

## **“Some people have a ghost town, we have a ghost city”: Gothic, the Other, and the American Nightmare in Lauren Beukes’s *Broken Monsters***

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### **Abstract**

Lauren Beukes’s novel *Broken Monsters* is set in contemporary Detroit, and depicts a sequence of gruesome murders against the backdrop of the city’s economic decline. In a more conventional novel the abandoned warehouses, rundown inner-city neighbourhoods and mean streets would be the ‘othered’ setting for the drama, serving as a contrast to the American Dream of prosperity and social advancement. But Detroit has earned a reputation as a place of crime, social unrest and economic malaise, to the extent that this has become the norm rather than the other. Nonetheless, Beukes still manages to other the city setting through various means, including adding a supernatural element and viewing the action through the prism of social media. This article explores how Beukes's novel others the rundown city setting through Gothic and supernatural elements, and how new developments in the Gothic genre are depicted throughout the text.

Key Words: Beukes, Detroit, Gothic, trauma, internet, nightmare, dream, urban decay



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Detroit is the most Gothic of cities. Once the fourth-largest city in the USA and the heart of the American automobile industry, in the second half of the twentieth century it entered an economic and industrial decline it has yet to recover from. Mark Binelli observes that the popular contemporary narrative for Detroit is one that portrays the city as a failure, a place of poverty and lawlessness (Binelli 2003, 3). Detroit is filled with abandoned, crumbling buildings, to the extent that Dora Apel has described the city as “the poster child of ruination.” (Apel 2015, 4). It embodies Gothic tropes such as the spectre of the past, in its ruined factories and memories of the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, which was one of the deadliest and most destructive riots in US history. The Gothic has a lengthy history of confronting, responding to and in some instances processing or even healing from trauma (Veeder 1998, 20-29). However, Detroit’s trauma is ongoing and the city has yet to make any meaningful recovery, at least in terms of popular perception. The Gothic genre habitually expresses and processes not only past trauma but also embodies contemporary fears and anxieties. Lauren Beukes’s novel *Broken Monsters* uses the Gothic city as a backdrop for a story about a serial killer and the cop hunting him. Confronting trauma is one of several central themes in the text, which also features

modern art, the risks of the internet, homelessness, marital and family breakdown, and the supernatural. Beukes's novel emphasises the strange and the weird; the otherness of the city and its inhabitants.

Otherness in a literary context is a nebulous term that signifies opposition to the dominant culture, the self. The other and otherness are of paramount importance to the Gothic genre especially. Robert Miles observes that

In no genre is the other quite so unavoidable as in the Gothic. Indeed, through tales of doubles, hauntings and *Doppelgangers*, one may even say the Gothic raises the other to the status of a narrative principle. (Miles 2002, 84)

Hauntings abound in *Broken Monsters*, as this article will demonstrate. Furthermore, the narrative is a Gothic one according to Miles's definition. The other is intrinsic to the story and the narrative of Beukes's novel, shaping both the characters populating the novel and the depiction of Detroit itself, with the backdrop and settings frequently othered. Arguably, the entire city is othered in the text, a point I will return to later.

A basic definition of the self within the Gothic is that the self is almost always white, masculine, upper-class, wealthy, human, law-abiding and Christian (Protestant). The other is any mode of being that does not adhere to these definitions, which encompasses a vast swathe of potential characters, situations and states of being. Yet despite existing in opposition to the self, the other is inexorably bound up with it. As Tabish Khair observes,

Every definition of the Gothic highlights a version of Otherness, an event, personage or term that is finally a partial or flawed attempt to conceptualise that which is vital to the Self and absolutely not the Self. (Khair 2009, 7)

The self in the crime novel, a category to which *Broken Monsters* also belongs, is the representative of the law and/or justice – the police officer, the lawyer, even the private detective. Their aim is to restore or preserve the social order, which is broadly depicted as good and worth upholding. The social order is preserved by

eliminating or at the very least capturing the deviant and rendering them powerless by holding them accountable for their misdeeds. The law would have no purpose if criminals ceased to exist: and so the self is inextricably bound up with the other in the crime novel.

