

Human Violence and Eating Animals: Reading Gaétan Soucy through the lenses of Animal and Vegan Studies

Scott Powers

Numéro 119, 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086333ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086333ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Department of French, Dalhousie University

ISSN

0711-8813 (imprimé)

2562-8704 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Powers, S. (2021). Human Violence and Eating Animals: Reading Gaétan Soucy through the lenses of Animal and Vegan Studies. *Dalhousie French Studies*, (119), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086333ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet essai examine le végétarisme et le traitement des animaux dans *L'Immaculée Conception* et *Music-Hall!* de Gaétan Soucy comme faisant partie d'une réflexion innovatrice sur la violence entre humains. Dans ces romans, l'emploi peu conventionnel du zoomorphisme et de l'anthropomorphisme qui établit la sentience et l'agentivité des animaux place ceux-ci au centre de la réflexion morale en vue de dénoncer les violences de l'anthropocentrisme. En s'appuyant sur des théoriciens des études animales et véganes, cet essai se propose de montrer que les ouvrages de Soucy présentent les animaux et les groupes minoritaires humains comme ayant un agresseur commun: le patriarcat et ses nombreux avatars. Par une mise en exergue de nombreux rapprochements dans les récits des victimes animales et humaines de l'agression masculine, cette étude met au jour une dénonciation de l'industrie et de la consommation de la viande, lesquelles perpétuent un ordre social hiérarchique qui prend pour victimes les animaux, les femmes, les enfants et les pauvres. À l'inverse, les récits prônent le respect des animaux comme le geste suprême de non-violence, et le végétarisme comme une conscience autocritique et foncièrement éthique qui rompt avec les comportements violents au fondement de la civilisation occidentale.

Human Violence and Eating Animals: Reading Gaétan Soucy through the lenses of Animal and Vegan Studies

Scott Powers

As physical and mental abuse, rape, torture, and murder are prevalent in the works of Gaétan Soucy, scholars have rightfully drawn attention to the theme of violence therein.¹ What has gone largely unnoticed, however, is the relationship in Soucy's narratives between violence among humans and eating meat. In his most celebrated novel, *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* (1998), an important component of the narrator's feminist utopia is vegetarianism. In envisioning a future for her unborn daughter in which men are absent, Alice imagines a peaceful existence founded not on the cruel exploitation and killing of animals, but on the cultivation and consumption of various plants and the milk of pet goats: "Personne ne viendrait mettre ses sales sabots dans notre existence avec ses couilles. On se nourrirait du lait des chèvres, des légumes et des herbes qui sont la paix sur terre, ou de champignons de ma connaissance, on ne passerait pas notre temps à assassiner des animaux pour se goinfrer de leurs cadavres qui ne nous ont rien fait" (177-78). The narrator's vegetarianism, as a response to male aggression toward living creatures, stems from her acute awareness of animals' ability to feel pain. In beholding the pathetic vision of partridges set afire by her brother, Alice comes to the realization that birds suffer just like humans "[Les perdrix] s'affolaient, c'est humain" (43). While vegetarianism as an ethical position emerges only in the conclusion of *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*, it constitutes a primary theme in Soucy's lengthiest and most complex narratives: *L'Immaculée Conception* (1994) and *Music-Hall!* (2002). What's more, the ubiquity of animals in the novels' urban settings strongly indicates that animals are not mere objects of the mise-en-scène. Through the lenses of animal and vegan studies, this essay will examine vegetarianism and the treatment of animals in Soucy's lesser known novels as part of a larger, innovative commentary on violence among humans.

If Soucy's other novels have not enjoyed the same scholarly attention as *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*, this is due in large part to their convoluted narratives that seem deliberately to thwart interpretation. In contrast to *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*'s single and linear plotline, *L'Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!* are characterized by a plethora of characters, a proliferation of subplots, and constant manipulation of event order. Marie-Lyne Piccione states that the very "mission" of *L'Immaculée Conception* is to lead the reader astray: "Le récit où s'entrechoquent données réalistes et notations fantastiques, précisions spatiales et confusions temporelles, semble, en effet, s'être donné pour mission de fourvoyer le narrataire, égaré au milieu d'une foule de personnages intermittents et d'intrigues secondaires qui se croisent sans vraiment se rencontrer, au hasard d'une diégèse diabolique, fertile en soubresauts" (159).² Jeffrey Orr presents *Music-Hall!* as "involv[ing] the reader in a process of puzzling out

1. Studies on violence in Soucy's fiction have focused primarily on *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*. See especially Ève Boutantin's "Des écritures de la violence : *Trou de mémoire*, *La Rage* et *La Petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*" and Lauren Choplin's "'This Gospel of my Hell: the Narration of Violence in Gaétan Soucy's *The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond of Matches*."

2. On the enigmatic nature of *L'Immaculée Conception*, see also Nicolas Xanthos's "Le vaste plan et l'incompréhension du pêcheur : forme et signification de l'énigme dans *L'Immaculée Conception* de Gaétan Soucy."

ultimately inconclusive possible meanings” (282). Frances Fortier similarly describes the novel as assailing the reader with countless indecipherable images: “Le lecteur [est] contamment bombardé d’images hétéroclites qu’il ne sait trop comment décoder” (175).³ I hope that by examining Soucy’s depiction of animals and their relationships to humans, this essay will meet some of the interpretive challenges that these works pose.

A primary objective of animal studies is to place into question the putative human/animal divide that has fueled the anthropocentrism at the foundation of western civilization.⁴ Leading theorists from biology and philosophy to literary criticism underscore common traits between humans and other animals, namely a shared dwelling space, a state of vulnerability with respect to famine, disease and death, the capacity to suffer, and intentionality. In rejecting the supremacy of the human (Cartesian) subject at the core of western philosophy, scholars such as Matthew Calarco, Alan Bleakley, Anat Pick, Anne Simon, Giorgio Agamben, Lucile Desblache, Louisa Mackenzie, and Stephanie Posthumus promote post-humanist inquiries into humans’ interactions with other animals. These studies often involve denouncing as a tragic consequence of anthropocentrism the deplorable living conditions and the slaughter of millions of animals each year in the global meat processing industry. In their critique of speciesism, many animal studies theorists have also related the privileging of the human over the non-human to systems of oppression (racial, gendered, etc.) among human groups.⁵

The still nascent discipline of vegan studies builds from both animal studies and ecofeminism by relating the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment including animals to the oppression of women and other marginalized groups. Carol J. Adams’ feminist-vegetarian critical theory, developed in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, argues that “feminist theory logically contains a vegetarian critique that has gone unperceived, just as vegetarianism covertly challenges a patriarchal society” (27). In denouncing the violence and discrimination inherent in patriarchal societies that are largely predicated on the domination of animals and consumption of meat, a feminist vegetarianism advocates an alternative world order that promotes “organic unity rather than disjunction, harvest rather than violence, living in harmony rather than having domain over [others]” (201). In *Through a Vegan Studies Lens*, Laura Wright lays the groundwork for a vegan approach to literary texts that “see[s] the enmeshed oppressions—of the land, the animals, and the people—as necessarily inherently linked and mutually reinforcing” (xiv). This approach highlights narratives that present the vegan diet as “disruptive of a capitalist system that is largely dependent on big agriculture” (xvi). By leaning on animal and vegan studies theory, my intent is to highlight ways in which *L’Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!* present the (mis-)treatment of animals as co-extensive with human rights.⁶

While it would be an arduous task to give a comprehensive synopsis of the numerous characters and subplots of these lengthiest and most complex of Soucy’s novels, a brief summary is warranted before turning to the animals within.⁷ *L’Immaculée*

