Crossing the Threshold:
Domestic Territory and Nonhuman Otherness in Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*

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In this article, I explore the representation of animal otherness in Colin McAdam's novel *A Beautiful Truth* (2013), in which a young chimpanzee is purchased and brought into the home of a human family. Otherness is discussed in this essay through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notions of territorialisation and also through the animal studies interpretations of the human/nonhuman divide as theorised by Margot Norris, Donna Haraway and Val Plumwood. Through this discussion, I explore the ways in which a constructed environment, such as a work of fiction, might navigate unfathomable otherness in human/nonhuman animal relationships.

In 2015, I regularly encountered a female magpie sitting on the deck attached to my home, an area that I considered part of my domestic space, and that she possibly considered part of hers. We both used the deck in similar ways – to eat on and to rest. The magpie was being a magpie in her territory and I was being a human in mine. Because these territories crossed over, we met in a zone of territorial exchange, where my fascination with and want of contact with the nonhuman other was indulged by her want of food. She would perch on my lap and eat food out of my hand. As long as I didn't try to touch her, we were okay. Humans and magpies are both predator species, but humans are apex or super predators (Goldman 2015, n.p.). Despite all the niceties and polite forms of

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exchange between two animals that couldn't communicate very well with each other, she was always the one at risk. In every encounter, she was the one taking the chance, the one who might die. It was she, who was being fed unnaturally, who was losing her fear of humans, who, if she became violent, would suffer the consequences of death or removal. It was always an unfair exchange, it would never be equal.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that territory is 'a result of art' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 316) in that territory is established by marking (for example, with rocks, barriers, scent and paint). Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of 'territorial signs' or indexes (ibid., 55) focuses on physical territory. Territorialisation exists in a constant motion of deterritorialisation and reterritorialiasation for these theorists, in which territory is established and redefined. Of this action they ask, 'how could movements of deterritorialisation and processes of reterritorialisation not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?' (ibid., 10). Deleuze sheds more light on these notions in an interview with journalist Claire Parnet, *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z* (2012), which was released after Deleuze's death. Here, Deleuze explains that 'territory is defined in relation to a movement by which one leaves the territory' (Deleuze 2012). Deleuze continues:

> there is no territory, without a vector of exiting the territory; there is no exiting the territory, that is, deterritorialisation, without at the same time an effort of reterritorialising oneself elsewhere, on something else. All this functions with animals and that's what fascinates me (ibid.).

This process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation is indicated by mark making, which Deleuze and Guattari term as 'territorial signs' and 'indexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 55), distinguishing 'three kinds of signs: *indexes (territorial signs), symbols (deterritorialised signs), and icons (signs of reterritorialisation)*' (ibid., 65, italics original). They further note that 'Signs are

not signs of a thing; they are signs of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, they mark a certain threshold crossed in the course of these movements' (67). In Deleuze and Guattarian thinking, territory can also be considered in terms of otherness and the portrayal of the other through 'territorial representation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 184).

I focus on the notion of territory in a domestic setting to consider how fiction about nonhuman animals navigates otherness. The word 'domestic' originates from the Latin for 'house' or 'home' (*domus*). The term domestic territory, in the context of this article, indicates the space marked out as home by human or nonhuman animals, often used for nesting. Fiction that imagines domestic territory may depict a space that is shared, transgressed and disputed by humans and other animals. Novels that represent human/nonhuman animal interactions often attempt to navigate the borders and territories of human and nonhuman otherness. In doing so, they confront what is known as 'the question of the animal' (Derrida 2008, 8),[1] that is, the impossibility of a human understanding of nonhuman animals. Fictional imaginings of human/nonhuman interaction explore territories that are often not navigable in reality, ones in which humans and other animals can communicate, have sexual relationships, in which power is held by the nonhuman and where animal minds are imagined into human worlds and vice versa. As I explore the complex plot of *A Beautiful Truth*, I expand this notion of domestic territory to include the physical body and the invasive encounters that humans have with other animals. I also wish to draw attention to the idea of psychological terrain (an area that isn't explicitly discussed by Deleuze and Guattari) as perhaps the most invasive area of human interaction with animals, where notions of training, breaking and experimenting are synonymous with human/animal relationships. In my discussion of domestic territory, I include

[1] Jacques Derrida draws from Heidegger to discuss 'the question of the animal' in *The Animal That Therefore I Am.*

the physical space that beings inhabit, as well as bodies and minds in these spaces. I argue that *A Beautiful Truth* is a case study of a fiction that is especially concerned with the physical and psychological aspects of non-human bodies, and how these spaces are used by humans in the domestic sphere.