Detroit is an infamous example of the American Dream gone horribly wrong. The American Dream is based on the premise that anyone can achieve their idea of success through hard work and industry in a society where upwards mobility is possible for all regardless of birth, race or class status. Detroit is a counterpoint to this supposition: the prospect of material success, at least, is remote in such a depressed economy and the city’s deep racial divisions are a continuing source of tension (Widdick 1989, 166-185). Detroit is arguably already othered: it bears little resemblance to America’s best version of itself.

Although one of Beukes’s central characters, Gabi Versado, is a senior police officer, and thus part of the establishment, the majority of her characters in the city are representative of the other. Most disturbing of all is the isolated, mentally-ill killer Clayton Broom, a failed artist. There is also T.K., a homeless man who has done time in prison and has vigilante tendencies. There are also plenty of self-styled outcasts: Gabi’s daughter Layla, who spends her spare time luring paedophiles into public confrontations over the internet, and Jonno, a hipster journalist who spends his days writing articles that he contemptuously refers to as “chum to pull in the likes” (Beukes 2014, 57). Detroit’s artistic community, which has apparently evolved to replace the heavy industry that disappeared half-a-century ago, also features heavily and the novel casts a sardonic eye over the self-consciously non-conforming artists who have moved into Detroit’s abandoned buildings.

*Broken Monsters* is full of characters who represent the other, and Beukes’s depiction of the city is as a Gothic, haunted location that bears little resemblance to the thriving city of the early twentieth century. As the city and its inhabitants are

the norm, the average – no matter how eccentric or disturbed, then arguably their otherness comes into question. It is only through the novels contrasting of their narrative with the bright lights of the American Dream, that their otherness is upheld. Although direct comparisons between Detroit and other American cities are not present in the novel, Detroit is established as the graveyard of the American Dream. “The dream” (Beukes 2014, 111) is a supernatural force which lurks throughout the city, permeating the text. It is unclear whether it possesses Clayton or whether he is merely sensitive to its presence, but it is clearly malign and his attempts to express how it appears to him manifest in the gruesome murders he commits. The term “dream” in the novel is suggestive of something extraordinary, supernatural, but also references the broader American mythology of universally attainable upward social mobility and success. Detroit, however, is an American nightmare, and Clayton’s dream is equally horrendous.

### **The Dream of Detroit**

*Broken Monsters* is not a conventional murder mystery. Although the Detroit Police Department have no idea who the killer is, the text reveals the murderer to the audience early on. Clayton Broom, a mentally-disturbed artist, starts creating art to express the aforementioned dream, using the bodies of humans and animals. His first murder is that of a young boy, Daveyton, who he cuts in half, adding a pair of deer legs to the torso to transform the child into a faun. He then murders a woman and creates what Gabi describes as “a clay exoskeleton” for her (Beukes 2014, 251). “The shape in the oven is not human. Some kind of insect or sea creature, she thinks... A carapace” (ibid.). Then the lower half of Daveyton’s body is found attached to the torso and front legs of a deer at a modern art exhibition. Significantly, Clayton places the second boy-deer carcass in the “Dream” themed section of the exhibition. Although as Gabi points out that “murders happen every day in Detroit” (336), the sheer strangeness and otherness of these murders capture

the public imagination. Beukes intersperses more conventional narrative chapters with extracts from internet message boards and descriptions of internet videos in which people take ghoulish delight in speculating on the meaning of the mangled bodies and what the next victim may consist of. Murder is a commonplace in Beukes's Detroit, but the dream/Clayton has othered his victims to such a degree that the public views them with horrified fascination and the media grants them much more attention than the majority of murders that occur.