-
3. Though Soucy’s *L’Acquittement* is not studied in this essay, the interpretive challenges that it poses have been discussed at length by Nicolas Xanthos in “Déjouer: imaginaires de la fiction romanesque dans *Les failles de l’Amérique* et *L’Acquittement*.”
 4. For a presentation of animal studies as a subversion of anthropocentrism, and as a path to “post-human” studies, see Cary Wolfe’s “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities.”
 5. See especially Mackenzie and Posthumus’s introduction in *French Thinking About Animals* for a summary of thought on associations between speciesism and social oppression, xvi.
 6. I do not make a distinction in this paper between “vegan” and “vegetarian” as both terms denote diets that, in excluding the consumption of animal meat, can be understood as resisting the mistreatment of animals.
 7. For questions of length, this essay does not include the treatment of animals in *L’Acquittement*, and will only refer to *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* on occasion. I have chosen to focus on *L’Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!* because their urban setting renders the presence and treatment of animals

Conception is a remarkably dark story set in early twentieth-century Montréal, the plot of which gravitates around two gruesome series of events. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that in his adolescence Remouald, a thirty-three-year-old bank clerk, had an eight-year-old sister who was brutally murdered by a young man (Wilson) out of jealousy for their sibling affection. Remouald learns of the murder only after eating parts of his sister's body in a stew prepared by Wilson. The second series of events involves the drugging and rape of two neighborhood ladies by a fire chief. What's more, the latter invites adolescent boys to take part in the heinous crimes.

Music-Hall! recounts the misadventures of Xavier Mortanse, an eighteen-year-old immigrant purportedly from Hungary who works for a building demolition team in New York City in the months leading up to the 1929 stock market crash. Both shy and unworldly, Xavier nonetheless befriends an outgoing mortician named Peggy who takes him under her wing and introduces him to popular entertainment, notably the music halls. Through a number of encounters with malevolent characters and a series of unfortunate events that lead to the suffering and death of others, Xavier apprehends the dark and cruel nature of the modern city. Reminiscent of Bardamu's observations of human behavior in Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, Xavier arrives at the conclusion, that "les personnes [...] viennent de la nuit" (388). Before his death, Xavier learns that he is not from Hungary, but from Montréal, that his original name was Vincent, and that he had died but was "resurrected" by his mother's spurned lover, a Frankenstein figure who stitched together the body parts of six deceased souls. What first appeared to be Xavier's memories were formed, rather, from various photographs, hand-written letters, and newspaper clippings that Xavier discovered in the hours following his return from the dead.

Zoomorphism and Anthropomorphism in *L'Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!*

In *L'Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!* animals are referenced on nearly every page. Despite their urban settings, everything and anything is compared to an array of animal species.⁸ While it is common for writers to employ zoomorphisms on occasion to describe human characters, the sheer number of instances in Soucy's fiction has the effect of blurring the lines between humans and other animals. Moreover, the incessant recourse to animal descriptions to portray people privileges animals as the ultimate point of reference for understanding human behavior. Soucy's treatment of animals fits squarely within the indistinction approach in animal studies that, as described by Matthew Calarco, explores ways in which humans are like animals, and indeed are animals (5). What is equally important, as Calarco explains, is that the underscoring of animal attributes in humans also draws attention to the sentience and agency of non-human animals (5).

exceptionally salient. What's more, an examination of Soucy's first and last novels can effectively highlight themes that span the length of the writer's literary opus.

8. While my focus in this essay is on the use of zoomorphisms that, in describing human characters, draw attention to animal sentience, it should be noted that animal references are ubiquitous in Soucy's fiction and describe a variety of human and non-human phenomena. For example, in *L'Immaculée Conception*, one character's knitting is described as the web of a crazed spider, the brisk wind as "un vaste frisson de jument," a threatening sky as "un ventre de mouche prêt à pondre," the sound of departing trains as a "plainte de bête," and the dilapidated buildings of Montréal as "des animaux échoués dans les sables du désert" (20, 88, 276, 280). Animals even become the referents of other animals. A mouse that escapes human foot traffic wriggles away in the manner of a tadpole (127). The head of a slaughtered horse resembles a frog turned inside out (38). In *Music-Hall!* beams of light filtered through the panes of a chapel's red stained-glass form the shape of a "carcasse ouverte d'un cheval pendu" (40). When Lazare, Xavier's foreman, witnesses his father's murder, he perceives the blood flow as "une couleuvre [qui] se tortill[e]" (171). A bird's eye view of New York City casts tramways as maybugs, automobiles as an ant colony, and pedestrians as buzzing insects (207).

As is quite common across literary traditions, human characters are compared to animals in order to accentuate a personality trait. In Soucy, images of suffering animals are employed most often to convey human anguish and physical torment. In *L'Immaculée Conception*, such is the case in descriptions of Remouald's tense relationship with his ageing step-father, Séraphon. In the narrative present, Remouald, who lives with and takes care of the octogenarian, must endure the latter's relentless emotional abuse. To illustrate Remouald's repetitive and utterly unsuccessful attempts to dodge Séraphon's aggressive jabs, the narrator likens the nervous twitching of Remouald's arms to a cow's tail desperately swatting at biting flies (34). To convey Séraphon's intimidation of his step-son, the narrator vividly describes Remouald as a piece of animal meat, roasted in a pit, his rind slowly cracking under the pressure of the fire's heat (34). In a flashback, to underscore Remouald's psychologic trauma in the wake of eating his sister, the narrator casts the adolescent as a frightened and wounded bird (136). As an illustration of his keen inquisitiveness, Remouald's struggle with the concept of nothingness is likened to a dog that strangles itself when it reaches the length of its leash (201). In *Music-Hall!* Xavier's anguished soul is conveyed through comparison with a fearful rabbit (71). When his friend Peggy perishes in a housefire, she pants and howls in the manner of a dog (174). In the second half of the novel Xavier, after having lost his job as demolisher, is employed at a music hall to perform various tasks at his boss's behest. When forced to fight against a champion boxer, he is beaten almost to the point of blackout. His intense physical torment is illustrated through the spectacle of an abused duck whose feathers were plucked from its body, and that has been bludgeoned and thrown into the boxing ring. As he attempts to pull himself off the trampoline and onto his four "paws" ("pattes"), Xavier sees his double in the pathetic image of the tortured duck, desperately quacking and shaking before him: "Quelqu'un lança sur le trampoline un canard déplumé, et Xavier, qui se remettait péniblement à quatre pattes, voyait sous son nez le canard aussi assommé que lui. La volaille secouait ses moignons en lâchant des coin-coin éperdus. Xavier en eut volontiers fait autant" (299).

Whereas zoomorphisms are widely used in literature to cast characters in a negative light, Soucy's novels often liken characters to animals conversely to accentuate human intelligence and mental activity.⁹ In *L'Immaculée Conception*, Sarah, a young mute girl that Remouald's boss asks him to babysit, is able to communicate to Remouald through her eyes. Sarah's eyes, in the manner of an owl's, speak a superior, more transparent language: "Remouald commençait à comprendre le langage de ses yeux, et bien souvent c'était plus clair pour lui que si elle lui avait parlé avec des mots. Les yeux de Sarah, comme ceux des chouettes, donnaient à voir ce qu'ils voyaient" (254). When Remouald's traumatic past is triggered by the smell of wet ash, the memory that takes hold of his mental faculties is likened to a wild animal liberated from its cage, as well as to a spider that dominates its web: "Mais la rumeur resurgit, et cette fois-ci elle était dans son crâne; telle une bête féroce dont on a ouvert la cage, elle avait bondi à l'intérieur de lui. Remouald sentit des gouffres s'ouvrir, et il recula. [...] Il finit par s'immobiliser [...], à la merci de la Mémoire, souveraine comme l'araignée au centre de sa toile" (132). At times, animals even become signs of the ephemeral and intangible, and therefore manifest as an opening onto the numinous. In a forceful example, while engaged in philosophical conversation with the adolescent Remouald, the parish priest is dumbstruck by the look in Remouald's eyes, which he apprehends as the visual manifestation of the adolescent's very soul. The narrator describes Father Cadorette's reaction in apprehending the soul's

9. In his study of literary anthropomorphism and zoomorphism entitled "Entre l'écrit et l'image, l'animal de fiction, un homme travesti," Janick Auberge states: "L'anthropomorphisme est plus inoffensif que le zoomorphisme [...]. Presque toujours, la métamorphose de l'homme devenu animal est une régression, une chute" (137).

sudden apparition in Remouald's eyes as that of a cat: "Cadorette ne lui avait jamais connu un tel regard. De l'âme qui vous sautait au visage comme un chat" (216). The appreciation of animals as a source of spiritual inquiry resonates with discussions of neototemism in animal studies, such as Alan Bleakley's advocacy of a "deep noticing" of creatures as a way to regain a notion of the sacred (108-09).

