MONSTRUM 8.2 (December 2025) | ISSN 2561-5629

"The factory is a fertile body": Impersonal Flesh, Miscarriage, and the Failure of Queer-Inhuman Affect in Elle Nash's *Deliver Me*

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Introduction

Human exceptionalism is anthropocentric insofar as it constitutes the belief that humans are not only distinct from animals but are of superior value. This facilitates the exploitation of bodies assigned to the category of the animal, or nonhuman. However, the line between human and animal is conceptually constructed and often blurred. Recent queer theory has mobilized queerness to challenge human exceptionalism, since the figure of the queer has been associated with both death and animality, revealing an entanglement between these ideas and undermining the human-animal distinction in the process.

Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004) explores the association of queerness and death, specifically the end of reproductivity and progress. He ultimately concludes that this association aligns the queer with "the *inhuman*" (Edelman 2004, 152; emphasis in original): a life that exists outside of human meaning and normativity. More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the generative possibilities of this alignment. Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein reject the treatment of queerness, specifically trans* embodiment, as a fixed quality or characteristic, stating: "trans* is movement, excitation, and intensification, or a motor of internal instability that drives self-overcoming, unpredictability, and irreducible multiplicity" (2015, 200). They argue that the trans*/queer subject is uniquely associated with animality, not only because of their dehumanization, but also because trans* is an inherent unsettling of the distinctions between different bodies and subject-positions. This creates a pathway towards explicitly queer relations between human and nonhuman life; relations that break beyond the hierarchical human-nonhuman binary.

Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen develop similar ideas in their discussion of "queer inhumanisms," referring to work that explores the ecocritical implications of the dehumanized queer body. Luciano and Chen ask: "When the 'sub-human, in-human, non-human' queer actively connects with the other-than-human, what might that connection spawn?"

(2015, 186). However, while this connection can prove generative in challenging human-nonhuman distinctions, and anthropocentrism, this essay addresses the limits of queer-inhuman entanglement. I will demonstrate and explore the implications of the fact that there is no essential tie between the embrace of this entanglement and a politics and practice of animal liberation.

I argue that Elle Nash's 2023 body horror novel *Deliver Me* narrates the ways in which queer-inhuman entanglement and affect—affect resulting from the queer subject's connection to, and affinity with, nonhuman life—can be captured and even co-opted by a society that presents animal cruelty as an unalterable reality. This society implicitly conceives *animality* as synonymous with impersonal flesh, since it erases the particularity of nonhuman animals and treats them not as embodied, individuated subjects, but as a manipulable and decomposable substance or resource. In this context, the queer subject's association with the animal becomes premised on violence, depersonalization, and death. Subjected to such capture, the potentially transformative force of queerness—as an excessive corporeality and desire that ruptures normative, fixed identity, and hierarchical relations between human and nonhuman—can in fact serve to amplify, instead of challenging, the violence of human exceptionalism.

This article therefore examines how, under conditions of human exceptionalism, a specific form of queer inhumanism can take shape that contrasts with the positive, intersectional queer inhumanism called for by José Esteban Muñoz, Jinthana Haritaworn, and others (Muñoz et al. 2015). Against the need to preserve the particularity and agency of specific queer subjects, queer inhumanism can entail a dissolution of the subject into depersonalized and non-agentic matter.

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Deliver Me explores conceptual and affective relations between queerness, animality, death, and non-reproductive femininity. The novel charts the evolving psychosis of its queer protagonist Daisy, also known as Dee-Dee, who lives in a Missourian town dominated by Pentecostal Christianity. Having left the church, Daisy still retains the conditioned belief that motherhood and heteronormative family are the only things that will grant her "purpose" (Nash 2023, 41). Motherhood becomes a way of not only assimilating to heteronormative culture but becoming fully human in the eyes of her religious mother. Without motherhood, Daisy feels her body is

a "bloated corpse" (193). Her non-reproductivity makes her queerness inescapable, and she associates her queerness with death.

Daisy's sense of inadequacy is intensified when her childhood friend and love interest, Sloane, moves in next door. For Daisy, Sloane represents assimilation into the order of heteroreproductive humanity. Daisy has attempted to attain heteronormative humanness through her boyfriend, David. However, like Daisy, David is repressing homosexual desire, and his repressed queerness manifests obliquely through a love of insects. For Daisy, then, this relationship simultaneously represents a chance of transcending queerness and the inescapability of the same. Daisy has already miscarried five times, and when she realises that she has failed to become pregnant following a false-positive test, her worsening mental illness is expressed through her growing affinity with the murdered and instrumentalized animals she encounters in her work at a meat-packing factory named Mike's.

