

Editorial Ecozon@ 7.1

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Animal Humanities, the focus of the themed Section of this issue, is a field which has grown rapidly over the past twenty years, and is finding expression, not only in the United States and the UK, but also increasingly in Europe, in publications, conferences, specifications for academic posts, summer schools, and student dissertations. A semi-autonomous sphere of ecocriticism, alternatively defined as ‘Animality Studies’ and ‘Cultural Animal Studies’, it has emerged as an exciting interdisciplinary undertaking, drawing together lines of enquiry in literature, the visual arts, ethics, ontology, epistemology, religious studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology and law. Animals play a central role in our lives (almost universally as food, and often as pets) and in our cultures (for instance as avatars of the wildness within us), and the interaction with them in our everyday lives is characterised by paradoxes and tensions. We are, on the one hand, animals ourselves, yet on the other we have for centuries defined ourselves as human subjects through our differences from them. This endlessly fascinating relationship of similarity-but-difference has made animals a symbol for human beings since time immemorial, prompted countless fantasies of transformation from man to animal and vice versa, and given rise to thought experiments in hybridity and meaningful solidarities between the human and non-human. A key challenge today, at a time when the interdependence of human and non-human animals is becoming ever clearer, yet animal species are becoming extinct at a rate unknown for millennia, is how to reconceive animals and our relationship with them, and how to represent in texts and images the human/ animal entanglement in the material world in ways which do justice to animals’ agency and otherness.

Embracing both zoontology and zoopoetics, Animal Humanities draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, postmodern theories of becoming animal, posthumanist conceptions of coexistence and coevolution, and debates on the rights and wrongs of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representation of animals and humans. As Elena Past and Deborah Amberson note in their introduction, the essays by Felice Cimatti, Anne Duggan, Christina Vani, Damiano Benvegnù, Shengmei Ma, Matteo Gilebbi, Todd LeVasseur, and Michael Charles Vale/ Donna Leanna McRae presented in the Special Section engage with a “knot of socio-political concerns, language and ethnic traditions, and expressive modes” in their exploration of the heterogenous relationships between non-human and human

animals. The pros and cons of anthropomorphism, the politicisation of animals, instances of interspecies communication and friendship, and other themes are discussed in novels, films, poems and discourses ranging temporally from the seventeenth century to the present, and geographically from Britain, France and Italy to China.

The theme is taken up in the Creative Writing and Arts Section. This comprises sets of images by the Spanish artists Verónica Perales and Nuria Sánchez-León, poems in English and Spanish by Florian Auerochs, Jacob Price, Juan Carlos Galiano and Antonello Borra, and a humorous short story by the Californian writer Robert Davis. As Serenella Iovino writes in her introduction to the Section, this variety of creative contributions illustrates perfectly Amberson and Past's claim that the non-human animal, long defined as being without logos and without reason, "may speak most clearly in artistic image and literary language".

In the first of three essays in the General Section, Agnes Kneitz examines a classic of German environmentalist writing, Wilhelm Raabe's short novel, *Pfister's Mill* (1883). The plot centres on the pollution of a river by effluent from a sugar beet factory. Raabe based his work on a contemporary court case in his home town of Brunswick, in which the owner of a riverside inn (the eponymous Pfister's Mill) sued the owners of a sugar beet factory for compensation after his customers deserted him because of the stench from the polluted river. Kneitz locates the novella in the wider context of industrial pollution at the time, scientific advances, and emerging legislative control. She shows why Raabe, caught between nostalgia and insight into the inevitability of industrial development, and between the associated literary currents of Realism and Naturalism, failed to reach a wider audience with this tale, with which he had hoped to alert contemporaries to a major social problem.

The second essay, by Kerim Yazgünoğlu, is concerned with the posthuman "Meta(l)morphoses" in Jeanette Winterson's novel, *The Stone Gods* (2007). Extrapolating from trends in the present, Winterson imagines a future in which the destruction of the environmental basis for life continues apace, and the human body has become hyper-gendered and technologically, discursively, and materially constructed. Drawing on theories of posthumanism and "trans-corporeality" (Stacy Alaimo), Yazgünoğlu argues that *The Stone Gods* warns against the dehumanization of the human, while exploring the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on human-nonhuman "naturecultures."

The third essay, Bryan Moore's "The Earth as Pinprick: Some Early Western Challenges to Anthropocentrism," shows how ancient Greek and Roman thinkers anticipated aspects of modern science, Darwinian evolution, and contemporary theories of posthumanism. Moore presents passages from the Presocratics to late antiquity, demonstrating the existence of a tradition challenging anthropocentrism which extended over 800 years. He suggests that this work of the ancients may help us move more responsibly into the future.

The issue closes with the customary Reviews Section. This includes review essays by Sara Crosby and Susanne Karr. Crosby presents two recent books on the Gaia hypothesis, by Toby Tyrell and Michael Ruse, which adopt diametrically opposed standpoints on its value. Karr discusses (in German) a major new German work located midway between philosophy and cultural history, published by Benjamin Bühler and Stefan Rieger in four volumes since 2006. Examining in turn the role played by Animals, Plants, Stones, and other structures of thought in scientific, political, literary and other discourses, Bühler and Rieger trace a history of the systems for ordering information which have come to dominate our perception of the world. Their studies of a series of key figurations of knowledge reveal the central role of metaphor, analogy, anthropomorphism, and narrative, and throw a fascinating light on the relations between nature and culture, including those between human and non-human animals. A further contribution to Animal Studies, Marie-Luise Egbert's *Life of Birds in Literature*, is reviewed by Roman Bartosch. The remaining reviews, by Luis Prádanos, Sebastian Thiltges, Stefan Schustereder and Margarita Carretero, pursue the aim of *Ecozon@* to communicate research in and between different languages and cultures, presenting the first major collection of essays on art and environment in Spanish (Tonia Raquejo and José María Parreño's *Arte y Ecología*), Pierre Schoentjes's outline of a Francophone *Écopoétique* (reviewed in English), the proceedings of a German conference on ecopedagogy edited by Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm, and a Spanish volume with several essays focused on ecology and gender (Alicia Puleo's *Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinario*).

Animal Humanities, or, On Reading and Writing the Nonhuman

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In *Marcovaldo, or the Seasons in the City*, an imaginative meditation on the relationship between urban and rural spaces in 1950s Italy, Italo Calvino writes that “The city of cats and the city of men exist one inside the other, but they are not the same city” (101). The imagined lines of demarcation between cats and men motivated (a naked) Jacques Derrida to return his cat’s gaze and to write about it in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a text that has become a landmark reference in a growing field that is variously referred to as animal studies, human-animal studies, or animality studies.¹ Derrida’s cat helps trace a complex network of relations linking human and nonhuman animals—relations that include questions of companionship, consumption, labor, exploitation, ontology, language, and *poiesis*, to name but a few. Committed to both interspecies and interdisciplinary methods regardless of its name, the field of animal studies works to rethink the human-animal entanglement within a material world and within texts of all kinds. Cary Wolfe aptly opined that attempting to sum up this vibrant field is akin to “herding cats” (564).

This special section of *Ecozon@* on “Animal Humanities” proposes to consider the animal question from the specific perspective of the humanities, a discipline alternately considered to be in crisis, in transition, or at the forefront of rethinking a world in crisis. Such considerations have prompted an invigorating and far-reaching reassessment of the philosophical foundations, the meaning, and the potential of the humanities. Advocating for the displacement of the “profoundly anthropocentric core of the Humanities,” Rosi Braidotti, for example, argues that, “far from being a terminal crisis, these challenges open up new global, eco-sophical dimensions” (*Posthuman* 145). In “Humanities for the Environment—A Manifesto for Research and Action,” a group of scholars outlines a call for action to humanists, suggesting that, in an epoch of environmental crisis (and specifically in the context of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris), the humanities “may contribute to understanding of human imagination, perception and relationship with their surrounding environments—both social and natural” (Holm et al. 979). The article, which results from the work of scholars across the globe and from a diverse array of disciplines, takes as its guiding question: “What is the role of the humanities in the age of the Anthropocene?” (Holm et al. 978). Advocating for important work to be done in both pragmatic and philosophical terms, the

¹ Some of the debate about these names can be traced in the *PMLA* issue dedicated to “animal studies.” Michael Lundblad proposes that we identify “animal studies” closely with advocacy work, whereas “animality studies” looks more at history and questions of human politics (496-7). Cary Wolfe seems to prefer this second interpretation, arguing that animal studies “studies both a material entity (nonhuman beings) and a discourse of species difference that need not be limited to its application to nonhumans alone and, second, that taking animal studies seriously thus has nothing to do, strictly speaking, with whether or not you like animals” (567).

manifesto argues that science alone cannot answer the multiplying crises of the “Great Acceleration” (Holm et al. 980). The authors posit that humanities should play a crucial role in understanding the “social uncertainties and contingencies” that will characterize a world marked by global climate change (Holm et al. 990). The humanities, they argue, understand both the nuances and the narratives of global environmental change, and thus are well-positioned to contribute both to seeing what is happening and to figuring out what can be done (Holm et al. 985-6). But the Manifesto is also an accusation. As they outline what they call the “New Human Condition,” the authors warn of the “unprecedented crisis of how we as a species will cope with the consequences, not to mention responsibilities, of being the major driver of planetary change. Our human intelligence has given us the power to create as well as to destroy the foundations of our own existence” (Holm et al. 983).

Like “Humanities for the Environment,” this special section of *Ecozon@*, complemented and enhanced by the images, poems, and texts in the Creative Writing and Art section curated by Serenella Iovino, celebrates the potentials of the humanities to shift the lens on a complex world of social uncertainties and contingencies. Yet our contributors ponder something even broader than the “New Human Condition,” looking at the world with nonhuman, posthuman, and more-than-human conditions in mind. The authors of the Humanities for the Environment manifesto conducted work funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and organized themselves into “Observatories” that sought to “observe broadly and reach out to map and work with the many new environmental humanities initiatives developing regionally and around the world” (Holm et al. 978). Many of the essays in this special section recall that, in addition to being “observers,” we humans are also, as John Berger and Jacques Derrida so convincingly articulated, *observed* by nonhuman others. The Manifesto may well recognize that our world looks different when seen from different cultural perspectives: “The challenges look differently to people in the streets of Beijing, in the townships of Johannesburg, and in the cornfields of Kansas” (Holm et al. 979). Yet examining exclusively human perspectives on or even solutions to planetary problems encounters a limit of its own. As this section conceives the field, Animal Humanities wonders whether the “New Human Condition” might learn something from the “New Posthuman Condition,” or what Braidotti calls the “post-anthropocentric premises and technologically mediated emphasis on Life as a *zoe*-centred system of species egalitarianism” (*Posthuman* 146). In a series of three special issues of *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* dedicated to the work of prominent European ethologists Dominique Lestel, Viciane Despret, and Roberto Marchesini, editors Brett Buchanan, Jeffrey Bussolini, and Matthew Chrulew wonder: “Must the worlds of animals be forever cast outside of human knowledge, or are there overlapping ways of knowing—empirical, phenomenological, ethnographic, otherwise—that prove insightful regarding other forms of life, and indeed transformative of our own?” (2). In the multi-lingual, transnational context of the journal *Ecozon@*, Animal Humanities hears stories being told in a multitude of human languages, but is attentive to nonhuman languages as well. We seek to recognize that not only does “culture” influence the way that we see the nonhuman world, but it also shapes and shifts that very world, in a complex process of co-constitution that shows the porosity—and the creativity—of all partners to the collaboration. Donna Haraway argues that:

Once again we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories. Appreciation of the complexity is, of course, invited. (*When Species* 42)

Appreciating complexity. This is a necessary step on the path to mapping the interdisciplinary fields, interspecies voices, and creative artistic forms that both read and write the nonhuman.

The project of thinking animals within the humanities encompasses an array of currents and voices intent, to varying degrees and with different accents, on broaching philosophical, political, gender-based, and species-related hierarchies. Here we might easily locate the aforementioned Derrida and his cat, Braidotti's call for a "bioegalitarian" thinking" ("Animals" 526), Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, and Roberto Marchesini's acknowledgment of the human cultural debt to the world of nonhuman animals. However, we must also acknowledge the multifaceted anxiety triggered by a project that threatens to supplant humanity, smugly complacent for millennia at the top of a species hierarchy hubristically devised by and for ourselves, as the measure of all things. Indeed, the unfathomable otherness of Derrida's staring cat signals "the abyssal limit of the human" and the redundancy of those categories and abilities—reason, language, amongst others—traditionally and jealously deemed *by man* as proper *to man*. This loss of anthropocentric privilege unleashes doubts that are not just ontological, gnoseological, and socio-political; humankind must also recognize the embodied vulnerability and finitude we share with the nonhuman animal. Thus while Heidegger struggles before our "scarcely fathomable, abyssal bodily kinship with the animal" (230), D. H. Lawrence acknowledges the cognitive and ethical limits of humanity in the face of fish being: "*I am not the measure of creation. / This is beyond me, this fish. / His God stands outside my God*" (339; italics in original). Here the philosophical and the literary agree that the human relation with the nonhuman animal is not an immediately comfortable one. The articles included in this section excavate this difficulty. Together they voice, from a broad variety of perspectives and fields, the bioegalitarian desire to reposition the human and the humanities within a wider web of relations. But they also contemplate the complex and even contradictory consequences of reconfiguring anthropocentrism, meditating on the shortcomings of the anthropomorphic impetus inherent in many of our humanistic attempts to give voice to the nonhuman animal.

We might embark on our attempt to map the multiple threads of our special section with a brief consideration of the paradoxes inherent in our chosen focus, namely, Animal Humanities. Of course the humanities, as a disciplinary designation, traditionally reflected a critical or speculative attention to human culture as opposed to, on the one hand, the long-standing academic tradition of theological studies and, on the other, the broadly empirical methodologies of the so-called natural sciences. Defined by the OED, in its simplest terms, as "learning concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy," the humanities seem, at first glance, to allocate no space for the nonhuman. Yet, it is precisely here, in the space of literary language, cinematic image, artistic creation, ethical thinking, and the philosophical imagination, that the nonhuman animal, long defined as being without logos and without reason, might speak most clearly. As we have reflected and continue to reflect on what constitutes humanity both in theory and in practice, we have done so and still do so in the presence of nonhuman beings who, by turns, sustain us, threaten us, assist us, evolve with us, and shape us, serving as food, clothing, natural menaces, companions in labor and, especially in more modern eras, living in our domestic space. Across a broad swath of global cultures, our religious aspirations were grounded in a symbolic deployment of animal figures whose somatic features shaped our imaginings of the divine. John Berger acknowledges the paradox or "existential dualism" underlying our theriomorphic imagination writing that animals "were subjected *and* worshipped; bred *and* sacrificed" (7; italics in original). Equally, as Berger insists, the nonhuman animal lies at the foundation of humanity's artistic impulse constituting both the material and the inspiration for humanity's earliest artistic endeavors: "The

first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood” (7). Human language and poetry too might constitute a further human debt to the nonhuman animal because, as Berger suggests drawing on Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss, “it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal” (7). In a similar vein, Roberto Marchesini insists that that the artistic impulse would not be possible without the human tendency to hybridize with the nonhuman: “human identity, in all its complexity, is an unstable structure in marked nonequilibrium that can maintain itself only by acquiring information from the outside. [...]. Cultural identity is possible only through structures of mestizoization that capture external information in an active way” (“Mimesis” xiv). That “outside,” for Marchesini, always brims with the heterogeneous complexity of the nonhuman, including nonhuman animals and the technosphere.²

So, as the disciplinary humanities turn to consider human culture, the nonhuman is always already present within this space. Yet as the humanities acknowledge this debt from the past and turn to the coming times of planetary ecological crisis, we must move beyond a symbolic deployment of the nonhuman and embrace, as Braidotti puts it, a “neoliteral relation to animals, anomalies and inorganic others” in order to “relate to animals as animals ourselves” (“Animals”, 528 and 526). This ethical charge also seems to underpin Serenella Iovino’s advocacy of “posthuman ethics,” an ethics “based on the co-extensive materiality of human, nonhuman, and natural subjects, in a perspective which necessarily implies moral horizontality [...]. All this opens up a very ‘concrete’ dimension—‘concrete’ in the Hegelian sense of the mutual merging of idea and reality” (64).

An evolution from the symbolic to the literal animal—a nonhierarchical evolution that recognizes the value of all iterations of the creatures along the path—represents an ethical aspiration of the Animal Humanities, an ideal that truly affirms a meaningful solidarity between the human and the nonhuman. This special section structurally embodies this standard, opening with Frankenstein’s monster, a fictional being neither animal nor human, and closing with Cobby, a chimpanzee whose hybridity derives from humanity’s anthropomorphizing affection but who remains nonetheless, as the authors affirm in their final paragraph, a unique individual. These two articles frame and are entangled with a broad array of co-related and intertwined concepts, each central to the Animal Humanities which, as a disciplinary hybrid, encompasses ontologies, epistemologies, ethics, philosophies of language, political rights and identities, economic and agricultural exploitation, as well as questions of representation, anthropomorphization, and symbolization. Across the essays in this section, a knot of socio-political concerns, language and ethnic traditions, and expressive modes tangle with the question of the heterogeneous relationships between nonhuman and human animals. Moreover, in selecting the final essays, we endeavored to encompass a wide range of language traditions and a wide swath of geographic referents.

Language immediately imposes itself as a concern in the opening essays. Long considered the sole property of humankind, the particular status of language, as well as the reified category of human reason, are explored and ultimately contested by a series of hybridized figures which defy categorization, namely, Frankenstein’s posthuman monster (Cimatti), Scudéry’s thinking and feeling chameleons (Duggan), and Elsa Morante’s talking dog, Bella, bound by affection to her own human-animal hybrid child companion, Useppe (Vani). Morante’s portrayal of Bella’s thoughts and desires, represented as facial or bodily gestures easily interpreted by Useppe or as direct discourse rendered, in this generically peculiar

² See in particular *Il tramonto dell'uomo*, where Marchesini offers a hermeneutic for “technoscience” and argues in favor of “technopoiesis” (155-178).

historical novel, in exactly the same manner as human speech, draws us towards another concern, namely, the uses and abuses of anthropomorphization. If the Animal Humanities are to take seriously and ethically what Kari Weil sees as their potential to “understand and give voice to others [...]; to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it; [...] to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say” (7), animal humanists must reflect on the risks inherent in the anthropomorphic gesture. John Simons warns of the dangers of “trivial anthropomorphism,” an expression he coins to expose the philosophical levity of many literary occasions on which the nonhuman animal is humanized. Highlighting children’s literature in particular, Simons argues that every representation of nonhuman animality “appropriates the non-human experience as an index of humanness” (87) and remains “trivial” if it fails to “press against and force us to question” that boundary between human and nonhuman (119). Yet, an absolute refusal to anthropomorphize establishes, as Juliana Schiesari suggests, an “emotional ‘firewall’ between humans and other creatures,” implicitly reducing them to the level of things or property to be bought, sold, or used at will” (8). Simons in fact allows for the potential of a “strong anthropomorphism” that does represent the nonhuman in human terms but does so “either to show how the non-human experience differs from the human or to create profound questions in the reader’s mind as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different” (120).³

Anthropomorphization is indeed a double-edged sword, most certainly from the perspective of the nonhuman creature. In the case of Morante’s *Bella* we are permitted an imaginative glimpse into the potential complexity, both in terms of thought, communicative ability, and self-consciousness, of dogs and, we are arguably called upon to reflect on those supposed faculties and borders that separate human from nonhuman. However, Vale and McRae reveal the dark side of the anthropomorphic impulse in their biography of Cobby whose television career came to an abrupt end when he ceased to be the large-eyed and furry creature privileged in what the authors term the realm of “cutopia.” Anthropomorphization has historically favored only certain nonhuman creatures and ultimately, in denying these cuddly nonhumans their own distinct culture, makes it easier to relegate the bulky, herd animals, themselves possessors of their own social and cultural orders, to objects of consumption, whether for entertainment or meat. In effect, anthropomorphization paradoxically opens the way to the industrial and agricultural instrumentalization of the nonhuman animal. The full brutality of this regime is revealed in the abattoir poetry of Ivano Ferrari in which massacred bodies are sadistically sexualized and nonhuman animal suffering is paralleled with that of the human animal (Gilebbi). However, the agricultural relationship has perhaps the potential to be one of care and concern as is suggested by the religious and spiritual philosophies and dilemmas that inform bovine agriculture in the context of a planetary ecological crisis (LeVasseur).

Though certainly the most brutal, the agricultural exploitation of the nonhuman is not the only instrumentalization of animals. Indeed, stripping the nonhuman creature of its cultural identity primes it for deployment as mere symbol not only for human traits in the style of a literary fable or parable, but also for political ends. This politicization of the nonhuman animal informs several of the essays here. While Jiang Rong’s wolves serve as ambivalent national symbol for a China torn between its cultural past and contemporary global capitalism (Ma), Clement Richer’s companion shark invites reflection on the racial undertones buttressing a post-

³ Paul Shepard also defends the ethical potential of anthropomorphism on the grounds that it “binds our continuity with the rest of the natural world. It generates our desire to identify them and learn their natural history, even though it is motivated by a fantasy that they are no different from ourselves” (88).

colonialist politics (Benvegnù). Yet, while the political dimensions of these questions of nationalism and race are crucially important, they remain essentially human questions. The authors of these essays approach their texts and subjects with a nuanced analysis that acknowledges the duality of the nonhuman animals in their chosen texts and films, as well as the slippery question of what it means to represent an oppressed human through the figure of an oppressed nonhuman. Indeed, central in these two essays is the question of adaptation, and in fact a politics encompassing both the human and nonhuman animal returns in the translations from literary text to film and from one geographical area to another—from China to France and from Martinique to Italy via the Sulu archipelago. Real and imaginary landscapes consider historically existing and fictionalized animals through central dichotomies of civilization/wilderness, West/East, White European/ethnic other. But these dichotomies yield an ethics of hybridization that encompasses both the mediatic adaptation and the represented animals: the translations themselves reveal the orientalist and exoticizing gaze directed at the other, both human and nonhuman. The mediatic migration of these animals returns us to questions directly related to what we might see as a politics of or for animal being, namely, respect for the culture of those animals who live outside “cutoxia” and the moral obligation to guarantee an ecologically sound habitat for all creatures on the planet. Ultimately, in chorus, these essays urge us to leave aside our all too human nostalgia for an always already imagined or constructed natural and uncontaminated space, whether mountainous or marine. We must instead nourish deference for and a healthy terror of the shark or the wolf; acknowledge the processes of domestication that included humans in a still unfolding dance of collaboration and coevolution; and learn to relate to creatures as creatures ourselves. Reading and writing the nonhuman, the vocation of the Animal Humanities, opens creative and critical horizons on urgent ethical and environmental questions.

This collection of essays opens with a contribution by Felice Cimatti on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus*, “*Frankenstein* on Language and Becoming (Post)Human.” In this essay, the so-called “monster” is central as Cimatti, drawing on a conceptual frame that encompasses psychoanalytical theories of human development, Wittgenstein’s reflections on “private language,” and Condillac’s sensationalism, considers the inevitable failure of the monster’s attempts to “become human” in the absence of a human community. Theoretical considerations of language take center stage here as the author sketches a portrait of a hybrid creature, neither human nor animal, that is offered as an example of a being who attempts, albeit unsuccessfully, to live a post-human condition.

Ontological classifications remain at center stage in the next essay, “Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Animal Sublime, or Of Chameleons*” by Anne Duggan. Here, the work of seventeenth century writer and thinker Scudéry reveals that René Descartes’s mechanistic vision of the nonhuman animal was challenged as soon as it was formulated. Moreover, Duggan reveals the ethical heart of Scudéry’s engagement with Cartesian theories of animality, showing that she proposes an interspecies friendship between humanity and the nonhuman animal by elevating it from its status as unreasoning object of scientific experimentation or metaphorical figure for humanity’s negative qualities. Scudéry does so, furthermore, in a manner that parallels her lifelong struggle for the recognition of women as beings endowed with rationality, and anticipates ecofeminist concerns.

Interspecies friendships also inform Christina Vani’s “Talking Animals ‘Talking’ with Animals in Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*.” Language continues as a central theoretical concern as Vani explores Morante’s fictional portrait of a particularly moving canine/human alliance set against the tragic backdrop of Italian fascism, the nation’s wartime experience, and the post-war

recovery. Drawing on theories of zoosemiotics, Vani focuses on Morante's representation of animal language, both spoken and gesticulative, and considers the interspecies hybridity which permits Useppe, one of the novel's child protagonists, to enter into a mutually decipherable dialogue with his beloved dog, Bella.

Damiano Benvegnù's "*Ti-Koyo and His Shark. Human-Animal Brotherhood from Clement Richer to Italo Calvino and Folco Quilici*" revolves around a central human-nonhuman friendship, too, in this case between a human boy and a shark. Here though, the interspecies relation is complicated by the fact that it appears in numerous narrative incarnations. Indeed, Benvegnù considers three versions of the same story—the original 1941 novel by Martinican writer Richer, Italian writer Calvino's short story adaptation, and Italian director Folco Quilici's 1962 film. This process of adaptation and re-adaptation reveals a political dimension to this friendship, remarkable in stories of human-animal friendships for the fact that it involves not a fur-covered, domesticated nonhuman but a sea-dwelling and potential lethal creature. Thus, while Calvino and Quilici reconfigure Richer's postcolonial and post-pastoral agenda, they also anthropomorphize or domesticate to some degree the shark himself as they themselves appear to fall prey to nostalgic ideals of an exotic, natural idyll.

The political dimension of constructions and reconstructions of a natural or wild space are equally central to Sheng-mei Ma's "Sino-Anglo-Euro Wolf Fan(g)s from Jiang Rong to Annaud," for here too we read of a non-western novel, already ideologically dense in its representation of a relation with wild and potentially lethal animals, in this case Mongolian wolves, later adapted for cinema by a Western director. Drawing on both historically extant and symbolically potent wolves, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004) evokes a lost natural space that permeates Chinese nationalism as this elegy for the ferocity of the Mongolian wolf doubles as a justification for fanged aggression in the metaphorical wilderness of China's socialist-capitalist market. Unsurprisingly, Annaud's 2015 orientalist adaptation dilutes the multi-layered complexity of the text's nationalistic discourse, romanticizing elements of the narrative and rendering more "humane" the relation between humans and nonhuman animals.

The human-nonhuman relationships that emerge in Matteo Gilebbi's "Testimoni dei macelli. Esseri umani e animali nella poesia di Ivano Ferrari" are disturbingly real. Exploring two poetry collections inspired by the time Ferrari spent working in an abattoir, Gilebbi identifies a critique of a pornographic sexualization of the animal body where cows and other meat animals are served up as if for sadistic pleasure. Yet, despite the fact that it is the human who does the slaughtering here, Gilebbi excavates deep and disquieting links between human and animal suffering, between cruelty inflicted on the nonhuman animal and cruelty endured by the human. The mortality we share with the nonhuman animal becomes imperative here. As Ferrari parallels his sick and dying wife with the animal victims of the slaughterhouse, it is a solidarity or empathy stemming from pain that indicates ultimately a potential site from which to challenge speciesism and other anthropocentric hierarchies.

Todd LeVasseur's essay, "Methane Dispensers and Bio-Dynamic Beings: Cattle as Polysemous Symbols in Environmental Religious Discourse," also confronts the familiar form of the cow, but here in its material form as generator of methane gas in an epoch when climate change is of central concern, as well as in its discursive form as alternately sacred or reviled. Arguing that life on our planet depends on understanding the nuances of interspecies existence, LeVasseur approaches the cow in the languages of religious environmentalism, biodynamic agriculture, and sustainable agriculture. Conflicting and complementary visions of domesticated kin, from animal and religious studies perspectives, underscore the difficulties of "managing" our shared space, but also reflect the high stakes of learning to do so.

The section closes with an essay by Michael Charles Vale and Donna Leanna McRae, titled “The Cutopia Paradox: Anthropomorphism as Entertainment.” Vale and McRae’s paper is a touching case study of the career of Cobby, a chimpanzee raised in a human household, who then starred in a television program, performed in the circus, and now lives in a zoo. The authors, who are also documentarians, expose the “cutopia paradox,” or the disconnect between human affection for “cute” animals and our willingness to bend and distort their lives to fulfill our desires for entertainment. Animals like Cobby are trapped between worlds, as they fit neither in wild nor in domestic spaces, but they are incontrovertibly individual creatures worthy of the kind of distinction Vale and McRae’s essay confers.

Finally, we would like to focus your attention on the artists featured in the Creative Writing and Art section, for whom the work of “Reading and Writing the Nonhuman” is elaborated in a fascinating variety of media and languages. The vibrant contributions here carry out the imaginative work of framing and reconfiguring relations between human and nonhuman animals. From Verónica Perales’ portrayals of great apes, to Nuria Sánchez-León’s depictions of slaughtered bodies of pigs; from Florian Aueroch’s verses, “Notes on Endangered Species” to Jacob G. Price’s bilingual “Water Droplets”; from Juan Carlos Galeano’s “Amazonian Cosmologies” to Antonello Borra’s “Alfabestiaro,” these visual artists and poets animate entangled worlds of beings, illuminating in words and images the “radical co-implication” of nonhumans in human creative arts, as Iovino eloquently explains in her introduction to the section.

The “Humanities for the Environment” Manifesto ends with a critique of a kind of “mega-thinking,” specifically calling out a human tendency, when thinking the environment, to identify “mega-problems” that demand impossibly ambitious “mega-solutions” and draw us to perplexity if not outright despair (Holm et al. 989). The humanities, in the authors’ view, should seek “evidence-based, reasoned, scaled and culturally diverse responses to the complex problems” (989). *Animal Humanities* takes on big questions, all the while attending to the irreducibility of individual stories and particular creatures, but also to their complexity, their hybridity, their codependence. As another manifesto, Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto*, eloquently advocates: “The relation is the smallest unit of analysis, and the relation is about significant otherness at every scale. That is the ethic, or perhaps better, mode of attention, with which we must approach the long cohabitations of people and dogs” (24). Vale and McRae’s closing comments on the dignity of the individual named (by humans of course) Cobby might serve as reminder of the high stakes of the enterprise at hand. The *Animal Humanities*, already well used to dealing in the currency of adaptation, generic hybridization, and self-conscious representation, are equipped to negotiate the stakes and potential pitfalls of a truly ethical engagement with nonhuman animality. Only by acknowledging the not inconsiderable dangers of anthropomorphism and maximizing the potential of an empathic imagination can the Humanities work to embrace that which we share with the animal and simultaneously respect the infinite and wondrous differences that constitute the plurality of life on the planet, and the hope for a shared future.

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Frankenstein on Language and Becoming (Post)Human

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Abstract



The “monster” in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a body forced to become *human* by itself, without any help from other human beings. This process necessarily fails, because there is no humanity without sociality. The case of the “monster” is confronted with two similar cases: Condillac’s statue in *Traité des sensations* and Wittgenstein’s “private language” in *Philosophical Investigations*. What the “monster” lacks is an external social and linguistic mirror where it could recognize itself as a human being. But the “creature” is still too human to endure its new post-human condition. The main theoretical consequences of such a hybrid state are analyzed here. In particular, the paper ends with the proposal of a tentative concept of “post human community.”

Keywords: Shelley’s “monster,” Condillac’s statue, Wittgenstein “private language,” Lacanian “mirror stage,” post human community.

Resumen

El “monstruo” en *Frankenstein* de Shelley es un cuerpo forzado a convertirse en humano por sí mismo, sin la ayuda de otros seres humanos. Este proceso está condenado al fracaso, porque no hay humanidad sin socialidad. El caso del “monstruo” es confrontado con otros dos casos parecidos: la estatua de Condillac en *Traité des sensations* y el “lenguaje privado” en Wittgenstein en *Investigaciones Filosóficas*. Lo que al “monstruo” le falta es un espejo externo, social y lingüístico, dónde poder reconocerse a sí mismo como ser humano. La “criatura” es todavía demasiado humana para sobrellevar su nueva condición post-humana. En este artículo se analizan las principales consecuencias teóricas de tal estado híbrido. En concreto, este trabajo finaliza con la propuesta del concepto provisional “comunidad post-humana”.

Palabras clave: “monstruo” de Shelley, estatua de Condillac, “lenguaje privado” en Wittgenstein, “estadio del espejo” de Lacan, “comunidad posthumana”

Premise

In this paper, the question of the animality of the human is addressed in an atypical way. This question will not be addressed by an analysis of the presumed “animal” component of human being; the actual peculiar animality of human being is imbued with artificiality and language (Cimatti *Il taglio*). In fact, such ‘animality’ is not animal at all. Animal humanity is something that lies neither in the present human condition, nor in the phylogenetic past of *Homo sapiens*. Moreover, the question of animal humanity is the question of a post-humanity that places itself beyond the very boundary between humanity and animality. From this point of

view, the figure of the “creature” in *Frankenstein* is proposed as a possible example of a living being who tries (even if it does not succeed) to live a post-human condition.

Logical loneliness

“I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine,” writes Robert Walton to his sister Margaret in the second letter of *Frankenstein*, while preparing for departure for the North Pole. From the very beginning *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* shows itself to be a history of the vicissitudes of recognition and self-recognition in human life:

You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution and too impatient of difficulties. But it is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated. (7-8)

The “greater evil” is self-education, that is, an education not mediated by another human being, the teacher. Self-education is a sort of oxymoron, because the very concept of “education” implies the presence of at least two entities: the teacher (even if s/he can be absent, as in the case where the teacher is a book) and the pupil, where the first one is supposed to know, and the second one is supposed not to know (such an asymmetry seems to apply in non-human animals also: see Caro and Hauser). On the contrary, Robert Walton tries to educate himself. One can read Mary Shelley’s novel as the story of the disastrous consequences of self-education (one has not to forget that Walton’s expedition fails).

Self-education poses to some extent the same logical and philosophical problems that a “private language” poses to its unlucky users. A language, like English, is a radically public entity. For example, when Mary uses the word “monster” I can understand what she says just because the meaning of the English word she is using is not private. If the word “monster” were private, that is, if Mary intended “monster” as referring to a private and subjective thought in her own mind, nobody could understand her. When one uses a word, what matters is its public meaning; even if Mary has a very atypical conception of what a monster is, if she wants to be understood she has to use the word “monster” according to the public rules that regulate its intersubjective use. A radically “private language” cannot be understood. However, the problem of a “private language” is even greater. In the previous example, Mary cannot use the word “monster” according to a private meaning; otherwise, nobody can understand her. This is obvious. Nevertheless, Mary has to face a more serious problem. Imagine that Mary privately decides to assign to the word “monster” the private meaning M. Since Mary distrusts others, she does not make a written note of this decision either. When she utters the word “monster,” in fact she intends her private meaning M.

The logical problem now arises of how she can be sure of correctly using the word “monster.” No *external* voice can confirm or disconfirm its use. Ludwig Wittgenstein addresses such a problem in *Philosophical Investigations*:

258. Let's imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. – I first want to observe that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. – But all the same, I can give one to myself as a kind of ostensive definition! – How? Can I point to the sensation? – Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation – and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. – But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition serves to lay down the meaning of a sign, doesn't it? – Well, that is done precisely by concentrating my attention; for in this way I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation. – But 'I commit it to memory' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection correctly in the future. But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'.

The impossibility of a “private language” refers to a general character of human life: humanity—like language—is not something one is equipped with at birth (Cimatti, *La vita*). A body *becomes* human when confronted with a preexisting human (and linguistic) community. For this reason, every form of specific *human* activity—like language learning—that claims to be self-sufficient, seems to be destined to fail. Walton's self-education faces a similar problem. Mary Shelley warns the reader that what s/he is going to read is about the anthropological paradox that is implicit in every attempt to become autonomously human outside of a human community.

“Le désir de l'homme est le désir de l'Autre”

Victor Frankenstein works hard at “infusing life into an inanimate body” (49); but when he finally reaches his goal, he does not recognize it: “Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room” (50). This is an anthropological sin connected to the “birth” of the “monster” (see Rowen, Zimmerman). The “father” does not look at his “son.” More generally, the preexisting human community does not host within itself what its previous desire brought into the world. What the “monster” seeks is just such a humanizing look. Throughout the book, the “monster” seeks nothing other than such a look. Nobody recognizes this body as human. It is a “monster”: it is given the name of “uncanny” forms of life. A “monster” is like a “thing,” something that language still does not precisely recognize (a “monster” is not a “cat,” a “dog,” a “child,” and so on). From this point of view it is significant that “Frankenstein” is popularly believed to be the creature's proper name; its name would be the name of its creator, that is, the name of he who refused to give to the creature a proper name. There is no other

name for it. Since it properly does not exist as human being, it cannot be named with a proper name either.

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus is a Lacanian novel; it is the novel about what happens when the “mirror stage” does not succeed. This “experience sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*” (Lacan, *Écrits* 75). The *cogito* is such an entity that does not presuppose the previous existence of any other entities:

Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he [the deceiver] is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement “I am, I exist” is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind. (Descartes 108)

The *cogito* is logically and metaphysically alone; it does not need any other entities to state its own existence. On the contrary, the “monster” is a possible *cogito* who cannot sustain its own loneliness. In the “mirror stage,” the infant “can already recognize his own image as such in a mirror. This recognition is indicated by the illuminative mimicry of the *Aha-Erlebnis*, which Köhler considers to express situational apperception, an essential moment in the act of intelligence” (Lacan, *Écrits* 75). What the infant sees in the mirror is an image, and she *is* such an image. The infant sees herself from outside her own body: she is out there, in the mirror. In fact, the “I” is *external* to the very same body that says “I.” This is the difference in respect to the *cogito*: while this is self-sufficient, the infant needs to go out from herself in order to self-recognize. “It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity’s term, ‘*imago*’” (Lacan, *Écrits* 76). This is the critical point: the body identifies herself with an external image.

The body needs this external side to think of herself as an identity, as an “I.” Without such a side, the body never reaches the “stable” condition of self-feeling as subject. Victor Frankenstein’s refusal to recognize “his” creature condemns the nameless “monster” to be a humanoid body without identity. This is the dialectic “fuel” of *Frankenstein*: the desire on the part of the “monster” to be recognized by its reluctant “father.” It desires to be desired by Victor: “le désir est l’essence même de l’homme” (Lacan, *séminaire VI* 16). It is important to note that in the “mirror stage” the child recognizes herself in the mirror only if the adult who holds her smiles at her. There is always a third party between the infant and the mirror: an adult—who represents the “great Other”—who ensures the infant that what she is seeing is her own image.

Déjà, rien que dans la petite image exemplaire d’où part la démonstration du stade du miroir, ce moment dit jubilatoire où l’enfant, venant se saisir dans l’expérience inaugurale de la reconnaissance dans le miroir, s’assume comme totalité fonctionnant comme telle dans son image spéculaire, n’ai-je pas depuis toujours

rappelé le mouvement que fait le petit enfant? Ce mouvement est si fréquent, je dirais constant, que tout un chacun peut en avoir le souvenir. A savoir, il se retourne, ai-je noté, vers celui qui le soutient et qui est là derrière. Si nous nous efforçons d'assumer le contenu de l'expérience de l'enfant et de reconstruire le sens de ce moment, nous dirons que, par ce mouvement de mutation de la tête qui se retourne vers l'adulte comme pour en appeler à son assentiment, puis revient vers l'image, il semble demander à celui qui le porte, et qui représente ici le grand Autre, d'entériner la valeur de cette image. (Lacan, *séminaire X* 42)

The child self-recognizing in the mirror depends on the great Other's approval. When the child sees the image, she perceives herself neither as a unitary body nor as a psychological identity. What she properly sees is another living being. She smiles at her because at this early age infants innately smile at strangers. Then her mother says: "Look here! *You* are!" Now the infant can associate the image she is actually seeing with the developing feeling of being such a unitary entity there in the mirror. The bare image in the mirror is not sufficient for self-recognition: the "I" presupposes the Other's approval. For this reason, the "monster" looks for its "father's" look: "le désir de l'homme est le désir de l'Autre" (Lacan, *séminaire X* 32). This is the original fault of the "monster": nobody loves it. But a human being who is not loved cannot exist.

"Che vuoi?"

Notwithstanding such a defective nature, the "creature" tries to become human—that is, it tries to love itself. Its narcissism is not original; it is a paltry compensation for the love it never received from its "father" and from its absent "mother" (see Rubenstein, Marder, and Lehman). The "monster" tries to give to itself what the Other did not give it. But such an attempt obviously cannot succeed. Lacan speaks of such a case when, in *Seminar X*, he excludes the possibility of auto-analysis:

Dans l'analyse, il y a quelquefois ce qui est antérieur à tout ce que nous pouvons élaborer ou comprendre. Cela, je l'appellerai la présence de l'Autre, grand A. Il n'y a pas d'auto-analyse, même quand on se l'imagine. L'Autre est là. C'est sur cette voie et dans la même visée que se place l'indication que je vous ai déjà donnée concernant quelque chose qui va déjà beaucoup plus loin, à savoir l'angoisse. (32)

An effective auto-analysis would entail the very possibility of describing one's own internal states. The problem arises that one cannot describe one's own private mental states with a private language, because such a language does not exist. Therefore, one can only describe oneself using a public language, that is, the words of the Other. This means simply that the Other describes me. I am what the Other says I am: *L'Autre est là*. But this is exactly the desperate task of the "monster": to do without the Other. The problem is that "L'Autre est celui qui me voit" (Lacan, *séminaire X* 33): what *am* I if nobody sees me? The Other is more than a physical entity like a mother or a father. The Other is a query; "*Che vuoi?*" (14), asks the creature of the Other. The problem is that nobody asks anything of the "monster."

From the very beginning of its sad life the “monster” looks in vain for its “father’s” attention:

I [Victor] started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. (Shelley 50)

The “father’s” eyes are not looking at his “son,” but the “creature’s” eyes look greedily at its “father’s” face. What Laplanche called the “situation originaire adulte-enfant” (1987) is inverted: the adult/Other is not the one who looks at the body of the newborn. From the very beginning it is the newborn who looks for someone who looks at it: “his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me.” The “monster” also tries to speak, but anything it could have said, “I did not hear.” The problem here is not that what it says is unintelligible; Victor does not want to hear it. Victor does not look at “his” son.” In the famous encounter on the glacier, the “monster” explicitly accuses him:

“Devil,” I [Victor] exclaimed, “do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!”

“I expected this reception,” said the daemon. “All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind.” (94)

The “monster” is not a human being, it is a “vile insect,” the living being that most resembles a mechanical thing. It is well aware of its own completely “unnatural” condition: “you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature.” In fact, Victor’s hatred for his own “creature” could be motivated more by its extraordinary self-sufficiency than by his own *hybris*. Maybe Victor is not astonished by what he directly did; perhaps he is amazed by how the “monster” managed to survive *alone*. What is at stake in *Frankenstein* is not the sacrilegious overcoming of the limits of nature. *Frankenstein* is a Lacanian novel of envy and desire to be desired. On Victor’s side, there is the envy for the “monster’s” radical independence from him; on the “monster’s” side, there is the desire to be desired by its forgetful “father”:

Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. (95)

“I ought to be thy Adam” says the “monster” to the Other/father. But the Other does not recognize his creature, he does not look at it. Therefore, the “monster” is condemned to an inhumane condition of solitude and despair:

How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. (95)

At birth, the “creature,” like any other living creature, is “benevolent.” It is ready to love and to be loved, to look at and to be looked at. The problem immediately arises when Victor realizes that his “son” does not really need his help, because it is already a mature and strong body. The glance they exchange immediately after the “monster’s” “birth” shows Victor that they are at the very same level. This is not the Laplanche “situation originaire adulte-enfant,” where an adult takes care of a helpless infant, where it is apparent who gives and who receives; the “monster” is already a self-sufficient body. The paradox is that the one who most needed to be recognized is Victor. The “monster’s” gaze shows him that the eyes that are looking at him are similar to his own eyes. Victor is the modern Other who immediately realizes that he is nothing but a “semblant,” that is, “le signifiant en lui-même” (Lacan, *séminaire XVIII*). Victor would have needed to be recognized by the “creature” as the Father; in fact, Victor sees in front of him nothing but another human body. The *Frankenstein* drama is that while Victor is well aware of this condition, the “creature” continues to search for a Father who recognizes it as son. “Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form,” Victor shouts at the “monster.” He does not want to see what reminds him of his own insignificance. At least the “creature” realizes its destiny: “‘Thus I relieve thee, my creator,’ he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; ‘thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor’ ” (96).

“It was dark when I awoke”

But how does the “monster” succeed in becoming human by itself? Shelley follows the model of Condillac’s mute statue (see Pollin). According to Condillac, a living body can acquire all the knowledge it needs to survive by sensory experience alone. Condillac tries to demonstrate such a thesis by imagining a living statue that gradually acquires knowledge using its different senses. The key point is that the statue faces such a development alone:

Le principe qui détermine le développement de ses facultés, est simple; les sensations mêmes le renferment: car toutes étant nécessairement agréables ou désagréables, la statue est intéressée à jouir des unes et à se dérober aux autres. Or, on se convaincra que cet intérêt suffit pour donner lieu aux opérations de l’entendement et de la volonté. Le jugement, la réflexion, les désirs, les passions, etc. ne sont que la sensation même qui se transforme différemment pourquoi il nous a paru inutile de supposer que l’âme tient immédiatement de la nature toutes

les facultés dont elle est douée. La nature nous donne des organes, pour nous avertir par le plaisir de ce que nous avons à rechercher, et par la douleur de ce que nous avons à fuir. Mais elle s'arrête là; et elle laisse à l'expérience le soin de nous faire contracter des habitudes, et d'achever l'ouvrage qu'elle a commencé. (*Traité* 11-12)

Through repeated sensory experiences, the statue can acquire “idées abstraites et générales” about the world. Shelley’s description of the mental development of the “creature” is similar: it learns gradually to distinguish different entities in external and internal reality that at first appeared as formless masses: “It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses” (99). At the end of this process, the statue is able to survive in the world. However, what kind of life is the one it actually lives? “Toute entière à la recherche d’une nourriture, que je suppose extrêmement rare, elle mènerait une vie purement animale. A-t-elle faim ? Elle se meut, elle va partout où elle se souvient d’avoir trouvé des aliments. Sa faim est-elle dissipée, le repos devient son besoin le plus pressant; elle reste où elle est, elle s’endort” (Condillac, *Traité* 211). For Condillac, the possibility of developing a complete *human* life outside of a human community is excluded:

Il est même vraisemblable, qu’au lieu de se conduire d’après sa propre réflexion, elle prendrait des leçons des animaux, avec qui elle vivrait plus familièrement. Elle marcherait comme eux, imiterait leurs cris, brouterait l’herbe, ou dévorerait ceux dont elle aurait la force de se saisir. Nous sommes si fort portés à l’imitation, qu’un Descartes à sa place n’apprendrait pas à marcher sur ses pieds: tout ce qu’il verrait, suffirait pour l’en détourner. (*Traité* 211)

The solitary life of the statue is “une vie purement animale.” What is missing that could radically change its mind is language. According to Condillac, language is mainly a cognitive device which dramatically transforms the human mind. Take the case of voluntary memory:

§39 As we have seen, memory consists in the power we have to recall signs of our ideas or the circumstances that have accompanied them; but this power will not act except when, owing to the analogy of the signs we have chosen and the order we have established among our ideas, the objects we wish to revive pertain to some of our present needs. In short, we cannot recall a thing unless it is at some point connected with some of those things that we control. For a man who has only accidental signs and natural signs has none that is at his command. Thus his needs can cause only the exercise of his imagination, and by that token he will be without memory.

§40 On that basis we conclude that animals do not have memory and that they have only an imagination which they cannot direct. (*Essay* 37)

A memory appears in the mind of the statue only when some external stimulus reactivates it. Such a memory does not depend on the statue’s will; on the contrary,

its memory causally depends on what the statue casually perceives. This is the reason why Condillac can sustain that “animals do not have memory.” On the contrary, a human being can control her memory using “the signs we have chosen.” For example, someone can try to think of a specific event of her own past even if nothing in the actual situation is connected to such an event. The sign referring to such a memory functions as an address in an information storage system: the sign “tells” the mind where the stored memory is located. In this sense, human memory is context-free. For Condillac, language is more than a communicative system; rather, it is a “method” of thinking. However, how does the mute statue manage to master a language? Condillac imagines such a situation: “I am assuming that two children, one of either sex, sometime after the deluge, had gotten lost in the desert before they would have known the use of any sign” (*Essay* 113). The natural “mutual discourse” between them—made of actions, play, sensations and so on—would make them

connect the cries of each passion to the perceptions of which they were the natural signs. They usually accompanied the cries with some movement, gesture, or action that made the expression more striking. For example, he who suffered by not having an object his needs demanded would not merely cry out; he made as if an effort to obtain it, moved his head, his arms, and all parts of his body. Moved by this display, the other fixed the eyes on the same object, and feeling his soul suffused with sentiments he was not yet able to account for to himself, he suffered by seeing the other suffer so miserably. From this moment he feels that he is eager to ease the other's pain, and he acts on this impression to the extent that it is within his ability. (114-115)

The two children invent what Condillac refers to as a “language of action,” which precedes the arbitrary languages that human beings now use. This is exactly the key point: the “language of action”—whatever its historical and psychological credibility (see Gleitman and Landau)—is already a *social* language. At the very beginning, there were *two* children.

In contrast, Shelley's “creature” begins its unorthodox language development through a solitary attempt to imitate the natural sounds (see Allen): “Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again” (100). However, if someone feels the need to express her own sensations, that means she already participates in language and communication. Only someone who knows that language exists can have the desire to communicate something. The desire to communicate is an effect of the existence of language, not the cause of such an existence; therefore, it cannot be the foundation of language. This is a key point: the “creature” is not properly a human being, because a human community has not recognized it *as human*. At the same time, the “monster” is naturally equipped with the specific *human* predisposition to acquire a language. This is the dilemma of its condition: it is not human, but it is not nonhuman either. On the one hand, it feels the need of a language; on the other, this need is not

justified by some social need because its life is radically solitary. The possibility of the language of action is precluded for the creature. Spying from the hut on the De Lacey family's life, the "creature" acquires the use of names:

By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it. But I was baffled in every attempt I made for this purpose. Their pronunciation was quick, and the words they uttered, not having any apparent connection with visible objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the mystery of their reference. By great application, however, and after having remained during the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; I learned and applied the words, 'fire,' 'milk,' 'bread,' and 'wood.' I learned also the names of the cottagers themselves. The youth and his companion had each of them several names, but the old man had only one, which was 'father.' The girl was called 'sister' or 'Agatha,' and the youth 'Felix,' 'brother,' or 'son.' I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds and was able to pronounce them. I distinguished several other words without being able as yet to understand or apply them, such as 'good,' 'dearest,' 'unhappy.' (109)

This is the difference between the "creature" and a nonhuman animal: its language predisposition makes it easy to grasp the concept of nomination. While a nonhuman animal does not realize that names stand for objects, the "creature" is able to discover that "the names" refer "to some of the most familiar objects." In such a way, the "creature" understands the basic mechanism of language. It realizes what language is from an external point of view, like an anthropologist in a "radical translation" situation (Quine). However, while Quine's anthropologist can ask a native speaker if he has correctly understood the foreign language (jungle language), the "creature" cannot. The anthropologist, like any other human being, acquires a language through the mediation and help of other human beings. In contrast, the "monster" does not have such a possibility. Therefore, it places itself at once inside and outside language. In fact, it learns alone to produce linguistic sounds: "My organs were indeed harsh, but supple; and although my voice was very unlike the soft music of their tones, yet I pronounced such words as I understood with tolerable ease" (112). In this paradox, which is both logical (because there is no such a thing as a private language) and anthropological (because there is no human being outside of a human community), the "monster" places itself in a strange situation: it is neither human nor animal. On the one hand, it is too human to simply live like an animal; on the other hand, it is not human enough to be accepted by a human community.

According to the philosophical and psychological tradition of which Lacan is part (Cimatti, *Il taglio*), it is language that makes us human because it splits the (prelinguistic) human organism into two parts: body and mind. Human language constitutes such an anthropological apparatus (Agamben), which isolates an "I" from the body, a psyche from the flesh. From this point of view, language's main

effect is not communication; rather it is transcendence and separateness. In this sense, language makes human beings separate from “their” bodies and from other people. Language does not make community possible; on the contrary, it makes it impossible. Human language exists just because human psyches are separate and distinct. Therefore, there is no principled difference between Condillac’s “langage d’action” and human language. On the contrary, non-human languages seem more apt to make possible a communal condition between different animals and between animals and nature. While human language separates living and nonliving bodies, animal languages trace connections between them. It is in some way paradoxical that the creature looks for a tool like human language that, in the end, will exacerbate its own loneliness. What the creature does not understand is that if salvation exists for it, such a possibility does not lie inside human society, but in animality and nature.

Envy

Frankenstein is the story of a being who is at once both inside and outside society. It is outside, because no one recognizes it as a human being; it is inside because it confusedly feels that it is similar to human beings. From this liminal position, the creature looks at the human society with a strong and violent feeling of envy. Considered this way, *Frankenstein* is the Lacanian novel of look and envy.

La Mettrie, in *L’homme-machine*, asks: “Qu’était l’homme, avant l’invention des mots et la connaissance des langues?” (52). The thesis of La Mettrie is that if a monkey could be trained to use a symbolic language, there is nothing in its nature that prevents it from learning to speak like a human being: “Pourquoi donc l’éducation des singes serait-elle impossible? Pourquoi ne pourrait-il enfin, à force de soins, imiter, à l’exemple des sourds, les mouvements nécessaires pour prononcer?” (49). In a sense, the “creature” is like a “singe” exposed to human language, like a lion and its tamer:

On a dressé un homme comme un animal; on est devenu auteur comme portefaix. Un géomètre a appris à faire les démonstrations et les calculs les plus difficiles, comme un singe à ôter ou mettre son petit chapeau et à monter sur son chien docile. Tout s’est fait par des signes; chaque espèce a compris ce qu’elle a pu comprendre: et c’est de cette manière que les hommes ont acquis la connaissance symbolique. (53)

The “creature” trained itself. It has been its own master. Therefore, the question it poses to itself—“What was I?”—has no answer at all. Only another person could have answered such a question. Then, who is the “monster”? What does it mean to become human without a human mirror?

As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. “The path of my departure was free,” and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did

this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them. (Shelley 126)

A nonhuman animal lives its own life, which can be hard and brief, but it is the life it has to live. That is, a nonhuman animal completely adheres to the life it actually lives. There is no psychological distance between the animal and its life. That is, a nonhuman animal probably does not reflect upon its life, asking itself if it is the right life to live: it simply lives this life. This is the condition of *animality* (Cimatti, *Filosofia dell'animalità*). From this point of view, the “creature” is not a nonhuman animal. On the other hand, the “creature” actually lives like a nonhuman animal; in particular, it lives far from human communities, in the woods or glaciers. Aristotle seems to be speaking of this when he describes the condition of a radically “citiless” man: “it is clear that [...] man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it” (9). Since the “creature” is not an animal, it is “above” normal human beings in the “scale of humanity.” Maybe this is the reason Victor hates his own “son.” *Frankenstein* is a Lacanian, or better Kleinian, novel because its main theme is envy. This includes both the envy that Victor feels with respect to a creature that is “above” him in the “scale of humanity,” as well as the envy that the “monster” feels with respect to the life of nonhuman animals which do not need the look of the Other. It also reflects the envy of every creature whose life is radically solitary with respect to the Other who looks elsewhere.

The “monster” is a new, desperate Adam:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (127)

While the first, lucky Adam has been “guarded by the especial care of his Creator,” the new and sad one, the “monster,” never received the warm and loving look of its “father”; it was left “wretched, helpless, and alone.” For Lacan, “anxiety” is the emotional state that each human being is confronted with from birth. In the presence of the look of the Other, we feel anxiety. Lacan compares such a blind look to the praying mantis’s eyes where “je ne voyais pas ma propre image dans le miroir énigmatique du globe oculaire de l’insecte” (*séminaire X* 14). The Other is an enigmatic mirror that, to some extent, stares at me, but it does not reflect “my” image. The “anxiety” is the original existential state of being watched by someone even if nobody watches us.¹ In the case of the “creature” there is no such Other.

¹ Such a Lacanian example could be used as an overall description of what a human feels while being watched by a nonhuman animal. I discussed this question in Cimatti, *Filosofia dell'animalità*

Indeed, the “creature” wants nothing more than an Other who watches it. With respect to the Other, the human prototypical question is “What do you want?” (*Che vuoi?*). However, in this case the question is inverted: “Why don’t you want anything from me?” (*Perché non vuoi nulla da me?*). If anxiety is correlative to the oppressive though elusive presence of the Other, in *Frankenstein* we are faced with a similar but different feeling: envy. For Melanie Klein, “envy appears to be inherent in oral greed. [...] envy [...] is first directed towards the feeding breast” (78). The “creature” is envious of the “feeding breast” it never had, of the mother it cannot have; Victor is envious of the self-sufficiency of his “son,” who immediately after birth was complete and autonomous. Both have been deprived of something: love in the case of the former, the rewarding feeling of being needed for the latter. Victor does not properly feel able to represent the Other with respect to the “creature”: both are mature men, equipped with fully developed bodies. Moreover, the “monster” is much stronger than Victor (“You are my creator, but I am your master” (169) the “creature” says to Victor on asking him to “create” for it a female companion). However, the “creature”—like any other human or almost human being—needs nothing more than to be loved and “to obtain one look of affection from” the “eyes” of someone (142). Therefore, the “creature” is torn between two contrasting feelings; the pity it feels for its weak and heartless “father,” and the violent envy it feels for the love it never received—a love it imagines that the lives of all other human beings enjoy:

I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror; I abhorred myself. But when I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for happiness, that while he accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me he sought his own enjoyment in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was forever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with an insatiable thirst for vengeance (223).

Post-human community

Anxiety and envy, to look at and to be looked at, to love and to be loved—the “creature” oscillates between these contrasting feelings. The theoretical point of the sad story of the “monster” is what type of humanity—or post-humanity—Shelley is addressing. *Frankenstein* is more about the way we become human than about the risk of creating hybrid monsters. The problem is not the risk of violating nature; quite the contrary, the risk is that Victor Frankenstein does not violate it enough. Even if the “creature” is stronger than us, even if it properly needs neither mother nor father, even if its body heralds for us a future of mixture between flesh and technology, it is still too human to endure this new condition. From a biological point of view, the “creature” does not need the dramatically complex and laborious “anthropological machine” (Agamben) that every “normal” human

(2013). It is important to note the difference between Lacan’s perspective and Derrida’s (2008) perspective. For Lacan, the animal gaze makes us anxious and confused; for Derrida it makes us somewhat more sensible to the presence of the animal *qua* sentient being. While in Lacan the animal gaze is mainly uncanny, in Derrida it is mainly ethical.

animal requires in order to come into existence. The “creature” is a body literally made of flesh and iron; it is a fully technical body (Braidotti). At the same time it is a typical human body because it needs the look of the Other to exist as psychological unity, as subject. In this sense, it really is a “monster” because it is placed at the boundary of two radically different ways of living. From the biological perspective, it is already a perfect example of the post-human body; from the psychological perspective it is still a typical human subject.

In fact, there is a moment, during the painful process of the “creature’s” self-education, where it is apparent that two diverging ways of developing are present: the first one is the conventional one, becoming human. The envious “creature” who looks for love, looks for other human beings, and wants to learn to speak and to read. This way inevitably fails, because the “monster” is not properly human. The other way is barely visible. It shows itself when the “creature” is surprised by nature. In such moments, it is no longer envious or furious. There it confusedly realizes that a non-human life is also possible, which does not presuppose the presence of humans. In the first human life, language, oral and written, dominates: “The words induced me to turn towards myself” (Shelley 117). This means that without words the “monster” would have not been forced to reflect upon itself. The “creature” is a *subject* just because it speaks. Through language it becomes human, that is, an entity split into two separate parts: on one side bare body, on the other mind. When a being is split, it becomes aware of its own mortality, because the mind is “separated” from the body, and it can look at it from outside: “Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind when it has once seized on it like a lichen on the rock. I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling, but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death—a state which I feared yet did not understand” (Shelley 117). For a split being, only death can give some relief from the troubles that inexorably follow thought.

However, there is another possible way of living, which presents itself at the very beginning of the “monster’s” life, when envy and language have not yet fully occupied its body, when “all the events” that it experiences are “confused and indistinct” (99). Here the “creature” is simply part of what is taking place. Here it is not properly alone because only someone who thinks of itself as a separate entity—a Subject or an “I”—can feel the sensation of being alone. Here the “creature” simply participates in the intrinsic movement of life; here it coincides with the life that it is living:

Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up and beheld a radiant form [the moon] rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path, and I again went out in search of berries. I was still cold when under one of the trees I found a huge cloak, with which I covered myself, and sat down upon the ground. No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me; the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure. (100)

It is worth noticing that this is one of the very few moments in *Frankenstein* where the experience of seeing is not painful and sad; it is no accident that what the “creature” is watching is the moon, an “inanimate” natural object. In such a moment, the “creature” takes part in a “block of becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 238) with moon and sky. Finally, there is some “pleasure” for the “creature.” Therefore, a possibility exists for the “monster” to exist beyond the human look, to live a life that is not solitary and desperate. Shelley barely hints at such a non-envious (non-linguistic) way to live because she mainly presents Victor as a sorcerer's apprentice. Even though such a possibility exists. The psyche of the “creature” is too human to believe in the moon, but its body is already sufficiently post-human not to be scared by such an *impersonal* pleasure.

The figure of the nameless “creature” can help us imagine what a “post-human community” could be, even if it does not succeed in living in such a community. The “creature” cannot help but look back to humanity, instead of looking forward to a new form of life no longer marked by the distinction between humanity and animality. First of all, such a community is not a *political* community, that is, a community made of different psychological and ethical subjects. The life in such a “post-human community” is regulated neither by ethics nor by law. The bodies that live in such a community are not the kind of bodies that have to think of themselves as “psychological identities.” That is, such bodies do not pass through the “mirror stage.” They do not need to be ratified by the Other in order to be allowed to participate in social life. Such bodies are simple, living beings, beyond subjectivity and personhood, therefore without the basic social feeling, envy. More precisely, such bodies have not the property of being alive, they *are* life; there is no difference between their being bodies and their being alive. The *cogito* exists by “himself” and has the additional property of being a living body too. Instead, in the post-human community there are only living bodies: “we will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else” (Deleuze 27). It is important to note that such “life” is not what is usually considered the contrary of non-living things. This is what Victor Frankenstein thinks; for example when he “infuse[s] a spark of being into the lifeless thing” (49).

As in the post-human community, the distinction between humanity and animality does not apply anymore, and the distinction between life and thing also no longer applies. Therefore, when Deleuze speaks of “life,” he in fact speaks of what he calls an “haecceity,” a state where it is no longer possible to distinguish between life and thing, human beings and animals. Therefore, an “haecceity” is such an unusual “mixture” that conventional scientific, humanistic thought is unable to imagine it: “A degree of heat, an intensity of white, are perfect individualities; and a degree of heat can combine in latitude with another degree to form a new individual, as in a body that is cold here and hot there depending on its longitude. [...] A degree of heat can combine with an intensity of white, as in certain white skies of a hot summer” (Deleuze and Guattari 261). This could be the world

of the “creature,” if only it were not so similar to a human being. Humanity means the restless need to name, divide, and classify. The post-human community is the simple and bare nature. The “creature” does not succeed in becoming an “haecceity,” that is, to simply participate in the flow of life. However, sometimes it does not feel the world in the usual humanistic way, that is, as object: “Spring advanced rapidly; the weather became fine and the skies cloudless. It surprised me that what before was desert and gloomy should now bloom with the most beautiful flowers and verdure. My senses were gratified and refreshed by a thousand scents of delight and a thousand sights of beauty” (113). In a post-human community, no more do we have subjects on one side and objects on the other. Following this line of thought, it is interesting to note that Deleuze and Guattari speak of the “creature” only to criticize its nostalgia for the condition of a body recognized as a *unitary* body, that is, a body that passed through the “mirror stage”: “You can make any list of part-objects you want: hand, breast, mouth, eyes... It’s still Frankenstein. What we need to consider is not fundamentally organs without bodies, or the fragmented body” (171). Such a body is “still Frankenstein,” that is, a body that can be known only with the name of its “father.” On the contrary, the body Deleuze and Guattari imagine “is the body without organs, animated by various intensive movements that determine the nature and emplacement of the organs in question and make that body an organism, or even a system of strata of which the organism is only a part” (172). The “creature” could have become a “body without organs,” a “system of strata,” but it did not succeed. It failed, but it indicates for us a direction.

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Madeleine de Scudéry's Animal Sublime, or Of Chameleons

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Abstract



Drawing from Erica Harth's work, animal studies, and ecofeminism, I explore the ways in which Scudéry engages in the important seventeenth-century debates over animal reason. Her engagement in these debates is significant: it foregrounds the fact that René Descartes's conception of the animal-as-machine was immediately challenged by his contemporaries. In her "Story of Two Chameleons," Scudéry challenges early modern moral and especially scientific representations of the chameleon, which limit our understanding of the chameleon to a figure for negative human qualities or to an object of scientific experimentation. Scudéry does so in ways that parallel her career-long vindication of women as elevated beings endowed with reason. Scudéry's ethical stance towards the animal, attributing to it the capacity to reason and establishing a relation of friendship or *amitié* between the human and non-human animal, disrupts both negative metaphorical moral discourse, on the one hand; and the scientific domination and objectification of the animal exemplified by Claude Perrault's *Anatomical Description*, on the other. Her "Story of Two Chameleons" suggests that these creatures are sublime, in the late seventeenth-century sense of "pure," "refined," and "elevated." Through a process of sublimation that, for instance, transforms excrement into musk, an eyeball into a pearl, Scudéry metaphorically elevates the status of her chameleons. In effect, Scudéry suggests that, just like the human animal, the chameleon can (albeit problematically) dominate its "nature within."

Keywords: ecofeminism, chameleons, Madeleine de Scudéry, René Descartes, Claude Perrault.

Resumen

Inspirándose en la obra de Erica Harth, en los estudios de los animales y en el ecofeminismo, exploro las formas en que Scudéry se involucra en los debates importantes del siglo diecisiete sobre el razonamiento de los animales. Su implicación en estos debates es significativa: pone en primer plano el hecho de que la idea de que la idea de René Descartes del animal-como-máquina fue inmediatamente cuestionada por sus contemporáneos. En su "Historia de dos camaleones", Scudéry desafía la moral moderna y en especial las representaciones científicas del camaleón, que limitan nuestro entendimiento del camaleón a una figura para las cualidades humanas negativas, o a un objeto de experimentación científica. Scudéry hace esto de forma paralela a su defensa, a lo largo de su carrera, de las mujeres como seres elevados dotados de razonamiento. El posicionamiento ético de Scudéry hacia el animal, atribuyéndole la capacidad de razonar y estableciendo una relación de amistad o *amitié* entre el animal humano y el no-humano, perturba tanto el discurso moral metafórico negativo así como la dominación científica y la objetificación del animal ejemplificada por la *Descripción anatómica* de Claude Perrault. Su "Historia de dos camaleones" sugiere que estas criaturas son sublimes, en el sentido de "puro", "refinado" y "elevado" de finales del siglo XVII. Por medio de un proceso de sublimación que, por ejemplo, transforma el excremento en almizcle, un globo ocular en una perla, Scudéry eleva metafóricamente el estatus de sus camaleones. En efecto, Scudéry sugiere que, como el animal humano, el camaleón puede (aunque problemáticamente) dominar su "naturaleza interior".

Palabras clave: ecofeminismo; camaleones, Madeleine de Scudéry, René Descartes, Claude Perrault.

Scholars of animal studies continually have to grapple with the legacy of René Descartes's conception of the non-human animal as an automaton, a non-sentient, non-thinking being; his influence can still be felt in contemporary research laboratories.¹ While Descartes's problematic conception of the non-human animal often serves as a point of departure to rethink the non-human animal, it is important to be aware that his position was not uncontested in seventeenth-century France. As Peter Harrison argues, "[a]t no time... except perhaps our own, have such concerns [about the non-human animal] sparked the magnitude of debate which took place during the course of the seventeenth century" ("Virtues" 463).

The importance of the question in this period can be tied to the epistemological shift taking place in conceptions of the non-human animal, exemplified by the work of Descartes and his followers, including Nicolas Malbranche and Pierre Chanut.² Influential in the Renaissance and the early seventeenth century, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle postulated distinctions between human and non-human animals that could be characterized in terms of a difference of degree: non-human animals were perceived to be inferior to human animals, but they shared certain qualities; they were viewed as being closer to matter, less spiritual, and endowed with less reason, than humans. Initiating a break with Antique tradition, Descartes insisted upon a very fundamental dualism between human and non-human animals, thus rejecting earlier models based on continuities between them.³ For Descartes, animals are machines, automata, lacking altogether a rational soul. Specifically contesting the more animal-friendly position of Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron, Descartes denies them speech or the power to decide, comparing their functioning to that of a clock.⁴ Val Plumwood emphasizes the repercussions of such conceptions of the non-human animal: "The machine image confirms the new confidence in control as well as the narrow and instrumental view of nature associated with a technological outlook. The machine's properties are contrived for its maker's benefit, and its canons of virtue reflect its users' interests... A machine is made to be controlled, and knowledge of its operation is the means to power over it" (*Feminism* 109). Not only does the image of the animal-machine serve to reiterate man's power over

¹ Many scholarly works in animal studies include a critique of Cartesianism, which significantly continues to influence perspectives on the non-human animal that deny them agency, sentience, or reason; see for instance Plumwood's chapter on "Descartes and the Dream of Power" (104-119); Weil 8 and 36; Waldau's chapter "Animals in Philosophy" (143-60); Steiner 79; and for an account of Descartes's own cruelty to animals that anticipates contemporary scientific practices, see Weisberg 95-96.

I would like to thank Elena Past for her thoughtful advice as I was developing this essay initially as a conference paper, and for her careful reading and suggestions for development as I worked it into an article.

² Harrison nuances Descartes's position on animals in "Descartes on Animals," and notes the somewhat more radical position some of his followers took, most notably Nicolas Malbranche, who asserts about animals that "[t]hey eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing" (219).

³ For an overview of pre-Cartesian notions of the animal, see Plumwood 105-10.

⁴ For Descartes's critique of the position of Montaigne and Charron with respect to animal rationality, see his letters of 1646 and 1649 in *The Animals Reader* (59-62). For a French version of the 1646 letter, see his "Lettre au [Marquis de Newcastle]" in *Oeuvres de Descartes* (573-76). For a summary of the positions of Montaigne, Charron, and Descartes, see Clarke 71-74.

nature; it also takes away animal agency and treats it “as an instrument for the achievement of human satisfactions” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 111).