Clayton himself is another example of extreme othering. He is possessed by the dream, which is strongly implied to be a malevolent supernatural force and not solely Clayton's mental illness. He describes the sensation: "I can feel it inside me, like an octopus in my head, getting its tentacles into everything" (84). He quite literally makes the dream flesh (and clay) when he murders his second victim and adds clay tentacles to her body. Whatever the dream consists of, it consumes Clayton. Two-thirds into the story, he ceases to refer to himself by name and simply calls himself "the dream" (111). He (or the narrator) also begins using gender-neutral pronouns and begins referring to "Clayton's body," suggesting that his original identity has been erased completely (341).

Clayton/the dream disrupts the conventional narrative about Detroit. Although the city has a reputation for gang violence and a high murder rate, these statistics are arguably what observers expect from the city (Buccalento 2015, 97). Mark Binelli suggests that

...On a basic level of storytelling, people love tales of Detroit because there's just something inherently pleasing about having one's plot expectations so consistently fulfilled... In fact, such events reinforce existing ideas in a way that's positively reassuring. (Beukes 2014, 5)

Tales of violence and of murder and economic decline, in other words, are precisely what is expected of Detroit. Beukes herself reiterates this point when depicting the cynical journalist Jonno, who observes that "people don't want novelty – they want the reassurance of familiarity. No-one want to be challenged, no-one wants to have

their minds blown” (164). The murders committed by Clayton, however, are decidedly unfamiliar. Clayton does not kill people in territory disputes as a gang member might, or for revenge as TK does (TK’s backstory involves a long stint in prison after he shoots his mother’s boyfriend, after the boyfriend battered her to death). There are overtones of *Frankenstein* (1818) in Clayton’s confused ramblings on his murders, and not simply because he stitches body parts together. When he attaches deer legs to Daveyton’s torso, he waits for his creation to come to life and embody the dream, and is devastated when it does not. Although the police do not grasp the reason behind the mutilations, they nonetheless suspect something occult behind them and begin investigating taxidermists, Wiccans and Satanists. The degree of otherness inherent in the murders, their strangeness, is evident to the investigators, who have no set routines or avenues of enquiry for these mutilations – unlike the more conventional drive-by shootings or domestic violence cases.

“The dream” does not manifest in the novel solely through the murders committed by Clayton. TK, in an encounter with Clayton, senses that there is something deeply wrong with him, far beyond the typical problems with drink, drugs, and abuse he usually encounters in his efforts to assist other homeless people. The dream infects the entire city: “there is evidence of the dreaming everywhere. There is a world that lurks beneath the world that is rich and tangled with meaning” (112). What this world consists of is never fully explained within the narrative, but it is hidden, subterranean and shadowy and only occasionally breaks through the surface to reveal itself. It is tempting to consider the dream as the unconscious expression of the corruption and evil of the city – not least because it is referred to as the dream throughout. However, as Sara Wasson observes:

[t]here are dangers in reading urban Gothic in terms of psychological dualism, of a conscious versus unconscious ‘self’ as discrete entities, since such an approach misunderstands the degree to which Freudian psychoanalysis presents the unconscious as being incorrigibly fragmented. (Wasson 2014, 136)

The dream exists as an entity in its own right in the narrative, rather than as a reflection of Detroit and its denizens. Although the dream is arguably fragmentary, as evidenced by Clayton's assemblages of human and animal body parts in an effort to express it, it is not the intention of this article to argue that it is a manifestation of the city's collective unconscious. That the dream is an entity, quite possibly a conscious one, is clarified in the text's denouement, when the main characters all converge on the same abandoned warehouse.