In *Music-Hall!* characters' superior mental facilities are similarly conveyed through descriptions of animal intelligence and sentience. Proud of his sense of direction, Xavier claims to have "une cervelle d'oiseau" (41). Nicknamed Le Philosophe because he is gifted with a keen intuition, Xavier's friend and co-worker possesses an "instinct taurin" (27). Oftentimes, Xavier's mental anguish is illustrated through descriptions of animal sentience. When Xavier is panic-stricken by Peggy's gruesome death, the narrator likens his agony to a mouse running frantically in its wheel (178). Xavier's relentless conjuring of images of Peggy's charred body is compared to the excruciating torment of cats cast into boiling water (179). As animal studies theorists are quick to point out, the anthropocentrism at the foundation of western thought has conveniently dismissed animals' intelligence and capacity to suffer. In this regard, it can be said that Soucy's literary imagination not only restores animals' experience, but in fact privileges them as a benchmark to illustrate human thoughts, skills, and emotions. What's more, Soucy's zoomorphisms highlight the vulnerabilities that humans share with other animals. As Anat Pick explains in *Creaturely Poetics*, recognizing humans' and other animals' common nature, namely that all living beings are "material, temporal, and vulnerable," constitutes the foundation of "a dominant thread within animal studies [that] extend[s] moral consideration to animals" (2, 5).

In *L'Immaculée Conception*, the arresting juxtaposition of Remouald's eyes and those of a raccoon illustrates the rich and complex relationship between humans and animals in Soucy's fiction. In a passage that constitutes a diary entry, the neighborhood elementary school principal describes his first encounter with Remouald. Captivated by the look in Remouald's eyes, Frère Grandon perceives Remouald to be unusually intelligent: "Tout à coup, j'ai entrevu, l'espace d'un éclair, au fond de ses yeux, une lueur d'intelligence inattendue, suraiguë, surprenante" (69). The flash of light in Remouald's eyes that manifests as the sign of brilliance immediately reminds the principal of a memory at the zoo. In this memory, as he beholds the spectacle of a raccoon whose paw was trapped in the grating of its cage, Frère Grandon becomes overwhelmed by the animal's gaze:

La bête m'a observé, et ce regard m'a bouleversé. Qu'est-ce que c'était? J'avais la sensation très claire qu'à l'intérieur de ces prunelles animales *il y avait quelqu'un*. Je me suis redressé, sans pouvoir continuer. Le raton laveur me regardait de manière implorante. Mon cœur battait de pitié pour lui, mais je ne pouvais plus rien, j'étais paralysé. Il me semble que l'employé de banque m'avait causé un émoi semblable. (69, emphasis is Soucy's)

In this example of mutual reflexivity, Remouald's subjectivity is heightened through comparison to an animal, and vice-versa. Just as the visual manifestation of Remouald's intelligence reminds Frère Grandon of the raccoon's imploring gaze, the animal's subjectivity is recognized in turn by the principal apprehending it as "quelqu'un," a term that typically denotes a human referent.

The animal's gaze ("ce regard") as the active agent in this passage has a destabilizing effect on the human visitor. Both Frère Grandon's sense of vulnerability in being observed by another being ("la bête m'a observé"), and the specifically imploring look of the animal in distress ("de manière implorante"), demonstrate two ways in which animal presence has the potential to disrupt anthropocentric prejudice. In a passage of *L'animal que donc je suis* often quoted by animal studies scholars, Jacques Derrida

elaborates on the destabilizing effect of the animal's gaze as an unsettling ("une gêne") and as a sign of the Other ("une existence rebelle à tout concept") (18-28). The overwhelming and paralyzing effect of the raccoon's stare ("ce regard m'a bouleversé [...] j'étais paralysé") incites the human onlooker to recognize the presence of an other ("il y avait quelqu'un"). Since the trapped creature eyes Frère Grandon "de manière implorante," it would seem that in this case the heightened effect of the animal's gaze is inextricably associated with the raccoon's suffering. Derrida's description of one's immediate and visceral reaction to an animal's fear and suffering informs the principal's reaction:

Personne ne peut nier la souffrance, la peur ou la panique, la terreur ou l'effroi qui peut s'emparer de certains animaux, et dont nous, les hommes, nous pouvons témoigner. [...] À la question « *Can they suffer?* », la réponse ne fait aucun doute; c'est pourquoi l'expérience que nous en avons n'est même pas indubitable: elle précède l'indubitable, elle est plus vieille que lui. Point de doute, non plus, pour la possibilité alors, en nous, d'un élan de compassion, même s'il est ensuite méconnu, refoulé ou dénié (49-50).¹⁰

Correspondingly, in Soucy's fiction the images of suffering animals recurrently trigger an "élan de compassion," and thereby underscore animal subject positions.

Alongside cases of zoomorphism, instances of anthropomorphism appear throughout the two novels. While anthropomorphism is generally scrutinized by literary scholars and biologists alike as a figure of rhetoric that obscures an animal's true nature, animal studies theorists have conversely emphasized the potential of anthropomorphism in understanding animals. By facilitating empathy, anthropomorphism can be an effective tool in questioning anthropocentrism.¹¹ For this reason, Anne Simon asserts that "tous les anthropomorphismes ne se valent pas" (77). Simon argues that what are commonly perceived to be examples of anthropomorphism function rather to underscore characteristics that humans share with other animals.¹² Likewise, in Soucy's fiction what may appear to be examples anthropomorphism serve rather to draw attention to genuine animal sentience. A clear example can be found near the beginning of the novel, when Remouald walks through the ruins of the Grill aux Alouettes, a neighborhood bar that recently burned. In considering the fate of the cockroaches that inhabited the building's cracks and crevasses, he imagines an insect's perspective:

Il pensait que les coquerelles devaient avoir leur perception du monde, originale et cohérente. Et il frémissait à l'idée que cette réalité monstrueuse, dans son ordre propre, valait sûrement la réalité que lui-même percevait. Sa réalité n'était pas plus vraie, sans doute pas plus complexe, que celle que voyaient les coquerelles. Il se retenait parfois pour ne pas crier d'horreur. Elles avaient dû périr comme les autres, les femmes, les hommes, les souris, les rats. (23)

In this example of psycho-narration, it could be argued that Remouald's imagining cockroaches as possessing a "coherent and original perception of the world" approaches anthropomorphism. The passage nonetheless counters anthropocentrism by recognizing

10. The italics and English are in the original text.

11. For a discussion of the ethical import of critical anthropomorphism, see Fredrik Karlsson's "Critical Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics" and Bryan Moore's "Anthropomorphism as Ecocentric Argument in American Literature" (47). In *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, Sherryl Vint has argued that the ostensible fallacies of anthropomorphism have served in fact as "an alibi for human (mis)behavior toward [animals]" (13).