The Cartesian denial of an animal soul or animal reason was immediately challenged in seventeenth-century France by, among others, the feminist writer and salon woman Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701). Scudéry's important contributions to contemporary debates about animal reason have been recognized by Erica Harth (1992), and most recently, by Peter Sahlins (2015). Within these debates Scudéry's position is aligned to some degree with the theories of the *médecin du roi* Marin Cureau de la Chambre (c.1594-1669), who frequented Scudéry and her salon.⁵ Dedicating his *Treatise on the Knowledge of Animals* (*Traité de la connoissance des animaux*, 1643) to the chancellor of France Pierre Séguier, Cureau de la Chambre presents the debate over animal reason to be “the greatest and most important affair that has ever been debated” (n.p.; emphasis in original).⁶ Arguing that animal foresight, craftiness, society, and communication all indicate actions based in reason, Cureau de la Chambre furthermore insists on a God-given “portion” of reasoning in animals that allows them to form general notions and draw conclusions.⁷ Clearly in agreement with Cureau de la Chambre with respect to these propositions, Scudéry arguably goes further than the king's doctor in her defense of animals by demonstrating the possibility of human and non-human animal “friendship” based in animal agency and reason, which is articulated extensively in her story of two chameleons, and by depicting the non-human animal as sublime.

Within seventeenth-century France, the chameleon in particular became central to scientific and literary reflections on and debates about non-human animals. As Nathalie Grande has argued, the chameleon was a popular animal in the late seventeenth century, “to the point of having inspired a veritable fashion in the beginning of the 1670s” (94). Since Antiquity, the chameleon served as a figure of inconstancy and hypocrisy due to its changing colors, a tradition that continued in the early modern period, when the chameleon became a metaphor for the ever-flattering courtier. This image was disseminated within the French literary field through, among other works, Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum libellus* (or *Emblèmes*), and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologie*, as it was known in French.⁸ The chameleon also was believed to have practical uses; its body parts and organs supposedly possessed medicinal and magical qualities. Surgeon to the Valois kings, Ambroise Paré claims to have observed that the eye of a chameleon cures cataracts in his *Book of Monsters and Prodigies* (*Livre des monstres et prodigies*, 1573), a work that

⁵ René Kerviler notes that Cureau de la Chambre frequented the salons of Madeleine de Scudéry and Madame de Sablé (83). In a letter to the comte de Nogent, Cureau de la Chambre mentions Scudéry (*Epistres* 141) to whom he addresses a letter as well (*Epistres* 218).

⁶ “la plus grande et la plus importante affaire qui ait jamais esté mise en contestation.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French are mine.

⁷ On animal foresight and communication in Cureau de la Chambre (2); on God's portioning of a small amount of reason to animals (245); on animals' ability to draw conclusions and form general notions (251-23).

⁸ Alciato's Latin works were published regularly throughout the sixteenth century, including his book on emblems. See for instance Pettegree and Walsby 23-32. Known as André Alciat in French, his emblems were translated into French as early as 1540 and continued to be republished until around 1616. The notion that the chameleon nourishes itself on air is associated with the flatterer's gossipy nature (Alciat 227). Ripa's *Iconologie*, which was “repeatedly published in Paris between 1636 and 1681” (Saunders 12), associates the chameleon with inconstancy due to its changing colors (see Baudoin 75).

continued to be published throughout the seventeenth century.⁹ Ancient and Modern notions of the chameleon co-existed until at least the end of the century, evident in Antoine Furetière's entry on the animal in his *Universal Dictionary (Dictionnaire universel, 1690)*. Alongside "modern" accounts of the chameleon by Claude Perrault and Madeleine de Scudéry, Furetière includes earlier associations of the chameleon with courtly flatterers, also making note of the sixteenth-century Italian doctor Pierandrea Matthioli's "superstitions" that the chameleon's tongue can help win a trial or protect a woman giving birth; its head and throat, burned in oak, can bring about rain; or its right jaw alleviates the fear of those who carry it.¹⁰

The emergence of Cartesian rationalism gave rise to a new way of viewing the animal in general and the chameleon in particular: it became the object of a modern form of scientific fascination, exemplified by the dissection. This new form of interest in the chameleon was embodied by the popularity of Claude Perrault's *Anatomical Description of a Chameleon, a Beaver, a Bear, and a Gazelle (Description anatomique d'un caméléon, d'un castor, d'un ours et d'une gazelle)*, published in 1669. During this period of the chameleon's rise in popularity, Madeleine de Scudéry received a male and a female chameleon from the French consul in Alexandria in 1672, and in 1688 she published her "findings" about her chameleons in *New Moral Conversations (Nouvelles Conversations de Morale)*. Harth notes that Scudéry's conversation, "The Story of Two Chameleons," "is presented as an actual alternative to Claude Perrault's *Description anatomique...* published under the auspices of the newly founded Académie des Sciences" (100). Scudéry's alternative description of the chameleon can be situated within seventeenth-century women's critiques of Cartesian rationalism, arguably anticipating ecofeminist conceptions of the non-human animal.

Drawing from Harth's work, animal studies, and ecofeminism, in this essay I explore the ways in which Scudéry's description of her chameleons challenges early modern moral and especially scientific representations of the chameleon, which limit our understanding of the creature to a figure for negative human qualities, medicinal or magical uses, or to an object of scientific experimentation. Scudéry does so in ways that parallel her career-long vindication of women as elevated beings endowed with reason.¹¹ Scudéry's ethical stance towards the animal, attributing to it the capacity to reason and establishing a relation of friendship or *amitié* between the human and non-human animal, disrupts negative metaphorical moral discourse (i.e., the chameleon-as-courtier); instrumental medicinal or magical uses; and the modern scientific domination and objectification of the animal exemplified by Perrault's *Anatomical Descriptions*. Her "Story of Two Chameleons" suggests that these creatures are *sublime*, in the late seventeenth-

⁹ After citing Matthioli regarding the use of chameleon eyes to heal cataracts, Paré notes: "I observed this description in the one [chameleon] I have at home" ("J'ay observe cette description en celui que j'ay en mon logis," 698)

¹⁰ The *Commentaries (Commentaires)* of Mattioli or "Matthioli" were republished in French numerous times in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century.

¹¹ Constructed as so many first-person speeches or harangues, Scudéry's *Illustrious Women (Femmes Illustres, 1642)*, for instance, not only and quite literally gives voice to illustrious women of Antiquity, it also demonstrates women's capacity to reason. Harangues are a form of juridical eloquence, whose foundation, as Marc Fumaroli has shown, is built upon the fusion between Ratio and Oratio, between reason and speech (see 477 and 510). The very act of giving a harangue, then, can be construed as a performance of one's reason through speech. Both the form of the harangue and its content—the logical argument constituting the case—together legitimate women as rational subjects throughout the text.

century sense of “pure,” “refined,” and “elevated.”¹² Moreover, Scudéry’s account carries out the work of *sublimation*—of purification and elevation—of the defective and physical attributes and properties attributed to chameleons in Antique and early modern narratives. Through a process of sublimation that, for instance, transforms excrement into musk, or an eyeball into a pearl, Scudéry metaphorically elevates the status of her chameleons. In effect, Scudéry suggests that, just like the human animal, the chameleon can (albeit problematically) dominate its “nature within.”¹³

By representing the chameleon as a sublime creature, Scudéry contests first its traditional associations with inconstancy and flattery; second, medicinal and utilitarian uses of the chameleon; and third, the Cartesian denial of the animal soul. Her observations suppress or deny the “reptilian” of the reptile, and the “bêtise” (“stupidity” or “beastliness”) of the beast, transforming it into a higher, sublime creature who lives on air, and whose body parts and organs carry no vulgar utilitarian functions; instead, they have an inherent, transcendent value of their own. In the same way that women writers sought to undo the hierarchy between men and women by embracing the notion that “the mind has no sex”—which includes a process of sublimating the physical body that marks women as different from men—Scudéry extends this strategy to validate her chameleons as thinking, feeling, and loving beings. Again, while such a process of sublimation indeed can be viewed as problematic in its devalorization of the material body, it nevertheless was a strategy Scudéry had already employed to legitimate women as thinking subjects.

At the outset, I would like to lay out some problematic areas within Scudéry’s narrative. Despite the ecocritical reading I will carry out here, I acknowledge that Scudéry’s chameleons were not given a choice to leave Alexandria and make their way to Paris. They were objectified in the very idea of offering them as “gifts,” but Scudéry and her entourage will construct them as if they chose to travel to France. Forced to live in the human environment of the French salon, the chameleons’ very real vulnerability is exemplified by the way in which one of Scudéry’s guests mishandles and mortally wounds one of the chameleons. Nevertheless, Scudéry’s works do point to ecofeminist possibilities in her approach to non-human animals. Although recognizing some of the problematic aspects of Scudéry’s account of her chameleons, I will set these aside for the most part to foreground the ecofeminist possibilities to which her writings lend themselves.

Animal Amitié

Scudéry’s “Story of Two Chameleons” reads like a tale of love and friendship or *amitié*. The character Bérénice recites to a group of salon goers “the account of my friend whom you all know”¹⁴ (295), implicitly referring to Madeleine de Scudéry. Thus the story is related through the voice of Scudéry, who claims that “I won’t meddle in speaking about

¹² As Ann Delehanty has argued, in this period “the sublime moves from being an effect of rhetoric [. . .] to a means to describe the transcendental in art, the divinity of the king, and the inexplicable grandeur of nature” (79). Indeed, while Longinus focuses on the sublime as it relates to aesthetic expression, René Rapin displaces Longinus’s notion of the sublime into the domain of morality in *Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les différentes conditions des hommes*.

¹³ Plumwood explains that within Platonic and Christian thought, one must dominate the “nature within,” and it is not until the Cartesian turn that humans sought to dominate “nature without” (106).

¹⁴ “la relation de mon amie que vous connoissez tous.”

them [the chameleons] either as a Doctor or as a Philosopher” (296),¹⁵ the two discursive modes that dominate in early modern representations of the chameleon. Instead, hers will be a hybrid text that, while integrating certain aspects of previous moralistic/philosophical and scientific discourses, foregrounds the fact that she will indeed relate a story or *histoire*.

The tale begins like a *relation de voyage* or travel account, a popular genre in the period.¹⁶ We learn that the two animals journeyed from their homeland in Alexandria, Egypt to Marseilles, then Lyon, finally arriving in Paris. Upon their arrival in her home, Scudéry not only observes the chameleons' behavior—finding them able to judge, reason, and love—but she also engages with them, becoming a character with the chameleons in the central narrative thread of this *histoire*. She observes “an extreme friendship between them... They always held each others' little hands” (304).¹⁷ But “a man of quality” who mishandles the female chameleon accidentally rips off her leg. She survives the injury for eight to ten days, and when she dies, “The [male] chameleon was so surprised and afflicted to see his [female] chameleon die that he hastily and with transport climbed to the top of the windowsill, from which he fell down three times” (304).¹⁸ The text reads like a melodrama in which Scudéry works to console the broken-hearted chameleon, who has lost his true love:

I became accustomed to holding him in my hand, and I named him Méléon . . . he came to love me, to know me, to understand his name, and to distinguish my voice: in such a way that I can assure you that those who have said that chameleons cannot hear are mistaken, for I clearly saw that this one could hear me, knew me, and distinguished my voice. (305)¹⁹

Like Claude Perrault's scientific representation of the chameleon in his *Anatomical Description*, Scudéry's text moves from external observation to, eventually, a post-mortem dissection.²⁰ However, Scudéry draws on the tropes of the novel or novella to urge her readers to empathize with two creatures endowed with reason and capable of *amitié*, and to whom she effectively gives agency and arguably “voice” in her ability to communicate their reactions and feelings to her readers.

Méléon is the dedicated lover, physically affected by the loss of his *amie* (or friend) in ways that recall the heroes of Scudéry's novels, whose relations are characterized in terms of *amitié*, inclination, tenderness, respect, and constancy.²¹ As such, the “Story of

¹⁵ “je ne me mêleray point d'en parler (des caméléon) ni en Médecin, ni en Philosophe.”

¹⁶ Sara Melzer notes that many of the *Relations* “were best-sellers” (36) and “there were more than 1300 *Relations* in print according to Furetière” (37).

¹⁷ “une amitié extrême entre eux... Ils tenoient toûjours l'un et l'autre avec quelqu'une de leurs petites mains.”

¹⁸ “Le Caméléon fut si surpris et si affligé de voir mourir sa Caméléone, qu'il monta avec grande hâte et avec transport au haut du chassis, d'où il retomba jusques à trois fois.”

¹⁹ “je m'accoutumay à le tenir dans ma main, et à le nommer Méléon [...] il vint à m'aimer, à me connoître, à entendre son nom, et à distinguer ma voix: de sorte que je puis asseûrer que ceux qui ont dit que les Caméléons n'entendoient pas, se sont trompez, car j'ay veû clairement que celui-ci m'entendoit, me connoissoit, et distinguoit ma voix.”

²⁰ It should be noted that Scudéry received the chameleons as pets and not as animals to dissect or study in the rationalist scientific sense of the word.

²¹ Scudéry's *Map of Tenderness (Carte du Tendre)* interestingly lays out the key concepts that traverse all of her works. *Amitié* or friendship is based on following the positive precepts of the Map of Tenderness such as “probity,” “respect,” “sincerity,” “goodness,” and avoiding the negative ones

Two Chameleons” challenges the traditional association between the chameleon and inconstancy; indeed, Méléon proves to be the ideal lover and friend. The fact that Scudéry uses the term “amitié” to characterize Méléon’s relation to the female chameleon and to Scudéry herself furthermore suggests that he is a reasonable animal who can move one to empathy. As I have argued elsewhere, “Traditionally ideal friendship was viewed as a relation between equals endowed with reason” (Duggan 105). Within humanist thought, women were excluded from the domain of friendship because they were not believed to possess reason. In *La Coche* (1541), Marguerite de Navarre proposes a model of female friendship that challenged *amitié’s* male prerogative, while Scudéry took her model of friendship a step further to characterize both same-sex and hetero-sex conceptions of friendship.²² It is important to note that Scudéry’s conception of friendship and its relationship to reason does not translate into relations lacking in emotion; instead, reason tempers potentially violent passions (sometimes detrimental to her female characters), channeling them into more “tender” forms of affection or *amitié*.²³

In “The Story of Two Chameleons” Scudéry further broadens her conception of friendship to encompass relations between human and non-human animals, presupposing animals’ capacity to choose friends and thus to reason. In a letter to Catherine Descartes, the niece of the philosopher, Scudéry discusses human and non-human animal friendship and its connection to reason:

My belief in favor of my dog takes nothing away from the infinite esteem I hold for your deceased uncle. It isn’t the friendship [*amitié*] that I have for animals that disposes me to their advantage, it the friendship that they have for me that inclines me in their favor. For one cannot love anything by choice without some sort of reason. (*Correspondance* 395)²⁴

To some degree, Scudéry’s conception of friendship between human and non-human animals anticipates the theories of ecofeminist Val Plumwood, who argues that an “ethics of nature” should be based on “less dualistic, moral concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship, and responsibility” (“Nature” 8). Indeed, Plumwood’s ethics align with the ethical precepts inscribed in Scudéry’s Map of Tenderness, or *Carte de Tendre*—which include goodness, respect, generosity, integrity, and *amitié*—that define ideal friendship and love between two individuals.²⁵ With respect specifically to relations between women and men, I have noted that the map “redefines male-female relations in terms of negotiation and reciprocity, and not conquest or domination” (Duggan 64). Scudéry’s conception of reciprocity necessarily implies a relation between two thinking subjects or agents who acknowledge and care for each

such as “perfidy,” “indifference,” and “negligence.” Méléon proves to be the perfect lover or *ami* in his adherence to the precepts of the Map of Tenderness.

²² On friendship among women in Navarre, see Skemp.

²³ In her *Clélie, Histoire Romaine*, Scudéry includes an account of the rape of Lucretia that equates political tyranny with rape. Male characters unable to control their violent emotions can turn to rape; violent passion leads to the inability to *respect* the other (i.e., a female character). Scudéry’s Map of Tenderness marks an attempt to channel that violent desire.

²⁴ “Ma croyance en faveur de mon chien n’ôte rien de l’estime infinie que j’ai pour feu monsieur votre oncle. Ce n’est pas l’amitié que j’ai pour les animaux qui me prévient à leur avantage, c’est celle qu’ils ont pour moi qui me prévient en leur faveur; car on ne peut rien aimer par choix sans quelque sorte de raison.”

²⁵ On the Map of Tenderness, see note 12.

other, thus undoing dichotomies upholding male domination over women. By redirecting *amitié* to qualify relations between human and non-human animals, then, Scudéry challenges the dualism legitimating the domination of humans over non-human animals.

In her 1991 essay “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism,” Plumwood repeatedly evokes the concepts of “self-in-representation” (as opposed to an instrumentalist approach), “relationships of kinship and friendship,” and “connectedness and caring for others” as ways of reconceiving relations between human and non-human animals in ethical ways.²⁶ Scudéry’s expansion of the conception of friendship to include Méléon as well as her dog not only presupposes their ability to “choose” Scudéry as a friend, thus implying reason. It also invests them with agency: they are not simply passive machines that humans can manipulate or control. It is precisely because non-human animals have agency and reason that Scudéry is able to engage and connect with them in ways that imply reciprocity and mutual respect characteristic of the social relations she aspired to establish within her salon.

Agency is precisely what is lacking in Claude Perrault’s account of chameleons in his *Anatomical Description*. Indeed, one might think of Perrault’s representation of the animal as being “monologic” (in the sense of a subject dominating, constructing, or exploiting a “passive” object) whereas Scudéry’s is “dialogic” (that is, two subjects engaged in a reciprocal relationship based on mutual respect).²⁷ While still attached to Antique and Renaissance allegorical and magical conceptions of the chameleon from which he is trying to move away, Perrault predominantly presents his chameleon in scientifically “objective” terms: “The Chameleon is of the kind of animals with four feet and who lay eggs, like the tortoise, the crocodile, and the lizard, which it resembles” (“Le Caméleon est du genre des animaux à quatre pieds et qui font des oeufs, comme la Tortuë, le Crocodile et le Lezard à qui il ressemble assez,” 4). Perrault experiments on the chameleon to determine why it changes color, and discovers upon dissection that it has “a kind of Glottis that is a transversal rather than a vertical slit as in animals that have some kind of voice, of which our chameleon was entirely deprived” (27).²⁸ Perrault’s relationship to the animal resides in him measuring and experimenting on it, first while alive—providing its size, weight, and natural functions—then when dead, through dissection.

Although he differed with Descartes regarding the idea that animals were simply automatons, Perrault nevertheless follows a very Cartesian procedure of measuring each body part of the chameleon and carrying out experiments to disprove previous theories about its properties. As Perrault’s treatise moves from external observation of the living animal to the dissection of the dead one, there seems to be no transition: the chameleon always appears “dead.” While the dissection suggests that it has no voice, given the structure of its glottis (speech being one indicator of reason), the text itself further takes all voice or agency away from the animal.²⁹ Unlike Scudéry’s representation of Méléon, the

²⁶ See for instance Plumwood, “Nature” 8-9, 16, 20, and 21.

²⁷ I am drawing very generally here from the work of Richard Johannesen, whose notions of ethical communication are inspired by the work of Martin Buber and his “I-Thou” and “I-It” models of communication. See Johannesen.

²⁸ “une espece de Glotte, qui estoit une fente transversale et non droite comme elle est aux animaux qui ont quelque espece de voix, dont nostre Caméleon estoit entierement privé.”

²⁹ Richard Serjeantson discusses the relation between speech and reason in early modern debates about animal reason, situating Cartesians such as Chanet on the extreme of denying the non-human animal conventional speech and thus reason.

reader never gets a sense of how—or even if—the nameless chameleon feels. In Perrault's text, the chameleon is simply a thing to be measured, observed, and analyzed within a scientific context in which empathy plays no role, and in which the non-human animal analyzed is reduced to the status of pure object.

In Scudéry's narrative, however, the chameleons never quite seem to die. As long as the two chameleons are alive, they have agency: they interact with each other and with the narrator, who is surprised by and who values their singularity and dignity. Describing their gait, Scudéry expresses her admiration: "This animal has a slow, grave, and majestic gait. He never places his foot on the ground without first having considered where he will place it" (298).³⁰ The passage suggests that the chameleon thinks or reflects even while walking, the description itself evoking the style of moralist writers like Jean de La Bruyère, rather than "objective" scientific observation.³¹ Scudéry also gives the male a name, *Méléon*, a further means of endowing him with subjectivity.

Sahlins relates that after their dissection, Scudéry had the remains of her two chameleons preserved, remarking: "her preservation of their remains was an enduring sentimental attachment and a belief in the moral, if not metaphysical, immortality of the chameleon's body" (26). Just as Scudéry preserves their physical bodies, so she preserves their memory, not only through the "Story of Two Chameleons," but also by publishing the texts written by her *salonniers* celebrating *Méléon* for posterity:

I sing of an Animal as gallant as rare,
A handsome Chameleon who adorned Africa
Who, coming for Palmis from the end of the Universe
Faced obstacles, and crossed Seas [...]
All of Paris was charmed by this noble Animal
Who renounced for her his homeland [...] (318)³²

Through life and after death, the relation between Scudéry and the chameleon is not simply one between scientific observer and object of investigation. It is a dialogic, empathetic relation between a human and non-human animal that survives even death, a relation memorialized through rituals binding the living with the dead. By recognizing the agency of non-human animals and broadening her concept of *amitié* to characterize relations between human and non-human animals, Scudéry indeed develops an ethics towards non-human animals based on the notion of self-in-relationship that anticipates the work of Plumwood.

The Animal Sublime

Such representational strategies elevate the chameleon, giving it the possibility of being *sublime*; that is, of inspiring noble emotion, of serving as an example of what Père René Rapin refers to as "the Sublime in faithfulness that makes these miraculous friends

³⁰ "Cét animal a le marche lent, grave, et majestueux. Il ne pose jamais son pied sans avoir considéré auparavant où il le place."

³¹ In his description of individual "characters" of Parisian society, La Bruyère often linked physical appearance and demeanor with their psychology.

³² Je chante un Animal aussi galand que rare,/ Un beau Caméléon dont l'Afrique se pare/ Qui venant pour/ Palmis du bout de l'Univers,/ Affronta les ecueils, et traversa les Mers [. . .]/ Tout Paris fut charmé de ce noble Animal/ Qui renonçoit pour elle à son païs natal [. . .]

so rare in society” (21).³³ The sublime and sublimation come together in Clayton Crockett’s definition of “sublimation” as an attempt to surmount material reality. He remarks: “sublimation has to do with the redemption of material reality that in itself is seen as fallen, depressing, or meaningless” (841). Indeed, Scudéry raises her chameleons from the status of “reptile” and assimilates them to “man,” arguing:

It is wrong that some have called it a reptile. Its belly never touches the ground, neither while walking nor while sleeping, leaning on its feet and its tail. Its feet resemble little open hands given the number of fingers, and its legs also have something about them that resembles the bones and muscles of the arms of a man. (298)³⁴

Just as the figure of the salon woman or *précieuse* sublimates women’s association with matter, with Eve, and with the Fall, so Scudéry’s representation of the chameleon sublimates the animal’s association with matter and the Biblical Serpent in that the chameleon’s belly never touches the earth.³⁵ Moreover, her external observation has the function not of objectifying the chameleon to study it for her own purposes or to further science, but rather to legitimate it as a dignified being worthy of respect in and of itself.

Scudéry further demonstrates the chameleon’s superior, sublime nature in her physical description of the animal’s natural functions and internal organs. While Perrault insists in his treatise that chameleons eat flies, evident in their excrement, thus rejecting Antique and Renaissance notions that chameleons live on air, Scudéry selectively retains certain earlier notions of chameleons, only to rehabilitate their image. First she notes that “It normally seeks out the Sun, whose rays I believe provide it with food just as air does” (300).³⁶ As Harth has argued, “In the *conversation* on the chameleons, the animal that lives on air becomes an image of the spirituality that Cartesian mechanism denied it” (104). Its transcendent nature is further revealed in its bodily functions and organs.

Scudéry claims to have observed that the female died “making a little bit of excrement without odor” (305).³⁷ She goes on to further describe their bodily waste in the following terms: “This excrement was yellow, musk colored, and a little tiny white brownish-yellowish stone. It had no odor and was fairly firm, which does not contradict the notion that air is the chameleon’s natural food, for hail and snow are nothing more, in some ways, than thickened air” (312-13).³⁸ While Grande expresses surprise at the *précieuse* Scudéry’s description of excrement, the description itself sublimates anything filthy or abject about it. By stating it is odorless yet associating it with musk, Scudéry

³³ “le Sublime dans la fidelité qui fait ces miracles d’amis si rares en la société.”

³⁴ C’est à tort que quelques-uns l’ont appelé réptile. Il ne touche jamais du ventre en terre, ni en marchant, ni même en dormant, s’apuyant sur ses pieds et sur sa queue. Ses pieds ressemblent à de petites mains entre-ouvertes par le nombre des doigts, et ses jambes ont aussi quelque chose qui ressemble à l’os et aux muscles des bras d’un homme.

³⁵ Denis Lopez characterizes the general conception of the animal in seventeenth-century France: “Affection for the animal, for example, is suspect. It distances man from God and bogs him down in matter” (19).

³⁶ “Il cherche ordinairement le Soleil, dont je crois que les rayons lui servent de nourriture aussi-bien que l’air.”

³⁷ “en faisant un peu d’excrément sans odeur.”

³⁸ “Cét excrément étoit jaune, couleur de musc, et une petite pierrette blanche entre le brun et le jaune. Cela étoit sans odeur et assez ferme, et ne contredit pas que l’air est la plus naturelle nourriture du Caméléon, car la grêle et la neige ne sont en quelque sorte qu’un air épaisi.”

“purifies” chameleon excrement, suggesting an affiliation with white snow and even perfume.

Moreover, things found within the body upon dissection are described like precious gems. Inside the “little” female chameleon were found “many eggs as big as peas, and of the most beautiful golden yellow in the world” (313).³⁹ Their eyes resemble pearls: “The body of the eye looked like a pearl, perfect in roundness, in whiteness, and in luster, the little tiny black and lively pupil surrounded by its little circle of the most beautiful gold in the world, and this golden circle surrounded by another little rose-colored circle” (315).⁴⁰ These descriptions of the dissection transform the chameleon’s organs into something quite marvelous and precious; indeed, they are aesthetically pleasing to contemplate.

As such, Scudéry’s representation of the dissection strategically works against the traditional utilitarian view of chameleon body parts and organs, in which they served the purpose of curing cataracts, winning trials, protecting birthing women, or inducing rain. Her account also challenges modern scientific usage, in which the study and dissection of animals furthered human knowledge. By transforming animal organs into precious gems, into something aesthetically pleasing, Scudéry can emphasize the value *in itself* of the chameleon, freeing it from the status of trafficable object, whose value resides purely in its use-value, subject to human whims.⁴¹ Although one could argue that precious gems are in fact trafficable objects, Scudéry represents the precious gems that are the chameleon’s body parts as aesthetically pleasing, as something to be appreciated for its beauty and marvel, rather than something to be exchanged.

Scudéry’s characterization of her chameleons raises their value to the status of the sublime as they inspire admiration and empathy—through their inner and outer beauty—in those with whom they come into contact. Not only are the two chameleons able to engage in relations of *amitié* with each other and with a human animal, thus demonstrating their ability to reason. They also display moral and physical attributes that Scudéry characterizes as being “marvelous” and “délicat,” inspiring *étonnement*, all of which can only happen when they are given agency, represented as subjects and not objects, as transcendent beings with inherent value.

Scudéry the Ecofeminist

In some ways, we might describe Scudéry as being “ecofeminist” *avant la lettre*. Carol Adams characterizes ecofeminism in terms of the breakdown of dichotomies that subject nature to culture, and non-human animals to human animals:

many contemporary feminist theories address a variety of conceptual sets that are historically characterized by these opposing terms: subject/object; self/other; domination/agency; culture/nature, sameness/difference; male/female; white/nonwhite; human/animal. We have seen how these dualisms mediate

³⁹ “beaucoup d’oeufs gros comme de petits pois, et du plus beau jaune doré du monde.”

⁴⁰ “Tout le corps de l’oeil parut comme une perle, parfait en rondeur, en blancheur, et en lustre, la petite prunette noire et vive environnée de son petit cercle, du plus bel or du monde, et ce cercle d’or bordé d’un autre petit cercle de couleur de rose.”

⁴¹ See Adam’s chapter on “The Feminist Traffic of Animals,” which plays on Irigaray’s notion of the traffic in women. Adam remarks: “By choosing the word *traffic* I imply that similarities in the treatment of ‘disposable’ or ‘usable’ bodies exist” (111).

power and value hierarchies of domination: man dominates woman; culture dominates nature; whites dominate people of color . . . a subject dominates an object; humans dominate animals. The eradication of a logic of domination as it is sustained, perpetuated, and enacted through these cultural sets becomes one of the goals of ecofeminism. (132)

Arguably, Scudéry's representation of her two chameleons—and of animals in general—works to undo precisely the dichotomies that subject the non-human animal to the human. In the same vein that Scudéry challenged the male domination of women, freeing up women's voices and proposing women as ideal, sublime models to be valued for themselves (and not on the marriage market), so she challenges here the human domination of the non-human animal by endowing her chameleons with reason, dignity, and the possibility of cross-species *amitié*.

Scudéry will continue to defend the cause of animals in *Moral Conversations* (*Entretiens de Morale*), published in 1692, in which the character Clarice deplores the killing of animals for human sustenance: "nothing is more horrible than to kill animals to live, natural reason would not go that far, and if I had not found this practice established, I would never have dared thought that one should inhumanely kill so many beasts that do us no harm at all" (171).⁴² Interestingly, it is the male *salonnier*, Polidore, who invokes the Bible and political economy to counter Clarice's condemnation of the killing of animals. Clarice concedes Polidore's point (perhaps out of *politesse*) but adds: "We have great sheepfolds constructed, we provide the herds with a shepherd and a dog to protect them from wolves, and we take them to good pastures to feed them well, and then all of this care leads to killing them in order to eat them" (171-72).⁴³ Clarice gets the last word here, foregrounding the inherent contradictions and cruelty of animal husbandry, in which caring for non-human animals proves to be completely instrumental, ultimately subjecting the sheep to the needs of humans.

Interestingly, Descartes himself realized the potential cruelty of killing animals if we accept that they are reasonable creatures. In a 1649 letter to Henry More, the philosopher explains that his opinion about the lack of reason or thought in animals "is not so much cruel to animals as indulgent to men—at least to those who are not given to the superstitions of Pythagoras [who advocated for vegetarianism and whom Scudéry admired] since it absolves them from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals" (*Animals Reader* 62). While Descartes seeks to legitimate the consumption of animals by denying them reason—thus being able to insist upon their instrumentality—Scudéry challenges the practice of eating meat, which is in line with her understanding of and relations to non-human animals.

Scudéry's interest in animals as thinking, feeling beings spans her career. As early as *The Illustrious Women* (*Les Femmes illustres*), published in 1642, Scudéry uses examples taken from the animal kingdom to propose the possibility that women may be endowed with more reason than men. In Sappho's harangue to her friend Erinna, she states:

⁴² "rien n'est si horrible, que de tuer des animaux pour vivre, la raison naturelle n'iroit pas là, et si je n'avois pas trouvé cét usage établi, je ne me serois jamais avisée, qu'il fallust tuer inhumainement tant de bestes qui ne nous font point de mal."

⁴³ "On fait bastir de grandes bergeries, on donne aux troupeaux un berger et un chien pour les garder des loups, et les mener dans de bons paturages pour les bien nourrir, et puis tous ces soins aboutissent à les tuer pour les manger."

For consider, Erinna, this almost universal order that we see among all animals who live in the woods and in caverns: you will see, that those who are born with strength and courage are often not very dexterous, and not very intelligent: and that the [physically] weak ordinarily have a stronger instinct and are closer to reason than those to whom Nature gave other advantages. You can well judge that according to this order, Nature having given more strength and courage to men than women, also must have given us more wit and more judgment. (429-30)⁴⁴

Here Scudéry draws from observations of non-human animals to validate the intellectual merits of women; later she will use the strategies she employed to legitimate women as reasonable beings to rehabilitate the chameleon, as well as other animals. Although some might criticize Scudéry for anthropomorphizing, her association of human and non-human animals ends up fostering empathy towards the latter and in fact moves away from anthropocentrism. As Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman have argued, “if humans were correct in their anthropomorphic assumption that, *grosso modo*, animals thought and felt as humans did, for that very reason humans would no longer be justified in using animals as stage props to act out certain ways of being human—no more than other humans may be used as a means to serve the ends of others” (4-5). The fact that Scudéry argues against an instrumentalist conception of the non-human animal indeed complements Daston and Mitman’s nuanced view of anthropomorphism.

By depicting Méléon as an exemplary *ami*, recognizing his agency, and representing the chameleon as endowed with reason, emotion, and beauty, Scudéry promotes the chameleon to the position of the animal sublime. As such, her account of chameleons constitutes one of the most striking examples—a culmination of sorts—of her career-long attempts to formulate an alternative narrative to the Cartesian, scientific discourse of her day. In many ways her prescient defense of the chameleon’s inherent, non-instrumental value announces future developments in animal rights, just as she offers a very early expression of future ecofeminist concerns in her ability to link the instrumental objectification of non-human animals to the power structures that keep women in socially subordinate roles. Indeed, Scudéry proposes an early modern animal ethics that acknowledges the reason, agency, and feelings of non-human animals.

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⁴⁴ “Car considerez Erinne, cét ordre presque Universel, que l’on voit entre tous les animaux, qui vivent dans les bois et dans les cavernes: vous verrez, que ceuz qui sont nez avec de la force et du coeur, sont bien souvent peu adroits, et peu intelligents: et que les foibles pour l’ordinaire, ont un instinct plus puissant, et sont plus près de la raison; que ceux à qui la Nature, a donné d’autres avantages. Vous jugez bien que selon cét ordre, la Nature ayant donné plus de force et plus de courage aux hommes qu’aux femmes; elle doit aussi nous avoir donné, et plus d’esprit, et plus de jugement.”

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Talking Animals “Talking” with Animals in Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*

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Abstract



In this essay, I explore the representations of spoken language by animals in *La Storia* by Elsa Morante. Furthermore, I seek to examine the ways in which humans, namely little Useppe, express themselves with animals and interpret what is said, but I also seek to discover what elements may predispose Useppe to be privy to code-sharing with these creatures of other species. While the interactions in this tragic novel are mainly between humans, it is worthwhile to consider the relationship between Useppe and birds, canines, equines, and felines. He acts as a type of intermediary between the species, though I venture to say that he shares more in common with animals than with humans: “Useppe rimaneva del tutto estraneo, e inconsapevole, come un cucciolo ingabbiato in una fiera” (Morante 458; “Useppe remained completely estranged, and unaware, like a puppy caged and put on display” [translation my own]), like a child raised amongst wolves. Since my research examines interspecies communication, I have used zoosemiotics as a starting point. My main focus, then, will be on how Morante successfully employs zoosemiotic notions to make the “spoken” as well as gesticulative communication of the animal reflect the animal’s temperament and emotional nature—even as a synecdoche for the archetype of the animal proper—and interpretable by the human interlocutor. That is, through implicit knowledge of zoosemiotics, these symbols are not just interpreted by Useppe but answered using a mutually decipherable code. In this way, Morante illuminates the profound relationships between humans and animals, relationships that are sustained due to the myriad means by which interspecies communication, compassion, and cooperation intersect and flourish in this novel.

Keywords: semiotics, zoosemiotics, Italian, Morante, animal, communication.

Resumen

En este artículo, exploro las representaciones del lenguaje hablado por los animales en *La historia* de la escritora italiana Elsa Morante. Además, quiero examinar los modos en los que los humanos, el niño Useppe en particular, se expresan con los animales e interpretan lo que estos últimos les dicen, pero quiero también descubrir qué elementos hacen que Useppe esté predispuesto a poder compartir códigos con criaturas de otra especie. Mientras que las interacciones en esta novela trágica son, en la mayor parte, entre humanos, es importante considerar las relaciones entre Useppe y algunos pájaros, caninos, equinos y felinos. Él actúa como una especie de intermediario entre las especies, aunque me aventuro a plantear que tiene más en común con los animales que no con los seres humanos: “Useppe rimaneva del tutto estraneo, e inconsapevole, come un cucciolo ingabbiato in una fiera” (Morante 458; “Useppe permanecía completamente extraño, e ignorante, como un cachorro enjaulado en una exposición” [traducción mía]), como un niño que fue criado por lobos. Ya que mis investigaciones examinan la comunicación interespecie, utilicé la zoosemiótica como punto de partida. Me concentro, entonces, en la manera en que Morante emplea con éxito unas nociones zoosemióticas para que lo que “dicen” los animales, tanto como con la voz como con las acciones, refleje el temperamento y la naturaleza emocional de estos—incluso como una sinécdoque del arquetipo del animal propio—y hace que el humano pueda interpretarlos. Es decir, a través de conocimientos implícitos de la zoosemiótica, Useppe no solamente interpreta estos símbolos sino que responde con un código

descifrable por él y los animales con los cuales se comunica. De este modo, Morante ilumina las relaciones profundas entre humanos y animales, relaciones que se sostienen a causa de los medios con los cuales la comunicación, la compasión y la cooperación entre especie se entrecruzan y florecen en la novela.

Palabras clave: semiótica, zoosemiótica, Morante, animal, comunicación.

“Ulí, che dicono?”

“Che saccio! Quelli mica parlano la lingua nostra, quelli sono forestieri”.

[...]

“E che dicono? Eppetondo, eh? che dicono?”

“Che hanno da dí! boh!... Dicono: ciricí ciricí io salto qui e tu zompi lí! Te va bene?”

“No”.

*“Ah nun te va bene! embè, ariccóntecelo tu, allora, quello che dicono”.*¹

La Storia (Morante 189)

Bella, one of the canine characters introduced to the reader in the latter third of Elsa Morante’s historical novel *La Storia: Romanzo* (1974), often demonstrates the simplicity and the absolute presenthood of nonhuman animals²—what Rilke refers to as the infinite, deathless existence, “ungrasped, completely / without reflection—, pure, like [animals’] outward gaze” (Rilke 49), through which they see “Everything,” yet we see only “Future” or even “Worry.” Animals possess *now* as well as *forever* in their marvellous simplicity (Rilke 49), and on the timeline of their mortal existence, they exist everywhere simultaneously. It is relevant to place children and animals on the same playing field, so to speak, since it is not uncommon to see mirrored in animals the timelessness, innocence, genuineness, simplicity, and unfaltering honesty of young children. It is not surprising, reciprocally, that children would seek the kindred spirits of animals, all of whom coexist with angels, according to Irigaray, due to their purity (199). The narrator in *La Storia* observes this divine union in the seemingly shared demeanour of adolescent Nino and Blitz, Nino’s dog: “[Blitz]

¹ “Ulí, what are they saying?”

“What do I know? Those ones, they don’t speak our language; they’re foreigners.”

[...]

“So, what are they saying? Eppetondo, huh? What are they saying?”

“What do they have to say? I don’t know!... They’re saying: tweet-tweet tweet-tweet! I jump here and you hop there! Is that good enough for you?”

“No.”

“Ah, it’s not good enough for you. Well, then: why don’t *you* tell us what they’re saying.” (All translations from Italian are my own.)

² For the purposes of this essay, henceforth, “animal” without the “nonhuman” qualifier will be employed to designate nonhuman animals, while “human” will denote human animals.

followed Nino everywhere, as though he were half of his soul”³ (Morante 107). Morante’s choice to bring into communion Useppe, Nino’s younger half-brother, and the animals that he encounters is corroborated by Capozzi’s explanation that the author frequently uses children as protagonists in her stories. “In most instances it is through male alibis, especially young boys,” Capozzi explains, “that Morante has represented both the effects of excessive love and the anxieties of feeling neglected or rejected.” These youthful characters are essential to her opus because “she sees them as the custodians of fables, myths, idols, and heroes. They are also vulnerable to love, confused about death, always craving attention, and blessed with the necessary fantasy needed to communicate with nature,” as Useppe indubitably and heartbreakingly is (Capozzi).

My aim, in this essay, is to explore the representations of spoken language by animals in *La Storia*, but I seek also to examine the ways in which humans, namely Useppe, express themselves with animals and interpret what is said. Additionally, I am interested in exploring what elements may predispose Useppe to be privy to code-sharing with these creatures of other species. Ultimately, however, through these exchanges facilitated by code-sharing, my goal is to illuminate Morante’s demonstration that coexistence, cross-species friendship, and compassion are attainable when humans bend their ears and open their hearts to listen closely to the inner workings of the simpler, purer animal world of which they, too, are an inextricable part. While the interactions in this tragic novel are mainly between humans, it is worthwhile to consider the relationship between Useppe and avian creatures, canines, equines, and felines. Though the exchanges and moments between Useppe and adult, teenage, and (notably) pre-linguistic humans are rich with sentimentality and merit analysis, my focus will be on Useppe’s meetings and greetings with animals. He acts as a type of intermediary between the species, though I venture to say that he shares more in common with animals than with humans: “Useppe remained completely estranged, and unaware, like a puppy caged and put on display”⁴ (Morante 458), like a child raised amongst wolves.

Since my research examines interspecies communication, I have chosen zoosemiotics as a starting point. The term “zoosemiotics” was coined and developed by Thomas Sebeok in 1963, and it studies the signs, symbols, and communication between and across various animal species; more formally, it has been defined as “the discipline, within the science of signs intersect[ing] with ethology, devoted to the scientific study of signalling behavior across animal species”⁵ (Maran et al. 1). My main focus, then, will be on how Morante successfully

³ “[Blitz] seguiva Nino dappertutto, come fosse metà della sua anima”.

⁴ “Useppe rimaneva del tutto estraneo, e inconsapevole, come un cucciolo ingabbiato in una fiera”.

⁵ Malacarne, however, explicates zoosemiotics in more detail as dealing with “the rules of animal communication by using the theory of information (e.g. mathematic analysis of signals) and the theory of communication.” It is “situated between traditional ethology and sociobiology” and deals with three things: “1) the nature of communicative channels (visual, tactile, electric...) in relation with the

employs zoosemiotic notions to make the “spoken” as well as gesticulative communication of the animal reflect the animal’s temperament and emotional nature—even as a synecdoche for the archetype of the animal proper—and interpretable by the human interlocutor. That is, through implicit knowledge of zoosemiotics, these symbols are not just interpreted by Useppe but answered using a mutually decipherable code. In this way, Morante illuminates the profound relationships between humans and animals, relationships that are sustained due to the myriad means by which interspecies communication, compassion, and cooperation intersect and flourish in this novel.

“No species [...] can survive in isolation from other sorts of animals,” Sebeok says in his influential *Essays* (106). This is true of humans, who, essentially, are animals endowed with the talent and physiology enabling speech. This is especially true of individuals who exist in isolation from other humans, that is, figurative isolation from what is perceived to be normal: Useppe is not a normal boy, what with the mental and physical limitations imposed upon him by his *Grande Male*⁶, his genetics, and his vital growing years’ having been stunted by the devastations of the Second World War. Additionally, he is alienated from his brother, Nino, since Nino is frequently away, a large age gap separates the boys, and, finally, they do not share the same father. The boys’ mother, Ida, is raped by a German soldier named Gunther at the beginning of the novel, and Gunther (Useppe’s biological father) dies without Ida’s ever learning of his eventual fate; consequently the references to Useppe as a “bastard child” are not infrequent, nor are the instances underlining similarities between him, a mutt like Blitz the dog, and other animals:

“[...] Because Blitz isn’t by any means a wolf[,]” [Nino explains].

“Then what race is he?”

“He’s a bastard.”

The casual word shook Ida, who blushed immediately [...]. In turn, then, Nino understood her thoughts: [...]

“Of course! Even Giuseppe is a bastard. In this house, there are two bastards!” he deduced, rejoicing at his discovery. [...] ⁷ (Morante 104)⁸

environment; 2) the meaning of a message in relation with the context in which it is emitted; 3) the ability of social species to construct symbolic languages” (qtd. in Radomska 74).

⁶ His “Great Illness”—epilepsy, essentially—which consists of a “*Violenta crisi convulsiva con perdita totale della coscienza*” (“Violent convulsive episode with complete loss of consciousness”; Morante 463).

⁷ “[...] Perché Blitz, di razza, mica è lupo”.

“E di che razza è, questo qui?”

“Razza bastarda”.

La parola casuale scosse Ida, che ne arrossì immediatamente [...]. A sua volta, allora, Nino concepì il pensiero: “Già! Pure Giuseppe è bastardo. In questa casa, ci stanno due bastardi!” ne dedusse, rallegrandosi moltissimo alla scoperta.

⁸ Initially, Ida takes offense at this term and is scandalized by it. She uses it—or, rather, *bastardo* is used by the narrator—to refer only to Blitz and his interactions with other bastard canines. Later, however, namely toward the end of the story, Ida appears to reclaim the term, rendering it more endearing, when imagining the worst-case scenario of Useppe being taken away from her by the Nazis; she thinks of him as her *bastardello* or *bastarduccio* (the suffixes *-ello* and *-uccio* render the term an affectionate, diminutive one; Morante 462, 503). The word appears 16 times in the novel (thrice of which in the modified forms).

Nino understands from that point on that his little brother is different not just from him, but also from other human animals, and he rejoices in a strangely aloof manner.

Although Useppe’s mother and half-sibling positively adore him, Useppe is isolated from them due to their age differences and diverse life experiences—and yet Useppe actively rejects the company of other boys and girls his own age, preferring animals, and, more specifically, dogs as his sole, and soul, mates: “Those ones (the dogs) were, one could say, Useppe’s only frequenters. Neither friends nor companions of his own species—he no longer had anyone”⁹ (Morante 494). Useppe stands apart also from the general Italian population who is jaded, dejected, and spiritually tired from the ravages of the war. Even Davide, also known as Carlo, an (ex-) anarchist soldier and friend of Nino’s, in his drug-induced garrulousness and candour, gushes to five-year-old Useppe, telling him that Useppe is the happiest little boy that he has ever met: “And yours is the happiness... of... everything. You are the happiest creature in the world. [...] You are too sweet for this world; you’re not from here. As people say, *happiness is not of this world*”¹⁰ (Morante 520). Useppe is “not of this world,” or supernatural, one could say; in *this* world, such pure and all-encompassing joy does not and cannot exist—and is not natural—alongside violence and abjection. Davide, who has witnessed the unspeakable horrors of war, is in awe of this boy who, despite physically inhabiting the same world as he, can experience a joy that must certainly originate elsewhere; Useppe’s joy is otherworldly. As a result of his uninhibited felicity, Useppe can relate more closely to and commune better with his canine companions, as opposed to the members of his own species, and Morante mirrors Sebeok’s earlier certitude regarding the necessity of inter-species companionship in her demonstrations of Useppe’s intellectual and emotional intimacy with Bella and Blitz. Sebeok argues that “[e]ach species must live in a vast ecosystem which requires its members to coexist with a variety of neighbors on certain terms” (106), and such a coexistence cannot preclude the employment of reciprocated communicative expressions—a method of code-sharing, that is—to identify how the limited space on this earth can be shared. If a lion roars at a poacher, or a dog barks at a trespasser, those are *clear* signs, which need no further interpretation, to the human being invoking that audible sign.

In *La Storia*, the reader learns explicitly that Useppe possesses the uncanny ability—indeed, “otherworldly,” if one is to adhere to Davide’s appreciation of Useppe’s jovial nature—to comprehend the language of dogs and of other animals: “And maybe it was in those primitive duets with Blitz that he learned the language

⁹ “Costoro (i cani) erano si può dire i soli frequentatori di Useppe. Amici o compagni della sua specie, lui non ne aveva piú nessuno”.

¹⁰ “E la tua è la felicità... di... tutto. Tu sei la creatura piú felice del mondo. [...] Tu sei troppo carino per questo mondo, non sei di qua. Come si dice: *la felicità non è di questo mondo*”.

of dogs. Which, along with other languages of animals, would remain a powerful acquisition for as long as he lived”¹¹ (Morante 110). Before this explication, however, the narrator insinuates that Useppe (when he is still pre-linguistic, crawling on all fours, and essentially sharing more characteristics with nonverbal quadrupeds than with loquacious bipeds) is privy to an awareness of and sensitivity to the inner workings of animals:

And maybe between the child’s eyes and those of the beast some kind of unexpected exchange took place, hidden and imperceptible. All of a sudden, the look on Giuseppe’s face underwent a strange change, one that was never before seen, which, however, no one noticed. A kind of sadness or concern went through him, as though a small dark curtain had fallen in front of him.”¹² (Morante 125)

He is an insider in the animal kingdom but is marked as an outsider in the human one (though no one, as far as the narrator betrays, is aware of this interspecies talent). In zoosemiotic terms, it can be said that Useppe possesses the extraordinary talent of being capable of deciphering animals’ codes and relaying a message in a code interpretable by his animal receivers. All messages or strings of signs, Sebeok explains, have to be:

generated by an emitting organism [...] and interpreted by one or more receiving organisms [...]. Messages have to be encoded in a form that the channel connecting the communicant can accommodate. For the message to have an impact the receiving animals must have the key for decoding it back into such a shape [...] that its biological makeup enables it to interpret. That is the reason why messages appear in coded form, and why the source and the destination must (at least partially) share either an inherited or a learned code, or, commonly, some mixture of both. (Sebeok 108)

Finally, Sebeok indulgently explains that,

[u]nderstandably, human being[s], in whose daily lives speech plays such a prominent part, tend to think of the vocal-auditory link as the paramount channel. Actually, however, the use of sound in the wider scheme of biological existence is rather uncommon: the overwhelming majority of animals are both deaf and dumb. (Sebeok 109)

He also cautions humans away from adopting “the layman’s traditional notion of the ‘five senses’,” since science has identified that there are others that far outnumber these simple five, with others yet to be discovered. “It has been known,” he clarifies, “that horses are capable of detecting movements in the human face of less than one-fifth of a millimeter” (Sebeok 111). I will come back to this notion later, when the curious case of Clever Hans is introduced.

Bella the dog appears to speak in a human tongue with Useppe. Her canine quality of being effortlessly distracted by new stimuli is reproduced verbally by

¹¹ “E forse fu in quei suoi duetti primitivi con Blitz, che imparò il linguaggio dei cani. Il quale, insieme con altri idiomi di animali, doveva restargli un acquisto valido finché fu vivo”.

¹² “E forse fra gli occhi del bambino e quelli della bestia si svolse un qualche scambio inopinato, sotterraneo e impercettibile. D’un tratto, lo sguardo di Giuseppe subì un mutamento strano e mai prima veduto, del quale, tuttavia, nessuno si accorse. Una specie di tristezza o di sospetto lo attraversò, come se una piccola tenda buia gli calasse davanti”.

Morante: one need only introduce a new character into the scenario and Bella pounces on it, immediately forgetting the preceding object that captivated her keen interest and enthralled her. Here, she raves profusely about the beauty of those humans around her with Useppe, her interlocutor, and it is the individual beauty of each of her human companions that distracts her from each of the others:

“Let’s look, for instance, at my Antonio, the one from Naples... Without a doubt, the most beautiful of all is him! But my Ninnuzzu, he, too, it’s enough just to look at him: there is no one that exists that is more beautiful than he is!! [...]”

“And you,” she continued here, looking at him, convinced, “you’re still the most beautiful in the world. That’s for sure.”

“And my mom?” Useppe inquired.

“Her! No one has ever seen a girl more beautiful! And in Rome, everyone knows it! She’s an infinite beauty. Infinite!” [...]

Useppe laughed, satisfied, because, truly, he and the shepherd dog were completely in agreement when it came to the topic of beauties. Giants or dwarves, ragamuffins or sophisticates, decrepitude or youth, for him, it made no difference. And neither the crooked, nor the hunchbacked, nor the big-bellied, nor the ugly, to him they were no less attractive than *Settebellezze* [literally, Seven Beauties], as long as they were all equal friends and smiled.¹³ (Morante 556-7)

Earlier in the novel, the narrator explains that Useppe, too, is blind to hierarchies: “Without a doubt, for him, differences with regards to age, to beauty or ugliness, to sex, to social status just did not exist”¹⁴ (Morante 185). What is important here is not simply that Bella and Useppe are nonjudgmental with regards to physical qualities, abilities, or intelligence; rather, what is notable is that they embrace *every* human—without needing to take as little as a moment to ponder their feelings—as the indubitable epitome of beauty.

With that in mind, one can entertain the zoosemiotic perspective as an ethical one. Can humans learn to be open, welcoming, and tolerant of other humans by observing the communication amongst animals and with humans, and engaging in these exchanges themselves? Were it not for Morante’s adoption of zoosemiotic theory in her text, thus granting Useppe and his animal friends the mutual ability to communicate, the reader would be ignorant of this realm of the universe that beholds humanity as unspeakably beautiful. This is remarkable in a book whose principal backdrop is the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, which featured humanity committing unspeakable cruelty and violence, and

¹³ “Guardiamo a esempio Antonio mio, quello di Napoli... Senz’altro, il più bello di tutti è lui! Però Ninnuzzu mio, lui pure, basta vederlo: uno più bello di lui non esiste!!” [...]

“E tu”, essa qua riprese, mirandolo convinta, “sei sempre il più bello di tutti al mondo. È positivo”.

“E mamma mia?” s’informò Useppe.

“Lei! S’è mai vista un’altra ragazza più bella?! Eh a Roma lo sanno tutti! È una bellezza infinita. Infinita!” [...]

Useppe rise soddisfatto, perché invero su questo argomento delle bellezze l’accordo fra la pastora e lui era completo. Giganti o nani, straccioni o pàini, decrepitudine o gioventù, per lui non faceva differenza. E né gli storti, né i gobbi, né i panzoni, né le scòrfane, per lui non erano meno carini di *Settebellezze*, solo che fossero tutti amici pari e sorridessero [...].

¹⁴ “Senza dubbio, per lui non esistevano differenze né di età, né di bello e brutto, né di sesso, né sociali”.

it is, therefore, unsurprising that Davide should be puzzled by Ueseppe’s complete joy (see above). Thanks to zoosemiotics, the community that it engenders, and the bridges between species that it creates, beauty beheld by animals can still coexist with humanity’s most shameful actions.

We can recall Bella’s reaction to verbal stimuli, too, at the mere mention of the word “*gatta*” (“female cat”) in Ueseppe’s improvised poem, even in the absence of any felines: “At the word ‘cat’, Bella perked up her ears and emitted a humorous bark, interrupting his poem”¹⁵ (Morante 632). Cats are not the clichéd enemies of humans, but they are to dogs, so Bella’s attention is immediately stolen when the word “*gatta*” is uttered, distracting Ueseppe from his recitation and Bella herself from listening to the poem. Another example of the distracted nature of the dog is Bella’s effort to divert Ueseppe’s attention from a traumatizing experience that had just befallen him. Ueseppe himself is very easily distracted: “Every tiny event distracted his glance; otherwise he remained quiet, with eyes rapt, as though his mind were drifting away”¹⁶ (Morante 458). Bella recounts a vaguely recalled story from her past. Though ignorant of most of the details of the puppies that she bore, Bella is thrilled and proud to talk about her offspring:

“One time, I had puppies [...]. I don’t know how many there were,” she continued, “I don’t know how to count. [...] Anyway, there were many, and each one was more beautiful than the next one. [...] When I looked at one of them, he was the most beautiful; [...] then I would lick another one of them, and meanwhile yet another one would stick its muzzle out amidst the others, and indubitably each one was the most beautiful. Their beauty was infinite; that’s the truth. Infinite beauties cannot be compared.”

“And what were their names?”

“They didn’t have names.”

[...]

“And where’d they go?”

“Where?... I don’t know what to think about this. From one moment to the next, I looked for them, and they were no longer there. [...] I looked for them again, I waited for them for who knows how long, but they never came back.”¹⁷ (Morante 556)

This tender excerpt makes evident the parental pride that Bella once possessed, even though she has not ascribed any individuality to her pups; but it also

¹⁵ “Alla parola ‘gatta’ Bella drizzò gli orecchi e fece un abbaio umoristico, interrompendo la poesia”.

¹⁶ “Ogni minimo evento distraeva i suoi sguardi; o altrimenti se ne stava quieto, con gli occhi assorti, come se la sua mente si allontanasse”.

¹⁷ “Io, una volta, avevo dei cagnolini [...]. Non so quanti fossero, di numero”, seguitò, “io non so contare. [...] Insomma, erano tanti, e uno più bello dell’altro. [...] Quando ne guardavo uno, il più bello era lui; [...] poi ne leccavo un altro, e frattanto un altro ancora spuntava di mezzo col muso, e indubbiamente ognuno era il più bello. La loro bellezza era infinita, ecco il fatto. Le bellezze infinite non si possono confrontare”.

“E come si chiamavano?”

“Non ebbero nome”.

[...]

“E dove so’ iti?”

“Dove?... su questo, io non so che pensare. Da un momento all’altro, li cercai, e non c’erano più. [...] Li ricercai, li aspettai chi sa quanto, ma non hanno fatto ritorno”.

demonstrates the simplicity and the absolute presenthood of the animal. This is why Bella cannot differentiate between the pups of one litter or another; she is fundamentally present either in acknowledging their presence or their absence. But she *does* have memory; nevertheless, she is blissfully ignorant of the future.

While Bella appears to assume the role of a supportive human companion more than that of a dependent canine whenever she is speaking (except when the narrator explains her forgetfulness as well as her “*accenti canini*” [“canine accents”]), there is a certain animal or childlike naïveté that Morante allows to filter through the animal speech and the passion that Bella exudes, and the dog’s exuberance regarding the undisputed beauty of each human recollected enthralls her, locking her into the present moment. Aesthetic beauty, as Morante demonstrates, is appreciated not just by humans, but by animals as well. And, like Bella the dog and all animals, Useppe, too, lives primarily in the present moment; analogous to Bella with the crisis of having her litter removed from her, Useppe has no recollection of his “*accessi*” (“seizures”) due to his “*Grande Male*” (“Great Illness”): “He slept for almost the entire day, but at around noon, for a brief interval, he got up. He neither remembered nor knew anything about his attack (these attacks, the doctors would explain to Ida, *are not experienced by the patient*)”¹⁸ (Morante 464).

In “Zoosemiotics as a New Perspective,” Radomska opens with a quote by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “If a lion could talk, we would not understand him” (Wittgenstein in Radomska 71). She then quotes a student of Wittgenstein’s, Vicki Hearne, a poet and dog- and horse-trainer, who says of Wittgenstein’s lion,

The lovely thing [...] is that Wittgenstein does not leap to say that his lion is languageless, only that he is not talking. [...] The reticence of this lion [...] is not the reticence of absence, absence of consciousness, say, or knowledge, but rather of tremendous presence[,] [of] all consciousness that is beyond ours. (qtd. in Radomska 71)

This is reminiscent of when Useppe suddenly realizes that silence, in fact, is as significant as words, tweets, or barks. After a bird’s repetitive sing-song, interpreted by Useppe as a variant of “It’s a joke it’s a joke it’s all a joke!”¹⁹ (Morante 509), Bella settles down on a patch of grass and dozes off; Useppe, meanwhile, is struck by the symbolic weight of the silence left behind by the bird, who had flown away:

The silence, once the song’s interval had concluded, had grown to such fantastic proportions that not only his ears, but his whole body listened to it. And Useppe, in listening to it, experienced a surprise that might have perhaps frightened an adult man, who is subject to a mental code of nature. But [Useppe’s] tiny organism,

¹⁸ “Dormì quasi l’intera giornata, ma verso mezzogiorno per un breve intervallo si ridestò. Della propria crisi non ricordava né sapeva niente (queste crisi — spiegheranno a Ida i dottori — *non vengono vissute dal soggetto*)”.

¹⁹ “È uno scherzo / uno scherzo / tutto uno scherzo!”

instead, accepted the surprise as a natural phenomenon, even if it had not been discovered until that very day.²⁰ (Morante 510)

The silence is rife with significance interpreted not just by the brain, but by the entire body (see below for more on nonverbal communication, specifically the story of Clever Hans). The quiet created by the bird’s silence could be understood only by the child—and not the adult human, weighed down by the unwieldy baggage of experiential knowledge—who unselfconsciously opens himself up to the vulnerability of communion with these creatures; with these animals who are totally unlike him, Useppe now possesses a common code: “The silence, in reality, spoke! Rather, it was made of voices, which, in the beginning, came out rather confused, blending themselves with the tremor of colours and shadows, until finally the double sensation became a single one”²¹ (Morante 510). Indeed, Useppe experiences the sound of silence with his ears (“era fatto di voci”) as well as his eyes (“[il] tremolio dei colori e delle ombre”) until, finally, the *doppia sensazione* felt by both senses combined to form a single sensation interpretable by the whole body (Morante 510).

The question of significant and symbolic silence invokes Calvino’s *Palomar*, wherein Palomar muses about the possibility of the pauses between the blackbirds’ whistles’ being more profoundly meaningful than the whistles proper: “And what if the meaning of the message were to be found in the pause and not in the whistle? If it were in the silences that blackbirds speak to each other?”²² He adds, quite remarkably, “The whistle would be, in this case, just a punctuation mark, a formula like ‘over and out’”²³ (Calvino 27). As Bolongaro expounds, “[t]he birds have taught Palomar and the reader that silence is a part of language[,] not opposed to it” (116). As the study of zoosemiotics proposes, nonverbal gestures—whether intentional or unconscious—hold as much, if not more, semantic weight as verbal expressions, like in the Clever Hans scenario described subsequently.

What is equally relevant when examining human-animal communication is the projection of expectations onto the other—namely the human’s onto the animal. Such was the case with “Clever Hans.” Clever Hans was a horse who, in the early 1900s, demonstrated a talent for responding correctly to queries (of arithmetic and other intellectual questions) posed by his trainer, Wilhelm Von

²⁰ “Il silenzio, finito l’intervallo della canzonetta, s’era ingrandito a una misura fantastica, tale che non solo gli orecchi, ma il corpo intero lo ascoltava. E Useppe, nell’ascoltarlo, ebbe una sorpresa che forse avrebbe spaventato un uomo adulto, soggetto a un codice mentale della natura. Ma il suo piccolo organismo, invece, la ricevette come un fenomeno naturale, anche se mai prima scoperto fino a oggi”.

²¹ “[i]l silenzio, in realtà, era parlante! anzi, era fatto di voci, le quali da principio arrivarono piuttosto confuse, mescolandosi col tremolio dei colori e delle ombre, fino a che poi la doppia sensazione diventò una sola [...]”.

²² “E se fosse nella pausa e non nel fischio il significato del messaggio? Se fosse nei silenzi che i merli si parlano?”

²³ “Il fischio sarebbe in questo caso solo un segno di punteggiatura, una formula come ‘passo e chiudo’”.

Osten. After Hans’ supposed genius had been studied by a varied team of researchers, it was discovered that he was not as intelligent as Von Helm had thought, though he was certainly clever: unbeknownst to the trainer, when Hans approached the correct answer (demonstrated through the horse’s tapping his hoof), Von Osten’s anticipation was palpable to the equine via small movements in Von Osten’s face. Thus, the horse could predict how to respond correctly (see Johnson, and Rosenthal in Sebeok²⁴). This is noteworthy because evidence of this type of exchange is present in Useppe’s interactions with Bella and Blitz and even the birds, when the reader wonders whether Useppe is truly *hearing* enunciated words emitted from their mouths or if he is anthropomorphizing these creatures as children are wont to do. Of course, Useppe, estranged as he is from humans but welcomed and adored amongst animals, communes with these animals for solace as well as for simple companionship, and he unwittingly projects his innate desires onto the creatures in his company. Just as Von Osten and Hans’ other interlocutors managed to inadvertently project their communicative desires and anticipations onto the cunning horse, Useppe receives the support and companionship that he earnestly seeks from his animal friends. Irigaray, in fascinating anecdotes about her moments spent with birds, explains that animals, in her experience, have been

[c]apable of perceiving a call where human beings hear nothing, and of providing a comforting presence where more rational arguments would have neither appeased nor healed the suffering or distress. Where a human body or affectionate gesture would not have been able to have the simplicity of an animal presence. As pure as that of an angel, Rilke claimed. Or that of a child? Who feels, also the danger or the trial that the other is going through. (Irigaray 199)

A particular moment underlines Useppe’s *understanding* and *hearing* spoken language by Bella—who poses not just as a loyal companion but also as a maternal figure²⁵ (since Ida, as the narrator explains, is progressively deteriorating due to the travails of age, paranoia, and stress [Morante 474]): “But my Ninnuzzu [...], there is no one more beautiful than he!!’ It was the first time in which Ninnuzzu’s

²⁴ Once Hans and his behaviours began to be studied by a team consisting of “a circus manager, a veterinary surgeon, two prominent German zoologists, two educators, and two psychologists of recognized ability—Professors Nagel and Stumpf” (Johnson 664), it was determined that “[t]he horse was simply a channel through which the information the questioner unwittingly put into the situation was fed back to the questioner” (Rosenthal in Sebeok 67). Thus, Von Osten and other questioners of Hans demonstrated a “self-fulfilled prophecy”: “Hans’ questioners, even skeptical ones, expected Hans to give the correct answers.” Thus, their anticipated response “was reflected in their unwitting signal to Hans that the time had come for Hans to stop his tapping. The signal cued Hans to stop, and the questioner’s expectation became the reason for Hans’ being, once again, correct” (Rosenthal in Sebeok 67-8).

²⁵ “[E], da questo medesimo giorno, Useppe ebbe due madri. Bella difatti [...] s’era presa, per Useppe, d’un amore diverso che per Nino. Verso il grande Nino, essa si portava come una compagna schiava; e verso il piccolo Useppe, invece, come una protettrice e una sorvegliante” (“And from that very day, Useppe had two mothers. Bella, in fact [...], for Useppe, was taken by a love that was different from the one she felt for Nino. Toward big Nino, she acted as a slave companion; for little Useppe, instead, she was a protector and a watcher”; Morante 474).

name had been *pronounced* between the two of them”²⁶ (Morante 556; italics my own). Other instances clearly elucidate Useppe’s discourses with Bella, with specific words like *traduzione* (“translation,” or, rather, the lack of a need for one, since Useppe can understand canine speech), *discorso* (“conversation”), or *pronunciare* (“to pronounce”), like in the above example. In the following excerpt, Bella fulfills her role both as mother and devoted companion, and Morante includes other vocabulary items (in italics) that connote code-sharing between the two creatures and indicate humanlike speech:

Meanwhile, there in the entrance, with a *tiny voice* that was tinged with panic, he did nothing but *repeat* to her: “Bella... Bella...” and nothing else, while she continued to hold a *conversation* of love with him that to foreigners would have sounded a bit like: “Ggrui grrruui hump hump hump,” the *translation* for which (superfluous for Useppe), however, would be: “Now, only you remain for me in this world. And no one can ever separate us.”²⁷ (Morante 474)

Fusco notes that Sextus Empiricus (160 AD–210 AD), Greek philosopher and physician, takes the dog as a particular example when he discusses animals. She explains that Sextus reflects on anthropocentrism in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, wherein he entertains the very real possibility that “even if we do not understand the so-called unreasonable voices of animals, it would not be completely absurd to think that they converse amongst themselves without our understanding them”²⁸ (Sextus in Fusco 33). Indeed, this phenomenon is comparable to the incomprehensibility of languages foreign to us, which may appear to our ears as a single, uninterrupted sound and for which we would need a translation, yet “[it] is entirely possible that, *from the point of view of the animals* and of barbarians, it is a real language”²⁹ (Fusco 33–4). To the ears of all except Useppe and Bella (and other canines), Bella’s “words” are meaningless, primitive barbaric utterances. Fusco emphasizes, however, the linguistic and semantic leeway that Sextus attributes to the canine species, indicating that, although the sounds of dogs may be incomprehensible to most human beings, they do contain a variety of sounds rife with significance, even if we are ignorant of this meaning:

We hear them emit a given voice when they want someone to distance themselves, another when they yelp, another when they are hit, a different one when they are wagging their tail with joy. In sum, if one were to pay attention to this fact, he would identify a great variety of voices [...] and in [dogs] and in other animals

²⁶ “Però Ninnuzzu mio [...], uno più bello di lui non esiste!!’ Era la prima volta che il nome di Ninnuzzu veniva *pronunciato* fra loro due”. (italics added).

²⁷ “Intanto, là nell’ingresso, con una *vocina* che sapeva di pánico, lui non faceva che *ripeterle*: ‘Bella... Bella...’ e nient’altro, mentre lei gli andava tenendo un *discorso* d’amore che all’orecchio degli zotici suonerebbe appena: ‘Ggrui grrruui hump hump hump’ ma del quale la *traduzione* (superflua per Useppe) sarebbe: ‘Adesso, al mondo mi rimani tu solo. E nessuno potrà mai separarci’”. (italics added)

²⁸ “Anche se non comprendiamo le voci degli animali, così detti, irragionevoli [...], non sarebbe del tutto assurdo pensare che essi discorrono tra loro senza che noi li comprendiamo [...]”.

²⁹ “È del tutto plausibile che *dal punto di vista degli animali* e dei barbari esso sia un vero e proprio linguaggio”.

according to different circumstances, one would conclude, ostensibly, that animals, so-called unreasonable, also take part in uttered speech.³⁰ (qtd. in Fusco 34)

It must be noted, however, that it is not only the voice or speech of dogs that is comprehensible to Ueseppe. On several occasions in the novel, Ueseppe is startled that he understands the *cantilena* (“sing-song”) of birds perched in trees outdoors:

They began a dialogue set to music. More than a dialogue, really, theirs was a little song, comprising a single sentence that the two of them took turns saying back to the other, alternating with jumps on two branches, one lower and one higher, and signalling each refrain with vivacious movements of their little heads. This consisted of a total of a dozen *syllables*, sung over two or three notes—always the same ones, save for imperceptible caprices or variations—with liveliness at an allegretto tempo. And the *words* (very clear to Ueseppe’s ears) said exactly this: [...] *It’s a joke it’s a joke it’s all a joke!*

The two creatures, before flying away once again into the air, repeated this little song of theirs at least twenty times, certainly with the intention of teaching it to Ueseppe.³¹ (Morante 269; italics of *syllables* and *words* my own)

Possibly the avian dialogue is a result of the problem that Shell addresses, inherent to the study of bird sounds proper, concerning “the charge of mindless parroting—or sound-making without linguistic meaning. Birds of some species,” he explains, “are indeed very good at imitating bird sounds of other species. (Mockingbirds—*mimus polyglottos*—brilliantly mimic the notes of other birds [...])” (96). Their song might, in truth, be nothing but “*mere esteriorizzazioni di un istinto*” (“mere externalizations of an instinct”; Fusco 26), an instinct mirrored and replicated “almeno una ventina di volte” (“at least twenty times”) in this particular scene. When Ueseppe first hears this litany and then hears it again, in slightly varying forms (see Morante 509–510), on later occasions, it is never sung by mockingbirds, but usually by simple swallows or sparrows. Though she attributes more depth to their singing than Shell does, Irigaray explains that whenever she would return to an oft-visited wilderness locale in her own life, “as soon as I arrived there, scarcely out of the car to raise the barrier, a bird would whistle, one of those birds that imitates a human voice so well you can be fooled. I was tricked each time, turning around to thank whoever was welcoming me” (Irigaray 197). Their song was familiar to her, like the intimate *ritornello* (“refrain”) of the birds in Ueseppe’s

³⁰ “Noi li udiamo emettere una data voce quando vogliono allontanare qualcuno, un’altra quando urlano, un’altra quando sono battuti, un’altra differente quando scodinzolano di gioia. Insomma, se uno fissasse la sua attenzione a questo fatto, riscontrerebbe una grande differenza di voci [...] e in questo e negli altri animali secondo le differenti circostanze, talché ne concluderebbe, verisimilmente, che gli animali, così detti, irragionevoli, partecipano anche del discorso esternato”.