Achille Mbembe uses the term "necropolitics" to discuss "the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (2003, 11), and Nicole Grimaldi has recently drawn on this idea to consider "the unique politics of death encapsulating animal genocide" (2024, 21). In *Deliver Me*, having failed to fulfil the role assigned to her by heteronormative culture, Daisy begins to feel consigned to the space of death represented by the factory. This is a space in which life is treated as, and reduced to, impersonal flesh, and where the human workers are themselves stretched to the outer limits of what their bodies can tolerate. Thus, if queerness consigns Daisy to death, her experience of the factory has led her to perceive this as consignment to devalued, depersonalized animality. In a desperate desire to differentiate herself from the space of death, Daisy pretends that she is pregnant—a lie that becomes increasingly untenable.

Daisy repeatedly passes a hospital billboard that counts the number of babies born on the premises. At one point, she observes that the number stands at "56,867," noting: "We kill at least that many chickens in a single day" (Nash 2023, 54). On the one hand, the hospital billboard displays a fundamental discrepancy between the value placed upon human and nonhuman life. However, *Deliver Me* is set in Missouri, where "a fetus is protected life" (20). This illuminates a parallel between what the meat-packing factory and the billboard respectively represent: the industry of death and the hyper-natalism reflected in anti-abortion laws. Both are related to the simultaneous instrumentalization and devaluing of life. AFAB-bodied inhabitants of the U.S. are increasingly faced with deadly abortion bans, issued by governments that restrict social welfare and value life only as potential labour.

Discussing what Leith Mullings terms "necro-reproduction" (2021, 115), Risa Cromer and Sophie Bjork-James discuss how, while Christian ideology is weaponised to legally confer personhood to the fetus, living children in communities of colour are "disproportionately expose[d]" (2023, 18) to health risks such as pollution. Cromer and Bjork-James also emphasise that "[p]regnant people of colour bear a disproportionate share of the harms caused by fetal protectionist laws" (16), since "their claims to rights and protections are harder to make in contexts where systemic racism and pregnancy status work together to undermine recognition of their personhood and humanity" (17). As such, necro-reproduction hinges on pregnant people's consignment to the status of impersonal flesh, which is to say their consignment to the status of the animal under conditions of human exceptionalism.

While Daisy's ethnicity is never confirmed, James Taylor reads *Deliver Me* in relation to the broader depersonalization of AFAB and working-class bodies, arguing that "Dee-Dee's obsessive reduction of her identity down to her fertility" reflects the "dilution of the human experience to physical descriptors and their labour value, like flesh on a production line" (2024, para 31). However, *Deliver Me* also explores how the industry of birth in the U.S. functions by holding out the promise of full personhood, equated with full humanity, through motherhood. This is the condition that Daisy strives to attain. While the promise of full humanness is partially constructed through the right-wing demonization of childless women—who, Nesrine Malik notes, are represented as having no stake in human society (Malik 2024, para 1–2)—Cromer and Bjork-James's analysis highlights that this promise is mainly held out to white women. It is revealing that it is Daisy's miscarriage, queerness, and class position, as opposed to her ethnicity, that she perceives as thwarting her path to an authentic humanness, suggesting that whiteness plays a foundational, enabling role in her fantasy of transcendence. Ultimately, while it is true that there is a connection between the forms of instrumentalization undergone by nonhuman animal and AFAB bodies, Daisy still envisions motherhood as a way to transcend the space of death and depersonalized flesh.

As Daisy puts it, "chickens find no redemption at Mike's" (Nash 2023, 51). By contrast, she decides that she will name her baby "Miracle, the blood and bone of me" (36). This fantasy is revealing in that Daisy imagines the bare materiality of the body, its "blood and bone," being fed into, and redeemed by, the miraculous baby. However, when Daisy goes to the doctor after believing she may have miscarried, following the excretion of clotted menstrual blood, she discovers that the test was a false positive. Daisy experiences the loss of the imagined baby as another miscarriage,

one that brings her crashing down from the promise of transcendence back to the space of death. She compares the doctor who gives her the news to a "butcher" (57), suggesting that the act of sharing this news is equivalent to reducing Daisy to the dead, depersonalized flesh of the meat-packing factory.

In a similar vein, Anna McFarlane has explored the relation between miscarriage and queerness, writing: "The abrupt exit from the heteronormative pathway of pregnancy and birth constitutes an entry into queer time" (McFarlane 2023, 248). Crucially, McFarlane notes that miscarriage manifests an "inhuman materiality," a statement which relates not only to the "cruelty" (243) of miscarriage but also to the fact that, in miscarriage, the biologically human body can be experienced as exceeding and derailing aspirations towards (hetero)normative humanness. However, while Daisy's realization that she is not pregnant invokes her experience of her preceding five miscarriages, ejecting her into a queer-inhuman temporality, she refuses to psychologically accept this condition and instead constructs an elaborate lie, even going as far as to order a prosthetic replica of a pregnant stomach.

