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## **A Close Reading of the Technoscientific Transformations and Blurring of the Boundaries between Humanity, Animality, and Monstrosity in Four Contemporary Science Fiction Novels**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The study seeks to analyze four contemporary science fiction novels, namely, Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Dogs of War* (2017) and *Bear Head* (2021), and Jeff VanderMeer's *Borne* (2017) and *Dead Astronauts* (2019), to show how the power of technology can radically disrupt and even destroy the already porous human-animal boundary that has for so long been separating the human from the non-humans. The study centers around the central hypothesis that while Tchaikovsky's *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head* attempts to portray a pre-apocalyptic world where biotechnological augmentations have clearly made animals comparable to the humans in terms of intelligence and much more superior to their non-augmented animal counterparts, in VanderMeer's *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts*, a post-apocalyptic reset occurs which unleashes the monstrous from within the animals and the nonhuman within the humans. The study will endeavor to show how after repeated denials and refusals to acknowledge the agency of the animals, the traditional humanist notion of human exceptionalism based on a binary-ridden, Western way of thinking only paves the way for a more monstrous manifestation of the repressed animality in a technologically mediated transhuman future. Such a transformation can have apocalyptic repercussions mainly because the human subject itself runs the risk of losing his much-cherished humanity and in the process gets transformed into the abject, the animal, and the monstrous.

*Keywords: Animal studies, human and animal, monster, apocalyptic, posthuman, science fiction*

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### **Introduction:**

"...we need to bring the animal center stage as the main focus of study", states Jonathan Burt. (Qtd. in Peterson, "The Posthumanism to Come," 131).

The portrayal of this fusion between animality and humanity in the works appear to dissolve and dismantle the "onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, an organic/inorganic" (Bennett, x) to finally pave the way for the affirmation of the agency of the animals. This, in turn, paves the way for the assertion of agencies of the non-human others through destruction of anthropocentric perception and by decentering and dissolving the notion that Man as the privileged, independent, autonomous, disembodied, and foundational entity in relation to whom all other entities must be defined and categorized. Following Stacy Alaimo's words, we may say that the post-anthropocentric and animalistic worldview of these novels fascinates the audience with "a sense of immersion within the strange agencies that constitute the world" (*Exposed* 10). The bioengineered animals featured in all these four novels contain "enthraling promises of possible re-embodiments and actualised differences" and their "Multiple, heterogeneous, uncivilized" nature always carries with it "multiple virtual possibilities" ("Posthuman, All Too Human" 204). In all these novels we see how in a world of genetically engineered creatures, man-animal hybrids, bioluminescent creatures, non-human creatures that act like humans and animals that once were humans and creatures equipped with the cybernetically enhanced weapon system, the concept of human undergoes a steady deterioration and the question of being and becoming become ever more important than before. These novels feature a gigantic, flying, bear (in *Borne*) named Mord, who supposedly once was human and is highly nostalgic and day-dreams a lot, a Bioform dog (human/animal hybrids) named Rex (in *Dogs of War*), an intelligent Bear named Honey (in both *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head*), distributed intelligence entities named Bees (in *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head*), an intelligent, orphaned creature resembling a hybrid of sea anemone and squid, but malleable and highly ambiguous named Borne (in *Borne*), a Multi-form Assault Pack comprising of Bees, Dragon, and Honey (In *Dogs of War*) and also several other remnants of past biotechnological experiments in *Borne*. The portrayal of the Bioforms in Tchaikovsky's novels and the biotech beasts in VanderMeer's works illustrate what Alaimo refers to as the "transcorporeality", or "the interconnections, interchanges and transits between human bodies and non-human natures" (*Bodily Natures*, 2). In these works, we see how humans continue to behave animalistically by engaging in violence against non-human lifeforms to reaffirm their idea of human exceptionalism while other animals physically and mentally seem to challenge those very qualities that in a traditional, hierarchically constructed society would invest the humans with distinctive glory of their own. On various occasions, these novels make us ponder on such issues as animals and transhuman rights, the agency of their beings, and the very definition of what makes a human truly human. It will show how technology (more specifically biotech) can animalize the human and humanize the animals by unleashing the monstrous or category-transgressing potential of the body. Also, it is to be noted that if technology is used healthily without the intent of asserting dominance and cementing privilege over others in a binary-ridden hierarchy where man is always placed at the top of the ladder, it can offer a more fulfilling and harmonious realization of the fullest potential of both the human as well as the animal. In a 1959

short story named *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes, we see how the experiments conducted upon a lab mouse named Algernon eventually helps one Charlie Gordon, the hero of the story with an IQ of 68 to not only overcome his intellectual disability but also achieve genius. So, animality must not always devolve into bestiality or monstrosity, rather through a healthy affirmation of the animal's agency humans can pave the way for a better and brighter future.

Now, before delving deep into a proper, textual analysis of such a multivalent and multilayered topic as the interrelationship between humanity and animality, Deleuze and Guattari's tripartite division of animals demands a discussion since it will give us a much-needed overview of the nature of the animals and animality we are about to deal in the rest of our studies. According to Deleuze and Guattari's classification of animals into three categories, namely the Oedipal animal, the Jungian, or "archetype" animal, and the demonic animal, we can try to categorize the animals featured in the novels concerned into these categories. We may observe that in VanderMeer's *Borne*, it is Borne who becomes the example of the first kind, i.e., Oedipal Animal because of his unique parent-child relationship with Rachel even though we, from the very beginning, can sense the inevitable failure of this relationship amidst the raging waves of monstrosity and animality in the post-apocalyptic world. This form of oedipal animality can form the basis for a more complex and transgressive kind of relationship between human and more-than-human entities in a post-apocalyptic period. In fact, VanderMeer is seen to be employing the trope of transgressive monstrosity for investigating alternative modes of interconnectivity through which humans might connect, couple and even entangle with their posthuman/more-than-human counterparts.