³¹ “[I]ncominciarono un dialogo musicato. Più che un dialogo, veramente, la loro era una canzonetta, composta di un’unica frase che i due si rimandavano a vicenda, alternandosi a salti su due rami, uno più basso e uno più alto, e segnando ogni ripresa con gesti vivaci della testolina. Essa consisteva in tutto di una dozzina di *sillabe*, cantate su due o tre note — sempre le stesse salvo impercettibili capricci o variazioni — a tempo di allegretto con brio. E le *parole* (chiarissime agli orecchi di Ueseppe) dicevano esattamente così: [...] *È uno scherzo uno scherzo tutto uno scherzo!* Le due creature, prima di rivolarsene via nell’aria, replicarono questa loro canzonetta almeno una ventina di volte, certamente con l’intenzione di insegnarla a Ueseppe [...]”.

company is to him, such that the narrator suggests that the birds repeat it in order that Useppe should learn it from them—so that he, too, might be familiar with their code, and as though this lesson were an initiation and acceptance into their world. Bella appears to have an ear trained to the semantics of this music and is already fluent in its code: when Useppe, noticing Bella’s demeanour in response to the avian chant, warily (since, on a previous occasion, he asks another human, Scimò, if he recognizes the birds’ song and is swiftly dismissed) asks Bella if she likes the song, Bella responds vivaciously: “She moved her tongue and raised half an ear, as though to say, ‘Anything but! And how could I not?!’”³² (Morante 509). Here, evidently, her actions speak louder than her words, but it is noteworthy that code-sharing of whatever type—verbal or nonverbal—is enabling the effortless communication between Useppe and Bella.

“But real animals don’t talk,” Shell proclaims in his essay on speaking (and stuttering) animals in fiction. “It is true, of course,” he continues, “that many human beings talk to animals and also treat their supposedly dumb animals—their pets—as flesh-and-blood ventriloquists’ dummies that seem to speak back to them” (Shell 85). “Seem” would be the key word in his declaration, and, of course, *La Storia* is a piece of historical fiction, but there is ample evidence in the book that Useppe, by the narrator’s explications, is actually *hearing* the enunciations of the birds and dogs: “*pronunciare*” (“to pronounce”), “*dialogare*” (“to dialogue”), “*cantare*” (“to sing”), “*chiacchierare*” (“to chat”) are used to indicate such phenomena, but it should be noted, also, that these words are used as often as “*abbaiare*” (“to bark”), “*mugolare*” (“to whimper”), “*cantare*” (“to sing”), and “*brontolare*” (“to mutter”), to mention only a few, with regards to the sounds made by the animals. Nonetheless, it is highlighted on many occasions that there is nary an instance wherein Useppe necessitates a translation³³—and, even so, “[i]t is impossible to paraphrase or find a single word to translate the sounds made by animals,” Sebeok maintains. “Even the transmutation of certain categories of human nonverbal messages into linguistic expression is, at best, likely to introduce gross falsification [...]” (Sebeok 52). In this way, Useppe, who has always had a unique relationship with the animals in his vicinity, is privy to the essence of the animals’ thought processes and never misses a single nuance or inflection; the poetry of their existence is never lost to him in translation. Sapir, referring to symbols and signals commonly seen in human life (including train horns and lights, smoke signals, etc.), explains that “one cannot make a word-to-word translation, as it were, back to speech but can only paraphrase in speech the *intent of the communication*” (qtd. in Sebeok 52; italics my own).

One cannot help but wonder what the true significance is, if any, of Useppe’s ability to comprehend and feel the thoughts and sentiments, respectively, of the animals around him. Are they really speaking to him—or, rather, are they really

³² [A]gitò la lingua e alzò mezzo orecchio, per intendere: ‘Altro che! e come no?!’”

³³ See Morante 474.

speaking *only* to him? Maybe these animals, like Useppe, wish to reach out to all human beings but, rather than harbouring an unfortunate inability to *express* themselves across species, their code is simply not understood by humans. Or, finally, like Useppe, perhaps these animals—Bella and Blitz, the *scherzo* birds, the “*vavàlli*” (“horses” [*cavalli*], as mispronounced by an infant) that Useppe meets—are the sole fortunate guardians of the inherent beatific purity of the world to which cynical adults are deaf and blind. Useppe and the animals appear to inhabit a world of their own and, unbeknownst to them, they possess an almost divine capacity to communicate that transcends the human realm, the ability to hear the flowing essence of the world, and they all but shout for the adult world to listen. Heidegger says that, “[o]f all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures”—that is, animals—“because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss” (qtd. in Calarco 19). By the end of the novel, Morante demonstrates how Useppe, despite his indomitable spirit, succumbs to the tragedy of human mortality, unable to make his voice heard across the abyss separating him and the animals from the rest of humankind.

Describing the vocal patterns and the healing, restorative powers of an avian companion, Irigaray eloquently describes a bird’s song as “[going] from the low to the high-pitched and shrill, from the high-pitched to the low, not without pausing on certain tonalities, raising the breath without ever cutting it from its corporeal site, from the intimacy of the flesh” (Irigaray 198). This vocal capacity, whether it contains a communicative goal, is simply aesthetically expressive, or is a “*mera exteriorizzazione di un istinto*” (“mere externalization of an instinct”), is a deeply ingrained part of the bird. It is visceral. “How to respond to their call,” Irigaray beseeches human readers, “[i]f not through becoming the delicate friends they want us to be? By listening to their instruction as well. Calling to love by singing” (198). As for humans, can it be said that their mode of expression is superior? Irigaray insists that we must look to animals as wise guides:

We pass from submission to a language founded on abstract argumentation to mute compartments where there is a dominator and a dominated. [...] Birds seem more advanced than we are in the amorous dialogue, and could serve as our guides at least a part of the way, if we keep still to listen to them. (198)

As Morante has poignantly demonstrated in *La Storia*, and as Sebeok has earnestly elucidated in his zoosemiotics, the coexistence of species is necessary to human as well as animal sojourns on this planet, and this coexistent nature is also mutually enriching. Though Useppe’s years on Earth were few, he is amongst the only human characters in *La Storia* (save for Nino, perhaps) privy to diverse and multifaceted experiences, the fruit of his cross-species friendships. Though he suffered critically due to malnutrition, the *Grande Male*, and social rejection, Useppe is arguably the character who lived the most complete and fulfilling life in this story. Perhaps in the supportive, indulgent, and patient relationship between

Useppe and his animal friends lies a message of compassion and thoughtfulness that Morante intends to convey to human readers—or perhaps therein she delivers an urgent invitation to listen more closely, with our whole bodies and, perhaps, souls, to *all* of the creatures with whom we share our space.

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Ti-Koyo and His Shark.
Human-Animal Brotherhood from Clement Richer to Italo Calvino and Folco Quilici

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Abstract



Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane [*Ti-Coyo and His Shark*] is a 1962 film by Italian film director and screenwriter Folco Quilici. Based on a novel by the Martinican writer Clement Richer entitled *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (*Ti-Coyo and his [White] Shark*, 1941) but adapted for cinema by Italo Calvino (who wrote an actual short story on the subject, "Fratello pescecane" [Brother Shark]), Quilici's film features the fraternal relationship between a boy and his beloved pet shark. This article investigates both the making of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* and the significance of the human-animal relationship it presents. It thus first explores Richer's novel in order to reveal how Calvino's and Quilici's versions have altered the original narrative as well as its postcolonial and post-pastoral meaning. It then examines how these transformations have affected the portrayal of the friendship between the human protagonist and the shark. The aim of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it argues that these three different versions of same story offer a perfect example of how contrasting representations of a similar environment might deeply affect both the cultural and the material relationships between human and non-human animals. On the other hand, it underlines how all of them also present a representation of an uncanny human-animal friendship capable of reminding us that we can actually love nature and its creatures for what they are.

Keywords: animal studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, literary animal studies.

Resumen

Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane [*Ti-Coyo y su tiburón*] es una película de 1962 del director de cine y guionista italiano Folco Quilici. Basada en una novela del escritor martiniqués Clement Richer originalmente titulada *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (*Ti-Coyo y su [Blanco] Tiburón*, 1941) y adaptada para el cine por Italo Calvino (quien también escribió un cuento sobre el tema, "Fratello pescecane" ["Hermano tiburón"]), la película de Quilici cuenta la relación fraternal entre un niño y su amado tiburón. En este artículo se analiza tanto la realización cinematográfica de *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* como la importancia de la relación humano-animal que presenta. El artículo comienza examinando la novela de Richer con el fin de revelar cómo las versiones de Quilici y Calvino han cambiado tanto la narrativa original, como su significado poscolonial y post-pastoral. Después, se examina cómo estos cambios han afectado a la imagen de la amistad entre el protagonista humano y el tiburón. El objetivo de este artículo es doble. Por un lado, mostrar que estas tres versiones diferentes del mismo cuento ofrecen un ejemplo perfecto de cómo representaciones contrastantes de un ambiente similar pueden afectar profundamente a las relaciones culturales y materiales entre los animales no-humanos y los animales humanos. Por otra parte, subrayar cómo todas las versiones presentan también una representación de una inquietante amistad entre humanos y animales capaz de recordarnos que en realidad podemos amar a la naturaleza y a sus criaturas por lo que son.

Palabras clave: estudios de los animales, ecocrítica postcolonial, estudios literarios de los animales.

Sharks have a special place in the imagination of modern Western cultures: more than any other non-human animal, they seem to “inspire terror out of all proportion to their actual threat” (Crawford 7). Besides the four truly dangerous sharks—great whites, tiger sharks, bull sharks, and oceanic whitetips—there are in fact more than 500 species that do not represent any serious threat to humans. Rather, the opposite is true: some twenty percent of the world’s shark population is facing extinction due to human activity (115).¹

As marine biologist Rick Aidan Martin has noticed, “more than any other event, the film *Jaws* revolutionized the public’s conception of sharks” (1). Sharks had been depicted as malevolent forces even before Spielberg’s 1975 film, but *Jaws* was so successful in transforming all sharks into human-eating beasts that we cannot but fear and possibly desire to kill them with mindless violence.² As Dean Crawford has pointed out, it is no exaggeration to say that *Jaws* “launched a thousand ships [...] all of them gunning for great white sharks” (75). While such an eradicating enterprise is no longer as popular as it was in the immediate wake of the film, unfortunately it has been recently replaced by a massive and potentially even more dangerous hunt for their fins, primarily for culinary purposes (128).

Jaws gave also birth to what Crawford has called a more symbolic “shark-ploitation” (83), that is to say a lavish series of popular works, mainly films, in which sharks are depicted as mindless and emotionless monsters for human entertainment. For instance, the number of horror films produced after 1975 devoted to sharks exceeds by far that of more common predators,³ and even television events supposedly developed to raise awareness and respect for sharks, such as the “Shark Week” run every summer by the Discovery Channel since 1988, testifies instead to this ominous popularity.

In such a charged material and cultural landscape, it is quite understandable that the sight of a shark fin emerging from the water almost automatically triggers the desire to kill, either out of fear or to profit monetarily. Cultural works capable of offering a different representation of sharks would thus be an invaluable tool not only for changing the common (mis)perception of shark species and possibly avoiding their eradication, but also for bringing Western audiences to a less

¹ For a thorough collection of data on sharks, current shark research, the shark fishery, and shark conservation, see also the website of the Florida Museum of Natural History (<https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Sharks/sharks.htm>).

² Aidan Martin was a marine biologist who devoted his life to sharks and the Director of the *ReefQuest Centre for Shark Research*. In this piece for the Centre’s website, entitled “JAWS Reconsidered,” he stresses however that the film also “ignited the imaginations and inspired the careers of a whole new generation of shark biologists,” including his own, and that “a whole constellation of dedicated shark research programs were begun or renewed” probably to counterbalance the negative representation of the shark in *Jaws* (Website).

³ According to the Wikipedia page devoted to natural horror films, since 1975 sharks have been featured as protagonists in 58 horror films. Primates come second in this list (47 films, including those on the so-called Bigfoot) and dinosaurs third (circa 40). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_natural_horror_films]

exploitative or sensationalist understanding of the ocean as a whole.⁴ Yet, these works are incredibly rare.

This essay explores one example of a potentially transformative depiction of sharks, as presented by *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* [Ti-Coyo and His Shark], a 1962 film by Italian film director and screenwriter Folco Quilici based on a novel by the Martinican writer Clement Richer originally entitled *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (“Ti-Coyo and his [White] Shark,” 1941). Adapted for cinema by Italo Calvino (who wrote an actual short story on the subject, “Fratello pescecane” [Brother Shark]), Quilici’s film features the fraternal relationship between a boy and his beloved pet shark. My goal is to investigate both the making of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* and the significance of the human-animal relationship it presents. I will thus first explore Richer’s novel in order to reveal how Calvino’s and Quilici’s versions have altered the original narrative as well as its postcolonial and post-pastoral meaning. I will then examine how these transformations—from novel to script to film—have affected the portrayal of the friendship between the human protagonist and the shark.

My aim here is twofold. On the one hand, I will argue that these three different versions of the same story offer a perfect example of how contrasting representations of a similar environment might deeply affect both the cultural and the material relationships between human and non-human animals. Narratives such as Richer’s version of the story, which acknowledges our complex socio-political relationships with other humans as well as with the environment, tend in fact to reflect such complexity in their treatment of non-human animals. On the other hand, I will underline how all three versions offer a positive portrayal of an otherwise uncanny human-animal friendship. As such they manage to remind us that we can not only engage and eventually appreciate non-human creatures which greatly differ from us, but also love them for what they are and for the transformative power they might potentially have on our lives. In fact, the ethical value of literary and cinematic animals does not exclusively lie in their ability to trigger identification, as suggested for example by Martha Nussbaum and her followers (Copeland 94). Rather, the case of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* displays how even literary animals which do not provoke an immediate sympathetic identification help deconstruct our often reductive assumptions about certain non-human creatures through narratives that establish mutually transformative connections between these creatures, humans, and their common habitat.

Clement Richer was born in 1914 in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique (Brooks 1), and throughout his writing career published several books

⁴ As Patricia Yaeger has noted, “the premises of the oceanic turn in literary studies is this: we have grown myopic about the role that seas and oceans play in creating ordinary histories and cultures” (524). This myopia is even more accentuated when we focus on sharks. If in recent years we have in fact seen few compelling studies devoted to the relationships between human cultures and identities, the ocean, and an increasing range of sea animals—from cetaceous (Steinwand, Bryld and Lykke, etc.) to jellyfish (Alaimo)—sharks have still been largely left out of the picture, despite their fundamental role within, for instance, Pacific Island cultures.

of fiction, almost all of which are now nearly forgotten.⁵ However, he experienced his share of international fame when his second novel *Ti-Coyo et Son Requin* was first published in Paris in 1941, and then again in 1951 in its English translation which “surprised and delighted American readers” (Cook 36).

Ti-Coyo et Son Requin is the story of the successful relationship between a boy and a shark, and it has been described as “a work of fantasy [...], humorous and lighthearted” (Jack 109). Yet, the subtitle of the 1951 American version, “an immoral fable,” better describes the tangle of contradictory elements that characterize this work, which is part children’s literature, part postcolonial and ecocritical pastoral. As a fable, it playfully portrays how the young and resourceful Ti-Coyo finds, raises, and welcomes a shark into his family. As a postcolonial post-pastoral (Gifford 146; Huggan and Tiffin 83), *Ti-Coyo and His Shark* not only introduces racial allusions, beginning with Ti-Coyo’s problematic mixed-race status,⁶ but it is also worth noting that the island where the story unfolds has nothing of the pastoral idea of a tourist snapshot (Huggan and Tiffin 111). Rather, Ti-Coyo’s Martinique is a place where nature and society coexist often in uncanny, enchanting, and violent ways.

Let us first examine the relationship between the boy and the shark. Ti-Coyo rescues the baby shark in order to terrorize the divers who gather coins thrown from tourist ships docked in Saint-Pierre’s harbor, with the intent to monopolize the coin-diving enterprise himself. His endeavor is successful as the shark Manidou devours several coin-divers and other local fishermen, helping the boy both to become one of the most prosperous inhabitants of the island and scandalously to marry the daughter of a white, outraged landlord. Yet, in spite of the violence embedded in Ti-Coyo’s initial reasons for raising the shark, the relationship between the boy and the animal is increasingly described in terms of brotherhood and mutual, almost exclusive, understanding. For instance, when the fishermen decide to capture and kill the shark, the boy claims that Manidou “was his very life; his best and only friend,” and he would therefore never allow anyone to harm it (Richer, *Ti-Coyo and his Shark* 64-65). So, when the shark is indeed captured, Ti-Coyo puts his life at risk to free the animal from its wire caged. Nonetheless, what is most surprising here is not the boy’s feelings toward the shark, but rather that Richer acknowledges the animal’s affection as well. While Ti-Coyo lies in bed, severely injured from saving the shark, Manidou does not leave

⁵ The current state of Richer criticism is apparent from the almost complete lack of monographic studies of his work. The most compelling and informative studies are still an article by Mercer Cook published in *The French Review* in 1953 and a Master’s thesis by Elizabeth Brooks defended at Howard University in the same year, from which I acquired most of Richer’s biographical information. I want to thank Joellen ElBashir, Chief Librarian and Curator at Howard University, for kindly providing me with a copy of Brooks’s work.

⁶ On Ti-Coyo’s *métissage* and his figure within Francophone Caribbean literary tradition of *récit d’enfance*, see the brief analysis of the novel in Hardwick 29-30. For a general analysis of “class-color hierarchy” specifically in Martinican writing, see instead Haigh 5ff, although in this volume Clement Richer is surprisingly not mentioned.

the big open tank built near the boy's house, instead remaining there for five whole days without eating. The shark's mysterious behavior is understood only by Ti-Coyo, who, once informed of Manidou's conduct, realizes that "the shark is dying from not seeing me anymore [...] just as I wanted to die when I thought his end had come" (81). Consequently, he decides to leave his bed and, as Richer writes,

the most extraordinary thing happened! Scarcely Ti-Coyo opened his mouth when the shark twisted about as though it had been stung by the sharp point of a harpoon, leaped over the rim of the tank, and fell on the paving stones, where it lay on its side, breathing with difficulty. [...] Ti-Coyo had no thought of running away. He had tottered across the few steps that lay between him and the shark, dropped to his knees, and was now passing his burning hands over the rough back and smooth white belly of the monster. [...] And all this while the monster's eyes—narrow of a strange, unusual green—were fixed on the boy and followed each of his movements. (83)

Although the shark is still described as a potential human-eater, the overall scene suggests love and affection. If the contrast between the powerful size of the shark and its devotion to the boy cannot but recall Yu-Fu Tuan's foundational text on the making of pets, here Clement does not describe a relation of inequality, but rather the encounter between "two sovereign individuals" (Tuan 163).⁷ By venturing out of his element in order to meet the boy in his human territory, the shark in fact reveals his own will and agency. Ti-Coyo grasps perfectly the importance of Manidou's behavior and, despite the fever, dives into the tank, not only to save his friend from dying but also to reciprocate the risk: as the shark has left the comfort of his habitat for the boy, so the boy is willing to embrace the watery world of the shark in spite of his illness. In this exchange, both the human and animal cross their own supposed habitat boundaries so that their emotional encounter happens in a state of limitrophy. Here, not only are both lives at stake but the human also acknowledges that the animal is actually looking at him; for readers as well the shark is no longer a passive object of observation or exploitation.⁸

Gaze and agency credited to the shark come as no surprise within the post-pastoral context of Richer's novel. What Elizabeth Brooks has called Richer's "method of personification" (20) is actually the literary method of attributing agency to the material world, often even beyond animated beings. For instance, *Ti-Coyo and His Shark* describes both Nature's felicitous thoughts at Ti-Coyo's wedding, and how Mount Pelée's eruption and destruction of a nearby city was the intentional result of the volcano's capricious feelings (175-176; 178-180). This non-human agency is at times used to humorous effect, but it also displays Richer's deep interest in the natural, non-human world as a subject in itself. As he wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Brooks, Richard was actually more interested in stories

⁷ On the ambiguous interplay of dominance and affection in "the making of pets" see also the more recent volume edited by Paul, Podberscek, and Serpell cited in the bibliography.

⁸ On physical limitrophy between human and non-human creatures at sea and the animal gaze, see respectively the two contributions by Stacy Alaimo and Jacques Derrida cited in the bibliography.

depicting animals and elements rather than human feelings: he explicitly states that he loved sharks more than the idiocy of humanity (Appendix 1: iv⁹). Yet, this almost hyperbolic love for nature led Richer to hide neither its violent, disturbing manifestations, nor its ties with human communities. Rather, from Manidou's attacks to Mount Pelée's historical eruption in 1902, Richer animatedly describes the predatory or destructive (or indeed "immoral") aspects of the natural world, as well as the relationships between these aspects and social power. For instance, both episodes trigger the reversal of the usual hierarchy and the rise of a social mixed-race pariah, *Ti-Coyo*, first above the community of black fishermen and later the white settler. In this way, Richer builds a postcolonial narrative that "refuse[s] to depict the natural world in terms that erase the relationship between landscape and power" (DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley 4), and thus offers an image of his island that is at the same time enchanting and dangerous, "a totality and an otherness that nevertheless cannot be possessed" (8). The result is a cruel, amusing fable in which humans, animals, and the whole environment interact in ways which remind us that the supposed Caribbean paradise belongs to a political, material sphere where human and non-human agencies may clash and collaborate sometimes in unexpected, uncanny and transformative ways.

Maybe Calvino's Caribbean birthplace (Cuba) was the reason why Quilici asked him to adapt Richer's novel into a film script. Or perhaps it was the similarities between the fabulous atmospheres of Calvino's early works that convinced the film director to pursue the writer's collaboration.¹⁰ In any case, Calvino accepted Quilici's invitation and likely read the only available Italian translation of Richer's novel, published by Longanesi in 1957 with its original title (Caputi 48; Ballardini 43). The outcome was a script entitled "Fratello pescecane" (Brother Shark), which was only partially published as a short-story in the cultural magazine *ABC* in 1962, but with a different designation, "Tikò e il pescecane," and with some minor discrepancies.¹¹

As Mario Barenghi has pointed out, the version published in *ABC* claims to be directly inspired by *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane*, but Calvino actually seems to treat Richer's novel only as a general suggestion for his own account (Calvino 1267), keeping the central theme of the friendship between a boy and a shark but ignoring the postcolonial complexity of the original story. For instance, he changes

⁹ Specifically, Richer writes that he only loves "que les ouvrages où il est question de la nature, des éléments, et des animaux, et je déteste ceux qui parlent des hommes, de leurs sentiments raffinés." He also states that he prefers sharks over humans, because they are less idiotic ("J'aime mieux les requins. Ils sont moins idiots;" Brooks Appendix 1: iv).

¹⁰ Quilici states that Calvino's script "s'innesta nella tradizione fiabesca e fantastica di Calvino, come un Barone rampante del mare (così fra noi si diceva, scherzando, durante i mesi dell'inverno 1959-1960 quando si stendeva il *treatment* del film" (Richer, *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane*, 1990 169)

¹¹ This 1962 version is the one in Calvino's "Meridiani" and is just the first third of the whole script (587-602; 1267). The entire story, in three parts ("L'infanzia;" "La giovinezza;" "L'amore"), was published as such only in 2000 by Caputi 177-216. However, in the "Meridiani," the editor added some notes on the characters written by Calvino on the original typescript (602-602; 1268) that are not present in Caputi's book.

the location from Martinique to a generic Pacific island in the Sulu archipelago, where, according to the script, “the idyllic atmosphere of primitive life seems to have been preserved” (Caputi 179). In his afterward to a new edition of Richer’s *Ti-Coyo* published by Einaudi in 1990, Quilici maintains that this shift in the story’s setting was his own idea, because in Polynesia “kids *truly* play with sharks” (Richer, *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane* 169¹²), and Calvino simply agreed. However, such geographical nonchalance is already displayed on the inside back cover of the Longanesi edition, where Saint-Pierre is mistaken as an island in itself. Strangely, such a mistake is replicated even in the Einaudi edition more than thirty years later, and might suggest a lack of postcolonial awareness that, as we will see, seems to characterize Quilici’s work as well.

A second interesting alteration lies instead in the name of the protagonist, which is changed to “Titokumi detto Tikò” [known as Tikò], thus losing the original connection with Ti-Coyo’s father, the humpbacked sorcerer Cocoyo (Ti-Coyo was the abbreviation of “Petit Cocoyo”). Actually, Calvino’s protagonist completely loses his original parents as they were presented in Richer’s novel and therefore also his mixed ethnic and racial origin, acquiring instead a generic status of “indigenous boy,” seemingly orphaned but with eleven older siblings, all fishermen. A similar destiny awaits Ti-Coyo’s lover Diana, who in Calvino’s account is neither white nor lives permanently on the island, but is rather the daughter of a Chinese businessman who runs a modern fishing business.

Such changes in location and genealogy also affect the relationship between Tikò and the shark. Rather than initially inspired by greed as in Richer’s novel, here their friendship is framed by the solitude of the boy, who is not allowed to fish yet, and a fabulous speech by the bar owner Cocoyo. Disappointed by his brothers’ lack of trust in him, Tikò encounters Cocoyo on the shore. The bar owner tells him that as a child his own brothers did not allow him to go fishing with them either. He thus learned how to talk with fish and can now teach the boy as well. Obviously, the possibility of talking to fish intrigues Tikò, but he should not be too surprised, because—as Cocoyo continues: “A long time ago, humans and fish were friends... And talked to each other. Humans spoke and the fish replied... But humans have forgotten the language they used to speak with the fish” (Caputi 180).¹³

Thus when the boy finds the shark, he rescues it not out of self-interest, as in Richer’s novel: he actually considers diving for the coins thrown by tourists degrading (182). Rather, Tikò expresses respect for non-human animals even before meeting the shark, saving the lives of several fishes captured for fun by other boys (184). Moreover, he is fascinated by their beauty, in spite of the harsh admonishment of his oldest brother that “fishes are neither beautiful nor ugly:

¹² The emphasis is in the original. All the translations from Italian to English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

¹³ “Devi sapere che tanto tempo fa, gli uomini e i pesci erano amici... E si parlavano... Gli uomini parlavano e i pesci rispondevano... Ma gli uomini hanno dimenticato la lingua con cui parlavano ai pesci.”

they are fish that we can catch or fish that can catch us” (186). Given such premises, Calvino does not waste too much energy explaining how the unusual friendship between the boy and the shark develops either, simply maintaining that “Tikò feeds [the shark] and in this way the friendship between the boy and the shark is born” (186). From the very beginning Tikò thus addresses the shark as “another one of my brothers” and the animal not only seems to understand him, but one day Manidu actually winks back at the boy, establishing a signal of mutual recognition that will play an important role later in the story. Yet, this first stage of their relationship does not last long and the end of Tikò’s childhood (as well as of the first part of Calvino’s account) is marked by the shark’s mysterious disappearance, apparently forever (190).

Although Calvino informs us that eight or nine years have passed, Manidu actually reappears relatively soon in the story. Many things have changed on the island, including the transformation of almost all the fishermen into workers for the big fish company “Chang Fishing Export & Co.” (191). Even the shark has developed and now is a menacing adult. However, it has not forgotten Tikò, who immediately recognizes his old friend from its winking and tail-wagging “as a dog” (192). This is one of the most striking features of Calvino’s Manidu: probably playing on the Italian name of the animal (*pescecane*: fish-dog), the shark is increasingly treated by his human friend as something in between a hunting dog (“cane da battuta;” 198) and a puppy (“cagnolino;” 207). Although later in the story Tikò explicitly claims that he does not control anything, because domestication is against nature (214), throughout the story the shark actually becomes increasingly a kind of pet, enormous and potentially dangerous, but also controlled and tamed. Differently from the novel, where Ti-Coyo is constantly concerned about Manidou’s possible attacks on his family, in Calvino’s story the shark seems to have learned that it must obey his human master and harms neither Cocoyo (194), nor Diana, who can freely swim with the animal. Nonetheless, the shark’s partial domestication does not stop the fishermen who work for the fish industry for planning a trap, and Tikò has to rescue his friend, who then lovingly pushes his unconscious human master to the shore. Here, he is cared for by Diana and Cocoyo, while the shark waits, indeed as a good dog, in the water under Cocoyo’s bar (209-212).

While in Richer’s account Ti-Coyo’s sickness and consequent meeting with the waiting shark transform their relationship as well as readers’ recognition of the animal, here nothing truly alters either their friendship or our comprehension of the animal’s agency. Actually, Calvino uses Tikò’s sickness and rehabilitation only to establish a pause in the main narrative, while the history of the island proceeds and Tikò’s brothers surrender to the enticements of the fish industry. An important ideological feature of “Fratello pescecane” is thus revealed while Tikò lies in bed, as an exchange between the new owner of the fish industry (and Diana’s brother), Jeff, and Cocoyo. The former is sad because “progress” has

arrived on the island and (almost) everybody has embraced it, but he does not see happiness around him:

- I am not like my father. I do not know what to regret. What did we lose? Do you know, Cocoyo?
- Well... Some people say that once upon a time there was more harmony in the world...
- Animals have always torn each other to pieces....
- But there is one who is capable of being friends even with sharks. (213)¹⁴

Needless to say, the one who stands aside and refuses the almost inexorable progress is Tikò, who, as Cocoyo says, is made of the same stuff as volcanos and therefore gets along with sea monsters (213). It is in fact Tikò's difference that matters, and his friendship with the shark is relevant only for its allegorical meaning: as the 1962 introductory note of "Fratello pescecane" states, in the relationship with the animal Tikò actually "finds the reasons to remain faithful to his true nature of islander" (Calvino 1297). The shark is thus significant as long as it embodies a kind of nostalgia for a utopian harmony that only Tikò is capable of preserving for himself and, in a moment of danger, also for his community who eventually embraces the idea that animals do not make mistakes (215). When in fact a huge volcanic tsunami is about to hit the island, Manidu leads his human friend and the other islanders to a peaceful spot in the middle of the ocean, where all the animals have already gathered in order to survive the cataclysm. As in a beautiful utopia and in spite of Tikò's final departure, Calvino's story culminates with an image of salvation where animals do not actually eat each other and even "enemies are at peace" (215).

Such a utopian ending clearly does not preserve any of the "immoral" features of Richer's story. Actually, all of Calvino's changes to the original tale seem to emphasize the benign aspects of the friendship between the boy and the shark in order to obliterate the tensions embedded in their "brotherhood." Instead of the potentially transformative but socially disturbing interspecific relationship depicted by Clement Richer, only a generic contrast between a mythical, extra-historical innocence—embodied by Tikò and Manidou—and a present ruined by progress and modernity is accentuated here. Yet, Calvino's imagination cannot endure such dichotomy, and even the greedy desire for modernization expressed by the other islanders is eventually redeemed by the shark, whose rather anthropomorphic generosity allows the European writer to keep his dreams of paradisiacal harmony intact.

Quilici's 1962 film, *Ti-koyo e il suo pescecane*, belongs to a tetralogy devoted to the Southern Seas (Ballardini 246; Caputi 45). The title of the first movie of this series, *Ultimo Paradiso* (Last Paradise; 1956), offers a clue to Quilici's intentions: to describe a detached, enchanted reality before it potentially disappears. The four

¹⁴ "Io non sono come mio padre. Io non so cosa rimpiangere. Che cosa si è perduto? Tu lo sai, Cocoyo? – Mah... C'è chi dice che un tempo al mondo c'era più armonia... – Gli animali si sono sempre sbranati tra di loro... – Ma c'è chi riesce ad essere amico anche dei pescecani."

films thus share a fascinating tangle of environmentalist, ethnographic, and entertaining attitudes, where documentary and fiction, representation and simulation, often overlap in order to describe a marvelous environment alien to the audience, as was customary in contemporary wildlife filmmaking (Bousé 13). Probably influenced by Jacques Cousteau's innovative underwater films, Quilici's earliest work displays a quasi-scientific approach toward the natural world mixed with a more adventurous side. For instance, *Sesto Continente* (1954) includes several scenes of underwater fishing, described as a sportsmanship practice that involves titanic fights between humans and dangerous animals, including sharks (Caputi 34-45; Quilici 5-17; on Cousteau, see Chris 41-42). In the tetralogy Quilici focuses less on documenting either the scientific enterprise or the targeted location and more on specific characters, according to his idea that real places must be described through characters (Caputi 42). This also means shifting toward a more ethnographic perspective, according to which not only must descriptions of nature always be deeply permeated by the presence of humans, but also all the natural elements acquire meaning only because they are parts of an environment with which humans interact (18).

Ti-Koyo aptly fits such description. As Quilici writes in his 1966 diary entitled *Giramare*, the location for *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* (the Tuamotu atolls in French Polynesia) was picked because, as noted above, on those islands he had actually seen children playing with small sharks (Quilici 112). He therefore knew that on those islands one could find “all the human material, and those landscapes, and that underwater nature, and those unexpected inspirations” (103) which would allow him to make a good cinematic product. The choice of the Polynesian islands helped Quilici not only transform Richer's fable into what he called a “magic film [...] hanging between the reality of images and the fantasy of the subject” (163), but also depict what he considered an almost completely isolated universe capable of eliminating any ties with the rest of the world (165). According to Quilici, it is such paradisiacal isolation that actually makes possible the friendship between a man and a shark and thus a perfect location for his film (165).

Given the anthropic quality of Quilici's interests, it is unsurprising that the first scene of the movie shows human activity taking place in a natural setting, namely, a group of Polynesian fishermen hunting a shark. Immediately afterward the dead fish is shown hanging from a tree, a proper fishing trophy toward which the camera zooms: quite surprisingly, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* begins with a close-up image of a dead shark.

This camera work is obviously one of the features that belong neither to Richer's novel nor to Calvino's script, and is therefore unique to the film. As Lawrence Venuti and other adaptation scholars have pointed out, a film adaptation belongs to a larger intersemiotic recontextualization (Venuti 28-30), which includes both the material act of filming and the various issues that such activity

might involve. In *Ti-Koyo's* case, the material environment of the film location and its cultural practice, as well as the inevitable involvement of some non-human "actors," influenced the final product.

As for the former, the change of location (from Richer's Martinique) is for the film as crucial as it was for Calvino's script. Quilici actually decided to incorporate into his story specific elements of the local Polynesian culture, such as the practice of hanging sharks on trees or a scene where boys cruelly play with fish for the enjoyment of tourists: an element also present in Calvino's script but that was the director's direct suggestion. In the context of the film, this scene is clearly meant to display Ti-Koyo's disgust for such games and thus his love for animals. However, it is also a real practice of Polynesian children who, according to Quilici, recognize in this game the difficulty of their own life and the continuous fight with the Ocean, capable of "hardening the natural sweetness of the Polynesian people" (Quilici 128). Even beyond the idealization of Polynesian people exposed by this comment, Quilici seems in his work both to denounce how such cruel practice is triggered by tourism and to forget that he and his desire for filming possibly constituted a trigger as well, if we reasonably assume that he asked the children to reproduce such a game for the sake of his own camera. As Alexander Wilson writes about what he calls "social anthropology movies," Quilici's project appears thus to be marred by an attempt at realism that erases the presence of the observer or, in his case, of the filmmaker (148-149). As a consequence, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* can also be quite "conservative—and mistaken—in [its] understanding of aboriginal cultures as static and unchanging and thus doomed in a modern industrial world" (149). We will return to this point shortly.

As for the latter, Quilici acknowledges the difficulties of working with human and non-human animals together. For instance, he recounts that Calvino's idea of the shark winking back at the boy led him to initially consider a mechanical fish (Ballardini 69-72). When it became obvious that the machine was not apt for the task, a member of the crew decided to take a living shark from the surrounding sea and splash its eyes with beer, wine, and finally fresh water to successfully make it wink. Quilici was allegedly not informed of the practice at the time of its occurrence, because probably he would have not allowed it. However, he commented afterward that he was not so sorry that a shark was tortured in order to obtain the "winking effect," because sharks do not actually elicit compassion (72). This ambivalence toward sharks persists throughout the whole making of the film, and it can be extended toward any animal used as an "actor." Some of these unwilling "actors" were in fact released back into the wild, but often they died as a consequence of the captivity and without much regret by the film crew (Quilici 135-140).

There is, however, a third aspect of the material reality of producing the film that radically influenced the final outcome and made it very different from both Richer's and Calvino's versions. According to Ilaria Caputi, after having read

Richer's novel Quilici fell in love with the idea of the friendship between a boy and a shark, but he did not like the "violent and manipulating" behavior of the "original" Ti-Koyo (48). He therefore decided to ask Calvino to modify the plot. Yet, initially Quilici did not approve of the overall kind-hearted tone ("spirito bonario;" Caputi 48) of Calvino's script either, and actually intended to give the story a sad ending: the shark is killed by Diana and Ti-Koyo leaves his island alone and in despair (49). In Quilici's mind, the shark Manidu represented less a real animal than the idea of uncontaminated nature (49), and therefore such an ending would have been allegorical, signifying the ending of the friendship between humans and nature and therefore the destruction wrought upon the Polynesian lifestyle by tourism and economic progress. The producer of the film, Goffredo Lombardo, ruled against such a conclusion, claiming that it would not have been good for the American market, and Quilici was thus forced to create a spurious happy ending (50). In this conclusive version, Ti-Koyo leaves his island because he realizes that the old world he knew has disappeared forever, and he cannot adapt to the new one. Most importantly, though, not only does Diana unexpectedly join the boy in his departure, but the shark becomes a "witness" to their happy, although unofficial, marriage, also performing the function of keeping a good watch ("fare la guardia") over their still undiscovered but somehow promised new paradise.

Despite Quilici's regrets about the producer's intrusion, this happy ending actually fits better within the overall narrative of the film. As Caputi has pointed out, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* is a "gentle fable" (50) that retains nothing of the raw and dark humor of Richer's story. Instead, Quilici builds a narrative that mixes together a unique friendship between a boy and a shark, a rather overly sentimental love story, and a melancholic farewell to what he believed was a culture at the edge of extinction, namely the Polynesian culture of the islands. These three elements are all gathered in the figure of Ti-Koyo, who in Quilici's movie is not the capriciously cunning boy of Richer's novel, but a consistent embodiment of purity. This is the reason why, in one of the last and most revealing scenes of the film, the director of the fishing business claims that he vainly tried to convince Ti-Koyo to join his business because he wanted to show everybody that the boy's purity and fidelity to nature can be overcome by the wealth brought by technological progress. For the Chinese businessman, Ti-Koyo behaves in fact as "a savage, a fish, a seagull." Namely, he is hardly human, and winning over him would almost mean taming nature. Yet, it is precisely Ti-Koyo's almost primitive ability to bring together human and non-human, sky and sea, that allows him to remind everybody of "something that unfortunately we are forgetting," as Diana passionately replies to his brother at the end of the scene.

Unfortunately, the invincible purity and connection to nature which make Ti-Koyo such a likable figure are also his cinematographic weaknesses. There is in fact a didactic, too expository aspect in his character as represented by Quilici, a feature that can also be extended to his whole interaction with the shark. Take for

instance the rather absurd “winking” between the two, an element allegedly introduced by Calvino in his script. This “winking” acquires a different reality in the film, mostly because in the movie the camera repeatedly zooms in on the shark’s eye and rests on it for few, long seconds. As Jonathan Burt reminds us, this cinematographic focus on the animal’s eye is neither unique nor original, and characterizes for example not only John Huston’s 1956 *Moby Dick*, but also a movie Quilici himself helped film after his experience on *Ti-Koyo*, that is to say *Orca – The Killer Whale* (Burt 64-71; Ballardini 75-76). Whether or not Quilici borrowed the idea from Huston, in the context of his 1962 film the repeated image of the shark’s eye is less a signifier of Manidu’s gaze and independent agency, and more a symbolic reminder of the animal’s affection for Ti-Koyo and their supposed mutual understanding. Moreover, as Stephen Rust has pointed out about wildlife filming in general, cinematic texts differ from literature because they “claim to represent the world as it actually existed at the time of filming” (227). *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* is presented both as a fictional, symbolic story *and* as a document of an existing reality. As observers of such reality, we are therefore not only asked to believe that a shark can and does wink (while we now know that that effect was cruelly elicited) but also, and most importantly, we become witness to a world that is proposed as “real” but is instead allegorical. The final outcome is thus infused with both a “deep ecological conscience” (Caputi 95) and an idealistic (if not simply conservative) binary ideology, according to which the noble savage Ti-Koyo is on the side of nature, as testified by his friendship with his well-behaved pet-shark Manidu, and Western progress and its destructively technological modernity are on the other.

Undoubtedly, an exploration of both the Italian reception of Richer’s novel (how it was explicitly classified as children’s literature, for example) and the function of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* within Italy’s cultural landscape in the early 1960s would be essential for a better understanding of Ti-Koyo’s story. A lengthier analysis of Calvino’s and Quilici’s other collaborations—such as in the documentary devoted to the Italian region *Liguria* (1973)—would be useful as well. However, even within the limited space of this article, we have enough elements to draw some conclusions.

We have for instance seen how the change of location from Martinique to Polynesia is crucial to the story and therefore to the human-animal relationship it depicts. Although Richer wrote his novel in Paris, Martinique was still his homeland, and we may assume that *Ti-Coyo et son requin* borrows at least a few elements from his childhood on the island. For both Calvino and Quilici the Polynesian archipelago is instead something foreign and exotic: regardless of the number of times they might have traveled to those islands, they remain white, European intellectuals depicting a reality to which they did not belong. This difference obviously marks their narratives and in particular their relationship with the respective postcolonial environments. It is no coincidence that Calvino

and Quilici erase from their versions the complex postcolonial components present in Richer's narrative, leaving only a negative but quite vague reference to Western tourism and technological progress as the forces opposing "a balanced relationship with nature" (Caputi 95). As a consequence and in spite of their own best intentions, the two Italian authors "orientalize" the story and its environment, creating a dichotomy between the supposed previous harmony and purity of the Polynesian paradise, as embodied by Ti-Koyo and his relationship with the shark, and the evil but inevitable force of history, represented by both the Chinese owner of the fishing business and the American tourists. In so doing they unwillingly replicate the tendency of a certain environmentalism to rely on the "old insular paradigm," that is to say the nostalgia for a prefabricated natural harmony which should (but somehow cannot) be restored (Garrard 21). In particular, Quilici's film risks being something similar to what Cynthia Chris—borrowing from Foucault and referring to wildlife films in general—calls "heterotopic spaces," that is to say places that "through their collection of normally unrelated objects, life forms, or representations expose visitors to worlds beyond their own reach" (xi). As she points out, the images presented by both wildlife films and their more ethnographic equivalents depict (human and non-human) animals and their habitats as both "real" and "absolutely different" from themselves, because they are constructed following specific conventions of representation (including "the economics of the film and television industries") which are instead accurately expunged from the final product (xii). As the scene of the Polynesian boys cruelly playing with fishes exemplifies, Quilici's *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* can be seen as such a space and therefore presents a painful and probably unforeseen paradox: it denounces Western technological progress as a force of destruction while employing it in order to depict the reality it wants to save. A similar paradox can be detected in the relationship with the shark. As Jonathan Burt has in fact noticed, even when it appears that animals in films point to a more natural or pastoral world, as in Quilici's case, "this is a role articulated by technology and therefore provided purely by modernity" (83). Unfortunately, this also meant treating some actual sharks quite cruelly in order to obtain a specific shot which was instead intended to display an intimate relationship with a fictional shark.

Yet, it is undeniable that the relationship between the boy and the shark is presented by both Calvino and Quilici in an overall positive light. For instance, although neither the script nor the film have those "post-human" features recently suggested by Serenella Iovino in her readings of Calvino's work, Ti-Koyo still seems to establish a kind of "symbiosis" with the shark. As Iovino pointed out, this symbiosis between different species advances an idea of human civilization as the product of the interaction between our history and the histories (and natures) of other creatures (128): an idea surely suggested by *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane*. Nonetheless, a symbiosis does not happen in a vacuum, but rather in a habitat, which in our case is constructed through words and images. This is the reason why

the binary habitat depicted by Calvino and Quilici risks impoverishing the relationship between the boy and the shark, which is not only paradigmatically given as the mark of an almost lost human purity but also belongs to a binary ecological ideology that is quite typical of the Western world (DeLoughrey and Handley 16). It is then not a coincidence that, as we have already pointed out, in both the script and the film Manidu behaves and is treated more as a dog than a shark, that is to say according to a master-animal relationship which is familiar to Western audiences. Instead, the postcolonial and post-pastoral world of Richer's novel neither dilutes the violent and paradoxical nature of the relationship between the two nor asks for a binary identification with the human protagonist, who is attractive but also quite disturbing and uncanny, as recognized by Quilici himself. Moreover, although he incorporates some historical elements into his narrative (such as the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902), Richer's "immoral fable" does not want to be "realistic" in the same way *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* aspires to be. It is therefore free to describe the "impossible" relationship between a boy and a shark as part of the overall complicated and turbulent environment rather than as the disappearing symbol of its lost purity. As we have seen, this ideological difference also forges different encounters between the human and the non-human, and allows Richer to establish the crucial moment of the relationship between the boy and the shark in terms of transformative limitrophy, that is to say where both (human and non-human) natures and identities are at stake.

Finally, one last point. In an article published in 2007, Raglon and Scholtmeijer point out the critical differences between environmental and animal advocacy literatures. According to the two scholars, while environmental authors tend to depict ecosystems and avoid emotions, animal advocacy writers focus on individuals and imagination. As simplistic and problematic as this dichotomy may be (as the authors themselves acknowledge), it nonetheless helps us to credit Richer's novel, Calvino's script, and Quilici's movie with similar abilities to synthesize the two positions. As I have tried to show in this article, clearly Calvino and Quilici embellish both the shark and the island for their own ideological reasons, while Richer instead downplays neither the dangerous nature of the animal nor the overall violent environment in which the story takes place. Yet, in spite of their fundamental differences, these three works establish a direct correlation between individual (human and non-human) animals, their emotions, and the whole environment. Moreover, in all three versions we cannot but be sympathetic to the fantastic tale of the friendship between Ti-Coyo and Manidu. Their story ultimately reminds us that, just as a boy can love a shark, we, too, might "have the capacity to love even creatures who intellectually seem repellent to us" (Raglon and Scholtmeijer 137).

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Sino-Anglo-Euro Wolf Fan(g)s from Jiang Rong to Annaud

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Abstract



Fans of Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* could arguably shapeshift into a wolf's fangs, the sharp tips of China's Social Darwinism today. Jiang mourns the killing of Mongolian wolves, erecting a literary totem there after wolves are gone. An elegy for the wild comes to justify the growing of fangs amid the jungle of the socialist-capitalist market. Wolf totem becomes a phallic symbol for power. A Sino-Anglo-Euro morphing materializes in global cinema as Annaud transforms the novel into *The Last Wolf*. Annaud's romantic film downplays Jiang's nationalistic tenor, avoiding to bare "red [in] tooth and claw" to the world.

Keywords: Jiang Rong, Wolf Totem, Jean-Jacques Annaud.

Resumen

Los fans de *Wolf Totem* de Jiang Rong podrían discutiblemente transformarse en los colmillos de un lobo, las afiladas puntas del darwinismo social en China hoy en día. Jiang lamenta la muerte de los lobos mongoles, erigiendo un tótem literario allí tras la marcha de los lobos. Una elegía a los salvaje llega a justificar el crecimiento de colmillos en medio de la jungla del mercado socialista-capitalista. El tótem del lobo se convierte en un símbolo fálico de poder. Un Changling sino-anglo-europeo de algún tipo se materializa en el cine global cuando Annaud transforma la novela en *El último lobo*. La romántica película de Annaud resta importancia al tono nacionalista de Jiang, evitando mostrar "rojo [en] diente y garra" al mundo.

Palabras clave: Jiang Rong, Wolf Totem, Jean-Jacques Annaud.

Introduction: Asian and Anglo-European Contexts

To a non-native speaker of English like myself, pronouncing the difference between "n" versus "ng" word endings, such as in a present participle or a gerund, is nerve-racking. This lifelong source of anxiety on my part leads to the pun of Chinese fans of, or Chinese fangs bared by, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004). Apparently, fans imagining self-empowerment via totemic idols are not limited to the Chinese. From a transnational perspective, wolf fans from admirers of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) to global followers of Jiang Rong's novel—courtesy of Howard Goldblatt's 2008 translation-cum-retelling in English—and finally to Jean-Jacques Annaud's 2015 film adaptation are conceivably drawn to the potency symbolized by a wolf's fangs, namely, the sharp tips of Euro-American Darwinian Naturalism a century ago or China's Social Darwinism today. A wolf fan is one who wishes to empower oneself with wolf-like fangs, a fitting description of

the millennial China which has, echoing Mao's prophetic words in 1949, "stood up" on the world stage. The secret to this transformation between fans and fangs lies in fiction's play of absence and presence, akin to the unseen fluttering of the tongue up or down inside the mouth to "g" or not to "g." Specifically, while the protagonist Buck in Jack London is a dog restored by necessity to his wolf instinct, he is expressly not a wolf, without the species' long fangs and other biological attributes. Likewise, *Wolf Totem* mourns the killing of wolves in Mongolian grasslands, erecting a literary totem there after wolves are gone, despite the fact that such a "primitive" cultural totem has never existed there physically, historically.¹ The presence of a wolf totem is predicated not only on the absence of wolves but also on that of totems. Jiang's muddled thinking is so intuitive and self-serving that it preempts any further reflection. Put simply, in the name of an elegy for the wild, Jiang's fans justify the growing of fangs to survive the jungle of the socialist-capitalist market, a mongrelized Social Darwinism that cross-breeds Mao's class struggle and revolutionary puritanism with free-market natural selection and individual greed. Wolf totem becomes a phallic symbol for masculinity and supremacy, the Golden Calf adored not only by the Chinese but also by the world market.

Morphing, whether between "n" and "ng" endings or other forms, is inherent in the definition of totem, and that of wolf in particular. Despite its problematic formulation, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1919) has long linked "savages and neurotics," the former worshipping ancestral spirits in animal totems and the latter fixated on certain psychic schematics. The father of psychoanalysis borrows from anthropology to elucidate the human unconscious. Likewise, Jiang conjures up the phantasm of nomadic "savages" and their wolves to fan a national, Sino-centric neurosis. In reaction to the fin-de-siècle history of the East Asia Sick Man wasted away by opium, Jiang showcases what turns out to be the millennial East Asia Sick Wolf, whose complex stems from the shame and self-pity of having been a sheep under colonialism, gradually hardening into the aggressiveness and ethnocentrism of a global wolf, a fanged China. Shared by both Freud and Jiang—as well as other wolf representations in between in the century-long span across West and East, the totem serves as a receding metaphor, substituting for the missing source of awe. It is simultaneously awe-inspiring spirituality and awful, terrifying unknown in accordance with Edmund Burke's sense of the sublime.² The "original" of the alleged Mongolian totem to Jiang and his Chinese fans is the 12th- and 13th-century historical figure Genghis Khan. Khan ruled China and a wide swath of land across Central Asia and Eastern Europe, so much so that the West

¹ When Jean-Jacques Annaud's film *Wolf Totem* came out in 2015, an ethnic Mongolian writer Guo Xuebo claims that the "movie, released at Lunar New Year and showing folk traditions, rituals and lives of the ethnic Mongolian nomads and their bond with wolves, distorts the truth." See Laura Zhou's "Wolf Totem: writer blasts hit film over 'fake' Mongolian culture" in *South China Morning Post* on February 24, 2015.

² See Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, particularly Chapter 7, "On the Sublime."

called Mongolian horsemen the yellow peril, which continues to disturb the West's (un)conscious to this day. Like a Freudian fetish, a totem always means something else, thus pointing away from its physical existence: it is and it is not what it is. This is especially true with the wolf totem.

The liberty of deploying the wolf as a ploy goes back to the two pillars (totems?) of twentieth-century thought: Freud and Darwin. Freud's famous case of the wolfman in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" sees the wolf as the symbol of the primal scene and sexual trauma plaguing his patient, specifically, his childhood trauma of having witnessed his parents copulating in the doggie style, having been scared, and possibly fondled by his older sister. The most revealing part of Freud's analysis is that the wolfman's dream vision looms large like a tall totem: "*Suddenly the window opens of its own accord and terrified, I see that there are a number of white wolves sitting in the big walnut tree outside the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were white all over and looked more like foxes or sheepdogs because they had big tails like foxes and their ears were pricked up like dogs watching something. Obviously fearful that the wolves were going to gobble me up I screamed and woke up*" (227; italics in the original). In his ingenious speculation on the linkages between the wolfman's recurring nightmare and his early childhood sexual experiences, Freud fails to theorize fully the association among various animals: white wolves, foxes with bushy tails, sheepdogs with pricked-up ears, and the dreaming human. The fluidity of wolf, fox, dog, and ultimately human comes across as a psychic displacement to accommodate the source of dread—the wolf—as less intimidating animals: fox, even tamed sheepdog. The dream vision's wolf keeps morphing, owing in no small measure to the wolf's genetic ties to canines and, indirectly, to humans. Graphically, the dream vision of wolves sitting around a "big walnut tree" comprises a wolf totem, menacing the wolfman through the erect posture of the tree and the wolves, a thinly-veiled phallic symbol. The wolf becomes Freud's epigrammatic placeholder for power. Himself standing tall as the alpha male reigning over human dreams, Freud bears a striking resemblance to Darwin, the alpha male over human evolution.

Regarding the process of "Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest" (51) in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin expounds by moving back and forth between wolf and dog. In a lean year, Darwin notes that "the swiftest and slimmest wolves have the best chance of surviving," which is followed in the same breath by the affirmation that: "man should be able to improve the fleetness of his greyhounds by careful and methodical selection" (58). What nature accomplishes through natural selection, humans can duplicate, Darwin counsels, through scientific intervention. From greyhounds, Darwin's train of thought instantly switches back to "two varieties of the wolf inhabiting the Catskill Mountains" (58). Darwin illustrates the gradual evolution of species while jumping abruptly to wolf, man, and dog in the same paragraph. The logical leap and lack of transition can only be explained by a Darwinian mental spectrum that runs from the wild wolves

to domesticated greyhounds to greyhounds' owners. A syllogism of sorts emerges and culminates in human centrality, as humans have control over tamed canines as well as theoretical mastery over the behavior of untamed ones.

Masters as they are in their respective fields, both Freud and Darwin fall victim to the expediency of wolf symbolism for the uncontrollable wild in wilderness as well as in the human unconscious. S. K. Robisch contends in *Wolves and the Wolf Myth in American Literature* (2009) that the conceptual duality of the real and virtual wolf runs through literature. The wolf's corporeality is inextricably bound up with mythology. Robisch calls the latter "ghost wolf," which "wrestled with the real wolf for dominance of our American thoughts" (3). The term *ghost* is used for two reasons: "The first is the overwhelming presence in human culture of myth and its totemic, ethereal, unconscious, and symbolic images, including the unidentifiable presence of imaginary animals in our mythologies; the second is the effort in both Europe and America to eradicate the wild from the face of the earth, leaving its revenant shade in its former regions" (17). Robisch's terms "ghost wolf" and "totemic" serendipitously resonate with Jiang's title, with one key difference. Robisch's word choice ensures an interweaving of the physical wolf and abstract human cognition, whereas Jiang's title anchors his novel positivistically, literally, almost experientially. In fact, Robisch argues, "the totality of the wolf (corporeal and ghostly, mimetic and imaginary, persona and shadow), the World-Wolf could be a mere buoy of corporeal glimmering in an apparitional sea" (19). Absent such scholarly subtlety as Robisch's parenthetical binarism, Jiang turns the "apparitional sea" upside down to flood the Chinese social fabric with a reactionary yearning for wolfishness. Yet Jiang's un-self-consciously metaphorical wolf remains motivated to some extent by Jack London's smorgasbord of a wolf. "In *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*," Robisch argues, "London attempted to synthesize no less than Darwinism, atavism, early Marxist socialism, the Nietzschean concept of the over-man, and the tricky relationship between deterministic naturalism and survivalist self-reliance" (290).³ To fashion his wolf image, Jiang draws from equally disparate sources, not just Western ones like London but Chinese ones as well.

Akin to Jiang's backward-looking nostalgia for Mongolian wolves from a modernizing China, London's catch-all fantasy of the wolf also rebels against scientific progress, particularly the taxonomy of eighteenth century English dog-breeding, which coincided with the development of the discourse on race. The more stratified human races and dog species become, the more London muses on what lies beyond regulated society and knowledge. In "Foxhounds, Curs, and the Dawn of Breeding," Martin Wallen posits that "language governed by race, breed, and species becomes the very essence of the discourse on nature: to speak and write about animals—whether wild or domestic—means to institute and enforce

³ In "In Wilderness is the Preservation of China," J. Gerard Dollar labels Jiang Rong's novel as "'neo-naturalistic,' a Chinese novel in the spirit of Jack London" (412).

these organized differences, and to speak and write about nature meaningfully can only be done taxonomically” (131). Given the proximity of discourses on race and on dog species, Wallen sees that “[d]ogs and humans. . . are the same, in that they share common interior sentiment, evident in the differences they each manifest within their own species” (133). Pitting his work against scientific taxonomy, Jack London makes a dog revert back to its wolf ancestry, a fallacy at the heart of mythical regression from men to werewolves.

American popular culture is replete with such tales of metamorphosis to assuage the urge for residual, repressed religiosity in an increasingly secular, technologized age.⁴ As science and technology come to dominate human life, we escape into magical, supernatural transformation, vampires and werewolves being the most prominent duets. The undying Count Dracula has a running mate in the werewolf, multiplying in *The American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Wolf* (1994), *The American Werewolf in Paris* (1997), *The Wolfman* (2010), *The Twilight Saga* (2009-2012), *Underworld* series (2006-2012), and many more. Note that in recent reincarnations, both vampires and werewolves populate the *Twilight* and *Underworld* franchises, as if to double animal magnetism in a market saturated with and inured to blood and gore. In both cases, the taboo of biological copulation is rendered in more acceptable, “filmable” oral contacts: vampires’ love bites or wolf bites that pass on animality to the bitten, the smitten. These films follow the well-trodden path of siring werewolves by wolf bites at full moon. Likewise, Jiang’s wolf bites are poisonous, requiring immediate penicillin shots, possibly to prevent rabies or some mysterious gangrene from setting in.

The fright over wolf bites coexists with the flight of fancy of becoming one with the wolf. Just as the Western compulsion rekindles itself in the old flame of wolf, or bat, for that matter, the East is also drawn to the alpha wolf of Genghis Khan. Inoue Yasushi’s historical novel *The Blue Wolf* (1960) purports to chronicle, as the subtitle goes, *the Life of Chinggis Khan*, a subtitle that does not exist in the Japanese original. But in the long list of Dramatis Personae of historical figures at the end of the novel, only one fictitious character exists, conspicuous for the “(f)” notation at the end of his name: Bültechü Ba’atur. Not only does Inoue go to great lengths to bring in a story-teller, a bard, to sing of the mythic genesis of Mongolians via the mating of a wolf and a doe, but the “historical” novelist takes pains to construct a thoroughly foreign-sounding name with two umlauts. Bültechü Ba’atur’s genesis story “told of a great lake far to the west and a rampaging wolf

⁴ Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* (1929) suggests the lineage from European to American cultures. Hesse’s protagonist resembles a “wolf of the Steppes that had lost its way and strayed into the towns and the life of the herd” (18). The steppes would take the figurative “werewolf” (62) all the way across Central Asia to the Orient. But it is a mere Orientalist gesture to increase the polarity within the protagonist, a device to sharpen the contrast of “God and the Devil” within Christianity, goodness and the temptation of evil: “There is God and the devil in them; the mother’s blood and the father’s; the capacity for happiness and the capacity for suffering; and in just such a state of enmity and entanglement were the wolf and man in Harry” (48). The wolf is, needless to say, a figure of speech.

that crossed it at the orders of its deity and took the graceful, beautiful doe as its mate” (Inoue 10). Temüjin, Genghis Khan’s pre-Khan name, is unsure of his origin because his mother Ö’elün had been abducted and raped by a rival tribe, the Merkid. To prove his Mongolian blood, Temüjin is resolved to demonstrate through action that he is a predatory wolf. The same doubt also haunts Temüjin’s first-born Jochi, meaning “guest,” because Temüjin’s wife Börte is also abducted and raped: “Temüjin stared at the face of the infant lying beside Börte in bed. Just as he tormented himself over whether or not Mongol blood flowed in his own veins, this child would in future bear such doubts. And just as he would have to prove that there was Mongol blood in his body by becoming a wolf, so too would Jochi have to become a wolf” (Inoue 74). The Mongols are presented as a hybrid group determined by wolf-like action rather than by bloodline alone. The Japanese take on Genghis Khan is eerily close to that of contemporary Chinese wolf fans: fate is in the hands of those who resolve to grow a wolf’s fangs.

This “historical” lesson is pushed to the extreme of Russian Orientalism in Sergey Bodrov’s *Mongol* (2007). In *Mongol*, a Japanese actor plays Genghis Khan and a Chinese actor plays his Mongolian sworn brother turned enemy, chock full of action and fairy-tale happenings. The child Temüjin flees from enslavement as he prays to Tengger (Tengri for Sky-Father in Turkic-Mongolian animism) for help, whereupon his wooden cangue falls off, but not before a wolf, Tengger’s avatar, peeks through a mountain shrine in slow-motion at the kneeling Temüjin. Akin to Robisch’s ghost wolf, Bodrov gives us God-Wolf. But not all Asian texts idolize, totemize, and mythologize wolves. Hamid Sardar’s documentary *Balapan: The Wings of the Altai* (2005) portrays Mongolia’s Kazaks raising hawks to hunt wolves. Hence, wolf totemism, if it ever existed, is not widespread throughout the Mongolian plateau. Truth be told, Jiang’s setting of Olonbulag lies to the west of China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, separate from the nation of Mongolia since 1924. Blurring the national borders and ethnic psyches is only the beginning of Jiang’s and the Chinese fallacy of lupine transfiguration.

Such Japan-, Russia-, and China-made “Mongolian” kinship to wolves contravenes the Chinese phobia of wolves, if not in Japan and Russia as well. As early as the thirteenth-century, Wang Jiushi’s play “Wolf of Mount Zhong” already capitalizes on the perception of the evil wolf: “Human beings are sly, / treacherous and cunning, / for all their human-looking faces, / And their hearts are the image of this wild wolf’s” (102). In modern times, Jiang alludes several times to the wolf imagery used by the father of modern Chinese literature Lu Xun. Like any idol subject to exploitation, Jiang attributes to Lu Xun such canine tropes of wild versus tamed as the following: “Westerners are brutish, while we Chinese are domesticated” (Jiang 173). Quite on the contrary, a recurring motif in Lu Xun’s short stories is the cannibalistic Chinese tradition. Far from a land inhabited by the “domesticated,” Lu Xun’s China is a Darwinian “man-eat-man” world, recast in the wolf stereotypes. “A Madman’s Story” deals with a half-crazed narrator raving about cannibalism in his home village called “Wolf Cub Village,” where a man was

beaten to death, “his heart and liver” taken out and “fried... in oil” and eaten (9). Endocannibalism is practiced figuratively not only by the villagers named after wolf cubs but by his own older brother and family, suspected of consuming the narrator’s young sibling (17). “New Year’s Sacrifice” details a traditional Chinese woman being devoured by patriarchal oppression. The nameless protagonist, Xianglin’s Wife, loses her son to wolves that symbolize human greed and bestiality. Like the Ancient Mariner, Xianglin’s Wife repeats her tale so frequently that, upon hearing her story (“there he was, lying in the wolf’s lair, with all his entrails eaten away, his hand still tightly clutching that small basket”), listeners preempt her in mockery (139). While her son is eaten alive, her listeners are far more cruel and ravenous in taunting the memory of the child, who clutched even in death the basket his mother entrusted to him. A comi-tragic turn takes place in “The True Story of Ah Q” when the scapegoat for failed revolutions, the protagonist Ah Q, is paraded through the streets all the way to the execution ground. It suddenly dawns on Ah Q that the shouting crowd reminds him of “a hungry wolf” he met before: “He had never forgotten that wolf’s eyes, fierce yet cowardly, gleaming like two will-o’-the-wisps... Now he saw eyes more terrible even than the wolf’s: dull yet penetrating eyes that, having devoured his words, still seemed eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood” (111-12). The sole lucid moment in his pathetic life arrives with the realization that he is a mere sacrificial lamb to his wolfish compatriots. Contrary to Lu Xun’s biting satire against animalistic Chinese, Jiang portrays Chinese as sheep in need of a wolf-like appetite.⁵ Jiang’s revisionism stems from the iconoclastic communist ideology pitting the long-suffering peasants and working class against China’s feudal past and elite, and foreign imperial powers. Chinese communist victimology lays the foundation for self-aggrandizement in the name of revenge. Into such a complex cultural milieu enters Jiang Rong.

Jiang Rong

Based on his eleven year exile to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Rong wrote the best-selling *Wolf Totem* to mourn the loss of Mongolian wolves and their habitat, and the lack of wolfishness within Chinese psyche. Published in 2004, nearly three decades after the Cultural Revolution, *Wolf Totem* was an instant hit in China. Its success stems not so much from Chinese nostalgia for wolves or grievances of the Cultural Revolution; rather, the distance of time and location allows Chinese to de-politicize *ressentiment* against Beijing under Mao as well as post-Mao and to displace their sentiments onto a remote, mythic animal fable. Empathy for the demise of Mongolian wolves—put simply, for

⁵ This dichotomy of wolves and sheep is common in “recent Chinese writings,” according to Chengzhou He in “Poetic Wolves and Environmental Imagination.” Many Chinese writers, such as Jia Pingwa’s *Huainian lang (Remembering the wolves)*, portray wolves in an unusually positive and appreciating manner” (398).

the losing of their fangs—forms a victimology for fans who feel threatened and oppressed in the Social Darwinism of the post-Mao capitalist market, who wish to transform themselves from underdogs to top wolves. Indeed, what better way to justify ruthlessness than a victim's sense of vengeance? Confronted with the widening gap between the haves (capitalist wolves) and have-nots (sheep), totem worshippers identify with wild wolves that lost to modern wolves, believing that "the call of the wild" would revitalize them. In the hunt for superlatives, from Maoist self-righteous propaganda to communist-capitalist nouveaux riches, *Wolf Totem* is the new Little Red Book, eerily doubling back to Mao's maxim that "A revolution is not a dinner party... A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." Except today's revolution plots Western-style modernization and the dinner party serves endocannibalistic fare.

Historically, under the pretext of learning from peasants and the proletariat, Chairman Mao dispatched masses of urban youths and intellectuals to China's backwaters and borderlands during the Cultural Revolution. These potential independent thinkers and dissidents against the Great Leader and his "Gang of Four" were herded like sheep, their youth devoured by the rapacious State. One such young man, Jiang Rong, turns his exile into a requiem for the decimated Inner Mongolian grassland and its wolves. A psychic displacement motivates such a narrative. To cope with the injustice, the wasted youth, and the lingering grief of having been sent en masse to the countryside to be "reeducated" by the preliterate and the not-so-literate, Jiang and his urban fans turn the decade-long disaster under Mao into the fruitful, enriching experience of learning about the Mongolian prairie. The personal and cultural negative is re-tuned as a lifelong positive.⁶ Jiang is not alone in such imaginary revisionism of the Cultural Revolution. Dai Sijie's semi-autobiographical fiction and film *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2000, 2002) also romanticize those years spent in the remote mountains of the southwest not only through the stereotypical ingénue of a Chinese seamstress but also through symbols of Western high culture, including the French writer, violin, and Western classical music.

Jiang's semi-autobiographical novel has contributed to contemporary Chinese frenzy in promoting "*langxing*" (wolf nature) as a way of thinking and behaving. The novel centers on two Beijing youths sent down to Inner Mongolia: Chen Zhen who is so mesmerized by wolves that he raids a wolf den for a cub, Little Wolf, to raise himself; and Yang Ke who falls in love with Mongolian swans. Chen finds his inspiration in Jack London's stories and Yang in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. In addition to Western masters, Chen and Yang learn from the Mongolian

⁶ J. Gerard Dollar asserts that the exile is "a radical dislocation from Beijing, an exile so extreme that it leads to the death of an old self and the fashioning of a new pilgrim self . . . an important part of each pilgrimage is the attempt to find and recover the wild" (417). However, Joan Chen's film *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl* (1998) presents an urban woman willing to give up her body repeatedly to obtain official approval to return to the city, alas, to no avail. Chen's bleak portrayal of a corrupt and woman-eating Maoist China accounts for the film's total ban in China.

wise man “Papa” Bilgee. Bilgee’s family consists of three generations: his son Batu and his feisty daughter-in-law Gasmai have a son Bayar. In this “swan song” to a land subject to irreversible desertification, Jiang gives us few antagonists, other than the constant complaint of Chinese sheepishness and, paradoxically, Sinic wolves. These wolves are in human skin, in the form of Han-influenced ethnic and Han (the majority ethnic group similar to white Caucasians in the U.S. and in Europe) settlers from the eastern part of Inner Mongolia led by the Mongolian-turned-communist-leader Bao (his Chinese surname denoting a Sinophile more Chinese than the Chinese). Despite his Mongolian origin, Bao points with his riding crop, which only the Khan or tribal leaders would do (88). He even proposes scorching the grassland, a sacrilege no traditional Mongolian would ever contemplate (205). Bao’s settlers decimate the land and its inhabitants—wild animals, livestock, and Mongolian nomads—bent upon remaking the grassland into farming communities, forcing a settler economy onto the nomads. A dramatis personae would not be complete without the nonhuman actors: Chen’s Little Wolf and the Bilgee family dogs: Erlang, Bar (“Tiger” in Mongolian), Yellow, and Yir. Finally, following animist belief, Bilgee and Chen appeal to Tengger as an omnipotent God.