12. Simon reminds us that "l'humain n'est pas 'purement' anthropomorphique, mais [...] il est aussi primatomorphique, mamomorphique et plus généralement biomorphique" (77).

the insects' way of apprehending the world and their reaction to phenomena not as inferior to Remouald's, but as equally true ("vraie") and complex ("complexe"). What's more, in a striking anti-hierarchical gesture, Remouald becomes acutely aware that all animals including humans share in suffering and death: "[Les coquerelles] avaient dû périr comme les autres, les femmes, les hommes, les souris, les rats."¹³

The inclusion in *Music-Hall!* of two talking animals can be appreciated within the context of the novel's intent to draw attention to non-human perspectives as well as to undermine the preconception that humans are exceptional in their ability to communicate and to harbor feelings such as love. While at work one day, Xavier discovers among the rubble of a freshly demolished building a wooden box that contains a singing frog. In this case, the frog possesses the uniquely human ability to speak French. But in light of the myriad passages from Soucy's fiction that draw attention to animal intelligence such as the example of the owl's powers of communication mentioned above, the singing frog's ability to discuss Einstein's theory of relativity and Kantian transcendentalism can be interpreted not as allegory but as hyperbole (378). The same can be said of Écharlotte, an ostrich that performs in the music halls by swallowing clocks. While the audience perceives her as solely an animal, the narrator insists that she has a soul: "Tout le monde ici la prenait pour un animal, n'est-ce pas? Mais attention! Elle possédait une âme, elle aussi" (274). The day that she encounters Xavier in the music hall, the ostrich becomes smitten: "Le cœur d'Écharlotte] chavirait" (277). She even sees him as her soulmate, imagining that "en elle et en lui battait un cœur unique" (277). This example of interspecies love can be understood, in the context of Soucy's treatment of animals, as an extreme example of effacing perceived differences between humans and other animals.

Soucy's carnivores and vegetarians

Among the vast array of references to animals in Soucy's novels are numerous allusions to the human consumption of meat. In fact, the main characters are distinguished based on whether they are vegetarians or carnivores. In *L'Immaculée Conception*, as the narrator plainly states in the opening pages, "Si Remouald ne mangeait jamais de viande, Séraphon, lui, après ses repas, aimait sucer une couenne de lard" (27). The narrative also neatly establishes Remouald's aversion to, and Séraphon's delight in, strolling down the neighborhood street where stands a pork factory: "La rue Moreau était pour Remouald le moment le plus déprimant de leur excursion; c'était donc celui que Séraphon préférait. Il fallait longer la gare de marchandises, puis l'usine à cochons, qui dressait ses cheminées énigmatiques" (20). Remouald's meat-free diet, which the narrator qualifies as "un régime parfaitement équilibré," is attributed to his aversion to meat (28). The passage in which the fire chief pays a visit to Remouald and Séraphon to inquire into their trespassing on the ruins of the Grill aux Alouettes acutely focuses on meat consumption. While cutting pork rind for the chief, Remouald tries to contain his disgust by diverting his look to newspaper headlines (28). Conversely, the narrator draws attention to the chief's constant chewing of the pork ("chiquant sa couenne de lard"), and the bits of lard sticking to his cigar: "Des rebuts de couenne récalcitrants aux molaires, plantés au milieu des cendres de son cigare, s'y dressaient comme des pattes d'araignée" (31). Given Remouald's aversion to meat, it comes as no surprise that during the night he dreams of a fireman sporting a hunting bag from which protrudes the head of a rabbit. While the fireman insists that the hare be eaten, the animal—not unlike the trapped raccoon in the passage discussed above—implores Remouald with its eyes ("le lapin implorait

13. Another example of presumed anthropomorphism to convey animal sentience can be found in a passage on the trembling stature of Remouald's pet mouse. In describing mice as acutely aware of their mortality, the narrator conveys their fearful nature as vulnerable prey: "Toutes les souris savent qu'elles mourront de mort violente, elles s'attendent à cela à tout instant, et tremblent" (130).

Remouald du regard”), and jolts him from his sleep (35). The nightmare establishes Remouald’s vegetarianism as a result of his sensitivity to animal suffering.

Wilson’s eating habits are also emphasized. Although a carnivore, he only consumes what he himself has caught and killed. This distinction in no way forms an ethical stance with respect to the meat industry, but rather can be understood in the context of Wilson’s having spent his formative years in his family’s hunting lodge, and where his only adolescent diversion involved setting traps on the property for wild game and preparing his own meals (180-81). Wilson’s explanation to Séraphon that he refuses to take communion because he only eats meat that he himself prepares serves to remind the reader that the Catholic Mass involves the symbolic eating of human flesh. Wilson’s heavily freighted remark forms part of a larger observation that the narrative makes regarding the ubiquity of meat consumption in society, including its symbolism in religious devotion (174). Of course, the attention drawn to Wilson’s habits of hunting his own meat also prefigures his acts of murder and cannibalism. In *L’Immaculée Conception* the choice to eat or to abstain from meat assumes moral value in light of the fact that the three characters specifically identified as meat eaters are those guilty of grave infractions. The fire chief is revealed later in the novel to be the perpetrator who initiates adolescent boys in the raping of women; Wilson slaughters Remouald’s sister and feeds pieces of her body to Remouald in a stew, unbeknownst to him; Séraphon, well aware of Wilson’s prurient interests, neglects to protect the young Remouald. While Remouald’s vegetarianism presents as the direct result of his adolescent trauma of eating his sister, his refusal to eat meat can also read as an ethical position that opposes human violence.

Music-Hall! similarly casts a world of meat eaters against a vegetarian protagonist. The opening pages present Xavier through a description of his plant-based diet. While his co-workers “mordaient dans leurs saucissons huileux,” Xavier’s lunch consists of “un pétale de laitue bien dodu, une branche de céleri avec les feuilles, une demi-carotte pour la santé des yeux, et un radis” (18). Toward the end of the novel, after falling gravely ill and diagnosed with tuberculosis, Xavier nonetheless refuses to eat a steak prepared by his neighbor to help him regain his strength. Apprehending the meat as a body part, and more specifically as a wound (“une plaie”), Xavier deems it to be “de la nourriture d’assassin” and prefers death to eating “des cadavres” (312). It is noteworthy that Xavier’s language here to refer to the killing of animals for meat, mirrors the language employed by Alice in *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* quoted earlier. In both cases, the terms “assassin” and “cadavres” constitute examples of what Carol J. Adams describes as “restoring the absent referent” (51). Alice and Xavier’s demystifying language renders keenly present that which is habitually made absent for meat to exist, namely the actual killing of the animal (51).

On more than one occasion, secondary characters rehearse anti-vegetarian discourse in advising Xavier to eat meat in order to gain strength. Finding Xavier’s diet to be at odds with his line of work as demolisher, and although Xavier has no difficulty in meeting the demands of the job, *Le Philosophe* encourages him to renounce his vegetarianism (114). Xavier’s neighbor Rosette similarly attempts to convince him to abandon his “scrupules,” given that “depuis la nuit des temps, les êtres humains tuaient les bêtes pour s’en nourrir, c’était comme ça. Leur corps avait besoin de ça pour vivre” (312). The conversation between Xavier and Rosette ends quite enigmatically with the narrator revealing to the reader that she was born with a penis: “L’univers allait tout de travers aussi depuis qu’elle était née avec un pénis” (313). The insinuation that Rosette is transgendered, an ostensibly gratuitous detail, works in fact to deflate her argument for meat eating based on the necessity to submit to the “natural” order of things. Unpersuaded by his friends, Xavier’s vegetarianism is deeply rooted in his perception of vegetables as regenerative: “Il fallait respecter la nourriture, qui régénérerait notre chair et

nos os, et tâcher d'en comprendre le langage. Les légumes parlent aussi, à leur façon, c'était sa conviction intime" (18). On the other hand, Xavier perceives meat consumption to be destructive, and a poison that causes physical ailments and mental ill-health (314).