It is important to emphasise that the condition of pregnancy towards which Daisy aspires is not essentially heteronormative, but is instead contingently, culturally associated with normative roles, relations, and lifepaths. Sophie Lewis considers how pregnancy and birth can become embedded in systems of queer relationality, including "reproductive communes" (2019, 149) that surpass gene fetishism and the biological determination of familial roles. Additionally, Lewis notes that "the cyborgicity, the queerness of the labor experience" (128) involves bodily transformations that undermine distinctions between the natural and technological, human and nonhuman, while disrupting fantasies of a formally determined and bounded human subject. In this way, the materiality of pregnancy already exceeds representations of pregnancy as an essentially heteronormative condition. However, for Daisy, miscarriage precludes the attainment of this condition and forces her to experience a queer-inhuman corporeality.

For Daisy, healthy pregnancy and motherhood function together as a phantasmatic ideal of heteronormative humanness which, if it were to be attained, would not facilitate the transcendence she seeks. Nevertheless, Daisy becomes pathologically invested in motherhood, believing that the baby can be manifested through simulation: if she acts like a mother, convincing herself and others of her maternal status, then the baby will come. In this context, the meat-packing factory continually confronts Daisy with the space of death that she is trying to transcend.

Peter Hutchings notes that body horror narratives are typically bound up with a fear of bodily transformations that alienate the body from its ostensible owner by escaping this subject's "conscious control" (2009, 41). While this fear is central to *Deliver Me*, the horror of the novel also derives from Daisy's fear of being reduced to impersonal flesh (animality). Instead of embracing the potentially transformative space of queer-inhuman entanglement, Daisy reacts to this entanglement with fear, and resorts to increasingly horrific ways of attempting to differentiate herself from the queer-inhuman *thing* she feels she is becoming. Furthermore, even when Daisy and her boyfriend embrace identification with nonhuman life, they amplify the horror of human exceptionalism—specifically its reduction of life to impersonal flesh. It becomes clear that queer alignment with nonhuman life is not essentially radical. Instead, in some contexts, it carries the risk of simply extending the domain of depersonalization and death to queer bodies without challenging exploitative human-animal relations.

I will first explore how Daisy's work at the meat-packing factory reveals the horror behind the commodity form to which animals are reduced. Second, I will explore how Daisy's relationship with her boyfriend gives rise to a queer-inhuman familial regime that is nonetheless founded on the exploitation of animals. Third, I will consider how Daisy simultaneously identifies with and attempts to abject the animal, and how she is ultimately possessed by grotesque fantasies of a queer-inhuman productivity that collapses the life-death distinction and naturalizes human exceptionalism's violence. Finally, I will consider the novel's ending, in which Daisy murders Sloane, using pneumatic scissors from the factory to extract Sloane's baby before implanting it in her own body. This process is represented as a queer birth and simulation of motherhood. The murder distils the way in which Daisy's identification with nonhuman animals, and her visions of queer-inhuman productivity, amplify the violence structuring the industry of human exceptionalism.

1: The factory

In "Veganism as Left Praxis," Jonathan Dickstein, Jan Dutkiewicz, Jishnu Guha-Majumdar, and Drew Robert Winter write of commodified meat:

> At the supermarket, there is no sign of … mass-scale animal suffering and death at industrialized slaughterhouses at the hands of marginalized and racialized laborers …. The entire social,

> political, and ecological biography of bacon is effaced behind its commodity form. (2022, 57)

Daisy's work confronts her with the horrifying scale of industrialized animal death, with the factory processing "140 birds or more a minute" (Nash 2023, 7). However, her work is also defined by the class politics with which this industry is entangled. The factory provides inadequate PPE and bathroom breaks, and prevents workers from unionizing (182). While the nonhuman animals' personhood is wholly unrecognized, and their agency negated, the human workers also find that their personhood and agency are overlooked.

Additionally, Daisy lives in a working-class area and notes that the domestic infrastructure is increasingly nonfunctional, with landlords failing to carry out vital repairs. Daisy states, "things fall apart and their corpses rot … as we adapt to a lesser way of living" (Nash 2023, 90), and she notes the ubiquity of mental and physical illness in the area (39). The community is affected by what Jodi Dean terms "'hinterlandization,' that is, the loss of a general capacity to reproduce the basic conditions of liveable life" (2022, 48) due to the concentration of power and wealth. Thus, while animal death is presented as a means of sustaining human life, Daisy bears witness to a capitalist incarnation of human exceptionalism in which human life is increasingly devalued. In this context, the purpose of animal death is primarily to accumulate capital.

