



MULTISPECIES FUTURES

New Approaches to Teaching
Human-Animal Studies

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Neofelis

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This publication was funded by the Open Access Publication Fund
of Leuphana University Lüneburg.

Diese Publikation wurde gefördert durch den Open-Access-Publikationsfonds
der Leuphana Universität Lüneburg.

German National Library Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the German National Library:
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>

© 2022 by the authors and editors
Published by Neofelis Verlag GmbH, Berlin
www.neofelis-verlag.de



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Cover design: Marija Skara
Editing & typesetting: Neofelis Verlag (mn / lw / vf)
ISBN (PDF): 978-3-95808-402-5
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52007/9783958084025>

Maria Moss

“The skin and fur on your shoulders”

Teaching the Animal Turn in Literature

1. Introduction

The quote in the title comes from the foreword to the 1971 poetry collection *The Broken Ark: A Book of Beasts* by Michael Ondaatje, in which Ondaatje makes a claim for animal-centered poetry by exchanging the routinely anthropocentric view of animals for an animal-focused perspective:

These are poems that look at animals from the inside out – not the other way round. We don't want to classify them or treat them as pets. We want you to imagine yourself pregnant and being chased and pounded to death by snowmobiles. We want you to feel the cage, and the skin and fur on your shoulders.¹

By seriously challenging the privileged status of the human, human-animal studies (HAS) attempts to reverse the notion of human exceptionalism and the dictum that cognitive domains – such as communication, emotion, and tool use – are reserved for humans only. By viewing animals as independent actors, HAS requires us to think beyond ourselves and include the perspective of the animal. When teaching human-animal studies, I focus on different modes of relating to animals (for instance through theoretical and/or literary texts, creative writing exercises, and practical experiences), thus enhancing

1 Michael Ondaatje: Introduction. In: Idem: *The Broken Ark*. Ottawa: Oberon 1971, pp. 5–9, here p. 6.

the possibility of building a relationship with them.² However, there is still widespread denial that animals can lead complex lives, and depictions of animals as emotional and rational beings always run the risk of being dismissed as unscientific. “This situation,” write Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin,

is further complicated by two factors. First, hesitant as we are to accord complex emotions to animals, we are equally reluctant to admit our own involvement with them. We may acknowledge our love for particular pets [...] but we *necessarily* disguise our feelings toward animals from ourselves. If we did not, the structure of most human societies, dependent as they are on animal products, would collapse.³

At a time of mass species extinction, as well as pervasive cruelty in factory farms and laboratories, we need to confront the contradictions in our relationships with animals who are often “both cherished family members and factory-raised and slaughtered food on the table – at times loved and wept over; at other times ignored.”⁴ Indeed, incontrovertible evidence of both wild and domestic animal emotions and rational behaviors has led many to reconsider their complex relationships with animals. If great apes are capable of serious reflection and social behavior, if dolphins and whales enjoy an elaborate social networking system, and if ravens exhibit a degree of intelligence previously thought impossible, is it still possible for us humans to consider them the “other”?

In this article, I address the various ways in which animals appear in literature and how university instructors could go about “teaching the animal.” Due to constraints in length, this article can only present a limited selection of tasks and texts.⁵ After introducing material that raises such questions as, “What are we talking about when we talk about animals?” and “How do we as individuals / as a society relate to and interact with animals?,” I will present background material explaining terms crucial for discussing human-animal

2 Although I find the terms “animal” and “human animal” more appropriate, in this article, I will use the terms most commonly used: nonhuman animals and human animals.

3 Graham Huggan/Helen Tiffin (eds): *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. London/New York: Routledge 2010, p. 194 (emphasis in original). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.5990> (accessed: June 1, 2021).

4 Janice Fiamengo: *The Animals in This Country*. In: Idem: *Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination*. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P 2007, pp. 1–25, here p. 3.

5 I use the texts presented in seminars for general education students as well as for introductory to intermediate-level courses in the English major.

relations, e. g., *speciesism* and the *animal turn*. I have chosen texts that tend to initiate controversial discussions and encourage students to not only employ some of their reflections on characters and situations in their daily lives but also – and most importantly – assume the perspective of the animal(s) they read about. As a next step, I will introduce a number of literary texts – from poetry to short fiction and novels. These texts present animals as seen both through the eyes of humans and through the eyes of animals. Lastly, I will touch on “chimp fiction” and briefly discuss the issue of animal narrators. By working with these various texts, students will hopefully develop

reading practices which make possible the formulation of difficult questions, give shape to indistinct or fraught conditions in fictional animal representations, and engage with fictional animals to consider how the textural politics of literary representation might enable more just and thoughtful, and less harmful and anthropocentric, ethical relationships between humans and other species.⁶

As disparate as they might initially appear, all of the texts have one thing in common: they express, in various ways, pro-animal intentions – that is, they raise awareness of anthropocentrism in their content and/or narrative form, draw critical attention to fictional animals in their various entanglements with humans, and offer representations of animals – sometimes even as a disruptive presence – that are different from the essentially voiceless animals we often encounter in literary and cinematic material.⁷

6 Catherine Parry: *Other Animals in Twenty-First Century Fiction*. London: Palgrave 2017, p.4.

7 Since most animal narratives more often than not end in tragedy, here are two examples that do not: Ann Patchett’s *This Dog’s Life* is a beautifully written story about the close relationship between a young woman and her dog. Initially published in the collection of dog stories, *Dog is My Co-Pilot*, the story takes up, in a highly ironic way, the prejudice that every woman of childbearing age who decides to get a dog would in fact much rather have a baby. It is a thoroughly enjoyable story. See Ann Patchett: This Dog’s Life. In: *NPR*, September 30, 2003. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1446804> (accessed: March 17, 2021). An equally upbeat text – again by an American writer – is Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s poem, *Dog*, about a dog who enjoys a range of freedoms most readers would love to have. See Lawrence Ferlinghetti: *Dog*. In: *Poetry Foundation*, n.d. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53076/dog-56d2320f90631> (accessed: March 14, 2021).