Although the supernatural elements in the texts are somewhat muted (with the exception of Clayton) up to this point in the novel, the warehouse is the setting in which the dream finally reveals itself to the horrified protagonists. Jonno's girlfriend, Jen Q, is ripped apart from the inside out as the bird tattoos on her skin come to life and the birds claw their way out of her body. Layla stumbles across TK, and witnesses him being attacked by a pack of dogs: "its [the dog's] head distends with the movement, stretching like putty..." (Beukes 2014, 153) All the characters with the exception of Gabi suffer from what might be hallucinations or could very well be the dream warping the fabric of the world. Significantly, they behold their greatest fears: TK revisits the scene of his mother's death, Layla is pursued by a paedophile she encountered earlier in the narrative. The setting becomes entirely other: while an abandoned warehouse is a common space in Detroit, the way in which it is twisted and gives rise to the character's anxieties, marks it as a space that is both Gothic and other. While a criminal, even a murderer, belongs to the conventional narrative of Detroit, the dream is completely alien.

The Gothic aspect of this confrontation between the dream and the main (human) characters is heightened considerably when it becomes apparent that the dream has managed to break down the boundaries that exist between the everyday world of Detroit and whatever dimension it inhabits. "A black angel steps out into the room with a door embedded in its face... its wings erupt into flame, the halo flares into spikes of light..." (494) The dream escapes into Detroit when Gabi

shoots Clayton in the head and unwittingly unleashes the entity that has consumed him. Once the boundaries of Clayton's body are destroyed, the dream is freed and begins to warp the fabric of the world. But in an interesting twist, it becomes apparent that the dream cannot sustain itself without people to witness it. Jonno, who is filming the entire sequence on his mobile phone, grants the dream power: "everything his lens sees becomes more alive, more real. A window to the world..." (489) While this is a less than subtle commentary on the contemporary obsession with the internet and social media, it also draws parallels with ancient religion. Layla observing that the old gods needed the faith of their followers in order to gain power and Jonno's self-serving filming of the event offers unlimited potential for the dream, allowing it to gain endless disciples. Whereas old religions were constrained by such things as geography, birth, and law, the internet has broken down these borders and allowed videos – and potentially the dream – to reach the entire world. It isn't until Layla smashes his phone and deletes the imagery that the dream is finally extinguished and the other is temporarily contained.

**"If you liked this, click on...": social media and othering.**

A recurring theme throughout the novel is the power of social media and the internet, a theme Beukes has also explored in previous novel *Zoo City* (2010). The power of the internet to transform the identities of the people who use it, to both break through and define boundaries and to copy things, thus doubling them, is explored in detail in *Broken Monsters* and represents another example of how the text others the city. The city and its residents are examined through a computer screen and through the online jargon of message boards and chatrooms, and the result is Detroit is othered by social media, which exists in an interesting parallel to the dream. The internet exists in a parallel dimension to the physical world, and like the dream it has the potential to warp and mutate the reality its users inhabit. Also

like the dream, the internet content e.g. blog posts and memes, requires attention and awareness to gain power over people.

Although the light-hearted side of the internet is mentioned (rainbow toaster cat memes are popular, apparently) the text is far more preoccupied with the ugliness that created online. The novel chronicles and experiments with the potential of the internet to mutate, transform or even obliterate identity in much the same way the dream does to Clayton Broom. One of the novel's darkest Gothic elements is an event in the past of Layla's friend Cas, who was sexually assaulted when unconscious by a group of (male) classmates. Worse, the incident was filmed and posted on the internet.

The threat of sexual violence has been present in the Gothic novel since its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Kate Ferguson Ellis notes that the Gothic tradition is that "conjures up, in its undefined representation of heroinely terror, an omnipresent sense of impending rape without ever mentioning the word" (Ellis 1989, 46). In one sequence, Layla plays the video in which Cas is attacked, conjures this Gothic terror, evoking such fear in Layla that she can only listen, and not watch. She cannot bring herself to say the word "rape" when she speaks to Cas about what happened. Nonetheless terror is bound up with desire. Cas confesses that prior to the assault, being desired by boys was an intoxicating sensation: "it's better when the craving is mutual, a feedback loop... she felt worshiped" (Beukes 2014, 371). This desire recurs throughout the novel as other characters – specifically Jonno – try to attract attention via the internet, unleashing the terror of the dream as they do so.