Along with notions of territorialisation, the persistent gap between human and nonhuman animals is a preoccupation in philosophical studies of human/nonhuman relationships, and one that arises in fictional portrayals. Animal studies theorists Margot Norris, Donna Haraway and Val Plumwood focus on this divide in their work. In *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985), Norris discusses human/nonhuman interactions in the context of 18th and 19th century thinking. This was a time when the conceptualisation of humans versus animals was polarised into the cultural (human) and creatural (nonhuman) (Norris 1985, 3-4). Norris shows how these categories were collapsed by the seminal findings of Charles Darwin and the biocentric creations of Franz Kafka and D. H. Lawrence (among others) who wrote '*as* the animal – not *like* the animal, in imitation of the animal – but with their animality speaking' (ibid., 1). Anthropocentric thought continues despite Darwinian and subsequent contributions and, as Donna Haraway explains in *When Species Meet* (2008), human exceptionalists still place humans 'on the opposite side of the Great Divide from all the others' (11). However, Haraway's arguments across a number of works also demonstrate how this binary can be passionately disrupted. Haraway describes this as 'mak[ing] a mess out of categories' (ibid., 19), through a discussion of humans as 'companion species' (see also *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 2003) and an emphasis on 'species interdependence' (19).

Philosopher Val Plumwood also offers a critical framework to think about animal bodies and how they are separated from the animal being by anthropocentrism. In her article 'Babe: the Tale of The Speaking Meat' (2011), Plumwood discusses the dichotomy of human relationships to animal bodies –

especially when the terms of engagement change, such as when an animal is moved from farm animal to pet. Plumwood argues that:

> There is injustice for such a being in being conceived reductively as body, first because such conception singles its referent out for treatment as radically less than it is, and second because such an instrumental reductionism defines the Other in terms that assume the right of a "higher" group to treat them as a resource for their ends. (2011, 205)

In terms of territorialisation, the shifting boundaries of human/animal engagement that are considered by Norris, Haraway and Plumwood, allow a discussion of novels that challenge the human/animal binary, and reveal what interspecies relationships may look like when the binary is destabilised, reversed or eradicated. To this discussion of animal bodies, I would like to add the work of animal studies theorist Vinciane Despret, who examines the lives of working animals and animals in captivity. Despret argues that, even in livestock and institutional situations, nonhuman animals can be understood to have agency through an acceptance of nonhuman perspective and exchange. She discusses the exchange between a parrot, Alex, and the researchers working with him, who have come to understand the bird's 'right to "want"' (Despret 2008, 125). Despret argues that 'By restating and inverting the question of control – no longer a solution requiring purification but a problem to be negotiated – the laboratory authorised a superb exchange of properties between the researchers and their subject' (ibid., 125). *A Beautiful Truth* proves a difficult case study to explore notions of animal agency, as the chimpanzee character's body is used as a resource in different scenarios of domesticity throughout the book and is repeatedly placed in situations where he is 'other', often responding to this othering through violence.

The notion of violence might be discussed more fruitfully as a form of agency through Norris' theories. Norris maintains that the function of 'animal violence' is 'a discharge of power for its own sake, as an expenditure of

superfluous, opulent energy and strength, and it is therefore simply appropriative, destroying its victims without malice or hatred, as the simple fulfilment of its biological destiny' (Norris 1985, 10). According to Norris, humans (in biocentric thought) are 'militaristic' in their violence, which is a natural 'fatalistic assent' (ibid., 10). Norris implies that violence is conveyed differently by humans as compared to other animals. While humans plot violence, other animals are more likely to react immediately. These arguments about militarised human violence relate to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'the abstract machine' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7), in which human processes are mechanical ones. The abstract machine is 'a technical and physical construct that operates *on* bodies and social or concrete assemblages according to symbolic and transcendent imperatives (producing *mechanical* effects); that which territorialises and captures desire by limiting it to concrete forms' (Young, Genosko and Watson 2013, n.p.). Similarly to *A Beautiful Truth* both Norris and Deleuze and Guattari's discussions of human and nonhuman violence leave little room for animal agency. Even so, violence may be examined as the only form of agency open to Looee in *A Beautiful Truth*.