2. Teaching human-animal studies

2.1 Introductory material

As a first step in a HAS seminar, the students and I tackle the question of the animal itself. What exactly do we mean when we speak of animals? Undergraduates need to understand the ways in which animals are socially constructed and thus take on human categories. Often, those categories are based on their value to humans, for instance, as pets, livestock, marketing tools, or laboratory or zoo animals. In *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies Across the Disciplines*, Margo DeMello suggests showing a picture of a rabbit and letting students come up with ideas of what they see: A cute bunny? A laboratory animal? One of Hugh Hefner's playmate? A Sunday roast? The list is endless. At some point, however, it becomes clear that all of these depictions are human constructions of the animal that have nothing to do with the animal itself. In order to further ease into the subject, I often ask students to describe one of their most significant encounters with an animal, be it from their childhood; with a companion animal; with animals used in sports or hobbies (e.g., horseback riding, hunting, agility training, falconry), or for cultural / ceremonial reasons (e.g., bullfights, wolves in fairy-tales); or roadkill.⁸ At times, I will ask students to create animal haikus⁹ or to write a response diary recounting their encounters.¹⁰

8 Margaret Atwood's poem *The Animals in That Country* is a perfect example of the many uses and abuses of animals in such contexts. The poem's beginning is often interpreted as showing the worth people attribute to animals in "that country," that is, in Europe; yet, it also reveals the ceremonies and sports traditions in which animals were forced to participate. The end of the poem, which is indented in order to further demonstrate the difference between "that country" and "this country" (Canada), delineates the reality of the animals' lives in "this country" and most likely also in "that country." See Margaret Atwood: *The Animals in That Country*. In: Idem: *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965–1995*. London: Virago 1991, pp. 30–31; or on the website of the Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47791/the-animals-in-that-country> (accessed: February 17, 2021).

9 For more information on how to teach haikus, see my article: *Writing Creatively in a Foreign Language: Vignettes, Haikus, and Poetry*. In: *ZIF (Zeitschrift für interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht)* 25:2 (October 2020), pp. 29–53. <https://tujournals.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/index.php/zif/article/view/1086> (accessed: June 1, 2021).

10 HAS seminars attract students who have companion animals; thus, besides a number of dogs in class, we normally also have a fair share of hamsters and rats – we just need to decide beforehand who brings which animal when. For other interesting ways to engage students, see the article by Pamela Steen, in this volume.

Another general introduction to HAS are EGO / ECO pyramids.¹¹ While students are not surprised to see a man at the very top of the ego pyramid (an issue that often initiates discussions about equal pay and the #MeToo debate), it is less obvious why the woman is situated next to a whale and other beings that we, as a society, consider valuable and/or worthy of protection. Heated discussions are pre-programmed.

The Harold Herzog Animal Attitude Scale is another source that works well as a general introduction to the field of human-animal relations.¹² The survey features over twenty statements that students can rank from “strongly agree with” to “strongly disagree with.” I find it best to have students work on their own, and then in groups of two to three, to discuss the individual questions with the goal of trying to convince other students of their opinion. If this is not possible, they should write down their answers in different colors. I also ask each group to come up with two additional statements. Here are some (adapted) sample statements:

- It is unethical to drink milk since it rightfully belongs to calves.
- Eating the meat of animals that you have killed yourself is better than buying packaged meat.
- If you can't kill animals, you shouldn't eat them.
- Wearing leather, such as boots or jackets, is unethical.
- Horse-drawn carriages should be outlawed.
- Testing medication on animals is more ethical than testing it on humans.
- Keeping pets is a glorified form of slavery.
- I find the meat aisles in supermarkets disturbing.

When American historian Harriet Ritvo observed “an increasing scholarly interest in *animals*, in the relationships between humans and other *animals*, and in the role and status of *animals* in (human) society,”¹³ she coined the term *animal turn*. What the animal turn has done and continues to do is to respectfully take into account the omnipresence and the significance of the

11 For a creative commons image of the pyramids, see *Mother Pelican: A Journal of Solidarity and Sustainability* 10:11 (November 2014). <http://www.pelicanweb.org/solisustv10n11page1.html> (accessed: March 2, 2021).

12 Harold Herzog / Stephanie Grayson / David McCord: Brief Measures of the Animal Attitude Scale. In: *Anthrozoös: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Interactions of People and Animals* 28:1 (2015), pp. 145–152, here p. 148. <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279315X14129350721894> (accessed: June 1, 2021).

13 Harriet Ritvo: Species. In: Lori Gruen (ed.): *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*. Chicago / London: U of Chicago P 2018, pp. 383–394 (emphasis in original).

other animals with whom we share our time and space.¹⁴ After showing the brief video of Ritvo's explanation of the *animal turn* as something that recognizes that research and teaching should not only encompass but also emphasize nonhuman animals, I ask students to fill out a worksheet. Here are some sample questions:

- What does the term *animal turn* refer to?
- Are “human” and “nonhuman animal” adequate terms? Why / why not? Can you think of any better terms? (Students will routinely ask: why not animals and human animals? Yes, indeed. Why not?)
- What does “intrinsic value” mean? And why do humans hesitate to apply this term to animals?