The double entendre of fan and fang points to Jiang’s inherent fuzzy thinking and self-deception. The Han Beijing student Chen Zhen learns from Papa Bilgee about Mongolian grassland and its wolf soul. Revered as the alpha male who would scare off the wolf pack, Bilgee, along with his nomadic balance with nature, gradually gives way to a new alpha male, Bao, who brings about an anthropocentric annihilation of nature. While Jiang uses this change to rail against Han Chinese sheepish passivity, it contradicts the aggressiveness of sinologized and Han farmers in the novel.⁷ The novel, perhaps unbeknownst to itself and to its millions of fans, epitomizes the Han majority as the new wolf destroying the old wolf of ethnic Mongolians. One group of carnivores with rifles, explosives, and jeeps simply wipes out the other with fangs and muscles. Yet in the hope of engendering aggressiveness, Jiang represents the Han Chinese culture as docile, blithely oblivious to the discrepancy between textual evidence and its intended message, between the novel’s land-grabbing, plundering sinologized Mongolians and Han settlers driven by Beijing policies, on the one hand, and, on the other, China’s hypothetical inaction. Jiang gives a new meaning to passive-aggressive in a make-believe China that pities itself as the prey of history, one supposedly apprenticed to the predatory mindset of Mongolians such as Bilgee. Yet Bilgee’s way of life has already been eroded by China!

Jiang’s twisted, expedient logic replays in the textual refrain of Chinese sheep, first by the Mongolian wise man Bilgee in educating Chen as to the ways of the grassland, subsequently by Chen himself in didactic preaching to his

⁷ Chengzhou He in “The Wolf Myth and Chinese Environmental Sentimentalism in Wolf Totem” describes these “new arrivals” as “most of them Han Chinese” (787).

companion and sidekick Yang. Because of the alleged trinity of Bilgee, wolves, and Nature, Jiang intimates that the indigenous, the animal, and Nature speak through Bilgee. Rather than offering a posthuman and ecocritical perspective, Bilgee remains a Sino-centric mouthpiece. In fact, Bilgee's teachings resemble the format of Cultural Revolution struggle meetings where the non-Han Mongolian opens with criticism of Chinese sheepishness, followed by Han self-criticism from Chen. From the outset, Bilgee lectures Chen: "You're like a sheep. A fear of wolves is in your Chinese bones. That's the only explanation for why you people have never won a fight out here" (1), empty rhetoric indeed given Bao's and the Han people's imminent victory over Bilgee and Mongolians (1). At any rate, Bilgee reinforces this dichotomy: "You Chinese have the courage of sheep, who survive by foraging grass. We Mongols are meat-eating wolves" (21). Jiang also makes sure his puppet "Papa" links the non-Han with the Big Good Wolf Genghis Khan: "Back when Genghis Khan formed his army, he always picked the best wolf hunters" (12). Mongolian success is thus credited to wolf-like prowess, which transpired, incidentally, seven centuries ago. A la Bilgee, Chen enacts self-criticism, reminiscent of a Maoist struggle meeting: "China's small-scale peasant economy and Confucian culture have weakened the people's nature" (304). Chen's analysis even calls for revitalization of the national character "by cutting away the decaying parts of Confucianism and grafting a wolf totem sapling into it" (377). A totem is imagined to be a living organism to energize any Sinic werewolf.

Not only is Bilgee's Mongolian viewpoint highly suspect but the seemingly animal, posthuman, and ecocritical voices come from sinologized wolves in sheepskin as well. Wolves are mindlessly anthropomorphized, often cast in military terminologies and martial metaphors, both favored in the People's Republic of China discourse: "Here's some of what the wolves knew: weather, topography, opportunity, their and their enemy's strengths, military strategy and tactics, close fighting, night fighting, guerrilla fighting, mobile fighting, long-range raids, ambushes, lightning raids... they were as conversant with guerrilla tactics as our Eighth Route Army" (97). Wolves know nothing of the kind—clearly a case of human projection onto wolf behavior. Digging a hole to avoid summer heat, Little Wolf supposedly "squinted to form a smile," as if proudly showing off to his adoptive father Chen, who muses, sentimentally, that the cub is sired by "the current king of the wolves" (336). This melodramatic wishful thinking grows toward the end: just as Little Wolf is about to die, he is believed to be sired by the White Wolf King (491). Chengzhou He in "The Wolf Myth" calls such passages "Environmental Sentimentalism," which only deflects unendurable horror, for Little Wolf is doomed when Chen de-fanged him, resulting in tooth abscess and the impossibility of ever surviving in the wild. It is revealing that in an article on sentimentalism, Chengzhou He details the rising of Little Wolf's spirit in a sky-burial (790), thus continuing Jiang's sentimental elevation without getting down to the root cause of such soppieness. Even Jiang himself touches on Chen's pangs of conscience and his true motive for owning the cub: The cub was neither "orphaned

[n]or abandoned. He, on the other hand, had stolen the cub from its den, an entirely selfish act intended to satisfy a desire for novelty and for study... for what he wanted was to enter the wolf totem realm of the grassland people” via the cub (266). Just as Chen is a self-professed egoist, Jiang Rong is ethnocentric in fashioning and exploiting Mongolian customs. Just as Mongolian wolves are valorized, dogs, or Chinese sheep/dogs, are maligned: “Dogs have regressed far from their wolfish origins. These days dogs are weak, or lazy, or stupid. Just like people” (146). The implication is clear: dogs and Chinese are so lazy that they need to reactivate their ancestral wolf genes.

In Jiang’s Sino-centric fictitious universe, Mongolians and wolves are paired yet with a third foreign totemic symbol: the West, a complex spectrum from nomadic and barbaric to refined high culture.⁸ Herein, Jiang’s broad strokes and cultural stereotypes are shockingly antiquated. Equipped with his college education, Chen goes beyond Bilgee in associating wolves with Westerners: “The Westerners who fought their way back to the East were all descendants of nomads... The Chinese, with their weak dispositions, are in desperate need of a transfusion of that vigorous, unrestrained blood of wolves” (218). Two allusions in particular hinge on the genesis of Romans. When Chen observes that “the ancestors of the Huns, the Gaokus, and the Turks were wolf children, all raised by wolf mothers” (100), it harks back to the mythical twin brothers and founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, suckled and raised by a mother wolf. Later, Chen expands the claim to “Westerners are descendants of barbarians, nomadic tribes such as the Teutons and the Anglo-Saxons. They burst out of the primeval forest like wild animals after a couple of thousand years of Greek and Roman civilization, and sacked ancient Rome” (173). One supposes that in Chen’s scheme of things, Rome had become civilized and was replaced by new nomads. Be that as it may, self-contradiction and faulty logic run rampant through the novel.

One perfect example of textual incongruity is the ambiguity attributed to the West. Deemed barbaric, the West also inspires Chen and Yang with sophisticated “high” culture. London’s *The Call of the Wild* is the frame of reference for much of Chen’s endeavor. Influenced by Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, Yang worships the beauty of Mongolian swans and laments their demise in the hands of Chinese migrants. The West forks into two “wolf gangs”—one lowly and violent, the other lofty and aesthetic—reflecting the millennial ascent of a self-splitting China. Exploiting domestic cheap labor and the proletariat’s powerlessness, China’s captains of industry, the new wolf gang, sanction the Wild West of London et al., but China simultaneously upgrades itself via Western high culture as in, pardon my

⁸ Chengzhou He in “Poetic Wolves and Environmental Imagination” argues that because of defeats in the early part of the twentieth century, the Chinese began to study this “foreign, alien but vital image in Western culture” such as in Jack London. He contends that “the Western wolf images were brought in and praised in order to break down the centuries-old feudal ideas of passivity and obedience that had confined the minds of Chinese people and suppressed their natural desires and feelings” (399).

German, Wolf/gang—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the like, from classical music to luxuries like Louis Vuitton and Mercedes-Benz. Among other things, the light-hearted tunes of a Viennese musical prodigy mask the brutal reality of survival of the fittest. Not to mince words, the Wolfgangs from the West are the soft, beautiful sheep's clothing worn by the wolf gang stalking fresh meat and blood. Accordingly, *Wolf Totem* repeatedly pays tribute to Jack London's Naturalism, despite the contradictory nationalist fervor within and in the wake of *Wolf Totem*.

A wolf gang justifies savagery by convincing itself that it is a victimized lamb. Such ideological brainwashing from self-belittling to self-glorification, from inferiority to superiority, drones on in Jiang Rong, spreading like a cancer from the text to the paratext. An Paoshuen's Preface raises the rhetorical question of whether the Chinese are "dragon's descendants" or "wolf's descendants." An's hyperbolic question stems from the style of inflated discourse in PRC, from the 1950s Great Leap Forward slogan of "Surpass England, Overtake America" to today's *People's Daily* headlines and *China Central Television* news scripts. Appealing to ethnocentric sentiments, An retires the Chinese self-image as the offspring of mythical dragons, replacing it with that of wolves. Since Qing dynasty emperors, those "heavenly sons" descended from dragons, have shamed us into a subcolony, An pontificates, the New PRC ought to undergo a psychological makeover to align itself with the wolf's rapacity. An's iconoclastic reinventing is underwritten by Marxist class struggle and revolutionary zeal, targeting whatever is moribund but still in power, either a political regime or a frame of mind. Although theoretically credible, the Chinese are neither dragons nor wolves, which is but a smoke screen to veil the oppression of imperial hierarchy or Social Darwinism.

The didactic, ethnocentric tone and message of An's Preface are consistent with Jiang's own paratextual materials. Jiang's novel has two dedications in staggered, poetic lines: "Dedicated to: Distinguished grassland wolves and grassland people"; "Dedicated to: The once beautiful great Inner Mongolian grassland." The fluffy, repetitive rhetoric embodies Wordsworthian "emotions recollected" less in tranquility than in hyperbole. Each chapter comes with epigraphs from supposedly historical documents, which relate but tangentially, if at all, to the thesis of Chinese sheep versus Mongolian wolf. Chapter one, for instance, lists two epigraphs. The first one draws from Fan Wenlan's *A Short Survey of Chinese History*, Vol. 1: "'The Quanroan Tribe' claims its ancestry in two white dogs, its totem possibly in the shape of the dog." The second epigraph is in classical Chinese from "The Chronicle of Xiongnu" in *The Book of Han*: "Zhou's King Mu triumphed in his expedition against the Quanroan Tribe, and returned with four white wolves and four white deer." Similar historical-cum-legendary excerpts comprise all subsequent chapter epigraphs. The cumulative affective power of wolf imageries would only hold if readers ignore the flimsy logic of an ancestral claim possibly in the dog—not wolf—totem and the utter irrelevance of campaign spoils of possibly albino animals. Jiang also concludes with a lengthy, boringly didactic

Afterword in his usual proxies of Chen and Yang. This Afterword beats the dead Mongolian wolf, so to speak, beckoning yet again the inner wolf within the Chinese.

Anglo-Euro Translation

All such nationalist paratextual materials are either completely excised or drastically condensed in Howard Goldblatt's English translation, on which my argument and many global readers must rely. An old China hand adroit in presenting Nobel laureate Mo Yan and others to the world, Goldblatt translates Jiang in a way consistent with his oeuvre: a radical rewriting in the name of translation for the non-Mandarin speaking global market. Goldblatt deletes An's Preface and all the chapter epigraphs. The Afterword is likewise trimmed to the bare bones, serving primarily to update the death of Bilgee and Erlang in Chen's return visit to Olonbulag twenty some years later. Rather than staying faithful to the Chinese original, Goldblatt separates the universal human-animal tale from Jiang's propaganda-style chaff. This Anglo-distillation undergoes secondary condensation in Annaud's *Le Dernier loup* (*The Last Wolf* 2015). Annaud retains Goldblatt's structure and further compresses it, collaging numerous episodes for dramatic effect. One intriguing change in the medium of film is Annaud's choice of having characters speak in Mandarin and Mongolian throughout, which is then translated back into English subtitles. To some extent, Annaud is being more Mongolian than Jiang's Mandarin-language novel since Mongolians speak in their own tongue and Mongolian music occasionally adorns the soundtrack. However, Annaud's seemingly restorative approach regarding language use comes with its own revisionism.

The film's opening episodes illustrate Annaud's revisionism. Originally, Jiang Rong opens in medias res with Bilgee and Chen observing through binoculars a wolf pack in action hunting gazelles. Annaud replaces that scene with Chen's voiceover and intertitles on how excited Chen is to leave the capital Beijing in 1967, away from the chaos amidst the second year of the Cultural Revolution. Annaud's establishing shots contrast, visually, the panorama and freedom of the grassland with, auditorily, the long view of history marked by the exact year and the collective trauma. Despite the appearance of historical accuracy, the unit leader Bao proceeds to introduce the two Beijing arrivals to Bilgee: They can "teach the [Mongolian] children and [teach them to] read Chinese characters." The suggestion that they would teach Mongolians countermands Mao's decree of having urban youths reeducated by the people, a transgression that as studious a cadre member as Bao dare not perpetrate. Annaud attempts to set up a clear chronology on the one hand and, on the other, to obfuscate historical facts. While Jiang has already insulated Chen and other exiles from the worst of the Cultural Revolution, Annaud further romanticizes it, giving agency and initiative to those teaching Mandarin, raising a cub, and writing about the loss of the Old Mongolia. Of course, Bilgee instructs Chen in all things Mongolian save the art of wolf-rearing. A reversal of

master-disciple roles takes place when Chen undertakes something no Mongolian has ever done before.

Chen's voiceover is tinged with sloganeering and sentimental effusiveness, both toned down in English subtitles. Annaud's opening includes the pivotal scene where Chen escapes from a wolf pack by clashing his metal stirrups, for he suddenly remembers Bilgee's advice that wolves are fearful of metal sounds, which suggest triggering traps. Barely surviving the trauma awakens Chen to the mystical power of the wolf totem. In his voiceover, a shaken Chen gasping on horseback wonders if wolves have opened the door for him to the primeval force. The Burkean doubleness of awe—near-death experience and palpable spirituality—impregnates Chen's awakening. A spin-off of Burke's duality is that what is sublime may come across as Chen's narcissistic theatrics to those unmoved by filmic chicanery of wolves shot against a green backdrop at a studio, under the tutorage of the Canadian wolf whisperer Andrew Simpson.⁹ In the subsequent scene in a yurt, Chen reads to the Bilgee family, who are probably semi-literate in terms of Mandarin, about Genghis Khan's exploits and his kinship to Tengger. What is quintessentially the glory of Mongolia must now be translated back to Mongolians by a Chinese book and a Chinese reader. Queried by Gasmai on a certain passage, Chen probes for words, coming up with "If not free, then die," a distant echo of the West, namely, Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death." Chen proceeds to confess to Bilgee: "*Xiang ni tanbai: wo bei lang mizhu le*" ("To level with you: I am entranced/smitten by wolves"). The subtitle simplifies it as "To be honest. Wolves fascinate me," which is when Chen broaches the idea of rearing a cub. Neither the subtitle nor my parenthetical translation brings out the shades of meaning within the original Chinese. "*Tanbai*" goes back a long way to the Cultural Revolution, a term of euphemism for coerced confessions, often under physical and psychological duress, during struggle meetings. Notwithstanding the unsavory association with the mendacity and ferocity of Mao's campaign, the somber tone of baring one's soul abruptly causes a silly, child-like grin to appear on Chen's face as he ends with "*mizhu le*." "Fascinate" is far too mild a word to render the familiar Chinese phrase, most often appearing as "*bei hulijing mizhu le*," or "infatuated by the fox spirit," female ghosts or seductresses who mislead and ruin men. Chen's object of love is not a woman, but his dreamy, boyish chuckle portends a child's passion for keeping a pet, a passion awaiting the adult's approval and indulgence. Bringing up a wild wolf as a pet contradicts the spirit of animal studies and posthumanism, for it signals an unbalanced relationship between an owner and possessions. Although Chen later bemoans that he appears to be the slave serving his winter ration of meat to the growing, voracious Little Wolf, he is the one who clips off Little Wolf's fangs and seals its fate. The de-fanging does not come to pass in Annaud, who packages the human-canine relationship in a more "humane,"

⁹ See Tessa Thorniley's "Andrew Simpson: the Wolf Whisperer" in *The Telegraph*, 25 June 2012.

more palatable way, ultimately making possible the final release of Little Wolf in the wild.

This linguistic masquerade lost in subtitles extends from Chen's lines to Bilgee's. When Chen shares the hardships of raising a wolf cub against Mongolian customs and Nature's Law, Bilgee commiserates in accented, faltering Mandarin: "*Laohua shuo: qihunanxia*," which means "as the old saying goes, hard to dismount a tiger when riding it." An apt description of Chen's dilemma of being stuck with the cub, this Mongolian saying happens to not only follow the traditional Chinese format of four-character aphorisms but it *is* one of such aphorisms. On the one hand, Annaud's script improves Jiang's novel in terms of authentic Mongolian speech patterns, evidenced by Bilgee's, Gasmai's, and most Mongolians' code-switching between apparently fluent Mongolian and decidedly staccato Mandarin. A sinologized Mongolian, Bao is the odd man out. After his first greeting of Bilgee in Mongolian, Bai switches in the rest of the film to his Northern Chinese accent. On the other hand, Annaud transposes a Chinese figure of speech into an "old saying" in Mongolia, historically devoid of tigers and hence the basis for that proverb. Even if there were such an old Mongolian maxim, Bilgee would have said it in Mongolian by force of habit. Bilgee, like the spectral totem, is but a conduit for Chinese expressions, a spectacle of the ventriloquizing puppet on the Chinese stage.

In transcribing Jiang to the big screen, Annaud employs all the filmmaking techniques at his disposal. Chen's voiceover provides a structure from the arrival of a bookish Beijing youth to the final farewell to Little Wolf, now full-grown, across the wide expanse of grassland. That epic panorama in extreme long shots punctuates the entire film, the visual aesthetics intensified by the soundtrack's torrent of symphonic music, interspersed with solos of indigenous Mongolian string instruments and chordal singing. In addition, Annaud toggles between long shots of stunning landscape and close-ups of equally becoming faces of the two protagonists, Chen and Gasmai. Described by Chen as an "elder sister-in-law," "big sister," "kindly old aunt or a perky younger one" in the novel (133), Annaud exploits that shifting metaphor of what appears to be the only woman in Mongolia, turning her into Chen's love interest. The incipient romance demonstrates Annaud's filmic compression and dramatization of the five-hundred-plus page novel.

Annaud's camera favors the face and body of Gasmai, the only female, from the outset. When Bao brings Chen and Yang to Bilgee's yurt, the first close-up of a Mongolian is that of Gasmai's face, leaning over from behind the cow she is milking, greeting in Mongolian. As Batu's wife, Gasmai is out of reach for Chen in the novel. But Batu dies some forty minutes into the film, and Gasmai the widow becomes fair game. In fact, even prior to her widowhood, a respite after gazelle harvesting by a frozen lake escalates into a bantering and physical tussling where Gasmai and Chen enjoy a brief moment of intimacy, a flash of their imminent romance. Annaud proceeds to develop Chen's love for Gasmai alongside his love for Little Wolf, both thwarted in the end, for the most heartbreakingly romantic

scenario is always aborted romance. Annaud condenses several episodes scattered in the novel into a cross-cutting dramatization between Batu dying in a wolf attack against military horses and, on the same stormy night, Gasmai pulling on a wolf's tail caught in a tight flock of sheep. As the ice storm and wolf bites bring down Batu, Annaud repeatedly intercuts to Gasmai struggling to hang on, with the strong gale tearing open her fur coat, exposing her snow-white lower body and thighs in medium shots and close-ups—a moment conjoining Death and the Maiden, although the eroticism never quite climaxes into *la petite mort* with Chen.

Their love remains unconsummated in yet another key scene of theatrical condensation approximately seventy-five minutes into the film. In one of their walks, Little Wolf strains to break free to respond to wolf howls in the distance, only to have his instinct suppressed as Chen pulls strenuously on the chain. Enraged, Little Wolf turns and bites Chen. His teeth marks alarm Gasmai who insists on dressing the wound, lest his arm be infected and possibly amputated. Alone in her yurt, Chen confesses his love. But a practical Gasmai rejects him for he will eventually return to Beijing. Instead, she is to marry, with Bilgee's blessing, Bao's brother to help, presumably, cement the relationship between nomads and settlers—a plot twist not in Jiang's novel. The gentle touch to apply ointment to Chen's arm, their low whisper, a fleeting embrace, and a subsequent kiss serve but to tug at the heartstrings of the audience. Little Wolf's natural instinct to howl is obstructed by his owner; the lovers' instinct to unite is also crushed by their "owner," a Beijing that will reclaim Chen in its fold and that has orchestrated Bao and his brethren's push westward.

A Sino-Anglo-Euro transnational metamorphosis of sorts materializes in front of the eyes of global cinema when Jean-Jacques Annaud transforms Jiang Rong's novel by way of Howard Goldblatt's sanitized English translation into, in its release in France, *Le Dernier loup*. Romantic and nostalgic like his Orientalist corpus, including *The Lover* (1992) and *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), Annaud's film taps into pressing ecological and environmental concerns of the West, while downplaying the original novel's nationalistic and jingoistic tenor that has appealed to the Chinese public, a tenor the German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin calls "fascist."¹⁰ In his career in the last decade of the last millennium, Annaud used to skirt along the edges of the Chinese empire: first tinkering with the French author Marguerite Duras' novel on the forbidden love between a Cholon "Chinaman" and a French girl; then revising an Austrian Nazi mountain climber's memoirs of his years spent with the teenage Dalai Lama. By way of Vietnam and Tibet, Annaud now enters into the heart of the Middle Kingdom, filming a Chinese best-seller set in Inner Mongolia with joint Chinese-French financing, specifically, from China Film Company, Beijing Forbidden City Company, and Repérage, in that order as the credits roll. As Jiang's protagonist Chen Zhen seeks to access the realm of the wolf

¹⁰ See Qian Meng and Noritah Omar as well as the Wolfgang Kubin entry in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Kubin#cite_note-10.

totem via Little Wolf, resulting in the cub's death, Annaud has found a way, through aesthetic cinematography and exquisite filmmaking, to de-sinologize Jiang and de-fang the new wolf from the East for global cinema. The de-fanging of Jiang's ethnocentrism is endorsed, or at least uncensored, by Chinese sponsors, who understand the possible adverse effect of baring "red [in] tooth and claw" to the world.¹¹

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¹¹ See Tennyson's *In Memoriam*: "Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation's final law / Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek'd against his creed."

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Testimoni dei macelli. Esseri umani e animali nella poesia di Ivano Ferrari

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Abstract



Quando le rappresentazioni e le simbologie animali ridimensionano e mettono in discussione lo statuto umano, ci si trova di fronte al passaggio dal *teriomorfismo* alla *questione animale*. Ciò significa che, da semplici tropi, le figure animali divengono operatori epistemologici che forzano un ripensamento dell'antropocentrismo e mettono in luce i limiti dello specismo. Le raccolte di poesie *Macello* (2004) e *La Morte Moglie* (2013) di Ivano Ferrari sono, all'interno della letteratura italiana, tra i più recenti ed intensi esempi di questo passaggio dal teriomorfismo alla questione animale. Queste poesie costituiscono un diario in presa diretta del periodo che Ivano Ferrari ha trascorso come operaio al mattatoio di Belfiore, presso Mantova. La sua scrittura testimonia le tensioni presenti nel rapporto umano-animale quando questi, fuori e dentro il mattatoio, diventano rispettivamente carnefice e vittima, svelando anche i profondi legami tra crudeltà verso l'animale (interspecifica) e crudeltà verso l'umano (intraspecifica). I componimenti di Ferrari mostrano inoltre come, proprio nell'inumanità dello spazio del mattatoio, sia possibile un contatto con l'animale che riduce la distanza tra specie causata dall'antropocentrismo.

Keywords: Anti-specismo; eco-femminismo; painismo; poesia italiana; post-umano; macellazione animale; studi sull'animalità.

Abstract

When animal representations and symbols reconfigure and challenge human status, we are then confronted with a transition from theriomorphism to the so-called Animal Question. This means that, from simple tropes, animal figures become epistemological operators that force a reconsideration of anthropocentrism and highlight the limits of speciesism. Ivano Ferrari's poetry collections *Macello* (2004) and *La morte moglie* (2013) are, within Italian literature, among the most recent and intense examples of this shift from theriomorphism to the Animal Question. The poems constitute a type of diary of the period Ferrari spent working in the abattoir in Belfiore, near Mantua. His writing bears witness to the tensions present in the relationship between humans and animals when, inside and outside of the slaughterhouse, they become respectively executioner and victim, revealing even the profound links between cruelty to the animal (interspecific) and cruelty to the human (intraspecific). Ferrari's compositions also show how, precisely in the inhumane space of the slaughterhouse, contact with the animal is possible, contact that reduces that distance between species caused by anthropocentrism.

Keywords: Animal Studies; Anti-speciesism; Ecofeminism; Italian Poetry; Painism; Posthumanism; Slaughterhouse.

Resumen

Cuando las representaciones y símbolos de animales reconfiguran y cuestionan el estatus de lo humano, nos enfrentamos a la transición del teriomorfismo a la llamada Cuestión Animal. Esto significa que las figuras animales pasan de ser simples tropos a operadores epistemológicos que fuerzan una reconsideración del antropocentrismo y resaltan los límites del especismo. Los

poemarios *Macello* (2004) y *La morte moglie* (2013) de Ivano Ferrari se encuentran, dentro de la literatura italiana, entre los ejemplos más recientes e intensos de este cambio del teriormofismo hacia la Cuestión Animal. Los poemas constituyen un tipo de diario del periodo que Ferrari pasó trabajando en el matadero en Belfiore, cerca de Mantua. Su escritura da testimonio de las tensiones contemporáneas en la relación entre humanos y animales cuando, dentro y fuera del matadero, estos se vuelven verdugo y víctima respectivamente, revelando inclusive los profundos vínculos entre crueldad hacia los animales (inter-específico) y crueldad al humano (intra-específico). Las composiciones de Ferrari también muestran cómo, precisamente en el espacio inhumano del matadero, el contacto con lo animal es posible, un contacto que reduce la distancia entre las especies causado por el antropocentrismo.

Palabras clave: Estudios Animales; anti-especismo; ecofeminismo; poesía italiana; dolorismo; post-humanismo; matadero.

“If we enter a slaughterhouse we do so through the writings of someone else who entered for us”
Carol Adams

Echi dal mattatoio

Ci sono luoghi di cui sappiamo poco. Spazi organizzati in modo da non essere completamente accessibili. Non mi riferisco a spazi impervi, selvaggi, pericolosi, irraggiungibili, o segreti. Sono spazi comuni, tutti intorno a noi, vicinissimi ma costruiti per essere altrove. Spazi in cui non ci fanno entrare, o spazi in cui non vogliamo entrare. Spazi che sono intrinsecamente difficili da osservare, e quindi difficili da raccontare. La prigione, il manicomio, l'ospedale sono alcuni di questi. Michel Foucault è stato il primo che ce li ha fatti veramente notare. E che ci ha aiutato a riconsiderare. Ad esempio ci ha raccontato che la prigione non è propriamente un luogo, ma un meccanismo. Un efficiente meccanismo che permette al potere disciplinare di identificare il delinquente come parassita e di trasformarlo in un corpo docile. Un meccanismo che opera nel silenzio e nell'opacità dello spazio carcerario, e di cui diamo per scontata la funzione civilizzatrice (Foucault).

Ce ne sono molti altri di questi spazi, comuni e inaccessibili: la caserma, la fabbrica, la fogna, il parlamento. Ma ce n'è uno con cui, se ci pensiamo veramente, siamo più a contatto di altri, con cui la relazione è più diretta e allo stesso tempo più distante. Più diretta perché è uno degli spazi che ci nutre. Più distante perché luogo invisibile, ignorato, dimenticato, rimosso. Questo spazio è il mattatoio.

Sono pochi quelli che, pur avendo avuto accesso al mattatoio, hanno saputo raccontare come questo spazio è costruito e organizzato. Uno dei più celebri (e celebrati) resoconti sul mattatoio è *The Jungle* di Upton Sinclair, in cui sono narrate le ingiustizie subite sia dal bestiame che dagli operai nei mattatoi dello Union Stock Yards di Chicago. Un romanzo talmente popolare e influente da aver spinto l'opinione pubblica americana a esigere, con successo, nuove leggi per la salvaguardia degli operai e della qualità del cibo. L'opera infatti non era stata redatta da Sinclair come protesta contro il maltrattamento animale ma come denuncia delle pessime condizioni igieniche in cui la carne veniva lavorata e del

precario stato fisico, psicologico ed economico dei lavoratori del mattatoio. Meno conosciuto, ma non meno importante, è il racconto “How to Build a Slaughterhouse” di Richard Selzer. Selzer scrive che lo spazio del mattatoio è uno spazio pulsante, vitale, perché la sua architettura è mutabile e flessibile: pareti separatrici mobili, locali di lavorazione contigui ma separati dai locali di macellazione, superfici facilmente lavabili. Si tratta di una strategia architettonica necessaria a poter continuamente decidere cosa mostrare del processo di macellazione, e cosa nascondere (116). Lo spazio del mattatoio ha una funzione attiva anche nello “sterilizzare”¹ la mente degli operai, che non devono percepirlo come uno spazio di morte (120). Per questo esistono pareti, superfici, corridoi e stanze progettate per separare il lavoro dalla percezione della morte degli animali, e per trasformare gli animali da esseri viventi in esseri “mai vivi,” che non vengono quindi uccisi ma semplicemente “trasformati” (122).

Un'altra importante fonte di informazioni sul mattatoio è la raccolta di saggi *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* curata da Paula Young Lee. Influenzata dalle già menzionate ricerche di Foucault, questa raccolta indaga le ragioni per cui il mattatoio sia diventato uno spazio culturalmente al margine della nostra conoscenza, se non addirittura un vero e proprio tabù culturale (242). Culturalmente al margine perché il processo di uccisione degli animali richiede una forma di violenza di cui non si vuole essere partecipi sia per ripugnanza, sia per vergogna del desiderio tutto basso e corporale di consumare carne animale, sia per un sentimento di responsabilità e colpa nei riguardi della sofferenza animale. Gli autori di *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* non dimenticano inoltre di notare che nel mattatoio si è perfezionata la produzione di carne secondo metodi industriali, una pratica che testimonia il sempre più ampio distacco tra l'umano, le tecniche di produzione di cibo e i ritmi della natura. All'interno del mattatoio, il controllo altamente tecnologico sulla produzione di cibo tipico della modernità non si esibisce quindi in uno spazio di conquista ma, sintomaticamente, in uno spazio di sofferenza (7).

Questa sofferenza animale è il tema principale di due altre opere che hanno saputo dare precisa testimonianza dello spazio del mattatoio: il libro *Every Twelve Seconds* di Timothy Pachirat e il documentario *Earthlings* di Shaun Monson. Queste due testimonianze, più di altre, presentano un elemento chiave nella descrizione dello spazio del mattatoio: la pratica diretta, da parte dell'autore/testimone, della macellazione animale. Il testimone è il macellaio. Pachirat e gli operatori di *Earthlings* (con le loro videocamere nascoste) si sono trasformati in addetti alla macellazione per poter attraversare quella linea decisiva che nello spazio del mattatoio separa il visitatore dal lavoratore, e che li ha resi testimoni diretti del mattatoio. Attraversata quella linea, l'opacità del mattatoio si dirada, e il suo essere altrove si trasforma nel qui e ora. Da spazio osservato si trasforma in spazio

¹ Traduzione mia. Se non indicato diversamente in bibliografia, le traduzioni delle citazioni dai testi originali sono tutte mie.

vissuto, rendendo la testimonianza di Pachirat e degli altri un'autobiografia. Questo passaggio è decisivo in quanto il mattatoio è parte integrante non solo della biografia di questi coraggiosi macellai-testimoni ma della biografia di ognuno di noi. Il loro racconto ci mostra che il mattatoio non è distante, non è estraneo. Questo spazio ci nutre, è letteralmente parte di noi, ed è per questo parte integrante della nostra stessa biografia. Il desiderare carne, l'esigere carne, e il consumare carne rende anche noi *addetti* alla macellazione, parte integrante del meccanismo produttivo e culturale del mattatoio. Anzi, la parte più decisiva, in quanto il mattatoio esiste *per* noi, su nostra diretta o indiretta richiesta. Per questo Pachirat e gli altri macellai-testimoni ci ricordano con la loro opera che il mattatoio è lo spazio fisico e culturale che più ci appartiene.

Anche in Italia esistono esempi, seppur esigui, di artisti ed intellettuali che si sono occupati direttamente del mattatoio. Voglio brevemente menzionare lo studio di Massimo Filippi e Filippo Trasatti *Crimini in Tempo di Pace*, un'ampia e profonda analisi dell'ideologia di dominio che lega mondo umano e mondo animale. Nelle pagine dedicate allo spazio del mattatoio, Filippi e Trasatti ci spiegano che nel mattatoio si mette cruentemente e silenziosamente in mostra l'esito dello specismo, cioè del pregiudizio che la specie *Homo sapiens* sia superiore a tutte le altre (47).² Prendendo poi spunto dalla lettura di *The Jungle* di Sinclair, Filippi e Trasatti sottolineano che nello spazio del mattatoio si manifesta in pratica quello sfruttamento umano e animale su cui si fonda il sistema capitalista. Scrivono i due autori che "per poter funzionare alla velocità che gli è necessaria per sopravvivere, il capitalismo ha bisogno innanzi tutto di un tempo sincrono e di uno spazio amorfo" e che il mattatoio è organizzato appunto secondo questa necessità del sistema capitalista (58). Nel mattatoio industriale che ci aveva per la prima volta descritto Sinclair, il tempo sincrono è quel continuo, orrifico presente in cui gli animali mai vivi attendono la loro trasformazione. E lo spazio del mattatoio è necessariamente spazio amorfo del capitalismo perché non deve presentare identità o segni di riconoscimento. Se questi infatti esistessero, se il mattatoio avesse forma e identità, questa sarebbe un'identità di dominio, sofferenza e morte. Tre segni identitari che se visibili interferirebbero con il costante consumo della carne-merce necessario al meccanismo del capitalismo (59).

La seconda opera italiana che voglio telegraficamente menzionare è il celebre racconto "Una mattinata ai macelli" di Carlo Emilio Gadda. Come Filippi e Trasatti, anche Gadda vede nel mattatoio uno spazio di produzione di merce integrato perfettamente nell'ingranaggio capitalista (11). In aggiunta, Gadda registra anche come sia necessario che nel mattatoio l'animale non sia percepito come essere vivente ma come oggetto, movimentato da operai che appaiono "come i facchini delle stazioni" (12). Ritorna anche qui il tema del mattatoio come spazio

² Per una più dettagliata definizione ed analisi dello specismo rimando alle seguenti opere: Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Toward Speciesism* (1989); Richard Ryder, *The Political Animal: The Conquest of Speciesism* (1998); Richard Ryder, *Speciesism, Painism and Happiness* (2011).

amorfo senza identità: “il luogo, nel sole tiepido, non è altra cosa se non un mercato, uno ‘stabilimento’ qualunque” (14). Lo spazio è amorfo anche perché organizzato in modo da sottrarre allo sguardo dell’umano l’identità dell’animale. Questa mancanza di identità dell’animale è il lubrificante più potente che possa facilitare lo scivolamento lungo i piani inclinati del mattatoio verso il *killing floor*. Gadda sembra voler provare a esorcizzare questa sottrazione d’identità che semplifica e normalizza la morte dell’animale. E lo fa con lo strumento della letteratura stessa, dicendoci che ogni animale possiede un’identità nella propria storia, un’individuale biografia, e che anche noi possiamo leggerla. Ai macelli Gadda riconosce un “romanzo-toro” che testimonia nei movimenti un’esistenza nobile e un passato di eventi significativi che non solo gli restituiscono identità, ma lo sottraggono idealmente dall’eterno presente della linea di macellazione popolata da animali tutti identici (13). Il suo passato lo rende storia, “romanzo,” e quindi individuo. In questo modo Gadda fa emergere come nello spazio del mattatoio si consuma la riduzione ideologica ed economica di un individuo in materia. L’animale invece non è oggetto semplice, merce, ma soggetto che prima di essere ucciso era “il costoso elaborato delle epoche, disceso di germine in germine traverso i millenni” e che nel mattatoio “è annichilito da un attimo rosso” (15).

Ivano Ferrari. Testimone

Chi ci ha saputo raccontare meglio di tutti, in Italia, che cos’è un mattatoio, è stato il poeta Ivano Ferrari. Lo ha fatto attraverso due raccolte di poesie: *Macello* (2004) e *La morte moglie* (2013).³

Come per Pachirat e per gli operatori di *Eathlings*, anche per Ferrari il mattatoio è diventato parte della propria biografia: a metà degli anni Settanta, Ferrari ha lavorato per alcuni anni al mattatoio comunale di Mantova. In questo luogo, ha sentito l’urgenza di testimoniare quello che vedeva e sentiva: la sofferenza, il degrado, la morte, ma anche la vitalità, la sacralità e il riscatto dell’esistenza, sia animale che umana. La sua testimonianza ha preso la forma di brevi, a volte brevissimi componimenti, dallo stile e dalla struttura uniformi, tanto da formare un unico organico poemetto. La prima parte di questo poemetto è contenuta nel libro *Macello*, che raccoglie poesie scritte durante il periodo di lavoro al mattatoio, ritrovate e pubblicate quasi trent’anni più tardi. La seconda parte si trova in *La morte moglie*, che raccoglie sia ulteriori poesie ritrovate risalenti al periodo di lavoro al mattatoio, sia più recenti componimenti scritti in morte della moglie. In questo secondo libro Ferrari conclude quindi la sua testimonianza dal mattatoio affiancando al dolore animale quello umano. Non solo questi due dolori sono equivalenti, ma sono altrettanto intimi, perché a scomparire nella morte, sia umana che animale, è la materia di cui ognuno di noi è costituito: “muore sta morendo la materia / enorme ombra d’alfabeto” (LMM 87). Ciò che

³ D’ora in poi indicati rispettivamente come M e LMM.

sopravvive di questa morte condivisa è una traccia linguistica, quella “ombra d’alfabeto” che Ferrari cerca di mantenere viva attraverso la sua opera poetica. Una materia che morendo porta con sé umano ed animale, ma non la testimonianza lasciata della loro equivalente esistenza e sofferenza.

Affiancando la morte umana a quella animale, e specialmente la morte di chi si ama a quella di un qualsiasi altro essere vivente, Ferrari attacca il pregiudizio di superiorità specista e ci mette in contatto con il painismo, cioè con quella convinzione filosofica che considera il dolore come il limite morale nell’interazione con il vivente. Il dolore è una sensazione universale e un’esperienza negativa transpecifica che l’umano e l’animale condividono e comprendono. La sofferenza umana e animale non presentano differenze in quanto in entrambi i casi si tratta di sofferenza della materia. E se la sofferenza umana vuole essere moralmente evitata o limitata, altrettanto vale per quella animale.⁴

Per quanto riguarda lo spazio del mattatoio e le pratiche di macellazione, Ferrari ce le descrive in entrambi i libri in modo netto, quasi scientifico, con infiltrazioni di descrizioni minuziose fino all’ossessione, incastonate dall’uso sistematico dell’indicativo presente: “la presenza di bollicine d’aria / di vario volume / (in genere da un grano di miglio ad un pisello) / disposte in linea serliata / nei setti connettivi interglobulari / si trovano sovente sotto la pleura” (M 51). In particolare il costante uso del tempo presente ci rimette in contatto con quel tempo sincrono con cui la produzione di carne viene portata a compimento, e con essa la sofferenza e la morte animale, secondo la necessità del meccanismo capitalista. Si tratta dello stesso tempo sincrono al cui ritmo tutti i mattatoi scandiscono il loro operare, sia quello di cui Ferrari è testimone, sia tutti quelli operativi prima, dopo, in qualsiasi momento e in qualsiasi parte del mondo. Il costante uso dell’indicativo presente ci informa che la testimonianza che emerge dalla poesia di Ferrari è valida per qualsiasi mattatoio perché la macellazione animale, sempre identica a sé stessa, avviene costantemente ed è, seppur celata, costantemente presente. Il mattatoio è qui, è ora, è sempre. È la continua, lenta, interminabile fila di esseri viventi mai vivi in attesa di essere trasformati: “Tutti in fila / nudi / appena sporchi di letame / attendono la perfezione / balbettando proteste” (M 5).

Il mattatoio che ci descrive Ferrari è uno spazio reale, ma a volte è inteso anche come spazio metaforico. Non a caso una delle due raccolte si intitola *Macello*. Perché *macello*, rispetto a *mattatoio*, incorpora un sovrasenso decisivo nel definire il messaggio etico e politico presente in molte di queste poesie. Oggi il termine mattatoio indica generalmente un luogo in cui si crede che la macellazione sia effettuata secondo criteri di funzionalità, efficienza e sterilità. Nel mattatoio l’animale viene percepito come semplice bene materiale che passa attraverso un

⁴ Per approfondire il concetto di painismo e la relazione tra sofferenza umana e sofferenza animale, si veda Richard Ryder, *Speciesism, Painism and Happiness*, e Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*.

processo di raffinamento. La morte dell'animale sembrerebbe asettica e depurata dal dolore. Il trauma è come disinfettato dalla visione degli acciai, dei coltelli chirurgici, dei guanti di gomma, dei getti di acqua bollente, dei vapori di soda caustica che il termine mattatoio spesso ispira. Rispetto a mattatoio, macello è invece parola più antica (risale infatti al quattordicesimo secolo) e in questa sua più lunga pratica d'uso ha assorbito e adottato i significati di *confusione*, *disordine*, *scempio*, *disastro*, perfino *massacro* e *caos*. Il macello non rimanda al campo semantico dell'ordine e della sterilità, ma a quello del sangue e della carneficina. E soprattutto—e credo sia questo che interessi soprattutto a Ferrari—il titolo della sua opera fa riferimento anche ad altri *macelli*, ovvero a tutti quegli altri luoghi in cui si fa esperienza di un trauma. Il macello di Ferrari è sì un mattatoio, ma rappresenta anche tutti quegli spazi in cui si manifesta la sofferenza, sia per l'uomo che per gli animali. Spesso, nelle poesie di Ferrari, questa sofferenza, questa condivisione di *macelli*, diviene l'aspetto che avvicina l'uomo all'animale, e in questo processo l'uomo stesso sembra divenire più *umano*, più sensibile alla sofferenza dell'altro essere vivente: "Ho chiesto al vigile sanitario / se era possibile salvare / l'asino malato, / ho detto che mi capitava di rado / la pietà" (LMM 13).

Passando in rassegna il mattatoio come luogo che rimanda metaforicamente ad altri macelli, va notato che in queste poesie di Ferrari sono ad esempio presenti versi che evocano immagini della guerra ("Un porco sgozzato mi intima: / parola d'ordine!" M 39), dello sterminio di massa ("non si annusa il gas della morte" M 57), degli scontri di classe ("pellai, insaccatori e necrofori, / la classe operaia." LMM 31). Il mattatoio emerge quindi dalla testimonianza di Ferrari come luogo reale e metaforico che contiene e rappresenta altri macelli, altri luoghi e pratiche di sofferenza: la violenza verso l'animale (interspecifica) appare in queste poesie legata alla violenza verso l'umano (intraspecifica), cioè la macellazione animale si connette e ci connette con le violenze che gli uomini infliggono ai propri simili. Nel capitolo successivo di questo saggio mi soffermerò sul tema specifico del rapporto tra sessismo e specismo che riguarda appunto questo legame tra logiche di dominio inter e intraspecifiche.

Carno-sado-porno

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams ha mostrato le connessioni tra sessismo e specismo, e in particolare tra il dominio intraspecifico maschile e il dominio interspecifico legato al consumo di carne animale. Analizzando varie rappresentazioni mediatiche di corpi femminili e corpi animali, Adams ha fatto emergere come le immagini pornografiche spesso propongono la donna dominata attraverso simbologie e metafore derivate dall'allevamento animale e dalla produzione di carne: il corpo femminile è incatenato, bloccato da collari, legato da corde, cappi e altri strumenti di controllo, tortura e dominio, che decisamente connettono il piacere sadico maschile al dominio umano sull'animale (43).

Quell'oppressione della donna che passa attraverso il consumo del suo corpo come oggetto di piacere, passa decisamente anche attraverso un'animalizzazione che è preludio alla sua oggettificazione. La donna "vacca" e "cagna" è rappresentata pornograficamente come animale dominato, il cui corpo non è altro che un "pezzo di carne" da consumare. Attraverso questo processo di animalizzazione e mercificazione, l'individuo donna diventa "assente" e sostituito dalle singole parti anatomiche—selezionate come fossero tagli prelibati—che la fantasia pornografica maschilista individua come fonti di piacere: i seni, la vagina, ecc. (58). La donna dominata non ha più volto, non ha più identità, in quanto disumanizzata dall'animalizzazione e dalla divisione del suo corpo in sezioni erotiche e *tagli* pornografici. Grazie all'assenza di identità il maschio mette più facilmente in atto il suo progetto di dominio sulla donna rappresentata come inferiore e mantenuta tale nelle pratiche sadistiche. Adams definisce questa disumanizzazione e perdita di soggettività come "referente assente" (40-43): nelle immagini erotiche e pornografiche l'identità femminile viene rimossa dal corpo femminile per poterne giustificare la sottomissione e goderne a pieno il piacere sadico. L'elemento umano è il referente assente del corpo femminile ridotto a carne. Il legame tra sessismo e specismo, secondo Carol Adams, sta proprio qui: così come l'umano/donna è il referente assente nella rappresentazione pornografica e nell'abuso del corpo femminile, così l'animale è il referente assente nella produzione di carne. All'origine del prodotto commestibile non è percepita la presenza di alcun essere vivente. Così sintetizza quest'ultimo aspetto l'autrice americana: "Attraverso la macellazione, gli animali diventano referenti assenti. Perché possa esistere la carne, il nome e il corpo dell'animale deve essere reso assente *in quanto animale*. Le vite degli animali precedono e permettono l'esistenza della carne. Se gli animali sono vivi questi non possono essere carne. Quindi un corpo morto prende il posto di un animale vivo" (40).

Secondo una strategia tipica del sessismo quindi, anche l'animale come la donna deve perdere identità e diventare merce prima di essere consumato. Questa prassi è uno degli elementi fondanti della macellazione, e *conditio sine qua non* del mattatoio. Nelle sue poesie Ferrari registra questa condizione di oggettificazione dell'animale e la combatte provando a ridare all'animale una qualche forma d'identità. L'oggettificazione emerge specialmente quando Ferrari osserva i suoi colleghi, "strane creature" che lavorando "come minatori" trasformano gli animali in "parchi nutrimenti" (M 21). L'animale non esiste nella concezione del macellaio se non come nutrimento: l'animale è assente e sostituito dalla sua funzione di cibo. L'essere vivente è ridotto a oggetto, rendendo il lavoro del macellaio simile a quella di un minatore: entrambi lavorano con elementi inanimati. Ferrari tenta di resistere a questo processo e spinge i suoi versi alla ricerca di una resa identità all'animale, nel tentativo di rendere il referente animale, prima assente, presente invece ora a sé e al lettore. L'occasione arriva con la descrizione della fuga di un toro che "erra sul cavalcavia" alla ricerca della libertà e che invece di essere

macellato nel mattatoio viene come giustiziato da un plotone di esecuzione di “carabinieri coi mitra” (M 25). La sua morte inusuale, fuori dal mattatoio, sfuggendo a quello spazio sfugge anche al meccanismo di oggettificazione: il toro si riappropria, nella fuga, della sua identità di essere vivente. Un’identità che si materializza sia nella fuga come desiderio di sopravvivere alla macellazione, sia nel momento della morte, quando l’animale “sussurra qualcosa alle mosche” (M 25). In quel sussurrare è presente una spinta di vitalità, una disperata volontà di comunicazione, uno slancio di sopravvivenza, e soprattutto un’ultima testimonianza di sofferenza. Tutti atti che ci conducono a riconoscere in lui un singolo essere vivente capace di sentire, desiderare, soffrire, e non un esanime pezzo di carne.

Tornando alle tesi di Carol Adams, si deve aggiungere che per la scrittrice americana il rapporto tra sessismo e specismo non sta solamente in questa parallela condizione di referente assente tra la donna e l’animale. La perdita di identità che deriva dall’assenza del referente è solo l’inizio di queste prassi di dominio inter- e intraspecifiche. La riflessione più stimolante che emerge da *The Sexual Politics of Meat* riguarda infatti la tensione erotica presente nella macellazione e che ci porta a una conclusione particolarmente interessante: quando nello spazio del mattatoio si comunicano metafore sessuali, si mettono in pratica feticismi, si sovrappongono macellazione ed erotismo, allora il referente assente della carne non è l’animale, ma la donna (43 e 59). Significa cioè che il dominio sull’animale, oltre a riguardare una pregiudiziale superiorità di specie e un meccanismo di produzione e consumo capitalista, riguarda anche una forma di piacere sadico e di perversione sessuale. Carol Adams ci porta qualche esempio, e più che su azioni specifiche si concentra su rappresentazioni erotiche particolarmente popolari negli spazi dove si mette in pratica il dominio sugli animali. In particolare la scrittrice fa riferimento a poster e calendari ideati per un pubblico di allevatori, macellai e negozianti in cui all’animale, rappresentato in pose sensuali, viene sovrapposto un tipico immaginario erotico maschile (39, 41, 58). Sul dominio e sullo sfruttamento dell’animale si concentrano pulsioni erotiche simili a quelle presenti nell’interazione sadica con il femminile. La macellazione eccita le zone erogene della logica di dominio del maschio umano. Ivano Ferrari ci porta esempi ancora più precisi e ci mostra in numerosi dei suoi componimenti quanto complesso e profondo sia il rapporto tra macellazione ed erotismo, tra violenza sull’animale e piacere sessuale, tra macello e bordello.

Alla relazione simmetrica tra rappresentazioni pornografiche femminili e animali è dedicata proprio la poesia che apre *Macello*, a segnalare che il trittico carno-sado-porno si presenta come elemento fondamentale sia nella sua opera poetica che nello spazio del mattatoio, come il suo più vero peccato originale: “Lo stanzino in fondo allo spogliatoio / è detto delle seghe / affisse a tre pareti foto di donne / dalla vagina glabra / nell’altra il manifesto di una vacca / che svela con differenti colori / i suoi tagli prelibati.” (M 3). Nell’architettura e organizzazione

stessa del mattatoio si presenta uno spazio espressamente dedicato al consumo autoerotico delle immagini femminili e animali. La tensione sessuale che monta durante le fasi della macellazione trova sfogo in un luogo appartato, isolato all'interno dell'isolamento del mattatoio, a mostrare che il godimento che passa attraverso il dominio sull'animale/donna si pratica nello spazio più nascosto del mattatoio, un nucleo oscuro nella sua architettura, su cui Ferrari trova necessario fare luce immediatamente all'inizio della sua testimonianza poetica. In questa poesia la relazione tra corpo femminile e animale, e in particolare l'animale come referente assente nel corpo erotico femminile, emerge nella corrispondenza tra i versi "dalla vagina glabra" e "i suoi tagli prelibati": la selezione di un elemento anatomico femminile come stimolo erotico avviene secondo la stessa prassi di selezione dei tranci di carne. Il corpo femminile è goduto in quanto carne selezionata e dominata, e la carne animale è goduta in quanto referente della dominazione sul corpo femminile. In questa poesia infine, il connubio tra violenza sull'animale e piacere sessuale si materializza nel termine "seghe" al secondo verso. Il termine indica l'atto della masturbazione e allo stesso tempo evoca gli strumenti utilizzati per sezionare l'animale macellato, per ridurlo in quelle parti discrete quanto le sezioni erotiche femminili, e per ridurne l'identità da essere vivente a prodotto alimentare. La *sega* è il fine ma anche il mezzo di quella dominazione sull'animale che si gioca nello spazio erotico del mattatoio.

In numerosi altri componimenti Ferrari rappresenta inoltre con sintomatica insistenza la tensione sessuale presente nelle diverse fasi della macellazione. Ad esempio spesso gli animali sono descritti con precisi elementi sensuali, come le vitelle appese ai ganci che "si pavoneggiano" (M 31), le "flessuose manzardine" che sorridono (M 82), la "vitella elegante" (LMM 8) e le "bovine ninfomani" (M 72). Questa tensione emerge anche dai movimenti degli operai del mattatoio le cui mani, mentre "scorticano" un animale dissanguato "acconciano la carne viva / di una praticante" (M 46) mettendo di nuovo in diretta relazione la macellazione con l'atto sessuale, e riducendo ancora una volta la donna a ritaglio di macelleria. Ferrari testimonia anche il rapporto sadico che intercorre direttamente tra il dominatore umano e la vittima animale, quando ad esempio descrive un cavallo "ballerino culattone" che viene sodomizzato dal bastone di un operaio e la cui morte avviene "offrendo schizzi organici / al suo inseducibile violentatore" (M 71). All'interno del mattatoio l'umano ha assunto a questo punto l'identità dello stupratore e i suoi gesti sono letteralmente *violenza carnale*, in quanto la violenza e il piacere sessuale che ne deriva, messi sadisticamente in pratica nello spazio del mattatoio, sono elementi imprescindibili della carne animale che consumiamo. L'uomo dominatore e stupratore dell'animale, catalizzatore del godimento nella macellazione, resta comunque "inseducibile," in quanto da questo rapporto di piacere non emerge nessun tipo di avvicinamento all'animale. Il piacere sessuale, in quanto sadico, e la rappresentazione erotica della macellazione, in quanto pornografica, non lasciano nessuna chance di intimità. Neppure a un'intimità di

tipo perverso. La distanza tra umano e animale è invece dilatata e lo specismo è rafforzato proprio da questo violento godimento nella sofferenza e nella morte animale che drammaticamente connette lo specismo al sessismo.

Un imbarazzato e goffo tentativo di avvicinamento cerca di metterlo in pratica lo stesso Ferrari: “Per provare la febbre al macellando / si introduce un termometro nel retto / o a scelta (se femmina) nella vagina / questa operazione è fatta senza guanti / e non si fa fatica ad infilare / assieme allo strumento un bigliettino / di versi scarabocchiati prima” (M 73). Queste stesse poesie scritte durante le ore di lavoro al macello vogliono essere il tramite di un diverso rapporto con l’alterità animale, di un avvicinamento al dolore della condizione dei non-umani nel mattatoio. Ma i “versi scarabocchiati” arrivano al contatto con l’altro attraverso un tentativo maldestro, una pratica veterinaria scorretta “fatta senza guanti” che richiama più l’immagine dello stupro e dell’ennesima violenza che quella dell’intimità e dell’incontro. Ferrari ci suggerisce con questo componimento che anche la buona intenzione di testimoniare dal mattatoio ricade inevitabilmente in un gesto brutale. Quasi che la violenza interspecifica, anche quando denunciata, sia così radicata nel genere umano da essere inevitabilmente sempre messa in pratica. Si tratta inoltre di una violenza interspecifica che nel mattatoio produce inesorabilmente pratiche che si legano a doppio filo con la violenza intraspecifica: donare la poesia all’animale passa attraverso la penetrazione della sua carne, attraverso una forma di stupro che rende impossibile qualsiasi comunicazione con il non-umano, secondo una stessa forma di violenza con cui si sottomette e viola il corpo femminile. Specismo e sessismo si intrecciano di nuovo in un componimento che nel testimoniare il mattatoio si contamina della stessa violenza che questo luogo perpetua.

Animalizzarsi

Abbiamo appena visto come il dominio e il godimento sadico del femminile passi attraverso una sua animalizzazione ovvero, come ci insegna Carol Adams, l’animale diventa il referente assente nelle rappresentazioni erotico-pornografiche della donna. L’implicita o esplicita animalizzazione dell’umano in generale si presenta quindi come un meccanismo retorico di potere che, dando per scontato che la condizione animale è un *abbassamento* dell’umano, giustifica il controllo su quegli individui *ridotti* ad animali. Giorgio Agamben ha analizzato questo meccanismo considerandolo come lo strumento più tipico del potere bio-politico moderno e lo ha rinominato “macchina antropologica,” a indicare che si tratta di un elemento costituente della condizione antropologica stessa.⁵ Insomma come specie *Homo sapiens* ci viene naturale controllare, sottomettere, tormentare e sterminare altri esseri umani etichettandoli come specie inferiori.

⁵ Faccio qui riferimento a Agamben, *L'Aperto. L'Uomo e l'Animale* (2002). E a Agamben, *Lo Stato di Eccezione* (2003).

Esiste però anche un'animalizzazione che potremmo definire positiva e che si presenta generalmente in tre forme: nella sua prima iterazione si tratta di un innalzamento della condizione umana a quella animale, per cui si considera l'animale superiore all'uomo e quindi un ideale da imitare o raggiungere; la seconda forma spinge invece per un'emersione dell'elemento animale da sempre presente all'interno dell'umano, che vuole restituire l'animalità perduta ad una condizione antropologica considerata incompleta se privata del suo nucleo selvatico; infine la terza forma considera un'animalizzazione dell'umano come condizione necessaria all'avvicinamento e al dialogo con l'alterità animale, come tentativo di contatto interspecifico in cui l'umano cerca di evolvere verso una condizione di apertura all'eterospecifico, auspicata da posizioni filosofiche post-umaniste.⁶

In questo capitolo mi soffermerò proprio su questo ultimo aspetto, sull'animalizzazione dell'umano come processo di riduzione della distanza dal non-umano, e su quali possono essere le conseguenze di tale animalizzazione sull'*inumanità* dello spazio del mattatoio. Nelle sue poesie Ferrari ci dà infatti più volte testimonianza di quanto il mattatoio diventi un luogo privilegiato per l'emersione dell'inumano; in questo contesto si intende l'inumano come mancanza di comprensione della condizione umana e animale, e come assenza di compassione verso la sofferenza di cui l'animale fa esperienza nel mattatoio. Questa inumanità prende spesso le forme di cinica violenza: "Dare alla bestia / più botte / di quante ne regga, / ghignare / quando si rende conto / che sta per morire" (LMM 15). Altre volte si manifesta come abissale distacco dal dolore animale di cui l'umano è diretta causa e testimone: "La bestia morente / agonizza da sola / perché nessuna cosa / avviene tra le braccia" (LMM 17). In diversi componimenti la morte dell'animale appare come un avvenimento separato, a cui solo l'animale partecipa, in doloroso segreto, senza che l'aguzzino presenti alcuna capacità di empatia. La morte animale resta ignota o ignorata, accompagnata dalla fredda inerzia dell'inumano: "Caricata l'arma / il boia dalle orbite verdastre / gli sorride (giaccio tra pezzetti di grasso) / spara. / I segreti si ricompongono / nella estraneità della morte" (M 23).

Animalizzarsi, all'interno del mattatoio, significa quindi resistere all'inumano e cercare un'empatia e un dialogo con la condizione animale che vada anche oltre la semplice pietà, quella "tristezza"—che come scrive Ferrari—"non ci impedisce / di iniziare la macellazione alle sette e trenta precise" (M 32). Animalizzarsi significa incontrare l'animale nello spazio della sua (e nostra) sofferenza per riuscire a interrompere il meccanismo dell'inumanità, dello specismo, della macellazione.

⁶ Mi riferisco specialmente a: Roberto Marchesini, *Post-Human: Verso Nuovi Modelli di Esistenza* (2002); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (2008); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. Malden: Polity Press (2013). Di quest'ultimo mi riferisco in particolare al secondo capitolo.

Per poter meglio analizzare questo processo di animalizzazione voglio prendere in prestito le intuizioni di Donna Haraway. Nella sua intervista con Nicholas Gane, Haraway ci ammonisce innanzitutto che l'animalizzazione prende spesso la forma di un antropomorfismo o di uno zoomorfismo (Gane 143). Significa che l'avvicinamento all'eterospecifico si riduce o ad una attribuzione all'animale di elementi umani con cui abbiamo familiarità (antropomorfismo), o viceversa alla proiezione di caratteristiche di animalità sull'umano (zoomorfismo). Lasciandosi alle spalle queste categorie limitanti, Haraway prospetta la possibilità di un'animalizzazione come nuova categoria di relazioni basate sulla curiosità reciproca che avviene durante l'incontro tra "mortali, situazionali, incessantemente relazionali esseri-nel-mondo" (Gane 143). L'animalizzazione parte perciò da quella curiosità tra esseri viventi che emana dalla loro stessa contingenziale e relazionale esistenza, post-heideggeriani esserci e essere-per-la-morte che azzerano la distanza specista e rendono il contatto tra specie innato e spontaneo. Per Haraway quindi l'animalizzazione è un processo intrinseco all'umano e agli altri viventi, che è inoltre storicamente e biologicamente sempre in atto (Gane 146). Quel che ci resta da fare, in quanto specie umana, sembra essere riuscire a riconoscere questo sistema di relazioni interspecifiche e trarre le conseguenze di un rapporto con l'animale esistente *con* noi, e non *per* noi. Ciò significa che il "noi" non può essere parte di un "noi contro" deve invece divenire un vero e proprio metodo di collaborazione tra quelle che Haraway chiama "specie compagne" (17). Quello che come umani siamo e diventiamo non è qualcosa di acquisibile nell'isolamento, ma nell'incontro con il non-umano, il diverso, l'altro, l'eterospecifico (Haraway 155). A mio avviso, riconoscere questo processo e cercare di mantenere attive queste prassi di incontro significa, per l'umano, animalizzarsi. E questo animalizzarsi significa anche, come spiega esemplarmente Roberto Marchesini, "antropodecentrarsi" e "viaggiare attraverso i piani di realtà" (Caffo e Marchesini 21-22), cioè non certo superare l'umano ma portarlo in contatto con quelle diverse possibilità esistenziali (gli animali) con cui da sempre si è trovato in dialogo, attraverso cui ha anche imparato a relazionarsi con il mondo, e che ora considera invece come oggetti o esistenze inferiori. Antropodecentrandosi la nostra specie ha l'occasione di esplorare altri centri d'esistenza, e di riconoscerli dinamici e validi tanto quanto l'umano. In questa esperienza di animalizzazione si potrà anche scoprire che questi centri di esistenza non sono monadi, ma pulsanti nuclei che si aprono alla reciproca contaminazione. Animalizzarsi significa resistere all'incontaminato, solitario inumano e sporcarsi di realtà, impantanandosi in nuovi mondi, compromettendo la nostra esistenza con quella di innumerevoli altre. È questo il modo secondo cui, anche per Donna Haraway, le specie si incontrano e *insieme* si trasformano, evolvono, non come essere celesti ma come terrestri creature del fango (Haraway 3, 19, 27, 72). E del sangue.

Di questo incontro il mattatoio diviene spazio privilegiato proprio perché qui, come abbiamo già visto, prolifera quell'inumano che la contaminazione tra specie tende a contrastare. Nello spazio del mattatoio avviene anche un contatto tra specie che è drammaticamente fisico, un vero e proprio corpo a corpo interspecifico in cui l'umano si trova forzatamente a contatto con la fisicità dell'esistenza, della sofferenza e della morte animale. Ivano Ferrari è l'umano che di questo drammatico incontro è stato protagonista e testimone, e che con le sue poesie ci offre ulteriore materiale di riflessione per tentare di capire cosa accade quando le specie si incontrano nello spazio del dolore e della morte.

Innanzitutto nello spazio del suo macello Ferrari si accorge di quello che umano e animale condividono, in primis la sofferenza di fronte al dolore fisico, il versare reale e metaforico dello stesso sangue: "Due dita tagliate di netto / quasi una metafora / il sangue uguale all'altro" (M 34). Nel mattatoio un incidente di cui l'umano è vittima diventa episodio epifanico durante il quale si è necessariamente portati a prendere atto che il dolore è elemento condiviso. Emerge l'esistenza di un momento, quello della sofferenza, in cui ci si può incontrare con un'altra specie. La consapevolezza di possedere dell'animale lo stesso sangue, lo stesso corpo, lo stesso sistema nervoso capace dello stesso dolore, appare nella sua banalità, nel suo essere un dato di fatto di cui l'umano aveva accantonato l'esistenza. Questa consapevolezza si manifesta come "un attimo di immobilità, come un ripensamento" (M 34) che per un momento ci antropodecentrizza e ci fa percepire la verità della sofferenza animale, seppur in rapporto alla nostra. Insieme alla sofferenza esiste poi l'esperienza della morte, quella che Ferrari chiama "assoluto" (M 16) e che nei suoi versi spinge l'umano ad una particolare animalizzazione: il poeta assume qualità e atteggiamenti bovini per poter avvicinarsi ad un vitello e seguirlo da vicino nel processo di macellazione. Nel mattatoio l'esperienza della morte appartiene tutta all'animale; solo lui, in quanto vittima, può esserne testimone assoluto. Per il poeta diviene perciò essenziale animalizzarsi per poter cercare di testimoniare quella morte animale che avviene nel mattatoio ma che è identica alla morte, umana o animale, che avviene ovunque: "Tiepido, annuso il culo / del grosso vitello che mi precede / nella corsa verso l'assoluto" (M 16). L'animalizzazione dell'umano consiste qui nella produzione di gesti animali e nella condivisione dello stesso spazio di macellazione, spazio in cui siamo metaforicamente in fila con l'animale, che ci precede nello stesso destino di annullamento. In questo componimento l'animale, precedendoci nella morte, ce la preannuncia. Il suo ruolo diventa quello di testimoniarcì la morte per prepararci ad essa. Per questo, animalizzandosi, il poeta annusa il vitello: per instaurare una comunicazione con l'animale che gli possa permettere uno sguardo sulla morte prima che venga il suo turno. Il nostro turno.

O il turno di chi più amiamo, e con cui abbiamo più condiviso della nostra esistenza. Ivano Ferrari ci propone un'animalizzazione dal profondissimo impatto emotivo e morale nelle poesie dedicate alla malattia e alla morte della moglie. Sono

poesie sull'animalizzazione anche dal punto di vista dell'organizzazione dei componimenti, in quanto la sezione "La morte moglie" che le raccoglie segue direttamente la sezione "Le bestie imperfette" dedicata al mattatoio e alla morte animale. Posizionate una di fianco all'altra, le due parti sono strutturalmente e stilisticamente in simbiosi per formare una singola silloge (*La morte moglie*), che a sua volta completa l'opera iniziata con *Macello*. Le poesie in morte della moglie sono quindi in relazione a quelle in morte dell'animale, in modo organico e senza separazione o interruzione.

Inoltre, attraverso l'animalizzazione della figura della moglie malata, il rapporto tra sofferenza umana e animale appare ancora più intimo, fino a che la separazione interspecifica svanisce per lasciare il posto ad un mondo animalizzato in una sola specie, quella degli esseri viventi che vivono, sentono, soffrono, muoiono. La moglie in agonia si animalizza perché il suo corpo è mostrato appartenere al mattatoio tanto quanto quello animale, anche lei appoggiata "su una grande tavola per essere mangiata" (LMM 43) e del cui corpo, alla fine, non resta nulla "se non un pasto" (LMM 50). Il suo volto diventa un "muso ondoso" (LMM 50) e tra i suoi gesti umani appare quello animale di "leccare il palmo della mano" (LMM 53). Non si tratta di semplici zoomorfismi, in quanto non c'è similitudine né un intento metaforico in questi componimenti. L'umano è biologicamente animale perché *ricosciuto* animale nel momento della sofferenza e della morte. Quello che Ferrari vedeva nel mattatoio gli si ripresenta identico nell'ospedale; una carcassa appesa a un paranco è identica a un corpo sdraiato su una barella. È la conferma delle intuizioni emerse dallo spazio del mattatoio. Uomo e animale soffrono lo stesso dolore a vivono la stessa morte perché specie compagne; ora entrambi sono animalizzati. Nello spazio del mattatoio e dell'ospedale le distanze si azzerano: il vivente, senziente, animale, è uno. L'antropocentrismo deflagra. Lo specismo implode.

Così si legge in un altro componimento di Ferrari, perfetta sintesi del suo antispecismo: "Duro come sangue rappreso / e morbido come il midollo di un vitello / sono così se non addirittura uguale" (LMM 33). Possiamo verificare in questi versi il percorso che oltrepassa la similitudine e giunge all'uguaglianza. Si tratta di un percorso che passa attraverso elementi corporei che con l'animale condividiamo (il sangue e il midollo), filtrati attraverso la sofferenza (il sangue rappreso). Uomo o animale, tutto è ugualmente corpo, carne, materia senziente. E Ferrari cerca costantemente di comunicarlo, in una testimonianza difficile perché proviene comunque da un macellaio, dalla specie che finora si era considerata dominante e che adesso, consapevole, animalizzata, prorompe nel grido "sono agnello anch'io" (LMM 19).

Questa animalizzazione, che è consapevolezza e testimonianza, si trova a questo punto di fronte alla necessità morale di smontare lo spazio del mattatoio e mostrare la possibilità dell'animalizzazione al resto dei macellatori, e ai consumatori di carne. Si tratta di un passaggio che Ferrari lascia appena abbozzato,

sotto forma di ipotesi e domanda: “Se sfondassi il muro della carne / e attaccato al gancio sorridessi / cosa direbbe chi è pagato per squartare / il timbratore di lingue / quale etichetta mi metterebbero / quanti organi scarterebbero / e il veterinario penserebbe panta rei? (LMM 9). L’atto assoluto di questa animalizzazione diventa l’ipotetico auto-sostituirsi alla vittima animale, un sacrificio denso di tensioni cristologiche che, trasformando il mattatoio nello spazio della macellazione umana, potrebbe provocare il cortocircuito. Potrebbe. Perché Ferrari non propone una conseguenza a questo ipotetico immolarsi da animale, ma solo domande. Il meccanismo del mattatoio, dello specismo, del dominio sull’animale e della sua capitalistica trasformazione in oggetto potrebbe essere talmente radicato nella prassi della nostra specie da non essere messo mai in discussione, nemmeno di fronte alla chiara identità tra umano e animale. Anzi, abbiamo già sottolineato come la macchina antropologica fa dell’animalizzazione dell’umano sempre un meccanismo di dominio; tanto più facile sarebbe quindi macellare l’umano quando questi volontariamente si sostituisce all’animale. Quel che resta quindi della poesia di Ferrari è la testimonianza che una diversa animalizzazione è improbabile ma possibile; un’animalizzazione che si concretizza, secondo la posizione morale e filosofica del painismo, in un avvicinamento fra umano e animale attraverso la condivisione della stessa, universale sofferenza.