The Other Truth

The character of Judy in *A Beautiful Truth* is a woman of rural 1970s United States who is unable to conceive with her husband, Walt – and both want children. Judy muses that she 'had seen enough hours and days to know that when things are truly strange their strangeness doesn't appear until after the strangeness has passed' (McAdam 2013a, 10). These thoughts come after the announcement from Walt that he has purchased a baby chimpanzee so that they can raise it as their child in their own home, a domestic arrangement that promises to be truly strange. *A Beautiful Truth* portrays the confines of emotional and physical domesticity with a complexity befitting human/nonhuman animal interactions and relationships. McAdam weaves together an enormous cast of human and

nonhuman characters, perspectives and locations in order to tell the story of Looee, a male chimpanzee who was taken from Sierra Leone and sold to Judy and Walt by way of exotic animal smugglers, then rented to a pharmaceutical company for experimentation, and then finally housed in a field research centre with other chimpanzees. The novel is told from first, second and third person perspectives, from the points of view of different – sometimes multiple – characters, and in present, past and occasionally future tenses. Significantly, the novel also depicts the voices and interiority of human and nonhuman characters. This risky narrative style, where the author is attempting to present multiple sides of the story, highlights the complex relationship that modern Western cultures have with animals, enabling a broad reading of human/nonhuman animal relationships. The narratives, while at first seemingly disconnected, are united as Looee becomes increasingly significant to each. Through every shift in location and perspective, Looee's body and Looee's self are redefined as he moves from being Judy and Walt's child/pet, to being leased by a pharmaceutical company, to being part of a community for field research.

The complexity of *A Beautiful Truth* makes the novel both broad and confronting. Critical readings of the work must also navigate this sweeping portrayal of human/animal relationships and nonhuman otherness. In his essay 'Non-Human Otherness: Animals as Others and Devices for Othering', Sune Borkfelt argues that 'non-human animals are arguably placed in a constant, almost irredeemable state of alterity and are unable to speak for themselves from this othered position, which distinguishes their otherness from that of humans' (Borkfelt 2011, 137). This is particularly the case in the portrayal of Looee, who is taken from his home and forced to make do in new domestic spaces. In Judy and Walt's home he is always other; and this is also the case when he is sent to live with chimpanzees. It is easy to imagine that, had the narrative placed Looee back in Sierra Leone, Looee would have been other there too, after a childhood

raised by humans, and the damage of research experimentation on his mind and body. This unflinching look at Looee's domestic situations offers an example of the possible states of constant alterity that Borkfelt suggests.

The territories of otherness are explored in *A Beautiful Truth* through bodily and perceptual differences. At the beginning of Looee's journey, his otherness is super-imposed upon the otherness of parenthood. When it comes to the reality of adopting Looee, Judy and Walt simultaneously relate to his body and distance themselves from it. Looee has a fascination with body parts, and Judy attempts to set rules around this fascination. This relates to what film theorist and historian Kaja Silverman (discussing Lacan) describes as 'corporal zones – because they in effect represent those zones (mouth, anus, penis, vagina)' (Silverman 1983, 155-156). In the novel, Judy

> looked down sometimes and saw this little hairy creature and thought is he my baby or a beast. He handed her blossoms and smiled. She could tell him to fetch his toys from the upstairs landing and he would. But he walked on all fours, always grunted before he ate, and idly put his finger in his anus and smelled his finger, sometimes licked it, although he heeded Judy on occasion when she said dirty Looee don't do that (McAdam 2013a, 42).

This focus on body as domestic space signposts Looee's later experience in The Girdish Institute, where his body is rented out to a pharmaceutical company and effectively becomes commercialised by humans.

In her book *Chaos, Territory and Art* (2008), Elizabeth Grosz discusses Deleuze and Guattari's theories of territorialisation in relation to art. Grosz argues that bodies are remade through territorialisation and chaos 'forestalled, framed, and welcomed through a regulated, tolerable if perhaps bracing and transformative dose' (Grosz 2008, 21). The transformation of Looee's body through human regulation adds to the confusion of the domestic situation in Judy and Walt's home. After adopting Looee, Judy's thoughts progress, from, 'is he my baby or a beast' to 'what's an animal?' (McAdam 2013a, 45). Neither is