Besides the “animal turn,” another term that needs explanation is “speciesism.” In his article, “Who lives, who dies, and why?,” ethologist Marc Bekoff claims that “speciesism is the main culprit in our interactions with other animals [and] reinforces the property status of nonhuman animals [...]”¹⁵ He asserts that “speciesist arguments ignore or violate well-accepted evolutionary theory and result in the establishment of false boundaries that have dire consequences for species deemed to be ‘lower than others.’”¹⁶ In debating teams, I invite students to discuss the following statement: “There aren’t any ‘lower’ or ‘higher’ species. We make this differentiation because it serves us well and makes life easier when deciding who lives and who dies.”¹⁷

By this point, students have a general idea of the wide range of human-animal relations, their own involvement with animals, and some of the difficulties encountered in such relationships.

2.2 Theoretical / philosophical background material

After the “fun” part spent looking at pyramids and bunnies, I provide students with texts by philosophers such as René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, John Bentham, and Jacques Derrida, who have helped to shape our Western

14 Harriet Ritvo: Defining the Animal Turn. In: *Animals and Society*, n.d. <https://www.animalsandsociety.org/human-animal-studies/defining-human-animal-studies-an-asi-video-project/defining-the-animal-turn-with-harriet-ritvo/> (accessed: February 27, 2021).

15 Marc Bekoff: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why? How Speciesism Undermines Compassionate Conservation and Social Justice. In: Raymond Corbey / Annette Lanjouw (eds): *The Politics of Species: Reshaping our Relationships with Other Animals*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2013, pp. 15–20, here p. 16.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 17.

tradition in terms of how we behave toward animals, and who have thus influenced our ideas about animals in the areas of language capacity, reason, and natural hierarchy.¹⁸ It was Descartes who not only refused to grant animals the capacity to experience pain but also established the superiority of rational thought, of which only humans are supposedly capable.¹⁹ Moreover, he claimed that – unlike humans who, even if disabled, can create words and sentences – “no animal however perfect or well-bred can do anything of the sort.” This is not simply “because they lack the right organs,” Descartes continued, but is rather due to their souls, which are “of an entirely different nature from our own.”²⁰ In the Cartesian framework, rationality is cut off from nature, and since humans are defined by their capacity to think, it follows that they, too, are necessarily separate from nature and thus also from nonhuman animals. The influence of the Cartesian rationalist tradition, Mary Midgley notes, paved the way for the perceived need to counter “primitive paganism”²¹ and nature worship.²²

Although Kant did not deny animals the capacity to feel pain and urged people to not mistreat animals, his concern always lay with people. In Kantian philosophy, self-consciousness is one of the most important aspects of a person’s duty, and because animals – in the Kantian view – cannot be self-conscious, we do not have any obligations or duties toward them. Instead, they are a mere means to an end (the end being us). The only reason that Kant gives against being cruel toward animals is that cruel behavior might lead to a disposition toward cruelty in general, e. g., toward humans:

18 See Carrie Rohman: *Animal Writes: Literature and the Discourse of Species*. In: Margo DeMello (ed.): *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies Across the Disciplines*. New York: Lantern 2010, pp. 48–58, here p. 51. This is an especially helpful book for THAS because all the contributors include course syllabi and assignment choices.

19 Elizabeth Costello, protagonist of J. M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, sarcastically points to the paradox of the totality of reason introduced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment: “[R]eason is simply a vast tautology. Of course reason will validate reason as the first principle of the universe – what else should it do? Dethrone itself?” (J. M. Coetzee: *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton UP 1999, p. 25.)

20 René Descartes: *Discours de la méthode*, p. 5, qtd. in Marjorie Spiegel: *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. Michigan: Mirror 1996, p. 26.

21 Mary Midgley: *Beast and Man*. London: Routledge 1995, p. 219.

22 Students might like to listen to the Cartesian view of animals according to Gregory B. Sadler: *Core Concepts in Philosophy: Descartes – Discourse on Method (Part V) Machines, Animals, and Rational Beings*. In: *YouTube*, May 1, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESfq4cQD0fs> (accessed: February 4, 2021).

Yet it cannot be denied that a hard-heartedness towards animals is not in accordance with the law of reason, and is at least an unsuitable use of means. Any action whereby we may torment animals, or let them suffer distress, or otherwise treat them without love, is demeaning to ourselves.²³

In contrast to the Cartesian view of animals as machine-like, unfeeling beings, and Kant's denial of animals as self-conscious beings, Bentham focused on animals' ability to suffer: "The question is not, Can they reason nor Can they talk but, Can they suffer."²⁴ In his treatise, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*,²⁵ Derrida repeatedly returns to Bentham's quote in his thoughts on the animal in Western culture. Struck by his recognition of his own cat's nonhuman cat perspective, Derrida identifies Western animal representations as a precursor to violence against animals.