In sharp contrast to Xavier's vegetarianism, Xavier's foreman Lazare only eats meat, namely sausages: "[Lazare] ne se nourrissait que de saucissons" (66). When Xavier bears witness to Lazare's spiteful demeanor, and learns that Lazare suffers from stomach cramps and abuses alcohol, Xavier recommends that he cease eating meat: "Réforme ton régime! [...] Tu t'abstiens de viande, particulièrement de saucissons, et te voilà guéri, en pleine délivrance, plus besoin de Clinique, plus besoin de gémir, plus besoin de noyer les tristesses à forts recours de frelaton" (155). The narrative clearly distinguishes between Xavier's and Lazare's relationship to meat by juxtaposing the ways in which they relate to the neighborhood slaughterhouse. Xavier loathes walking in front of Salaison Supreme (sic) on his way to and from work, but is thankful that he does not hear the shrieking of the pigs ("le hurlement des cochons"), which only happens mid-day (76). In diametric opposition, Lazare deliberately cuts through the premises of Salaison Supreme in order to reach Peggy's apartment (166). The narrator stresses, in fact, that the slaughterhouse is Lazare's North Star: "[Lazare] reprend sa route, ayant pour étoile polaire les mots Salaison Supreme, car c'est près de là que Petty habite" (79). It is noteworthy that the slaughterhouse brandishes the slogan "Aux chrétiens l'extrême-onction, aux bêtes du diable la salaison-suprême" (43). Not unlike Wilson's remark that likens the Catholic Mass to the preparation of meat, the slogan's uncanny juxtaposition of communion before death and entry into heaven (believers' final partaking of Christ's flesh and blood) and salting as animals' final destiny draws attention to the pervasiveness of meat consumption in society. Xavier's aversion to the meat industry makes him an outlier in a culture in which meat is believed to be both physically and spiritually sustaining.

As we saw in the case of *L'Immaculée Conception*, in *Music-Hall!* characters' status as carnivores or vegetarians is morally inflected. Xavier is presented as a kind and generous soul who puts others' interests before his own, and gives away the sum of his advance from the music hall director to the homeless: "[Xavier] se rendait compte [...] qu'avoir plus d'argent, c'était avoir plus à donner. Beaucoup de billets de banque étaient dans des mains pingres, mais ils passeraient bientôt dans les siennes, à lui Xavier, et de là, à partir de ses mains, ils rayonneraient vers la misère et les multiples pauvretés" (225-26). Le Philosophe admires Xavier's "candeur," his "pureté," in sum, his "sainteté" (239). Peggy esteems Xavier's honesty, deeming him "incapable de mensonges" (160). In the novel's conclusion, Xavier unmistakably emerges as a Christ-like figure as he journeys to the pit of a razed building where he expires, in the manner of Jesus carrying his cross: "Xavier [...] allait rasant les murs, portant la croix d'être" (388). In contrast, Lazare is reputed for having never smiled in his life (63). He is perceived by others as harboring "un esprit de malfaisance gratuite" and as the incarnation of "la méchanceté pure et simple" (70).

In meat eating societies, as Carol J. Adams notes, "animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist" (51). In its preparation of meat for purchase and consumption, the slaughterhouse is the quintessential place where the effacing of animal referents occurs. As described in Richard Selzer's short story "How to Build a Slaughterhouse," "[The Slaughterhouse] carries out its business in secret and decides what you will see, hides from you what it chooses."¹⁴ In this context, a passage of *L'Immaculée Conception* that takes place at a butcher shop pulls back the curtain separating the transformation of animals into meat and the consumer. When Remouald takes his boss's niece for a stroll through the city, Sarah insists on entering a butcher shop. The narrator's description presents the various meats on display precisely as

14. Quoted in Adams, 62.

butchered animals: “Viandes tuméfiées, aplaties sur les étals, en quartiers ou en tranches, protégées par des vitres, comme un musée des plaies et blessures; et Sarah s’arrêtait devant chacune, cérémonieuse, comme on visite une exposition. La volaille étêtée, avec ses airs de cantatrice, rosette et déplumée, poitrine bombée, était retenue à des crochets le long du mur” (255). By likening the butcher’s showcase to a museum of wounds, scars, and beheaded cadavers, the narrative forcefully draws our attention to the violence executed on animals.

The passage further underscores the realities of meat preparation in its description of animal noises coming from the back of the shop. Hens can be heard scraping their claws against their cages: “On entendait le caquet des poules de l’autre côté de la cloison, le raclement des griffes sur la grille des cages” (255). In response to Sarah’s mutism, the butcher asks the young girl if the cat ate her tongue (“Le chat t’a mangé la langue?”)—an ironic quip in the context of the shop’s setting that further underscores animal victimization (256). Sarah reacts by darting to the back of the shop, only to behold the pathetic vision of rabbits that places at the center of meat consumption the suffering of animals: “Sarah s’approcha des cages; les lapins à plat ventre, le museau entre les pattes, les yeux rougis par l’insomnie, semblaient résignés à terminer leur existence dans une assiette, recouverts de moutarde, une pomme de terre entre les dents” (256). Such a spectacle, which reveals that animals too can suffer from insomnia and show signs of despondence—and all for the sake of carnivores’ delight—causes Sarah to burst into a rage. After toppling over the various cages of animals, Sarah rushes to the front of the store, jumps on the counter, and proceeds to whip cuts of hanging ham with a slice of veal: “Sarah se faufila dans la boutique et attrapa une tranche de veau. Elle grimpa sur le comptoir et, à l’aide de celle-ci, s’appliqua à fouetter les jambons” (257). This highly effective image of the young girl executing acts of violence not on live animals but on treated meats prompts Remouald to reply euphemistically to the angered butcher that Sarah must not like meat: “C’est parce qu’elle n’aime pas beaucoup la viande” (258).

Given the consistent blurring of distinctions in Soucy’s fiction between humans and other animals, and given the vegetarian discourse that subtends the plots, it comes as no surprise that on occasion human characters are described as meat and other dishes to be consumed. Oftentimes, human cadavers smell or look like a prepared meal. In *L’Immaculée Conception*, the patrons who perished in the Grill aux Alouettes emanate an odor of smoked meat (“viande fumée”) (15). In the novel’s conclusion in which Remouald and Séraphon perish in a fire, the funeral director describes Remouald’s bodily contortion as a stuffed goose (“une oie que l’on gava”) (294). Séraphon’s charred corpse, bundled up and secured with rope to his wheel-chair, is likened to a sausage link (295). In *Music-Hall!*, when a dynamiter becomes the victim of his own explosion, his mutilated body appears as a piece of bloody (or “rare”) meat (“tranche de viande saignante”) (109). At other times, characters described as edible dishes are those who suffer emotionally or physically. In *L’Immaculée Conception*, as noted earlier, when subjected to emotional abuse, Remouald is likened to a roasted pig (34). In *Music-Hall!*, the blood gushing from the neck of a vanquished boxer is described as a “ratatouille fumante” (294). His body, violently severed from his head, is likened to that of a beheaded hen: “Le corps étêté de celui-ci continuait de tressauter tout seul, à la mode des poules” (294). At the end of Xavier’s own boxing match, his body—ejected from the ring by the victor—lands like a crêpe on a hot-dog stand (299). The merchant then inserts a sausage between Xavier’s teeth as if to prepare him to be enjoyed as a main dish (299). It is highly symbolic that the boxing matches organized by the music halls take place in a sausage factory, described alternately as a “usine à saucisses” and as a “usine à saucissonner,” and can be read as a commentary on the violent nature of human sport and entertainment (289-90). All in all, textual allusions to human meat alongside of course the tragic case in *L’Immaculée*

Conception of Remouald's sister's literal ingestion, forcefully demystify the human body as another animal body vulnerable to cutting, roasting, and consumption.