answerable, or articulable, especially to people outside Walt and Judy's home. Judy and Walt keep to themselves initially, but eventually realise the way in which their family is seen by others: as an oddity and, ultimately, an alterity: 'One of them in the corner said is that a dog and Mike said that's a monkey in a suit' (ibid., 41); 'Susan just wasn't sure that Judy was spending her days as she should, and was really, frankly, afraid of seeing her with a chimpanzee' (41); 'the look on some people's faces – she saw judgment or arrogance or hints of dark questions she had not yet found the answers to' (87); 'Looee's days seemed sad to Larry, sometimes, and he would feel angry with Walt for taking him from wherever it was he belonged' (106). This transformation, of Looee the chimpanzee-as-other to Judy and Walt human-as-other-by-association, serves to both separate and unite the human and nonhuman characters. McAdam creates a kind of vortex of paradoxes for Judy and Walt, with Looee drawn in unwittingly. Judy and Walt are at once ashamed of and defiant in their roles as Looee's parents, despairing and delighting at difference and rejoicing in the unique experience of parenthood. Judy feels 'aware of other realities: that what she saw was not the whole truth, or what other people saw was simply not her truth. It was a lonely feeling' (98). While much of Judy and Walt's delight is in the upbringing of a small being, there is also joy and pride in Looee's different abilities, such as his love of swinging and climbing – the strength of his body – a joy that almost serves to overcome the realities of human-to-human versus human-to-nonhuman parenting.

McAdam warns in an interview that the relationship between humans and exotic animals brought into homes rarely goes well. This is an idea explored in other contemporary novels, especially in what reviewer Barbara J. King describes as a 'growing genre of chimpanzee fiction' (King 2013, n.p.). Books in this category might include Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013), Benjamin Hale's *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* (2011), and Neil Abramson's *Unsaid* (2011), not to mention fiction about other human-

simian relationships, such as Peter Goldsworthy's *Wish* (1995), about a human and a gorilla. Fowler's *We are Completely Beside Ourselves* is similar to *A Beautiful Truth* in that it depicts domestic territory gone tragically wrong. Fowler's book is narrated by a young woman who tries to come to terms with her 1970s childhood, and ultimate separation from her family's adoptive chimpanzee 'Fern'. Like Looee, Fern also ends up at an animal research facility, which uses her body for experiments. McAdam says that the 1970s was 'the heyday of people trying to raise chimps in their homes […] It still happens. And it always has the same tragic consequences' (McAdam 2013b). In 2013, I visited The Centre for Great Apes in Florida, United States of America, where ex-show chimpanzees and orang-utans were housed, along with a number of primates that had been rescued from homes where they were often raised on beer, cigars and doughnuts. The staff at the centre advised that the animals they rescue often arrive at the centre obese and some had been housed in cupboards when they grew too big and their owners didn't know what to do with them. While an infant chimpanzee is manageable and easily anthropomorphised, an adult chimpanzee has four times the strength of a human being (Walker 2009, 229). Unlike Fowler's book, where the chimpanzee is distinctly missing from the narrative (we never actually meet Fern), *A Beautiful Truth* gives voice to Looee and other chimpanzee characters. Instead of being told about Looee's experiences, the reader is invited to experience *with* the nonhuman character, 'Nights of hunger and bony moons, steel and rubber teat' (McAdam 2013a, 10).

The territorial boundaries of Looee's body are also explored in terms of his bourgeoning sexuality. Moving from infancy to childhood and then adolescence, Looee masturbates with increasing frequency, preferring human women in magazines. Judy's female friends are at times treated with suspicion, yet also the objects of his desires. In one scene, 'Susan came over and Looee was very excited. He didn't go to shake her hand, he crawled right up to her and Susan

said oh. He liked her big stiff boobs' (McAdam 2013a, 46). Susan is horrified when he squeezes her breast, and Judy tries to placate her by reminding her that Looee is a teenager, like Susan's children once were. Judy says 'You remember what it was like. It's just his age,' to which Susan responds, 'Well, yes, but he's not' (ibid., 49). The sentence is unfinished, emphasising that Looee is not a teenage boy, but a male chimpanzee. Just as Looee's body is owned by different human characters, Looee also tries to take ownership of women's bodies by becoming possessive. At one point, he throws the radio out the window because the song 'American Pie' seems to him to be threatening Judy. He is acutely sensitive to emotional shifts, but interprets these through a lens that the human characters neither share nor understand.