Chiusura

Ivano Ferrari ci ha permesso, se pur indirettamente, di fare alcuni passi all’interno dello spazio difficilmente accessibile del mattatoio. In questo saggio ho saputo e potuto accompagnare il lettore solo lungo alcuni dei numerosi camminatoi che la poesia di Ferrari ha saputo mappare: il rapporto tra macellazione e sadismo, l’inumana incapacità di empatia con l’animale, la ricerca di un’animalizzazione costruttiva, la possibilità di un contatto con l’eterospecifico nella solidarietà del dolore. Ma i temi e le tensioni ancora inesplorate sono numerosi. In particolare sarebbe importante decifrare in che modo il genere letterario della poesia possieda la capacità di aprire riflessioni sull’ecocritica e sulla questione animale secondo modalità diverse e autonome rispetto ad altri generi letterari e ad altre arti. Si tratterebbe di aprire una discussione teorica alquanto vasta che va al di là degli intenti di questo saggio, ma che potrebbe comunque trovare nella poesia di Ferrari un produttivo elemento d’indagine. Questo saggio invece vuole essere soprattutto un invito per il lettore a esplorare direttamente la poesia di Ferrari e ad addentrarsi personalmente in tutti quegli spazi del mattatoio che questa poesia ha saputo rendere accessibili.

Perché, come spero di essere riuscito a mostrare, lo spazio del mattatoio ha molto da dirci e da rivelarci sulla nostra specie; e sul rapporto di dominio, ma anche di empatia, che la nostra specie ha instaurato con le altre.

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Methane Dispensers and Bio-Dynamic Beings: Cattle as Polysemous Symbols in Environmental Religious Discourse.¹

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Abstract



This paper approaches thinking animals via the animal humanities, focusing on the conflicting meanings ascribed to domesticated cattle: are they destroyers of the environment, or saviors of the planet? By investigating narrative tropes, especially those grounded within the at times competing and overlapping worldviews of religious environmentalism, biodynamic agriculture, and sustainable agriculture, this paper explores the iterative interaction between how cows are conceived, and thus managed, in relation to human-nature interactions. Management questions may include: Who can kill a cow, when, why, and for what purpose? How should cows be raised and treated? Do cows have their own form of intelligence, and even spiritual intelligence? Are cows a leading cause of climate destabilization and deforestation, or can they help avert runaway climate change? Should cows be the entry point into animal abolitionism? Investigating the competing answers to these and other such questions is important, for if humans are to have any form of functional habitat that enables the flourishing of human and non-human lifeforms in the coming decades, then how humans conceive of, manage, and interact with other lifeforms, especially in the context of religion and agriculture, matters. Emerging metrics suggests that the narrative, ethical, religious, and biological understandings of non-human evolutionary kin in the dawning Anthropocene will be fluid and contested. Therefore, scholars must be prepared to interpret and analyze emergent meanings that will be ascribed to other lifeforms on a climate changed planet. Investigating cows—their labor, their environmental impacts, their role in shaping human societies and providing calories, the art of interacting with them on agricultural fields—presents a chance to rethink the human in a world of limits.

Keywords: cows, religious environmentalism, religion, climate change, authentic religion, animal studies.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza los animales pensantes a través de las humanidades animales, centrándose en los significados conflictivos atribuidos al ganado domesticado: ¿son destructores del medio ambiente, o salvadores del planeta? Al investigar los tropos narrativos, especialmente aquellos basados en las visiones del mundo, a veces rivales y superpuestas, del ecologismo religioso, la agricultura biodinámica y la agricultura sostenible, se explora la interacción iterativa entre cómo las vacas son concebidas y gestionadas en relación con las interacciones entre el ser humano y la naturaleza. Las preguntas de gestión pueden incluir: ¿Quién puede matar a una vaca, cuándo, por qué, y con qué propósito? ¿Cómo deben ser criadas y tratadas las vacas? ¿Tienen las vacas su propia forma de inteligencia, e incluso de inteligencia espiritual? ¿Son las vacas la principal causa de la desestabilización del clima y la deforestación, o pueden ayudar a evitar el cambio climático? ¿Deberían ser las vacas ser el punto de entrada en el abolicionismo animal? La investigación de las respuestas conflictivas a estas y otras preguntas es importante, ya que si los seres humanos han de tener algún tipo de hábitat funcional que permita el florecimiento de las

¹ The author wishes to express deep gratitude to the reviewers who offered insightful and helpful feedback on an original submission. Their comments led to a much stronger paper. Fault for remaining deficiencies of course resides with the author.

formas de vida humanas y no humanas en las próximas décadas, es importante cómo los seres humanos conciben, gestionan e interactúan con otras formas de vida, especialmente en el contexto de la religión y la agricultura. Métricas emergentes sugieren que la narrativa, los entendimientos éticos, religiosos, familiares y biológicos de la evolución no humana en el Antropoceno naciente será fluida y controvertida. Por lo tanto, los especialistas deben estar preparados para interpretar significados emergentes que se pueden atribuir a otras formas de vida en un planeta frente al cambio climático. La investigación de las vacas—su trabajo, sus impactos ambientales, su papel en la conformación de las sociedades humanas y la disponibilidad de calorías, el arte de interactuar con ellos en los campos agrícolas—presenta la oportunidad de reconsiderar al ser humano en un mundo de límites.

Palabras clave: vacas, ecologismo religioso, religión, cambio climático, religión auténtica.

This paper investigates the multiple meanings ascribed to one domesticated animal, the cow, and does so through combining the lenses of animal humanities with religious studies.² I choose the cow for the following three interrelated reasons. First, because of the sheer numbers of cows raised by humans globally. Second, because of how central cows have been and continue to be in Agricultural and post-Agricultural Revolution lifestyles; this is especially true in terms of providing calories and labor, and the cumulative impact on soil nutrients. Lastly, emerging metrics suggest our narrative, ethical, religious, and biological understandings of non-human evolutionary kin in the dawning Anthropocene will be economically, ethically, legally, and cosmologically contested. The latter suggests that scholars must be prepared to interpret and analyze emergent meanings that will be ascribed to other lifeforms in a climate changed planet. Investigating cows—their labor, their environmental impacts, their role in shaping human societies and providing calories, the art of interacting with them on agricultural fields—presents a chance to rethink the human in a world of limits. This rethinking is triggered by a recognition of human/other-animal relations and a consideration of what these relations will require of humans as they adapt to a changing planet. By combining insights from religious studies and animal

² I ask readers to recognize that, for this paper, I am using the mass noun, “cattle,” and also “cows,” for ease of presentation. Thus, with both cattle and/or cow, I am referring to male and female animals, and covering the multiple species and breeds of cattle that have existed, past and present. Furthermore, the title of this paper is a play on words. It utilizes a line from Bruce Cockburn’s poignant song, “If a Tree Falls.” When describing the clear cutting of the Amazon, with much of this denuded habitat being turned into pasture for cows, Cockburn calls bovines “methane dispensers” (<http://brucecockburn.com/music/big-circumstance> Accessed May 20, 2015). This signals a growing recognition, going back to the formation of CAFOs (concentrated animal feedlot operations) in the 1980s onward, and the correlated steady increase in the consumption of cow products in affluent diets, that there is an emergent view of cows as despoilers of the environment (Pollan; Foer; Lappé). For two quick examples that support such charges, in 2011, there existed 1.4 billion cows globally (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/07/global-livestock-counts> Accessed May 20, 2015), and in 2015, global beef exports topped 10 million tons (<http://www.cattlenetwork.com/news/industry/global-beef-exports-projected-set-record-2015> Accessed May 20, 2015).

humanities, a space opens where humans can reflect on their own policed species barriers, where this policing occurs while they manage and use cattle for various purposes. Such reflection constitutes at its core a chance to reconceive the role of the human animal, and its relation with other animals, in the Anthropocene. Crucial here is that such a reflective space also opens possibilities for rethinking “religion’s profile against the backdrop of species” (Schaefer 35).

Environmental realities in terms of ecosystem, planetary, and animal (human and cattle) health have generated a sustained critique of cattle farming and production.³ Such critiques emerge within religious subcircles, and are in part based on the recognition that the amount of grain, energy, water, and fossil fuels needed to raise these amounts of beef and/or dairy cattle, especially in a CAFO or feedlot setting, is inimical to these three domains of health. This religious view of cattle’s environmentally destructive role can loosely be called a religious environmentalist view (Tomalin). Such a view is based in the ongoing Ecological Reformation that recognizes we are irreparably damaging a “sacred” planet, where cows are increasingly seen to be hazardous to our planetary health.⁴ Such views are generating criticism with regards to the often hidden (linguistically [Stibbe], visibly [Pachirat]) and externalized (in terms of true cost accounting [Daly]) role played by cows in precipitating environmental damage at local and global levels. This is especially true in relation to their role in contemporary industrial agriculture. While this paper will present and elucidate such views, my research suggests that in contrast to these familiar criticisms of cattle, another view of cows is possible. Cattle in contemporary forms of agriculture can in fact also be seen as essential to ecosystem health. One view in particular, originally espoused by Rudolf Steiner and now known as biodynamics, sees cows as spiritually pure and powerful beings, able to tap into etheric and other forms of cosmic energy; forms of energy that help overall farm health. In this, and other similar views expressed by those in religious agrarian (LeVasseur “Religious Agrarianism”) and environmental agrarian (K. Smith) settings, cows are seen as central to halting human-induced climate change, and as being an integral part of healthy, holistic farming.

How can the same animal, collectively known as *Bos primigenius*, prompt such competing views in this century?⁵ This paper does not necessarily attempt to answer this question, for that is quite impossible—indeed, religious symbols are

³ These health considerations are based on various metrics such as, for example, those provided in note 2.

⁴ “Ecological Reformation” has become one way of understanding and framing how world religions are responding to, via various strategies of reform, the last approximately 40 years of ecological insights about how human actions are damaging various planetary systems. The flavor of this term is comparable to the Protestant Reformation, which radically changed the political and cosmological systems of Europe, and this new reformation based on ecology might have similar impacts on human biosocial systems.

⁵ This name accounts for the many subspecies of the larger subfamily *bovinae* that have been bred over the approximately last 10,000 years.

polysemous, lacking any form of “ideal-type” authenticity (Martin, especially chapter 7). Rather, what I aim to do here is to use cattle as a focal point for exploring larger ramifications in the biosocial production of religion, helping us better understand the confluence of animal humanities and religious studies. If humans are to build interspecies relationships that enable the flourishing of human and non-human lifeforms in the coming decades, then how they conceive of, manage, and interact with other lifeforms matters. Climate predictions suggest that religious understandings and conceptions of non-human evolutionary kin will be contested and in flux in the coming decades (LeVasseur, “Earth is *sui generis*”). This biophysical reality suggests that scholars must be prepared to interpret emergent meanings that will be ascribed to other lifeforms on a climate changed planet.⁶

Animal Humanities and Religious Studies

In her deft summary of the “animal turn” in the academy, Kari Weil suggests that animal studies

stretches to the limit questions of language, epistemology, and ethics that have been raised in various ways by women’s studies and postcolonial studies: how to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it; how to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say. (6-7)

While these are indeed important and probing questions, there is evidence that human animals have attempted, via the biosocially produced vehicle of “religion,” to grapple with some of these issues, in at times articulate and systematic ways and over many centuries (Waldau and Patton). Though it is true that species borders have been erected and policed, what this resembles varies by culture, ecosystem, and species (DeMello, especially chapter 2) despite the European scientific hegemony of the last few hundred years (Pratt).⁷ It also varies in terms of religion, which, in this paper, is understood following religion and nature scholar Bron Taylor, who defines religion as “that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms, which are related to transformative forces and powers and which people consider to be dangerous and/or beneficent and/or meaningful in some ultimate way” (“Introduction” x). One reason Taylor uses such a definition in crafting the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* in which it appears is that it opens up the theoretical and analytical possibilities of religion-nature related phenomena, which can then be analyzed by religious studies scholars. Though the views of cows addressed in this paper may not appear to be strictly “religious,”

⁶ For the most recent, consensus science on climate change predictions, see <http://ipcc.ch/index.htm> (Accessed May 20, 2015).

⁷ See especially Pratt’s analysis of Linnaeus, and how “The Linnean system epitomized the continental, transnational aspirations of European science” (25).

when we embrace Taylor's definition, they become so. Moreover such an unrestricted definition opens up a scholarly space for analyzing human/animal-other interactions that for practitioners may be self-reported as "spiritual." This discursive space of meaning for religion and/or spirituality allows for the views of other-animal agencies explored below to be taken as seriously as more traditionally-informed religious views of animals, as found for example in Hinduism, Buddhism, or Judaism (as problematic as it is to reify such nouns as if they represent stable, singular traditions).

There are a variety of approaches to understanding the voice and experience of cows. These can range from caring for them as spiritual beings (see below), to seeing them as divine (some aspects of Hinduism, broadly speaking [see Korom]), to working for their liberation and recognizing their needs to graze, get fresh air, and nurture their young (see Baur). For example, organic farmer, rancher, and philosopher Fred Kirschenmann writes that, "On the farm, I know things best by immersing myself in the things I wish to know. [...] Thus, contemplating a host of ethical and values issues while castrating a calf is the only way to 'know' about it; it is a way of 'dwelling' in the fullness of the act" (16). For many involved in contemporary forms of sustainable agriculture, attending to differences between species and taking seriously the interests of animal-others is increasingly becoming part and parcel of their stewardship and farming practices. And, as we see with Kirschenmann, it may even be part of theological reflections.

What is suggested by Kirschenmann and by others referenced in this paper gives credence to Lisa Kemmerer's position that, "Reading sacred literature, examining spiritual teachings, and pondering the lives of great religious adepts can remind people of time-honored spiritual principles and provide insights into the human being's proper place in the universe" (4). This is on one level true, and many academic anthologies and papers attest to this. However, such a position also underlies advocacy work, and many leading scholars in the study of religion and animals do at times enter into animal advocacy. However, we must be cautious in attributing contemporary concerns about animal rights and welfare, as well as insights drawn from ethology and contemporary environmental concerns, to religious humans, in the present and especially in the past. For example, as ethically profound as the concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence/non-harming) may be in both Buddhism and Jainism, when it comes to guiding human animal interactions with non-human animals, the historical context is one of anthropocentrism, as concern is centered most directly on achieving human rebirths on the path to enlightenment. This means that acting nonviolently towards other animals is not based on intrinsically valuing non-human others and their own agency. Furthermore, in some aspects of religious systems in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, where we may find evidence of insights regarding the human being's proper place, we see that it is the human animal that is able to receive revelation or act on the dharma, broadly speaking, and not nonhuman animals. This generates

an important insight: scholars must be cautious when studying animals via religion. Specifically, scholars have to navigate (possible) activist work and scholarship, recognizing the very real and deep seated anthropocentrism present in a variety of religious systems that historically led to the exploitation of animal others and continue to lead to such exploitation (see Nelson; Harris; and Chapple). As Paul Waldau suggests,

recognizing that asking whether a tradition as a whole is open or closed, friendly or unfriendly to nonhuman animals is different than asking whether religious believers in daily life hold accurate, detailed information about other animals' actual lives. [...] even a religious tradition that promotes an overlapping dismissal of the environment and subordination of all other-than-human animals may include individuals or entire subtraditions that put into practice altogether more positive responses to other animals, the environment, or both. (173)

Caution aside, it is important to recognize, as does leading theologian and religious studies professor Aaron Gross, that, "Animals [...] have always been at the center of the modern and contemporary study of religion, albeit in a camouflaged and forgotten manner. I do not wish to make animals more central, but rather to make their centrality more conscious, more just, and more interpretively productive" (61). I agree with this passage, and in this paper, hope to consciously re-center religion around cows in a way that is productive to helping us better understand their meaning and role in agriculture, especially as we move further into a planet undergoing anthropogenic global warming.

Domesticated Cattle

This section provides a broader context so that we might better understand cows, beginning by backing up about 10,000 years. Archaeological and anthropological records suggest that dogs and humans co-domesticated one another well before this time. The other plants and animals that form the basis of most human calories today were domesticated later, beginning about 10,000 years ago with the onset of the Agricultural Revolution. For cattle, the record suggests that domestication first occurred in Turkey, with just a small number of what became cows constituting the foundation of modern breeds. And what is needed to domesticate an animal? According to Kirkpatrick Sale, the following conditions must be met: the animal in question must live in herds with follow-the-leader hierarchical systems; be amenable to fencing; have a placid disposition; be able to eat foods humans provide; have short growth and birthing periods; and be able to breed in captivity (94-99).⁸

As Sale points out, the urge to dominate other species via technologies and cultural worldviews most likely emerged at this point in time. Importantly, this time significantly predates our current world religions. So while cows without

⁸ What is fascinating is that only fourteen species fit these criteria, meaning that 134 of 148 large mammalian species have never been domesticated by the human animal (Sale 98).

blemish were sacrificed to Yahweh and cattle are still worshipped in India and signify personal wealth in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, these various understandings of and symbolic meanings of cattle are a product of biosocial systems where cows are a key domesticated animal and are viewed anthropocentrically. In the context of domestication of both animals and plants (and by default, the planet), and factoring in issues of justice and rights for all species involved, it is thus important to investigate how various worldviews dictate at least in part how human animals interact with the material environment. If human worldviews from the onset of the Agricultural Revolution contain a seed of human superiority over the natural world and over the plants and animals that humans have strategically domesticated, then it is important to look at human views of cows and how these views are shaped by various worldviews. This is especially important within the context of shifting environmental metrics of the Anthropocene, where these metrics may require humans to rethink their varied relations with this majestic animal.

Cows today form the basis of multiple meals, from fast food burgers to frozen lasagna. From an ethological perspective, they are not horribly mistreated as they are brought to slaughter after spending their last few weeks in CAFOs. As ruminants, they have four stomachs and burp out a lot of methane. In addition to these facts, humans now know with ever increasing surety that the planet is rapidly crossing tipping points: the ocean is becoming an acidic body of water that will most likely not support a functional food chain; and in the coming years there will be an increase in massive droughts, floods, and other terrestrial-based system shifts related to anthropogenic climate change. These larger planetary realities signal a theoretical recognition that changes in the natural world can and do trigger shifts in worldviews. This phenomenon can be encapsulated in the terms “biosocial evolution” and/or “biocultural evolution,” which recognize the iterative interaction between constructed systems of human meaning and the environments within which this ongoing construction takes place, in a relationship where both mutually shape one another. Biosocial evolution can be observed at work today when reflecting on how some humans are beginning to reconceive their relation with and understanding of the natural world, where the natural world is seen to be sacred and worthy of morally-grounded religious concern (Taylor, *Dark Green*). This reconception ranges from the “greening” of mainstream religions (Tucker and Grim), to the development of Dark Green Religiosities (Taylor, *Dark Green*), and collectively signals the onset of the Ecological Reformation of religions, both old and new. Moreover, important insights from ecological and environmental sciences feed into and shape this greening of religion. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to recognize that much of this science brings us back to certain key human activities that are drivers of climate change, including especially the human domestication of cattle.

Cattle are a key driver of climate change because in the U.S. alone there are 31 million cattle raised each year for slaughter. Fully one third of the United States landbase is used to grow corn, with much of this going to feed the millions of cattle alive in the U.S. at any one time. Thirty-five percent of the farms in the U.S. are involved in some process of beef production, so that altogether, the raising of cattle has a huge impact on environmental health and the terrestrial landscape.⁹ Global numbers confirm an equally profound impact. Seventy percent of global agricultural land is dedicated to livestock production, and livestock account for 18% of total greenhouse gas emissions because of enteric fermentation—the internal microbes in the four stomachs of a cow and other ruminants generate methane as they turn fibrous grasses into protein. This accounts for one third of all methane being released, and methane is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of immediately heating the planet’s atmosphere. Another methane bump results from the literally millions of tons of excrement created by cows in feedlots, as methane is released when this fecal matter is anaerobically broken down. The impact of this massive quantity of cow shit is compounded because much of it ends up poisoning groundwater by leaking ammonia, phosphorous, antibiotics, and various pathogens into surrounding waterways. Lastly there is the loss of habitat and biodiversity, as land is turned into grazing pastures for cattle, especially in the Amazon.¹⁰ The impact of cows on the planet is summed up by James Lovelock, the originator of the Gaia hypothesis who blames environmental degradation on what he calls “The 3 Cs,” namely, cars, chainsaws, and cows. The cars need oil and release CO₂; chainsaws clear forests; and cows not only require the clearing of forest but also burp and fart copious amounts of methane.¹¹

Religious and Religious Environmentalist Discourses about Cows

The above metrics help to create a view of cattle where they are seen as despoilers of a sacred planet. This point of view, which can be called a religious

⁹ See here the documentary *Food, Inc.* (2008, dir. Robert Kenner; <http://www.takepart.com/foodinc>), as well as: Lyman, *Mad Cowboy: Plain Truth from the Cattle Rancher Who Won't Eat Meat* (2001), Jackson, *Consulting the Genius of the Place: An Ecological Approach to a New Agriculture* (2010), Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (2012), and Hayes and Hayes, *Cowed: The Hidden Impact of 93 Million Cows on America's Health, Economy, Politics, Culture, and Environment* (2015). Industrial cattle farming also has impacts on human health, from dietary to medical; on the latter, see for example the rise in drug-resistance bacteria caused by the huge amounts of antibiotics given to cattle and other feedlot/CAFO animals: <http://www.takepart.com/article/2015/01/23/antibiotic-resistance-downwind-feedlots> (Accessed May 27, 2015).

¹⁰ For the preceding figures and claims, see <http://www.worldwatch.org/agriculture-and-livestock-remain-major-sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions-0> (Accessed May 25, 2015), <https://woods.stanford.edu/environmental-venture-projects/consequences-increased-global-meat-consumption-global-environment> (Accessed May 25, 2015), and especially FAO's "Livestock's Long Shadow" 2006 report <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM> (Accessed May 25, 2015).

¹¹ This insight was shared with me by Stephan Harding, Schumacher College's resident ecologist, during a short course at Schumacher in 2001. Harding and Lovelock are close friends.

environmentalist view that sees nature as sacred, recognizes that humans are precipitating the sixth largest extinction crisis on the planet and severely altering the planet's climactic systems. Within these larger ecological realities, created chiefly by human managerial decisions and lifestyles, cows become a symbol of destruction, of wasteful consumption, of gluttony, and of short-sightedness as the true impacts (social, environmental, ethical, and medical) of cows and their products are externalized. According to some religious practitioners who have embraced the religious environmentalist turn, the raising and slaughtering of millions of cows is a desecrating act, one that needs to be offset by a vegetarian or vegan diet and a move away from the ills of animal agriculture, away from the mooing cacophony of Angus burgers and Jersey milkshakes.

Despite the aggregate impact of cattle on ecosystems and biogeochemical cycles, and the dawning human understanding of the true gravity of this impact, it is hard for many humans to turn their backs on one of their oldest domesticated partners. In contrast to the widespread condemnation of industrial cattle farming, many authors, farmers, and religious authorities offer a competing understanding of cattle. Indeed, individuals who both care about the environment and who advocate the strategic use of cows argue that, if managed properly, a free range, pasture based system of raising cattle actually helps the planetary environment (Philips and Sorensen; J. Steiner, et al., "Knowledge and Tools"). Moreover, it is felt that, in a sustainably-managed pasture regime, it is possible to honor the intrinsic dignity of our bovine kin. Journalist Judith Schwartz elaborates such a worldview in *Cows Save the Planet* (2013). Here Schwartz argues that intensive, rotational grazing by herbivores, especially cows, helps aerate, nourish, and regenerate grassland ecosystems which in turn stores atmospheric carbon.¹² Furthermore, and echoing perhaps Kari Weil's aforementioned insight about giving voice to others, one of America's leading suppliers of grass fed, certified organic cow's milk, Organic Valley, even prints farmer biographies on their milk cartons. Together with these biographies they offer quotes, which include the words of some farmers who claim that to them cows are cared-for members of the family, a position that suggests that the voice and perspective of each cow factors into how the farmer treats them!¹³

This same line of argument, namely, that proper cattle farming can contribute to sustainability via best-management practices, is vociferously advocated for by Joel Salatin, owner of Polyface Farm in Virginia and self-proclaimed "Christian libertarian environmentalist capitalist lunatic," who argues that farming "is inseparable from ethics, politics, faith, or ecology."¹⁴ Salatin's

¹² Similar arguments are made in Niman, *Defending Beef: The Case for Sustainable Meat Production* (2014), Webster, *Animal Husbandry Regained: The Place of Farm Animals in Sustainable Agriculture* (2013), and White, *Grass, Soil, Hope: A Journey through Carbon Country* (2014).

¹³ <http://www.organicvalley.coop/products/milk/why-choose-ov-milk/> (Accessed May 25, 2015).

¹⁴ All Salatin quotes come from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/can-animals-save-us/joel-salatin-how-to-eat-meat-and-respect-it-too> (Accessed May 15, 2015).

interviews, included in various sustainable food documentaries such as *Food, Inc.*, have made him a popular and authoritative voice in alternative agriculture milieus. Significant here is his claim that the religious environmentalist argument that “cows are evil and cause climate change” is a canard, as it focuses on feedlot cattle. However, if cows are strategically managed via rotational grazing and are kept within the regenerative carrying capacity of the larger farm ecosystem,¹⁵ this acknowledges, according to Salatin, that cows “mow forage. [...] We feed cows grass, and that honors and respects the cow-ness of the cow.” And “mob-stocking” cows, or allowing a critical mass of cows to intensively graze a fenced area of pasture for just two or three days and then moving this “mob” to another pasture, actually generates grass growth and stores carbon—thus, adding to a discourse that we can call, along with Schwartz, “Cows Save the Planet.” Lastly, by honoring the cow-ness of the cow and having an open-door policy allowing the public to see how Salatin treats his cows, Polyface Farm can, as Salatin puts it, “create a thankful, gracious, honoring experience when we come to eat” the actual cow.

This view of cows and the deep symbiotic relationship of their domestication and human physiology is mirrored in the work of radical feminist Lierre Keith, both in her sole-authored book *The Vegetarian Myth* (2009) and her subsequent collaborative publication *Deep Green Resistance* (2011). Having been a vegan for 20 years, Keith now argues the opposite, “we have Paleolithic bodies, we need Paleolithic food” (*Deep Green* 157). This nature mystic and radical environmentalist, who writes that humans *need* a sense of spiritual belonging with “the multitude of members of this tribe called carbon” (*Deep Green* 167), argues, like Salatin and Schwartz, that the rotational grazing of cows (and bison) provides a needed element of sustainable, ethical living on this planet.

These pro-cattle farming views are by no means a product of 21st century environmentalism. For example, there is no more developed view of the inherent sacredness of the cow than in the biodynamic model that evolved in early 1900s Germany out of the teachings of the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, known for his work on Camphill Villages, Eurythmy, Waldorf Education, and biodynamics, all of which derive from anthroposophy, or spiritual science. Steiner’s spiritual science is predicated on the belief that each person is on an evolutionary trajectory, occurring by multiple incarnations, towards self-realization/God-realization. By practicing and cultivating the spiritual insights taught by Steiner, individuals can advance along this evolutionary path and enjoy visionary, gnosis-filled experiences. Steiner’s cosmology borrows heavily from Theosophy, Germanic idealism, and advaita Vedanta Vedic philosophy, which speaks of an eternal divine spark within each being on a path towards liberation via reunion with the Divine/God. Steiner taught that as a soul progresses through physical incarnations,

¹⁵ This concept refers to the amount of cattle that can sustainably pasture in a field before soil nutrients are depleted and the larger pasture ecosystem becomes brittle and loses nutrients and biodiversity.

so does humanity and the world. Steiner's view is that the human contains a four-part body. The first is a physical body, based in the mineral world; the second is a life or etheric body, which, associated with the plant world, causes the body to grow and vitalizes it; the third is an astral body, which, connected to the animal world, serves as the seat of consciousness and sentience; and the fourth body is the ego, or self-awareness. Steiner's cosmology posits an interconnected, holistic cosmos, where etheric and astral forces emanate from the cosmos and influence the development of all life on earth. This includes the evolutionary growth and development of animal life, plant life, and human spiritual and physical life. It is within this larger cosmology that biodynamics functions (for the content of this entire paragraph, see LeVasseur, "Biodynamic Agriculture").

From June 7 to 16, 1924, Steiner gave eight lectures in German to a group of farmers at Koberwitz, Silesia on the "Spiritual foundations for the renewal of agriculture."¹⁶ These farmers had expressed concern about noticed losses in yields and soil health, so Steiner was invited to provide insights into potential remedies. Key insights from Steiner's lectures became the basis for biodynamics as almost every biodynamic farmer builds his or her own practice of farming upon these teachings. These include the view that a farm is a self-contained microcosm that mirrors the macrocosm. Thus, a farm should be managed as a holistic entity, while recognizing that astral and etheric forces from the cosmos influence plant, animal, soil, and human health. It is especially this teaching that shaped particular biodynamic farming practices, the most important of which is the creation and casting of biodynamic preparations or "preps." In essence, biodynamic preps (BD preps) are a kind of homeopathy for the soil, bringing etheric and astral forces into the soil within which plants grow and upon which animals graze. The preps are intended to help the farmer create a microcosm of the macrocosm, to amplify astral and etheric forces on the farm, resulting in healthier and purer products. As these spiritually pure products are consumed, the human becomes more spiritually pure, and their personal evolutionary process in this lifetime is sped up. Another insight offered by Steiner, and one of particular relevance to this paper, is the significance of cows. Steiner saw cows, especially those with their horns intact, as being in tune with astral and etheric forces. Cows with horns became a kind of cosmic antenna, and their dung is the basis for spreading cosmic health throughout the farm ecosystem, and ultimately to the ecosystem of human bodies sustained by biodynamically produced products. In this agricultural aspect of Steiner's larger spiritual science, cows literally form the basis of biodynamic farming and, at least in part, the basis of spiritual health.

¹⁶ A selection of Steiner's writing and thinking can be found in Steiner, *Agriculture: An Introductory Reader* (2003).

A Cacophony of Ruminations

The future that awaits both humans and cattle is uncertain. By 2100 earth will be warmer by anywhere from 2 degrees Celsius to 6 degrees Celsius. This planetary reality brings with it serious choices that humans will have to make in regards to how they manage, and equally, conceive of their landscapes. Currently, cows play a determinant role in how multiple human communities manage landscapes from local to global levels. Should humans condemn the “3 Cs” and ostracize their domesticated kin? Should they see the inherent sacredness of cattle and their “cow-ness” and use them to generate healthy grass-based farms that store carbon? In *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999), anthropologist Roy Rappaport convincingly explains how human beliefs, rituals, and ethics play a pivotal role in how humans manage ecosystems. Biocultural evolution and Traditional Ecological Knowledge both explain how, for millennia, humans have shaped and been shaped by their varied ecosystems (Posey; LeVasseur and Johnston). Given the amount of planetary biomass devoted to cattle farming, cows are central players in this mutual shaping or domestication, and this has been the case for these past 10,000 years.

But maybe domestication means something else on “eearth,” as Bill McKibben calls it in *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2011). McKibben’s creative spelling recognizes that while it is technically the same planet it is, as a result of human action, climatically changed with respect to the entirety of its prior history. The human species is entering new territory, so the relations humans have built and the lifestyles humans have become accustomed to over 10,000 years are at this point possibly maladaptive. This may hold equally true for many current socially constructed religious views, ethics, practices, rituals, and material dimensions. Do humans need to rethink their view of calories, of animals and plants broadly, and given the focus of this paper, cows specifically? Might more and more humans generate a “cosmic holism according to which we are bound in an essential kinship relation with all beings that suffer and struggle to realize their natural potential” (G. Steiner 195), a holism that might include human-cattle relations? For those motivated by religious convictions, teachings, rituals, and practices, especially at the interface of environmental and agricultural concerns, such natural potential of full species flourishing is viewed differently. As illustrated in this article, some view cows and their species potential as being met by removing them from the basis of the current industrial food system. Other views maintain that their species potential is realized by allowing them to roam free range and even making them the spiritual basis of holistic farming.

Given climate change models, I am confident that humanity will have to make tough decisions moving forward. Decisions will range from how to get calories, to managing resources, to conceiving of and talking about non-human evolutionary kin (on discourses about animals, see Stibbe). These decisions bring

up very real issues of authenticity. As indicated earlier, Craig Martin points out that, with religion, “There are no essences to be found, only authenticity claims in process” (162). So while there is clearly a biological essence to cattle, how various human communities imagine them and interact with them reflect authenticity claims. Cattle also reflect contested uses of science; if science is helping humans to better understand the ecocrisis and is thus influencing the Ecological Reformation, then authenticity claims about the role of cattle—either damaging or ameliorating—will equally factor into religious environmentalist production in regards to how humans conceive of ruminant cousins, especially on a warmer planet. Regardless, the reality of domesticating cattle is that on one level humans have also domesticated the planet and its atmosphere, and have equally been domesticated by cattle, where this “relationship is mutual, though not egalitarian” (Peterson 90). How humans navigate this mutual relationship, and how this navigation is steered in part by religious production, where in biosocial systems, “conflicting feelings about human-animal relations [will produce] strategies of resolution” (Perlo 1), can offer continued insights into both animal studies and religious studies.

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The Cutopia Paradox: Anthropomorphism as Entertainment

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Abstract

An infant chimpanzee, dressed in riotous checks, bowtie and braces, cradled in human arms while it regards a camera, is perhaps further from us than a tiger lurking in the deepest jungle. Anthropomorphic sentiment negates empathy, blinding us to the real animal behind the “character.” The engaging creature we imagine we’d like to hold and protect is the product, most likely, of violent separation and trauma, stolen in order to bring us this enjoyment. We read the comical face, celebrating what appear to be traces of commonality; but the eyes of the small creature are windows to a realm we cannot comprehend. By following the life of a single chimpanzee, Cobby, the oldest chimp in captivity in the USA, this paper will explore our attraction to cuteness via the lens of chimpanzees in entertainment, regarding it as an intersection of emotion and metaphor that is potentially devastating to animals. We will argue that anthropomorphic sentiment and construction misdirects empathy away from the plight of real animals, and that every animal has the right to be acknowledged as a unique individual, rather than a generic entity. Animals that have been born in captivity and, to a lesser extent, those that have been extracted from the wild in infancy, can be seen as trapped between worlds. There exists, therefore, a hybrid population of animals that lives amongst us, amnesiacs dependent upon human compassion, or conversely, prey to its absence.

Keywords: animal, anthropomorphism, chimpanzee, entertainment, empathy.

Resumen

Una cría de chimpancé, vestida a cuadros alborotados, pajarita y tirantes, acunada en brazos humanos mientras que mira una cámara, está tal vez más lejos de nosotros que un tigre que acecha en la selva más profunda. El sentimiento antropomórfico niega la empatía, nos ciega ante el animal real detrás del “personaje”. La criatura atractiva que imaginamos que nos gustaría guardar y proteger es el producto, probablemente, de la separación violenta y del trauma, robada para traernos este disfrute. Leemos la cara cómica, celebrando lo que parecen ser rastros de similitud; pero los ojos de la pequeña criatura son ventanas a un reino que no podemos comprender. Siguiendo la vida de un único chimpancé, Cobby, el chimpancé más viejo en cautividad en los Estados Unidos, este trabajo explora nuestra atracción hacia la ternura a través de la lente de los chimpancés en el entretenimiento, considerándola como una intersección de emoción y metáfora que es potencialmente devastadora para los animales. Sostenemos que la construcción y el sentimiento antropomórficos dirigen mal la empatía de la difícil situación de animales reales, y que cada animal tiene derecho a ser reconocido como un individuo único, en lugar de una entidad genérica. Los animales que han nacido en cautividad y, en menor medida, aquellos que han sido extraídos de la naturaleza durante la infancia, pueden apreciarse como atrapados entre mundos. Por lo tanto, existe una población híbrida de animales que viven entre nosotros, amnésicos dependientes de la compasión humana, o por el contrario, víctimas de su ausencia.

Palabras clave: animal, antropomorfismo, chimpancé, entretenimiento, empatía.

Parallel to the everyday world there exist a fantastic realm where animals, particularly those that are small and soft of fur, with large appealing eyes, behave in ways that directly mimic the human condition. They speak our language, wear our clothes, and share our preoccupations. We are granted access to this marvellous domain, which we shall call *Cutopia*, via the portals of popular entertainment and merchandising. The citizens of *Cutopia*, in the majority of cases, are resilient, optimistic, and quaintly amusing. Moreover they seem entirely immune from the troubles and hardships endured by animals in the real world, offering us relationships that are both convenient and reassuring. In fact they are not like real animals at all. The empathy we extend to the animal from *Cutopia*, the pink or blue construct or humanized mammal that smiles coyly as it regards us with dedicated attention, is false. Conversely, the empathy we feel for the creature that stares at us from a crowded, abattoir-bound truck is an emotion that acknowledges animal suffering, even to the extent of recognizing psychological fear beyond the imagining of physical pain. The recognition of fear in the faces of soon to be slaughtered animals elevates our ability to empathize at a psychological level that has the potential to challenge even the most convincing appearance of physical well-being. Cuteness then, or the emotional response to fictional creatures, seems aligned with the misuse or misdirection of empathy and thus needs to be analysed and evaluated.

This paper will explore our attraction to cuteness via the lens of chimpanzees in entertainment, and to regard it as an intersection of emotion and metaphor that is potentially devastating to animals. As a case study we will follow the life of Cobby, the oldest chimpanzee living in an accredited zoo in the United States of America. His long journey, from jungle to quasi-human domesticity, to performing on television and, finally, life in a zoo, offers a story that is comparatively free of suffering, but one that will nonetheless cast light on practices that can combine cruelty and exploitation with great caring and kindness. This is not a simple story to tell as animals born in captivity and, to a similar extent, those that have been extracted from the wild in early infancy can be seen as trapped between worlds. While a chimpanzee left to live in the wild is, presumably, perfectly good at being a chimpanzee, its domesticated or imprisoned counterpart quite simply is not. This, of course, applies to all animals. The cultivation of pampered companions, the noble rhetoric surrounding “man’s best friend,” and the various modes of worship and fetishism surrounding animal types are ubiquitous. Certain animals, in particular those that are young and compliant (preferably with large eyes), provoke emotional responses that can readily arouse parental and protective impulses. The opportunities for maternal/paternal rehearsals or proxies are abundant within the accessible animal kingdom, but more elusive accessibilities can be synthetically substituted via entertainment.

There exists, then, a hybrid population of animals that lives amongst us, amnesiacs dependent upon human compassion or, conversely, prey to its absence. The legions of domestic pets, or their darker cousins, the stray animals that secretly stalk the alleyways of large cities, are perhaps the most obviously separate from the utopian concept of animals living in the Eden-like environment of “the wild.” But they form only a part of the ever-increasing numbers of creatures born into captivity, forfeiting their instinctual birthrights and constituting an order of non-human life that is flanked on the one side by creatures from the wild and on the other by *Cutopians*. This third, or hybrid category, represents a collection of real species that have been successfully sublimated by human dominance. It is a strange reflection on our relationship with chimpanzees that because of, or in spite of, their genetic proximity, we still treat them as a slave class - there for our entertainment, for risky biomedical experiments, and even food.

However, the most mysterious driving factor in these relationships is our desire to anthropomorphise our fellow creatures and to represent them as humanoid. This preoccupation can be traced as far back as ancient hunting rituals and the symbolism of various deities, with animals believed to possess powerful spirits or, at the very least, to represent them. But the mythologising and imagining of the thoughts and impulses of non-human creatures is not necessarily a form of empathy. As an example, Franz Kafka imagined, in “A Report to an Academy,” the thoughts of an ape that has survived a caged journey from Africa, but immediately encountered a paradox: “Of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it” (qtd. in Daston 38). Elliott Sober, however, argues that the denial of anthropomorphic interpretations and inclinations can be equally problematic:

Anthropomorphism is often defined as the error of attributing human mental characteristics to nonhuman organisms; people are said to fall into this error because they are sentimental and uncritical. It is a revealing fact about current scientific culture that the opposite mistake—of mistakenly refusing to attribute human mental characteristics to nonhuman organisms—does not even have a ready name. The ethologist Frans de Waal has suggested the somewhat ungainly phrase “anthropodenial” to label this second type of error. (85)

Clearly, in order to empathize without the benefit of a shared language or communication system, a degree of “humanized” attribution is inevitable. It is when this becomes distorted or exaggerated to the point of fantasy that anthropomorphic sentiment becomes counterproductive in terms of animal welfare.

The gulf of language persists as the greatest barrier between us and other species, therefore we insert our own, inevitably exaggerating any wished for proximity. This form of fanciful representation extends to types as well, with the ugly and the predatory uniformly perceived as evil and the vulnerable and cute perceived as good. John Berger sees anthropomorphic representation as a concept that has evolved with historical circumstance. This is most apparent when we

compare the contemporary proliferation of synthetic animal toys with the semi-concealed multitudes that provide us with food sources.

Until the nineteenth century, anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity. Anthropomorphism was the residue of the continuous use of animal metaphor. In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them. And in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy. (Berger, 102)

The desire to narrow the gap between ourselves and other species seems age-old, a dilemma that was once veiled by ritual and is now veiled by sentimental fantasies. However, the façade presented by humanised animals, a make-believe universe constructed from varied motivations, never succeeds in entirely concealing the fellow creatures that have inspired it. Intermediary storytellers and shamans, from Aesop to Dr. Dolittle, have only succeeded in emphasizing the gulf between animals and humankind. The attribution of familiar human foibles and the suggestion of an elusive language that might be known to a limited group of cognoscenti are tropes that persist in the present. The contemporary idea of the “horse-whisperer” for instance implies a realm of arcane skills that resist classification. Perhaps the most curious development is the anthropomorphization of the anthropomorphic object, best exemplified perhaps by toy bears that walk and talk in the form of Winnie the Pooh and his contemporary counterpart “Ted.”¹ Such magical and artificial entities help us to accept the duality in our animal relationships inherited from long distant forebears.

The French illustrator J. J. Grandville (1803–1847) saw the animal kingdom as a feast of anthropocentric satirical opportunities. By epitomising human types as animals, he created an anthropomorphic society that utilised other species as comedic constructions: turkeys in top hats, foxes as politicians, and cats as burglars. In one drawing that stands apart from the rest he depicts a group of fish dangling baited lines into a river bobbing with human heads (Grandville 28). Here the animal transcends the role of metaphor and instead issues a moral challenge. But such representations, in Grandville’s and in other works, are all too rare. What is uncanny about Grandville’s oeuvre though is that he depicts a world where animals have become disenfranchised, conscripted into a hybridity of status where they are neither animal nor human. He anticipates the ambiguous populations of animals, both real and synthetic, that inhabit the contemporary world, animals that have been born into captivity [in some cases the rare survivors of their species] and animals that have been constructed and anthropomorphised for our amusement.

¹ “Ted” is a wise-cracking, adult teddy bear featured in the film *Ted* (2012) written and directed by Seth MacFarlane.



Cobby's Hobbies (Calvin Productions, 1964)²

Fifty-two years ago a small chimpanzee, dressed in vaudeville style clothing by his trainer, hobbled into a television studio in bespoke leather shoes. As the cameras rolled he was released onto a set that featured a lamp, a telephone, and an umbrella. He turned to the trainer as he encountered each object, responding to visual instructions from behind the camera. The hours passed and many actions later the hot lights were dimmed and the cameras turned off. When the film footage was edited a squeaky voice-over was added as though the animal had provided a comic soliloquy for our amusement. The individuality of this animal was thus further established for his audience, but it was a constructed individuality, one that was bestowed rather than conceded. Welcome to *Cobby's Hobbies*, a television program that would pitch an infant chimpanzee against a vast array of props and situations over many episodes. The spectacle of this diminutive creature blundering good-naturedly through the human world aimed to delight us in a number of ways. Firstly, he offered us a face that was an exaggeration of our own; large features, prominent eyes that appeared to engage with us via the proxy of the camera, and a guttural pant that perhaps equated with a laugh. But what happened to this appealing creature after the credits rolled? And what happened to him when production finished altogether? What did the viewer really know about Cobby, the animal behind the illusion?

In 2014 we, the authors, decided to follow the story of Cobby the chimpanzee by seeking out and interviewing those who have been close to him, both professionally and privately. This proved to be an illuminating endeavour, necessitating a rapid learning curve regarding the contemporary world of chimpanzees and the impact of anthropomorphic appeal and genetic proximity to humans on their wellbeing and future prospects. Cobby, according to best estimates, was born in an African jungle in 1958. The circumstances of his capture and subsequent sale to an American entertainer named Murray Hill [aka Arlan Seidon] are unclear, but Hill was to become Cobby's *Svengali* until 1968. The tiny

² Courtesy of the American Library of Congress

chimp was taken into the Hill domicile, trained and cared for, eventually making stage appearances and actively earning his keep.³ Hill's successful incorporation of chimpanzees into his nightclub act catapulted his career in the inevitable direction of television, the most powerful conduit of illusion the world had yet known.⁴ Filmed in Kansas City by Calvin Productions in 1964, *Cobby's Hobbies* followed a simple formula, culminating in the production of over one hundred, four-minute episodes. But the program, unlike similar predecessors, failed to catch on. Calvin and Hill persevered but the program's reach was limited to a few regional television stations in the United States and, improbably, two in Australia. Disappointed but unstoppable, Murray Hill decided to turn his attention to the circus, quickly developing his own family acts while expanding his business in the wider direction of training and hiring out a variety of animals.

According to members of his family, Hill could be tough and generous in equal measure. He was a man who cared responsibly for his animals, family, and employees as long as he was incontestably "the boss." During their infant years, both Chatter (an older chimp, whose foray into television had proven more successful) and Cobby resided in the Hill household, living as quasi-siblings to Murray's four children. The eldest of these, Robin, later described the chimps as her "hairy brothers" and related how they were treated as bona fide family members, sharing meals and even clothes with the Hill children.⁵ However, as chimpanzees approach physical maturity, around the age of seven or eight years, they become far more difficult to control and potentially dangerous to humans in their proximity. With apparent regret, Murray was obliged to donate his beloved chimps to zoos, as he saw no palatable alternative. This thoughtful decision proved fortunate for Cobby, who has lived in the San Francisco Zoo ever since.⁶ In the compromised world of chimps in captivity this was indeed a happy outcome. But while Cobby began his zoo life many other members of his species were destined for lonely imprisonments or the unimaginable horrors of bio-medical research laboratories.

The transition from infant to adolescent is a dramatic development in the life of a "showbiz chimpanzee." Their cute, semi-human appeal is erased by size and, frequently, aggression, perhaps partly the result of confusion; one day an indulged pet, the next a reviled outcast. As chimps grow their "cuteness" currency diminishes radically. In the public imagination adult chimps are much less appealing than their infant selves, so entertainment roles become both unworkable and inappropriate. Moreover, the adult chimp bears little resemblance to the cute infantile version, to the extent that many associate the species only with the infant and fail to recognize the adult as the same animal. They are, in effect, expelled from

³ It is important to note that chimpanzees in entertainment are, without exception, infants.

⁴ Ironically, Hill disapproved of bestowing human names onto animals.

⁵ Robin Seidon in conversation with the authors, San Francisco, November 2014.

⁶ At time of writing Cobby is still alive and well at the San Francisco Zoo, aged 57. Chatter's fate is less clear.

Cutopia. As many chimps can live on into their forties, fifties, or even longer, the problem of what to do with them becomes highly vexatious. Show business veterans inevitably join the discarded ranks of exotic pets and other “post-cute” animals in a cruel limbo of life behind bars, often deprived of companionship and subject to dispassionate treatment as experimental specimens. This class of creature faces a life of smothering limitations, forever divorced from any ancestral dignity and excluded definitively from the sentimental embrace of humankind. It would, however, be fanciful to imagine that these societal outcasts dream of utopian lives in “the wild,” as they have never experienced it. In fact “the wild” has become an increasingly romantic concept as areas that were once natural habitats diminish at alarming rates. Ironically, captivity may ultimately preserve the species, but it will survive as a modified version of its original.

The primatologist and researcher Lisa Hamburger who, for several years was Cobby’s trainer, wrote a Master’s thesis in 2003 examining the effects of captivity on the social options of chimpanzees. As case studies, Hamburger used Cobby and his three female companions, Tallulah, Maggie, and Minnie, who had been sharing his enclosure for over forty years. It is worth noting that all four chimpanzees were wildborn. Hamburger found that the three females had formed a coalition against Cobby, the alpha male, largely to defend Maggie from his unwanted attempts at domination or, more particularly, copulation:

The study population at the San Francisco Zoo has a sex ratio of one male to three female chimpanzees. After an extended period of time [...] with daily interactions, the females appear to have formed an alliance [...] banding together to displace the male [...] and working as allies to take desired food items from the male. (Hamburger 4)

The artificiality of their situation can be compared to a human scenario, as many female chimps resist mating with males who are familiar from their infancy, preferring, in the wild, to migrate to other social groups for mating. If this compromising of social options is seen to be typical, then a very different order is being established amongst captive groups, further modifying the ideal of the chimpanzee from “the wild.” Hamburger’s study suggests that captive populations of any species will exhibit modified behaviours and thus differ in fundamental ways from their original order. Such shifts in the social structure may well obstruct breeding programs as well. When we consider the predominance of captive-born chimpanzees in the United States, it is clear that while species survival may be achieved, future populations may have undergone significant social transformations.⁷

To return to the particular example of Cobby and his hybrid upbringing, Murray Hill provides a complex and possibly signifying case study. On the one hand, he can be seen as a shrewd and non-emotive entrepreneur who considers his

⁷ Dr. Steve Ross, chief primatologist at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, monitors the population of known, captive chimps in the USA, and estimates the number at approximately 1850, including the large number living in non-accredited zoos or as exotic pets.

human clients as “suckers” and his animal employees as capital. On the other, he is known to have cared for his animals almost paternally, placing them on at least an equal footing with his children. To quote his second daughter, Nada: “he loved his animals and they loved him.”⁸ Clearly, it was in his own pragmatic interest to maintain good health and good relations with his “meal tickets” and to this end he was a harsh disciplinarian. But, according to his daughters, a high degree of empathy existed also. He exemplifies a centuries old human paradox in this regard. By way of contrast (or perhaps elucidation) Robert Bresson’s film *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966) explores these conflicting motivations through several human subjects and their treatment of a donkey named Balthazar. While the donkey is both slave and dependent, he maintains a dignity and stoicism that elude his human counterparts, who enact a self-destructive cavalcade of the seven deadly sins. While Bresson’s story is apocryphal it nonetheless reflects our duality and inconsistency of action with regard to animals. The most significant feature of this film is Balthazar’s passive acceptance of the misfortunes that befall him, as though he is blessed with a fatalism that dilutes his suffering.

This style of depiction is the opposite of the anthropomorphic approach, where meaning will be imposed via any means possible: voice-over, costume, mood-leading sound, whatever will effectively elicit an emotive response from an audience. Bresson, instead, relies purely on empathy. In one powerful scene Balthazar is brought to a circus and encounters other animals in cages. The donkey slowly peruses the cages, exchanging eye contact with, amongst others, a tiger. The two animals connect with a tacit language that is at once moving and yet unknowable. It is clear that the hunter and the prey here possess a commonality when enslaved by a shared oppressor. Again, Bresson employs empathy, between the animals and between them and us, the audience. The difficulty with anthropomorphic layering is that it compromises empathy by replacing it with sentiment. In the case of Cobby and other anthropomorphized animals, we the viewers are engaged with the representation of the animal rather than the animal itself. Unlike Balthazar, who seems unshakeably himself in any situation, Cobby is an actor and, as such, is adept at falsely narrowing the gap between non-human and human. John Berger articulates the inevitable distance between humans and animals that anthropomorphic sentiment can never hope to overcome. He reminds us that while animals were the subject of the first artworks, the first forays of figurative language and the first rituals, they remain unknowable: “The animal can be tamed. [...] But always its lack of common language, its silence, guarantees its distance, its distinctness, its exclusion, from and of man” (Berger, 102).

This distance goes beyond normal measurement; Cobby, the infant chimpanzee, dressed in riotous checks, bowtie and braces, cradled in human arms while he regards a camera, is perhaps further from us than a tiger lurking in the deepest jungle. The urge to anthropomorphise his small body and enjoy his facial

⁸ Nada Seidon in conversation with the authors, Chicago, November 2014.

contortions engulfs us in a wave of sentimental indulgence that effectively blinds us to his unnatural plight. The engaging creature we imagine we would like to hold and protect is the product, most likely, of violent separation and trauma, stolen from his family group in order to bring us this enjoyment.⁹ We read the seemingly comical face, celebrating what appear to be traces of commonality, but the eyes of the small creature are windows to a realm we cannot comprehend. When Cobby looked at the camera, the viewer [often an urban child] experienced an engagement that was both unique to that individual and improbable for most in the modern real world. This one-to-one interaction, although synthetic, offered an intimacy that reveals a significant absence in contemporary human experience. Conversely, the impassive eyes of Balthazar the donkey offer a truer portrait of the unknowable inner world of the non-human animal. Likewise, the returned gaze of a domestic pet will always be incomplete; there is a lack of intensity or priority beyond the basic functions of appetite. A visit to the zoo will prove even less satisfactory in this regard as even the least sensitive viewer of animals will be aware that he or she forms only a generic backdrop to a creature's gaze. There is no exclusivity of the kind offered by the TV chimp or the cartoon animal. Unlike the zoo animal, the television counterpart has no purpose other than to perform for you. When this exclusivity is offered by an animal that seems to exist between species, an animal that is dressed in human clothing and engaged with human activity, then a special, if artificial, relationship is formed. However this relationship is founded in fantasy and can perpetrate a distorted understanding of both the animal in question and its species. The ubiquity of animals in entertainment exposes us to a (C)utopian universe where our fellow creatures appear to enjoy an equality that is simultaneously ludicrous and reassuring. But the very familiarity of this fantasy can blind us to potential threats of extinction, cruel practices and any meaningful understanding of a species. This is the dark side of *Cutopia*.

Jacques Derrida has pointed out that what we really mean when we use the wildly generalizing term "animal" is "non-human": "*Animal* is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. [...] as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept" (124). Derrida's rejection of this binary separation demands further examination of the spread of species thus delineated. While it is clearly ridiculous for a chimpanzee and a cockroach to be grouped together, a generalized conflation of mammals is similarly problematic. To counter this we look for further binaries, from hunter versus prey (carnivore versus herbivore) to, in the context of this paper, wild-born versus captive-born. In essence though, our tendency is to explore the sub-categorization of animals in terms of their proximity to, or distance from our own experience. This is what

⁹ These family groups are often slaughtered for bush meat and to enable the stealing of chimpanzee infants.

drives our interactions with those that seem closest to us, and are thus capable of engendering emotional connections. The extreme divergence of human responses to animal cruelty might be seen as a mirror to our mysteriously varying levels of empathy, but this is arguably the result of cultural programming via belief systems. René Descartes's disregard for the suffering of his wife's dog (even if this story is apocryphal) illustrates how empathy can be modified according to rationalisation or belief.¹⁰ A lover of puppies and kittens might feel no compunction stepping on a spider, thus enacting an inherent hierarchy of empathetic sensibilities. "Empathy," therefore, can be seen as a relative term that can cover a spectrum of emotional calibrations, scaling from the "zero point" of callous indifference to profound, pro-animal sympathies. The historical position of the Catholic Church, that animals do not have "souls" and are thus inferior to humankind, has recently been revised, but its impact in previous centuries has been significant.¹¹ Descartes's view that the body is purely a mechanical instrument and that animals, without a soul, should be understood as such, provided intellectual support for both religious dogma and vivisection. This position proved influential and remains clearly widespread to this day.

A perverse acknowledgement of the qualities possessed by animals is the human need to dominate. The use of animals in circus acts or similar performances is an implicit statement of this domination. The spectacle of an animal that is known to be strong, wilful or fierce obeying its human master provokes a mixture of amazement and delight. As the viewer observes the trick or performance, admiration is directed to the trainer rather than the animal. A tacit acknowledgement of the hundreds of hours that have led to this performative moment inspires applause and excitement. Rather than oppressed or brutalized, the obedient animal is assumed to be both smart and willing. And once again, the animal that so performs is seen to exist in a space between species, a space where hybridity has elevated it to a level beyond its origins. The more the animal can approximate human activity and appearance, the more we are tempted to consider it "intelligent." We are less inclined to wonder if this human training has impacted on the animal, either positively or negatively, as the inner life of the creature is neither our immediate concern nor our immediate point of engagement.

The animal that behaves or appears as semi-human has been culturally appropriated while the animal that has surrendered its head, fur or body parts has been terminated as an individual. The head mounted on the hunter's wall is closer to the teddy bear or the animated mouse than many may choose to believe. Such trophies imply human authority over the might of the animal kingdom and uniformly feature slain creatures that are renowned for their power, speed or size.

¹⁰ Descartes is popularly believed to have nailed his wife's dog to a board and proceeded to dissect it, impervious to the small creature's cries of agony as he had rationalized that these were the result of mechanical impulses rather than real suffering.

¹¹ In a public audience in 1990 Pope John Paul II declared that animals do indeed have a soul. More recently, the current Pontiff, Francis, has stated that "dogs go to Heaven."

It is a curious fact that “cute” animals are spared from this form of tribal display. The idea of a kitten’s head mounted on a wall is unthinkable, but why is this? Perhaps such a totem would imply human cowardice, or is it because our dominion over kittens is entirely unchallenged? Another explanation might be that empathy towards animals that are cute, or that represent a species of individuals rather than types are more likely to induce compassion. The status of the “cute” animal, in human eyes, is strangely separate from that of the giant or the threatening carnivore. When Derrida describes the gaze of his cat, a gaze that inspects his naked privacy, he responds to this cat as an individual rather than a generic clone: “It doesn’t silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions” (115). While this animal remains inscrutable, its individuality or uniqueness is registered; it is not reduced to the collective identity of a hunter’s mounted trophy. While the hunter may recall the fatal event in detail, the act of killing and mutilation has forever deleted the victim’s uniqueness. Conversely, Derrida’s co-habitation with his cat produces a familiarity that further enhances the creature’s status as an individual and, more importantly, one that lives largely by its own rules.

I see it as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. (Derrida 116)

While Derrida is acutely aware of his cat’s gaze, the gaze of the other, it is a gaze that eludes comfortable exchange. Conversely, the eyes of the TV chimp seem dedicated to the very warmth of exchange the cat fails to offer. In a further distinction, the cat or pet almost certainly has a name. Whether this name is borrowed from human usage or is, say, conventionally feline (e.g. Tiddles), it affords the creature a degree of anthropomorphic significance. Likewise, the entertainer animal that performs in the public domain also has a name. To name something is to acknowledge its right to exist. A mountain on the moon does not exist for us unless it is named. A chimpanzee does not exist for us, as an individual, unless it is named. Conversely, a stag that appears in the cross-hairs of a rifle is simply “a stag.”

The positioning of animals as generic rather than particular was accelerated by the advent of the industrial revolution, where animals became only supportive of, rather than central to, the lives of humankind. However, a contradictory position, perhaps the result of societal misgiving, has emerged with regard to our engagements with our fellow creatures. While our primordial interest in other species is clearly as a source of food and, to a lesser extent, labour, the need to compensate these exploitations seems equally primal. Berger describes the genesis of this traditional paradox thus:

they [animals] were mortal and immortal. An animal’s blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox. This—maybe the first existential dualism—was reflected in the treatment of animals. They were subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed. (102)

The farmer who eats a beloved animal, although subject to the duality described by Berger, respects that animal's ultimate gift. The supermarket meat package allows for no such regard.

The discovery of extinction of species by the French zoologist and pioneer of paleontology Baron Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) shook the assumption that animal species were inexhaustible. Berger suggests that the industrial revolution brought about an accelerated extinction of species, leading to an unrequited but suppressed outbreak of human guilt. This was salved by the introduction of substitutes in the form of teddy bears and other toys, anthropomorphic animations and, of course, an increased visibility through a variety of animal-based entertainments: "it was not until the nineteenth century that reproduction of animals became a regular part of the décor of middle-class childhoods—and then [...] with the advent of vast display and selling systems like Disney's—of all childhoods" (104). So the mass production of substitute animals seeped into virtually every first-world household, frequently intermingling with (and sometimes being attacked by) domestic pets. Increasingly, it became possible to simultaneously cherish real and artificial animals within the bosom of the home while actively contributing to their accelerating demise through everyday consumerism. Increased hunting, harvesting and related environmental incursions have rendered many species extinct, despite a global infatuation with animal cartoons, toys, and pets. Berger points out that encounters with real animals in zoos inevitably lead to disappointment when compared with their fantasy-garnished replicas. This is because real animals are preoccupied with their own lives, compromised as these may be, and routinely show little interest in their human audience.

While the zoo appears to be a less contrived form of animal entertainment it nonetheless remains contentious. While some might consider the inmates pampered and protected from survival uncertainties, others would argue that it deprives animals of motivation or purpose.¹² Firstly, while the cage itself acts as a frame for the seemingly unadorned representation of the animal, it is an unfortunate structure that we inevitably associate with the forfeiting of freedom. It represents security from the outside while crushing elementary liberties from the inside. It might be argued that the implicit dangerousness of many animals is vicariously enhanced by the use of cages and bars, thus adding a thrill factor for the curious viewer. The German zoo pioneer Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913) exemplifies our multivalent relationship with animals in captivity, a position echoed to some degree by the English naturalist and writer Gerald Durrell (1925-1995). Hagenbeck not only captured and exhibited wild animals for the "infotainment" of

¹² This paper will not discuss these complex issues in depth but will instead look at the "entertainment" aspect of animals in cages.

the public, but also displayed human “others” in adjacent cages.¹³ All the while, though, he worked towards introducing less draconian environments for his captives, eventually creating the modern zoo enclosure that replaces bars with the moat. The influence of Hagenbeck’s innovation has been slow to spread though, with cages still in plentiful use throughout most levels of zoological architecture. However, neither Hagenbeck’s nor Durrell’s concerns for the welfare of captive creatures challenges the act of capture in the first instance, or the resultant psychological issues imposed on these creatures. In *A Zoo in my Luggage*, Durrell describes his assembly of a menagerie of animals acquired through dealings with various hunters, wardens, and the like in 1950s Africa. While clearly enjoying the characteristic behaviours of his charges, Durrell describes their singularity without any curiosity about its origins. In this way he exemplifies the attitudes of fifty years ago, when animals were often indulged as engaging pets while little thought was afforded to their birthright or psychological wellbeing. It is revealing that Durrell’s book is contemporaneous with Cobby’s capture and sale. For all Durrell’s enjoyment of the personality of his chimp, Cholmondeley, he gives little thought to his psychological condition, eventually finding him unmanageable and handing him over to the London Zoo.¹⁴

In nearly all cases, fictive animal characters from film and TV were drawn as “good” in the sense that they would use their non-human attributes, usually involving superior acuteness of the senses, to help, protect, and/or amuse their human co-characters, in turn engaging and amusing us, the viewers. “Bad” animal characters were more likely to appear in animated or literary fantasies until the advent of horror movies such as *Them* and *Jaws*, but even in these cases, human folly or intervention was uniformly the cause of their animosity.¹⁵ These acts usually took the form of environmental disturbance such as radioactive leakage or scientific adventurism gone wrong. In the rich field of primate and simian typecasting, the role of the angry or vengeful ape has become synonymous with the gorilla in the public imagination. The chest-beating giant with inestimable brute strength is nonetheless portrayed, in *King Kong* (1933) for example, as capable of emotion and tenderness.¹⁶ Our cultural need for equilibrium though, also calls for a benign ape, a gentler creature or clown that can work with us rather than against

¹³ Hagenbeck displayed pygmies and other exotic humans in simulated environments alongside non-human species.

¹⁴ Cholmondeley also “enjoyed” a brief television career and became a popular drawcard at the zoo. In 1951 Cholmondeley escaped from his cage, climbed onto a bus and bit a woman’s leg, a wound that required two stitches. Upon recapture, Cholmondeley’s keeper described him as “good as gold and, as always, a perfect gentleman” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 January 1951). Notwithstanding this, a later escape culminated with the animal being shot dead.

¹⁵ *Them* (1954, dir. Gordon Douglas) describes an invasion of giant ants modified by radioactive leakage, while *Jaws* (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg) describes the unprovoked carnage wreaked by a killer shark. A slightly later film, *Orca* (1977, dir. Michael Anderson), provides a revenge motive for similar attacks perpetrated upon the human world by a killer whale.

¹⁶ The 1933 version of *King Kong* was directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack.

us. The chimpanzee, of a certain age, fits this casting call perfectly.¹⁷ The infant chimpanzee provides a perfect foil for human heroes such as “Tarzan” or “Jungle Jim,”¹⁸ assisting with climbing, retrieving, and message delivery when needed, but reliably endearing as the clumsy, well-meaning buffoon who can induce laughter at the *dénouement* of a tense narrative. The reward of a banana is enough to reassure us that this comical creature is happy and well looked after, despite such humble return.

Within this context it is appropriate to refer to these animals as “actors” considering they were both performing and animating a role that had been authored by another being. What were the training circumstances away from the eye of the camera? Were they adequately rewarded for entertaining us, for helping to form our paradoxical worldview? And what happened to them after their currency as entertainers had expired? Cobby the chimp offers a window through which we can explore shifting attitudes to animals in entertainment, from the 1960s to the present. His “childhood” loosely coincides with the space program, television sit-coms, and the proliferation of advertising. Chimpanzees were routinely cast as both comic and “lovable.” The latter is a curious word that doesn’t necessarily equate with “loved.” As innocents we are happy to watch these “actors” and enjoy their apparent clumsiness and good naturedness, imagining, perhaps, that their wish is to be more like us. We are programmed to believe whatever fantasy is offered through the magical conduit of television, rarely following the occasional inclination to question the reality of such marvels. After all, it’s only harmless entertainment, isn’t it? The phrase “harmless entertainment” prompts a disturbing question though: how should we define its opposite, which presumably is “harmful” entertainment, an ironic consideration in the context of this paper.

If the animal performing a quasi-human action, perhaps dressed as a quasi-human and filmed as a quasi-human, does indeed wish to become a quasi-human, we can only ask “why?” If our innocent answer is “to ensure a better life,” then it follows that the life of an animal is inevitably inferior or miserable. If our answer takes the form of an endorsement of the creature’s intelligence, then we might assume that such a transmutation is possible, notwithstanding the total

¹⁷ This template was both challenged and inverted by the *Planet of the Apes* films, where adult chimpanzees wreak vengeance on the cruel human world that has enslaved them. These films, of course, do not use real chimpanzees for their protagonists, instead introducing audiences to the concept of the adult chimp via prosthetic costumes that mostly resemble (particularly in the original film) baby chimps on a larger scale. Recent films (*Rise of the Planet of the Apes* 2011, dir. Rupert Wyatt and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* 2014, dir. Matt Reeves) depict mature chimps with far more visual accuracy, further exploring the “good vs bad” axis within the primate universe. But these films bear too much similarity to the idea of “fantasy revenge,” where a creature that is perhaps intended as symbolic (e.g. “creature from the black lagoon” or ET) appears as an avatar for general, intra-human conflicts, and the need for empathy.

¹⁸ Both featured a tame chimpanzee: Cheetah in the *Tarzan* films (1932-48) and Tamba in the *Jungle Jim* TV series (Screen Gems 1955/6).

absence of success stories in this regard.¹⁹ We might also assume from this fantasy (that we are so willing to follow) that the animal that aims for quasi-human status is motivated by admiration and therefore wishes to imitate—to “ape.” Clearly, such speculations are, at best, half-formed, and they fade with the closing titles of the program. When an entire series, such as *Cobby’s Hobbies* fades, then the non-human actor fades from public view as well.

There is little doubt that large eyes resonate with us at a primordial level, engendering emotion-driven responses such as nurture and protection. Wide eyes can also be interpreted as indicators of innocence, fear or wonder. But the great paradox inherent within this reading of cuteness is that the eyes of an animal, as indicated earlier, resist any confirmation of meaning. They are, in fact, the most unfathomable feature of any animal, windows to a world that might contain the secrets of the universe or, conversely, nothing beyond the most fundamental survival functions. Their inscrutability, as evidenced by the donkey Balthazar, by Derrida’s cat and, penetrating the mask of anthropomorphic garnish, by Cobby the chimpanzee, presents us with one of the great mysteries of human inquiry. The animal that is offered for entertainment, as we have seen, is a representation that effectively obscures rather than reveals the real individual we observe. While Cobby has never enjoyed total control of his long life, he has maintained an enigmatic inner “persona” that is his and his alone. While trainers and keen observers have described him having mood swings, or good and bad days, and while the political equilibrium between him and his female companions can be understood at a basic level, the one thing he can tell us beyond any doubt is perhaps the most valuable message he can impart—he has always been, and will always be, a unique individual quite distinct from his television representation. We must remind ourselves that every animal, whether cute, nameless, big, small, dangerous, endangered, pampered or mistreated, possesses a sovereign identity that is incontrovertibly its own.

¹⁹ This point seems to be underlined by the relative lack of successful communication resulting from teaching sign language to Koko the gorilla and Nim the chimpanzee, both featured in recent documentary films (*Koko: A Talking Gorilla*, dir. Barbet Schroeder 1978; *Project Nim*, dir. James Marsh 2011).



Cobby, aged 56, at San Francisco Zoo, 2014 (photo: Michael Vale)

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Posthuman “Meta(l)morphoses” in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

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Abstract



Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007) pictures a futuristic world in which every body is technologically, discursively, and materially constructed. First of all, *The Stone Gods* foregrounds the futuristic conceptualization of embodiment and posthuman gendered bodies in relation to biotechnology, biogenetics, and robotics, interrogating contemporary dimensions of the interface between the human and the machine, nature and culture. Secondly, the novel focuses on environmental concerns relevant to our present age. More specifically, however, drawing our attention to posthuman toxic bodies in terms of “trans-corporeality,” as suggested by Stacy Alaimo, *The Stone Gods* is an invaluable literary means to speculate on our “posthuman predicament,” in Rosi Braidotti’s words, and global ecological imperilment. In *The Stone Gods*, Winterson provides not only a warning against the dehumanization of the human in the process of posthumanization, but also a salient picture of posthuman trans-corporeal subjects through a discussion of the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on human-nonhuman “naturecultures.” On this view, looking at both human and nonhuman bodies through a trans-corporeal lens would contribute to an understanding of how material-discursive structures can profoundly transform human-nonhuman life on Earth.

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, posthumanism, trans-corporeality, material agency, naturecultures.