While the infrastructure required for liveable life is decaying, Daisy perceives the factory as perversely alive, stating: "The factory is a fertile body, each breast a beginning" (Nash 2023, 7). This line subtly foreshadows the capture of queerness and queer-inhuman affect that structures the rest of the novel. While the factory is notionally fertile, the chickens are "not bred to make life" (15) and "find no redemption" (51) through the factory's productivity. This fertility is clearly of a different order to what Daisy has been conditioned to perceive as the miraculous process of human reproduction. Instead, it is a fertility that Daisy implicitly perceives as queer. She notes that each shift begins by donning "sexless scrubs" (122). The organic-human form of the body is overwritten, as Daisy assumes her position as an infrastructural component of the factory's processes.

The terms Daisy uses to describe her work indicate that she has associated her non-reproductivity and queerness with the violent, notionally alien, yet all-too-human productivity of the factory, which has repurposed her body for its own ends. This conceptual and affective association is perhaps tied to the sense in which queerness describes a warping and exceeding of the normative form and/or functions assigned to a given subject's body. In the factory, the body is stretched beyond its

organic-biological form and function, integrated into a productivity that has nothing to do with the reproduction or maintenance of life.

However, this is not really a vision of queerness—which is not something imposed onto the body from without—and less one of queer vitality. Instead, Daisy declares: "I feel empty, hollowed and ripped apart by the assembly line" (Nash 2023, 116). Daisy's description of the factory in terms of a queer fertility reveals her underlying sense that the cruel productivity of the factory is the fate allotted to her as a consequence of her failure to enter the order of heteroreproductive human life. The potentially generative relation between queerness and animality has been subsumed by industrialized death. Owing to her class position, there is no moving beyond this capture. As Daisy's queerness becomes fused, in her mind, with the machined death of the factory, this fusion is paired with her belief that she can be saved from the space of death through motherhood. She imagines that the fulfillment of a heteroreproductive identity and function will allow her to extricate herself from the devalued, impersonal flesh to which the chickens are reduced.

However, Daisy's fantasy of transcending the space of death is continually undermined. In one scene, she is tasked with disposing of the bodies of sick chickens who have been killed through deliberate overheating. While Daisy is attempting to deceive others, and sometimes herself, about her non-existent pregnancy, the underlying affinity she feels with the chickens initially seems to enable recognition of their personhood. She describes "looking at them one by one as if I am honoring each one" (Nash 2023, 125). The qualification of the group pronoun "them" by the phrase "one by one" indicates a recognition of each chicken's individuality, resisting the collapsing of individual lives into a mass of depersonalized flesh. However, Daisy's honoring of the chickens is immediately negated, as she describes "tossing them in the crates" (125). The carelessness and apathy implied by the verb "tossing" indicates that Daisy's respect was superficial and performative. Her work in the factory has desensitized her to the chickens' deaths. Instead of deep empathy, Daisy's alignment with the chickens on the basis of her queerness and non-reproductivity simply instils fear and, in turn, a desperate desire to distinguish herself from the meat of the chickens' bodies by making herself human.

Nevertheless, Daisy elaborates regarding the murdered chickens: "something about the chickens puts me at unease, like a brutal truth tugging me below the surface of my preimagined normalcy" (Nash 2023, 125). The depersonalized chickens seem to reflect her awareness—repressed by fantasies of pregnancy—of her own consignment to the status of impersonal flesh. However, the "brutal truth" may also relate to the way in which the fantasy of heteroreproductive "normalcy" towards which

Daisy aspires is itself bound up with the factory's death-machine. This is exhibited when Daisy envisions "cooking up Hamburger Helper on a hot plate as [her child] watches cartoons on the cable TV" (166). Not even this fantasy can be extricated from death, with the reference to Hamburger Helper representing the way in which the heteroreproductive human order is powered by industrialized death. This order is complicit, in turn, with the general disregard for life that begins to corrupt even the domain of human life through hinterlandization (infrastructural decay). Thus, Daisy's fantasy of transcending death can only ever be a fantasy, irrespective of her status as a mother.

Daisy ultimately tries to assimilate to the logic of human exceptionalism through the excessive consumption of animal-derived products. Passing through multiple drive-throughs, she orders a chicken-finger sandwich and realizes: "I most likely cut the tenders myself" (Nash 2023, 95). Through overconsumption, and becoming a devourer of death, Daisy imagines she can manifest the baby as a representation of the humanness towards which she aspires, becoming "full, full, full" (89). The connection Daisy imaginatively effects between the desired baby and the consumption of animal products speaks to her awareness that the heteroreproductive order of full humanity and personhood is fueled by the industrialized death and domination of nonhuman life.