As the novel progresses, Judy and Walt's story is infused with Looee's perception of the world. Looee is eventually provided with an enclosure off the side of Walt and Judy's 'big house'. The enclosure is fitted with a doorbell, which Looee can ring if he needs to see his adoptive parents, 'But when he was in his own house he never heard no, Looee, no' (91). This domestic freedom, with constraints, allows Looee to develop in two directions: within the rules of human culture and within the rules of his innate world-view: a lonely world without the company of other chimpanzees, but one where certain needs can be met, such as climbing and swinging. In his house, Looee is territorial and lets 'no one cross his threshold unless he really liked them' (93). With this territorialised space, the relationship that Looee has with humans becomes blurred and the categories that the humans have put in place become messy – to use Haraway's phrase. A family friend, Larry, arrives early for a Christmas party and Looee becomes suspicious of his presence. I quote extensively from the following section in order to explore this human/nonhuman animal encounter and how power, territory and otherness are represented.

As Judy and Larry enter Looee's enclosure,

> there was the warmth of alcohol on their breath, the warmth of distant light – and Looee felt immediately removed from both. Concrete at his feet and at his back. Larry and Judy had gathered affection as they had walked to Looee's door, and Looee mistakenly sensed it as affection for each other rather than for him. Judy didn't notice when he made a quizzical noise.
> I shouldn't leave the candles burning she said. She touched Larry's arm and said will you come and help me for a second.
> Looee watched them leave and pull the steel door behind them. He didn't trust their movements tonight and didn't understand why Larry wasn't staying longer. He stared at the door and listened. He couldn't hear them walking away or talking and thought they were just outside his door. Hiding and whispering secrets. He banged on the door but they wouldn't open it. He banged again and got angry (176).

Later, Larry enters Looee's room and props the door open to spend time with him, as he has done many times before, and 'They drank. Looee wasn't looking at Larry, and Larry wasn't comfortable sitting close to him. There was a prickliness to Looee, and it felt like they were staring forward like rivals at a bar' (177). Larry comments that Looee is in a bad mood, but 'Larry seemed equally confrontational to Looee. He looked at the open door and was all the more confused' (177). When Larry bids him goodnight 'Looee jumped at him and pulled him by the arm' (178). This understated sentence has power when it is understood that Looee is so strong that he has broken the man's arm.

Judy's husband Walt arrives home to find Larry and Judy maimed – Larry with a broken arm and one of his buttocks bitten off and Judy with a hand missing, her face disfigured. Walt finds Looee

> sitting in a corner of the living room, his eyes slow blinking and brown. As the ambulance raced towards them through a horizontal snowstorm, Walt chased Looee the two of them screaming into a corner of Looee's house where Looee cowered and hugged himself. Walt had his rifle and aimed it at Looee while the paramedics took Larry out of the room. Larry remembered nothing. Walt couldn't imagine the creature that was taken away. Tranquilizers and game wardens. Was he screaming or muttering his own weird story, that animal they found. […] Why can't a man turn his back on his son (178-179).

The final question in this scene is an interesting one. Despite Walt's apparent inability to turn his back on his son, Walt *does* disown Looee, who is sent to The Girdish Institute and never sees Walt or Judy again. If Looee was human, he would also be incarcerated for his actions. Human incarceration does not usually include clinical trials resulting in permanent physical and psychological damage, however. Judy will remain disfigured for life, but after the initial point of violence, will slowly heal physically and emotionally. By contrast, Looee will be subject to painful experimentation, disease and a cramped cage for the next twenty years, the subject of medical tests to his decline. This is the most blatant example of interspecies disconnection in the book – the pivotal moment where human and animal territories collide, power dynamics shift and both species retreat to familiar territory. Norris' theory of human and animal violence can be applied to this scene, which depicts Looee enacting immediate and violent creatural retribution and the humans resorting to long term, and equally violent cultural punishment. As Norris argues, 'exchanges between natural and cultural life has its most disturbing consequences in connection with the redefinition of human violence' (Norris 1985, 9).

Looee is removed from Judy and Walt's home and taken to a section of the Girdish Institute nicknamed 'The Congo' for the lack of light in the facility and the secrecy of its experiments. The reference to the Congo also nods to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a novel often used as an example of fictional representation of colonisation and othering. In the research facilities, Looee encounters his own species for the first time since infancy, describing them as 'dogpeople'. He 'awoke to the smell of nothing and a dogperson sitting in a close dark corner of his cage. He sprang and screamed and banged his hands and feet on the cage to scare the creature away' (McAdam 2013a, 194). In this encounter, Looee is confronted with the horror of his own otherness: he sees the chimpanzee as he himself has been seen by humans, and the horror is almost insurmountable.