The potential of the internet to warp identity is emphasised by this section of the novel. Cas suffers not only the sexual assault, but the shame and humiliation meted out by her peers, who far from being sympathetic label her a slut. While normally a fast-talking and confident teenager, Cas's day-to-day identity is eclipsed by the footage, which defines her in the eyes of her classmates, (with the exception of Layla). It is revealed later that her family moved to Detroit to escape the stigma

and the denunciation of Cas as a “slut” by her peers. The reach of the internet means that the awful event is inescapable, however. “Social media leaves ghosts,” Gabi observes (379). Or, in an echo of Clayton’s description of the dream, it is like an octopus, getting its tentacles into every aspect of people’s lives. Social media, as Joseph Crawford argues, has parallels with the Gothic in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was one of the first mass-market forms of entertainment (Crawford 2015, 36). In *Broken Monsters*, the internet casts a baleful influence upon its users and very nearly unleashes the dream upon an unsuspecting world, as the Gothic was once accused of doing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Gothic potential of technology – which presumably includes the internet and social media – is also remarked upon by Justin D. Edwards, who argues that

The subject is imitated, duplicated and eradicated by the power of technology. The mechanization of nature and the uncanny nature of doubling reduce individuality through a reliance on surface, the erasure of depth. (Edwards 2015, 11)

The internet in *Broken Monsters* is used in all these capacities: it can imitate, duplicate, and eradicate identity. Most importantly from the point of view of this article, it offers a distorted view of the city and the vicious killings taking place within it. The incident at the art show – where Daveyton’s dismembered legs and the deer’s head and torso are displayed – is filmed and goes viral. A *Reddit* message board dedicated to discussing the killings and possible suspects sprouts numerous branches and areas of discussion ranging from other serial killers to the Disney villain Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* (1991). And chillingly, towards the conclusion, Jonno has set up a webpage dedicated to fundraising for the documentary is planning about the incident, describing himself as the disciple of the higher power he witnessed (Beukes 2014, 508).

Social media within the text carries tremendous subversive potential as it is impossible to control and can be used to undermine the official narrative of the city, as embodied in the statements given by police and the articles written by print

journalists for newspapers and official websites. In a blackly humorous scene, police are trying to detain people at the art show following the discovery of the corpse, and people begin looking up their legal rights on their smartphones. More seriously, much of the internet featured prominently in the text is, to borrow Gothic terms, shadowy and liminal. Some of the content, such as the video of Cas being sexually assaulted, cannot be found on mainstream websites such as *YouTube* as these websites have rules against violent, sexual or otherwise dubious content. It can only be found on sites with no such restrictions that like the city of Detroit, have a reputation for crime and lawlessness. Such spaces offer a distorted reflection of the physical world, where evil lurks in abandoned, dark places and memory can never be wholly erased – not even if the places containing it are destroyed.

### **Urban Gothic Geographies**

*Broken Monsters* takes place, for the most part, in the Gothic spaces of Detroit. Derelict warehouses, homeless shelters, spooky forests and basements all serve as settings for the events that take place during the cold dark month of November.<sup>1</sup> However, as noted in the introduction, in some respects these liminal spaces are normal for Detroit, which was been in economic decline since the mid-twentieth century, giving people in general plenty of time to adjust their perceptions of the city. The novel others these spaces through the medium of the supernatural entity the dream. However, it also accomplishes this through the urban geography of the city itself and the demographics of its population.