J. M. Coetzee's novella *The Lives of Animals* becomes extremely helpful at this point as it depicts the debate between the protagonist Elizabeth Costello – a modern-day novelist and animal rights activist – and canonical philosophers such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant,²⁶ as well as their modern-day followers, for instance Thomas Nagel. In his celebrated 1979 article, "What Is It like to Be a Bat?," Nagel argues that, although it is possible to give a scientific, objective account of the bat's visual mechanism, this achievement will not capture what it is like to live in a bat-like way. We cannot know, Nagel argues, what it is like as we cannot imagine ourselves living a bat-like existence. This is because we do not have the sensory equipment required to do

23 Immanuel Kant: *Lectures on Ethics*, transl. from the German by Peter Heath, ed. by Peter Heath / J. B. Schneewind. New York: Cambridge UP 1997, p. 434; Christine M. Korsgaard, Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University and a Kantian scholar, offers a different view of our obligations to animals in: Christine M. Korsgaard: A Kantian Account of Our Obligation to Animals. In: *You Tube*, February 28, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bn3-qffqiAc> (accessed: January 19, 2022).

24 Jeremy Bentham: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, qtd. in Karla Armbruster: Thinking with Animals: Teaching Animal-Based Literature Courses. In: Laird Christensen / Mark C. Long / Fred Waage (eds): *Teaching North American Environmental Literature*. New York: MLA 2008, pp. 72–90, here p. 76.

25 Jacques Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham UP 2008. A great starting point for Derrida's treatise is the excellent foreword by the collection's editor: Marie Luise Mallet: Foreword. In: *Ibid.*, pp. ix–xiii.

26 Richard Alan Northover points out that the reliance on Kant is counter-productive since, "for Kant, ultimate value in the universe resides only in the good will of persons, that is, in the autonomous rational individual, and only human beings are capable of personhood." (Richard Alan Northover: *J. M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy*. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria 2009, p. 16.)

so.²⁷ Costello disagrees and argues that we *can* and *do* imagine ourselves in any number of situations in which we do not fully share our sensory experience with animals. She suggests that human thought can be better understood in the context of our fundamental human capacity for sympathy, which allows us to “share at times the being of another.”²⁸ Costello rejects reason as not compelling enough, relying instead on the sympathetic imagination. When she asks her audience to walk beside the cattle “flank to flank”²⁹ on their way to the slaughterhouse, she is encouraging everyone to emotionally enter the being of an animal faced with death. “If principles are what you want to take away from this talk,” Costello tells her audience, “I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says.”³⁰ Being able to identify with an animal and not, as Nagel proposes, seeking similarities in the realms of reason, self-consciousness, or an afterlife should be the motivating factor in relationships between human and nonhuman animals. Thus, the question should be: what would it be like if I were in their place?

Sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object, the “another,” as we see at once when we think of the object not as a bat but as another human being. There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it.³¹

After this brief excursion into the historical debates on human-animal studies, I present students with more current perspectives, for instance from the 2005 publication *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*³² by the moral philosopher and animal rights activist Peter Singer, or excerpts from Marjorie Spiegel’s 1988 publication *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. Here, Spiegel presents some astonishing visual and ideological parallels between the treatment of slaves and the treatment of animals. She contends not that the injustice suffered by Black people and animals have taken

27 Thomas Nagel: What Is It like To Be A Bat? In: Idem: *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1974, pp. 165–180.

28 Coetzee: *Lives*, p. 34.

29 Ibid., p. 65.

30 Ibid., p. 37.

31 Ibid., pp. 34–35.

32 Peter Singer (ed.): *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell 1985.

identical forms, but that the relationships between the oppressors and the oppressed show remarkable similarities:

Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist: one who has embraced the false notions of what animals are like. Those who are offended by comparison to a fellow sufferer have unquestioningly accepted the biased worldview presented by the masters. To deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our own power.³³

In his ground-breaking treatise, *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer agrees that the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals “can only be compared with that which resulted from the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans.”³⁴ In the introduction to *The Dreaded Comparison*, Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, also comments on the enslavement of Black people and the enslavement of animals.³⁵ She points to the analogies between cruelty to animals and slavery, maintaining that animals, just like Black people, have been and are being mistreated on the grounds of morally irrelevant physiological differences:

It is a comparison that, even for those of us who recognise its validity, is a difficult one to face. Especially if we are descendants of slaves. Or of slave owners. Or of both. Especially so if we are responsible in some way for the present treatment of animals – participating in the profits from animal research (medicine, lipstick, lotions) and animal raising (food, body parts). In short, if we are complicit in their enslavement and destruction, which is to say, if we are, at this juncture in history, master.³⁶

In her own short story, *Am I blue?* (1986),³⁷ Walker covers several basic issues relevant to teaching human-animal studies (THAS), such as the parallel oppression of animals and marginalized groups like Indigenous people, Black

33 Marjorie Spiegel: *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. Michigan: Mirror 1996, p. 30.

34 Peter Singer: *Animal Liberation*. New York: HarperCollins 2009, p. 7.

35 PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has run several very controversial campaigns juxtaposing images of oppression against Black people with images of dead, dying, or captive animals: PETA’s “Holocaust on your Plate” Campaign. In: *The Society Pages*, May 5, 2008. <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2008/05/05/petas-holocaust-on-your-plate-campaign/> (accessed: March 1, 2021).