Despite her attempts to assimilate to human exceptionalism as a means of transcendence, Daisy experiences a growing disgust towards meat. At one point, she describes how the texture of bacon "reminds [her] of the mutilator crunching up all the chicken carcasses" (Nash 2023, 185). She struggles to repress her awareness of the violence that subtends human "normalcy," and which has produced the food she eats. As Daisy comes to believe that her queerness and non-reproductivity condemn her to the status of an inhuman corpse, her identification with the dead flesh by which she is surrounded enables the reader to perceive the horror of this flesh's omnipresence. When Sloane prepares a meal for Daisy, she presents "roast pork loin, sliced, with chunks of fat slightly toasted along the top" (207). In the context of Daisy's experience of seeing behind the veil of the meat's commodity form, this image of pork is loaded with connotations of violence and suffering. It is visible as dead flesh, as opposed to an abstract commodity or food product whose association with an organic body has been severed. The effect is compounded by the fact that the conceptually constructed line between human and animal flesh, and death, has been blurred by Daisy's queer-inhuman identification with the meat of the factory. She sees in the pork an extension of her own depreciated flesh, and "the smell […] sickens [her]" (208). This is one way in which queer-inhuman affect successfully challenges the violence of human

exceptionalism in the novel, since it succeeds in defamiliarizing the image of cooked meat and rendering it as inescapably horrific.

2: Exploitative kinship

As Daisy is haunted by the "brutal truth" gleaned from the culled chickens—a reality of inescapable entanglement with death—she struggles to maintain the lie that she is pregnant. In this way, her queerness and concomitant alignment with nonhuman bodies becomes increasingly irrepressible. Throughout the novel, this alignment and affinity is almost wholly negative in terms of the affects and relations it produces. This can again be seen in Daisy's relationship with her abusive boyfriend, David. David started collecting insects after his father caught him experimenting sexually with a male friend and "beat him senseless" (Nash 2023, 32). His fascination with insects is therefore presented as an oblique manifestation of his repressed queerness. It also deepens the novel's conceptual alignment of queer and nonhuman bodies, which find themselves outside the heteroreproductive order of normative humanness. However, while David treats the insects as family, he ultimately constructs a familial regime that often simulates heteronormative dynamics, and which relies on the imprisonment and exploitation of nonhuman animals.

This recuperation of queer-inhuman kinship in service of human exceptionalism and heteronormativity is initially indicated when Daisy notes that David requires her to "feed [the insects] for him, care for them" (Nash 2023, 27), positioning himself as a governing patriarch. In one sequence, he intimidates Daisy into a sexual act in which he stings her thigh repeatedly with live bees immobilized using tongs. This leaves Daisy with multiplying "cystic lumps" on her thigh, one of which seems to have "something white and hard […] growing" and "squirming inside it" (205). Daisy experiences these lumps as manifestations of a queer-inhuman xeno-productivity: a productivity channeled through Daisy's body while exceeding its normative, human form and function. However, while this xeno-production contrasts with Daisy's aspiration towards human heteroreproduction, it is also the product of an act of domination in which both Daisy and the bees are reduced to, and instrumentalized as, impersonal matter.

In other moments, David and Daisy's familial regime begins to challenge human gender roles, heteronormativity, and the human-nonhuman binary. However, even these moments fail to offer an emancipatory vision of the relation between human and nonhuman

subjects. During another sexual interaction, Daisy is asked to retrieve a praying mantis. She relates:

> I fight the deep-in-my-flank impulse to fling her alien physical form off. The impulse reminds me of an earlier miscarriage, when parts of the fetus didn't leave my uterus all the way, and all I'd wanted was for them to get out. (Nash 2023, 175)

This passage captures Daisy's sense that the excessive materiality of miscarriage, which ejects her from the heteronormative lifepath, manifests her repressed queerness and undermines her body's separateness from biologically "alien" nonhuman life. Daisy's contact with the mantis initially seems to present the possibility of communing with, instead of abjecting, the alien that simultaneously comes from within.

However, queer relationality between human and nonhuman is once again recuperated in service of dominating the animal. The mantis is kept in a cage and brought out for the purpose of gratifying David's sexual needs. Placed on David's chest, the mantis begins to consume his nipple, "pulling strings of flesh into her mouth" (Nash 2023, 177). David's nipple, a "useless thing" (176) in relation to the heteroreproductive function of the body, acquires a xeno-productive purpose in feeding the animal. This moment invokes—in a warped, ambiguous, and attenuated form—Jack Halberstam's account of the "transbiological," which "can be conjured by hybrid entities or in-between states of being that represent subtle or even glaring shifts in our understandings of the body and of bodily transformation" (2008, 266). These entities and states "question … the artificial boundaries between humans, animals, machines, states of life and death" (266). David's feeding of the mantis places his body in excess of human identity and intraspecies biological kinship. He not only assumes a parental relation to the animal but offers his body as flesh to be consumed. However, the queerness of the scene is framed and negated by the fact that this queer-inhuman interaction is the product of David's imprisonment of the mantis, who, even as she consumes his body, is still being instrumentalized in service of his gratification.