In Tchaikovsky's *Bear Head*, Jimmy seems to have become both inextricably and intimately entangled with the projection of Honey, the bear in his head and this can be thought of as an illustration of Oedipal animality. We, the readers seem to form a kind of strong attachment with Rex at the end of the novel *Dogs of War*, and so from our perspective, Rex can be thought of as the symbol of the Oedipal animal. Now, under the Jungian, or "archetype" animal category, we can easily place Honey from Tchaikovsky's works, and Mord in VanderMeer's *Borne* besides also including Behemoth/Leviathan from VanderMeer's *Dead Astronauts*. Bears feature in Greek and other mythologies prominently. In Greek mythology, we see Zeus's wife Hera turns the huntress named Callisto into a bear in a fit of jealousy when she comes to know that her husband Zeus has fallen in love with the huntress. In Native American mythology too, bears symbolize such traits as wisdom, prowess, and healing. The figures of such fantastical creatures as Behemoth and Leviathan both feature in Bible heavily. Behemoth, the terrestrial monster is mentioned in the Old Testament's Job 40:15- 24, while Leviathan, the sea-monster finds mention in Job 41, Psalm 74:14, Psalm 104:26, and Isaiah 27:1. Also, the Biblical undertone can be seen in the naming and portrayal of the character John Keram Aslan since the name Aslan reminds the reader of the major character in C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series and Aslan, the talking lion in Lewis' series is compared to the figure of Jesus Christ himself. Aslan in *Dogs of War* clearly strikes us as a Christ-like figure because of his ardent advocacy for the rights of the Bioform animals especially when the rest of the world has been manipulated into thinking the modified animals as a clear threat to the entire humanity. Lewis himself comments about the allegorical nature of the 'Lion' Aslan and its relation with Christ thus: "Since Narnia is a world of Talking Beasts, I thought He [Christ] would become a Talking Beast there, as He became a man here. I pictured Him becoming a lion there because (a) the lion is supposed to be the king of beasts; (b) Christ is called "The Lion of Judah" in the Bible; (c) I'd been having strange dreams about lions when I began writing the work" (*Companion to Narnia*, 6). In fact, upon a close analysis of the four select texts undertaken for the purpose of the study, an uncanny parallel emerges between the animalistic imageries in Shakespeare's sublime masterpiece *King Lear* and the four works of Tchaikovsky and VanderMeer. Lear's "dog-hearted daughters" (4.3.46) seems to anticipate Tchaikovsky's human-hearted bioform canines of whom Rex is the undisputed leader; Lear's and Fool's comparison of Lear's daughters to "foxes" (3.6.22, and 1.4.318) again bears strange similarities to the post-apocalyptic figure of the Blue Fox in VanderMeer's *Dead Astronauts*; the image of the cuckoo biting off the head of the hedge sparrow (1.4.213-14) can be seen re-enacted in a post-apocalyptic setting in *Dead Astronauts*, where we see the monstrous duck uses its head like a hammer and bites off the head of another creature; the "wolvish visage" (1.4.307) of Goneril can be seen as a pre-apocalyptic precursor to the more monstrous figure of the bear named Mord and the Mord-proxies in *Borne*; similarly, Lear's imagining of his ingrateful daughters as the sea monsters (1.4.253 and 3.2.57) and the "monsters of the deep" (4.2.50) again reminds us of VanderMeer's the Leviathan transforming later into the figure of the Behemoth. Now, under Deleuze and Guattari's category of the demonic animals or the pack animal, we can place several figures from these four novels who seem to go insane in different parts of the stories, and humans too often label them as monstrous and insane. So, figures like Mord, the broken-winged Duck, and Behemoth, the Mord proxies, and even Borne himself at various points in VanderMeer's books, function as symbols of terror and death while Rex along with his Multiform Assault Pack and Bees, Dragon, and even Honey all appear to function as demonic animals. These animals undergo change and are always in the process of becoming-animal. Braidotti has further expanded in this aspect of 'becoming-animal' when she posits the concept of Zoë, as "the generative vitality of non- or pre-human or animal life" (Braidotti *Transpositions* 37). Braidotti has posited three mods of becoming which are: becoming-animal becoming earth and becoming machine (*The Posthuman* 66-67); and here, it is the first mode of becoming, i.e., becoming-animal which appears to be most relevant for our study. She further opines that it is through realizing this potential of Zoë, that a subject becomes aware of "the endless vitality of life as continuous becoming" (Braidotti *Transpositions* 41).

The study will attempt to show how repeated acts of denial of agency to the animal can pave the way for the monstrous to emerge which fully overtakes the animal and the human alike. Also, the animal, the human, and the monster are actually separated by a very thin and permeable membrane which can be easily violated, traversed, and transgressed. In Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Dogs of War*, the struggle rages both without and within as the biomechanically engineered lifeforms continue to struggle for their agency and basic rights against a formidable power structure and highly efficient propaganda machinery that constantly seek to dehumanize, denaturalize, denigrate and demean their very existence and exercises. Tchaikovsky's *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head* might very well be seen as preparatory stages that only hint at the latent monstrosities that these Bioform creatures seem to possess which in VanderMeer's *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts* will later manifest and grow to titanic and transgressive proportions. Throughout these novels, technological mediation plays the role of a catalyst in this apocalyptic monstrosity which not only dissolves the distinction between the human and the animal but also between the monster and the man. The monstrous incarnations of all the animals are entirely the result of man's own action and they invariably seem to come back to haunt their creators following and reinforcing the Frankensteinian paradigm. Now, as Latour comments, that this Frankensteinian paradigm is often used as "an all-purpose modifier" ("Love Your Monsters" 21) for any form of wrings committed against nature or environment. However, one should not forget that "Frankenstein's real sin" lay in the fact that "he abandoned the creature to itself" (21). So, according to Latour, "our sin is not that

we created technologies but that we failed to love and care for them” (“Love Your Monsters”, 21). This observation, as we will progress in our study, will prove to be extremely relevant in capturing the crux of the study where the themes of abandonment and annihilation of the animal lives by the human masters will assume a monstrous proportion for both the animals as well as their human masters.

### Reason for Selection of the Four Texts:

The article wants to analyze four works, namely, Adrian Tchaikovsky’s *Dogs of War* (2017) and *Bear Head* (2021), and Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne* (2017) and *Dead Astronauts* (2019) to show how superior technological advancements of the future can problematize the already porous and often imperceptible boundary that separates animality from monstrosity, or humanity from nonhumanity. Deleuze & Guattari also state that it is “impossible to say where the boundary between the human and animal lies...” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 273). While in Tchaikovsky’s *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head*, we see a picture of a pre-apocalyptic phase where humanity is still trying to find out means to cope with the newfound agency and autonomy of the biotechnologically augmented animals, in VanderMeer’s *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts*, we see the world has already undergone a biotech-apocalypse where animals have devolved or transformed into monstrous entities that wreak havoc not only on one world but several worlds across different timelines in a weird multiverse full of unforeseen and unpredictable possibilities. Economides and Shackelford have aptly observed how VanderMeer’s works collapse “the distance between monstrous humans who wield biotechnological power and their chimeric creations, laying bare the anthropocentric violence...” (*Surreal Entanglements* 16). In Tchaikovsky’s works, we see humanity trying hard to refuse and reject the innate animality and agential capacity of the nonhuman lifeforms whom their own technologies have upgraded into highly augmented beings and by doing so they are projecting a monstrous version of these augmented animals, while in VanderMeer’s works, we see animals have already lost their animality and instead have degenerated into weird monsters while humans too have devolved to become nonhuman and posthuman entities in a post-apocalyptic timeline or across multiple timelines. Many of the major characters featured in Tchaikovsky’s works seem to mirror the characters portrayed in VanderMeer’s works as their pre-apocalyptic and less monstrous reincarnations. The highly intelligent bear named Honey in Tchaikovsky strikes us as the pre-apocalyptic version of Mord, the gigantic bear featured in VanderMeer’s works, the distributed intelligence of the hive-mind bees seems to anticipate the hive-mind of salamanders into which Chen often disintegrates in VanderMeer’s *Dead Astronauts*, the Multiform Assault Pack whose leader is the augmented dog Rex also reflect the post-apocalyptic version of the incredibly ferocious team of Mord Proxies in VanderMeer’s *Borne*, The Company and Charlie X in VanderMeer’s works also parallels the biotech corporation headed by the Master in Tchaikovsky’s works which has already inflicted untold damages on the ecosystem of the planet. However, the underlying similarities go much deeper than just functional semblances since in Tchaikovsky’s works we see the signs of an oncoming apocalypse where because of humanity’s refusal to appreciate the dignity and agential autonomy of the nonhuman lifeforms, the path for their steady degeneration into monstrous entities in the future seems to have been paved which is what has been explored in all its weird glory in VanderMeer’s works.