36 Alice Walker: Introduction. In: Spiegel: *Comparison*, pp. 1–10, here p. 9.

37 Alice Walker: Am I Blue? In: *The Westcoast Post*, June 1, 2013. <https://westcoastword.wordpress.com/2013/06/01/am-i-blue-by-alice-walker/> (accessed: March 3, 2021).

people, and recent immigrants to the US; and animal emotion. The California School Board banned this story due to Walker's mention of personal responsibility for meat consumption, arguing that the suggested alternative eating habits were inappropriate information for tenth graders.³⁸

2.3 Teaching the animal in poetry, short fiction, and novels

From childhood on, animals abound in children's stories, fairy-tales, and fables. They talk, argue, and often extend a helping hand to their human cohabitants. All of this makes complete sense – at least to children.³⁹ Only later in life do animals become an apparently insurmountable problem since, as adults, equipped with the considerable baggage that we refer to as literary theory, we become aware that we can only perceive and represent animals through our own eyes, a fact that opens the can of worms called “anthropomorphism.” Although in our digital age, as DeMello reminds us, “social networking sites and blogs are both venues in which animals – primarily pets – speak about their daily lives and interests,”⁴⁰ in academia, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to incorporate animal emotions, thoughts, and reflections into fictional texts without resorting to human structures of meaning. Speaking for animals in literature and literary criticism remains a formal and philosophical challenge, and is always a double-edged sword, “both an exploration of the radical otherness of the animal and an intensely human, and human-centred, endeavor.”⁴¹

The animal story is often considered a quintessential Canadian genre. It differs from its American counterpart, Canadian author Margaret Atwood claims, in that its focus is strictly on animals, even if the stories more often than not

38 W.P. Malecki / Alexa Weik von Mossner / Malgorzata Dobrowolska: Narrating Human and Animal Oppression: Strategic Empathy and Intersectionalism in Alice Walker's “Am I Blue?” In: *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Environment* 27:2 (2020), pp. 365–384. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isaa023> (accessed: June 1, 2021).

39 Although Indigenous narratives are more often than not tied to the more-than-human world as a setting and to animals as vital characters, I will refrain from discussing them here because they are – to this day – rooted in oral rather than written exchange and proclaim a different worldview. Unlike in Indigenous tales, First Nations author Thomas King reminds us, “talking animals are a problem” in Western writing. Thomas King: *The Truth about Stories*. Toronto: Anansi 2003, p. 23.

40 Margo DeMello: Introduction. In: Idem (ed.): *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*. New York: Routledge 2013, pp. 1–14, here p. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203085967> (accessed: June 1, 2021).

41 Fiamengo: *Other Selves*, p. 2.

result in their deaths.⁴² These deaths are “seen as tragic or pathetic, *because the stories are told from the point of view of the animal.*” Consequently, Canadian animal texts “are about animals *being* killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers.”⁴³ Like much of Ondaatje’s and Atwood’s poetry, *The Well-Traveled Roadway* by Canadian poet John Newlove exemplifies this. In the first stanza, the lyrical I seems almost shocked by what it sees:

The dead beast, turned up
(brown fur on back and white
on the belly), lay on the roadway,
its paws extended in the air –
worn-out attitude of prayer.

In the second stanza, the narrator is taken by the beauty of the animal, even in death but is – at the same time – shocked by her/his own ignorance:

It was beautiful on the well-travelled roadway
with its dead black lips: God help me,
I did not even know what it was.
I had been walking into the city then,
early, with my own name in mind.⁴⁴

The writings of the South African Nobel Prize winner for literature J. M. Coetzee are a treasure trove for just about every aspect of THAS. His novella, *The Lives of Animals*, consists of two lectures, delivered at fictional Appleton College by Elizabeth Costello, an Australian writer, animal spokesperson, and Coetzee’s probable alter ego.⁴⁵ Though neither of her lectures,

42 For further information on Canadian animal stories, see my article: “Their deaths are not elegant”: Portrayals of Animals in Margaret Atwood’s Writings. In: *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 35:1 (2015), pp. 120–135. http://www.kanada-studien.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/zks_2015_6_Moss.pdf (accessed: June 1, 2021).

43 Margaret Atwood: *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Concord, OT: Anansi 1972, p. 74 (emphasis in original).

44 John Newlove: *The Well-Traveled Roadway*. In: Nancy Holmes (ed.): *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems*. Waterloo, ON: Laurier UP 2009, p. 257.

45 For an enlightening description of teaching J.M Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, see the article by Alexandra Böhm: Teaching Empathy and Emotions: J. M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* and Human-Animal Studies, in this volume.

“The Philosophers and the Animals” nor “The Poets and the Animals,” is successful with her audiences, they provide the reader with a *tour de force* through centuries of philosophy (from Kant to Nagel) and through twentieth-century poetry (from Ted Hughes to Gary Snyder).

Costello’s second lecture, “The Poets and the Animals,” centers on the assumption that, rather than theory, poetry – by addressing the emotional side of an issue – is better suited to both exploring the relationship between human and nonhuman animals and depicting animal presence without colonizing their otherness. Costello uses Hughes’s poems *The Jaguar* (which in class can be contrasted with Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Der Panther*) and *Second Glance at a Jaguar* to demonstrate that, by addressing our power of imagination, poetry enables us to place ourselves outside of any anthropocentric framework and thus share, if only for a short time, the animal’s perspective:

More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wildernesses of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.⁴⁶

The poem *Second Glance at a Jaguar* in particular attempts to literally get under the skin of the animal, exploring every aspect of his physical being: “The hip going in and out of joint, dropping the spine / With the urgency of his hurry [...]”⁴⁷ By focusing on the details of the animal’s physical aspects, the poem depicts one way of understanding the jaguar’s complex nature. There are no limits to the human imagination, Costello claims. And since poetry can communicate in a way that theory cannot, it is entirely possible to produce poetry – like Hughes’ jaguar poetry and Rilke’s *Panther* – that “does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him.”⁴⁸ Although Costello never mentions the term speciesism, it is implicit in many of her arguments:

46 Ted Hughes: *The Jaguar*. In: *The Hawk in the Rain* [1957]. London: Faber & Faber 2003, p.7.

47 Ted Hughes: *Second Glance at a Jaguar*. In: *Selected Poems: 1957–1967*. London: Harper-Collins 1957, p. 19.

48 Coetzee: *Lives*, p. 51.

To me, a philosopher who says that the distinction between a human and non-human depends on whether you have a white or black skin, and a philosopher who says that the distinction between human and nonhuman depends on whether or not you know the difference between a subject and a predicate, are more alike than they are unlike.⁴⁹

One argument that especially infuriates Costello's audience is her comparison of animal suffering to the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust. However, the animal rights movement has been significantly shaped by those whose advocacy of animals has been influenced by the Holocaust, including survivors and the children of survivors. Both Peter Singer and Isaac Bashevis Singer have origins in European Jewry and lost family members in the Holocaust, yet both – Peter Singer most notably in his seminal volume *Animal Liberation* and I. B. Singer in his novel *Enemies: A Love Story* – repeatedly compare cruelty against animals to the Holocaust. In *Enemies*, Isaac Bashevis Singer tells the story of Herman, an aging Jewish immigrant from Poland who works as a translator for a publishing company. When Herman – who lost his entire family in a Nazi death camp, recovers from a bout of pneumonia – thinks that Huldah, a mouse to which he has become attached, has also died, he laments:

What do they know – all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world – about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka. And yet man demands compassion from heaven.⁵⁰

If HAS seminars include a practical or service-learning component (like, for instance, my project seminar, “Study & Save: Eco-Critical Theories in Action”), J. M. Coetzee's 1999 novel *Disgrace* is a must-read. Set in post-Apartheid South Africa, it is most commonly read and discussed in terms of apartheid issues. However, Coetzee himself has repeatedly called attention to the novel's many contributions to the animal rights debate and the centrality of the animal presence in *Disgrace*:

49 Coetzee: *Lives*, p. 66.

50 Bashevis-Singer, qtd. in Northover: *Coetzee*, pp. 1–2.

The test case is my novel *Disgrace*, in which animals figure quite prominently. Most reviewers have more or less ignored their presence (they mention that the hero of the novel “gets involved with animal rights campaigners” and leave it at that). In this respect they – naturally – mirror the way in which animals are treated in the world we live in, namely as unimportant existences of which we need take notice only when their lives cross ours.⁵¹

Dismissed from his teaching position at a university due to sexual misconduct, David Lurie undergoes a transformation from a glib professor of literature to a person who learns to feel empathy, even for shelter animals. The part toward the end of the novel when he helps to euthanize a dog he had come to like always initiates heated debates: Why doesn’t Lurie at least save this dog who had come to rely on his kindness? Is Coetzee suggesting that Lurie – by killing this specific dog – needs to punish himself? Is there no redeeming sense of compassion? Or is killing the only logical – even humane – thing to do? Whatever the answer, this passage has the potential for rousing, heated debates.

It is not shelter animals but farm animals that figure prominently in the title story of Atwood’s short-story collection *Moral Disorder* (2006). In the story of the same, apt name, *Moral Disorder*, Atwood describes a young couple’s attempt at farming. While Tig takes a farmer’s pragmatic approach to raising and slaughtering animals, Nell experiences serious problems when a lamb she needs to bottle-feed gets so attached to her that he starts attacking Tig. Although she realizes that the lamb is actually trying to protect her from a rather insensitive partner, she eventually agrees to slaughter him. By presenting the animal as the more sensitive companion, Atwood stresses both the limitations of the human and the humanity of the animal.⁵²

Although often described as a dystopian novel, Atwood considers *Oryx and Crake* (2003) to be a piece of speculative fiction, since twenty-first-century humans are already living in the novel’s post-apocalyptic environment of biochemical research – ripe with super pills and pandemics. Eventually, Crake, one of the novel’s protagonists, gets a job at a bioengineering lab, where he helps to create genetically altered animals:

51 J. M. Coetzee: 2004 Interview with a Swedish Newspaper. In: Anton Leist / Peter Singer (eds): *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*. New York: Columbia UP 2010, pp. 109–118, here p. 110.

52 Margaret Atwood: *Moral Disorder*. In: Idem: *Moral Disorder*. Toronto: Seal 2006, pp. 145–177; for a detailed analysis of this story, see my article: “Their deaths are not elegant.”

“This is the latest,” said Crake. What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing. “What the hell is it?” said Jimmy. “Those are chickens,” said Crake. “Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They’ve got ones that specialize in drumsticks too, twelve to a growth unit.” “But there aren’t any heads,” said Jimmy. He grasped the concept – he’d grown up with *sus multiorganifer*, after all – but this thing was going too far. At least the pigeons of his childhood hadn’t lacked heads. “That’s the head in the middle,” said the woman. “There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those.”⁵³

Oryx and Crake features all of the literary highlights cherished by most students: post-apocalyptic science fiction scenery with youthful characters who go on adventures and undertake life-altering research. The current Covid pandemic, which is threatening to alter people’s lives forever, gives the novel a relevance unimaginable a few years ago.