This sequence demonstrates how queer-inhuman entanglements can generate a superficial impression of subversion while sustaining a hierarchical human-nonhuman relation. In this context, Eva Haifa Giraud has sought to qualify the emphasis on entanglement found in much ecocritical theory, emphasising calls "for greater recognition of the undesirable nature of certain forms of relation and the need (in certain contexts) to preserve distance, alterity, and separateness" (2019, 9–10). In *Deliver Me*, the perils of queer-inhuman entanglement between biologically

human and nonhuman bodies are laid bare. Ultimately, David's identification and alignment with nonhuman animals—expressed through his repressed, obliquely queer sexuality—is recuperated by the human supremacy that allows him to imprison and instrumentalize the animals for his own purposes, even as he blurs the line between human and nonhuman. In *Deliver Me*, this blurred distinction becomes a feature of the exploitation of nonhuman animals, revealing the contingent, inessential correlation between this blurring and a politics and practice of animal liberation.

3: Abjection and the naturalization of death as queer-inhuman production

Daisy's attempts to establish human-nonhuman separateness are as abusive of animals as David's cultivation of queer-inhuman entanglement. As the pain from the bee stings worsens, Daisy is possessed by rage and begins murdering David's insects (Nash 2023, 240). This massacre can be described as an attempt to abject—reject and cast out—the unique kinship with nonhuman animals into which she has been forced as a result of her non-reproductivity and queerness, and which is reflected in the queer xeno-productivity of the notional spawn squirming in her thigh.

This is not Daisy's first time engaging in abjection. As a child, she murdered her pastor's dog by burying it up to its neck and leaving it to die of hunger in the local graveyard, after discovering that the pastor was sleeping with her love interest, Sloane—an affair that reflects the hypocrisy of the church. Identifying with the dog, Daisy describes how its burial allows her to see her "suffering manifested outside of [herself]" (Nash 2023, 237). However, the cruelty she inflicts also allows her to differentiate herself from the dog through domination. It is an attempt to externalize, objectify, and control her own suffering.

When Daisy beheads the dog's corpse and leaves its head outside the pastor's house, she can be read as enacting a return of the repressed. The dog was previously treated as a pet, assimilated by the human subject into a familial relation. In reducing the dog to impersonal flesh and forcing the pastor to confront this flesh, Daisy ruptures the hypocrisy of a human society that selectively privileges certain forms of nonhuman life while repressing awareness of its abuse and murder of other animals. The pastor's adoption of the dog is uniquely significant, since Christianity advances a form of human exceptionalism in which, as Anna Peterson explains, humans are conceived as possessing immaterial souls that separate them from other forms of life (2001, 29). Consigned to the space

of death by her queerness, Daisy functions as a kind of specter, confronting the pastor with the death and violence he simultaneously sanctions and refuses to fully acknowledge.

However, if Daisy resists the distinction between the body of the adopted pet and the body of the instrumentalized, bred-to-be-eaten animal, she does so in a murderous, immoral fashion. Instead of revealing the personhood of the instrumentalized animal, she collapses the distinction in the other direction by reducing the pet to depersonalized matter. After beheading the dog, she relates: "with the muscle of its shoulders exposed, I thought immediately of a ham hock" (Nash 2023, 243). The return of the repressed that Daisy enacts brings the violence of human exceptionalism and its depersonalization of nonhuman animals to the surface, making it uniquely visible, but it also fails to challenge the collapsing of life into meat.

Daisy distills the psychopathy that human exceptionalism cultivates. As a child, her father taught her how to gut hogs and shoot squirrels "into a burst of fur and guts" (Nash 2023, 163). Exposure to violence as a child has evidently warped Daisy's perception of life, to the point where the violent logic underlying human exceptionalism—the reduction of life to impersonal flesh—is turned against this ideology and begins to unbind the human-animal distinction in her mind. Attending her father's open-casket funeral, Daisy wonders "how his insides had been removed, if he'd been cut anus to throat like a hog" (206–7). By conflating her father's body with the depersonalized meat of the murdered hog, Daisy ruptures a system of value that elevates human kin above nonhuman animals. However, in unbinding the human-nonhuman distinction, she simply extends depersonalizing violence to the human body, instead of personalizing and valuing nonhuman animals.

Ultimately, Daisy's psychology reveals the way in which the collapsing of human-nonhuman distinctions is insufficient as a means of challenging the violence perpetuated by human exceptionalism. While it creates an opening beyond the human-animal binary that structures this ideology, there is no essential correlation between this opening and a positive reconditioning of the human mind, one that would facilitate an escape from the logic and normalization of depersonalizing violence. This is increasingly true in a global context where vast numbers of human lives continue to be depersonalized and devalued, whether through war or hinterlandization.