Physically, Looee may be similar to the other chimpanzees at the institute, and they may even share a history of being kidnapped and raised by humans, but he has been taught that looking and behaving like a human is correct, and looking and behaving like a chimpanzee is incorrect. He faces a kind of purgatory in the confrontation with self, where everything he has been taught is put into question by the reality of his own species.

McAdam addresses the shock of the other from the perspective of the nonhuman animal, in which encounter is portrayed with horror, then familiarity and then denial – a repressing representation, to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari's term (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). In the cages:

> Both were shivering like orphans in an alley. They wouldn't look each other in the eye. Looee hit the cage with the back of his arms and Dusty had nowhere to go. He wouldn't look at Looee but was grinning in fear. Looee saw the grin, saw it as fear instead of a caricature of an ugly man's smile. He understood Dusty for a moment, and then reverted to understanding nothing (McAdam 2013a, 194-195).

This glimpse of understanding, followed by a state of confusion is mirrored in Judy and Walt's reaction to parenting Looee, and then later in the field section at Girdish. McAdam appears to use this repetition of encounter to show similarity between human and animal others, rather than difference. Indeed, the book trailer for *A Beautiful Truth* focuses on this point, depicting footage of a chimpanzee completing a series of tasks on a computer screen. The text accompanying the trailer reads:

> Genetically we have more in common with the chimpanzee than a spinner dolphin does with a bottle nose dolphin, or a red eyed vireo does with a blue eyed vireo. Two related birds with different color eyes. It's a 98% DNA match. We are not descended from apes. We are apes (McAdam 2013c).

A Beautiful Truth confronts the perverse and complex issues of human intervention in nonhuman animal lives, where one ape (human) invades another

(chimpanzee). This provides a challenge to the notion of de- and reterritorialisation. How can a body, which has been invaded, be reclaimed? If Looee's body has been effectively remade into human commercial territory by being leased by a pharmaceutical company, how does the process of de- and reterritorialisation occur? I pose these questions without seeking to answer them in the scope of this paper; rather, they are theorisations of the questions that the novel raises.

Challenging Territory

After years of experimentation on his body, Looee once again becomes other when he is moved from The Congo and introduced to the established community of chimpanzees housed in the field research section of Girdish, headed by a human researcher called Dave. The field section is described by the collective chimpanzee voice as The World: 'The World needs fruit. The World needs sleep. The World needs touch and the quick pink heat' (McAdam 2013a, 12). It is soon apparent that this is the voice of a group of chimpanzees, the collective noun for which is a 'cartload' – interesting to note, given the fact that these are animals that have effectively been kidnapped. The voice that McAdam employs for this section is present tense and unconventionally syntaxed, revealing the inner world of the non-human characters:

> Dave was full of questions.
> ? What does Ghoul want.
> ? What is name-of this which-is black.
> And Ghoul had to answer in a certain way or Dave would not understand.
> Banana give Ghoul which-is black.
> That is not right.
> Please machine give Ghoul banana which-is black (ibid., 19-21).

McAdam expands on his use of language in an interview, in which he explains that he 'wanted to look as roundly and honestly as I could at chimpanzees and

tease out from that what it means to be an ape. I'm an ape. You're an ape. We're all great apes, but we don't have a language for that I think. The book was my attempt to find a language for that' (McAdam 2013b). Where English language is inadequate, McAdam supplies his own, with words such as 'yek' to describe Looee's otherness; 'oe', a term to indicate a blissful sense of peace and security; and '¡harag!' to indicate an almost violent excitement. These terms are used exclusively by the characters in the chimpanzee community of Girdish. This has the effect of bringing the reader into the voice and mind of the other. A number of contemporary novels (not to mention poetry, such as Les Murray's *Translations from the Natural World* [1992]) use this technique, including *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (2008) by Garth Stein, told through the perspective of a dog, and *The White Bone* (1999) by Barbara Gowdy, told in the collective voice of a herd of elephants.