In an analysis of the urban Gothic and the works of George Lippard, Chad Luck argues that in Lippard’s texts “the social space of the city... enacts the same disjunction between surface appearance and hidden truth as do the novel’s interlocking crime narratives” (Luck 2014, 129). Surface appearances are not to be trusted in *Broken Monsters*, simply because these can be altered so easily. As Edwards argues in his examination of the internet in relation to the Gothic, the

internet can erase identity through its focus on the surface, and the social spaces of Detroit serve as camouflage for the underworld in which the more gruesome events of the novel takes place. One of the most notable examples of this is the avant-garde art show at which Clayton Broom leaves one of his stitched-together creations. A series of deserted houses are each given a theme and filled with artworks in a surreal show including projections, paintings and sculpture. In this scene the art does not appear in a conventional space that has been designated for the purpose of displaying it, as in a traditional art gallery. The abandoned houses are appropriated and given an 'other' purpose, turning from family homes to areas of self-expression. This sequence is reminiscent of Mighall's examination of a city's Gothic:

For Gothic *of* a city rather than just in a city, that city needs a concentration of memories and historical associations. Ideally these would be expressed in an extant architectural or topographical heritage, as these areas provide the natural home for ghostly presences of imagined/projected meanings. (Mighall 2007, 55)

The imagined and projected meanings are quite literal in the art show, but Mighall's analysis hints at a deeper resonance, memories that linger in the buildings and layout of a city. That Detroit feels haunted by its past is made explicit within the text: one character references Zug Island, an artificial, heavily industrialised construction at the southern city limits. It is rumoured to produce "subsonics" (this presumably means infrasonics, noise produced at a vibration below the range audible to the human ear) which creates an uneasy ambience (Beukes 2014, 282). That the city of Detroit is haunted, or feels as though it is haunted, is made explicit by the text. "Maybe that's why the whole city feels haunted," says Layla in response to being told about Zug Island (ibid.). Although by no means the only heavily industrialised city in the USA, the extent to which Detroit is identified with (haunted by) its manufacturing history is worth noting. The hauntings Layla refers to in this context are common in Gothic fiction, but Detroit is not haunted by the ghosts of American historical traumas, such as the Civil War (although racial

tensions are still very much present). The specifically industrialised haunting is unique to Detroit and expresses the Gothic of the city, as defined by Mighall.

Mighall also refers to a “concentration of memories” as necessary for expressing the Gothic unique to a particular city. A developing area of sociology is researching into social haunting. According to Avery Gordon, a social haunting “registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present” (Gordon 2011, 2). Rather than registering in physical terms, e.g. deteriorating infrastructure or a declining economy, a social haunting is a trauma that registers emotionally and is passed on from generation to generation. It is an atmosphere that pervades a community, and it appears in *Broken Monsters* in microcosm. TK, who faces a legacy of domestic violence and incarceration, is perhaps the most obvious example. Although his tragedy is specific to himself, TK is African American and from a low income background, as well as being a native of the inner city, all demographics that suffered disproportionately from the decline of heavy industry in American cities (including, of course, Detroit) (Wilson 2017, 323). The gutting of the motor industry and the flight of whites and wealthier African Americans to the suburbs entrenched the poor even deeper into the inner city and made it even more difficult for them to escape the cycle of poverty being passed on from one generation to the next. This is reflected in TK’s homelessness and his difficulty in securing steady employment. In this respect, TK is far from unusual: African American males are disproportionately represented in the US prison system. As of 2006 46% of the male prison population were African American, despite their making up just 12% of the overall population (Mauer 2001, 200). These depressing statistics hint at all manner of historical traumas and hauntings that have been passed down from generation to generation. Although Detroit was sufficiently far north that it was not impacted by the battles of the American Civil War, the legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow era are apparent. More recently, the Civil Rights movement and the infamous Detroit Riot of 1967, which

is still within living memory, left lasting scars upon the city's population. Although Beukes does not refer explicitly to these historical events within the text, the racial tensions of the city are a recurring theme. TK as an individual is not othered by his past: in many respects it means he is unexceptional, disheartening though that is. But if a wider view is taken, then TK's story is a microcosm of how Detroit is haunted by numerous aspects of its past, traumas that in true Gothic fashion, continually resurface to confront its current population.