Having distilled a psychology that views life as impersonal flesh, Daisy dreams of salvation through motherhood. However, this residual belief in transcendence—the residue of her religious conditioning—comes into tension with her perception of life as meat, and her conceptualization of death itself as the site of a queer productivity. Daisy imagines that this

productivity repurposes bodies beyond the limits of their normative forms and functions, in the manner of the human and nonhuman bodies in the meat-packing factory. As the novel progresses, her conceptualization of death is communicated through the motif of flowers. This is initially signaled by the fact that she buries the dog beneath a magnolia tree, its abused and murdered body fueling the growth of the tree. Flowers come to represent an alien productivity that levels the distinction between life and death, treating bodies as mere fuel for the propagation of an impersonal mode of life.

At her father's funeral, Daisy envisions "[v]iolent flowers, blooming bloodily from every one of his orifices" (Nash 2023, 206). The corpse becomes a structural component of the flowers' propagation, collapsing human-nonhuman and life-death distinctions simultaneously. However, while Daisy's visions of queer-inhuman productivity challenge the logic of human exceptionalism, they ultimately serve to naturalize violence and take on increasingly sinister dimensions. Imagining "white petals," Daisy notes that white is viewed in some cultures as "an omen of death, … the only thing that can't end" (196). The embrace of death is perceived as offering liberation from the limits and mutability of personalized life. This becomes important when Sloane moves next door to Daisy as an adult, and Daisy becomes increasingly obsessed with Sloane's pregnancy. Daisy's desire for heteroreproductive assimilation becomes fused with her simultaneously violent and queer-inhuman collapsing of the life-death distinction, whereby life is reduced to the status of impersonal matter-energy.

Prefiguring her use of the factory's pneumatic scissors to extract Sloane's baby and implant it into her own stomach, Daisy envisions that "Sloane's stomach opens like the petals of a tiger lily, … palest white where the flesh meets the muscle" (Nash 2023, 210). Flowers here represent Daisy's naturalization of the process by which life is reduced to meat. Through this process, a given body is formally and functionally manipulated without regard for the consciousness, suffering, and agency of the person to whom it belongs. In applying this logic to a human mother's body, Daisy will reduce what is, for her, an archetype of normative humanness to the status of the depersonalized animal, bringing the violence of the meat-packing factory into the domain of heteroreproductive human life.

4: Formalizing meat

The comparison of Sloane's flesh to a "red tiger lily" distils a horrific vision of queer-inhuman productivity that sanctions, in Daisy's mind, the

universalization of human exceptionalism's violence—its application to the designated-human body. In the novel's final scene, Daisy barges into Sloane's apartment—dragging Sloane into the bathroom, strangling her, and using the pneumatic scissors to remove Sloane's baby. Daisy once again represents a return of the repressed: the material violence and death upon which the ideal of human, heteroreproductive family relies under conditions of human exceptionalism. Daisy possesses a unique awareness of this violence, having seen behind the veil of the commodity form to which nonhuman animal bodies are reduced. By contrast, Daisy views Sloane as embodying the ideal condition of humanness, having transcended the status of mere flesh through motherhood. The operation initially seems to represent a revenge of the depersonalized animal flesh to which Daisy believes her own body has been reduced.

In this way, the order of heteroreproductive humanness represented by Sloane's apartment is ruptured and invaded by the queer-inhuman flesh that Daisy feels she has come to embody. Sloane's body, the body of the human, is subsumed and repurposed by this flesh. Daisy describes how "The flesh gives easily," stating: "Her energy passes on to me, formless" (Nash 2023, 255). Sloane's body becomes a resource, its identity collapsed into a depersonalized, formally indeterminate matter-energy that Daisy imagines herself absorbing. When the baby is extracted, Daisy compares her to "an upside-down insect," before declaring: "I see myself whole" (255). The baby-insect comparison affirms that Daisy views herself as enacting a distinctly queer-inhuman birth and approximation of motherhood. With Sloane's personhood and biological form violated by this artificial extraction, Daisy cuts herself open with the factory's scissors and implants the baby into her body. On one hand, Daisy's appropriation of the meat-packing factory's equipment represents a return of the repressed that collapses the human-nonhuman distinction, subsuming the body of the human mother into the status of impersonal flesh, which is a status that Daisy associates with both animality and queerness. However, on the other hand, this violent murder affirms and extends the violence propagated by human exceptionalism.

Ultimately, if Daisy enacts a queer-inhuman rupture of the sphere of human life and reproduction, this rupture is captured by the logic of depersonalizing violence and instrumentalization. Indeed, Daisy's instrumentalization of Sloane and her baby can be related to the way in which they are already devalued by a society that consigns working-class communities to hinterlandization, spaces in which, Daisy notes, "it seemed you were always losing somebody to sickness of some sort" (Nash 2023, 39). Sloane represents an ideal of full humanness for Daisy, but she does not really transcend the space of death. This is another way in which

Daisy's murder of Sloane, while appearing to rupture a human normalcy that represses awareness of animal suffering, simply reinforces the violence of a society that is subsuming an increasing number of humans into the status of depersonalized animality.