The World of the field section of the Girdish Institute is cramped, passionate and violent, dominated by food, sleep and sex, along with the ever shifting battle for male supremacy over the group. The other in this world view is human – a controlling, yet very foreign body. Mr. Ghoul, a chimpanzee who has been at the institute long enough to remember times when the humans would smoke with him, reward him if he used a computer and occasionally beat him with sticks, is the primary voice in these sections. Humans are presented as violent and confusing, with occasional acts of kindness: 'Sometimes the people were good and he would walk with them down the hall and hold their hand' (McAdam 2013a, 19). When Mr Ghoul first encounters Looee, he describes him as 'the yek' – indicating Looee's alterity. Mr Ghoul watches as 'a yek appears. He walks oddly. Mr Ghoul sits. He doesn't challenge the yek. He watches […] The yek doesn't move or make a sound. He is black in the corner […] There is no fear in that room. Mr. Ghoul stares at him' (ibid., 238). In describing Looee as a 'yek', Looee is at once other and also similar. A recognisable otherness.

While Mr Ghoul accepts Looee, the rest of the chimpanzees in The World struggle with the change. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, psychoanalytic philosopher Julia Kristeva describes the meeting with the stranger as 'a choked up rage deep down in my throat […] the image of hatred and of the other' (Kristeva 1991, 1). McAdam portrays a similar reaction in the field section of Girdish. One of the chimpanzees watches Looee enjoying the sun, thinking of him as 'A foreigner [who] takes our jobs and our women. He has greasy hair, kinky hair, blond hair and no hair, smells like armpits and cumin, patchouli and Ralph Lauren, and I swear I can smell his ass. […] We used to know everyone here' (McAdam 2013a, 281). In contrast, Looee 'sees a dogperson running at him and it looks like he won't stop. It's the crazy one who lost a tooth. He gets hit and is scared despite feeling that he shouldn't be afraid of these animals. He cowers while he is hit, and then runs' (ibid., 246-247). Disassociation between nonhuman primates who have spent their lives with humans, even in cruel situations, is common. In The Centre for Great Apes in Florida, I met a chimpanzee who was housed separately from other chimpanzees because she couldn't accept living with animals. She had been exposed to human culture to such a degree that the creatural was incomprehensible to her and beyond curiosity. She seemed a lonely figure in a separate enclosure, unable to exist in the human world because of her nonhuman strength and otherness, and unable to exist in the chimpanzee world because of her over-exposure to human culture.

After the death of a benevolent alpha male, the community of chimpanzees in the field centre is in disarray – ruled by two violent alpha males. The introduction of Looee to the group brings about change, in that 'the presence of the yek is a brief new perspective, a momentary catalyst for correcting the state of the World. Soon there is a fight involving six of them' (247). The notion of de- and reterritorialised space can be applied to the sections of McAdam's book set in

The World. For example, on arriving at the field research section, Looee feels that:

> For these, his past, and most of the rest of his days, he does not know where he is. A diplomat's son. He is not Looee. He is not a number. He is not he without others to need and define him. There is a truth in every corner of Girdish. Every ape has a home and leaves it; every ape is lost without other apes (249).

This loss of country is also akin to the concept of the foreigner. Looee is a foreigner in his own body – unable to rectify his human experiences with his nonhuman physicality; his animal reactions with the human punishment; his animal companions with his human memories. However, the community in the field research area are equally without country. Though they have thoroughly territorialised their space, and are largely left to their own lives – within the confines of the sanctuary and where food, shelter and medicines are available – almost all of the chimpanzees have experienced life under intensive human intervention and have trouble leaving these memories behind. As well as Looee's history, which spans most of the novel, Mr Ghoul's history is also revealed as that of a chimpanzee used to research the possibilities of interspecies communication. After this research is defunded and abandoned, he still attempts to communicate with Looee using a symbols chart to 'lazily, autistically, [point] at the symbols for up and window and vodka, meaning that when the bed is up you can look through the windows at the moon' (249). Referring back to Deleuze's and Guattari's signs, Ghoul's relationship with his old self is with a deterritorialised space, one that he hasn't quite moved on from.

Looee is also stuck between worlds. Despite being disfigured by cage life in the lab, he climbs to the top of a tree in the research wing and makes the same sounds that he made in the trees when living with Judy and Walt. Looee

> moans and snaps and coughs and eats and speaks a language almost human. Pentecostal kitchen gossip. Brandy swoons and lonely comfort and orgasms baffled by swells of new delight.
> He is calling for someone.
> Laughing.
> He stops and hools that song from where beginnings and endings join. ¡Hooooooooooooooo!
> He's eating spaghetti with meatsauce.
> ¡Whoo!
> Friends too far to hear him (289).

