similarities between humans and other animals in their capacity to suffer, die, and potentially experience and afterlife, most of these stories instead inflamed the artificially constructed species boundary by presenting human-nonhuman relationships as deeply adversarial. Paranormal author Darren Zenko emphasizes that only about half of the ghost stories featuring Nonhuman Animals with which he is familiar entail heartwarming stories of departed pets, but my analysis finds that frequency to be much lower. All but five of the ghosts included in my sample are consistent with Zenko's further observation that many ghostly nonhumans are recorded as frightening, "terrible," and "weird" (2004, p. 7). Social psychological research finds that participants are more likely to support the killing of other animals when they either feel afraid or have been primed to think about death. Presumably, this triggered violence against other animals relates to a desire for humans to reassert their power and attain a sense of invulnerability (Lifshin et al., 2017). If so, this could explain why more than one in four stories in this sample feature at least one human who attempts to destroy the nonhuman spirit they

encounter. Such behavior is consistent with an attempt to maintain a human supremacist hierarchy.

Conclusion

Both the recognition of animal subjectivity and the social significance of animal death are culturally bound. I have argued that the status of “ghost” is socially ascribed and that, in an anthropocentric society, the ability to be recognized as a ghost is restricted primarily to humans and favored companion species. The erasure of Nonhuman Animals (especially farmed animals) from haunting narratives appears to be consistent with efforts to mask the violence inherent in humanity’s speciesist social and economic structures. Although most humans have daily intimate contact with nonhuman death via the fondling, touching, wearing, smelling, tasting, and ingesting of nonhuman corpses, the social erasure of this death is nevertheless achieved through a variety of ideological mechanisms, ghost stories included. Indeed, ghost stories are likely to be highly effective in this regard given that they are highly interactional (intended as they are for sharing) and frequently are targeted at children.

Sociologist Avery Gordon observes that “Haunting always harbors the violence, but it also imagines the utopian” (1997, p. 207). In excluding Nonhuman Animals from haunting narratives, anthroparchy eliminates the potential for cultural awareness to speciesist violence, but it also stifles the imagination for a life-affirming social solidarity. Boundaries and categories are themselves illusionary. Ghosts transgress binaries and can conjure the hidden subjectivity of those in the margins (Holland, 2000). Ghost stories, in other words, need not be ideologically aligned with oppression and can instead be liberatory. Indeed, vegan scholars have identified the importance of species-inclusive media for increasing compassion for other animals (Cole and Stewart, 2014; Freeman, 2009). In addition to the mainstream mediums analyzed by these

scholars, I suggest that spinning ghost stories about Nonhuman Animals who are traditionally erased from the cultural narrative could be useful in challenging speciesist ideologies as well. Similarly, in an analysis of British urban landscapes, Kean (2011) emphasizes the importance of nonhuman memorials as they emerged in the 19th century. This new, species-inclusive cultural architecture raised the profile of Nonhuman Animals, she argues, lending them personhood and recognition. A memorialization of Nonhuman Animals in the literary cultural space could lend a similar benefit. Waskul and Waskul (2016) insist that ghost stories are not simply manifestations of culture, but can also motivate action (117). Material and ideological structures of capitalism may erase the suffering of other animals, but vegan-centric stories have the potential to restore to Nonhuman Animals their dignity, personhood, and vitality. Indeed, veganism acts as a sort of necromancy in its attempt to open lines of communication with the unseen dead, conjuring them into public consciousness.

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