Daisy is found with her torso "half sewn shut" (Nash 2023, 257). Her simulation of motherhood is an attempt to mold her body into Pentecostal Christianity's ideal form of human femininity. Her attempt to achieve this through the application of the factory's machinery to her body can, in turn, be related to her experience of the way in which depersonalized, devalued chicken bodies are converted into designated-useful products. This exhibits the fundamental parallel, identified by James Taylor (2024), between the reduction of AFAB-bodies to their reproductive function and the instrumentalization of life in the factory. While chickens find "no redemption at Mike's," the reduction of their bodies to "cold and shiny beige objects" nevertheless comes to represent, for Daisy, a way of controlling, formalizing, and to some extent recuperating the excessive, necrotic flesh that has subsumed her (Nash 2023, 51).

As Daisy puts it in the novel's opening paragraph, "my pneumatic scissors make sense of the mess" (Nash 2023, 7). This is the mess of impersonal flesh to which she witnessed her father reduce life when he taught her how to hunt, converting animals into a formless "burst of fur and guts." Daisy's way of processing the trauma of being exposed so viscerally to the violence of human exceptionalism simply extends this violence. She does not set out to re-personalize the meat to which she has witnessed life being reduced. Instead, she adopts the strategy of carefully managing and formalizing this meat, and this extends to her attempted conversion of her own body into a kind of product: a formal simulation of the hetero reproductive human. This operation, which Daisy perceives as the extension of a queer-inhuman productivity that collapses the life-death distinction, conforms to the logic of both human exceptionalism and heteronormativity.

Conclusion: the foundational importance of personalization

Elle Nash's *Deliver Me* makes legible the insufficiency of queer identification with nonhuman animals as a means of challenging the depersonalizing violence of human exceptionalism. In doing so, it also clarifies the foundational insufficiency of collapsing human-nonhuman distinctions for this purpose. Furthermore, while Daisy sees behind the commodity form to which nonhuman animals are reduced, depersonalizing

violence has been rigorously normalized and naturalized throughout her life. Thus, exposure to the violent reality behind the commodity form, queer-inhuman identification with the nonhuman animal, and the associated rupture of the human-nonhuman binary all prove insufficient as means of compelling change.

The context in which Daisy lives does not support the expression of queer-inhuman affect in anything but a destructive way. As well as normalized, ubiquitous violence, this context is defined by class persecution, heteronormativity, and the reduction of AFAB bodies to their reproductive function. In this context, to be queer, and to be aligned with the animal, is to be subsumed by death and the status of impersonal flesh. The radical potential of queerness—as an excessive corporeality and desire that ruptures normative and fixed identities, and which opens a pathway towards non-hierarchical relations between human and nonhuman—is negated. Moreover, the rupturing force of queerness is fed back into, and serves to amplify, the violence propagated by human supremacy.

This amplification relates to the way in which Daisy, locked outside of a vision of queer and non-reproductive vitality, conceptualizes death as the site of queer-inhuman productivity. Her visions of this productivity, which feed into her eventual murder of Sloane, affirm the collapsing of life into impersonal matter-energy, even as they draw on ideas of queerness as transformative excess. Encapsulating this productivity through the motif of flowers and even associating it with the productivity of the meat-packing factory, Daisy envisions this productivity as rendering bodies formally indeterminate—capable of being repurposed and remoulded beyond their normative forms and functions without regard for the agentic persons to whom they belong. In this way, the logic of queer excess is recuperated by the logic of depersonalizing violence, and a system of instrumentalization that overrides the agency of embodied persons.

Ultimately, the conceptual, aesthetic, and affective collapsing of human-nonhuman distinctions is not enough to resist the violence sustained by human exceptionalism. My analysis of *Deliver Me*'s deployment and exploration of queer-inhuman affect demonstrates that the reduction of life to impersonal flesh is what must be challenged most fundamentally. In an age of normalized violence towards nonhuman and many human lives, the collapsing of the human-animal distinction is a necessary but insufficient condition of animal liberation. The violence that is facilitated by human exceptionalism could conceivably continue to function despite, and even through, the collapse of this distinction, as an increasing number of humans are openly subsumed into spaces of death and the status of depersonalized matter. nonhuman

Furthermore, as queerness and animality continue to be aligned with death, queer-inhuman affect perhaps acquires a radical potential in contexts associated with wildness and agentic vitality. The present moment demands cultivation of non-hierarchical relations between human and nonhuman subjects in wild (and rewilded) spaces beyond the reach of death-powered capitalism. These would be spaces extricated from war, hinterlandization, and industrialized death, and which facilitate recognition of the personhood shared by human and nonhuman lives. To not only unbind the human-nonhuman binary, but to do so within and through these wild spaces, is an increasingly difficult but necessary task.

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- 2025 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.