#### (i). *The Triad and the Tension: Animality, Humanity and Monstrosity:*

“There is no doubt that we need to think unheard-of thoughts about animals, that we need new languages, new artworks, new histories, even new sciences and philosophies” (Calarco, *Zoographies* 6).

In Tchaikovsky’s *Dogs of War*, even though we see the battle between animality and humanity takes the center stage, still there are hints about the undercurrents of monstrosity. It says about Rex: “He was a monster made by men. Still, it was easy to anthropomorphise him” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 133). People are also concerned about the destructive and violent nature of these Bioforms: “Bioforms retained the potential to do enormous damage” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 213). From the very beginning, Bioforms could hear people screaming their names and telling them monsters and that plays a very significant role in reinforcing the sense of dehumanization and degradation in these semi-human creatures striving hard to emulate the best of human traits even while following their master’s commands: “Monsters, they were shouting. There were monsters coming” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 94). Even an intelligent creature like Honey is described as a “gun-toting, talking, caffeinated monsterbear” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 97). Characters are seen as telling repeatedly the Bioforms that they are nothing but monsters inside as one Doctor Thea de Sejos is seen to be doing to Rex: “...she shouted into his big, dog face, telling him he was a monster” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 125). Aslan, the lawyer on Rex’s side, explains that the main problem is the perception of the people of these Bioforms as the people mostly see them as monsters and as such it is difficult to defend them based on pure legal technicalities in a courtroom. “Aslan frankly tells, “But it’s how they’re seen... Monsters, basically. And that’s a real problem” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 179). Rex observes that humanity just wants to subject them to every possible hardship and every worst ordeal to the point that their monstrous nature comes screaming out: “Every time we are deployed the world waits to see if we will turn out to be monsters” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 294). Aslan points out how it is easy to lay blame on these bioengineered beings who do nothing but obey their Master’s commands but all that the media and press do is to dehumanize them even further. The lawyer on the opposition side is one David Kahner who labels them as “unnatural monsters” and argues that they should get rid of them as soon as possible. In VanderMeer’s works, we see the eco-catastrophic repercussions of actually discarding these creatures as parts of an aborted experiment. The biotech remnants assume monstrous dimensions and threaten to destroy and destabilize the entire civilization. In VanderMeer’s works, we come across some kind of a wholesale dissolution of known and the emergence of a corrupted, twisted, and poisoned world order. In *Dogs of War*, we see the leader of the bioform dogs Rex hints at a possible future where something truly unexpected and transgressive could emerge. Rex says, “They will discover how we have exceeded our design parameters” (Tchaikovsky, *Dogs of War* 240). Here, the design parameters simply are the set of certain predictable animalistic traits that humans want to see their augmented animals follow blindly without becoming aware of their agency and any act of exceeding those parameters implies a subversion of the anthropocentric worldview which cherishes the notion of human supremacy and exceptionalism at the cost of marginalizing everything that is non-human. It also symbolizes the animal’s venture into the forbidden territories of the monstrous. Now, in Tchaikovsky’s novels, we do not come across the depiction of the aftermaths of such a transgressive venture into the monstrous territory which also involves a comprehensive dissolution of the known in favor of the emergence of the unknown and ambiguous. However, what we see here is that the more enigmatic these Bioforms begin to appear, the greater

the humanity begins to feel threatened from the eerily humanlike and sentient behaviors of these otherwise ferocious animals. As Honey, the bear in *Bear Head*, seems to have rightly pointed out, it is the monstrosity lurking deep within the hearts of human which humans seem to be projecting onto the biotech beasts and so by repeatedly labeling the Bioforms as monstrous creation, humanity is unconsciously dehumanizing their own agency as rational, sentient beings. As Jimmy, himself a Bioform, is brainwashed into believing that the Bees are monsters by nature just as any other Bioforms created from animal stocks: “We made Bees, and the monster always comes back for its creator some day” (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 22). In VanderMeer’s *Dead Astronauts*, we see that the very idea of humanity is disposed of entirely to pave the way for the emergence of a posthuman, postgender, postmortal and photobiological mode of existence where nothing is what it seems to be. Now, the process of branding Bioforms as monsters continue unabated in *Bear Head*. When Honey asks Jimmy to go looking for Bees, Jimmy tells, “Bees is a monster, lady. We don’t go talking to Bees around here” (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 132). Even later, we are told that many still believe that “Bees is a monster that will devour the Earth!” (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 255) even after all the things they have done for humanity which include the task of terraforming the Mars single-handedly and creating oxygen-enriched atmosphere. But since then, humanity has grown to be more and more averse to the Bioforms and labelled many of them as terrorists and potential threats to humanity. Here, we see how the virtual avatar of Honey plays the pivotal role but is hardly present physically throughout the novel. It is through her presence in the head of Jimmy Marten, himself a bioengineered human or Bioform but of human stock, that the virtual avatar of Honey seems to control Jimmy’s actions and Jimmy seems to have become an amalgam of virtual and real, and also human and animal. It is in the extra storage space of the illegally rented headspace of Jimmy that Bear’s projection somehow manages to find its way. So, as the action moves forward, we see that Jimmy is increasingly being manipulated, commanded and controlled by the virtual avatar of Honey, the bear, who in turn is in search for the Bees that have hidden somewhere in Mars. Through the virtual presence of Honey, we see that not only the distinction between virtual and real, but also between the human and animal has become blurred and almost non-existent. Now, through the commanding, virtual presence of Honey’s digitized avatar in Jimmy’s brain, we see that the essentially vitalist, embodied and materialist existence of the animal fuses with the thinking, ghostlike, abstract aspect of the rational human. Honey, as the physically real bear stands for “fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being – not a consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation – a heavily affective sensation – of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world”, which then gets coupled to her virtual avatar which is projected into Jimmy’s head “which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell” (Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* 33).