Resumen

The Stone Gods (2007) de Jeanette Winterson describe un mundo futurístico en el que todo el mundo está construido tecnológica, discursiva y materialmente. En primer lugar, *The Stone Gods* pone en primer plano la conceptualización futurista de la materialización y de los cuerpos posthumanos provistos de género en relación con la biotecnología, la biogenética y la robótica, cuestionando las dimensiones contemporáneas del interfaz entre el humano y la máquina, naturaleza y cultura. En segundo lugar, la novela se centra en preocupaciones medioambientales relevantes en nuestra época. Más específicamente, sin embargo, haciendo notar los cuerpos tóxicos post-humanos en términos de “trans-corporalidad,” tal y como sugiere Stacy Aliamo, *The Stone Gods* es un medio literario que no tiene precio a la hora de especular sobre nuestro “dilema posthumano,” en palabras de Rosa Braidotti, y sobre la peligrosidad ecológica global. En *The Stone Gods* Winterson no solo ofrece una advertencia sobre la deshumanización del humano en el proceso de posthumanización, sino también una imagen destacada de los sujetos posthumanos trans-corporales por medio de un debate de los efectos beneficiosos y dañinos de la biotecnología y de las máquinas sobre las “naturaculturas” humanas-no-humanas. En este sentido, observando los cuerpos humanos y no-humanos a través de una lente trans-corporal contribuiría a comprender cómo las estructuras materiales-discursivas pueden transformar profundamente la vida humana-no-humana de la Tierra.

Palabras clave: Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, posthumanismo, trans-corporalidad, agencia material, naturaculturas.

The body has long been a social, cultural, political, and literary touchstone in the humanities and social sciences, not just as a discursive construction and a corporeal abstraction but also as a literary element of bodies politic. Recently, however, the understanding of the body has undergone a significant change in environmental theories with the advent of posthumanism(s)¹. Posthumanist ontologies of the material body foregrounded by various figures from both the natural and social sciences, such as Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, Stacy Alaimo, Vicki Kirby, and Jane Bennett, moved the postmodern discussions of the discursive body in a new direction, resulting in the emergence of a posthuman turn. This new focus on the materiality of the body also triggered a shift in the contemporary British novel, which is evident in Jeanette Winterson’s later work, such as her 2007 novel, *The Stone Gods*. In other words, although Winterson focuses on a postmodern understanding of the body as a textual entity in *Written on the Body* (1992), she demonstrates in *The Stone Gods* how both discursive and material practices affect and reconfigure human and nonhuman subjectivities as well as the physical environment. Firstly, *The Stone Gods* brings to the fore the futuristic conceptualization of embodiment and posthuman gendered bodies in relation to new technologies, such as biotechnology, biogenetics, and robotics, interrogating contemporary dimensions of the interface between the human and the machine, nature and culture by developing the debate about what posthumanness is. Secondly, drawing our attention to posthuman toxic bodies, *The Stone Gods* is an invaluable literary source to speculate on our “posthuman predicament,” in Rosi Braidotti’s words, and global ecological imperilment. Not only does Winterson provide a warning against the dehumanization of the human in the process of posthumanization, but also creates a salient picture of posthuman trans-corporeal subjects, artificial embodiment, sentient machines, and *Homo sapiens/Robo sapiens*, through discussing the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on the human-nonhuman. In this regard, looking at both human and nonhuman bodies through a trans-corporeal lens might contribute to the understanding of how material-discursive structures can profoundly transform human-nonhuman life on the planet.

¹The term posthumanism ranges from “(a) an enthusiastic embrace of new ‘anthropo-technologies’ and the many new freedoms that they may bring us (known as *popular* or *liberal* posthumanism, or simply *transhumanism*), (b) the embrace of those technologies’ potential to dissolve ossified humanist pretensions of the human and the non-human (known as *critical*, *cultural* or *radical* posthumanism), (c) the insistence on the ubiquity of other, non-human forms of agency, which reframes the human as just one among many players in the game that is our life, and thus strips us of the exceptionalism that once set us apart from the rest of the world (*methodological* posthumanism), to, finally, (d) a deep skepticism regarding the desirability of all the changes in our condition that are already taking place or are being envisaged for the near future (*dystopian* posthumanism, or, rather disparagingly ‘*bioconservatism*’)” (Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell 6-7).

Through an examination of the fluid boundaries between the body, biotechnology, and the physical environment, I will argue in this article that Winterson brings *The Stone Gods* into new dialogue with critical posthuman discourses on the entangled relations between physical and social bodies, the material and the immaterial self, and the organic and the technologically-enhanced body. Drawing upon the arguments and concepts put forward by new materialist and critical posthumanist theorists, I will trace the relationship the novel insinuates between corporeality, gender, biotechnology, ecology, and toxicity with a particular focus on posthuman “trans-corporeality.” Before exploring bodily identity and material self with regard to changing technologies and ecologies, as illustrated in the novel, however, a brief introduction to the material turn is necessary.

Material feminists, such as Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo, currently theorize human and nonhuman corporealities by engaging with the porous boundaries between bodies and physical environments. In their theorization of the body, the material body is no longer regarded as a fixed, static, immutable, and encircled entity that is temporally and spatially confined to only one territory. Rather, corporeality, as Elizabeth Grosz reflects, “can be understood as a series of surfaces, energies, and forces, a mode of linkage, a discontinuous series of processes, organs, flows, and matter” (120). Parallel to suggestions made by a number of material feminists, the posthuman body undoubtedly emerges from the complex entanglements of nature and culture, which new materialist and posthuman theories emphatically highlight, arguing that not only biological entities, but matter itself, in its various manifestations, also possesses agentic capacities. Jane Bennett, for example, defends the idea that matter has “a vitality intrinsic to materiality,” and contests the older visions of matter as a “passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance” (xiii). According to Bennett, matter has agency or capacity to affect and be affected in its complex interactions with human and nonhuman factors. In a similar way, Serpil Oppermann remarks that the “old conceptions of matter as a stable, inert, and passive substance, and of the human agent as a separate observer always in control, are being replaced here by the new posthumanist models that effectively theorize matter’s inherent vitality” (465). This vision of matter as agentic, effective, and beyond human control is of great importance in understanding the “interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity” (Bennett 31). Material agencies, then, as new materialist theorists underline, can “aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us” (Bennett ix). As a result, the posthuman concept of “material-discursive” bodies (in Karen Barad’s sense) illustrates both positive and negative interactions of nature and culture.

Accordingly, human and nonhuman corporealities must be seen more as a site of intermeshment within the nonhuman world than as a pure material entity, thereby becoming “trans-corporeal,” which Alaimo identifies as “interchanges and

interconnections between various bodily natures” (*Bodily* 2). Trans-corporeality refers to the inseparability of human and nonhuman corporeality from the environment. Intertwining in toxic pollutants, viruses, chemical substances, and contaminated landscapes, the body, as Alaimo argues, is extremely “vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments” (*Bodily* 28). Therefore, the posthuman body becomes a trans-corporeal site of danger. Posthuman trans-corporeality of material bodies, as indicated above, regards the posthuman body as “vital,” “intra-active,” agential, toxic, relational, “porous,” and “vibrant.” Additionally, trans-corporeal bodies are material ontic agents in human entanglement with the nonhuman and the material world. In line with this understanding of corporeality, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, in *New Materialisms* (2010), propound the view that “[p]aying attention to corporeality as a practical and efficacious series of emergent capacities [...] reveals both the materiality of agency and agentic properties inherent in nature itself” (20).

On that basis, Winterson similarly suggests that all bodies are enmeshed within other material bodies, and she sees the posthuman gendered body as a pliable and fluid entity as well as a material actor. Winterson’s novels, as Jago Morrison notes, “carry out a genealogical investigation of flesh and its pleasures, tracing the processes by which sexed bodies are materialised over time” (174). Winterson’s contribution to the posthumanist discourse, then, is that she introduces material flexibility into gendered human and nonhuman subjectivities so as to support the idea of posthuman ontological difference, for she is against the transhumanist idea that “essence becomes non-essence, and uniqueness is converted into sameness” (Sheehan 254). She also introduces a “literary posthumanism” (Sheehan 246). *The Stone Gods* brings into focus literary posthuman issues regarding the theorization of (now technological) body, gender, embodiment, toxicity, sexual difference, and subjectivity, where corporeality is interpreted as a plastic material-discursive entity open to the physical environment. In this sense, *The Stone Gods* brings theory to life, giving shape to the posthuman.

The Stone Gods is comprised of three time zones in which the gendered corporeal entities are transformed in relation to the physical environment. In the first section, Billie Crusoe works for a corporation called “MORE” in the near future and goes on an expedition to Planet Blue with Spike, a female robot Winterson calls “Robosapiens,” because Billie’s world is on the verge of total collapse, and the future clearly belongs to the posthuman cyborg. By means of new technologies, such as DNA enhancement, human bodies are reconstituted as a kind of cyborg. In such a post-technological environment, human and nonhuman bodies have also become totally toxic since they are exposed to extreme toxicity due to pollution on the land and in the water and air. The second section is set in the 1770s on Easter Island, where people have literally destroyed all the forests in the course of constructing their stone idols. The protagonist is again Billy Crusoe, whose gender

role here changes into that of a male subject. In the last two sections of the novel, after a nuclear war, the entire planet is polluted and divided into Tech City and Wreck City. Tech City is a hyper-technologized society where human bodies are technologically constructed, whereas in Wreck City human bodies are exposed to nuclear waste and toxicity. People live in toxic landscapes in Wreck City, and are regarded as outcast bodies—as the ultimate “others.” Winterson’s posthuman novel, in this light, illustrates bodily natures in relation to nuclear waste, toxicity, and the interactions between corporeal and trans-corporeal bodies.

Winterson’s work, as Sonya Andermahr points out, is “well known for its multiple border-crossings and fantastic journeys through space, time, genre, and gender. Her fictional universes blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine, past and present, material and magical worlds” (“Cyberspace” 108). *The Stone Gods* posthumanizes a futuristic and post-technological world in which every boundary is not only deconstructed but also biotechnologically, discursively, and materially reconstructed. In a hyper-technologized society in the first part, Planet Blue, of *The Stone Gods*, a mixture of ecological science fiction and cyberfiction, posthuman techno-embodiment and gendered selves are entwined with biotechnology and machinery. The narrator/protagonist of the novel, Billie/Billy Crusoe, as a scientist in Enhancement Services who is androgynous and bisexual in her/his temporal and spatial adventures throughout the novel, helps people of the Central Power to enhance their lives. The Central Power is one of three governmental institutions, together with the Eastern Caliphate and the Sino-Mosco Pact in Orbus. The technologically advanced one is the Central Power, with “twenty-two geo-cities” (6), which stands for “a visible and invisible sign of progress and power” (5). Inhabitants of the Central Power are biogenetically fixed, and they are controlled through the use of biopolitics by the ruling elite. Biotechnologies, such as genetic replication, genetic tinkering, genetic engineering, and biogenetics, permeate the lives of the inhabitants of the Central Power. For instance, Billie/Billy’s boss, Manfred, says: “a world that clones its meat in the lab and engineers its crops underground thinks natural food is dirty and diseased” (9). It is significant to note that “natural” bodies, human/nonhuman, are seen as “dirty” in this post-technological community. Nevertheless, Billie/Billy is against the technologization of life, bodies, and selves. Unlike her, most citizens are drawn to genetic fixing. People want to be young and beautiful, and the material-discursive relations affect everybody except for a minority who do not favor this trend in this society.

Manfred is one of those confident men who have had themselves genetically Fixed as late-forties. Most men prefer to Fix younger than that, and there are no women who Fix past thirty. ‘The DNA Dynasty,’ they called us, when the first generation of humans had successful recoding. Age is information failure. The body loses fluency. Command stations no longer connect with satellite stations. Relay breaks down. The body is designed to repair and renew itself, and most cells are only about a third as old as our birth years, but mitochondrial DNA is as old as we are, and has always accumulated mutations and distortions faster than DNA in the nucleus. For centuries we couldn’t fix that - and now we can. (Winterson 10-11)

In this posthuman society, fixing DNA, as Manfred mentions, opens up new spaces for body modification. The body is both discursively and materially reconstructed. The genetically modified bodies are by all means inseparable from “naturecultures” (in Donna Haraway’s words) in *Orbus*. What stands out as their trans-corporeality is that human and nonhuman bodies are imbricated with each other. As Alaimo clarifies, “the material self cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial” (“New Materialisms” 282). In *Orbus*, these factors have a great impact over the bodies of men and women and children, for these naturecultures and the material world of *Orbus* are part of the “Phenomena” suggested by Karen Barad. In her article entitled “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” Barad highlights the fact that “Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime matter, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of ‘quantum entanglements,’ which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’” (125). This complex of agential phenomena is depicted through the use of discontinuous but interrelated narratives in Winterson’s text, creating a “post-generic” posthuman story (Sheehan 255). In the posthuman story, trans-corporeal subjects encompass multiple identities that are malleable, depending upon the temporal and spatial conditions. Nevertheless, in this biotechnological society, the aforementioned fixity is seen as a way of “normalizing” the body, although “Winterson,” as Sonya Andermahr notes, “continually returns to the idea that the self is not fixed” (*Jeanette* 29). She destabilizes the fixity of the gendered self, and what’s more, she displays the posthuman ontological flexibility and fluidity of subject positions in terms of transgressing Cartesian dualisms and boundaries. Indeed, *The Stone Gods* “promotes ontological relativism and a subjective understanding of the world [space], rejecting the idea of a fixed self” (Andermahr, *Jeanette* 28-9).

But while Winterson criticizes the fixity and sameness of corporeality, she also questions the dominance of new technologies. In the Central Power, having been bio-technologically modified, people are transformed into posthuman beings who are not at all transgressive, as would be expected of the posthuman corporeality. In this sense, new technologies construct a posthuman trans-corporeality by breaking down the boundaries; that is, the posthuman trans-corporeality challenges the interface of human/machine, the natural/the postnatural in relation to the physical environment. “Every human being in the Central Power,” writes Winterson in the novel, “has been enhanced, genetically modified and DNA-screened. Some have been cloned. Most were born outside the womb. A human being now is not what a human being was even a hundred years ago. So what is a human being?” (77). In Neil Badmington’s words, posthumanist thought “emerges from a recognition that ‘Man’ is not the privileged and protected center, because humans are no longer – and perhaps never were – utterly distinct

from animals, machines, and other forms of the ‘inhuman’”(374). Obviously, posthumanist discourse disrupts the anthropocentric understanding of “Human” as central actors and interrogates what counts as “human” or “nonhuman” by blurring the boundaries between human, machine, nonhuman animals, and more-than-human naturecultures. Likewise, as N. Katherine Hayles argues in *How We Became Posthuman*, “the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (3). In other words, “we are not who ‘we’ once believed ourselves to be. And neither are ‘our’ others” (374). In *The Stone Gods*, this kind of “we”/“others” binary opposition is disrupted and eliminated, but it is reconstructed anew in the Wreck City in the novel, pitted against the Tech City. In the Wreck City, posthuman cancerous people are hidden from the inhabitants of the Tech City, and these cancerous people are regarded as “others.” Otherness has to do with the fact that “the posthuman is the *other than human*, where otherness is defined by the principle of transformation” (Sheehan 246). Enmeshed in the physical environment, the human body cannot be thought to be separable from other nonhuman bodies. As Ollivier Dyens argues, “when the body is transformed, whether naturally or artificially, its relationship to the environment is affected, and it can no longer exist exactly as before” (55). It is through three post-generic narratives that the boundaries of human and nonhuman corporealities have become malleable and transformative in line with biotechnological changes and transformations in ecology in advanced technologized societies in the novel. In this context, Winterson not only celebrates transgressive politics of the posthuman, but also clearly warns her readers against a posthuman futurity controlled by new technologies in *The Stone Gods*.

The posthuman is beyond any entrenched notion of what “human” is, for the posthuman entails human and nonhuman bodies that can at once become real or virtual, organic or inorganic, natural or postnatural. As Barad states, all bodies are apparatuses in this re-configuring intra-active phenomena (*Meeting* 148-149). Corporealities in *Orbus* are apparatuses that are intra-acting with other naturecultures, biotechnology, robotics, and information technologies. Genetically engineered bodies become posthuman through biotechnological transmutations. As Patricia MacCormack points out, the posthuman, “like the queer, is the materially incarnated agency emergent from an alteration of paradigms of humanism” (113). The novel’s posthuman bodies certainly emerge from such alterations when they become sexually queer after genetic fixing:

Celebrities are under pressure, no doubt about it. We are all young and beautiful now, so how can they stay ahead of the game? Most of them have macro-surgery. Their boobs swell like beach balls, and their clicks go up and down like beach umbrellas. They are surgically stretched to be taller, and steroids give them muscle-growth that turns them into star-gods. Their body parts are bio-enhanced,

and their hair can do clever things like change colour to match their outfits.
(Winterson 19)

In fact, this genetically modified corporeality is also gendered according to the ideals of fashion promoted by the Central Power society. Male and female corporealities in this posthuman society are still objectified, sexualized, medicalized, programmed, controlled, oppressed, and technologically engineered. It is worth mentioning that male and female bodies here are seen as malleable things, easily fashioned according to a cultural ideal. Although transgressions of corporeal boundaries are significant for Winterson, “sameness” and “non-essence” of bodies might create a fixity depending on a false ideal. In this society, the cultural icon is a child, Little Seniorita, who is a pop star. Little Seniorita, who is twelve years old, is also fixed, and just like other children transforms nearly into a freak. Fixity is both an obsession and a fashion. For instance, Mrs. Mary McMurphy’s husband wants her to be younger so as to have more enjoyable sex with her, and Billie/Billy goes to speak to her about genetic reversal. However, Billie/Billy is very cautious about genetic reversal: “Genetic reversal has strange effects on the body. The last time it was done, the reversal couldn’t be contained, and the girl got younger and younger until she was a six-foot-tall six-month-old baby” (20). The narrator continues to reflect upon the situation: “I guess she has been Fixed at twenty-four. Now that everyone is young and beautiful, a lot of men are chasing girls who are just kids. They want something different when everything has become the same” (21). The sexualization of culture and children is widespread in this community where human corporeality turns out to be highly perverted, which the narrator underlines: “we’re all perverts now” (22). When Billie/Billy visits Peccadillo to see Mr. McMurphy, she encounters “translucents,” who are “see-through people” (22). The global crisis people witness is the genetic fixing:

All men are hung like whales. All women are tight as clams below and inflated like lifebuoys above. Jaws are square, skin is tanned, muscles are toned, and no one gets turned on. It’s a global crisis. At least, it’s a crisis among the cities of the Central Power. The Eastern Caliphate has banned Genetic Fixing, and the SinoMosco Pact does not make it available to all its citizens, only to members of the ruling party and their favourites. (Winterson 22-23)

The narrator is against genetic fixing and cosmetic surgery, because it is through genetic tinkering and cosmetic surgery that bodies are modified according to the male gaze and posthuman desires. The modified corporealities of the perverts in Peccadillo are posthuman in this sense, since biotechnology is intermeshed with other bodies. It is noted that “sexy sex is now about freaks and children. If you want to work in the sex industry, you get yourself cosmetically altered in shape and size. Giantesses are back in business. Grotesques earn good money. Kids under ten are known as veal in the trade” (23). The gendered “monstrous” bodies of women are constructed according to the controlled biopower formations in this society. Female bodies become trans-corporeal, but they are by no means

subversive or transgressive in the feminist sense. Billie/Billy relates how he comes across a giant-woman as follows: “As I hurry across the floor, my way is barred by an enormous woman with one leg, hopping along on a diamond-studded crutch. I am on a level with her impressive breasts — more so, because where I would normally expect to find a nipple, I find a mouth. Her breasts are smiling, and so is she” (23). This biogenetically enhanced woman has a monstrous posthuman body, bringing the issue of sexuality to the surface in the novel. However, as an empowering tool for women, as Rosi Braidotti suggests, “[s]exuality [should be] simultaneously the most intimate and the most external, socially driven, power-drenched practice of the self. As a social, symbolic, material, and semiotic institution, sexuality is singled out as the primary location of power in a complex manner that encompasses both macro and micro relations” (“Meta(l)flesh” 243). The sexual power of women, however, is diminished in *Orbus* through genetic reconstruction of women’s bodies. As Luciana Parisi argues, “the bio-technological engineering of the body, the genetic design of life accelerates the recombination of different elements and the mutations of the body–sex by disclosing a new set of urgent questions about the relation between feminine desire and nature” (12). Winterson elaborates upon this argument of embodiment through a posthumanist narrative platform where Billie/Billy reflects upon the predicament of women:

So this is the future: girls Fixed at eight years old, maybe ten, hopefully twelve. Or will they want women's minds in girls' bodies and go for genetic reversal?

The future of women is uncertain. We don't breed in the womb any more, and if we aren't wanted for sex ... But there will always be men. Women haven't gone for little boys. Women have a different approach. Surrounded by hunks, they look for 'the ugly man inside'. Thugs and gangsters, rapists and wife-beaters are making a comeback. They may smile like beach-boys, but they are pure shark. So this is the future. F is for Future. (Winterson 26)

The ambiguous situation of women is recontextualized by Winterson in her posthumanist scenario. For example, the desire to transgress the boundaries and limits of the flesh is unsatisfactory, for the system sees woman and children as fetishized and commodified objects, thus making female bodies quite “docile.” Billie/Billy observes: “I am beginning to feel justifiable paranoia. I look around for the cameras, not that you can ever see them. I am being watched, but that isn't strange. That's life. We're all used to it. What is strange is that I feel I am being watched. Staked out. Observed. But there's no one there” (29-30). This kind of biopower oppresses and controls various corporealities through surveillance, that is, “the satellite system that watches us more closely than God ever did” (31). Nevertheless, in the posthuman world of *Orbus*, human and nonhuman bodies do not lose their agential performativity, effectivity, and vitality in their ongoing new materializations. Yet, even Billie/Billy cannot escape from posthuman materialization. She, for example, reveals her own corporeality when she talks about chip implantation: “my data-chip implant. Everything about me is stored just above my wrist” (33). This material-discursive practice has great impact on the posthuman subjectivity of Billie/Billy. Her flesh is not at all separable from the

material implant. They are co-constitutive, making her body truly posthuman, but not entirely robotic, as is the case with Spike, who is identified as a “robo sapiens” in the novel.

As a robo sapiens, Spike is evolving as a posthuman cyborg, thus “representing the hybrid natural-cultural, organic-technological, authentic-artificial nature of the contemporary subject” (Hollinger 274). His material body is agential in terms of how it affects each body in trans-corporeal exchanges with other apparatuses, for “[t]he body is an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and affective or unconscious nature” (Braidotti, “Meta(l)flesh” 243). In the novel, posthuman bodies of people and robots alike are what Braidotti describes: “shot through with technologically-mediated social relations” (*Metamorphoses* 228). The posthuman body Winterson envisions is, thus, similar to Braidotti’s description. The posthuman is “positioned in the spaces inbetween the traditional dichotomies, including the body-machine binary opposition. In other words, it has become historically, scientifically, and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically-mediated extensions” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 228). The posthuman body is not a fixed entity, but an interface of intensities, flows, exchanges, and movements through iterative intra-actions within the material world. “The textualized flesh,” Domna Pastourmatzi points out, “is abstract clay in the hands of writers and it is this very abstraction of the actual organic body in the creative but controlled lab-environment of fiction that permits the bloodless transition of human consciousness into a technologically contaminated posthuman existence” (213).

Creating a “literary posthumanism,” Jeanette Winterson, in *The Stone Gods*, dexterously deals with such enfleshments in a circular text showing how posthuman “meta(l)morphoses” can take place in a changing world. What remains to be asked, then, is whether the posthuman is “a utopian aspiration, a cautionary critique, [and] an evolutionary end-point” (Sheehan 245). The answer to this question is hidden in the environmental problem of toxicity in *Orbus*, where planetary toxicity is visibly intra-acting with human and nonhuman bodies. As a palpable example of trans-corporeal space, the posthuman body represented in the novel is also toxic. Trans-corporeality here signifies “the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” (Alaimo, *Bodily* 282). The ramifications of these actions can be beneficial or deleterious, creating liminal spaces for human and nonhuman bodies. The “space-time of trans-corporeality,” as Alaimo and Hekman contend, “is a site of both pleasure and danger – the pleasures of desire, surprise, and lively emergence, as well as the dangers of pain, toxicity, and death” (14). As Billie/Billy Crusoe observes, “[t]here’s a red dust storm beginning, like spider-mite, like ants, like things that itch and bite. No one has any idea where the red

dust is coming from, but it clogs the air-filtering systems, and since it started about two years ago, we are obliged to carry oxygen masks. This one might blow over or it might not” (30). The dust storm has an agency of its own, intra-acting with human bodies negatively. The “trans-corporeal subject,” as Alaimo puts it, “is not so much situated, which suggests stability and coherence, but rather caught up in and transformed by myriad, often unpredictable material agencies” (*Bodily* 146). The flows and exchanges between human bodies and more-than-human environments manifest quite negatively in the dust storm, because it is through the red dust storm that human and nonhuman bodies become toxic. However, this is not the sole factor in reconfiguring human corporeality in relation to the physical environment in the narrative. Oxygen masks, for example, are vital prostheses for human bodies in Orbus, where there is always a “red-alert pollution warning” (37). Even though, as Manfred says below, technology has done so much for the benefit of the society in Orbus, the end-result could not be prevented:

“We have the best weather-shield in the world. We have slowed global warming. We have stabilized emissions. We have drained rising sea levels, we have replanted forests, we have synthesized food, ending centuries of harmful farming practices,” he glares at me again, “We have neutralized acid rain, we have permanent refrigeration around the ice-caps, we no longer use oil, gasoline, or petroleum derivatives.” (Winterson 37)

This is significant in the sense that no matter how advanced technological solutions may be in interfering with the planetary life support systems, technology alone cannot save a dying planet that is on the brink of destruction, ironically by technological tampering with its ecosystem. Stacy Alaimo’s trans-corporeal theory makes it clear that we intra-act with more-than-human natures positively and negatively by resorting to naturalcultural practices. In the age of the environmental crisis, with accelerating global warming, increasing levels of pollution, toxins, and radiation in landscapes, air, and water, it is crucial to highlight the idea that *The Stone Gods* reflects our posthuman predicament and global ecological imperilment. The focus in the novel is on the fact that “[w]e made ourselves rich polluting the rest of the world, and now the rest of the world is polluting us” (Winterson 37). The material self turns out to be irreversibly toxic under the trans-corporeal effects of poisonous substances killing the planet. So significant are the toxic, synthetic, and chemical substances that are an inseparable part of posthuman trans-corporeality that Billie/Billy observes pollution on the very streets: “On the streets everyone was wearing their pollution filters. Everyone had the glassy-eyed, good-looking look that is normal nowadays. Even in an air-mask, people are concerned to look good. The State gives out masks on demand, but the smart people have their own designer versions” (44). Toxicity engulfs all forms of life in Orbus in a manner that leads to the destruction of the planet. Ecological imperilment, accordingly, frightens everybody in Orbus:

The red dust is frightening. The carbon dioxide is real. Water is expensive. Bio-tech has created as many problems as it has fixed, but, but, we’re here, we’re alive, we’re the human race, we have survived wars and terrorism and scarcity and

global famine, and we have made it back from the brink, not once but many times. History is not a suicide note — it is a record of our survival. (Winterson 47)

Although biotechnology can partially solve the problems people encounter in their quotidian lives, they cannot prevent the toxic atmosphere of Orbus from affecting everyone and everything lethally. Therefore, Orbus becomes destitute, and the Central Power starts searching for a new colonizable planet. Subsequently, the Central Power finds verdant Planet Blue, which is suitable for human life. As Sonya Andemahr suggests, “the novel is informed by Winterson’s concerns about our relationship with the environment. It develops her major themes of ‘displacement, searching, and longing’ in a new social context” (*Jeanette* 151). Billie/Billy, Spike, as a female robo sapiens, and Mrs. McMurhpy, are sent to Planet Blue with captain Handsome, who likens it to Orbus. He calls it the “white planet”:

“The white planet was a world like ours,” said Handsome, “far, far advanced. We were still evolving out of the soup when the white planet had six-lane highways and space missions. It was definitely a living, breathing, working planet, with water and resources, cooked to cinders by CO₂. They couldn’t control their gases. Certainly the planet was heating up anyway, but the humans, or whatever they were, massively miscalculated, and pumped so much CO₂ into the air that they caused irreversible warming. The rest is history.” (Winterson 67-68)

In a way, the author highlights what Val Plumwood poignantly suggests: “It seems increasingly possible that many of those now living will face the ultimate challenge of human viability, reversing our species’ drive towards destroying our planetary habitat” (32). The situation of the destitute Orbus displays the concern. Vital as it might be, human beings make the same mistake continuously throughout *The Stone Gods*. In the second part of the novel, Easter Island, the islanders also do so. The islanders destroy their once pristine and verdant environment to construct stone gods. In the third and fourth parts, Post-War 3 and Wreck City, after the nuclear destruction, the corporate states make the same mistake, which Plumwood touches upon. The mistake is recurrent everywhere irrespective of ecosystems. The text, hence, highlights the posthuman predicament of humans who have become experts in turning their bodies and the environment into toxic places.

Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, argues that she “would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?” (17-18). In order to answer such a question, one has to identify, first, who or what can be regarded as “human” or “nonhuman” or “inhuman” or “posthuman” or “subhuman” or “pre-human.” The question is so problematic that Winterson scrutinizes it throughout *The Stone Gods*. In this context, posthuman toxic bodies emerge in the fourth part, Wreck City. Wreck City exemplifies the radioactive situation of Post-3 War, the post-nuclear holocaust, the deleterious effects of atomic bombs, and the dehumanization of toxic mutants. In the third part of the novel, Tech City, like the one in Orbus, is seen as safe, for it is also technologically advanced. Tech City is

governed by a global corporate named MORE. Billie and Spike in Orbus spatially and temporally re-emerge in Post-3 War and Wreck City. Billie visits Wreck City: “Wreck City is a No Zone — no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police. It's not forbidden to go there, but if you do, and if you get damaged or murdered or robbed or raped, it's at your own risk. There will be no investigation, no compensation. You're on your own” (179). Obviously, Wreck City is highly risky. The community in Wreck City is rendered as a “trans-corporeal risk society,” since it is difficult to live without being exposed to the poisoned environment. As Billie observes, “[t]he fires never go out, smouldering with a molten half-life, the wind blowing ash and flakes of metal into your clothes and hair” (180). Billie and Spike come across a man called Friday, who lives in Wreck City as a trans-corporeal subject. The trio talk about The Unknown: “‘What’s in the Unknown?’ ‘If I could tell you that, it would be Known, wouldn't it? It's radioactive. It's re-evolving. It's Life after Humans, whatever that is, but you know what? It can't be so much worse, can it?’” (188). In The Unknown, there are “ultimate others,” mutant beings isolated from those in Tech City. So, there is a conflict between mutated/toxic beings and those who are unaffected. In Wreck City, Billie experiences the toxicity first hand:

In front of me, barring my way, was a petrified forest of blackened and shocked trees, silent, like a haunted house. I moved towards it, frightened of what I would find, with an instinct for danger that only happens when there really is danger.

I moved through the first rows of trees. Their bark had a coating — like a laminate. Further in, deeper, I could see that these trees were glowing. Was this place radioactive?

Underfoot was soggy, not mossy soggy, not waterlogged, but like walking on pulped meat. It wasn't only that the forest was silent — no bird noise, animal sound, tree cracking, it was that I had become silent. (Winterson 191)

Due to the poisoned environment, the forest is putrefied and totally radioactive. It is obvious that “[t]he soil itself was poisoned” (201), making the flows between human and nonhuman bodies completely toxic. As Friday points out, you are

[p]art of it. They don't patrol it here because they hope it will kill us all. If you can't nuke your dissidents, the next best thing is to let the degraded land poison them. But it's not quite happening like that. A lot of us have been sick, a lot of us have died, but it's changing. Something is happening in there. I've been in with a suit. There's life - not the kind of life you'd want to get into bed with, or even the kind of life you'd want to find under the bed, but life. Nature isn't fussy. (Winterson 192)

Billie enters the Dead Forest, which is “like walking into a corpse, only the corpse wasn't dead” (200). In such a “trans-corporeal landscape,” to quote Alaimo, the body of Billie and the forest become material-discursive sites where “institutional and material power swirl together” (*Bodily* 48). The trans-corporeality of the forest is of great significance in understanding the nature of posthuman toxic bodies, which are both alive and dead. In her encounter with toxic mutants, Billie observes:

Here I am, and the wood is glowing. Ahead of me there's something moving. I speeded up to follow it, cutting through the lines of black trunks, and after about ten minutes, I came to spaces where the trees had been cleared or cleared

themselves, and pushing out of the ground were small, stunted leaves with anaemic yellow stems. Feeding on the leaves and stems were five or six rabbit-like animals — hairless, deformed, one with red weals on its back. They ran away when they saw me. Movement again. I turned, followed further, and then I saw it — saw them. A boy and a girl. Perhaps. Holding hands, barely dressed, both with rags tied round their bodies. The boy was covered with sores, the girl had no hair. (Winterson 201-2)

Both human and nonhuman animals are affected by destructive radioactivity. When Billie meets deformed beings, “ultimate others” in the Dead Forest, we are reminded of the crucial significance of what Alaimo defines as “the movement across – time, across place, across species, across bodies, across scale,” and “the human as a site of emergent material intra-actions inseparable from the very stuff of the rest of the world” (*Bodily* 156). This enables us to think about our responsibility and accountability towards other human or nonhuman naturecultures in the world. The novel’s questioning of our destructive practices and mindset opens up a new space for challenging the deep-rooted understandings of humanist utilitarian ethics that leave behind “others,” including women, people of color, nonhuman animals, and queer people. MORE tries to hide the truth from the “normal” people of Tech City. Friday talks to Billie about this issue:

“You’ll get sick if you go in there,” he said.

“People are sick in there,” I said. “I saw two children. We have to help them.”

He shook his head. “We can’t. They’re *toxic radioactive mutants*. They won’t live long. It’s Tech City’s big secret, one of them anyway. The incurables and the freaks are all in there. They feed them by helicopter. A lot of women gave birth just after the War finished. No one knew what would happen to the babies — well, now we do. Those are kids from nuclear families.” (Winterson 203; emphasis added)

The text asks repeatedly who can be counted as human or inhuman. Can we consider these toxic radioactive mutants human beings? As Butler asks, are these lives grievable? In the light of posthuman environmental ethics, whether they are human or nonhuman does not matter at all. As Andermahr remarks, “all Winterson’s work revolves around this central tension between responsibility and freedom, weight and weightlessness, commitment and restless desire” (*Jeanette* 29-30). In this context, Winterson puts a great emphasis on accountability and culpability. Although it seems that Winterson attaches greater importance to the “human” in the novel, the very notion of the human is always already posthuman. Hence, Winterson’s attitude is ambiguous. However, MORE, which does not see itself as responsible for what it has done, perceives them as subhuman. In this sense, radioactive mutants are dehumanized. Crucial to their dehumanization is the description given in the narrative:

They lived in the Dead Forest. They were the bomb-damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, blood-poisoned, lung-punctured, lymph-swollen, skin like dirty tissue paper, yellow eyes, weal-bodied, frog-mottled, pustules oozing thick stuff, mucus faces, bald, scarred, scared, alive, human.

They bred, crawled out their term, curled up like ferns, died where they lay, on radioactive soil. Some could speak, and spat blood, each word made out of a blood vessel. [...]

There were children holding hands — or what stumps and stray fingers they had for hands — limping club-footed, looking up from the hinge or their necks, uncertain of their heads, wrong-sized, misshapen, an ear missing, a nose splayed back to a pair of nostril holes. Some no holes at all. Breathe through your mouth like a panting animal — pursued, lost, find a hole, live there, rot there.

There were women, traces of finery, traces of pride, a necklace saved from the smash, the sleeve of a blouse, fastened on one arm. A woman, breasts open, the nipples eaten by cancer, the soft inside exposed, raw pink. (Winterson 232-233)

Their cancerous bodies, materially intra-acting with other nonhuman ones, are part of the newly evolving phenomena of radioactive toxicity here. They are not at all independent. Enmeshed in the toxic landscape, their bodies are transcorporeally inseparable from other toxic naturecultures. Indeed, they are both postnatural and posthuman becomings. These grievable lives show us the destructiveness of nuclear weaponry and dehumanization of the (post)human:

There were men, skin so burned that the muscles underneath were on show like an anatomy textbook: deltoid, rhomboid, trapezius, veins leaking like a crucifixion. A man with skin to his knee and not beyond — a skeleton walk, a thing dug up from the grave, but not dead, alive. Human. (Winterson 233)

Winterson draws our attention to the fact that regardless of what they are or who they are, these radioactive mutants are “Human.” She is concerned with anthropogenic devastations of not only environments but also human beings: “What if we really do keep making the same mistakes again and again, never remembering the lessons to learn but never forgetting either that it had been different” (105). In every part of *The Stone Gods*, the mistake is recurrent. What is considerable is that “[p]erhaps the universe is a memory of our mistakes” (106). Winterson also indicates how human mistakes pose varied risks that might have irreversible effects on our daily lives. From global warming to nuclear destruction, human beings are part of the problem caused by their irresponsible behavior towards the environment and all life forms. This predicament raises striking questions about politics, biotechnology, society, and bodies in the narrative. The text itself aims at raising ecological awareness about the environment and the hazardous repercussions of human mistakes. Indeed, *The Stone Gods* undergirds “a posthuman environmentalism of co-constituted creatures, entangled knowledges, and precautionary practices” (Alaimo, *Bodily* 146). In this regard, the novel is both edifying and thought-provoking. As Alaimo and Hekman suggest, “thinking through the co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman natures offers possibilities for transforming environmentalism itself” (9). *The Stone Gods*, in this sense, would open up novel avenues for reconfiguring the prevalent orthodox views about the material world and bodily natures.

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The Earth as Pinprick: Some Early Western Challenges to Anthropocentrism

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Abstract



It is common to assume that the ancient Greeks and Romans were essentially anthropocentric in point of view. While this is partly true (as it is today), the ancients established important precedents that challenge and overturn this view, anticipating modern science and even Darwin and beyond. This article analyzes texts from the Presocratics to late antiquity to show how the questioning of anthropocentrism developed over roughly 800 years. This matters because overcoming our present ecological crises demands that we reassess our place on the earth and draw down our impact on the planet. The ancients show that the questioning of anthropocentrism is nothing new; their work is part of the bridge required to help us move more responsibly into the later parts of the twenty-first century and beyond.

Keywords: Ancient Greek and Roman, science, ethics.

Resumen

Es común asumir que los griegos y romanos antiguos tenían un punto de vista esencialmente antropocéntrico. Aunque esto es cierto en parte (como hoy en día), los antiguos establecieron precedentes importantes que desafían y dan la vuelta a esta perspectiva, anticipándose a la ciencia moderna e incluso a Darwin y más allá. Este artículo analiza textos desde los Presocráticos hasta la antigüedad tardía para mostrar cómo se cuestionó el antropocentrismo durante aproximadamente 800 años. Esto es importante porque para vencer las crisis ecológicas actuales es necesario que re-evaluemos nuestro lugar en la tierra y que reduzcamos nuestro impacto en el planeta. Los antiguos demuestran que cuestionarse el antropocentrismo no es nada nuevo; su trabajo es parte del puente necesario para ayudarnos a trasladarnos más responsablemente hacia el último periodo del siglo XXI y más allá.

Palabras clave: antigua Grecia y Roma, ciencia, ética.

It is common to conclude that the writings in physics, ethics, and literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans, refocused and dogmatized by later Christians, established the anthropocentric mindset that justifies and dictates such practices today as the massive depletion of species, the burning of fossil fuels, and mountain-top removal coal mining. The ancients did tend toward anthropocentrism, just as consumerist-industrialist societies largely do today,¹ but there are also some

¹ Recent public polls on climate change indicate a strongly anthropocentric mindset. Most Americans, for example, believe in global warming but do not believe it is anthropogenic; most Americans do not believe that scientists agree that climate change is caused chiefly by humans (2014). See a detailed study at <https://environment.yale.edu/poe/v2014/>. Europeans are generally

important precedents among the ancients in interrogating and rejecting anthropocentrism. In fact, many ancient and medieval writers were open-eyed and, given their limited means for measuring and observing the universe, well-informed. Many of them did not believe that the earth is the most important part of the universe or that it is particularly unique. Some perceived the earth as tiny, almost irrelevant in the cosmos, and—outside my present scope—many ancients, including Theocritus, Virgil, Horace, and Martial,² wrote about peaceful, placid, and noiseless places of environmental simplicity as contributing to the healthiest development of human life. Even the implications for humans in the astronomical writings of Claudius Ptolemy, whose geocentric system would be standard until Copernicus and Galileo, are still frequently misunderstood; “Ptolemaic” does not imply anthropocentric (Danielson 68).³

Many distinguished writers have discussed the worldviews of ancients, including Clarence J. Glacken, David C. Lindberg, Margaret Osler, and Max Oelschlaeger; my much more modest aim in this article is a thumbnail view of a handful of chief figures to show that the anthropocentric mindset—and more importantly for my purposes—its interrogation, has been in circulation for a very long time, at least since the fifth century BCE.⁴ While the vast majority of ancient works are essentially anthropocentric, many of the ideas of the ancients crop up over and over into the present day, including the notion that the earth—and the humans that inhabit it—is a relatively tiny part of the universe, a “pinprick,” as Seneca and other ancients described our cosmic position.

Why does this matter to us in the twenty-first century? Beyond sheer historical-literary-cultural interests, if we are going to overcome our global ecological crises—climate change, habitat destruction, species elimination, and so on—we must reassess our place on the earth and draw down our impact on it. Paul J. Crutzen sought in a well-known *Nature* article to establish our “human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene,” as the “Anthropocene.”⁵ Crutzen concludes his article by stating that it is the task of engineers and scientists “to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales” (23). Philosophically and spiritually, this demands that we revoke a “hard” or extreme anthropocentrism. Writes the British philosopher A.C. Grayling, to have an anthropocentric view is

more aware of climate change; a significant part of the population (20%) believe climate change is the most important current issue; see http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_409_en.pdf

² See Theocritus; Virgil; Horace, e.g., Odes 1.3 and 2.15; and Martial, e.g., Epigrams 3. 26 and 31, 4.66, 5.13, and 12.50.

³ Michael J. Crowe notes the complexity of Ptolemy in *Amalgest* and other works: “Ptolemy had not one, but rather a number of systems—one for each of the main bodies of our system” (43).

⁴ See Glacken; Oelschlaeger; Lindberg; and Osler.

⁵ Although Crutzen’s article popularized the term “Anthropocene,” it was coined by biologist Eugene F. Stoermer in the 1980s.

To see everything as having humankind at the centre, or as the measure, or as the chief point of interest; to conceive of the gods as human beings writ large . . . to think that nothing has greater value than human beings, and that everything else can legitimately be bent to the service, use or interest of humanity, is to place humankind at the pinnacle of value in the world, and to privilege human existence over other kinds. (17)

Grayling contrasts anthropocentrism with biocentrism, “the view that all life is valuable, not just human life” (17). Although few of the ancients developed the idea of biocentrism in much depth, the seeds of the idea do lie in their work and it is obviously a necessary intellectual step toward objective, nonanthropocentric science and ethics.⁶ This article seeks to show that the questioning or outright rejection of anthropocentrism is not a new idea or as extreme a position as some may imagine. Many of our greatest writers, from antiquity to the near present, have already prepared the way for us. This nonanthropocentric heritage is part of the bridge required to help us move more responsibly into the later parts of the twenty-first century and beyond.

Ancient Greek and Roman thinkers, beginning with the Presocratics, pioneered the seeking of rational explanations for the world not out of a Baconian desire to subdue or control nature, but to explore the place of humans in the greater world. The natural philosophy that began in sixth-century Miletus with Anaximander and Anaximenes represents the first attempt “to understand the phenomena of nature in purely physical or mechanical terms” (Kahn 2). The ancient Greek and Roman study of nature (*phusis*) made no claims about rigor; it did not, like modern science, exist for its own sake, but for what Pierre Hadot calls “a moral finality” (208). The detached distance experienced in the writings of some of the ancients comprises a view of ourselves from above everyday life to show us the things that matter most—not luxury, power, fame, and the like, but philosophy. Hadot states that such a point of view is a sort of “exercise of death. One might say that this exercise has been, since Plato, the very essence of philosophy” (207). The tendency to strip ourselves of “the human” is constant through many ancient schools of philosophy (211).

Of course, the ancient Greeks and Romans did not use the words anthropocentrism or ecology in their writings.⁷ Yet many ancient philosophers anticipate the language of modern ecology and cast doubt on the centrality of humans in the world—sometimes within the same contexts. Plato and others up until the birth of modern science appropriated the careful observations of the

⁶ On the relationship between stoic science and ethics, Lawrence C. Becker writes, “When we say ethics is subordinate to science we mean, among other things, that changes in our empirical knowledge are likely to generate changes in ethics. When the best science postulate a cosmic telos, as it sometimes did in antiquity, so does stoic ethics. When the best science rejects the view that the universe operates teleologically, in terms of something like human purposes, and suspends judgment about whether cosmic processes have a de facto end, convergence point, or destination, so does stoic ethics” (11). For a short discussion of biocentrism and ecocentrism, see Curry.

⁷ According to *Merriam-Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, both words emerged at around the same time, respectively, 1863 and 1873.

ancient Babylonians, who understood the movements of heavenly bodies as the purposeful activities of the gods. The work of the Greeks, from Thales to Plato's *Timaeus*, establishes not only Western philosophy but science and the initial conception of nature itself. The cosmic scheme of Democritus and the atomists, writes Charles Kahn, "most fully anticipate[d] the world view of modern science" (1, 2) and is an important precedent for Lucretius and his *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), which was even more central in the birth of modern science.

Among other Presocratics, Empedocles (c. 495-c. 435 BCE), called a "natural scientist" by later ancient writers, evokes protoecological unity in his *Physics* (extant only in fragments). Change is continuous but, anticipating the Stoics, it is also orderly, personified as Love and Strife; anticipating the Epicureans (he was a substantial influence on Lucretius), he suggests that change in nature is by chance (*Early Greek* 136). Plutarch quotes Empedocles' statement that "there are effluences from all things that have come into being"; "not only animals and plants and earth and sea, but stones too, and bronze and iron, continuously give off numerous streams" (*Early Greek* 139). Irrational animals--his fragment cites hedgehogs--are better endowed than humans (*Early Greek* 150). It is unethical to kill living things, he writes, since there is "a law for all" (see Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 1373b.2).

The Stoics would ridicule Empedocles, but he, again, anticipates the Stoics by writing of plants: "There is a single spirit which pervade the whole world like a soul and which unites us with them" (*Early Greek* 158). Even plants feel pain (159). Empedocles suggests a poetic, affirmative view of relationship between us and animals (161). In contrast to Aristotle's later understanding of final causes, laid out in Book II of *Physics* (especially 8.198b-199a), Empedocles suggested a natural selection in which only the most successful organisms would succeed. Though he does not provide evidence for such a theory, he does anticipate Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* by about two millennia.⁸ Stoic physics, as it turns out, would be central in the questioning of anthropocentrism, even if Epicureanism more centrally espouses the rejection of this view.

Plato and Aristotle are often cited as the source of many misconceptions about the nature of the universe and the place of humans in it. Their views would largely persist until the observations of Galileo and the mechanical philosophies of Gassendi and Descartes in the seventeenth century. Plato and Aristotle held a teleological view of the cosmos, as did Anaxagoras before them, though their teleological bases are very different. Plato (and Socrates) turned away from the natural philosophy of many of the earliest Greek philosophers, though works such as *Timaeus* and *Laws* are attempts to explain the universe, mythically but also rationally—through mythos and logos. In *Phaedo*, we learn that "natural science"

⁸ In late editions of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin cites both Empedocles and Aristotle on evolution in *Physics*, though he doesn't acknowledge that Aristotle's views are in contrast to Empedocles'.

consisted (says Socrates) of a search for “the causes of everything; why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists” (96a). Related to his sense of political and ethical order, Plato rejects the materialism of the Presocratics in the thoroughly teleological scheme of *Timaeus*, which explains the universe as the ordered result of a single beneficent demiurge or “Craftsman” (29a-b). In contrast to the chance-governed materialism of the atomists, the demiurge imposed order on the cosmos, and the heavenly bodies are alive.

Aristotle rejects the teleological basis of his great teacher Plato; for Aristotle, order has always existed. As he writes regarding “the four types of cause” in *Physics*, every natural process acts toward an “end or that for the sake of which a thing is done” (2.3). For Aristotle, the stationary earth is at the center of the finite universe, yet it is of no great size when compared to the fixed stars (*On the Heavens* 2.14). Following Plato, he writes that the divinity of the earth decreases from its circumference to its center—an idea one may observe in many later works, including Dante’s *Inferno*, which places Satan at the very center of the earth’s core. Plato’s conception of the self-moving stars is impossible, though Aristotle has little to say about the “unmoved mover” in his treatise *On the Heavens*.⁹

The Stoics (beginning with Zeno of Citium in the fourth and third centuries BCE) re-enforced the anthropocentrism espoused by Plato and Aristotle: humans are in an elevated position. Of course, Christian thinkers would develop this idea in various ways, though they would largely abandon Stoicism for Platonism by late antiquity. Diogenes Laërtius, quoting the Stoic Posidonius (135-51 BCE), writes that the substance of the universe is “a complex of heaven and earth and the nature in them or a complex of god and humans and the things that come to be for their sake” (*Stoics Reader* 52). Yet some Stoics diminish the importance of human affairs in their works and even veer closely towards a rejection of anthropocentrism. Animals are below humans for most Stoics, yet central to their philosophy is the idea of the unity of all things which is derived from the Presocratics. Not all users of the *topos* proceed in the same way, other than in diminishing man for whatever reason. Humans are small if one considers the great size of the world, though early Stoics tended to stress the notion that the earth is the absolute center of the cosmos. Stoic physics was an attempt to elevate the legacy of myth and legend “into science and philosophy, and to combine it with the cosmology of Heraclitus, seeing the world as flux and fire, conflagration and return” (Gillispie 182). The movement away from myth to science in the Hellenistic age goes hand in hand with a move away from teleological explanations of the universe and from anthropocentrism.

Cicero was a self-styled Academic, following Plato, but his understanding of the universe is clearly indebted to Stoic thought, especially by way of his friendship

⁹ In *The Inferno*, Dante places Aristotle in his Limbo, along with Socrates and Plato, Democritus (“who strove to show / That the world is chance” [4.120-21]), Diogenes, Seneca, Averroes, etc. Satan is frozen in Lake Cocytus at the center of the earth in Canto 34.

with Posidonius. In Book I of *The Laws*, Cicero lays out principles of natural law, including the ideas that the universe is ordered by rational providence and that man, a single species, stands between God and the animals; he is possessed of both animal needs and a godlike reason (1.1-57). As Niall Rudd writes, until recently “most people agreed with Cicero and the Stoics in assuming that man’s dominion over the animals . . . was in accordance with natural law,” oblivious to the idea that humans are capable of squandering resources, pollution, and anthropogenic extinction to such a high degree (*The Republic and The Laws* xxxi).

Cicero was a Roman transmitter of Hellenistic thought rather than an original thinker. His *The Nature of the Gods* is chiefly a debate between Stoic, Epicurean, and Academic philosophies. In the dialogue, he appears to side largely with a Stoicism that represents a strongly anthropocentric viewpoint. The dialogue wastes no time jumping into the main questions at hand: Do gods exist? If not, does the absence of gods create chaos? If there are gods, what is their nature? (In antiquity natural philosophy and theology were inextricably tied.) Is the worship of the gods a “mere façade”? Cicero states that many esteemed philosophers hold that the universe is ordered, that all that occurs (weather, seasons, and the like) is created and “bestowed by the gods on the human race” (1.4).

Set forth first in the dialogue is the Epicurean case, presented by Gaius Velleius, who speaks, Cicero notes, “with the breezy confidence customary of Epicureans” (1.18). Stoics, Velleius charges, “prefer dreaming to reasoning” (1.19), and he ridicules the Stoic (and Platonic) notion that the whole cosmos is sentient and that the gods created the world for humans. He asks whether the gods made the world for all humans or only for the wise or for fools (1.23). Anticipating Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,¹⁰ he asks, rhetorically, why, if god made the world for humans, so much of the earth is uninhabitable for humans (1.24). He mocks the notion of fate, or *Heimarmene*, which holds that “every chance event is the outcome of an eternal verity and a chain of causation. How much respect can be accorded to this school of philosophy, which like a pack of ignorant old women regards all that happens as the course of fate?” By contrast, Epicurus (the founder of Epicureanism) brought freedom by teaching us to not fear superstition or the wrath of the gods (1.56)—an idea that would be developed by Cicero’s younger contemporary Lucretius.

Responding directly to Velleius, Cicero has (Quintus Lucilius) Balbus deliver a rundown of the Stoic case, which is, of course, markedly anthropocentric. He quotes the great Stoic Chrysippus in making a case for the existence of the gods, and in the process he shows the elevated state of man: if there are no gods, then nothing is better than man because he has reason (2.16). All things in the universe, Balbus continues, “have been created and prepared for us humans to enjoy,” and “all that exists in the entire universe must be regarded as the possession of gods

¹⁰ Hume undermines the argument by design (in part) by arguing that the earth contains too many flaws to have been created by an omniscient, beneficent deity.

and men,” including animals (2.155-56). Representing Cicero’s own Academic skepticism, in Book 3, (Gaius) Cotta takes the edge off of Balbus’ strict anthropocentrism by elucidating Chrysippus: if gods don’t exist, nothing is naturally better than men, yet, said Chrysippus, to state that nothing is better than men is “supreme arrogance” (3.26). He mocks the Stoic claim that the gods have bestowed on man alone the faculty of reason (3.66). The gods, he continues, do not think of or care about human cities, much less humans themselves, which providence holds “in contempt” (3.93).

Weighing up the degrees of final causes and anthropocentrism, Cicero appears to back away from what one might call hard-line anthropocentrism. Like many ancients, including Seneca, who I discuss below, Cicero is genuinely interested in philosophy for its own sake and not as a rote set of laws that one should dogmatically follow without question. Other Cicero works underscore the impulse to move away from hard anthropocentrism, including *The Dream of Scipio*, which comprises the sixth and final book of *On the Republic*. The importance to the history of ideas of *The Dream of Scipio* is difficult to overestimate; it would be a model for other writers, including Macrobius, whose *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* was studied closely throughout the Middle Ages. The piece is derived from Plato’s *The Myth of Er*, which concludes his own *Republic*, and it is narrated by the second century (BCE) general Scipio Aemilianus, destroyer of Carthage, who recounts his service as a military tribune in Africa.

Set in a Platonic-Aristotelian geocentric universe of fixed stars and a motionless earth, Scipio falls into a deep sleep and is visited by the shade of his adopted grandfather, the Roman general Scipio Africanus, hero of the Second Punic War, who speaks of duty to the state and the younger Scipio’s future. In the dream Scipio is positioned in the stars, where he notes how small the earth is; the Roman Empire is only a tiny point on a tiny surface. The earth, says Africanus, is “in the middle of this celestial space” (6.15), and Scipio sees the “whole universe” which includes many stars that greatly exceed the earth in size. The earth, he says, “seemed so small that I felt ashamed of our empire, whose extent was no more than a dot on its surface” (6.16). Given this context of a motionless earth positioned in the lowest sphere, humans are incapable of hearing the Pythagorean music of spheres (6.18-19). The elder Scipio sees that his grandson is gazing on the tiny earth and says,

I notice you are still gazing at the home and habitations of men. If it seems small to you (as indeed it is) make sure to keep your mind on these higher regions and to think little of the human scene down there. For what fame can you achieve, what glory worth pursuing, that consists merely of people’s talk? Look. The earth is inhabited in just a few confined areas. In between those inhabited places, which resemble blots, there are huge expanses of empty territory. (6.20)

He goes on to show how large areas of the earth are uninhabitable or occupied by non-Romans. “In the remaining areas of the east or west,” he says, “who will ever hear your name?” (6.22). The fact that his speech avows a position of humility may

at first seem anti-Roman, since the Romans, Cicero included, so revered their ancestors and statesmen. Posterity forgets us all eventually. On the brink of overthrowing Carthage, Scipio receives a giant dose of humble pie from his honored kin. Of course the disavowal of earthly fame is purely Stoical by nature, and Scipio vows to live in the future with “a much keener awareness” (6.26).

Yet the elder Scipio also echoes the critique of Stoicism by the Epicurean Velleius in *The Nature of the Gods*: if the gods created the earth for human use, why is so little of it hospitable for human life? Far less a statement opposing anthropocentrism than an attempt to mortify human ambition, the idea that the earth is but a pinprick in the rest of the universe would be explored and expanded on by later writers. Of course, Copernicus, then Galileo, Newton, Herschel, Hubble, NASA space probes, and contemporary astrophysics would in time demonstrate the literal truth of this idea. Outside of Cicero, according to Polybius, after issuing the order to raze Carthage, Scipio Aemilianus said, “A glorious moment, Polybius; but I have a dread foreboding that some day the same doom will be pronounced on my own country” (38.5.21).

Lucretius is doubtless the key Epicurean figure, and he is also central in the rational questioning of anthropocentrism.¹¹ Lucretius writes in *De rerum natura* that the gods have no concern for humanity and the world, which is the result of the chance collision of atoms. Implicit in his view is a strong antianthropocentrism: “not for us and not by gods / Was this world made. There’s too much wrong with it!” (2.181-82). Although Epicureans have an implicitly cyclical view of the world, Lucretius tends to ignore this. Near the end of Book 2, he envisions an exhausted earth, and like the writing of Seneca (see below), the book may be called ecocatastrophic, as in the famous lines in which he writes of a “shipwreck with spectator”—the enjoyment of catastrophe from a distance (*De rerum natura* 2.1-2). In his celebrated book *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, Stephen Greenblatt shows the influence of Lucretius in the making of a modern, rational view of the cosmos. The reintroduction of Lucretius was central in the Renaissance and the birth of modern science. Writes Greenblatt regarding *De rerum* (4.1105+), “Human insignificance—the fact that it is not all about us and our fate—is, Lucretius insisted, the good news” (199).

In *Natural Questions*, Seneca (55 BCE-41 CE) is heavily Stoic in attempting to understand nature and its relation to ourselves. Harry M. Hine writes that it is surprising that Seneca wrote such a long work about physics, but he had, like Lucretius, an ethical aim: to lift the mind from narrow human concerns and survey the world as a whole—“the contemplation of the physical world complements moral action by shunning the full context of human action” (Seneca xvii). The focus throughout is on nature and natural events, but the human context is always near as he espouses the Stoic belief in the essential, inherent dignity and worth of all

¹¹ Virgil was also an Epicurean, and he is certainly the great Roman writer, but his poetry is less directly concerned than Lucretius’ with Epicureanism per se.

humans. Yet, veering toward materialism, the nonhuman is also possessed of inherent worth through the idea that even inanimate things have vital spirit, or *pneuma*; the earth itself breathes (6.16.1). We learn about ourselves by studying the great variety of nature; it is the means by which the mind can understand itself (7.25.1). We can learn the importance of things and interrelationships by looking outside ourselves to nature. So, he writes, shifting subjects, “let us inquire about terrestrial waters” (3.1.1). The Stoic notion that the earth is a living creature with a soul that can experience stress (6.14.2) holds some obvious comparisons with the twentieth-century Gaia theory of British engineer James Lovelock.¹²

As a result of his belief in the unity of all things, at times Seneca displays a protoecological and environmental awareness rather unusual for an ancient. He warns against the misuse of natural resources, and the pollution of the heavens is contrary to Stoic philosophy, which posits a tense relationship between the cosmos and its parts—the *pneuma* results in cosmic sympathy, something close to what we would term “ecology” today. He writes, “we cannot complain about god our maker if we have corrupted his good gifts” (5.18.13). The book holds many warnings against living for mere luxury and greediness; for example, mines are used by the greedy (15.1). (One may temper such thoughts with the knowledge that Seneca, Nero’s counselor, was extraordinarily rich. He has been attacked as a hypocrite over the centuries, but many have defended him.)

Seneca is, like Cicero, also open to other philosophies, including Epicureanism. *Natural Questions* rejects conventional Stoicism in its backing away from teleological explanations and anthropocentric reasoning. Seneca does not mention Lucretius or Epicureanism, but the book shares characteristics with Lucretius in presenting a rational explanation of events often attributed to malevolent or arbitrary gods—the attempt to replace fear with knowledge—and learn about ourselves along the way. The mind gains strength from the study and contemplation of nature and allows us to “stand above the abyss unflinching.” Death is “not a great thing,” being only a law of nature (6.32.5).

Again recalling Cicero in *Scipio*, Seneca, though centrally involved in Roman politics, appears to attack the imperialism of Rome. Earthly empires are insignificant when compared to the immensity of the cosmos. But he is less concerned with political power than with understanding the world philosophically, to measure “the world on its own scale,” and to show “that the earth occupies just a pinprick” (4.11.4). For Seneca, almost everything in nature supports the idea that “god did not make everything for human beings.” Observing comets, for example, should show “How small a part of this vast creation is entrusted to us!” (7.30.3). He critiques the Etruscan teleological ascription of everything to a god; they say that clouds collide so that they will produce lightning. But Seneca is more given to the

¹² Lovelock’s Gaia theory, named after the ancient Greek representation of the Earth, argues that all living entities, from simple (a virus) to complex (a whale), comprise a single living entity. See Lovelock.

“coincidence” of natural events: the fates are not involved in the minutiae of nature (2.35.2). Near the end of the text, he wryly combines a Stoic view of death with the randomness of natural events: “But if you think that the turmoil of the heavens and the strife of the storms is being arranged for your sake, if the clouds are gathering and colliding and crashing on your account, if such powerful fires are being unleashed for your destruction, then count it a comfort that your death is so important” (2.59.12). He compares human operations with the activities of ants. Were they possessed of human intelligence, they would divide the world into provinces, yet this, again, only shows how, on the larger scale with which *Natural Questions* is concerned, kingdoms are only a “pinprick” (1.1.11).

Seneca’s great book is certainly one of the earliest works of ecocatastrophe written from a rational perspective, and this major theme seems to undermine Stoic anthropocentrism. Echoing Velleius in Cicero’s *The Nature of the Gods* and anticipating (again) Hume, he asks why, if the gods have created the earth for our benefit, life is so marked by overwhelming events. Humans are “short-lived, frail creatures” who are subject to earthquakes (6.1.14). Sea torrents grow and wash the wreckage of nations into itself, containing human civilizations; afterwards, “remnants of the human race” cling to the heights (3.27.12). Yet (echoing Lucretius) earthquakes and the like don’t happen because of a god: “these things,” he writes, “have their own causes” (6.3.1). Natural catastrophes are very much in step with the unity of nature (3.27.1-3), a unity that extends to our own bodies, including human bleeding as a natural counterpart to the flow of earthly waters (3.15) and even farting and the emission of air from the earth (5.4.1-2).

The Renaissance translations of Pliny the Elder’s writings led to the study of natural history (Osler *Reconfiguring* 132-33). Pliny’s studies of a vast array of animals, geology, and other sciences (many of them premodern) were accompanied by his (more modern) observation of the human place in the greater world. In his massive *Natural History*, he casts doubt on the idea that Nature created everything for man. For Pliny, “It is ridiculous to think that a supreme being—whatever it is—cares about human affairs” (2.20). Like Roman writers before him, he attacks through ridicule the notion that humanity is at the center of the universe because we are so frail: “Pride of place will rightly be given to one for whose benefit Nature appears to have created everything else. . . . man is the weakest among all living creatures” (7.4). Monkeys, he notes, are much like humans (11.246), and “only he who is always mindful of the frailty of man will weigh life in a fair balance” (7.44).

Lucian (c. CE 115-after 180) was probably the next significant thinker on anthropocentrism. Born in Samosota (modern Syria), he spoke Aramaic or Syrian but wrote in Attic Greek. A number of his philosophical dialogues attack human pettiness and the arrogance of the wealthy as well as what he saw as the foolishness of philosophers and, often, human nature itself, though he holds room for praise of those who live honestly, humanely. He is thus an important precedent

for Voltaire, Swift, and Twain. Lucian was a clear model for Johannes Kepler in his *Somnium*, which defends Copernicus' theories on the movement of the earth.¹³ While it would be overstretching the truth to state that Lucian's dialogues explicitly reject anthropocentrism, they often veer in this direction. His *Charon or the Observers* was influenced by the Greek Cynics during the Second Sophistic, in which Romans looked back to Attic Greek writing of the Golden Age for inspiration. Cynics (like Socrates) are ascetics; virtue and self-sufficiency are the goals of life.¹⁴ Cynic Menippus, the third-century BCE Greek satirist, was a enormous influence on Lucian. C.D.N. Costa, in his preface to *Charon*, writes that the vanity of human aspiration and the mutability of fate are themes derived largely from Cynic ideas (13). Hermes states that if people were more aware of how fleeting human life is—as temporary as foam bubbles in a spring—they would live more reasonably and feel less grief over death. Cities die, says Hermes, as do even rivers (23). Elsewhere, Lucian, as is the wont of many satirists, takes a darker view of humanity. In *Dialogues of the Dead* a series of shades, including Diogenes, Menippus, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Alexander, along with gods associated with the underworld, Charon, Pluto, Cerberus, and Hermes, underscore human vanity.

His *Icaroneipuss or High above the Clouds* is a satirical dialogue, the title of which combines Menippus and Icarus. The former, the main speaker in the dialogue, flies on wings to the moon, then to Olympus, where he meets the gods, including Zeus. Largely a sideswipe at philosophers both well-known and obscure, Menippus pays considerable money for their learning but becomes confused with their talk of “first principles, final causes, atoms” (5). Determined to find wisdom, he flies to the heavens by attaching to himself the wing of an eagle and another from a vulture. On the moon, he notes that the earth is—echoing Cicero's *Scipio*—tiny, smaller than the moon. He is visited by Empedocles, who, burnt from the fire of Etna (into whose mouth he is stated in some sources to have cast himself), advises Menippus to flap only the wing of the eagle to acquire the great bird's vision. In this way Menippus is able to see the minutiae of the earth and even individual humans. Greece, he observes, is very tiny, and the holdings of the greatest of landowners is merely the size of one of Epicurus' atoms. Visiting heaven, he hears the prayers delivered to Zeus, but they are comically crude, mean, and petty. Zeus pronounces philosophy useless and bids Hermes to send Menippus unceremoniously back to the earth.

Writers of the early Christian era, following Paul, generally stress the doctrine that since a Christian's true home is not the earth but the kingdom of heaven, “Our spiritual and worldly natures remain separate, and residence on earth is, in the end, inconsequential to the meaning of human life” (Peterson 34). Even suggesting that someone like Augustine is antianthropocentric demands

¹³ Another important source for Kepler is Plutarch's *The Face on the Moon*, which the astronomer read in Greek. See John Lear's Introduction to *Kepler's Dream* (84).

¹⁴ The word “cynic” from Greek word for dog: Diogenes the Cynic was, by tradition, “as shameless as a dog.” See *The Cynic Philosophers: From Diogenes to Julian* (xi-xii).

serious qualification; within the spiritual context of *contemptus mundi* (contempt for the material world as suggested in e.g., I John 2:15), he downplays human significance in its illusory sense of earthly permanence in Book XI of *The Confessions*. He channels both the book of Genesis and Plotinus in stating that the notion that a benevolent providence would only create a world which in itself is good goes against the grain of a harder, tragic belief system which perceives of a fallen, wicked earth as a place to plunder and despoil for materials and profit. Although his thinking is not compatible with modern science, Augustine, the most important of early church fathers, arrives at diminished role of humans in the world in ways comparable to that implied by modern science of the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment and Newtonian science of the eighteenth century and the theories of Darwin in the nineteenth century.

The *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (*Somnium Scipionis*) of Macrobius, who was a Neoplatonist and probably a pagan, was tremendously influential in the Middle Ages. He writes that humankind has, following Stoic doctrine, been frequently all but wiped out by a series of global catastrophes. In his cosmology, the matter that created the universe rises to the ether at the top of the cosmos, while earth, stationary and set at the bottom, is the repository for “the dregs and offscourings of the purified elements” (1.22.5). Macrobius writes: “Insignificant as [the earth] is in comparison with the sky—it is only a point in comparison, though a vast sphere to us” (2.5.10). He echoes many earlier works of literature, including *The Dream of Scipio*, by stating that only a fraction of the earth is temperate and habitable for humans.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, Boethius’ *The Consolation of Philosophy*, written in prison in 524, the year of his execution for alleged treachery, became the cornerstone of medieval humanism. Bridging classical traditions with Christianity, the work is about finding happiness and meaning amidst a world of human suffering. Man has a “need to explore and reveal Nature’s secret causes”—the work makes use of many nature images and metaphors (see Poem 6)—but now the speaker’s mind is deadened, and he can only stare at the “dull earth” (1.Poem 2). In a seeming understatement, man is “no small part of [God’s] great work,” but he is subject to Fortune (1.Poem 5). The anthropocentrism in the work unfolds slowly but is never absolute; the fruits of earth were “given to animals and men,” and God wished humans to be above “all earthly things” (2.Prose 5). It is only the human race that stands erect and (evoking *contemptus mundi*) looks to heaven “despising the earth” (5.Poem 5). Yet when humans forget who they are, they become like beasts (2.Prose 5 and 4.Prose 3). Echoing Cicero’s Scipio, human ambition is an empty thing: “the whole circumference of the earth is no more than a pinpoint when contrasted to the space of the heavens.” The earth has comparatively “no size at all”; the habitable lands are an “insignificant area on a tiny earth” (2.Prose 7). Through the twelfth century, Boethius, along with Plato’s

Timaeus (by way of Calcidius), Seneca, and Macrobius, would dominate scientific thought (Dales 37).

Granted, none of the ancient writers I have discussed hold what one might call a biocentric or ecocentric viewpoint. Although many thinkers intuitively as well as rationally anticipate such a view, its grounding in science would require evidence beyond the reach of Aristotle, whose physics dominated the west from the thirteenth century until the Renaissance. The astronomical observations of Galileo and the philosophy of Descartes overturned Aristotle. In the nineteenth century, the watershed work of Charles Darwin, and finally the rise of ecological science and environmental ethics in the twentieth century would make biocentrism possible. The tragic effects of the Anthropocene would underscore the importance of challenging anthropocentrism and work their way, eventually, into legislation such as the U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964 and various worldwide attempts (with failures and successes) to control the burning of fossil fuels.