Animal and Human Victims

As part of their indictment of the human condition, Soucy's narratives present animals not only as the victims of evil, but also as symbols of good. On numerous occasions, animals stand in stark opposition to evildoers. Highly intuitive of moral character, they alert the reader of impending doom. For instance, the raping of the widow Racicot in *L'Immaculée Conception* is incessantly punctuated by the distressed meows of the victim's cats: "À travers les murs leur parvenaient, épars, des miaulements lancinants, qui montaient et descendaient" (109). The cats' bodily reaction displays a visual distress signal, as their fully erect tails form exclamation points ("la queue en point d'exclamation") (109). Wilson's evil nature is also announced by an animal. When the young Remouald first meets Wilson, he becomes disheartened at the site of a mouse desperately attempting to escape Wilson's hands: "Remouald observait la petite bête. Elle courait entre ses doigts, cherchait à fuir, grattait sa paume avec une fureur affolée" (207). Wilson himself interprets the rodent's piercing squeals as a warning: "On dirait qu'elle cherche désespérément à avertir quelqu'un de quelque chose" (208). In another striking example, a horse forcefully opposes the lewd and aggressive behavior of the fire brigade. While the fire chief is speaking to Remouald and Séraphon regarding their visit to the Grill aux Alouettes, his unit remains outside and begins to sexually taunt a group of young boys playing street hockey. A fireman grabs one of the player's hockey sticks, places it between his thighs to simulate an erect penis, and proceeds to gyrate in front of the boys (29). Upon exiting the house, the chief beholds the vision of a horse that has trampled and snapped the hockey stick in two: "Entre les sabots d'un cheval, un bâton de hockey gisait, brisé en deux" (33). In this case, the horse intervenes to oppose sexual violence against children by breaking the makeshift phallus and potential assault weapon.

In addition to casting animals as the victims of men, Soucy's various novels also draw a number of parallels between the mistreatment of animals and the victimization of people. To illustrate this, I would first like to look closely at the lengthy description of a peculiar game that appears in *Music-Hall!*'s last chapter. Designed to entertain exclusively male carnival attendees referred to as "papas," the game occupies a unique position in the narrative as one of its final images. Moreover, it reads not as an element of the plot but as an allegory. An arcade game bearing the name *Mary Had a Little Lamb* deceptively conjures a child's song about an animal's faithfulness to its owner. Rather, it is a horrific instrument of torture that reveals disturbing associations between sadistic male desire, on the one hand, and its female, child, and animal victims on the other. To begin, one inserts three pennies into a slot that alludes to the young girl's vagina ("la fente des fesses en tôle de la petite Mary") (382). By controlling a lever, the "papa" proceeds to maneuver a steel wire from which hangs a lead marble. Below, approximately sixty mice swarm about with pieces of magnet attached to their tails. With enough skill, the player magnetizes a mouse and carries it over a funnel. At this point, two possible destinies await the animal. Either the "daddy" drops the mouse into a pit that leads to a grinder to end its "vie minuscule," or it falls inside the mouth of the funnel fitted with a tube that is inserted into the vagina of a living sheep whose legs are bound by rope. Accordingly, if jettisoned into the funnel's mouth, the panic-stricken rodent is projected inside the sheep's vagina. To be sure, the mouse's frantic clawing would cause the sheep to jolt. A cord attached to the animal's snout leads to a plate full of candies, which would fall and spill out of the machine (382-83). The game's various interconnected components allegorize the relationships established throughout Soucy's fiction between sources of oppression—namely, sadistic male pleasure and patriarchal institutions—and their most common victims: women, children, and animals.

As noted above, a main precept of vegan studies is that the oppressions of animals and minority groups are “enmeshed” and “mutually reinforcing” (Wright xiv). This is because the patriarchal politics of our culture, in the process of constructing “manhood,” determine both what we eat and whom we exploit (Adams 16-17). Soucy’s narratives recurrently link the victimization of people and the abuse and consumption of animals. On many occasions, male characters compare a woman’s sexual appeal to different animal species. For example, in *L’Immaculée Conception* the funeral home director, in commenting on the bodies of the women who perished in the burning of the Grill aux Alouettes, likens their young, plump appearance to sparrows: “De belles femmes parmi eux, pas trop enfoncées encore, un peu enflées à la gorge, comme des moineaux, comme je les aime” (15, ellipsis is Soucy’s.). The syntax of this sentence deliberately confuses women and birds, as the direct pronoun’s antecedent is ambiguous. By the expression “comme je les aime,” it is unclear whether the funeral home director is describing his taste in women or how he likes to eat sparrows. The conflation of violence against women and meat consumption is further developed in the description of an adolescent boy’s initiation in the raping of the widow Racicot. Coerced by the fire chief, Bradette begins to caress the woman’s breast, which is described as an animal’s head, and her nipple as its eye: “Il le conserva longtemps entre ses paumes, comme on tient la tête d’un animal, il regardait ardemment le gros œil brun du tétou” (113). Bradette then proceeds to wrap his mouth around the widow’s breast and bites into it as he might a cut of meat: “L’enfant se jeta la bouche ouverte sur le mamelon et le mordit” (113). In light of the parallels drawn between violence against women and violence against animals, it comes as no surprise that during the raping of the widow, the cats too succumb to the fire chief’s aggression: “Les chats furent expulsés à coup de pied. L’homme en saisit un par la peau du cou et le lança au fond de la cuisine” (111).

In the character of Wilson, connections between violence against animals and against women become blatantly manifest. In a series of flashbacks (thanks to Séraphon surreptitiously reading Wilson’s diary), we learn that Wilson had a twin brother, and that their mother preferred the twin brother to the point of cruelly isolating Wilson from the family, both physically and emotionally. In his journal, Wilson refers to his mother as “la Jument.” The French word for mare, “Jument” also closely resembles “jumeaux,” the French term for twins. This example of metonymical zoomorphism, sustained throughout the narrative, reinforces Wilson’s hatred for his mother (which is certainly justified if we are to believe Wilson’s account). The confusion in Wilson’s mind between his mother and a female horse explains Wilson’s cruel act toward a veritable mare. In an act of vengeance, Wilson repeatedly punches the face of Séraphon’s horse: “De toutes ses forces, à trois reprises, il frappa en pleine gueule la vieille jument” (192). And of course, in the novel’s climax, the confusion of humans and animals culminates in an ultimate evil act. In the final flashback, we learn that to deceive the young Remouald into eating human flesh—that is to say, his dead sister—Wilson hides bits of human flesh among the body parts of various animals (“pattes de lapin, oreilles de lièvre... il préparait la viande du gibier qu’il avait battu, ou des animaux volés”) (340).