While Looee is depicted as finally free amongst his species, there is a melancholy to this final scene, as he calls for Judy and Walt, who are far away both in distance and in their unwillingness to ever see him again. The incarcerated Looee holds the guilt at his creatural violence and is punished for it, while Judy and Walt's cultural guilt goes unpunished.

Conclusion

One of the great successes of *A Beautiful Truth* is McAdam's replication and even-handed depiction of the imbalance imbued in human/nonhuman animal relationships. The complexities of human and nonhuman behaviour are portrayed through the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of bodies and domestic spaces, and the tension builds as the boundaries between human and animal are blurred. McAdam shows where domestic territory shared across species fails. Although the immediate victims are the human characters of Judy, Larry and Walt, the ultimate victim is Looee. He is forcibly removed from his original Sierra Leonean jungle territory and given a new space. Then, when he brings the animal-instinctual into human domestic territory, he is taken away to the Girdish Institute. At this point the notion of domestic territory moves from the human home and depictions of Looee as a body in that home, to Looee's body leased to a pharmaceutical company.

In *A Beautiful Truth*, mechanical process is aligned with loss, for both humans and other animals. A veterinarian in one of the scenes in the research laboratory is dissecting another deceased chimpanzee in the section where Looee is housed, and sees his hands inside the animal's body and loses 'all sense of whose hands they were' (McAdam 2013a, 216). Due to the effects of repeated ketamine injections, Looee also loses sense of his hands, and attacks them regularly. McAdam regularly visited a chimpanzee sanctuary in Montreal to research his book and describes an interaction with a male chimpanzee who spat water on him in order to make it clear that he wanted a bottle of Gatorade. McAdam says that the chimpanzee's

> struggle was to communicate his desire to get that thing. First it began with play and then it escalated and became more desperate and when he finally got what he wanted he reasserted his authority by dinging the water bottle at my head. As I stood there humiliated, I also stood there with open eyes, thinking all the stuff that I'd read to that point about our genetic and immunological relationship with chimpanzees is there in a nutshell. I've been thinking of human life since those times as ape life. As an interplay between individuals wanting something and other individuals either arbitrating or providing (McAdam 2013d).

McAdam's views align him with Despret's theories of animal agency; however, his novel also points to the fact that there is a big difference between human and nonhuman agency. Despite the correlations that McAdam continues to draw, the separation between cultural and creatural always becomes clear: at the end of the day the veterinarian is able to leave the institute, Looee is not, and will not for the remainder of his life in the book.

McAdam's portrayal of the similarities between human and chimpanzee primates is Darwinian in its attempt to 'collapse' (Norris 1985, 3) difference. Norris argues that, by contrast, 'Hegel made the function of the "other" in human desire the cornerstone of the symbolic life that marks the radical distinction between Nature and culture' (ibid., 3). For Norris, biocentrism allows the traditional view of nonhuman animals' deficient lack (in intelligence, ability and

power) to be instead prescribed to humans, in which 'it is cultural man, rather, who is engendered by an imaginary lack that gives birth to desire, language, intersubjectivity, social life, that is, the entire Lacanian Symbolic Order that is governed by the "other"' (3-4).

Is the overarching message to *A Beautiful Truth* (for it is certainly a novel with a strong moral compass) that we should leave nonhuman animals alone? In terms of territorial engagement, the depiction of human domination is not one of invasion as such (at least, not at first) but of bringing the nonhuman into the human space. McAdam shows how this can work (to a degree) in a human/baby chimpanzee relationship, as long as the chimpanzee behaves as a human – as much as this is possible. When Looee returns to chimpanzee nature, he his punished and his body effectively taken from him. The Girdish Institute is described by one of the characters as a 'perverse abattoir where the animals were efficiently denied their death' (McAdam 2013a, 216). It is also a space that takes human territorialisation to a level where other bodies are, as Plumwood suggests, resources to be owned, manipulated and discarded. Norris also argues that in terms of biocentric thinking, 'mimesis acquires a negative value as inimical to the animal's power and to the body's life. Mimesis is the negative mark, the mark of absence, castration, and death' (Norris 1985, 5). In the theorisation of *A Beautiful Truth*, the territorial mark (index or sign) described in Deleuze and Guattari's and Norris' notions is that of Looee's ruined body at the hands of human intervention, and Looee is left in a between state of motion and de- and reterritorialisation. If McAdam's intention was to show how badly human love for another animal can go, it has been starkly realised in *A Beautiful Truth*.

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