The rise of Christendom would present another story beyond my present scope, but, like the ancients, one labels the early Christian thinkers as purely anthropocentric at much peril. Doubtless, the Bible has been throughout history used much more often to justify the exploitation of the earth than its good stewardship, as espoused by such writers as Wendell Berry and Terry Tempest Williams.¹⁵ However, portions of it problematize anthropocentrism. As the celebrated translator Robert Alter has written, Job is a “radical rejection of the anthropocentric conception of creation that is expressed in biblical texts from Genesis onward” (*The Wisdom Books* 3). In Chapter 40, Job briefly, meekly replies (in Hebrew Wisdom parallelism) to Yahweh’s heavily poetic speech rife with rhetorical questions: “I am worthless. What can I say back to You? My hand I put over my mouth” (40:3). And in the New Testament, Paul writes that “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” (I Cor. 10:26, KJV). Many early church fathers, including Arnobius and John Scotus Eriugena, as well as the great Jewish theologian of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides (though an ardent antagonist of Epicureanism), respond negatively to anthropocentrism.¹⁶ Whatever the case, I have, I think, provided sufficient evidence to challenge the notion—all but a commonplace for some—that the ancients were absolutely anthropocentric in outlook. Far from it.

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¹⁵ In his essay “God and Country,” for example, Berry writes, “The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. . . . If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?” (98).

¹⁶ The second chapter of Peterson’s *Being Human* discusses an orthodox Christian position on “human exceptionalism.” See also Glacken and pages 55-62 of my own *Ecology and Literature*.

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Pfister's Spill? Narratives of Failure in and around Wilhelm Raabe's 1883 Eco-novel

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Abstract



This paper explores different aspects and layers of failure in Wilhelm Raabe's *Pfister's Mill* and its cultural context, which is closely related to German discourse on the environment in the second half of the nineteenth century. Raabe sought to draw attention to and inspire solutions for a pressing environmental problem of the day by conveying perceptions of everyday sensual experience in culturally communicable form. His aim was to use the novel as a means of communication about the processes whereby "socio-natural sites" affected by industrial pollution were being transformed. The author's ultimate inability to realize this aim, the paper argues, should be understood less as a failure of literary form than as a consequence of an inherent feature of the public discourse on political ecology of the time: the tension between popular support for progress and industrial development on the one hand and growing environmental awareness within a limited range of political action on the other. Drawing not only on literary, but also historical sources, the paper seeks to (dis)entangle the complex net of relations around a classic of German environmental literature.

Keywords: Wilhelm Raabe, pollution, narrative, science, public discourse, socio-natural site.

Resumen

Este trabajo explora diferentes aspectos y secciones relativas al fracaso en la obra de Wilhelm Raabe *Pfister's Mill* y su contexto histórico, el cual está estrechamente relacionado con el discurso alemán sobre el medio ambiente en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Raabe trató de llamar la atención y esbozar soluciones respecto a un problema medioambiental de alta importancia para aquellos días, siendo su objetivo transmitir y analizar las percepciones a través de experiencias cotidianas de carácter sensorial que se hacen manifiestas culturalmente mediante la comunicación. Su objetivo es utilizar la novela como un medio de comunicación de los procesos que provocan transformaciones en "enclaves socio-naturales" afectados por contaminación industrial. La incapacidad en última instancia del autor para alcanzar este objetivo hace que el presente ensayo no deba entenderse como un fracaso de la forma literaria, sino como una característica inherente al discurso público sobre la ecología política de la época: que se fundamenta en el cambio de percepción popular del medio ambiente. Se refiere no sólo a documentos literarios, sino también a fuentes históricas, este trabajo pretende desentrañar una compleja red de relaciones en torno una obra clásica de literatura ecológica alemana.

Palabras clave: Wilhelm Raabe, contaminación, narrativa, ciencia, discurso público, enclave socio-natural.

The Sample

Literary critics offer a variety of interpretations of both *Pfister's Mill* (Raabe 1883) and its author, often not only contrasting, but contradicting each other. As this suggests, Wilhelm Raabe was a complex writer, and his work was and is difficult—maybe intentionally difficult—to grasp. Critics, however, agree on the artistry of his writing, including the beauty of his meticulously constructed sentences and narratives, which invite readers to analyze and deconstruct them word by word, one level after the other. While this has made him a classic author of nineteenth-century poetic realism, it has undoubtedly contributed to the difficulty his works pose to his readers, both now and then. Like the written word, pollution knows no boundaries. And as Sabine Wilke's reading of *Pfister's Mill* within the framework of a newly emerging "toxic discourse" suggests (198), pollution as a poetic practice invades and colonizes the language of Raabe's realist fiction, which is eventually overpowered by the environmental degradation it depicts (208). With its proliferation it spills the news of a toxic presence in the novel and the world it represents.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the lowlands of the Duchy of Brunswick in Northern Germany emerged as a prime sugar beet growing area due to the fertile topsoil in the broad Oker river basin and its many tributaries (Neuber). The crop became increasingly important as Germany attempted to become less dependent on imported cane sugar products. In order to enhance productivity, a number of sugar refineries were established in the vicinity of the agricultural production sites. As demand for their produce grew, these factories mushroomed all over the Duchy. While they contributed to a prospering economy, they also led to growing populations of sulfur-affine microorganisms with their output of organic effluents, which were soon to overwhelm the self-cleaning capacity of river systems within this socio-natural site. Consequently the flourishing sugar industry had a negative impact on small businesses that depended on fresh water supply or generated mechanical energy from the river flow. More disturbing for the general population, however, were the aesthetic effects of river pollution, its visual and olfactory consequences.

In the early 1880s, a group of intellectuals and artists who called themselves "Die Kleiderseller" (The Clothes Sellers) would wander from the city of Brunswick to the garden of a small country inn every Thursday and Sunday, enjoying the countryside and debating political ideas (Oppermann, *Wilhelm Raabe* 85). As one of the regular attendees and co-founder, Wilhelm Raabe had made the group his intellectual home after moving back from Stuttgart. He spent some very productive years there, during which he began to address issues of industrial river pollution in his writings, most importantly in the novel *Abu Telfan* (1867) (Onwuatudo Duno 96) and, just a few years later, in his novella *Die Innerste* (1876). Heinrich Beckurts, a young scientist who immersed himself in the study of chemistry and

biochemistry, occasionally joined the gatherings. He felt these sciences could contribute to solving the growing sanitary problems of his hometown. One fall afternoon, the two men became engaged in a lively discussion about the impact of the sugar industry on the fields around Brunswick. Every week, they would walk along the River Wabe, a side arm of the Oker River, which turned into a bubbling, slimy sewage channel, depending on the season, weather, and sugar beet harvest. Aesthetic obstructions troubled the flaneurs, but the Kleiderseller were even more concerned about the impact of the water pollution on flora and fauna, and the traditional economy of the rural area. As it turned out, Beckurts had some interesting facts to share with his novelist friend. He had been called in as an expert adviser for the lawsuit brought against the perpetrators of precisely the environmental offences Beckurts and Raabe were so up in arms about.

The probably best-known fact about the 1883/84 novel *Pfister's Mill* is that Raabe borrowed Beckurts' copy of the court files for a few days and wrote the piece based on them (Popp). For example, he directly quoted from the bio-chemical analysis that served as evidence to convict the owners of the "Aktienzuckerfabrik Rautheim" ("Krickerode" in his literary interpretation). In the novel, the effluents from the sugar factory pollute the stream next to Pfister's mill, which is also a tavern with a beer garden. As tourists from the city cease to frequent the establishment, the old man finally decides to sue the company. His case is supported by a lawyer who hopes to enhance his reputation, and a befriended young chemist named A.A. Asche, who is to become an ambitious entrepreneur. The story of how the pollution is first detected, gradually worsens, is then demonstrated by scientific water analysis, discussed by the miller and his friends, and finally settled in court, is told in retrospect by the miller's son Eberhard during his final summer at the family home. It is "final" because the mill is soon to be demolished and replaced by a chemical factory.

The plot is simple, but characteristic for Raabe's style: he aimed at evoking deeper layers of meaning among an informed audience by the use of associations spiced with a mix of allusions, for example to sulfane and other chemicals (Helmers, "Die Verfremdung" 20). Already in 1925, biologist August Thienemann wrote a short essay about the novelist's stance towards sewage-water analysis. Besides providing factual background on the scientific state of the art, he examined the role chemist Heinrich Beckurts played in the development of the novel. Thienemann found it remarkable how Raabe stressed the importance of hydrobiology as a natural science with practical relevance, although it was not at all well established when *Pfisters' Mill* was published. In contrast to the historical case, Raabe's fictional chemist A.A. Asche (German for "ash"), whose work is responsible for the successful outcome of the fictional lawsuit, refrains from chemical analysis and merely examines the water samples under the microscope (Vaupel 82).

This method of measuring water pollution based on the existence of certain microorganisms was developed by Professor Ferdinand Cohn during a Cholera

epidemic in Breslau in 1852. Remaining the unchallenged expert in the field, Cohn had also been asked for expert opinion by Beckurts in support of his testimony in 1883, and Raabe pays tribute to the scientist in his *Mill* as “friend Kühn” (German for “bold”) (Hoppe 183). Even though Cohn produced many spectacular results with his research, it was not until the turn of the century that the method was commonly established. Soon enough, however, hydrobiology was specialized with limnology as the new field of expertise for industrial pollution cases, due to a metaphorical explosion in knowledge about microorganisms and measuring techniques. In this respect, Raabe’s narrative can be seen as surprisingly prescient. The main agent in this bacterial takeover of the Brunswick landscape is *Beggiatoa alba*: its natural behavior of accumulation and exchange of chemicals represents a mode of proliferation similar to that of capitalist economy (Wilke 208).

Raabe seems to have shared some of the scientific curiosity that had driven Cohn in his research, as Brigitte Hoppe found when reading the latter’s private papers, which Raabe did not know of course. In his chapter “Vater Pfisters Elend unter dem Mikroskop” (Father Pfister’s Misery Under the Microscope), the fictional chemist comically explains:

The Schulzes, Meiers and other families may have ceased to frequent Pfister’s mill, but you still have the Schizomycetes and Saprolegniaceae families in cheerful abundance, and if these are unable to brew coffee in Pfister’s mill, they possess the laudable ability to brew the nicest hydrocarbons from the salts dissolved in Pfister’s millrace in no time. (PM 94)

In 1852, Cohn had written:

This winter I am mostly studying ... Systematic Botany... By the way, I am quite enjoying acquainting myself with the families and their kinship. They actually include many interesting facts and intellectual connections; it’s only a shame that new and beautiful things can’t be seen at first glance, as when you peek into a microscope for pleasure. (Hoppe 167)

This “playfulness,” seemingly inherent in some early natural science, might be one of the reasons why Raabe ventured onto the terrain of naturalism in his “Summer Notebook” and the subsequent 1885 novel *Unruhige Gäste* (Lensing). For the greater part of his career he rejected literary naturalism with its interest in “typhoid smells.” He had subscribed early to literary realism and remained loyal to it, despite his increasing criticism of it, or rather the parts of society associated with it. On the other hand, he was greatly interested in the latest scientific and philosophical achievements and curious about their influence on the future development of German society. As a result, his repertoire of poetic forms was incapable of depicting these problems (Sammons), and his stylistic experiments have been regarded by some as glimpses of literary modernism (Wilke). The vital role Raabe nonetheless assigned to science and technology in his work is revealed in his response to a congratulatory letter received from the Technical University of Brunswick on his seventieth birthday: “If his [Raabe refers to himself] writings have life, they verily owe this to technology, and “Pfister's Mill” especially would

surely not exist, had the Carolina-Wilhelmina Technical University not helped him with it!" He goes on to explain that "[h]is [Raabe's] characters wander not only on golden clouds: they have soil and rough paving beneath their feet, they till the land, they make things in factories, they worry ~~to death~~ [crossed out by the author] about the pollution of rivers. How could that have been so, if exact science had not extended its hand to him?" (Nachlass H II 10 122).

The Petri Dish

Raabe offered a detailed description of a form of pollution that went practically unnoticed at the time and had not yet been described scientifically (advanced scientific analysis was to be a significant step towards tackling water pollution). As Horst Denkler and others pointed out in the late 1980s, this marked his achievement as the author of the first German "eco-novel." As I have argued elsewhere, Raabe's special focus on environmental awareness, combined with his reflection on the social consequences of pollution, can be regarded as constitutive for the genre. With the awakening of activism in Germany in the 1980s (i.e. almost exactly a hundred years after its publication), his "stinky and smelly book," as Ernst Rodenberg had called *Pfister's Mill*, finally reached a wider audience. Failure to attract public attention to the problem of industrial water pollution had frustrated the author for years. Especially as he was convinced that he had his finger on the pulse of the time and his work was to become a landmark among critical writings of the kind, when he had just finished the manuscript (Reuter 180).

Raabe's usual publisher Julius Rodenberg could not deny that the topic dominated everyday life in many places throughout the German Empire. But he was convinced that its graphic description in *Pfister's Mill* would not be appreciated by his readers. Consideration of their feelings (and their manifestation in sales figures) was not, however, the only reason for his rejection of the manuscript (Koller 142). He wrote:

This is not to say that everyone will think and feel the same as I do; others may experience it differently, as what you are depicting is undoubtedly a fact of real life and has as such the right to be represented. But in matters of taste as well as in matters of morals, a responsible journal publisher is, in my opinion, obliged to risk as little as possible; even more so, as the unpleasant and dubious impression cannot be mitigated through a quick succession of new ones, but would rather be aggravated by the interval of weeks in this kind of publication. (Nachlass H III 10 2)

Despite his responsibility for keeping the business in profit and the obligation in matters of taste and morals to which he alludes, the work seems to have pleased him in general. He did not dismiss the manuscript for its narrative composition, which he acknowledged would temper readers' feelings. Soon after his negative response, Rodenberg wrote to the author: "Until the point when it starts smelling nauseous in Pfister's mill, everything had gone well; from this point onwards, however, I could not proceed, and as much beauty as the subsequent chapters may

have contained (...) in the end I only felt this disastrous smell, tainting my joy in *Pfister's Mill*" (Nachlass H III 10 2). Raabe had hit a nerve. Rodenberg liked it, but could not like it at the same time. With his statement, he clearly admits his hesitation to leave it to the readership whether they would like to engage in the discourse around current environmental problems or not. With their role in public discourse, publishers made pre-decisions for contemporary literary taste, deciding what was made accessible to the German market. And the author himself had no way of predicting whether the *Mill's* theme would offend public taste or not, as he wrote to a friend (Nachlass H III 10 56).

Raabe's confidence in the potential of his work appears to have suffered with the difficulty he experienced in getting it published. He later wrote to a friend that, "even if I myself do not have a bad opinion of this work, I cannot tell what the audience will think of it" (Nachlass H III 10 2). In the opinion of Germany's two main publishing houses (Rodenberg and Westermann) at least, the middle class readership targeted by their books and journals was not yet ready to be confronted with environmental topics in literature. This would have been equivalent to criticizing the effects of industrial production and would have undermined their self-image. The myth of the "Founder's Boom" (Gründerzeit), in reality a shortlived phase of economic growth triggered by the high reparations from the Franco-Prussian War, still prevailed at this point. Having been disillusioned by the slow demise of liberal ideals after 1871, Raabe believed the middle class had become an even more important stabilizing element for society, and blamed its members for their political ignorance and cultural disintegration (Manthey 82). But what frustrated him most was their embrace of capitalist values while devaluing everything and everyone they had considered invaluable before (Onwuatudo Duno 95). In this particular case what grieved him must have been their (sometimes) unwitting acceptance of ecological sacrifices in support of the German (beet sugar) industry.

The novel was not reprinted until 1893, ten years after its initial publication. At the time, Raabe had managed to place it in the realist-conservative journal *Die Grenzboten* with Johannes Grunow, who also arranged for it to appear as a book. After five days of inspection he agreed to its publication, calling it the "dearest thing." But it took him ten years to sell the first 1,500 copies. He told Raabe as much when the author inquired about a reprint. The publisher of the new edition, however, the author's long-standing friend Gustav Janke, suggested it himself, assuming the book would be valued more by the audience at this point, because of "the persistent fouling up of the rivers" (Nachlass H III 10 3). It seems that Janke was not only persuaded by the natural volatility of (public) opinion, but that his awareness of the problem was also based on personal experience in New Brunswick, where the sugar industry flourished without notable legal regulation. Although new technologies for sewage water cleansing were introduced and even became mandatory, the fines were too low to effect change (Neuber).

Hydrobiologists of the area, with Heinrich Beckurts at the forefront, continued testing water quality and rallied to induce changes when they saw public health in danger. Nonetheless, during the winter 1890/91 the Oker basin became so severely polluted that its water was unusable as potable or even non-potable water (Beckurts). Wilhelm Raabe described it in a letter to his daughter Margarethe as “[a] veritable pigsty! We don’t wash ourselves, we don’t brush our teeth, even through a cooked meal one can taste the Oker water, spoiled as it is by 12 sugar refineries: Pfister’s Mill in most horrible perfection!” (Nachlass H III 10 57). The author may have felt a degree of personal satisfaction at this point. Following this environmental disaster, the Brunswick municipality at last introduced a minimum size for sewage farms attached to sugar plants, a decision notably influenced by the research of Heinrich Beckurts and his colleagues. A general change of opinion may have been fueled by the upwind of the social-democratic party, which had begun to integrate environmental issues, especially concerning the destruction of landscapes, into political discourse in the 1880s. In the mid-1890s this was reflected in the founding of the Viennese “Naturfreunde” (Friends of Nature), who sought to bring factory workers back into contact with nature (Zimmer 159). Still, the historical cultural fabric of the novel, as defined by Steven Greenblatt (4-5), in this case failed to openly acknowledge the dangers of industrialisation both for the environment and human beings.

The Matrix

From the perspective of environmental history, Wilhelm Raabe’s characters’ individual struggle against the omnipresence of toxicity is part of the story of the transformation of the “socio-natural site” of *Pfister’s Mill*. Wilhelm Raabe had hoped to create a novel that would have a positive effect on the negative changes he perceived in New Brunswick. But *Pfister’s Mill* can be interpreted as a failed attempt to shape the region’s environmental history.

Socio-natural sites, as defined by Verena Winiwarter and Martin Schmid (2008), are constituted by a feedback loop of human practices and their material precipitation. The concept can be applied to both fictional and non-fictional settings, and helps to clarify the role of Raabe’s work within the socio-political context. Theoretically, the term ‘socio-natural site’ draws on Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Schatzki’s concept of social sites, aiming to dispel the Cartesian presentiment often underlying spatial concepts. Thus, a socio-natural site encompasses all changes in a living environment, including the introduction of a sugar refinery to an area and the consequences thereof. The specific arrangements of humans adjusting to these circumstances are then to be seen as their material result, like the final demolition of Pfister’s mill, or Wilhelm Raabe choosing to write about organic water pollution as an indicator of societal transformation. In his and young Heinrich Beckurts’s case, sensory perceptions and their cognitive processing

lead to practices of artistic and natural-scientific engagement. Their material representation, whether it be in the form of a novel or an expert report, is enabled by and asserted through processes of communication. In turn, this communication leads to a change of practices, and the cycle starts anew. The old mill is replaced by a chemical factory, new industry leads to new pollution, and the future remains to be discovered. According to the idea of socio-natural sites, Wilhelm Raabe's novel transforms the author's ideas for improving the environment of "his" site around the city of Brunswick into culturally communicable content (Winiwarter 162), at a time in German realism when spaces had already become more than mere locations (Nünning 46).

Given his long-lasting frustration with the novel's reception, it is safe to assume that Raabe had wished to make an impact with his writing, ideally spurring German society on to fight against industrial environmental pollution. Just as reparations after the Franco-Prussian War had promoted the "Founders' Boom," a high concentration of organic phosphates was promoting the growth of certain microorganisms. While acknowledging the limited scope for political maneuver of German citizens in the Kaiserreich, he sees it as the responsibility of authors to act as social critics, offering and inspiring to new possible solutions of contemporary problems. For the case of industrial water pollution, he presents two interwoven strategies: Firstly, legal action was to be taken. Based on scientific analysis, acute cases of pollution could be stopped, and based on precedents, future pollution could be prohibited. Secondly, general environmental awareness needed to be raised. This was to be achieved through holistic understanding and scientific knowledge of the environment by means of general education or practical experience.

The author failed, however, to make his ideas accessible to a wider readership, and his writing had little immediate impact. Passages in an experimental style, corresponding strangely with stylistic transformations which were just being initiated in literature and the arts, upset his old audience, the readers of the *Grenzboten*, who were neither receptive to nor interested in this kind of story, without being able to reach a new audience. As a historical document, the novel is consequently to be interpreted as an example of what Rita Jungkuntz-Höltje has called the crisis of culture and consciousness of the outgoing nineteenth century (38), or rather its victim.

The novel can thus be considered to have played little part in the general process of improving the socio-natural site of New Brunswick, let alone Germany. This is not, however, to imply that Raabe failed to accept change and progress, or even their environmental implications as integral parts of his own reality (Detering 20). He anticipated the danger of chemical pollution and its future hazardous complications; especially should they remain unrestricted by legislation for too long. In order to adjust to the current state of the non-fictional site, he focused on the inhabitants of his fictional site, who are confronted with changes in the

traditional meanings of things (Thürmer 85) which would eventually result in changes in their inner life (Clark 98). These would in turn change the future state of the socio-natural site(s). It is merely that Raabe's complex narrative made it difficult for his message to reach an audience whose own personal realization process was probably similarly tricked and delayed by the transition from visible to invisible environmental risks. In this sense, he anticipated aspects of Ulrich Beck's conception of the risk society.

Raabe quotes from the final verdict of the civil chamber of the Regional Court of the Duchy of Brunswick from March 14, 1883, directly in the narrative text. This celebrates Pfister's victory over the sugar producers, who were to stop emitting pollutants, pay compensation, and ensure they caused no future nuisance (Civil process). But only two weeks after completion of the manuscript, the sued party successfully lodged an objection, which more or less levered out the previous verdict. As Raabe was having difficulty in selling his manuscript he could—hypothetically—easily have spiced up the story with some additional zest. But he ignored this development, possibly as it would have interfered with his proposing of legal intervention as a strategy to mediate environmental pollution conflicts. At a time when the freshly unified Kaiserreich was reconfiguring its judicial system, and preparing a German Civil Code, this optimistic belief in legal solutions should also count as a positive stance towards modernization, something which he has often been denied. As Manthey concludes, this omission on the author's part catered to the readers' desire for an optimistic outcome (96). For the literate and well-educated members of his audience, however, Raabe undermines this superficial optimism in the final sentence. When the newborn son of the ambivalent A.A. Asche is bawling in the crib, the author alludes to the failure of humanist values and education, cleverly utilizing the words of Pfister's "ideational heir" in order to express the tension within German society: "Well, well, I have polished my Greek, and read my Homer every now and then, by the way, without intending to lift his indelible sun's frayed quote out of the disinfectant vessel" (PM 188). The intertextuality of this reference to a passage in Friedrich Schiller's work and its adaptation by Theodor Storm, and its display of Wilhelm Raabe's cultural pessimism, have been thoroughly researched by John Pizer among others. As Sebastian Susteck suggests for Raabe's *Chronik der Sperlingsgasse* (1856), such episodes should be read as infused by a contemporary realist pessimism, which struggled to accept the world in such an undesirable state (45). It is likely that within the 27 years since Raabe's debut novel, the state of mind Susteck identifies would have undergone individual changes, but manifested as a general feeling of the period. Raabe's oeuvre, however, seems to become more relaxed in his later works, which are also marked by humor and experiments in writing style. This was not, however, what people expected from his writings, which have commonly been subsumed under the heading of poetic realist pessimism. His readership had another vision for the socio-natural site in question and was not receptive to

alternatives.

Evidence of this tension can for example be found in the response to *Pfister's Mill* of a contemporary critic, who wrote:

As with all poetry, we are happy that Raabe's writing is free of political tendency. The waves of political and social questions do not cloud the clear tide of his idyllic scenes, and reading them offers a consoling certainty in the midst of the oppressive circumstances of our time; namely that fears of an inevitable decline of spiritual values, emotion and poetry in the face of the material forces of our present are unfounded. (Nachlass H III 10 32)

He seems completely oblivious to the author's intention to formulate his novel as a social and political critique. Whether this is attributable to a bias towards poetic realism, Raabe's work in general, or *Pfister's Mill* in particular, can only remain speculation. But in the course of the review it becomes apparent that the critic's objectivity is hampered by the figure of the chemist Asche. In his eyes, Asche's "little poetic business" of a chemical dry-cleaning factory in close vicinity of the dying mill conserves "a youthful freshness in its idealistic conception," as he puts it. This very much resonates with Sabine Wilke's illustration of the poetics of pollution in the novel. The critic finds it remarkable how Raabe never attempts to force upon his reader "the so-called poetic, the imaginative," which seems a red flag to him. Besides revealing his literary taste, it can also stand as an indicator of his place in the political-ideological spectrum. In his eyes Raabe very successfully ascribes poetic appearance to the depicted reality, by integrating values into his textual design. Thereby he fails to detect the author's sarcastic, sometimes even cynical undertones in this "swan song of romanticism" (Nachlass H III 10 32). Thus the critic reveals himself as one of the ignorants Raabe had wanted to nudge into greater recognition of the injustices and environmental damage incurred in the process of industrialisation through his text. Critical reflection on the social and ecological reality of the Kaiserreich would ideally have led to acknowledgement of the widespread existence of socio-natural sites subject to industrial water pollution.

New Brunswick not only had fertile topsoil to offer for beet sugar production, but also a dense network of rivers and streams that supported the industrialisation of agriculture, providing fresh service water while serving as natural drain pipes. Due to their shallow beds and slow flow, however, their ecological capacities were more limited than initially assumed. The much praised self-cleaning capacity of rivers was exhausted relatively quickly, resulting in natural sewers meandering through the landscape as depicted in *Pfister's Mill*. Given the abundant presence and importance of water in and for the area, the duchy had already adopted a body of water laws in 1876, the first of its kind in Germany. Raabe must have known about this, given his engagement in local politics. And the state's reliance on natural water resources also contributed to the engagement of staff at the Technical University like Heinrich Beckurts, who researched water hygiene, aside from its becoming a fashionable topic in science at the time. On the

basis of property rights, relations between neighbors, and related access to clean water resources, the state law provided access points to file against pollution which went beyond the levels “customary” to a place. Yet the 1871 federal commercial law, which was based on the Prussian state law from 1845 concerning industry and commerce, did not provide public water security, but regarded all industrial emission as tolerable (Koch). This way financially potent factory owners were able to lever out restrictions to their business, if they initiated revision procedures up to the higher federal courts (Civil process). Although ecological realities had already changed in the 1880s, industrial development was still being perceived as the main paradigm of modernization, and thus contributed to keeping alive the myth of the “Founders Boom” at the cost of clean water resources.

It can be argued that Raabe’s positive stance towards his home state’s water law indicates a kind of nostalgia for the “old days” before unification, but it can also be interpreted as encouragement to make use of the great diversity in state traditions in order to enhance the judicial and industrial system of the young nation state. The latter seems more likely, as the novel’s characters as well as its narrative seem to fail in preserving traditions, keeping values, and maintaining a sense of romantic idyll, which is revealed as a mere shadow of its former self. Realities had changed, and needed to be accepted. Through his sharp voice, Raabe, in different pitches, deconstructs, alienates, and ridicules it, thereby violating genre conventions, including the idea of closure (Wilke 200). This of course can be interpreted as another way of conserving a romantic idea of nature. The satirical criticism which he is more likely to have intended—and which also set the tone in his proceeding novella *Prinzessin Fisch* (1883)—of a general contemporary oblivion towards industrial environmental impacts, fails to make itself clearly heard. Maybe it is embedded in the German nostalgia which was so typical towards the end of the nineteenth century, increasing almost directly in proportion with the rising influx of scientific knowledge.¹ In *Pfister's Mill*, however, the smooth surface of poetic realism is disturbed.

In the end, it does not matter whether this problem with nostalgia is caused by Raabe’s style or if it is (intentionally) overlooked in the spirit of progress. But it is certain that strategies of dissociation (Helmers, “Zur Verfremdung”) and multi-layered narration of time (Oppermann, “Zum Proble”) contributed to it. Like agency and processes in the shaping of non-fictional social-natural sites, the techniques and narrative strategies that contribute to the shaping of a novel need an expert if they are to be disentangled: literary critic or natural scientist. In their separate “ecosystems” these play similar roles representing micro- and macrocosms. Yet the narrative strategies within the novel and the particular interpretation of the literary critic are both individual contributions to the overall

¹ Wilke refers to a then unpublished article by Barbara Thums, “Stadt-Land-Fluss: Öko-Poetik bei Charles Dickens und Wilhelm Raabe.” *Kunst, Erkenntnis, Wissenschaft. Formen des Wissens von der Antike bis heute*. Ed. Marion Hiller. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015. n.n. Print.

communication process shaping the literary socio-natural site of *Pfister's Mill*. Raabe had wanted his novel to be part of the communication process shaping the socio-natural site of New Brunswick, which was troubled by an increasing number and problematic sugar refineries. Unfortunately, his attempt did not succeed. It did not earn him the popularity or wide distribution required to make an impact, and his audience failed to grasp his message.

The Microscopy

This failure to communicate the necessity of (lasting and effective) environmental protection is—from a modern point of view—even more frustrating, as Raabe not only foresaw the current problematic, but recognized and anticipated another problem, namely that of invisible risks arising from a growing chemical industry. In his poetic practice, he describes the toxicity of that specific sector throughout the course of the novel. The arc of tension peaks during Old Pfister's visit to Asche's makeshift city laboratory. The miller and his son personally approach him to ask if he is willing to support their legal cause with his scientific expertise. Yet the vapors they inhale cause massive breathing problems to the old miller and his son, even worse than those caused by the smells of the sugar factory (PM 58). The linguistic artistry Raabe uses to describe the coughing and spluttering chemist and his visitors in the midst of the heavy fog in the washhouse testifies to his well-informed concerns (Rindisbacher 29). The passage also exemplifies his use of black humor and biting sarcasm, modes of writing which are usually concealed in reassuringly humorous descriptions. Although it is an integral part of realist writing (Preisendanz 11), this contrast makes his images seem almost cruel, as Heinrich Detering phrases it (4).

Literally at the center of his novel, Raabe places a poem, "Einst kommt die Stunde" (The Hour Will Come). It is recited at midnight on Christmas Eve by the failed poet Doktor Felix Lippoldes, who is a hopeless alcoholic. The party has just taken water samples in the fields behind the sugar factory and is now celebrating in the cozy atmosphere of a warm home permeated by the incongruous smells of roast goose and hydrogen sulphide (PM 88). Here the absurdity lies in celebrating the coming arrival of the Christian savior with an ode to the apocalypse in the presence of the future perpetrator of pollution. On this very evening, Asche, who will later build a chemical factory on the grounds of the old mill, chooses the poet's daughter as his life partner. Almost absurd in their conception, Lippoldes's poem and the whole scene have received special attention by Raabe scholars such as Hermann Helmers (1987) and Heinrich Detering, who extrapolated from it the author's awareness of environmental degradation. Surrounded by citations from the biblical apocalypse and Jewish religious writings, Raabe literally and metaphorically presents the end of the world in shockingly lurid terms. With Lippoldes as comical and fretful caricature of the purveyors of looming apocalypse

(Pizer 121), he also lampoons attitudes of the petty bourgeoisie, effectively ridiculing them both (Detering 14).

There is a striking reference to Pfister's polluted millstream as a "provincial styx," and the underlying criticism of both cultural crisis and ecological damage probably caused Raabe many sleepless nights. Increasingly detached from reality, Lippoldes drowns himself in the end, probably in an act of idealism (Manthey 90) (PM 144). With him and the old miller gone, humane and humanistic values figuratively turn to "ash," while society watches in stupor. At the end of the novel, the miller's son Eberhard Pfister recaptures the mood:

We go for tea on the veranda. Next door the great stain-removal institution is rattling away, blowing its clouds up into the evening sky, almost as badly as in Krickeroode. The river, which is broader here, yet also not truly broad, is swarming with all sorts of rowing and sailing boats, even though we pollute it to the best of our abilities, and it seems to accept Rhakopygros as something wholly natural, to which it is quite indifferent. (PM 187)

This episode conveys a sense of multiple failures: failure to grasp the hazardous nature of the present, failure to acknowledge future problems, and failure to preserve past values. Even the old miller's lament about the young chemist being the only one to conserve the values of the older generation (PM 185) reveals itself as based on a false premise. Raabe, however, uses the scene with great skill to point to the dangers of environmental pollution.

The Rotifers

A.A. Asche is the most interesting character of the novel when it comes to analyzing Raabe's position on the dangers of pollution. With this figure, the author suggests the intertwined branches of natural science and economy are Janus-faced. Their dangers are expressed through the chemist's name, occupation, and behavioral practices. Spelled out, his first names read as "August Adam." Adam, the father of all men, stands for the father of all new "modern" industry, but the inherent danger to the environment and society which he poses supports a reading of this Adam as an Anti-Christ figure (Kaiser, "Erlösung Tod" 10). Driven by nostalgia and quasi-filial piety, he helps Old Pfister save his mill by convicting the sugar refinery with his water analysis. In the end, however, he "saves" the world by polluting it. The "world" here incorporates the whole of German society, the German economy, and the environment. Asche is a future pillar of industry, yet he is still interested in traditional humanistic education and even fights organic water pollution. His second name, August, alludes to the figure of the "dumme August," a silly man, who with his efforts of saving it, endangers the environment even more (Helmers). The categories of failure and success become blurred in this cynical juxtaposition. Asche's involvement on both sides of the equation prefigures Donna Haraway's critique of the supposed neutrality of spectatorship in scientific work (Clark 100).

Ash is one of the main ingredients in traditional soap production, in which Asche is interested. Furthermore, the German colloquial term “Bocksasche,” used in industrial contexts for certain kinds of toxic waste (generally used for road building), evokes the symbolic billy goat side of the devil (Kaiser, “Erlösung Tod” 10). Built into nature and society as seemingly harmless refuse, it is also alluded to in the novel (PM 88). Raabe skillfully describes a landscape picked bare, permeated by (tourist) railroads, and pathways fortified with Bocksasche. It is an example of how he perceives and successfully depicts the flip-side of industrial transformation. He accuses his readership of failing to see this sinister side of landscape change brought about by industrialisation and modernization. As Berbeli Wanning has argued, an adaptation of cognitive and perceptual processes can be identified in narrative texts of the nineteenth century: they adapted in order to cope with the losses and dangers of a changing environmental reality (381). It also becomes apparent that the fumes and effluents emerging from the new chemical industry are more intense and toxic than the miasma-like odors they are replacing (Hoppe 187). Their invisibility makes them potentially more harmful, as their ostensible absence can fool spectators into believing they are safe. Raabe’s characters struggle with the all-pervasiveness of toxicity, each in a unique way, as Wilke shows: individually, they prepare the ground for a toxic discourse as defined by Lawrence Buell (202). It almost seems like although Raabe had been interested in the effects of industrial pollution for decades, he failed to cognitively process this popular change in perceiving it. Alongside with his remaining trapped between realism and naturalism, this may help to explain his inability to connect with a wider readership.

The emerging urban middle class culturally deconstructs the risk from Asche’s factory’s inorganic pollution, when reevaluating the rural landscape and transforming the former economic basis into a recreational space, a site of semi-rural escapism, as Timothy Clark puts it (98). In the text this is indicated by rowing and sailing boats observed on the water by Pfister’s son Eberhart, who redefines his own identity by remembering and narrating his family (hi)story. His recollection enables the miller’s son to liberate himself from the past and its legacy, while reconfiguring his own personal boundaries (Decker 112). In order to portray this process in literary form, Raabe interweaves narrating and narrated time so complexly that in some parts past and present become almost indistinguishable (Oppermann, “Zum Problem” 64). In the end, it allows Eberhard to leave the rural area behind on all levels and embark on a new life within urban society. His family’s only recently saved mill will be torn down and replaced by a chemical factory. A life cycle starts anew, while the dangers looming ahead are flatly denied.

Eberhard’s main audience for this process of psychological cocooning and hatching is his young wife Emmy. Although seemingly unnecessary for the course of the story at first, the adorable and somewhat naive young lady holds important functions for the narrative. She stands in for the real readers, allowing for a

separation between the audience and the narrated tale, which according to Manthey is also a sign of the author's progressing alienation from his readership (73). With her shallow reaction to both her husband's emotion-laden personal story and the changes in her immediate environment, Emmy also represents those parts of society who have already become alienated from nature and rural life and who exist seemingly almost completely sealed off from the natural environment and its principles. As Raabe only introduced her in a later draft of the novel, she is said to be a mediating figure, first and foremost. With her childlike characteristics and "female" charm, apart from adding a love story to the narrative, she is thought to have been aimed to make the scientific story with its unpleasant odors more digestible for the readers (Fuld 289).

But her role as mediator is more complex and more important than merely being a stand-in for Raabe's readers. On the one hand, she embodies all stereotypes of middle-class women at the time. On the other hand, midway between Eberhard and Asche, she fulfills the function of a "midwife" for growing awareness. Without her, Eberhard would be stuck in nostalgia, subject to a fate similar to his father's. She initiates his thought process on two levels when she confronts him with the inevitability of their "actual existence now on this earth" (Clark 98). Firstly, her mere existence inspires the young teacher to chronicle his family history, as he feels urged to share his family heritage with his wife before it is gone and they start their own family. Secondly, her ignorant reactions to his tales offer food for thought to Eberhard, and he often starts writing after she has gone to sleep, translating his father's toxic discourse into realist fiction (Wilke 203). One evening he ponders,

I did not find out (...) and leaned out of the open window for a while longer (...) and gazing into the summer night (...); or rather, breathing in its odours, I immediately had to agree with Emmy, who was unable to comprehend either the last innkeeper of Pfister's mill's in his desperation, or my own story. (PM 52)

Wilhelm Raabe had a very positive image of women, as can be read from the correspondence with his wife Berta and eldest daughter Margarethe in particular, who he appreciated as sparring partners in conversation (Nachlass H III 10 57; 120). He may well have woven these experiences into his narrative. Lippoldes' daughter Albertine plays a similar role to Emmy's in her relationship with A.A. Asche. Neither Asche nor the miller's son can proceed in their personal and professional development without the support and company of the female companion.

Old Pfister seems the only central character who really suffers from the environmental degradation. The cultural and social changes widely connected to it, however, cause the death of a minor character, Doktor Felix Lippoldes, thereby reflecting Raabe's grief over the decline of humanistic education and values. The dying miller, a wonderfully multi-layered personality, represents the end of Germany's rural society, whose traditions and values are shifting almost at random; consequently, he also represents the effects of social change brought about by

acceleration and anxiety about the future (Detering 5). But above all, he can be read as personifying the “romantic” nature which is fast disappearing. He thus provides the entry point for readings of *Pfister's Mill* in this context. Both society and literature had come to reassess and recharge the symbolism of “Nature” since the Romantic era, which has been described by Sonja Klimek with reference to the very German concept of “Waldeinsamkeit” (forest solitude). It seems there is no place for nature in modern society, and no such thing as even the illusion of an unspoiled nature remains. Yet Raabe and others generate an idyllic nature through negation (Thürmer 75). Inability and unwillingness to adapt to the progress demanded by an industrialised nation are the causes of Pfister’s death.

While the old miller fails to develop, his son Eberhard stays unaffected by the unfolding events, at least on the surface accepting every stroke of fate (the decline of the family business, the degradation of the environment, and his father’s death) as given and necessary. As part of the new generation, he remains safe from any negative effects, at least for now. And “palliator” Asche’s involvement in the biological investigation to revenge the mill’s fate resembles a casting out of demons by their ruler. This paradox was clearly intended by Raabe as a critique of the uncritical, oblivious, and in his eyes opportunistic supporters of industrialisation. At the same time it might help to explain his focus on biological water analysis, rather than the combined bio-chemical practice of the time, as has been pointed out by August Thienemann, and again by historian Elisabeth Vaupel in the late 1980s.

The challenges to modern society are represented in the experiences of the younger generation. Asche actively transforms the landscape—the world outside—while Eberhard transforms the world within, reflecting on the consequences. Emmy, necessarily emotionally distant, mediates between the two realms. She actually structures the plot, as she supports the shift between the internal and framing narrative of *Pfister's Mill*, between the text as a vehicle for the story of pollution, and as Eberhard’s project (Wanning) of “therapeutic” writing. Thus she fulfills an important function, enabling and presenting the internal and external changes to Ebert’s reality, the inner and outer nature of Pfister’s mill. Furthermore, Emmy’s naive and simple mind serves as platform of translation between her husband’s humanist ethics and Asche’s scientific worldview devoid of all literary and cultural allusions. As the woman is so unobtrusive in her existence, she is easily overlooked and underrepresented, like the other female characters, Albertine and Christine. The female characters, however, are also indispensable facilitators of the narration of Pfister’s toxic discourse, which is only spoken by men (Wilke 205).

The Report

Raabe generally favored open endings (Pizer 116). His writing is dense, and

the challenge of the rich intertextuality of his works has attracted generations of scholars. His “failure to take a clear stand” in politics and literature also invites readers and critics alike to take his so carefully constructed narratives apart, word by word, piece by piece. With every layer additional meanings can be excavated, revealing openness, vagueness, shifting positions, and most importantly ambiguity. The only certainty that remains in the end is Raabe’s disillusionment with social, political, economic, and general development, swathed in yearning for a meaningful wholeness of life. Humans had, he believed, become alienated from art and nature through progress and technology.

In the end, however, one is left wondering: If reviewers and readers failed and still fail to understand Raabe’s socio-critical intention, is not Raabe himself to blame? Does his relatively inaccessible form of writing not determine a small readership and a hesitant appreciation of his work? Or are these inevitable consequences of the problems he deals with, the embracing of progress at the late nineteenth-century dawn of globalized economic competition?

At the very least, Wilhelm Raabe’s prescient awareness of the environmental (and health) problems caused by industrial pollution cannot be denied. His novels describe the causal relationship between water pollution and its effects on flora and fauna, as well as their hazardous health effects (in *Pfister’s Mill* especially their effect on the respiratory system). Cleaning up the environment, or better preventing contamination, is something not done for its own sake, but induced primarily by the human interest in survival: the need to breathe. It is, however, underpinned by a nostalgic view of the past and discussions about the modern use of rural nature as a recreational sphere. Although the representatives of the younger generation in the novel gain in environmental awareness, this does not lead to any real change in their attitude and approach towards nature. Instead of preventing future ecological damage to the socio-natural site, they accept it: their conduct is directed towards changing their personal perception; which is at best a first step towards action. This is what Colin Riordan has identified as the core problem of today’s political ecology (323). Although it is undeniably important, it neglects the real-life limitations of the protagonists’ scope for action, as well as that of the citizens of the German Empire, who lacked possibilities to influence their livelihoods.

Raabe’s use of industrial water pollution as a symptomatic field for his narrative on the price of modernity nevertheless underlines the artist’s foresight, which is closely linked with his holistic sensing and thinking (Goodbody 87). He managed to capture the contemporary sensibility and *Zeitgeist*, skillfully sketching the crisis of cultural consciousness (Jungkuntz-Höltje). The mechanism he uses is the act of remembering of his chronicler Eberhard Pfister, which allows the author to reflect on the inner confusion and instability brought about by change and uncertainty. At the same time, it allows him to tap into a new quality of emotions that would inspire modern psychology, as extracted from internal and external

history. This sense of “crisis,” so closely associated with Sustecks’ proposal for a realist pessimism of the era, also applies to the contemporary awareness of environmental questions in general. With a distorting mirror Raabe tried to direct his contemporaries’ attention towards a topic of enormous significance and explosive power, which was, however, not discussed controversially in public for socio-political reasons. He shows a world where there is no inside and outside of society, where humans and nature are interdependent (Wilke 211). It is as if he tried to spill the news, but succeeded only in spilling his opportunity to act. The mill stands not only as a deconstruction of the motif’s romantic symbolism, but also as a metaphor for Germany, and New Brunswick in particular, which face the prospect of ecocide due to bad political decision-making. With its multiple entangled narratives of technological and scientific progress, industrialisation, and legal development, *Pfister's Mill* can serve as a case study for a political ecology of the nineteenth century, dealing with the effects of ecological change on and in human communities, and standing as a monument of crisis within the crisis.

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Editorial: Creative Writing and Arts

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In his famous book *The Others: How Animal Made Us Human* (1995), Paul Shepard writes:

Longer than memory we have known that each animal has its power and place, each a skill, virtue, wisdom, innocence—a special access to the structure and flow of the world. Each surpasses ourselves in some way. Together, sacred, they help hold the cosmos together, making it a joy and beauty to behold, but above all a challenge to understand as story, drama, and sacred play. (173)

One of the founders of human ecology, Shepard (1925-1996) conceived of this discipline as an intersectional field, embracing biology as well as philosophy, environmental history along with anthropology and psychology, thus paving the way to what we now commonly call the “environmental humanities.” In all of his works, from *Man in the Landscape* (1967) to *Nature and Madness* (1982), a very special emphasis falls on the co-evolutionary pathway of our species. The way we experience, know, speak, and imagine the world—even our sense of the sacred—have been shaped, Shepard acknowledged, by this long encounter with nonhuman animals. Perception, language, creativity, *culture*: this is what happens “when species meet,” as Donna Haraway would say a few years later.

Once more, the integral role that the “animal humanities” play in this broader trans-disciplinary debate is validated: if nonhuman animals have made us human, as Shepard maintained, then the humanities are unthinkable apart from this radical co-implication. And this mutual predicament is what our *Ecozon@* issue titled “Animal Humanities, or, On Reading and Writing the Nonhuman” explores. Here again the connection between the “Special Focus” cluster and the Creative Writing and Art section proves to be extremely strong. As Deborah Amberson and Elena Past write in their superb Introduction, “it is precisely here, in the space of literary language, cinematic image, artistic creation, ethical thinking, and the philosophical imagination, that the nonhuman animal, long defined as being without logos and without reason, might speak most clearly.” The variety of creative contributions in our section—two sets of images, a noticeable selection of poems, and a comic short story—could not resonate better with this statement. Let us explore this rich array in full detail.

The first contribution is visual, and it consists of a choice of six pictures from the project *Great Apes in Feminine* by Spanish artist and ecofeminist activist Verónica Perales. The project, which is vividly illustrated in the artist’s abstract, is meant to give visibility to the female subjects in primate studies, often obscured by

the conceptual “grouping” of these species. Hence the necessity to give these “apes in feminine” not only *faces* (in Lévinas’s sense), but also names. And so, Perales’s portrayals become liminal experiences: with their mutual ties and individual appellations (both essential to the narrative sequence of these artworks), Nadia, Coco, Virunga, Muni and all the others participate in drawing, as Diana Villanueva Romero suggests, a “space of relation between the human and the nonhuman that responds creatively to the kind of configuration of the humanities that is needed” (n.p.) in a time when human culture is called to cross the borders of our species. A similar vision and sensibility also animates our second art contribution, Nuria Sánchez-León’s *La vida como producto, Life as a Product*. The pictorial series created by this artist who explores the mergers between ecological activism and “public art,” is again animated by the claim against the reduction of living beings to a dimension of objectual anonymity, something which completely erases the human-nonhuman evolutionary ties as well as interspecific ethical considerations. In her contribution, while the slaughtered pig bodies are almost undistinguishable in texture and shapes from the bodies of human babies, human babies are in turn transformed into packed meat. And so, entering in such a close proximity with these bodily subjects, the artist turns the species difference into a granular intimacy of fates.

After visual works, poetry takes the stage. And here we have a richness of voices, which articulate human-nonhuman encounters in an ample array of modulations. Our first two authors are already known by *Ecozon@* readers. The first, Florian Auerochs, is a German scholar and writer, working in the fields of queer and feminist criticism, animal studies, and psychoanalysis. His *Notes on Endangered Species #1* is a two-poem suite engaging with the animal body, be it vulnerable, endangered, or extinct. Under his eyes, the real body of the animal, whether a starfish or an ibis, overlaps with virtual images (“I watched them / crumble / in the dark / on youtube”) and mediated emotional reverberations (“viral / tears”). The second short suite is *Water Droplets: Amidst the Zodiacs and Constellations* by Jacob G. Price, two bilingual poems about the ongoing change that is inherent in natural cycles. Written in both English and Spanish, Price’s verses describe encounters of beings (seagulls, phoenixes, trees, puddles, humans) and elements (rain, ground, stars, the celestial spheres), marking secret correspondences among all of them: “I awake and see my son in a puddle. / I mutter to the trees, / ‘One among so many, / so many among one.’”

The next two poets are making their first appearance in *Ecozon@*. They inaugurate their collaboration with our journal by way of two extended groups of lyrics, all in bilingual versions. The first of these two authors is the renowned Colombian writer, translator, and filmmaker Juan Carlos Galeano, who is also a Professor of Spanish at Florida State University. Here presented in Spanish and English, Galeano’s sylloge *Amazonian Cosmologies: Six Poems* is the result of a combination of influences, encompassing motifs of Amazonian folklore as well as Japanese imagistic poetry, Surrealism and the Hispanic and North American poetic

traditions. This short anthology is a very good sample of Galeano's poetic "cosmovisions" and "cosmologies of reciprocity." As he explains in the preliminary note (strongly recommended for reading),

the religious cosmovisions of Amazonians [...] believe in the existence of visible and invisible beings living in multiple spheres of the world. [...] Spirited rivers, forest, boulders, winds provided me with the fabric for themes of movement, love, violence, and rebirth elaborated in the folktales of Amazonians [...]. The poems want to become a sort of spiritual history of the place—for poetry is an emotional and sentient world speaking through our bodies.

All these beings and worlds appear in the six poems, embodied in the forms of pink dolphins, young snakes, anacondas or mermaids, who are in turn figures or children of the Yakumama, the "Mother of all Water Beings." Writing about the Colombian poet, Joni Adamson has observed that Galeano's poems are about "transformational beings" that "take the forms of trees, dolphins, birds, or clouds," or that sometimes "transform themselves into the shape of humans" (Adamson and Galeano n.p.). All these beings are "persons," as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro uses that word, revealing that "humans, animals, plants and spirits are participating in the same [multinatural and multicultural] world" (Adamson and Galeano n.p.). Involuntarily resonating with Shepard's words, in Galeano's poetry these Amazonian "sacred" beings really "help hold the cosmos together" (Shepard 173). The last poetic guest of our Spring issue is Antonello Borra. His *Quattro poesie inedite da Alfabestiaro (terza parte) / Four unpublished poems from Alfabestiaro (third part)* reconnect with collections of verses previously published in Italian, English, and German by this multilingual Italian poet and translator based in Vermont, where he also teaches Italian Literature. The title *Alfabestiaro* is a pun in which the words "alphabet" and "bestiary" are hybridized. As Borra writes in his insightful (and also highly recommended) introductory note about his poems,

[w]hen human beings forget that they too are animals, they forfeit their soul: "anima" in Italian. It is this simple, linguistic truth that is at the root of these animal poems, in which the human voice lends itself to each of the different creatures that speak in the texts. The hope is that readers will smile, or laugh, and then start taking a good, long, hard look at themselves. And think.

In these four poems, the human animal lends its voice to a magpie, an ibis, a blackbird and a bear, mixing loving irony with a sense for earthly dwellings and the surprise of unexpected connections, as in *L'orso / The bear*: "Paradise is a place / here on earth, / and that's why I prefer / that corner in the sky / where I already have my wife / and my daughter pulling the wagon."

The human also lends its voice to a speaking nonhuman creature in our last piece, Robert Davis's "The True Story of Edgar Allen Crow." The tale is a fantastic comic story based on an actual encounter that the author, a very original and prolific Californian writer, had while taking his four collies for a walk in a park of San Francisco. As Davis writes, with his usual tone of understatement: "This is a comic take on some bird friends I see daily, and have noted their highly intelligent

behavior.” What happens in these amusing and captivating pages is that a super-smart crow lures the dog’s owner with his capability not only to grab cookies, successfully competing with pigeons (and dogs), but also to articulate complex conversations and even to start his own business. With his surreal irony and impressive talent for storytelling, Davis uses anthropomorphism as a litmus test for revealing both animal talents and human flaws. In doing so, he inspires us to ask whether what we commonly consider “anthropomorphic” might be instead an extension of zoomorphism to the human realm. As Joseph Meeker once wrote, “I am not suggesting that all plants and animals possess human qualities, but that much elaborate philosophizing about human behavior has been mere rationalization of relatively common natural patterns of behavior which are to be found in many species of plants and animals” (161). Even if we know that crows do not really start their business in the field of hot dogs, seeing these human-animal resemblances in the “comic mode” is surely something which reinforces our Darwinian family ties, reminding us, as Shepard said, that the nonhuman animals are the ones that make us human.

In conclusion, speaking of encounters and ties, we would like to pay here a heartfelt tribute to the memory of one of our contributors, Peter Bergthaller, who recently passed away. His beautiful photographs of marine life will continue to tell us the stories of his meetings with nonhuman ones.

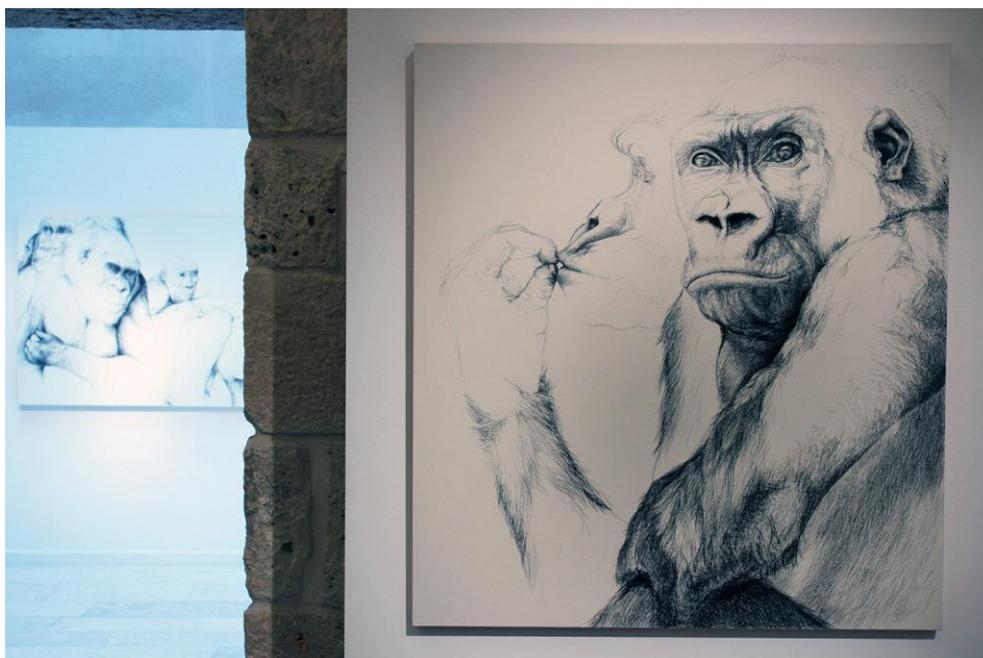
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Great Apes in Feminine

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Batanga



Muni



Nadia



Sala



Virunga



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La vida como producto

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Óleo sobre lienzo



Óleo sobre lienzo 60 x 60



Óleo sobre lienzo



Óleo sobre lienzo



Óleo sobre lienzo

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Notes on endangered species #1

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I. Pisaster ochraceus

I've seen
sea stars dying
along the Pacific coast

I watched them
crumble in the dark
on youtube

viral
tears

II. Geronticus eremita

I've seen
the ibis' absence

bald bearded black-clothed extinct extremists

time to die

ethical shops
on fire
pop

Poems

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Water Droplets

Water droplets
glaze turquoise seagulls.
An organic rain
weathers their beaks,
lifting their heavy wings.
Their brick-bone wings droop,
with time,
crumbling to the ground.

Gotas de agua

Gotas de agua
vidrian gaviotas de color turquesa.
Una lluvia orgánica
erosiona sus picos,
alzando sus alas pesadas.
Sus alas con huesos de ladrillo caen,
con tiempo,
se deshacen en la tierra.

Amidst the zodiacs and other constellations

Amidst the zodiacs and other constellations are innumerable spheres aging in reverse, and the wise become naïve.
The old, reborn, leap across barren blackness.
A phoenix to no grave.

The smallest seeds of the tallest trees find within themselves the strains, the wrinkles, the wisdom, of life after life death after death leaf turned over a greener leaf, fruit that bares more fruit until the same soil buried under ages reversed until the first generation the second, third and last are the third, second and the first.

I awake and see my son in a puddle.
I mutter to the trees,
“One among so many,
so many among one.”

Entre los zodiacos y constelaciones

Entre los zodiacos y constelaciones existen esferas sin número, envejeciéndose al revés, los sabios se convierten en los inocentes.
Los anteriores, renacidos, brincan por la oscuridad vacía.
Fénix a ninguna tumba.

Las semillas más pequeñas de los árboles más altos se hallan en sí las tribulaciones, las arrugas, la sabiduría de vida después de vida muerte después de muerte hoja envuelta en hoja más verde, una fruta que da más hasta la misma tierra enterrada en edades al revés hasta que la primera generación, la segunda, la tercera y última son, la tercera, la segunda la primera.

Me despierto y veo a mi hijo en un charco.
Murmuro a los árboles
- Uno entre tantos,
tantos entre uno.

Amazonian Cosmologies: Six Poems¹

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Pink Dolphins

Cuando los delfines siguen a los barcos, se visten de rosado
para suavizar el odio en las miradas de los hombres.

"¿Cómo nos pueden odiar si hacemos el amor como los hombres?"

Muchos dicen que por las noches a los delfines
les crece el pelo en el sexo y salen a robarse las mujeres.

Los niños creen que los delfines son gringos
que se bañan desnudos por las tardes en el río.

Los pescadores les cortan el pene a los delfines
y lo venden como amuleto para enamorar a las mujeres.

Pink Dolphins

When dolphins follow the boats, they dress in pink
to soften the hate in men's eyes.

"How can they hate us if we make love like they do?"

Many say that at night the dolphins
grow pubic hair and go out stealing women.

Children think that the dolphins are gringos
who bathe naked in the river at dusk.

¹ Translated by James Kimbrell and Rebecca Morgan. James Kimbrell is a North American poet, the recipient of several prestigious poetry awards and a translator. He teaches poetry and creative writing at Florida State University. Rebecca Morgan's translations of Latin American and North American poetry have appeared in the United States and Latin America. She teaches Foreign Language Education at Florida State University.

Fishermen cut off the dolphins' penises
and sell them as amulets to charm women.

Boítas

Un día un hombre se despierta con los dedos convertidos en boas pequeñas.

Su habitación es una caja de cables moviéndose por todas partes
y los niños les ruegan a sus madres que los lleven a jugar con las boítas.

Las boas no se quedan tranquilas ni un minuto; se abrazan con fuerza a los
muebles
(que ya empiezan con sus quejas), y salen a enredarse en los árboles vecinos.

Los familiares y amigos se preocupan y tratan de arrancárselas de las manos
pero el hombre se pone a gritar diciendo que son las venas de su corazón.

Un inversionista japonés quiere abrir una tienda de masajes 24 horas al día.

Los científicos y niños están muy fascinados; y los canales de TV despliegan las
noticias
registrando nuevas conexiones entre los animales y los hombres.

Boítas

One day a man wakes up to find that his fingers have turned into little boas.

His room is a box of these writhing cables moving everywhere
and children beg their mothers to take them to play with the little boas.

The boas can't be still for a moment; they hug the furniture tightly (which has
already begun complaining), and go out to wrap themselves around the
neighboring trees.

Friends and relatives worry and try to pull them from his palms
but the man screams protesting that the boas are the veins of his heart.

A Japanese investor plans to open a 24 hour massage parlor.

Scientists and children are fascinated; and TV channels broadcast reports
of new connections between animals and people.

Iaras

Mitad mujer-mitad pez las Iaras enamoran a los hombres que buscan aventuras o riquezas en la selva.

Sólo para cantar sin tener que cocinar viven las Iaras.

(Para los biólogos son vacas marinas asoleándose en las orillas).

Sus canciones curan heridas que las gentes hacen en los ríos.

A los pescadores que no han cogido nada, las Iaras les prometen caricias todo el tiempo.

Quienes prueban de su miel se quedan en los ríos para siempre.

En cualquier río, una mujer cantando o peinándose el sexo puede ser una Iara.

Yaras

Half woman, half fish, Yaras seduce those men in search of adventure and riches in the jungle.

Yaras live to sing and don't have to cook.

(Biologists argue that they are merely manatees sunbathing along the shores.)

Men inflict all kinds of wounds on the rivers—wounds cured by songs of the Yaras.

The Yaras offer easy love at any moment to fishermen in need.

Those who taste the Yara's honey stay in the jungle forever.

Along any river, a woman singing or combing her pubis could be a Yara.

Anaconda

Una Anaconda vive feliz enroscada en el cuerpo de un hombre por las noches.

"¿Por qué no te acuestas derecha como yo lo hago?", se queja el hombre un día.

La Anaconda le dice que él tiene más calor que todos los árboles que ella conoce.
"Además me sueño con mis remolinos y los ríos mientras duermo".

"Pues sería mejor que te soñaras convertida en un canal"
(piensa el hombre, pues no quisiera herir a la culebra con palabras).

Pero no puede dormir bien, y decide comprarle una cama a la Anaconda.

Por las mañanas la culebra se despierta con dolores en la espalda.

El pobre hombre le da muchos masajes y le ruega que trate de dormir sola,
que lo considere, que él también necesita dormir bien.

"Una culebra tiene que dormir bien", le dice llorando la Anaconda.
"Una culebra tiene que dormir bien. Una culebra tiene que dormir bien".

Anaconda

An Anaconda lives happily wrapped around the body of a man at night.

"Why don't you lie down straight like I do?" the man complains one day.

The Anaconda tells him that men are warmer than all the trees she knows.
"Besides, I dream of my whirlpools and rivers while I sleep."

"You'll be better off if you dreamed of being a canal,"
(the man only thinks this to himself—he wouldn't want to hurt the snake's
feelings).

Because he can't sleep, he buys a bed for the Anaconda.

Now, every morning the Anaconda wakes up with an aching back.

The poor man gives her massages and begs her to try to sleep alone, to think
of him, he also needs to sleep.

"A snake must have her rest," says the Anaconda crying, "A snake must have her rest.

A snake must have her rest."

Garzas

Los pescadores que escaman y abren las barrigas
de sus peces les encuentran un río.

En el río brilla una playa donde juegan fútbol unos muchachos;

y a la playa llegan unas garzas a quitarse sus plumas y a bañarse.

Los pescadores les hacen guiños a los muchachos
para que se bañen con las garzas.

Pero los muchachos prefieren esconderles las ropas a las garzas.

Entonces los que les abren las barrigas a los peces
se ríen tanto que se ahogan de la risa.

Las garzas se ponen las escamas de los peces y se tiran al río.

Hérons

The fishermen who scale and gut their catch
discover a river in the bellies of the fish.

In the river shines a sandbar where some boys play soccer.

A few herons come to the beach, take off their feathers, and go for a swim.

The fishermen wink at the boys
goading them to bathe with the herons.

But the boys prefer to hide the herons' clothes.

Then the fishermen who scale and gut their fish
laugh so hard they fall down, choking.

The herons dress themselves in the fish scales and dive into the river.

Chicua

Un avecita como ninguna para anunciar el futuro con su canto.

Los cazadores nunca se van por la selva sin su perro
y los consejos de la Chicua.

Chic-chic-chicua y el camino es una víbora.

Chic-chic-chicua, canta y sus ojitos brillan como televisores
tristes por las noticias.

Chic, chic chic y llegan bestias deliciosas a la boca de los rifles.

Con mucho sentimiento, la Chicua vuela de una rama a otra
contestando las preguntas.

Capaz de ver la cabeza y la cola antes de nacer,

A donde no llegan nuestros ojos es la casa de la Chicua.

Chicua

An exceptional, tiny bird with the ability to announce the future in song.

A hunter never enters the forest without his dog
and the advice of the Chicua.

"Chic-chic-chicua," the bird sings and his eyes shine like televisions, sad about the
news.

"Chic-chic-chic," and delicious beasts appear in the hunter's scope.

With great emotion, the Chicua flies from branch to branch
answering questions.

Capable of seeing head and tail before birth.

The Chicua lives in a zone the eyes cannot reach.

From Alfabestiaro (third part)

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La gazza

Per quanto mi riguarda,
tutto quello che luccica
è d'oro ed io lo rubo,
mi fido di apparenze
e ne faccio sostanza.

The magpie

As far as I'm concerned
all that glitters
is gold, and I steal it.
I trust appearances
and make substance of them.

L'ibis

Ibis, re d'ibis... non fa differenza,
tanto, prima o poi, tutti ce ne andremo:
quelli che mangiano serpi e carogne
e quelli che si nutrono d'amore
per il mondo, o per qualche dio che appare
di profilo. Lasciarsi dietro delle
tracce serve a qualcosa? Rimanere
indecisi sul senso di una virgola
nell'enciclopedia del proprio tempo
ci compra anche un minuto a questa mensa,
tra il riso e i bisi di un destino avverso?

The Ibis

Ibis, king Ibis... it makes no
difference:
sooner or later we'll all go:
those feeding on snakes and
carrion
and those feeding on love
for the world or for some deity
appearing in profile. What's the
point
of leaving traces? Does indecision
on the meaning of a comma
in our time's encyclopedia
buy us even a minute at this
banquet,
through the *risi e bisi* of an
unfriendly fate?

Il merlo

Sono un merlo, non sono
un corvo adolescente,
il colore non conta,
il corvo è un'altra razza,
una razza cattiva:
basta sentirne il verso
per capirlo: se un merlo

apre il becco, hai un canto.

The Blackbird

I'm a blackbird, I'm not
an adolescent crow,
color does not matter,
a crow belongs to a different race,
an evil race:
just listen to its call,
you'll understand: when a
blackbird

opens its beak, you get a song.

L'orso

Il paradiso è un posto
che sta qui sulla terra,
e perciò preferisco
quell'angolo di cielo
dove ho già moglie e figlia
che tirano il carretto.

The Bear

Paradise is a place
here on earth,
and that's why I prefer
that corner in the sky
where I already have my wife
and my daughter pulling the wagon.

The True Story of Edgar Allen Crow

Robert Davis

Writer

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One morning while I was walking my dogs at Day Street Park I threw a few crumbs of dog cookies to some pigeons. Suddenly a crow swooped down, scared the pigeons away, ate the remaining crumbs and stared at me. Soft touch that I am, I threw the bird a whole cookie, which he grabbed in his beak and flew away.

The next morning, when I reached the same place in the park, a crow flew down to the lawn on the other side of the fence, and cawed. So I threw him a dog cookie.

This went on for several days. First it was just one crow, then two crows, then several crows meeting me in the park and receiving from me first bits of dog cookies, then bits of bread, cheese, chicken and beef.

From the park I always walk up 30th Street to a place we call 'Billy Goat Hill.' Two crows, a pair I called 'Amos' and 'Andrea,' began following me. They would fly from telephone pole to telephone pole. There's a concrete road divider at the bottom of Billy Goat Hill. I began placing some food on this concrete fence. Soon several crows were feeding there. And then some big 'crows' started coming. These bigger birds were, I learned, ravens. The crows would come only within 10 or 15 feet of me. But the ravens came quite close, sometimes within 2 or 3 feet.

I wondered if I had something long to hold out to the, long enough so my fingers wouldn't be in danger, they might eat from my hand. So the next morning I brought a hot dog, and when I held it out, one of the ravens came right up and ate from my hand.

I could now tell the difference between crows and ravens, but I couldn't tell one crow or one raven from another—except by their behavior, especially the one fearless raven that ate hot dogs from my hand. This bird began following me along Laidley Street, not just flying from pole to pole or roof to roof, but sometimes walking on the sidewalk behind me and my dogs.

One day, as I held out a hot dog, the raven seemed to wink his left eye at me. I thought, "Well, this guy seems friendly enough. I wonder what he'll do if I put a piece of hot dog on my outstretched arm." When I did this, the bird immediately jumped onto my arm and ate the piece of hot dog. I stood with my arm outstretched and looked at him. He was only a foot or so from my face, and was looking back at me.

I said, "That's it. You got your hot dog."

The raven croaked. But to my amazement this croak sounded like the word 'more.'

I said, "Did you say 'more'?"

The raven croaked again. "More, more, more."

I held out another hot dog and let the bird take the whole thing, which it did and flew away. I thought, I'm getting old. My imagination is too active. I had too many beers last night. I didn't get enough sleep. I asked my dogs if that bird had really said 'more.' The dogs didn't know. They had been paying attention to a squirrel.

The next morning I came to Billy Goat Hill early. Well, I was very curious. The raven suddenly swooped down from a tree, landed next to me, looked up, and said, "What's for breakfast?"

I glanced around. There was nobody else in sight. I looked at this large black bird, and he looked at me.

I said, "A hot dog?"

"I'm a little tired of hot dogs," the raven said. "All beef, turkey, chicken—they all pretty much taste the same. What say we go to Chloe's for scrambled eggs with lox, bagel and cream cheese, and a side of bacon?"

"I've got my dogs with me," I said.

"Finnegan and Fergus can wait outside," the raven said. "You can bring them a snack after we eat."

So we went down to Chloe's on Church Street. The dogs and I walked; the bird flew ahead to reserve a table.

Over breakfast I asked the raven, who stood over his plate on the table, what he thought about the famous poem, The Raven.

"It's bullshit," the bird said. "In the first place the guy who wrote it was a dumb crow who didn't know squat about ravens. Like all we can say is one word. Even that he got wrong. What my ancestor actually said was, 'Never at the Moore's,' or 'Never Moore's.' Moore's was a lousy downtown restaurant. And dumb questions like, 'Is there balm in Gilead?' How should my ancestor know anything about Gilead's, which was an old diner in another city?"

"You ravens are associated with death," I said. "What do you think about this?"

"A pure canard. Prejudice, profiling. Mr. Edgar Allen Crow was an obsessed old bird."

Glad that the meaning of the poem had been clarified for me, I asked how the eggs were.

"Very good, thank you," said the raven. Then he called to the waitress. "Miss, another bagel, please. And I'd like my latte now, and a side of bacon to go." Then he turned to me and said, "Tomorrow let's try the waffles with Canadian bacon."

JUST BUSINESS

Edgar was coming back several times each morning for more and more hot dog. And he didn't want just bites, but would turn his head so that he could grab the hot dog I held out to him in the middle, and so fly off with the whole thing. Finally I said, "What's going on here? I thought you were sick of hot dogs."

"They're not for me," the raven said, resting his sixth hot dog at his feet.

"Then who's eating them?" I was sort of thinking Edgar might have a young ones in the nest.

"I'll meet you down at Chloe's and tell you all about it," he said, and flew off with number six.

Edgar was already standing on his favorite table, finishing a plate of steak and eggs, with home fries, when I got to the restaurant.

"I'm in business," the bird said. "Capitalism. Private enterprise. You should be proud to be my partner."

"Business?"