Associations between the aggression toward women and eating animals are further exploited in *Music-Hall!* In describing Lazare’s relentless pursuit of Peggy, the narrator presents his jealousy towards Xavier as a lion that reprimands its cubs for biting into its portion of meat: “Lazare repoussa l’apprenti, comme un lion éloigne d’un coup de patte des lionceaux qui cherchent à mordre dans son quartier de viande” (154). But much of the narrative, which recounts the dispossession of the poor by a brutal capitalist system, develops rather the metaphor of the rich feeding on the poor. In its critique of progress as founded on destruction, exploitation, and class division, passages of the novel feature the work of demolisher teams that, tasked with leveling old buildings inhabited by the impoverished (“les démunis”), follow the commands of entrepreneurs eager to profit

from the modernization of New York City. William Cagliari, the owner of the city's various music halls, succeeds in controlling the entertainment industry by exerting his influence in the earmarking of buildings slated for demolition. He creates a veritable monopoly by "eating" his competitors: "Grâce à des avis de démolition bien choisis, il a mangé ses concurrents un à un" (218). The narrative explicitly associates the dispossession of the poor and the eating of animals in recounting the joining of forces between the American Order of Demolition and the city's slaughterhouses (248-49). The narrator in fact prefigures this coalition by comparing the morbid desires that fuel the demolishers' pleasure in destroying buildings to those of slaughterhouse workers: "Tous savaient à quelle région obscure, insidieuse, innommable d'eux-mêmes [les démolisseurs] devaient le plaisir trouble et profond qu'il y a à tondre du taudis, à saccager du bâtiment. Un trou sans fond au cœur de l'être leur était révélé, que ne pouvaient même soupçonner ceux qui n'avaient jamais mis la main à l'outil fracasseur (les travailleurs d'abattoir exceptés peut-être)" (110). The consumption of animals and of space neatly merges when some of the buildings slated for destruction are subsequently gutted and converted into slaughterhouses. Xavier himself faces eviction as his apartment complex is chosen for "une démolition intérieure" in order to serve as a warehouse for the slaughterhouse Salaison Supreme (267).

Given that in *Music-Hall!* the poor and animals are equally oppressed by the capitalist system, it makes sense that Soucy's two talking animals would actively resist their own oppression. After a beggar deceives Xavier into profiting financially from his singing frog, the latter refuses to perform but simply emits an ordinary croak (251). The frog's obstinance reads as active resistance to a system that seeks to exploit animals for money. And Écharlotte—the clock-swallowing ostrich—refuses to continue acting before an audience after being obliged to relieve herself on stage (275). Écharlotte's self-respect recalls Holocaust scholar Terrence Des Pres's description of death camp inmates forced to relieve themselves in front of others as a direct attack on their dignity.¹⁵ The case of Écharlotte broadens the respect for one's sense of dignity to non-human animals. The narrative further develops Écharlotte's self-dignity when she expresses outrage toward a "spectacle de femmes." In this vulgar act, a group of naked women lie on stage and spread their legs in the direction of the crowd so as to reveal a baby doll inserted into their vaginas. The spectacle's "lâcher vaginal," in which the women expel the dolls into the audience, triggers the ostrich's indignation: "Écharlotte [était] fulminante du spectacle de femme, qu'elle trouvait d'un vulgaire, et qui l'indignait" (287). It is noteworthy that apart from Xavier, the one character who explicitly opposes the disrespect of women is an animal. Écharlotte's concern for the treatment of human females provides a rare representation of compassion for fellow members of an interspecies victimhood.

Eating Meat and Trauma

By no means do Soucy's novels provide us with a simplistic portrayal of carnivore evildoers, as it is always the case that the victimizers were initially victims. More specifically, the narratives present meat eating within a broader illustration of evil as the result of trauma. In the case of both Wilson and Lazare, delight in eating meat is linked to their traumatic past. In *L'Immaculée Conception*, Wilson's relish in eating game that he himself caught stems from an interest in hunting that he developed while banished to the family hunting lodge, and out of fear that his mother would poison him with foods prepared in the mansion (181). It is during this time that Wilson, as he described it in his journal, became full of hatred and acquired a sense of power to dominate others: "Tout se bousculait dans ma tête —la rage, le sentiment de ma puissance—, me laissant sans voix.

15. In reference to the deplorable conditions of the death camps, Des Pres pithily states: "Befoulment of the body is experienced as befoulment of the soul" (64).

Puis tout à coup, ces mots surgirent entre mes lèvres : ‘À genoux! Admire-moi! Adore ton Dieu!’” (187). This passage, directly followed by the scene in which Wilson strikes Séraphon’s mare as his mother’s ersatz, diagnoses Wilson’s eating habits and cruelty toward animals as the symptom of his traumatic adolescence. The notion of eating meat as a form of psychic acting-out is rendered altogether explicit in *Music-Hall!* Upon learning from others of tragedies that befell Lazare’s family, Xavier attributes both Lazare’s violent nature and his carnivorousness to trauma. When Lazare discovers Peggy in conversation with Xavier and threatens the latter with his fist, Xavier attributes Lazare’s anger to his indulgence in sausages: “Voilà où on en arrive quand on se gave de saucissons!” (155). As Xavier explains, if Lazare is full of hate and an “eater of sausages,” it is because he has come to identify with his abusive father. Following Xavier’s diagnosis, Lazare, in his ravenous consumption of meat, is in fact acting out the physical abuse that his father repeatedly meted out on his mother:

Il faut que tu cesses de manger des saucissons. [...] C’est à cause que ton père, il était batteur d’épouse, tu comprends? Et voilà: quand tu mâches ton saucisson, tes mâchoires sont comme si elles étaient ton père et que ton saucisson était ta mère. Or, ta mère, tu l’aimais comme qui dirait que tu aimes aujourd’hui la viande forte et le frelaton. (154)

As the cases of Wilson and Lazare indicate, in Soucy’s fiction meat consumption is a response to childhood trauma, and presents as the continuation of aggression and abuse, but redirected toward (the eating of) animals.¹⁶

Other characters’ aversion to eating meat is also linked to a traumatic event. In *L’Immaculée Conception*, the reader can easily make the connection that Remouald’s disgust for meat consumption and for the neighborhood slaughterhouse stems from his having been fed the body of his sister in a meat stew. The origin of Xavier’s refusal to eat meat is much less clear, certainly in part because of his general amnesia as a result of his death and resuscitation. The narrative does suggest, however, that his vegetarianism originates from a traumatic event in which Vincent (Xavier’s original name) had beheld a disturbing vision of dead animals flowing in their blood: “Il rêvait ce fleuve tranquille, toujours le même sous un ciel d’ardoise, où coulaient en silence des carcasses, des membres épars d’animaux. Un souvenir de Hongrie peut-être, ce fleuve de sang noir” (280). What differentiates Remouald’s and Xavier’s traumatic response from Wilson’s and Lazare’s is that the vegetarians—both in their peaceful disposition and in their dietary choices—constitute a break with a violent past. In the case of Remouald, eating meat amounts to reenacting his sister’s death. That he does not perceive a moral distinction between (eating) humans and (eating) other animals is forcefully conveyed in his cherishing of a rabbit’s foot. Given to him by Wilson as a lucky charm, Remouald sees it for what it really is: the body part of a once living animal (205). The adult Remouald, after having briefly lost the foot that he had safeguarded since his adolescence, speaks directly to the foot upon finding it: “Ma pauvre petite, tu te rends compte? C’est la première nuit que nous ne dormons pas ensemble” (253). Remouald’s awareness of the truth of rabbit’s feet illustrates the irony of the amulet, as famously stated by Louis Aragon: “La patte de lapin, ça porte bonheur, mais pas au lapin”.¹⁷ It could be said that Remouald’s traumatic experience renders him immune, in fact, to the

16. It is also noteworthy that the narrator describes Lazare’s penis as “minuscule,” and as a sign that Lazare has remained a scared child: “Il tient toujours entre ses doigts ce sexe minuscule qui n’a pas grandi, qui a refusé de grandir” (171). In this light, Lazare’s obsession with eating sausages (“saucisse” being a metaphor in French for penis) could be seen as acting out his childhood trauma and the drive to gain a sense of control.