The previous practice of dehumanization and denigration of animals have come to haunt the bioengineered human populace in Mars as they feel that they would too be looked down upon as the ‘Other’ just like those Bioforms who have been manufactured from the genes of baser animals. So, Bioforms in Mars seem to be now in danger of double marginalization and otherization primarily by the normal humans and then by their biotech counterparts. We see that through various means of propaganda common people have been brainwashed into believing that the Bioforms indeed now pose a grave threat to the very idea of humanity as we know it and the only solution available at hand is to eliminate them for good. The most common image that comes to one’s mind in such a situation when one speaks of Bioforms is that of “a ton of angry bear, half a ton of ravaging werewolf-lookalike, a monstrous reptile, an angry swarm of bees” (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 36). However, as the novel makes it clear, there is something deeper than just outward bestial manifestation which incites fear in the minds of men and this is nothing but a projection of their own monstrous nature into the Bioforms. It is their own suppressed monstrosity and bestiality that prompt humans to corner and control these Bioforms as if they are the source of all terror. The humans know in their heart of hearts what they are capable of doing as we see when they torture those creatures with such implanted inhibitor instruments known as Collars: “Sometimes, hidden deep within the trap of ‘They’re not like us’ was the terror of ‘What if they’re just like us, but stronger?’ Sometimes the fear came because you were scared of looking into the eye of the monster and seeing your own reflection” (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 37). In fact, from a psychoanalytical point-of-view, we may say that the animal is the embodiment of the physical otherness of humanity whereas the monster may be interpreted as a repressed double or, a symbol of the fears lurking deep within the recesses of man’s unconscious. In his famous *The Red Book*, Jung advocates the need of acknowledging the repressed animality in man himself and writes, “Man, you have even forgotten that you too are an animal” (391). In his work, Jung dwells extensively on the negative animalistic qualities such as our dark and unbridled desires and positive animal traits such as harmonious way of living. Honey in *Bear Head*, and Rex in *Dogs of War* bring out the positive and negative aspects of animality respectively. Jung further states, “What you excluded from your life, what you renounced and damned, everything that was and could have gone wrong, awaits you behind that wall before which you sit quietly” (*Red Book*, 340). The present study specifically aims to show how the renounced, damned and excluded part of animality could later emerge as some sort of monstrous reincarnation in a technologically-mediated apocalyptic age. The birth of Godzilla, ‘the King of the Monsters’ similarly marks such a monstrous transformation of an animal into a formidable monster and symbolizes a return or regress into the repressed memories of nuclear holocaust of Japan. Also, when the animals tend to devolve into monstrous entities humans also degenerates into inhuman beings and in VanderMeer’s *Dead Astronauts*, we see such a transformation through the portrayal of one Charlie X. Charlie X first helped the nefarious Company in creating several atrocious and chimeric monsters but in the process, he himself gets transformed into an utterly inhuman creature. Following Jung’s words, we may say Charlie X becomes “a monstrous animal form” for which he has “exchanged” his humanity (157). Honey’s words in *Bear Head* remind one of Nietzsche’s warning: “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 146). The fear of the unknown, the eerie, the other, the profane get transformed into the projection of monstrosity on these animals. It is through the human subjects’ attempt to strengthen the Cartesian divide through which a clear separation between the sacred humanity and a pure animality becomes possible that man’s self-conceptions of subject-object division is also realized and reinscribed. However, as Colebrook seems to suggest and Bataille hinted at, through the creation of monstrous and bestial, humanity itself gets objectified and gets placed among various other kinds of impure and bestial/animalized bodies. In Colebrook’s opinion, “To live and inhabit is to be parasitic, to pollute, to alter the *clima*, to effect an inclination that cannot be remedied or mitigated by some return or retrieval of the proper” (“Posthuman Humanities” 180). Bataille in his *Theory of Religion* feels that it is primarily as a result of man’s separation from the animalistic, vitalist mode of life where he is one with nature that has prompted him in the first place to erect and organize a capitalistic superstructure where the value system is based on the waste and glorification of the excess expenditure. In VanderMeer’s post-apocalyptic setting of his narratives, we see exactly how this plays out in the form of Company’s exploitation of nature and destruction of the ecosystem while in Tchaikovsky’s works, it is by normalizing the systematic discrimination of the intelligent Bioforms that the capitalist system thrives. Tchaikovsky is a master when it comes to imagining humanity’s interaction with sentient aliens and uplifted Animals in a technologically

mediated environment and this is evident in his works such as *Children of Time* and *Children of Ruin*, where humans interact with sentient aliens, manufacture highly evolved spiders and octopuses. In *Children of Time*, the main conflict ensues between the humans and the nonhuman spiders over the possession of limited resources, and in *Children of Ruin*, the humans mostly cohabit peacefully with other evolved animals and even get united to fight against a bigger threat. Tchaikovsky's *Echoes of the Fall* trilogy also shows humans and animals living in a well-knit environment where certain animalistic features become part of the humans themselves and when they are threatened by the 'soulless' humans from the outside who has no animal 'soul' in them, the hitherto quarrelling factions of man-animal people get united to form a bigger group. Tchaikovsky's *The Tiger and the Wolf* (2016), the first novel from *Echoes of the Fall Trilogy*, portrays shape shifting animals and reptiles collectively dubbed as the shifters and the post-anthropocentric worldview is presented through the viewpoint of such characters as Maniye, a wolf/tiger shifter, Hesprec, a snake shifter and a friend to Maniye, Loud Thunder the bear shifter often anticipating the figure of Honey in *Bear Head*, a Snake Priest and a lone wolf named Broken Axe. His *The Doors of Eden* (2020) depicts the adventures of mechanically augmented but highly predatorial cultures such as the eurypterid, fish-like Devonians who have uploaded themselves into computational simulation, rodent-like creatures that can travel through time, wolf-sized cats, super-advanced lemurs, exotic cockroaches, gigantic woodlice, near-immortal trilobites who create entire space-times from the ripples of their primordial consciousness and Cambrians who have survived the destruction of the entire planet to grow into space-faring posthuman culture that roams "across the vast stretches of space between galaxies and devour asteroids and planetoids to convert their masses into energy for sustaining the superintelligent mind harbored safely inside a hundred kilometers-long carapace-like spaceship" (Patra, "A Post-Anthropocentric Explication" 10).