Detroit's population itself is arguably another method through which the city is othered, and not simply in the case of truly warped characters such as Clayton Broom. Sociologist Richard Sennett has commented that the inhabitants of cities are always in the presence of otherness (Sennett 1992, 123). Nicholas R. Fyfe and Judith T. Kenny elaborate on this, commenting that "consciously or unconsciously, an individual's experience of the city is influenced by categories of difference, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability and age" (Fyfe & Kenny 2005, 213). Although city neighbourhoods may be segregated according to race or social class and income, living in the city ensures that its inhabitants are continually confronted with people who differ from themselves in some respect. Nor is this confrontation a static, us-versus-them opposition. The city, constantly in flux, offers a myriad of possibilities in relation to identity – people are always coming to the city from somewhere else, or leaving the city behind, or in the case of the homeless endlessly wandering its streets. This instability is increased by the continual reinvention of identity. In the vastness of Detroit, it has become very easy to invent a new self, something Layla and Cas do several times over the course of the narrative. They adopt different personas online to lure in a paedophile, Cas moves to Detroit to escape her history (unsuccessfully), and Layla plays the dutiful daughter for her mother (until Gabi finds out what she's been doing in her spare time). But arguably all characters adopt different personas depending on the situation they find themselves in: Gabi is alternately hard-nosed cop and loving

parent, Jonno is a quirky, inventive journalist online and a self-serving opportunist elsewhere in life. Identity is something that can be played with, altered or erased completely in *Broken Monsters*, and together with the dream, the internet, and the geography of the city, it all serves to render the city of Detroit as an othered space.

### **Conclusion**

Catherine Spooner has argued that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gothic has become more mainstream than ever.<sup>2</sup> However, the setting for *Broken Monsters* remains othered throughout the novel. The atmosphere of the city in *Broken Monsters* is imbued with the Gothic, reflecting the upheavals not only of Detroit's past, but its' uncertain present. Although Detroit has undertaken various initiatives to revitalise itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the popular imagination it is still very much an example of the American Dream gone wrong (Binelli 2013, 16). Beukes does not challenge this perception to any great degree, using the city's economic decline and abandoned neighbourhoods as backdrop for her supernatural crime story. This Gothic depiction of the city as a ruinous, haunted place of violence and despair would in most instances serve to other the urban area in which the story is set: it is completely alien, completely other, when set against the American dream of social mobility and infinite prosperity. However, Detroit's Gothic reputation is so strong that the breakdown of the American Dream has become its new normal, its new self. Charles L. Crowe suggests that

For many Americans still, the city remains the opposite of the Jeffersonian dream of a society of farms and villages – a place, rather, of corruption, crime and disease, the legacy of the Old World that immigrants to America were trying to escape. (Crowe 2009, 166)

Detroit is an excellent example of this. *Broken Monsters* portrays all the negative aspects of the city, most particularly crime. However, with such corruption and delinquency being an intrinsic aspect of the city within the narrative, otherness must come from elsewhere. The text uses numerous different methods to other the urban

landscape of Detroit. Foremost among these is the supernatural entity the dream, which is inhuman and emanates from somewhere beyond or beneath the everyday surface of the city. The internet too acts like a broken mirror, presenting people with a distorted image of themselves and the world they inhabit. And thirdly, there is the city itself, permeated by traumatic memory that continues to resonate in the lives of all its residents. Although the disturbing return of the past is a conventional Gothic trope, different methods of preserving memory are emerging. Internet search histories, videos filmed on camera phones, police records and telephone transcripts are all incorporated into the narrative of *Broken Monsters*, ensuring that the past can never be fully erased. As Layla muses at the book's conclusion, "you have to find a way to live with it" (Beukes 2014, 517).

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<sup>1</sup> Beukes specifies the date at the start of each section of the book.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of the Happy Gothic* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1-17. Spooner's analysis focuses predominantly on the UK, but many of the world events she refers to took place on American soil, and many of the popular culture texts she references were American-made and set in the USA.