17. Quoted by Marie-Agnès Moller in *Qui a peur des chats noirs?* (30). Remouald’s cherishing of the rabbit’s foot appears diametrically opposed to Wilson’s hobby of taxidermy, which Wilson touts as a testimony to his skill and dominion over the animals as acquired possessions (205).

type of cognitive dissonance that animal and vegan studies theorists locate at the heart of the contemporary meat-eating psyche.

Not unlike Remouald, Xavier is acutely aware of the nature of meat dishes. As noted earlier, he perceives the steak filet prepared by Rosette as a wound (312). When she forces a piece of meat into his mouth, he cannot help but imagine a dead horse devoured by flies: “La saveur abominable lui fit songer à un cheval mort, aux yeux mangés de mouches” (312). In addition to, or as an extension of, his ethical reasons for abstaining from meat, Xavier deliberately chooses a plant-based diet for what he perceives to be the health benefits for both the body and the mind:

Un légume, c’est méditatif, ça ne s’avale pas dans la précipitation. Il fallait respecter la nourriture, qui régénérait notre chair et nos os, et tâcher d’en comprendre le langage. Les légumes parlent aussi, à leur façon, c’était sa conviction. Aussi, manger concernait autant le corps que l’esprit, comme une seule chose d’un seul tenant. Engorger n’importe quoi, n’importe comment, et de la viande encore, comme il le voyait faire aux compagnons, on risquait de se retrouver le petit-clocher de travers, devenir un cheval à l’épouvante. (18-19)

Because Xavier possesses a heightened self-awareness of his diet, and even diagnoses what he perceives to be others’ eating disorders, his relationship to food can be interpreted not as acting out a past traumatic event, but rather as a self-reflexive working-through.

In contrasting Wilson and Lazare’s relationship to trauma on the one hand, and Remouald’s and Xavier’s on the other, I am borrowing from the distinction that trauma studies scholar Dominick LaCapra makes between two fundamental forms of response to traumatic events. By reliving or “acting out” the traumatic event through compulsive repetition, all sorts of distinctions crucial for psychic healing—such as between the past and the present—collapse (“Trauma, Absence, Loss” 699-700). In contrast, “working through” constitutes a more productive, countervailing response to trauma in which the victim attempts “to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present, and future” (“‘Acting-Out’ and ‘Working-Through’ Trauma” 2). More importantly for this essay, LaCapra argues that “it’s via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical agent” (“‘Acting-Out’ and ‘Working-Through’ Trauma” 3). Wilson’s and Lazare’s responses to trauma read as cases of acting out the past. Unable to gain critical distance with respect to their childhood trauma, they re-enact abusive relationships through the eating of meat. On the contrary, Remouald’s and Xavier’s responses present as cases of working through trauma that involve abstaining from meat. In sum, Soucy’s stories proffer vegetarianism as a critical, self-reflexive consciousness and a deep ethical awareness that breaks with patterns of violent behavior against both humans and animals. Correspondingly, they equate eating meat with an automaton existence of unconsciously repeating original acts of violence. In this light, it can be said that the non-reflexive, instinctual nature of the carnivore’s behavior is less “human” than that of mindful vegetarians.

In Soucy’s fiction, the eating of meat is inextricably linked to the oppression of groups of people. As we have seen, animals and humans are depicted as sharing a common aggressor: patriarchy and its numerous avatars. By presenting human characters as vulnerable animals, and in turn revealing animals to be intelligent and sentient beings, Soucy’s narratives lay bare the destructive effects of anthropocentrism at the foundation of western civilization. In denouncing eating meat as perpetuating a divisive social order that begets violence, *L’Immaculée Conception* and *Music-Hall!* proffer respect for animals as the ultimate anti-violent gesture. In sum, Soucy’s ethical vision displaces violent anthropocentrism by situating the animal at the center of moral inquiry. This displacement, which amounts to a rejection of western tradition in favor of respect for

animals, is strikingly captured in *L'Immaculée Conception* in the young Sarah's behavior as she is accosted by a priest. When Remouald and Sarah pass in front of a church, the priest asks Sarah if she can identify Jesus on the building's façade. Unable or unwilling to identify Jesus, she points rather to the birds flying around the bell tower: "Sarah pointait le doigt vers le ciel. Des oiseaux, des pigeons, peut-être, ou des mouettes, tournoyaient autour du clocher" (78).

The University of Mary Washington

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Carol J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. Continuum, 2000.
- Auberger, Janick. "Entre l'écrit et l'image, l'animal de fiction, un homme travesti." *La littérature et l'animalité*, vol. 13, 2007, pp. 133-51.
- Bleakley, Alan. *The Animalizing Imagination: Totemism, Textuality and Ecocriticism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- Boutantin, Ève. "Des écritures de la violence: *Trou de mémoire, La Rage et La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*." *Études Canadiennes / Canadian Studies*, vol. 61, 2006, pp. 25-35.
- Calarco, Matthew. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Distinction*. Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Choplin, Lauren. "'This Gospel of my Hell': The Narration of Violence in Gaétan Soucy's *The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond of Matches*." *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings*, edited by Susan Redington Bobby, MacFarland & Co, 2009, pp. 168-80.
- Derrida, Jacques. *L'animal que donc je suis*. Galilée, 2006.
- Des Pres, Terrence. *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Fortier, Frances. "Vitalités romanesques ou les traditions réinventées." *Voix et Images*, vol. 28, 2003, 174-79.
- Karlsson, Fredrik. "Critical Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, vol. 25, 2012, pp. 707-20.
- LaCapra, Dominick. "Acting-Out and Working-Through Trauma: Excerpt from Interview with Professor Dominick LaCapra." Shoah Resource Center, Jun. 2020, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203646.pdf.
- . "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1999, pp. 696-727.
- Mackenzie, Louisa and Posthumus, Stephanie. "Introduction." *French Thinking About Animals*, edited by Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, Michigan State University Press, 2015, pp. xv-xxi.
- Moller, Marie-Agnès. *Qui a peur des chats noirs?* Texte Vivant, 2015.
- Moore, Bryan L. "Anthropomorphism as Ecocentric Argument in American Literature." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1996, pp. 37-49.
- Orr, Jeffrey. "Strangers in Strange Lands: Cultural Translations in Gaétan Soucy's *Vaudeville!*" *Parallel Encounters: Culture at the Canada-US Border*, edited by Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup, Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2013, pp. 279-92.
- Piccione, Marie-Lyne. "Quand l'iconoclasme s'égare: *L'Immaculée Conception* de Gaétan Soucy." *L'écriture du corps dans la littérature québécoise depuis 1980*, edited by Daniel Marcheix and Nathalie Watteyne, Presses Universitaires de Limoges et du Limousin, 2007, pp. 159-64.
- Pick, Anat. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

- Simon, Anne. "La zoopoétique, une approche émergente : le cas du roman." *Revue des sciences humaines*, vol. 328, no. 4, 2017, pp. 71-89.
- Soucy, Gaétan. *L'acquittement*. Boréal, 1997.
- . *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*. Boréal, 1998.
- . *L'Immaculée Conception*. Boréal, 1999.
- . *Music-Hall!* Boréal, 2002.
- Vint, Sherryl. *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*. Liverpool University Press, 2012.
- Wolfe, Cary. "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities." *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 2, 2009, pp. 564-75.
- Wright, Laura. *Through a Vegan Studies Lens*. University of Nevada Press, 2019.
- Xanthos, Nicolas. "Déjouer: imaginaires de la fiction romanesque dans *Les failles de l'Amérique* et *L'acquittement*." *Intermédialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques / Intermediality: History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies*, vol. 9, 2007, pp. 59-78.
- . "Le vaste plan et l'incompréhension du pêcheur: forme et signification de l'énigme dans *L'Immaculée Conception* de Gaétan Soucy." *Voix et Images*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2004, pp. 111-30.