**(ii). Blurring Boundaries:**

In Tchaikovsky's *Bear Head*, the sequel to the *Dogs of War*, we find an even more thorough blurring of the boundaries between man and animal thanks to the unprecedented advancement in technology. The bear protagonist Honey in this work anticipates the more monstrous incarnation through Mord in VanderMeer's *Borne*. It is not only through the portrayal of Mord that VanderMeer's *Borne* evokes parallels between the two works in their own unique conception of bioengineered bears, but also in their setting of the novel which is based on the dereliction and dilapidation of the Earth and its ecosystem at large. In *Bear Head*, Earth has deteriorated so much that humanity has now decided to settle down on Mars and previously the hive-mind intelligence named Bees which are literally a swarm of genetically modified, intelligent bees with their hard labor have terraformed the Martian landscape to make it habitable for the humans. Bees have done the unthinkable by breaking up Mars into something akin to the soil of Earth, and then created atmosphere with their excretions and also seeded the landscape "with scurf, and by the time they came along to install the canopy the atmosphere was already on the turn" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 24). In *Dogs of War*, we see how Hartnell expresses the enigmatic and hybrid nature of the Bees in these words: "Only Bees is like a person. Or not a person, not really a person, but you can talk to Bees. Bees could ace the Turing test" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 43). The fluidity and shapeshifting, distributed nature of these intelligent creatures seem to anticipate the more radically shapeshifting and metamorphosing nature of Moss and the three other astronauts who are both dead and alive across as many as seven or more timelines. In *Dead Astronauts*, among the trio who have overcome death to avenge the wrongs committed by Company, the dissolution of forms and indefiniteness of essence are most prominent. Among the trio are the leader Grayson, a black woman who is blind but can see things that nobody else can, Chen who understands things in terms of abstractions, probabilities, and mathematical equations while frequently morphing into a hive-mind of salamanders, and Moss who is both gender-fluid and can switch between many alternative selves. They are the outcome of some experiments that the Company had once performed albeit unsuccessfully and Rachel discovers them, they were nothing but "three dead people in the hazard suits so familiar because all three had worn them. Skeletons within" (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 127). The trio comprising of Moss, Chen, and Grayson is not composed of three distinct personalities, but they act together as a hybrid superorganism composed of three parts with a shared consciousness. In their inhuman or non-human nature, we see differences between the human and the animal gradually disappearing to the point of becoming non-existent: "nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal." ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 10). As Grosz remarks, that man even while belonging to the animalkind, actually seeks to stand out from the rest through his/her unique traits of sentience and rationality and when these very qualities are challenged, animality and humanity virtually get indistinguishable. According to Grosz, "Man must be understood as fundamentally different from and thus as other to the animal; an animal perhaps, but one with at least one added category – a rational animal, an upright animal, an embarrassed animal – that lifts it out of the categories of all other living beings and marks man's separateness, his distance, his movement beyond the animal" (*Becoming Undone* 12).

Honey, the Bear in *Bear Head* seems to be as much aware of the systematic exploitation and oppression of her kind as Rex was when he was alive. Honey seems to have a more penetrating insight into the dark psychology of the humans than even Rex who was portrayed as being as much torn with war with himself as with the enemies without. Honey observes, "Just like they made Rex and me and the others to be soldiers, to do the brutal things that human soldiers might find inconvenient, so once again they'd warped us into their twisted shadows. Made us the monster that they'd always told stories about, because monsters are easier to destroy when they don't have your face" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 207). Honey explains how people as a result of their increasing sense of insecurity before these sentient Bioforms have started to become inimical. Honey speaks of "all those people who had always loathed the idea of a talking bear, a free Bioform, an educated animal who could use longer words than them, were waiting with knives at the bottom" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 141). It is this very idea of human exceptionalism that Honey points out has been challenged by the superior traits of these Bioforms who seem to excel and exceed their human counterparts on so many fields. While the Bioforms continue to challenge human exceptionalism with their unique, humanlike qualities, the humans, on the other hand, show many signs of continuously degrading into some of the lowest levels of bestiality imaginable. In the novel, we see how a manipulative and eccentric politician named Warner Thompson abuses her personal assistant named Carole Springer. Since, the episodes on earth are mostly narrated from Carole's point-of-view, the scenario becomes extremely disturbing where she describes how Thompson engages in acts that amount to sexual assault on her. Carole has an implant embedded in her that makes her unable to resist the sexual assault from her molesters, rather she is manipulated into craving for more despite her inner being feeling traumatized at each such incident. Carole again reminds one of Emiko in Bacigulapi's *The Windup Girl*, where Emiko, the windup girl of the title, is a transhuman character who has genes encoded in her which makes her unable to resist assaults from her molesters. We see how Emiko gets raped and beaten in public by other prostitutes and humanoids day in and day out to satisfy her customers, and the novel vividly describes how she is genetically programmed to orgasm and since her body

is not in her control, she climaxes onstage in public, even as tears stream down her face and her spasmed limbs ache in pain. Emiko's skin is poreless and smooth and so, unable to sweat, she overheats – all of which makes her closer to a mindless machine than a human being.

Now, in *Bear Head*, we find that after learning to see things from the animalist perspective of Honey, Jimmy comes to realize the common animality that underlies the nature of humans and the animals alike. Jimmy points towards the basic similarities that humans no matter how much have advanced still share with their cave-dwelling ancestors: "Bioengineer us however much you want, sometimes we humans ain't so very far from the caves and the stone tools" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 132). One may recall Jung's remark in this regard when he states, "Man, you have even forgotten that you too are an animal" (*Red Book* 391). Honey even informs Jimmy that the latter being a Bioform, his very identity might be nothing more than an illusion since in such an age of virtuality and personality uploading one can implant the scanned consciousness of a person into anyone else's body: "...that they'd just grow purpose-built clone bodies and then install personality uploads into the shells. So you'd all believe you were real people, but you'd be no more than copies, like me" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 156). So, we see that even the humans in such an age are in danger of losing their distinct and privileged stature by becoming assimilated with the constructs they have so painstakingly created themselves. In this book, we also come to know more about John Keram Aslan a character whom we find also in the first book who tried his best to secure minimum rights for the Bioforms even when the entire system was conspiring against to foil his efforts. Honey recalls: "He saved Rex, the dog-form who went on to become the poster child for Bioform heroism, the acceptable face of non-human sentience:" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 105). Honey points out how humans have always thought of only exploiting the Bioforms for their own selfish needs but when the latter prove to be more powerful and intelligent than their human masters, they feel threatened and consequently seek to eliminate them: "Everyone valued what Bioforms could bring to the world, and nobody sat around complaining about all the dogs that had suffered and died for them" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 81). Honey explains how humans sought to conquer her spirit by breaking her down by inflicting terrible punishments: "They forced my bones against my bones until the animal part of me that would be berserk was conquered by the human part of me that didn't want to be hurt, and I hung between them quietly" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 214). All these instances of brutality only foreshadow the more extreme instances of experiments in bioengineering that the animals undergo in the laboratory of the Company in VanderMeer's novels. We see how the blue fox in *Dead Astronauts* fills several pages with repeated mention of killing, skinning, torturing and scalding them in the name of conducting gruesome experiments. In the subsection *to the dead people* of Chapter 9 of *Dead Astronauts* titled 'Can't Forget,' which is narrated by the messianic blue fox, we come across these sentences each of which is repeated as many as ten times: "They killed us with traps. They killed us with poisons [...] They withheld water. They killed all our prey [...] They cut out our tongues so we bled to death. They skinned us alive" (271-72). While the chapter begins with repetitions of these two sentences "They killed me. They brought me back" for over 188 times (254-57). Honey also sees through the layers of hypocrisy of the humans as they gang up against the Bioforms because they are increasingly feeling insecure about their continuous exploitation of these creatures who are clearly much stronger and sometimes even more intelligent than them: "campaigning against Bioforms and DisInt and the rest because we weren't human, we weren't the environment they'd adapted to exploit" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 186). Honey knows how it will play out if they all do not rise up united as one: "Collaring Bioforms today is Collaring everyone tomorrow" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 100). Honey knows how the human Bioforms seem to be basking under the imagined glory of anthropic exceptionalism and unless she manages to bring them under one banner the future holds no prospect for them. Jimmy initially seems to be under the delusion that since they are not made from animal stocks, they will escape the process of systematic denigration of human rights and dehumanization. Jimmy thinks, "We just happen to be Bioforms engineered out of human stock, rather than the dogs and lizards and badgers who get to do the skilled work. And the bears..." (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 25). However, Honey knows it very well that once the authorities can get the law enacted by which they will be granted legal impunity for killing or 'decommissioning' the animalistic Bioforms, they will come after the bioengineered humans like Jimmy also. So, we may say that Honey by making Jimmy aware of the inherent objectifiability of the human body that she seems to be advocating the need for humanization of non-human entities. When Honey hacks into Jimmy's headspace she forces him to integrate in him the viewpoint of her own and thus we see how the animality and humanity fuse together to create an entirely new post-anthropocentric perspective. Jimmy, the narrator during the initial part of the novel admits: "I see through my eyes, but where they look is out of my hands. I hear through my ears and the radio link. I think, locked up there in my own brain. And everything else is gone. Everything else is Honey" (Tchaikovsky, *Bear Head* 102).