In recent decades, the genre of “chimp fiction”⁵⁴ has gained attention. Karen Joy Fowler’s *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*⁵⁵ and T. C. Boyle’s latest novel, *Talk to Me*,⁵⁶ are examples of this genre. While Fowler’s text is about an experiment in bringing up a chimpanzee as a human while it retains its legal status as an animal, Boyle’s novel resonates with the actual story of Michael, the gorilla who was rescued from poachers and raised in the California Gorilla Foundation. There, he and his companion Koko mastered American Sign Language (ASL) to such a degree that they could actually communicate their feelings as well as past events.⁵⁷ Sam, the young chimpanzee and one of the protagonists in Boyle’s novel, becomes a celebrity because he can sign an impressive number of words, including abstract concepts such as “time” and “love.”

53 Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*. New York / London: Doubleday 2003, p. 202; for further information on the trilogy, see the article by Liza B. Bauer: Reading to Stretch the Imagination: Exploring Representations of “Livestock” in Literary Thought Experiments, in this volume.

54 Jan Kline: Literary Blog. In: Parry: *Other Animals*, p. 10.

55 Karen Joy Fowler: *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. London: Serpent’s Tail 2013.

56 T. C. Boyle: *Talk to Me*. London: Bloomsbury 2021.

57 Watch the video on Michael’s account on YouTube: Michael’s Story, where he signs about his family. In: *YouTube*, August 4, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXXsPqQ0Ycc> (accessed: March 2, 2021).

The girl Rosemary in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* grows up with what she understands to be her twin sister, Fern, who is actually a chimpanzee. Eventually, Fern, who had been part of an animal-human behavioral experiment conducted by Rosemary's psychologist father, is given away, a loss with which Rosemary cannot cope. The novel reflects Rosemary's grief for her missing alter ego. While we never find out what has happened to Fern, it is Rosemary's problems as a young adult that shape the narrative. Looking back at her childhood, Rosemary recalls: "Most home-raised chimps, when asked to sort photographs into piles of chimps and humans, make only the one mistake of putting their own picture into the human pile. This is exactly what Fern did."⁵⁸ Although Fern is given a decisive part in the story, the novel's focus is still on humans and the effects an animal has on their lives. As Parry points out, Fern "is silenced and made absent by the human world into which she has been forcibly imported [...]."⁵⁹

Chimp fiction is not only about raising chimpanzees as humans, but also about the effects that this has on our concept of self. What is so special about us if apes can not only use tools, display emotions, and enjoy elaborate friendships but also communicate? Our hesitancy to attribute narrative capacities to other creatures belies an underlying unease with their capacity for complex thought and language, a cornerstone of the Cartesian doubts about the animal world. Eventually, chimp fiction might actually enable humans to escape their speciesist prejudices and enter more fully into animal experience.

2.4 Animal narrators

Chimp fiction also plays a decisive role in novels that feature animal narrators, such as James Lever's *Me Cheeta: The Autobiography*.⁶⁰ Actually a pseudo animal memoir, *Me Cheeta* initiates a "discussion of the nature of animal life writing, the comic animal, and human intervention into the lives of chimpanzees."⁶¹ By giving a voice to an animal, the novel transforms the biography of a chimpanzee – who may or may not have played the part of Cheeta in Johnny Weismuller's Tarzan films – into a satirical autobiography about how to survive in the "golden age" of Hollywood: "Dearest humans, So, it's a perfect day in Palm Springs, California, and here I am – actor, artist, African,

58 Fowler: *Ourselves*, p. 101.

59 Parry: *Other Animals*, p. 11.

60 James Lever: *Me Cheeta: The Autobiography*. London: Fourth Estate 2008.

61 Parry: *Other Animals*, p. 11.

American, ape and now author – flat out on the lounge by the pool, looking back over this autobiography of mine.”⁶² By featuring our most recent ancestors – in evolutionary terms – chimp fiction allows us to emotionally grasp the absurdity of speciesism, and Sam, Cheeta, and Fern, “without ever being anything but chimpanzees,” Catherine Parry maintains, “call into question the terms of human exceptionalism.”⁶³

Paul Auster’s novella *Timbuktu*⁶⁴ and George Saunders’ story *Fox 8*⁶⁵ also feature animal narrators. While *Fox 8* is narrated by the protagonist, Fox 8, *Timbuktu* features two alternating narrators – the dog narrator, Mr. Bones himself, and Mr. Bone’s former owner. The forty-seven-page story *Fox 8* in particular is always a guaranteed hit with students, regardless of their level or major. Fox 8 is an especially curious animal who has managed to learn the language of “Yumans” and whose malapropisms are often funny. He and his friends live in the woods under the benign supervision of the Grate Leeder, Fox 28. One day, however, they discover “a sine, and upon that sine are some Yuman letters like the ones I had been lerning [...]. What those werds said is: Coming soon, FoxViewCommons.”⁶⁶ When developers start cutting down the forest, Fox 8 has to flee, bypassing a landscape of “mawls” and “rodes” with names like RiverWalkEstates, Hummingbird Way, and Slow Stream Ave. Unlike *Timbuktu* or *Me Cheeta*, *Fox 8* is an environmental tale that describes humanity systematically destroying the natural world it claims to cherish. Fox’s letter to the Yumans ends with a message that sounds childishly sincere, but might be exactly what we need to hear at this point: “If you want your Storys to end happy, try being niser.”⁶⁷