"Yeah. I'm selling hot dogs at the ballpark. I get Solie Shuman's stale buns, and"—he looked around to see where Chloe was, then lowered his voice—"I take a little sour kraut and mustard and ketchup from the 'Help Yourself' table over there."

This I had to see, especially since I was a silent partner in the business.

That afternoon I went to the ballpark. On the roof above the reserved seats, several crows, a few ravens, some gulls and assorted other winged creatures, were perched along the edge of the overhang where they had a bird's eye view of the field. Walking behind them was Edgar, wearing a white cap and a white apron, and carrying a tray around his neck. His croak was unmistakable.

"Hot dogs here! Get you ball park specials here! I got 'em! Who wants em' now!"

When one of the crows flew down to the stands to pick up a stray piece of hamburger, I got a close look at one of Edgar's hot dogs. It was only about two inches long.

The next morning Edgar was at Billy Goat Hill bright and early to mooch hot dogs off his supplier—me. When I held out an empty hand, he looked up at me and opened his beak, but for once he said nothing.

"If I'm your partner," I said, "where's my share of the profits?"

Finally the black bird said, "Okay, give me the merchandise, I mean the hot dogs, and meet me down at Chloe's in a few minutes. I'll buy. How's that?"

While Edgar carefully watched, I looked over the menu and then ordered Eggs Benedict, a café latte, and fruit pie for dessert.

"Some people," Edgar said under his breath but loud enough for me to hear. "The guy must think I'm a millionaire."

"Aren't you eating today?" I said.

"With a partner like you," said the raven. "Nevermore."

Sorry, so far the story ends here. But hopefully my bird friend will be back with more adventures, either in the business world or elsewhere.

Gaia Again

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Toby Tyrrell, *On Gaia: A Critical Investigation of the Relationship between Life and Earth* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 311 pp.

Michael Ruse, *The Gaia Hypothesis: Science on a Pagan Planet* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 251 pp.



I remember the first time I encountered Gaia. I remember sprawling across the comforter on my grandmother's bed—a thin white cotton blend mushroomed over with impossibly huge red roses—and puzzling furiously through James Lovelock's *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. I'm not sure how much of the book I really understood. (I was an earnest, but profoundly ignorant tween.) But I do remember my reactions to it. The world changed.

I was growing up on an island that was being eaten by the Gulf of Mexico—largely because of decisions that big rich people were making—and I was witnessing the not-so-slow poisoning death of one of the richest ecosystems in North America, the Mississippi delta's millions of acres of wetlands—for the same reason. My heart was breaking, and Gaia reassured me. It said to me that life will take care of itself, that humans cannot ever truly destroy it. Gaia also said to me that life mattered, the Earth was alive and it had intrinsic value. That was not something that the Cajun Catholicism available to me had ever said. (Fetuses mattered, but not great blue herons or girls.) Suddenly, I was not alone or less. I was an equal part of something, kin, and the living world I loved had a moral right to fair treatment.

I bring up my twinned reactions to Gaia not out of narcissism (I hope) but because these two implications of the theory—cheerful reassurance and ethical kinship—motivate the two very different books under review here today.

Since the chemist and famed inventor James Lovelock and equally notable microbiologist Lynn Margulis first proposed Gaia in the 1970s, their hypothesis has impelled the development of crucial systems-based approaches to studying life on earth, which have helped us understand how biota, particularly the human variety, impact our planetary life support. Gaia has also helped inspire the global outlook that fuels the modern environmental movement and its resistance to practices that are destroying those life support systems. And yet, in spite of—or

perhaps because of—its pervasive influence, both popular and scientific, Gaia has also proven one of the most polarizing scientific theories ever proposed.

Toby Tyrrell's *On Gaia: A Critical Investigation of the Relationship between Life and Earth* and Michael Ruse's *The Gaia Hypothesis: Science on a Pagan Planet* are the latest installments in that debate. They come at Gaia from almost diametrically opposed angles. Not only are their authors from very different disciplines (science and philosophy), they arrive at contrasting conclusions about the utility of the hypothesis because they focus on different Gaias: Tyrrell sees the Gaia that consoled a tween girl and Ruse the Gaia that connected her.

Let's start with Toby Tyrrell's *On Gaia: A Critical Investigation of the Relationship between Life and Earth*. Or rather, for the sake of clarity, let's start with Tyrrell's Lovelock. Pinning down the Gaia hypothesis (or theory, if you're one of the more convinced) is a bit like trying to staple jello to a wall, but Tyrrell gives it a valiant try. He quotes a number of Lovelock's definitions of Gaia, which have evolved since he and Margulis first formulated the idea, leaving us various "strong" or "weak" versions of the hypothesis. But, as Tyrrell says, "in a nutshell," Gaia "suggests that life has conspired in the regulation of the global environment so as to keep conditions comfortable" (2). Life interacts with biotic and abiotic entities (air, water, rocks, etc.) to maintain life. In the strongest version of Gaia, this "regulation" means that the planet Earth is in some sense a coherent living organism straining to keep itself alive.

The grandness of the hypothesis makes assessment difficult, but assessment is Tyrrell's aim. He is an Earth system scientist, a discipline largely created by Lovelock's and Margulis's work, and he is determined to evaluate the scientific evidence both for and against Gaia, including the huge caches of new data about Earth's climate and climate history collected in the four decades after the hypothesis' formulation. In his preface, he claims that "this is the first book to carry out a critical examination" of Gaia (ix), and to make that possible he breaks the hypothesis down into three testable "components":

- A. Earth is a favorable habitat for life.
- B. It has been so over geologic time as the environment has remained fairly stable.
- C. This is partly due to life's role in shaping the environment [...] (4)

He spends the rest of his 300+ pages showing that these contentions are mostly not true. He holds Gaia up against natural selection (still no clear mechanism to make the two cohere); he takes it to extreme environments and sees how well it helps explain complex chemical cycles and environmental feedbacks; and, most importantly, he walks Gaia through geological history and reveals a climate system that, instead of being benign and well-regulated as the hypothesis predicted, is often rather unfavorable to life and radically unstable, propelling life on Earth to the brink of absolute extinction more than once. And, yes, because of Gaia scientists now acknowledge that life does alter or even control vast non-living components of the Earth, like the make-up of chemicals in the atmosphere. But that

can upset as well as regulate favorable conditions, and the upshot of Tyrrell's analysis is that life persists less because of Gaia and more because of sheer dumb luck. It is a very able, even-handed, learned, and devastatingly thorough performance, overflowing with notes and supporting documentation, yet straightforward enough in its analysis that a lay person can follow it.

For such an effective assassin, however, Tyrrell seems to have surprisingly little malice in his heart. All his criticism is motivated by an urgent concern about the future of life on Earth. He worries about Gaia's reassurances. He worries that "[a] complacent belief in the comforting power of the Earth to self-heal [...] can come as unwanted baggage with the Gaia hypothesis," and, with habitat destruction, overpopulation, over-consumption, pollution, and especially global warming seriously compromising our planetary life support, "[w]e need to keep our eyes open for Achilles' heels in the Earth system that could make it particularly vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts" (218). Rather than leave it to Gaia, "[e]nsuring that the global environment remains propitious for life is up to us, and there is no Gaian safety net to come to the rescue if we mismanage it" (218). To effect this end, "[w]e need a deep and accurate understanding of how our environment works," not soothing fairy tales (218). By debunking Gaia and replacing it with a frighteningly unpredictable and fragile Earth, a gloomily "accurate" "understanding" is precisely what *On Gaia* delivers.

However, in spite of *On Gaia's* critical strengths and urgent purpose, it's an irritating book—or rather I should say that our second author, Michael Ruse, finds it so. In his own review of it, Ruse wonders why Tyrrell "bothered" to write a pointless exposé merely "confirming the general [scientific] opinion" about Gaia's fatal foibles (Ruse 56). Instead, he queries, would it not have been more productive to write "a positive volume" that investigated the "good effects" of the theory or at least inquired into its lasting general popularity? He wonders, "[I]s Gaia a story on its own?" (Ruse 56). In other words, perhaps Tyrrell should have written Ruse's book.

The Gaia Hypothesis: Science on a Pagan Planet tells Gaia's story. Ruse has constructed an intellectual genealogy for the hypothesis, which affords the "context" necessary for "understanding" (one of Ruse's favorite words) both how Gaia happened and why it has generated such a peppery witches' brew of enthusiasm and vitriol (4).

Ruse frames his investigation with this mystery. He wonders: "There is a puzzle—a puzzle from the sixties. Gaia is hated by those on the science-technology side, who might have been expected to show some sympathy. It is loved by others, those on the counterculture side, who might have been expected to have been wary, at least of its origins" (42). Why did the public embrace Gaia, and why did the scientific community (for the most part) come after it, red in tooth and claw? Or, perhaps even more puzzling, "Why did they [Lovelock and Margulis] think up and stick with such a hypothesis, especially when it was so professionally dangerous?" (42).

Ruse investigates these questions by plunging us back in time, all the way to Plato, and then hurrying us forward in leaps and bounds over several centuries of philosophy and science from Aristotle to Romanticism and German Idealism to Charles Darwin and Rachel Carson. The scope is tremendous, which is both the book's major strength and weakness.

On the positive side, the strategy gives us a clear narrative framework upon which to hang Gaia and the conflict over it. Ruse sketches a long-running philosophical battle between "mechanism" and "organicism." Mechanism, he explains, implies "looking at the material world as if it were a machine" that ticks along according to amoral "laws of nature" (68)—the metaphor still dominant in mainstream science. His definition of organicism is a bit murkier, largely because, as he points out, it covers a rather diverse lot of thinkers, but, overall, the organicists "are looking for balance, for integration, for equilibrium" (100). They focus on wholes over parts, groups over individuals, and cooperation over competition, and, most of all, "[t]hey seek [moral] value" (100) in the world and its operations. Organicists are thus given to holistic pictures of the Earth as a living being, often re-invested with the sentience or even soul that Descartes sought to rip from it. They concentrate on our connection to this living world and, by extension, the moral obligations we owe it.

In spite of the huge swathe of history the book skims, Ruse keeps us straight on course to answer his questions about Gaia's origin and controversy: first, we ultimately find that Gaia was born of a peculiar cross-fertilization of the two philosophies he's been tracking for the reader. Margulis was a committed organicist thinker, while Lovelock remains a mechanist, although one that was tremendously influenced by organicism in the person of his friend, the novelist William Golding. (Golding provided the name "Gaia," and it is a particularly exciting moment when Ruse lifts Golding so prominently into the picture and uses him to connect Lovelock with the anthroposophist and Waldorf school founder, Rudolf Steiner.) Second, Ruse demonstrates that the public loved Gaia because it hit at the right cultural moment—just as audiences were encountering the "big blue marble" vision of Earth—and the scientists hated it because it hit at the exact wrong cultural moment—right as attacks from religious conservatives had amplified their "insecurities" into a prickly bunker mentality (214). The overall argument is very tight, and, at its best, *The Gaia Hypothesis* demonstrates some delightful detective work presented in a deftly controlled narrative.

But now for the criticism. Sometimes more than the devil is in the details, the story is often in them, as well. While the overarching conflict between philosophies of mechanism and organicism is very useful, the stages sometimes lack concrete historical details, leaving the reader floating through clouds of overly vague and undifferentiated general ideas, unsharpened by the particularities of their place and time. Part of this is certainly the fault of the subject. Idealism, world-soul thinking, and/ or general "metaphysicianism" (as Edgar Allan Poe termed it) tends to the analytically fuzzy and repetitive, no matter what century

the thinker inhabits; but this mental amorphousness would seem to demand even more historical context (with more dates) to ground it. I would have particularly appreciated further context when the book was covering some of the important early parties on the organicist side, such as Schelling.

I also have to add that, on rare occasions, this rush through intellectual history lends itself to caricature. Take for instance the brief discussion of ecofeminism. In a book about a hypothesis that borrows its name from a goddess, one might expect a fuller and more precise discussion of this diverse school of thought. But unfortunately Ruse smooshes together Carolyn Merchant with Starhawk and accuses them of “ideological myth-making” and of contending that, “Now women have the chance to take control; only then will we see improvement” (139). This is straw ecofeminism. While some self-identified ecofeminists would probably agree with Ruse’s summation of their arguments, in fact, many of the more serious and influential ecofeminist thinkers—Merchant for one—have identified the impulse to “control” (rather than to egalitarianism) as a significant cause (not cure) of our ecological crisis.

But my disappointment with Ruse’s eco-femazons aside, he doesn’t slip up like this often, and, when he slows down, he draws out startling cultural connections that illuminate both the science and philosophy behind Gaia. For instance, Ruse explains some of the enthusiasm for Gaia by weaving it into the weird countercultural moment of 1960s America and painting surprising and vivid portraits of mystics like Oberon Zell-Ravenheart. Or, for example, in one of the book’s best moments, he connects Darwin’s commitment to individual/family over group selection to his immersion in Victorian industrialism and in his own successful, industrialist family: “The Darwin-Wedgewood clan could have given lessons to the Corleones,” he quips (92). I wanted more of this. I realize I am also asking for a 500-page book, but I think that such heftiness is appropriate to the topic and would have made for a much more satisfying treatment.

Besides, Ruse’s writing is so engaging I don’t think readers would get bored with a more detailed tome. Clear, free of jargon that hides so much, and unafraid of the useful pop culture reference, it is a pleasure to read. My favorite bit (other than his trippily delightful description of the Darwins as a mobster family out of *The Godfather*) occurs in the discussion of Rudolf Steiner. Ruse points out that Steiner, “affirms that there were actually two Jesus children who fused together to make the Christ, a bit like the Skeksis and Mystics who come together to make the urSkeks in the movie *The Dark Crystal*” (125). Not many books on intellectual history can surprise an out-loud laugh out of me. Plus, Ruse gets extra geek credit for proper use of Jim Henson’s most wonderful and woefully underrated film.

Ruse wraps up his investigation by bringing us back to his project’s higher moral aim, which includes highlighting those “good effects” of Gaia he saw lacking in Tyrrell’s analysis. In his preface, he had identified Gaia’s chief benefit as its implication that “our home, the planet Earth” is something “that has life, that has value, in its own right” (x). A living planet just might be worthy enough for humans

to protect rather than consume on our way to some alien afterlife. For Ruse, the environmental ethics popularized by Gaia's "pagan" investment of Earth with life outweighs the dangers of false reassurance that keeps Tyrell up at night. "Failure as science," he concludes, "is balanced by success as philosophy" (223).

Tyrell and Ruse both have the same monumental goal: saving life on Earth. They just disagree vehemently about whether Gaia will help or hinder. Strangely enough then, *On Gaia* and *The Gaia Hypothesis* work rather well together to give readers a vital panoramic view of this still-influential and urgently relevant idea. They both tell us that it may be time to remember Gaia again.

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Marie-Luise Egbert, *The Life of Birds in Literature* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2015), 182 pp.



As far as scholarly studies or collection of essays are concerned, “animals” and “literature” might have been, as Bob McKay has recently reminded us (2014), an odd and somewhat unbecoming thematic coupling a decade or so ago. But the field of research concerned with the cultural representation of nonhuman others has been growing so fast and so successfully that it hardly needs any introduction or justification today. Or so one might think. On the one hand, we have the ever-burgeoning field of human animal studies (I use HAS as an umbrella term only and not in order to overlook the many different efforts in zooanthropology, critical animal studies, and so forth), resulting in an astonishing diversity and vitality of research perspectives and continuously incrementing theoretical sophistication. On the other hand, though, it is because of this very vitality that it is already becoming difficult to see the forest for the trees, or the swallow for the flock as it were, within this vibrant environment of analytical interest—for to speak of scholarly interest in “the animal” is, as Derrida put it, already an asininity. Human animal studies are concerned with the uncountable discursive operations within and through which nonhuman others are being constructed, rendered, used and abused in narrative, practices, and onto-epistemic configurations. We can now see historical, sociological, environmental(ist), aesthetic, ethnological discourses on animality and have come to understand concepts of speciesism, human exceptionalism, and the arrogance of humanism as ways to challenge a unified and catch-all notion of “animality,” which, maybe paradoxically, makes it difficult again to speak about any book “about animals” in an all-too easy manner.

This is why Roland Borgards, one of the central figures of human animal studies in Germany and editor of the first German handbook on animals from a cultural-studies perspective (2016), strongly advocates the idea of a decidedly “cultural” or “literary animal studies”: over and against the growing interest in all things ‘animal’, the basic assumption in this field is that literary animals are “word creatures” (225, my translation) that exist in the tension between the existing (or imaginary) creatures denoted by an expression and the relatively autonomous literary “ciphers” (see Tyler) or “animetaphors” (Lippit) while, at the same time, the dividing lines between both the world of “reality” and “text” are fundamentally

porous and increasingly understood as being so. Literary and cultural animal studies thus contribute to the project of questioning the dualisms of subject and object, nature and culture, and reality and imaginative discourse.

Bringing together animality and textuality in this way is a fruitful enterprise indeed. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that language, not only animal figures or metaphors, points beyond itself while it is also part of the ongoing and unending play of *difference*. And yet, as Tom Tyler has shown in his fantastic 'bestiary' *Ciferae* (2012), there is a particularly vital force in our animal imaginaries—literary and cultural engagements with animals may turn them into ciphers, but they also re-inscribe those with a ferality and special power of their own. Seen that way, literary animal studies contributes, in reading closely and analytically through the ways of human-animal entanglements in texts and cultural contexts, to a reformulation of nothing less than the concepts of human (and, of course animal) identity, as well as of what we and our profession think of as humanism and the humanities.

This is part and parcel of much contemporary ecocriticism as well as posthumanism and the new materialisms; and, coming back to McKay's question about the contours of human animal studies in general, we might want and need research that "destabilize[s] every supposedly natural categorization of bodily morphologies" for the sake of "a world of truly queer creatures" (McKay 643) that at the same time does not lose focus of the creatures with which it engages in the spirit of care and concern. A daunting task indeed!

I think this explains the breadth of scope of contemporary animal studies: from motif histories to political readings, as can be found in Critical Animal Studies, for instance, to endeavours to challenge traditional ideas about aesthetics and (post)humanism, human animal studies challenges disciplinarity and long-held assumptions of what constitutes literary and cultural studies, pointing to the fact that through our engagement with the numerous textual-real critters around us, we may "recognize that it is only in and through our disciplinary specificity that we have something specific and irreplaceable to contribute to this 'question of the animal' that has recently captured the attention of some many disciplines" (Wolfe 115). From looking at images of animals in various narratives we have moved, on little cat feet but with brute force, to an interrogation of the basic tenets of humanism.

This also describes, roughly, the spectrum of research perspectives we find in Marie-Louise Egbert's collection *The Life of Birds in Literature*. The title already indicates an indebtedness to Leonard Lutwack's 1994 *Birds in Literature*, and thus to the methodological tradition of *Motivgeschichte*, but it also promises a new vitality through the research conducted over the past two decades. This is why Egbert's book, too, offers essays on the history of the bird motif, from Wordsworth to the Victorians, from limericks to Heaney and Hitchcock. Some of the less compelling essays are content with recounting bird motifs and the rich history of literary engagements with avian others. When I say "less compelling," I do however

not mean to say that those essays are bad. Neither am I underestimating the importance of the visibility of such research, especially in the academic context of Germany, where Human animal studies still smacks of ideological criticism of the worst sort: 'environmentalist' and hence suspect of political indoctrination; interested in marginal motifs at the expense of more traditional topics and established paradigms of interpretation; and sentimental because of the fundamental interest in animals. It is thus thrice marginalised, and rigorous philological work concerned with the fact that animal motifs are ubiquitous in literatures and cultures of all regions and climes seems urgently needed to do away with the obstacles I have described.

However, I am more drawn towards the kind of research that ultimately questions the contours of the field and environment it came from: the 'animal turn' as a radical challenge of epistemological and theoretical-methodological practices that leads to postanthropocentric perspectives in humanist scholarship (which is a contradiction in terms only at first glance). Such a project is maybe most successfully outlined in an essay by Solve I. Curdts, on "Romantic Conceits of Modernity." Her discussion of textual animals is based on the tension, pointed to above, that "[i]t is tempting [to link] the bird motif to figurations of the poet" and to understand the bird (motif) as a "(literary) gesture engaging any given individual work with a pre-existing textual web" while, on the other hand, recent scholarship understands the animal figure "as that which resists conceptual and textual taxonomies" (56-7). She therefore opts for a rereading of Hegel vis-a-vis the challenges Romantic poetry and poetics posed to the idea of linear progression, and links this with a discussion of the potentials and pitfalls of representation, of birds and other figures.

But where, in the end, are the (traces of) animals? Are they really foundational for such forms of critique, or does our scholarly musing shy them off again, as Donna Haraway feared, when she says of Derrida's cat and the book that began with her gaze: "Somehow in all this worrying and longing, the cat was never heard from again" (2008: 20)? Animals have incited a rereading of aesthetics and philosophy which, ultimately, inspires productive re-articulations of poetic representation and, more generally, the capacity of language and literature. But say, the animal responded? I am not sure, but I am convinced that we do not have to resolve this tension that comes inevitably with any engagement with the subject matter and/or textual agency of birds in literature – since we cannot, anyway. We may formulate new and productive ways of asking questions, and Egbert's collection contributes successfully to the opening up of dialogues within the environmental (post)humanities, especially in the context of disciplinary traditions of philology and literary studies with which most of us are enmeshed.

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Eine Geschichte des Wissens

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Benjamin Bühler und Stefan Rieger, *Vom Übertier. Ein Bestiarium des Wissens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), 318pp.

Benjamin Bühler und Stefan Rieger, *Vom Wuchern der Pflanzen. Ein Florilegium des Wissens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2009), 324pp.

Benjamin Bühler und Stefan Rieger, *Bunte Steine. Ein Lapidarium des Wissens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2014), 278pp.

Benjamin Bühler und Stefan Rieger, *Kultur. Ein Machinarium des Wissens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2014), 320pp.



Mit dieser vierbändigen Geschichte des Wissens liegt eine Kultur- und Naturgeschichte vor, die sich nicht an glamourösen Ereignissen, exotischen Raubtieren, prominenten Figuren und Ikonen der Architektur und Kunst festmacht. Die beiden Autoren, Stefan Rieger und Benjamin Bühler, haben sich auf die Suche nach den verborgenen Strukturelementen unserer vorgeblich wissensbasierten Kulturgesellschaft begeben. Im Zuge dessen durchforsten sie unterschiedliche Forschungsterrains und extrapolieren Denkfiguren, aber auch emotional tradierte Assoziationen, die in die Beschreibung der Welt und des Wissens einfließen. Deren Entwicklung und Herkunft gehen den als selbstverständlich objektiv erachteten Kategorien voraus. Sie erhalten den Status eindeutiger Zeichen und werden fortan als wissenschaftliche Ordnungselemente behandelt.

Benjamin Bühler ist Literaturwissenschaftler, Stefan Rieger Professor für Medienwissenschaft. In diesen gemeinschaftlich verfassten Büchern beschäftigen sich die beiden mit Ordnungssystemen von Informationen, die letztlich zu „Wissen“ zusammengesetzt werden. Die These, dass in diesen Bausteinen die Fundamente eines kollektiven Bewusstseins bzw. Unbewussten zu finden seien, wird anhand vierer Themenkomplexe überprüft. Dazu begeben sich die Autoren, scheinbar ganz in der Tradition der taxonomischen Naturwissenschaften, in die Bereiche Fauna, Flora, Gesteinskunde und, hier eine in diesem Zusammenhang unerwartete Kategorie: Kultur. Zunächst zu den „klassischen“ Wissensgebieten, die analysiert werden. Im ersten Band, *Vom Übertier*, steht die These des Tiers als

Vorform des Menschen und der Anspruch im Vordergrund, aus dessen Beobachtung Schlüsse auf jenen zu ziehen. Im Band *Das Wuchern der Pflanzen* verfolgen die Autoren die Verwandlung wilder Pflanzen in sogenannte Kulturpflanzen und parallelisieren diese Entwicklung mit derjenigen des Menschen von einem wilden zu einem kulturellen Wesen. Im Band *Bunte Steine* schließlich wird die als selbstverständlich angenommene Grenze zwischen belebter und unbelebter Welt untersucht, die Annahme, die Welt der Gesteine stünde unwandelbar einer Dynamik der lebenden Objekte gegenüber. Im letzten Band, *Kultur*, werden Artefakte und Prozesse, Hilfeleistungen technischer Provenienz, bis hin zu Kniffen, Listen und Winkelzügen des Wissens untersucht.

Wie gehen die Autoren nun an diese Archäologie der Selbstverständlichkeiten heran? Die Untersuchung von Wissensfiguren steht im Zentrum der Texte. Sie nehmen Elemente alltäglicher Sprachbausteine, Wissensanker und Bilder aus ihren vorgeblich natürlichen Umgebungen heraus und untersuchen deren Biografie. Es geht nicht darum, deren—vermeintliche oder tatsächliche—Eigenschaften nachzuzeichnen, sondern ihre Bedeutung als „Agenten eines Wissens, das sich aus diesen Figuren generiert“ (Bühler and Rieger, *Vom Übertier* 12) herauszuarbeiten. Fern von Fabelerzählungen und Anekdoten skelettieren die Autoren das vorgeblich stabile Wissensgebäude westlicher Forschungs- und Kulturgeschichte, hinterfragen dessen Zusammensetzung und Haltbarkeit und führen die Lesenden nahe an die untersuchten „Wissensfiguren“ heran. Wie in einem Lexikon gibt es in den unterschiedlichen Bänden Schlagworte wie „Poison Ivy,“ „Hund,“ „Biene,“ „Laufrad,“ „Bioreaktor,“ „Transuran,“ „Phosphor,“ „Auto“ oder „See.“ Manche Namensgebung verweist bereits auf anthropomorphe, etwa erotische Konnotationen, wie die „Mimosa pudica.“ Manche Kategorie findet sich an unvermuteter Stelle, so etwa der „See“ im „Machinarium des Wissens,“ in dem die „abgegrenzte Biosphäre“ als Forschungsobjekt vorgeführt wird. Manche Deutung scheint zunächst allzu vorhersehbar, wie etwa bei der Ameise, die in vielfältigen Gesellschaftstheorien als Vergleichsfolie herangezogen wurde und wird: einmal als höchst soziales, dann wieder als rücksichtslos eigennütziges Wesen. Genau hier aber zeigen die Autoren die Verstrickungen unterschiedlicher Interessen, etwa wenn in den Beschreibungen der Biologen auf die Sprache der Politik rekurriert wird und dabei sozialtechnologische oder biologistisch-kulturalistische Narrative entstehen. Was bedeuten diese Vermischungen bezüglich der Frage nach Wirkmacht/Agency? Was heißt es für die behauptete Grenze zwischen Natur und Kultur, zwischen Tier und Mensch, wenn aus dem Verhalten der Ameisen Schlüsse über menschliche Sozietäten gezogen werden? Ungeachtet des Dilemmas einer fehlenden Positionierung werden auch in der heutigen Forschungslandschaft Grenzen ja nach Bedarf hin und her geschoben. Dies ist mit Sicherheit eine besonders wichtige Schlussfolgerung aus den vielfältigen Beispielen, die Bühler/Rieger darstellen. Die Suche nach dem, was in der Wissensgenerierung wirksam wird, zieht sich wie ein roter Faden durch die

Bücher. Bühler und Rieger wiederholen damit die Frage Donna Haraways: „What gets to count as nature, for whom and when?“ (n.p.).

Beispielsweise wird bezüglich Tierversuchen die Doppelzüngigkeit der Argumentation ganz lapidar aufgezeigt: als Rechtfertigung für Forschung und Versuchsanordnung wird, je nach Bedarfslage, auf die Ähnlichkeit des Menschen mit dem Tier verwiesen oder aber auf die Entfernung der Spezies voneinander. Das Verhältnis von Mensch zu Tier wird dabei immer noch als ein unhinterfragt hierarchisches angenommen: im Vergleich zum Menschen werden Tiere als defizitär gesehen, es mangeln ihnen Eigenschaften, die den Menschen klar den Tieren überordnen. Dass andererseits für unterschiedliche Tiere unzählige Eigenschaften verfügbar sind, die den Menschen fehlen, wird auch heute meist ausgeblendet. Allein der Sammelbegriff „Tier“ verweist auf die anmaßende Position des Benennens und Beherrschens, den Hochmut des Menschen gegenüber anderer Seinsarten (Montaigne) und den fehlenden Mut, sich diesen als Subjekten anzunähern. Bühler und Rieger verfolgen die semantische Entwicklung der Figur des Menschen aus der Figur des Tieres, d. h. aus einem Konglomerat unterschiedlicher beobachteter Verhaltensweisen und daraus interpretierter Eigenschaften. Sie verweisen zunächst auf den inneren Zwiespalt zwischen Vorbildhaftigkeit und Unterlegenheit der Tiere: so etwa wenn der griechische Philosoph Demokrit berichtet, wie die meisten kulturellen Fertigkeiten von Tieren gelehrt worden seien. So seien Schwalben die Lehrmeisterinnen für Architektur, Spinnen die Expertinnen für Webkunst und Nachtigallen Vorbild fürs Musizieren. Durch den Einzug und den Primat der Logik in die philosophische Welt verstärken sich Tendenzen zur Abwertung: das angenommene Fehlen von Sprache und Denken wird zum Hebel, der Tiere und Menschen voneinander entfernt.

Die willkürliche Spaltung in hier ein unter moralischen Gesichtspunkten zu behandelndes, juristisch geschütztes Wesen, da ein eher einem Ding nahestehendes, der Descartes'schen Maschine zugeselltes Objekt, springt sofort ins Auge. Die angeblich rationale Einteilung wird als herrschaftliche Setzung ersichtlich—sie bildet den begrifflichen Rahmen für die biopolitische Zurichtung des Lebendigen. Dabei sind die Übergänge zwischen den an diesem Projekt beteiligten Disziplinen fließend. Die Autoren attestieren den von ihnen zitierten Wissenschaftlern und Literaten „narrative Strategien, ob des Anthropomorphismus oder der Analogie, welche an den Grenzen des Pflanzlichen ansetzen, an der Schnittstelle Pflanze/Mensch bzw. Pflanze/Tier“ (Bühler and Rieger, *Vom Wuchern* 222). So reichten die Studien der Pflanzen hinüber ins Reich der Tiere, wie etwa anhand Darwins Beschreibungen des Sonnentaus deutlich wird. Als besonders bemerkenswert zeigt sich die darin deutlich zum Ausdruck gebrachte Subjektivität des Beobachters, seiner Neugier, seiner Einladung an die Lesenden, ihn auf der Forschungsreise zu begleiten. Darwins literarische Technik, mit der er die Lesenden zu Zeugen seiner Tätigkeit und seines Erkenntnisprozesses macht, verhehlt nicht, dass auch Naturgeschichte sich aus erlebten und beobachteten Geschichten zusammensetzt. Hier wird den

Bedingungen eines situierten Wissens Rechnung getragen: objektive, subjektivitätsbereinigte, und damit nicht mehr fehleranfällige Wissenschaft ist nicht zu haben. Diese Beobachtung relativiert Autoritätsansprüche, und eben deren Konstruiertheit wird in den einzelnen Kapiteln der vier Bände immer wieder verdeutlicht – oftmals auf unterhaltsame, mitunter auch auf bestürzende Weise.

Die Autoren stellen überkommene Sehgewohnheiten, die den Selbstverständlichkeiten vorausgehen, mit subtilen Wendungen in Frage. Mit den Verfahrensweisen traditioneller Wissenschaft und Psychologie werden genau deren Ergebnisse zur Diskussion gestellt. Dabei wird auch die Funktion epistemischer Vorentscheidungen als tragende Wände eines umfassenden Denk- und Wissensgebäude deutlich. Das Verhältnis von Wahrnehmung und Wirklichkeit wird in seiner Bedingtheit durch apriorische Taxonomien erkennbar. Bühler und Rieger zeigen, wie weit in die Vergangenheit deren Wurzeln teilweise zurückreichen—und wie sehr die ihnen eingeschriebenen autoritären, hegemonialen Annahmen in unserer Gegenwart weiterwirken, etwa in der zeitgenössischen Rechtsprechung. Die übersichtliche Gliederung der Texte, mit ihren kompakten, nach Schlagwörtern geordneten Kapiteln, und die geschliffene Sprache machen es dem Leser leicht, sich in ihren Bann schlagen zu lassen, und verführen zur kursorischen Lektüre. Die tieferen Zusammenhänge der Argumentation halten sich allerdings an keine Kapiteleinteilung—sie wuchern, um es mit dem Untertitel eines des Bände zu sagen, wie die Pflanzen: entlang der Risse im scheinbar so festen Fundament modernen Herrschaftswissens.

Zitierte Werke

Haraway, Donna. “Reading the National Geographic on Primates.” The European Graduate School, 1987. <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/videos/reading-the-national-geographic-on-primates/>>. Web.

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Tonia Raquejo y José María Parreño (eds.), *Arte y Ecología* (Madrid: UNED, 2015), 370pp.



El año 2015 (además de ser el año internacional del suelo) es significativo en cuanto a la relevancia que la crisis ecológica global está adquiriendo en diferentes ámbitos culturales, económicos o políticos, más allá de su vertiente meramente científica. Un ejemplo de ello es la publicación de una encíclica papal que enfatiza las conexiones entre los problemas sociales y los ecológicos generados por una lógica económica perversa. Ante la situación global actual de colapso ecológico inminente y desigualdad social intolerable, las humanidades y las ciencias sociales no pueden, ni deben, permanecer indiferentes. Urge un diálogo transdisciplinario en el que los avances científicos de las últimas décadas fertilicen otros campos que contribuyan, a su vez, a comprender mejor el contexto cultural en el que emerge la crisis ecológica. Con este ánimo de colaboración entre saberes y prácticas nace el libro que aquí nos ocupa. También surge motivado por la necesidad de reaccionar urgentemente ante la enorme crisis ecológica global en curso. Este libro supone el primer volumen de ensayos publicado en España dedicado exclusivamente a la convergencia entre arte y ecología.

El volumen consta de una breve introducción escrita por los editores y cinco secciones con dos o tres ensayos cada una. En la primera sección, “Convergencias entre el arte y la ciencia,” tanto María Novo Villaverde como Luis Balaguer Núñez teorizan sobre la apremiante necesidad de impulsar un paradigma sistémico o ecológico transdisciplinario que fusione ciencia y arte. Un paradigma que sirva de marco para comprender la frágil interdependencia de los sistemas vivos y la co-evolución de lo humano y lo no humano. La segunda sección, “Literatura y ficción en la consciencia ecológica,” trata temas de raigambre propiamente ecocrítica. Tonia Raquejo explora las posibilidades de la ficción y del arte a la hora de promover una consciencia ecológica, mientras que Carmen Flys Junquera elabora un análisis ecocrítico de una novela española con el fin de demostrar su efectividad a la hora de estimular el sentido de arraigo en el lector. Resultaría sugerente contrastar las propuestas de este ensayo con las del libro de Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

Los dos ensayos de la sección tercera, “Lo político en arte: ecología y praxis artística,” se centran en la convergencia entre escultura, ecología y compromiso político. El primero explora las posibilidades estético-políticas de las canteras y

otras estructuras extractivas. El siguiente ensayo reflexiona sobre las conexiones entre cultura, ideología y ecología, apoyándose en la teoría y la práctica del escultor Jorge Oteiza. Quizá resultase sugerente un diálogo entre estos dos ensayos y las reflexiones de Jacques Rancière sobre estética y política. La cuarta sección, “Arte y ecología: un compromiso necesario,” continúa la misma línea de convergencia entre disciplinas. La contribución de Fernando Arribas Herguedas repasa las tendencias del *land art*, se pregunta cuáles serían las condiciones básicas para que una obra de arte fuera considerada “ecológica” y aboga por la inclusión de la dimensión ética a la hora de juzgar la calidad estética del arte ecológico. José Albelda, por su parte, hace un interesante recorrido histórico por las diferentes concepciones de la dialéctica arte-naturaleza y se centra en aquella que entiende la naturaleza como ecología. Albelda provee diferentes ejemplos de arte efímero, ecologista y ecológico para, finalmente, abogar por una aportación del arte al paradigma ecológico desde sus propios términos (no como simple instrumento) y por la necesidad de “un arte en sintonía con los presupuestos de la ética ecológica” (240). Posteriormente, el ensayo de José María Parreño Velasco define arte ecológico como aquel que “es vehículo o exponente de los principios de la ecología” y como tal se trata de un arte que enfatiza y visibiliza la interdependencia, la (bio)diversidad, la complejidad sistémica o los límites materiales y energéticos de la biosfera (251). Además, Parreño Velasco hace un sugerente recorrido por numerosos ejemplos de arte ecológico español.

La última sección del libro cuenta con tres aportaciones en las que se bosquejan o presentan diferentes “Proyectos artísticos y arquitecturas efímeras en espacios degradados.” El provocador ensayo de Diego Arribas Navarro cuestiona la recurrente asociación entre huella ecológica y degradación (estética) y propone la intervención artística en infraestructuras extractivas abandonadas como modo de potenciar el valor cultural e incluso económico de zonas percibidas como degradadas. Como demuestran los ejemplos y proyectos expuestos por Arribas Navarro “el arte puede ayudarnos a descubrir e interpretar los valores estéticos de los espacios transformados” (300). En el siguiente ensayo, Carmen Blasco y Ángela Souto proponen, desde la arquitectura efímera, soluciones socioecológicas creativas, poco costosas y muy eficaces para la mejora de algunos espacios urbanos degradados de Madrid (Plaza de Jacinto Benavente, El lago de la Casa de Campo y su entorno, y el parque Lineal Manzanares Sur). Estos proyectos, con su propuesta de instalación de montajes autosuficientes y ecológicos pensados para aumentar el bienestar de la comunidad ecológica (humana y no humana), se opondrían radicalmente al diseño urbano neoliberal dominante en Madrid en las últimas décadas y su obsesión con las macro-inversiones y macro-estructuras que fomentan un crecimiento económico asimétrico socialmente indeseable y ecológicamente devastador. Finalmente, el libro se cierra con la presentación de un proyecto artístico y documental de Carma Casulá (en proceso de ejecución) sobre el parque regional sureste de la comunidad de Madrid.

Las últimas décadas han sido testigo de la emergencia de un nuevo paradigma ecológico que, si se toma en serio, afecta y modifica cualitativamente todas las disciplinas tradicionales. Ejemplos serían el surgimiento de la economía ecológica, la historia ambiental, la ecología política, la sociología ambiental, la ecocrítica, la ecología urbana y un largo etcétera. Asimismo, en la segunda década del siglo XXI, están floreciendo las llamadas *environmental humanities*, que cuestionan las fronteras entre las humanidades y las ciencias sociales y ecológicas pues, en el contexto actual marcado por los debates en torno al antropoceno, no tiene sentido seguir insistiendo en la separación entre la historia humana y la historia natural. El libro que nos ocupa es una importante y muy necesaria aportación desde la perspectiva española, si bien se hubiese beneficiado de participar más explícitamente en los fascinantes debates transnacionales en torno al antropoceno y las humanidades ambientales.

What “Taking Place” Means: Pierre Schoentjes’ Écopoétique

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Pierre Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu. Essai d'écopoétique* (Marseille: Éditions Wildproject, 2015), 295pp.



Pierre Schoentjes, a professor for French literature at the University of Gent, has been known for his studies of literature and irony (*Poétique de l'ironie, Silhouettes de l'ironie*), as well as First World War fiction (*Fictions de la Grande Guerre, La Grande Guerre. Un siècle de fictions romanesques, A la baïonnette ou au scalpel. Comment l'horreur s'écrit*). More recently, his interest has turned towards the relationship between literature and the environment. This has not only led to a series of papers,¹ but also to a special issue of the *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine* (Romestaing, Schoentjes and Simon), and to the book under review.

Ce qui a lieu aims to open up the new critical field of “écopoétique” (I will continue to use the French term instead of translating it to “ecopoetics,” since the latter suggests a stronger link to American-rooted transcendentalism and nature writing). *Écopoétique*, Schoentjes insists, must not to be conflated with ecocriticism,² whose political agenda, characterized by “national, lyrical and militant approaches” (“Schoentjes, Pierre”), he strongly rejects. *Écopoétique* is described as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment as perceived by the senses (“la réalité concrète des choses,” 18; “au contact du monde sensible,” 35). It is defined not by a literary topic, nor by a conceptual turn, but rather is seen as the contextual result of an increasing concern for the environment (13).

The cornerstone of Schoentjes’ *écopoétique* is his reading of French writer Pierre Gascar (1916-1997): “The sensual appetite for the world defines Gascar: it is the intimate experience of nature that helps the writer to imagine the real. Without this intimate experience, mythology, history, ethnology and natural sciences are not able to describe the real world” (214; this and all subsequent translations are by the author). Along with the rejection of positivism, anthropomorphic symbolism, and moralism (217), literature’s aesthetic unveiling

¹ Pierre Schoentjes’ entire bibliography may be consulted here: Web. 22 Mar. 2016. <https://biblio.ugent.be/person/801000734934>.

² For one of the first comments on French reception of ecocriticism, see Blanc *et al.*

of place encourages the reader to rethink the relationship between reality and imagination (204-205). Whereas Gaston Bachelard’s *La Poétique de l’espace* (1957) still strongly influences the way French literary studies address the relationship between space and imagination, Schoentjes quotes (180) Lawrence Buell’s formulation that “[t]here never was an is without a where” (Buell 55) to argue that a place can be “fill[ed]” (180) with imagination and meaning. That this is not only a metaphorical, but an onto-geographic bond is best illustrated by the book’s title, *Ce qui a lieu*, which suggests—as does the English expression “taking place”—that everything that happens is locally situated.

Despite the seemingly universal appeal of this argument, Schoentjes notes, ecocriticism has struggled to gain a foothold in France. This may be due to very practical reasons, such as the absence of translations (22), but Schoentjes also stresses the lack of a theoretical framework, especially among the early ecocritics of the 1990s, who were very attentive readers of Anglophone literature rather than literary theorists (ibid.). Finally, he explains how ecocriticism, having emerged from an interdisciplinary and “meta-contextual” tradition of cultural studies (Clark 4), differs profoundly from French literary criticism, which is based on a more aesthetic and poetic paradigm and emphasizes the work of writing and imagination. This difference is exemplified by Buell’s definition of environmental literature, which can neither be easily applied to other texts, nor provides aesthetical and poetical tools, since it is focused almost entirely on the thematic and ethical dimensions of fictional texts (77).

For Schoentjes, however, it is all about literature, as he describes his book as an “essai” (attempt) to combine the reader’s curiosity and pleasure with theoretical ambitions (13). Thus he emphasizes the relationship between ecocriticism and postmodernism (27-28, 239-240, 258), the theoretical attempt to escape localism and regionalism through irony (262) and cosmopolitanism (268, with the reference to Ursula Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*), and the tension between reality and imagination (273). This “poetic paradigm” (16) shows how literature changes the way we look—conceptually and phenomenologically—at places and landscapes (100-101). All in all, whereas ecocriticism in its first iteration focuses on nature writing, *écopoétique* is about the writing of place (“lieu”) and a particular European literary “sense of place” which is always “situated historically and geographically” (Heise 8).

It must be noted, however, that Schoentjes’ ample commentary on the American tradition of nature writing is largely sympathetic, and that he draws much inspiration from Anglophone ecocriticism. His observations and translations will provide French-speaking researchers on literature and the environment with a better insight into the field and possibly enable them to develop their own orientation(s). Schoentjes regrets that, even if ecocriticism has developed internationally, the “French cultural and literary reality” (23) has not been a field of interest. At the same time, he stays surprisingly elusive on the French and European contexts and how they have adopted ecocriticism. As Hicham-Stéphane

Afeissa has noted in another review (2015: n.p.), the contributions to the concept of landscape by Alain Roger (31), as well as to *géopoétique* and *géocritique* by Kenneth White, Michel Collot, and Bertrand Westphal, among others, are only briefly mentioned (24). It would also have been useful to explore how French and European thinkers have attempted to articulate aesthetics and poetics with ethics and politics, rather than merely stating the scepticism of French literary criticism towards the latter (even if the author stresses that the “hostility” towards Anglophone methodology is often “a caricature,” 23).

In order to show that nature is in perpetual transformation, Schoentjes proposes a typology of natural places, which, especially in the French context, does include “domesticated territories” (Bess 175). This typology (28-24) is based on real and on fictional places, and drawn mainly from books, but also from movies and visual arts: Planet Earth “and beyond” (“La nature au-delà de la Terre,” 29), spectacular landscapes (inherited from romanticism), rural nature facing urbanisation and being rediscovered by contemporary writers such as Jean-Loup Trassard (89), urban nature and, last but not least, wilderness. The latter receives particular attention from the author. Wilderness has been rightfully described as a concept rooted in a US American cultural tradition which cannot be easily applied to other geographical and cultural contexts (Larrère 25). However, with reference to the work of Hubert Mingarelli and André Bucher, two well-known readers of nature writing (86), Schoentjes insists that texts do travel and that the fascination with wilderness has become a global phenomenon.

The first part of the book addresses the evolution of the poetic depiction of natural places in European texts, thus drawing parallels between the cultural history of nature, the emergence of ecological thinking, and the history of literature. This diachronic investigation starts with a prolegomenon of ecological writing from the 19th century to 1945, highlighting in particular the naturalistic works of geographer Élisée Reclus (48-51). The next section is focused specifically on the interwar period, which saw the development of a new literary regionalism fuelled by anti-modernism and patriotism (52). The Second World War also drastically changed mankind’s perception of its environment: the nuclear threat plunged the globe into a new era of finitude and vulnerability;³ the cruelty of the concentration camps gave mankind a new “place in the world” (61) far away from the one assigned by traditional humanism. In the second half of the 20th century, literature developed a genuinely ecological sensibility, illustrated by the work of writers such as Romain Gary (63) or Pierre Gascar (66-67). Finally, the contemporary period (post-1980) saw literature integrate environmental problems with a wider spectrum of socio-political interests, as can be seen in Antoine Volodine’s treatment of post-apocalyptic and post-human society in the

³ Schoentjes’ argument here runs parallel to current discussions about the Anthropocene—a connection which, however, he does not draw.

novel *Songes de Mevlido*, or of species extinction in Éric Chevillard’s *Sans l’orang-outan* (92).

The second and third part of the book develop a cartography of natural places based upon the author’s wide-ranging literary excursions and experiences of both fictional texts and real places. Because Schoentjes is mindful of staying close to the texts, his cartography, picking up the typology developed in the first part and complementing it with thematic, generic, and poetic classifications, puts together a vast catalogue of European place writing. Besides the universality of environmental problems, which require us to think beyond national boundaries (14), Schoentjes repeatedly stresses the cosmopolitan dimension of writing and reading and points out that, as a consequence, literature should not be seen as closed in upon itself (17), neither culturally nor aesthetically. Addressing recognised 20th and 21st century authors (e.g. Claude Simon, Mario Rigoni Stern, Arto Paasilinna), but also inviting his readers to (re-)discover the work of writers who have somewhat sunk into oblivion (e.g. Jean-Loup Trassard and Pierre Gascar, to name only two among the many less-known authors treated in the book), Schoentjes’ argument for *écopoétique* presents a topical way to embrace the complexity and generic plurality of contemporary prose literature. It is particularly well-equipped to handle the many hybrid forms of fictional and documentary prose, such as autobiography, travel literature, guide book writing (Claude Simon, 244), the literature of adventure and the exotic (Joseph Kessel, 62-63, and Sylvain Tesson, 94), or regionalism (Jean Giono, Lanza del Vasto, Robert Goffin, 54-58). As Schoentjes systematically compares texts from the Anglophone canon with contemporaneous works from the literature of France and, more broadly, continental Europe, his corpus emerges as a European equivalent to Anglophone nature writing. Like the latter, the texts on which he focuses are characterized by formal hybridity, marginality to their respective national literary canon, strong links to particular locales or regions, and ecological thinking.

Ce qui a lieu insists that the multidimensionality of place experience (action, contemplation, primitivism, anti-intellectualism, or nomadism; 162) manifests itself by way of distinctive themes (pollution and apocalypse; 116-123), aesthetic figures (anthropomorphism and analogy; 126-132) and cultural concepts (polarities; 273). It gives birth to a range of different genres (125), including both traditional literary forms (pastoral, fable, utopia, exempla; 142) and more recent ones, such as science-fiction (120). This heterogeneity of the primary texts which Schoentjes’ study addresses, as well as the multiplicity of approaches and theoretical frameworks on which it draws, make it quite impossible to present a comprehensive summary, at least within the confines of a brief review. *Ce qui a lieu* indeed takes its readers on a journey that unsettles many of the assumptions ecocritics tend to take for granted. It is for good reasons that in the book’s conclusion, Schoentjes speaks of “*les écopoétiques*” in the plural (276), suggesting the need for a further diversification of the field. He clearly states that the very nature of environmental issues makes it imperative to consider contemporary

French fiction in the light of its connections to American and European literature (17). However, on the methodological level, this questioning of national frames is pursued with less rigor. Sometimes, Schoentjes stresses cultural and epistemological specificities, which are terminologically suggested by the author's insistence of using "écopoétique" to describe a more poetic paradigm than ecocriticism and cultural studies. At other times, he adopts an approach that one might designate as 'cosmopoetical'. Such quibbles aside, *Ce qui a lieu* not only represents a seminal contribution to the study of literature and the environment in the Francophone world, but it also constitutes an essential contribution to the environmental humanities as a transnational and transdisciplinary field of study.

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Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm, *Teaching Environments. Ecocritical Encounters* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 265pp.



Teaching Environments is a collection of papers that were presented at the “Transdisciplinary Perspectives” conference held at the University of Cologne in September 2012. Following a foreword by Greg Garrard, the volume presents 15 contributions discussing environmental discourse in everyday teaching. The collection thus focuses on a topic which, while long acknowledged within ecocriticism as Greg Garrard points out (8), still appears to be neglected by many other fields of study. After Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm’s introduction, Uwe Küchler’s paper not only discusses the role of the environment in foreign language teaching in Germany, but also outlines the responsibility of the humanities within the debate about the environment (30). He claims that the English as foreign language (EFL) classroom should play a prominent role when teaching about the environment: it provides a contact zone of language, culture, literature, and other media, while learners acquire communicative skills at the same time, offering an environment of inter- and transcultural discourse which seems ideal for the introduction of ecological topics.

The following section, “Beginnings: From Picture Books to Young Adult Fiction and Film,” presents four papers with examples of how teaching the environment can be realized. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer’s contribution focuses on the role of insects in children’s literature since the beginning of the 19th century. She argues that children’s fascination with ants, bugs and bees is not only due to the insects’ size and the similarity in perspective when seeing the world from the point of view of a small creature, but that adopting an insect’s perspective in literature plays an important role in establishing empathy with insects and understanding their life conditions. The human-animal relationship in literature is also the topic of Roman Bartosch’s paper. His argument, however, goes beyond the animals’ perspective and discusses anthropomorphisms which are often characteristic for the depiction of animals in literature (59). Anthropomorphism, he claims, is only of limited use when creating identification with nature in general and with animals in particular, since it will ultimately always “arrive at a point where [human] identity relies on the difference, the ‘contrast with animals.’” (61). Experiencing the divide between human and animal, following Bartosch’s

argument, can help the reader to approach nature's otherness, assess human-animal encounters from a distance and relate to the other "in its alterity" (71) instead of trying to identify with the anthropomorphic. In her contribution on children's picture books, Janice Bland emphasizes the use of multimodal sources when competing with race, class and gender studies within the EFL classroom. She argues for the use of children's picture books in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) for students to interact with images and texts in order to begin learning about environmental topics at a very early stage of learning. Her example of Rafe Martin's "The Rough Faced Girl," however, indicates that the advantages of being able to introduce young learners to environmental studies can come at a price: while the imagery and content of "The Rough Faced Girl" may communicate some understanding of the relationship between the human and nature, it also could be argued that they, at the same time, communicate postcolonial and ethnic stereotypes to young learners. Seen in the context of the competition between postcolonial, ethnic and environmental studies within teaching curricula, Bland's example indicates the risk of successful teaching in one area while simultaneously fostering stereotypes and colonial thinking in another. Adding film to the examples discussed in this section, Kylie Crane's paper demonstrates convincingly that issues such as animal ethics and human-animal relationships can also be addressed by films such as *Babe*. Her paper argues that the film provides numerous opportunities to enter classroom discussions about the treatment of animals or the production of meat and to facilitate discussions about the human-animal-relationship and students' everyday life.

In the section "Transdisciplinary Encounters I: Approaching the 'Two Cultures,' Adrian Rainbow and Celestine Caruso present past and ongoing debates about the interrelationship and dualism between the sciences and the humanities in the context of teaching the environment. Both authors demonstrate how this dualism provides an obstacle for the teaching of environmental studies in general. Adrian Rainbow, using novels by Barbara Kingsolver and Margaret Atwood, discusses the central role of science in environmental fiction and how fiction is able to "fuse the dichotomy between nature and humanity" (132) and to create a "Third Culture," a hybrid space overcoming the traditional boundaries dividing the two disciplines. Celestine Caruso follows a similar line of argument in her paper, claiming that the "two cultures" (150) have been interacting within art and literature for quite a while. Analyzing examples from science fiction and dystopian literature, Caruso demonstrates that science fiction can be used within a classroom environment to overcome the traditional divide, depending on whether this form of fiction will receive its deserved position within the literary canon of teaching in the future.

The section "Transdisciplinary Encounters II: Historicizing Environmental Discourse" discusses exemplary historical analyses of the relationship between the environment and teaching. Haiko Wandhoff argues for broadening the historical

perspective and moving beyond what appears to have become the accepted beginning of environmental discourse, i.e. early industrialization in Europe. Wandhoff discusses ecological thinking in a much earlier period via the 13th century epic poem “Der Welsche Gast.” Reworking the religious narrative of original sin and redemption, the poem’s “narrative patterns and [...] organization” (168) display proto-environmentalist sensibility. Dominik Ohrem discusses the reciprocal relationships between the human and nature via the examples of wilderness, conceptions of gender and race, and the construction of a (white and male) national identity in the US during the nineteenth century. His contribution shows how discourses of nature contributed to the construction of a social order under a white, male hegemony and how the historical perspective can enrich a discussion about environmental education in the present. This perspective encourages students to focus on a local and personal context, but also introduces the deep entanglement of “race, gender, and other axes of difference [...] with nature” (192). Sieglinde Grimm employs examples from E.T.A. Hoffmann, Gottfried Keller and W.G. Sebald in her study of environmental writing in German literature. Her paper successfully traces aspects of environmental discourse in works covering nearly three centuries. Claiming that teaching students about the connection between the human and nature requires an understanding not only of its present state but also of its historical genesis, Grimm argues that this understanding can help students to analyze and reflect on their own growing and learning processes.

The volume concludes with a “Debate” section focusing on the difficult dichotomy between traditional academic discourse and the urgency of acting against climate change. Roman Bartosch and Greg Garrard respond to criticism of the Cologne conference as a “prime example of ‘humanist boosterism’” (219) and argue that the topics discussed at the conference indeed contribute to acting against destructive

environmental change via developing how human interaction with the environment is approached in education. The authors argue that ecocritical studies can provide practical results “once they are free from apocalypticism and confinement” (222), while environmental discourse must be based on humanist principles such as thorough analysis and constant critical re-negotiation. The response paper by Major and McMurry, who initiated the debate via an earlier article, re-emphasizes the antagonism between academic discourse and practical action in which, as they put it, Bartosch and Garrard refuse the “the discourse of apocalypticism” (227) and prefer “the go-slow approach of traditional literary inquiry” (227). Teaching about the environment requires that “pedagogy [...] must come to terms with the urgency of the catastrophe” (233). Pamela Swanigan argues that agenda-biased teaching is “unnecessary” (235) since students naturally develop questions and critical thinking when offered suitable content in the classroom; they rather need to be offered with opportunities to “develop their

critical faculties and independent judgement” (238). In her concluding contribution, Sieglinde Grimm also addresses the dichotomy between theoretical discourse and the urgency of action within ecocritical discourse: “[D]ifferent traditions of teaching literary texts [...] in Germany and the Anglophone world” (257), the long absence of applied knowledge, and the German tradition of “Bildung” have only recently allowed for the introduction of ecocritical thought into teaching. The approach of the Cologne Conference, thus, aimed at discussing the status quo and the future of the ecocritical discipline in teaching in Germany, rather than championing an ivory-tower agenda over practical action.

Teaching Environments provides an inspiring collection of essays and debates offering useful impulses for teachers of languages and literatures (as well as the sciences) on how to include the environment and ecocritical thought into their teaching. The volume indicates that a discussion about teaching and the environment in Germany is still at its beginning and leaves the reader with numerous ideas and questions which will hopefully be addressed by future research.

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Alicia Puleo (ed.), *Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinar* (Madrid: Plaza y Janés, 2015), 413 p.



If T.S. Eliot had been writing from or about Spain, he might well have considered August the cruellest month. In truth, he might not even have picked a month, choosing instead the whole summer season, and not just because of its unbearably high temperatures. The summer of 2015—the hottest on record—was, indeed, particularly cruel. In addition to the abhorrent but all-too-common practice of abandoning other-than-human companions when the time to go on holiday arrives, there was an increase in the intensity of forest fires and an alarming escalation of cases of violence against women. August also announced Rompesuelas as the next bull to be gruesomely speared to death in the infamous tournament celebrated in Tordesillas every September. Being away from Spain, as I usually am during the month of August, the news that reached me from my country made me look at it with a mixture of sadness, rage, and repulsion. Fortunately, one of the books I had taken with me to read over the summer holidays was this superb collection edited by a pioneer of ecofeminism in Spain, Alicia Puleo. The twenty-three essays included in *Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinar* explore from different angles the pervasive thought patterns that consent and condone these and other atrocities: an episteme informed by an anthropocentric, androcentric gaze which relegates to a secondary position whatever is non-human and non-male. Reading this volume took me back to the many voices in Spain who demand change and are actively working on making it happen, both in academia and through grassroots activism.

As Alicia Puleo explains in the introduction, this book is the result of a three-year research project on gender equality within a culture of sustainability, with the ultimate goal of advancing a theoretical framework to generate practices oriented to achieving real equality between men and women, fostering human development, education in values, environmental sustainability and respect for other-than-human nature. The resulting volume is truly an interdisciplinary one since it brings together scholars from the fields of art history and performance, literary criticism, sustainable development, philosophy, psychology, medicine, law, and theology. Puleo also warns that the reader should not expect to find a dominant point of view summing up the voices of all the participants in this

volume, but rather a diversity of slants, corresponding to the debates and different standpoints adopted as they have evolved over the three-year period (11). This makes, of course, for a much more fruitful debate which continues long after the book is closed.

Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinar is divided into three thematic sections: *Cuerpos* (Bodies), *Territorios* (Territories) and *Resistencias* (Resistances). *Cuerpos* opens up with “Sesgos de género en medio ambiente y salud,” by endocrinologist Carme Valls-Llobet, which elaborates on the dangers of environmental pollution for the human body, paying special attention to the pernicious effects of endocrine disrupters on the female, which range from early puberty to an increase in cases of breast cancer. Even though many of the objectives set up in the Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe 2004-2010 have not been met, Valls-Llobet commends that it has at least contributed to confirming the connection between environmental pollutants and health, and insists on the need to train health professionals in environmental medicine, beginning at the university level—a training which should take into account the physiological differences in the way male and female bodies react to environmental pollution. In “De lo anatómico a lo simbólico: el cuerpo femenino en el diván psicoanalista,” psychologist Pilar Errázuriz Vidal focuses on the androcentric bias of cultural interpretations of the female body at a symbolic level, which is also reflected in Lacan’s conceptualization of the symbolic order as the Law of the Father, thus rendering the masculine as the universal One. Errázuriz Vidal observes, however, that the movement from the Freudian to the Lacanian paradigm inscribes the differences between the genders explicitly in the symbolic order, thus evidencing the cultural rather than the anatomical aspects of this differentiation, which should prevent them from being naturalised.

Lucile Desblache’s essay “Las otras víctimas de la moda” turns to other-than-human bodies, those of the animals used in the fashion industry. After referring to the numerous studies which confirm that women are more concerned about other-than-human animals than men, she elaborates on the apparent contradiction that they frequently display little concern about the origin of their cosmetics, clothes and accessories. This is certainly not uncommon, but Desblache seems to overlook the fact that women have also been key actors in campaigning against the use of animals in fashion and leaders in producing alternatives (the late Anita Roddick or Stella McCartney are some of the names that spring to mind). Particularly suggestive is her invitation to rethink fashion from the perspective offered by 21st-century new materialisms, one in which other-than-human animals become the source of inspiration for articles of fashion which celebrate the diversity of “vibrant matter.” Scholar and artist Verónica Perales Blanco, whose work can be found on the cover and in the creative writing and arts section of this issue, also focuses her attention on other-than-human animals, sharing with the reader the transformative power of the gaze after her own met, dwelled on, and

was captivated by those of the female gorillas she drew as part of her *Grandes simios en femenino / Grands singes en féminin* project (2009-11), a collection of portraits of female great apes. Perales Blanco's inspiring "Reflexiones de una retratista de gorilas" mixes the personal notes of her journey of (self-)discovery during the realisation of the project with the theoretical framework that informed her own gaze, in a magnificent exercise of empathy whose force is also revealed in the illustrations that accompany her superb essay.

As Iván Sambade Baquerín and Laura Torres San Miguel argue in "Cuerpo e identidad de género en la sociedad de información," the traditional objectification of the female body is far from being eradicated from the mass media. They observe that, despite the politically-correct image of gender equality largely adopted by the media, traditional patterns of masculinity are still reproduced, together with an unrelenting hyper-sexualisation of the female body. Objectification is also palpable in the new forms of oppression that have emerged in social networking systems (zing, grooming, sexting or sextortion), of which women are the main victims.

Although it would be bold to consider Anne Finch Conway as an ecofeminist *avant la lettre*, Concha Roldan's essay, "La filosofía de Anne Finch Conway: bases metafísicas y éticas para la sostenibilidad," traces the metaphysical and ethical foundations for sustainability present in the English philosopher's work, which make it compatible with ecofeminist postulates. In proposing a monist solution to the mind-body dualism, Conway stipulated the interdependence of all living organisms, a key concept for ecology, while her idea of universal convertibility and sympathy as the metaphysical basis for sustainability are of special interest for ecofeminist studies.

In the last essay of this section, "Los cuerpos colonizados: las religiones contra las mujeres," Margarita Pintos de Cea-Naharro and Juan José Tamayo Acosta agree in considering religions as one of the most powerful, resistant and influential forces in the legitimisation of patriarchy. They study the way religions have colonised the body, presenting it as an obstacle to salvation, and point at the new avenues opened up by feminist and ecofeminist theologians, concluding with Eduardo Galeano that no significant change will occur until religions start perceiving the body as a site for celebration.

The section *Territorios* opens up with the essay "Cuatro tesis sobre la asimetría de género en la percepción y actitudes ante los problemas ecológicos," in which Isabel Balza Múgica and Francisco Garrido Peña share the results of a quantitative study that reveals the different ways in which men and women perceive and respond to environmental problems. Avoiding any sort of essentialism, they establish that this gender asymmetry is not ontological, but the result of historical contingency, but helps to signal ecofeminism's key role in helping to overcome some of the obstacles that political ecology has traditionally encountered. In "Cuidado y responsabilidad," María Teresa López de la Vieja ponders whether the term "care" is the most appropriate one to apply to the

ethical system that should inform the way humans relate to the other-than-human. Given that the ethics of care usually remain at the level of the concrete and immediate, and that, to a certain extent, it helps to maintain a hierarchy between the caregiver and the cared-for, López de la Vieja proposes “responsibility” as a preferable term.

Eva Antón Fernández’s “Una lectura ecofeminista de la novela de anticipación actual” is the first of the two essays dealing with fictional landscapes included in this section. Antón Fernández’s looks at the differences between male and female authors in their perception of imagined future societies, focusing on the works by Elia Barceló, Emilio Bueso, Michel Houellebecq, and Rosa Montero. Limiting her observations to the novels analysed, she concludes that empathy towards other-than-human nature is a key element in the fictional future societies envisioned by women writers. In “Utopías feministas: las dualidades rotas,” Ángela Sierra González analyses the worlds created by Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Marge Piercy in *Woman at the Edge of Time*. As they convincingly project alternative worlds in which gender dualism has disappeared, Sierra González argues, they constitute successful feminist utopias.

The role played by dominant national narratives in the shape a territory takes in the human imagination, and the ensuing political public policies adopted, is the subject of Paula Gabriela Núñez’s “Patagonia argentina, relatos sobre naturaleza y humanidad.” National discourses presented Patagonia as a desert, consequently reducing it to the category of a hostile territory in need of domestication, which has led to the overexploitation of the region. For Núñez, it is necessary to recover alternative narratives which antedate national discourses, such as personal memories of small producers, in order to allow for the emergence of alternative means of production. Micaela Anzoátegui and María Luisa Femenías, for their part, take a look at urban planning as another aspect of the androcentric worldview which has rendered the city masculine, while the natural environment is indexed as the inferior, feminine other. In “Problemáticas urbano-ambientales: un análisis desde el ecofeminismo,” they look into the narratives that blamed “untameable” nature for the floods which in April 2013 seriously damaged 50% of the city of La Plata in Argentina, leaving out other more significant reasons for the devastation, such as abusive urban planning which had drastically reduced the amount of green areas around the city or the incorrect disposal of urban solid waste.

Similar to Perales Blanco’s essay in the previous section, M^a Teresa Alario Trigueros’s “Tejer y narrar en la plástica española contemporánea” examines the power of visual art to raise awareness. She looks at the narrative possibilities of weaving as an ecofeminist tool for artistic expression in her study of the works by textile artists Magda Bolumar, Teresa Lanceta, and Andrea Milde.

Of the several cases of grassroots activism included in the last section of the book, *Resistencias*, Georgina Aimé Tapia González’s “Aportaciones de las mujeres

indígenas al diálogo entre filosofía y ecología” explores the ecofeminism of indigenous women, focusing on the life trajectory of traditional doctor and activist María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, whose activism is the result of the “us-centred” worldview of Amerindian people and the feminism of Zapatist women. The indigenous women who defend the rights of both women and the land are naturally aware that true justice requires its application to all living organisms. Emma Silipandri’s “Una mirada ecofeminista sobre las luchas por la sostenibilidad en el mundo rural” looks into the way their participation in agro-ecological projects allowed women in rural areas in Brazil to step out of the roles which tradition had assigned to them in order to occupy a prominent position in the struggle for food, while bringing to the agenda issues of gender inequality which had not previously been addressed by their male partners.

Reading can also be an act of resistance, and re-reading a book from a different perspective often proves to be a very successful one. The essays by Teo Sanz and Carmen Flys Junquera are two excellent contributions to the volume coming from the field of ecocriticism. In “La Ecocrítica, vanguardia de la crítica literaria. Una aproximación a través de la ecoética de Marguerite Yourcenar,” Sanz looks at the French writer’s work from an ecocritical perspective, concluding that it deserves more attention from this field of literary analysis. However, he warns that her work may not lend itself to an ecofeminist reading given that Yourcenar successfully overcame the anthropocentric gaze, but not the androcentric one. Carmen Flys Junquera’s “Ecocrítica y ecofeminismo: diálogo entre la filosofía y la crítica literaria” nicely complements Sanz’s essay, as it explores the way ecofeminist philosophy has permeated an area of ecocriticism which has produced interesting fruits. After looking at the works of authors such as Linda Hogan, Anne Pancake or Octavia Butler from an ecofeminist perspective, Flys Junquera concludes that they may indeed provide the type of ethical narrative answer suggested by Val Plumwood.

Uniting within itself the non-human and the non-male, the female monster may safely be taken as one of the most abhorrent types of otherness from an anthropocentric and androcentric standpoint; for that very reason, this figure can also serve as a powerful site of subversion and resistance. This is the subject of Carmen García Colmenares’s “Por una genealogía de contra-subjetividades alternativas,” where she looks at the use of the traditional myths of Lilith and Melusine to counter-attack emerging patterns of female identities which sadly evoke traditional ones, as a result of the confluence of neoliberal politics and postmodernity in popular culture. She finds instances of subversion of these two popular myths in the novels of Angela Carter and Antonia Byatt, the artwork of Marion Peck and Marina Núñez, and the musical compositions of Lidia Pujol.

Dealing also with the representation of women in popular culture, Angélica Velasco Sesma’s “Más allá del mecanicismo: heroínas ecológicas del imaginario actual” analyses the image of the “natural woman” in three popular films: *Ferngully*

(1992), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Avatar* (2009). She appropriately concludes that, although the films cannot seriously be taken as providing examples of gender equality, they do offer interesting explorations of societies based on egalitarian and environmental values, presenting women as instrumental in bringing about change.

In “Del patriarcado como sistema alquímico a la alternativa: imaginario del don,” Kaarina Kailo rejects the discourses that naturalise capitalism and looks into the traditional worldview of Finno-Ugric peoples who, aware of the interdependence of human and other-than-human nature, observe a gift economy which, Kailo argues, may have its origin in a forgotten matriarchal society. Kailo asks for the recovery of eco-mythologies found in traditional fairy tales which focus on sustainable eco-social models but have been overlooked in favour of epic tales of violent conquests.

María José Guerra Palmero looks at the work of ecofeminist Mary Mellor in “Ecofeminismos materialistas. Política de la vida y política del tiempo,” which she associates with the critical ecofeminisms outlined by Alicia Puleo in *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible* (2011). Guerra Palmero brilliantly articulates Mellor’s criticism of the *homo economicus* construct, focusing on the need to reconcile the understanding of time by capitalist productivism with the biological time of human needs and the ecological time of nature.

Alicia Puleo’s own contribution to the volume, “El ecofeminismo y sus compañeros de ruta. Cinco claves para una relación positiva con el ecologismo, el ecosocialismo y el decrecimiento,” provides an excellent conclusion to the volume. She identifies five “keys” or rules which ecofeminism and other movements of resistance (ecosocialism, the ecological and the degrowth movements) should observe if they want to establish a productive and healthy relationship. She finds it necessary to comply with these rules in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, when women’s rights were relegated to the background after feminists had actively participated in achieving the goals of other movements. It is important to highlight that, for Puleo, ecofeminism should always remain critical; that is, it has to preserve the emancipatory legacy of the Enlightenment. Granting that some of the many faces of Modernity have taken us to our present ecological crisis, she insists on the need to remember that the philosophy of the Enlightenment struggled fiercely against religious and political oppression (398).

Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinar delivers what it promises and yet a bit more: itself participating in a gift economy, it is available as open-access e-book from the publishing house Plaza y Janés. With hindsight, I realise now that the gravity-defying drops of water on the cover designed by Verónica Perales Blanco anticipated the book’s refreshing content, much needed and greatly welcome in that hot, cruel August of 2015.

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This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

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