### (iii). *To Transgress is to be a Monster:*

In VanderMeer's works, we see how monstrosities reign in a post-apocalyptic setting where animals begin to get increasingly transformed into grotesque monsters and humans begin resembling their animal counterparts more. Next, we will see how Jeff VanderMeer's 2017 novel *Borne* presents an even more monstrous, exotic, and transgressive picture of the bioengineered animals in a post-apocalyptic setting. We may imagine it as the novel where the action plays out in an Earth that suffers from the fallout of a series of failed or botched bioengineering experiments conducted on the animals in Tchaikovsky's *Dogs of War* and while *Bear Head* has been busy portraying the action mostly in Mars, VanderMeer portrays what has been happening on Earth during that period of time. *Borne* features no overt fight from the sentient animals for their basic rights rather the situation has deteriorated so much that there is hardly any hope left for the surviving humanity and the remaining bioengineered animals save to engage in a ruthless struggle of existence where only the strongest and the weirdest will survive. Here, we see a flying, ravaging, behemoth of a bear named Mord that extinguishes anything it comes across with an unbelievable swiftness and ferocity, while several smaller but even more ravenous versions of the flying Mord known as Mord Proxies run amok throughout the City, a woman named the Magician who with the aid of invisible biotechnologically modified clothes can disappear from view, her minions known as the feral children, and the most enigmatic of all – Borne, a hybrid, blob-like intelligence that continuously keeps on metamorphosing. We see that by "some magic of engineering extorted from the Company" (VanderMeer, *Borne* 4). Mord is a bear who even on his side is over three stories high and the only reason for his existence is exacting revenge on the Company and the other beasts. While Mord can transform living beings "to a red mist, a roiling wave of...blood," while the Mord proxies get "drunk-stumbling in their own blood-murder" (VanderMeer, *Borne* 99), and instantaneously render living beings into 'a chaos of viscera and exposed bone' and relish in 'blood and offal' and 'arterial spray' (VanderMeer, *Borne* 164). In fact, in both of the works of VanderMeer, we see it is the Company that provides the motive for the existence of these animals as all these animals seek is revenge against the Company. Although it is only hinted at we get to know that Mord was, in fact, bioengineered