In *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*, Susan McHugh argues that literary animals – like Fern, Cheeta, Mr. Bones, and Fox 8 – are key figures in the biopolitical terrain of human-animal relations. She also argues for further articulations of animal knowledge in new and imaginative narrative forms. Such work, she notes, has the potential to change “patterns of engagement between species.”⁶⁸ Instead of solidifying the uniqueness of human aesthetic

62 Lever: *Me Cheeta*, p. ix.

63 Parry: *Other Animals*, p. 11.

64 Paul Auster: *Timbuktu*. New York: Holt 1998.

65 George Saunders: *Fox 8*. New York: Random House 2013.

66 Saunders: *Fox 8*, p. 10.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

68 Susan McHugh: *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2010, p. 23.

forms, she calls for a serious “turn of the imagination.”⁶⁹ Dominik Ohrem in “Animating Creaturely Life” pursues a similar course when he points out that “an important avenue for us to relate to other beings is relating their stories or, to be more to the point, allowing and inviting them to participate in *our* stories [...]”⁷⁰ While allowing animals to be part of our stories is one decisive step, Joshua Russell is willing to go even further. He belongs to the increasing number of scholars claiming that *storying* – experiencing and relating stories – cannot be limited to the sphere of the human. In “Animal Narrativity: Engaging with Story in a More-Than-Human World,” Russell argues that not only should we think of narrativity as “part of our own animality, a process through which we participate in multi-species relationships and communities,” but that we need to broaden our concept of narrativity to include the more-than-human world as well: “Animals may tell stories through echolocation, through scent or other chemical markers, or through dramatic visual displays: our inability to see or hear beyond our own human range does not negate the possibility.”⁷¹

While most strands of narratology focus on the unique linguistic capacities of human animals, the experiences of animal narrativity present us a subversive, counter-hegemonic, and more inclusive approach, recognizing that humans are not the sole subjects, agents, authors, or proprietors of stories. Yet language is typically the realm in which narrative is situated rather than in the complex bodies and minds of storying beings in relation to each other. Since language is still widely considered to be a unique human capacity, animal narrativity requires a wider, more inclusive understanding of language and mind, one that is inherently ecological, relational, and embodied.⁷²

It is rather doubtful, Russell continues, that humans are “the sole proprietors of narratives, the only beings capable of telling tales.” He claims that since stories are “living and communicative events that exist within a vast ecology

69 Ibid.

70 Dominik Ohrem: Animating Creaturely Life. In: Idem / Roman Bartosch (eds): *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide: Creaturely Lives in Literature and Culture*. New York: Palgrave 2017, pp. 3–19, here p. 11.

71 Joshua Russell: Animal Narrativity: Engaging with Story in a More-Than-Human World. In: Jodey Castricano / Lauren Corman (eds): *Animal Subjects 2.0*. Waterloo, ON: Laurier UP 2016, pp. 145–173, here p. 160.

72 Russell: Narrativity, p. 149.

of sights, sounds, and movements,” they seriously “challenge the assumption that narrative is a capacity that distances humans from all other animals and from the natural world.”⁷³ Canadian poet Robert Bringhurst agrees:

Each of us tells stories, and each of us is a story. Not just each of us humans, but each of us creatures – spruce trees and toads and timber wolves and dog salmon. We all tell stories to ourselves and to each other – within the tribe, within the species, and way beyond its bounds. Roses do this when they flower, finches when they sing, and humans when they speak, walk, sing, dance, swim, play a flute [...] or pull a trigger.⁷⁴

Animal narrators spell out for us that their lives are not only unique but also worthy of telling. And if we choose, as Russell says, “to engage with them, our experiences will reveal that our story is, indeed, entwined with their own.” While these relationships may be more practical in lifelong relationships, for instance with companion animals, “they are possible elsewhere given enough attentiveness and imaginative engagement.”⁷⁵ If we accept that our ways of storying the world are inseparable from nonhuman narrative modes, it becomes clear that the poetics of storying should be of crucial concern to post-anthropocentric ontology and interspecies ethics. In arguing for a “narrative ethology,” McHugh writes that storying suggests an “irreducibly relational ethics, a way of valuing social and aesthetic forms together as sustaining conditions of and for mixed communities.”⁷⁶

Focusing on techniques – including the use of animal narrators and/or alternations between human and nonhuman perspectives – many of these texts about and by animals explore how specific strategies for portraying nonhuman agents both emerge from and contribute to broader attitudes toward animal lives and stories. These varied texts thus promise to reshape existing narrative frameworks.

73 Russell: *Narrativity*, p. 149.

74 Robert Bringhurst: *The Tree of Meaning and the Work of Ecological Linguistics*. In: *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 7:2 (2002), pp. 9–22, here p. 14.

75 See Russell: *Narrativity*, p. 162.

76 McHugh: *Animal Stories*, p. 5.

3. Conclusion

One of the goals of THAS is achieved when animals are no longer just objects of study but singular and individual subjects – that is, when they are recognized as beings with their own agenda, their own interests, points of view, and emotions. In short, when we perceive them as individuals with intrinsic value who shape the environment we all share. Another more impressive step would be to stop denying animal agency within the narrative form and acknowledge that storying is not specific to humans. It seems that interspecies storied imaginings indeed offer an alternative to the long history of human dominance, and that human exceptionalism, based as it is on strict notions of language, cognitions, and future-thinking – all aspects of narrative as it is traditionally understood in human terms – has to be reconsidered and most likely abolished.