from a human being and now as a complete monster, his (or its) sole purpose of existence is to avenge the wrongs that Company had committed against him, and there is no time for engaging in questions on ethics, legality, and philosophy of right and wrong in such a situation. “Mord had claws and fangs that could eviscerate, extinguish, quick as thought” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 5). Rachel feels that monstrosity has so much overtaken and overwhelmed these animals now that no trace of animality is left let alone any trace of humanity. However, sometimes these creatures seem to transcend the notion of any strict separation between humans and animals, and rather impress us with their latent humanity: “That Mord might once have been human, then, seemed like some distant, remote truth...” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 61). While for Borne, the task of ascribing any fixed identity becomes an even more difficult task than it is with Mord. Rachel feels Borne “wasn’t human, even if he was a person. He didn’t need what we needed” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 144). These animals seem to thrive in the liminal and undefined zone that tries but unsuccessfully to separate the human from the animal. For Mord, when he engages in acts of mindless violence on the Company and its remnants he strikes as the purest reflection of everything that is inhuman in the City: “There was nothing human in his gaze in that moment, just the kind of hunger that could never truly be satiated” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 159); and still, when he daydreams or regresses into nostalgic ruminations of his past, we find him to be as humane as anything can be. There is no trace of sophistry or fine intelligence to be seen anywhere in him as is the case with Honey in *Bear Head*. In *Dead Astronauts*, the creature Nocturnal is an animal of a strange type which can change shapes and give rise to nightmarish visions in the hosts’ mind. In its dreams, “Behemoth dove and held his breath, to drown whatever clung to his head. Behemoth drifted like a dead thing at the bottom, among the skeletons of its prey” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 150). In the real world, Behemoth is the predator who preys upon others while in his dreams he is the prey. He “had fought much mightier beasts and won, faith and fated, shaped by scarring, a history of broken ribs, of fins turned misshapen like crooked oars, of a leer to the left side of the mouth caused by a claw ripping through and past” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 97), but once he drifts off into the land of nightmares and hallucinations, his physical prowess proves to be of no avail. Behemoth is also called Botch which refers to the failed or botched experiments of the Company itself and Botch’s murderousness not only evokes comparison but often exceeds that of Mord’s, both of whom kill when they please and it pleases them to kill: “the ways of rollick slaughter and slaughterous rollick” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts*, 134). Deleuze and Guattari (2005) have used the term “botched” (*ratés*) to point towards the metaphysical implications that underscore the very process of becoming where the end-result invariably involves the loss of identities and confusion between different forms of life. In VanderMeer’s novel too, Botch seems to illustrate a monstrous breakdown of categories and transgression into forbidden territories. What distinguishes the animals from the monsters is the presence of the mind and mental faculties, which in the former functions in a normal way but in the latter seems to be either non-existent or too weak to counter the insanity and mindlessness. The minds of the creatures and their thought processes for most of the novel, appear to us like some closed, folded, and highly opaque objects through which we cannot look. Even in the chaos of apparently mindless destruction and total wreckage, there lie some thought processes which are known perhaps only to these enigmatic animals. “Mord destroyed and reimagined our broken city for reasons known only to him, yet he also replenished it in his thoughtless way” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 5). Here, as the narrator Rachel observes, even the lifeless objects like the City itself is transformed into animals or predators that seem to thrive on its preys: “To me, the Company was the white engorged tick on the city’s flank, the place that had robbed us of resources and created chaos” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 26). So, animality has entered through every pore of the fabric of the City and its inhabitants following a terrible eco-catastrophe. Here, we see that in stark contrast to the situation presented in Tchaikovsky’s novels, it is not the animals that want to be more like the humans, rather it is the humans who seem to become more like the animals they have hated for so long: “Other than Mord, the poison rains, and the odd discarded biotech that could cause death or discomfort, the young were often the most terrible force in the city. Nothing in their gaze could tell you they were human. They had no memories of the old world to anchor them or humble them or inspire them. Their parents were probably dead or worse, and the most terrible and transformative violence had been visited upon them from the earliest of ages” (VanderMeer, *Borne* 30). However, the only exception seems to be Borne himself who reminds us of the Bees in Tchaikovsky’s works due to its exceedingly enigmatic, enormously complex, and highly ambiguous nature. Borne wants to be like humans although he himself is not sure about that, while Mord by engaging in ever more horrific acts of mindless violence, seems to recede more and more into the dark abyss of irredeemable monstrosity. In VanderMeer’s *Borne*, it is the almost parental relationship between Rachel and Borne that poses a stark contrast to the otherwise apocalyptic and completely dehumanized world. In fact, even when Borne seems to be growing exceedingly complex than anything familiar around Rachel, her affectionate relationship towards Borne hints at the last possibility of attaining anything that remotely resembles a meaningful, human relationship. Borne seems to imitate and masquerade as anyone he chooses whether it be Wick, or Mord himself, and it is not until the final moment when he is turned into a sea of fleshy blob and absorbs Mord in him that he ever stops becoming human. Jessica Langer, in her essay “Apocalypse Soon” deals at length on the issue of parent-child relationship between Rachel and Borne and it is for attainment of this kind of relationship that Bioforms like Rex and Honey in Tchaikovsky’s novels are seen to be fighting for all their lives. Benjamin Robertson in his *None of this is Normal*, feels that it is because of the overwhelming destructive nature of monstrosity that any or all “attempts to humanize” the parent-child relationship between Rachel and Borne are “rendered impossible” (154). While the biotech beasts in VanderMeer’s works are portrayed as beings possessing traces of humanity, the apparently human characters like Wick are portrayed as inhuman ones. Wick only appears to be a normal human being but he is not and he even erases Rachel’s memories about what the Company had done to the City in the pre-apocalyptic period. In VanderMeer’s *Acceptance* too, the last in a series of three books in his Southern Reach Trilogy, we see such an instance of a monstrous and inhuman transformation of an originally human character. In that novel, the biologist gets transformed into a complex and monstrous being called the Crawler, which seems to anticipate Borne in many respects. Later, in the novel, when other characters like Grace, Control and Ghost Bird come across the biologist-turned-Crawler they could only realize his eyes and nothing else. Sometimes, Mord and Borne are seen to be different manifestations of a same psyche where the humanity and monstrosity collide and, in this fight, Mord seems to always have the upper hand. In fact, throughout the Southern Reach Trilogy, the Crawler seems to be the eerie presence or the inexplicable “mechanism” that transforms the entire area named Area X into an exotic land where it keeps inscribing words in cursive scripts that further turn into fungi-like entity resembling moss. Thus, we see how monstrosity once unleashed, can destabilize many of our familiar regimes of truths that we have for so long taken for granted. Bernard Stiegler in his *States of Shock* (2014), Elizabeth Grosz, in her *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2008), and Brian Massumi in his *What Animals Teach Us* (2014) have attempted to present the phenomenon of pure animality as being far more complex than what either biological science or a humanistic conceptualization of human-animal relationship is able to comprehend.

Now, commenting on the conflict between Mord and Borne as featured in *Borne*, Robertson observes that “...if Borne lacks the monstrous hardness necessary to fight and defeat Mord, such is the case because he possesses a tiny amount of something else, something from which the planet has turned

away from in this age of giant monsters: humanity” (*None of this is Normal* 155). Brain Jones in “Science Fiction Can Change the World”, has interpreted *Borne* as VanderMeer’s attempt to oppose the artificially constructed human-animal divide which seems to be the root of so many evils. In this regard, we may recall that Donna Haraway in her seminal 1992 article “The Promises of Monsters,” has presented the monster figure as a means to move beyond the rigid, binary-based discursive framework. Bruno Latour in his essays “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene,” and “Love Your Monsters,” and Timothy Clark in his book *Ecocriticism on the Edge* have advocated the need for going beyond this binary-infested, Western mode of thinking which is deeply entrenched in the notions of human supremacy and Cartesian divide to tackle such purely Anthropocene problems like destruction of natural habitats and the ecosystem in general. Robertson while commenting on both *Borne*, and a sequel/accompanying novella titled *The Strange Bird: A Borne Story* (2017), feels that these works represent the death and defeat of the humanity at the hands of the non-human and chaotic forces of wilderness. These works illustrate “the disappointment of ever being humans at all” (144). VanderMeer has portrayed the power of the weird further in his anthologies titled *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011) and *The New Weird* (2008) – both edited with his partner, Ann VanderMeer. The animal after its repeated failure to assert humanity seem to evolve to the level of weird and even monstrous.

Mord is described as “The great bear that might once have been human, who would return at dusk to the ruins of the Company for many nights, to sleep fitfully atop its remains, tormented by visions that would turn our own attempts at sleep into squint-eyed insomniac roving” (VanderMeer, *Borne*, 160). The animality depicted in VanderMeer’s work seems to be much different than Tchaikovsky’s since here it is less of a struggle for equality with humans and more of the battle between the chaotic, catastrophic forces of wild nature and the uncontrollable forces that biotechnology seems to have unwittingly unleashed on the face of the Earth. *Borne* seems to grow in size and intelligence quickly to transform from being a blob-like “hybrid of sea anemone and squid” to that of a human child but could not comprehend even the most basic notions of life and death. Like a pure Grottesque, *Borne* keeps on ingesting things to grow and evolve. As Rachel states, “To him, on some level I’d never understand, there was no death, no dying, and in the end we stood on opposite sides of a vast gulf of incomprehension. Because what was a human being without death?” (VanderMeer *Borne* 222). In *Dead Astronauts* (2019) which reads like a prequel but chronologically a sequel to *Borne*, we see an extrapolation of the monstrosity that began to rear its hydra-heads in *Borne*, only to manifest in its full force in *Dead Astronauts*. Katherine Buse in her article “Saving the Future by Tidal Pool Rules,” writes: “In Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne* (2017), to which *Dead Astronauts* is a sequel, we learned of a series of overlapping crises through which human life on Earth had become a largely stateless, disorganized scene of slow attenuation, scavenging, and mutual predation”.

Animality itself seems to give way to a rising wave of grotesquery and monstrosity. The four novels in our discussion starting with Tchaikovsky’s *Dogs of War* and *Bear Head* to VanderMeer’s *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts*, can be seen to be the depiction of a steadily deteriorating humanity where animality at first suffers and then starts to ascend to the level of humanity only to overtake and overwhelm humanity completely to the point that only the monstrosity and grotesquery remain. However, it is the humans who are to be held accountable for the destruction of the balance in animals, nature, and the world in general and the consequent emergence of monstrosity. In VanderMeer’s works, the human researcher Charlie X seems to be descending into a non-human state of indifference as a result of his inability to engage with the past, while the monsters appear more humane than their creator when they dream about a past, long for a God, and search for an identity. The man-made world of the laboratory seems to be a futile exercise for separating the wild and uncontrollable from the restrained and controlled since the wilderness and chaos inevitably invade and intersect to make the lab even more chaotic and wild than its natural counterpart. The lab of the Company becomes the hotspot of grotesquery and monstrosity which nature could not have given birth to had it been left unperturbed. The world of lab-made experiments is ruled by the motto of kill or be killed. In *Dead Astronauts*, when the Company first created the prototype Behemoth, other creatures of its kind were also born, but as the struggle for existence grew harder, almost all the other Behemoths died and only the present one remained. It is in his dreams that the Behemoth feels like he is listening to the voice of God while also imagining that it must be like the voice of the Company since the voice of the Company too ‘would boom through like God’ (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 230). The entire post-apocalyptic condition has been brought about by man’s cruelty, callousness, and carelessness towards life and nature in general. In the novel, the inanimate objects including the City along with its tunnel assume a hybrid and monstrous dimension: ‘Devoured. Digested. Broken down for parts. Nothing human. Nothing real, flesh-and-blood. Just a witness to atrocity’ (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 193). The entire City becomes an amalgamation of a post-apocalyptic graveyard and an exotic, carnivalesque hotspot where some of the most chimerical and monstrous beings come to being. It strikes us as a ‘liminal space where ‘the law’ is overturned’ and where ‘nonexclusive oppositions collide’ (Fanning, *The Body of the Grottesque*” 258). The Company has created all sorts of monsters ranging from ‘vast monsters with glittering eyes’, to ‘digging gap-jawed leviathan that ate the soil and vomited it back out’, or a ‘flying creature with many wings that blotted out the sun’ (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 18) In *Dead Astronauts*, we are thrown further into a world of irredeemable chaos and monstrosity where mindless acts of violence take the center stage. In fact, *Dead Astronauts* does not just restrict itself towards describing the incidents unfolding across only one timeline, rather it is through various alternative timelines and strands of narrative that the action evolves in the novel and despite being clouded with a sense of all-pervading futility and impending failure, it is in the depiction of the struggles against an overpowered authoritarian power (the Company) that the narrative captures our imagination and elicits our admiration. Chen, Grayson, and Moss are the three eponymous ‘Dead Astronauts’ who themselves defy the boundaries between the living and the dead; animal and human; and monstrosity and animality. There is the wolf-sized, prophetic and messianic figure of a weird blue fox, a leviathan that gradually transforms over the course of the narrative into a behemoth, and a ferocious duck with a broken wing and serrated teeth. The duck in *Dead Astronauts* becomes the symbol of death and horror incarnate just like Mord appears in ‘*Borne*’: “the duck did bring down its head like a hammer that became an ice pick that split the fox’s head in a crack and splatter of blood and brain matter” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts*, 65). The three post-mortal and posthuman astronauts defy all limitations of time and space as they travel across time and several timelines to prevent certain events from happening and to fulfill this purpose, they even have to kill their past versions when they used to collude and cooperate with the Company only to come back to the present timeline and find that nothing has changed. The novel makes us aware of this loopiness and paradoxical nature of a non-linear conception of time where through retrocausal action subjects from future travel back to past seeking to alter the outcomes: “Chen had killed Chen. Moss had absorbed Moss. Grayson had killed them both. Moss had killed Chen, Chen Moss” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 29). Here too, as we see in *Borne*, the struggle is motivated against the one and only Company whose inhuman and grotesque biotechnological experiments were responsible for the cataclysmic transformation of the characters concerned. *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts* seem to reimagine the world where the nightmare that was hinted at in Tchaikovsky’s novels have come to a



grisly pass as the ‘Masters’ of the Company have gone with their proposed experiments and thereby turning almost the entire planet into a dumping ground of their botched experiments and remnants, and from this wasteland of biotech remnants, monstrous incarnations of bioengineered beings have emerged. While in *Borne*, the struggle between humanity and animality plays out mostly within the minds of the biotechnologically augmented entities that the Company engendered in *Dead Astronauts*, the battle for reclaiming or reasserting humanity unfolds across multiple alternate timelines and realities. Characters like Moss have no specific identity or even gender and can transform themselves into any shape they want. Moss even reminds us of Bees in Tchaikovsky’s novels both of whom seem to possess the same sort of distributed intelligence while Moss has an even stranger ability to connect the consciousness of various other characters with him/herself. The novel confirms the posthumanity of Moss thus, “Moss had already given herself over to a cause beyond or above the human” (*Dead Astronauts* 16). Like a truly posthuman entity, Moss exists in a state of never-ending becoming where he/she is continuously morphing from one state to another, or to borrow Bakhtin’s words, Moss’ grotesque self “outgrows itself” and “transgresses its own limits.” (*Rabelais and His World*, 26). Moss blends “with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world...” (*Rabelais and His World*, 27). Moss operates both “a conduit as well as a person” who evolves and outgrows herself by accumulating and accreting different versions of her past selves, while also merging across different timelines to give rise to her present, unfinished self: “she was an accumulation of Mosses, all of whom lived inside her” (VanderMeer, *Dead Astronauts* 35). Using Braidotti’s words, we may state that Moss’s self is “recast in the nomadic mode of collective assemblage” (‘Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others’, 527).

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## Conclusion:

Deleuze & Guattari, in their epochal work *A Thousand Plateaus* talks about the “Animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human” (237), and this is what seems to be the central hypothesis of this study where animality seems to play a very crucial role as a mediating force between the polar opposite tendencies of humanity and monstrosity and technology can either improve and augment the animals or transform them into mindless monsters. The novels tell the tales of transformations, where in Tchaikovsky’s works, the humanity seems to get transformed by the influence of the same animality which it seeks to deny, dissolve and destroy, in VanderMeer’s works, we see animality making a strong comeback and is transformed violently into the monstrous, grotesque. Also, it is the humanity’s false sense of supremacy and self-importance that in the first place thwarted the attempts of the animals to affirm their own agencies and this denial seems to prepare the ground for a more disruptive, transgressive and grotesque assertion of animality in an apocalyptic future. Also, it would not be an exaggeration to say that these novels attempt to portray the story of infinitely complex and exceedingly rich process of evolution, a story of “mad proliferation of forms so fertile as to defy the human imagination” (Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us* 21), and the disastrous consequences of man’s technological prowess to mimic, tinker with and even excel upon the work of nature.

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