



# MULTISPECIES FUTURES

New Approaches to Teaching  
Human-Animal Studies

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Neofelis

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# **Multispecies Futures**

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Liza B. Bauer

## Reading to Stretch the Imagination

### Exploring Representations of “Livestock” in Literary Thought Experiments

#### 1. Thought experiments in science and speculative fiction, and human-animal relationships

Her mind raced. She pictured a million steps in an endless meadow, her hoof planting itself again and again in the soft ground, an endless messy line showing only that she once took another step, that she once walked, that she once was. And then she watched the hoofmarks disappearing, washed over by the rain and the sun, washed over by the markings of other animals, maybe humans – bigger, stronger, faster animals, until the proof she had stepped was gone forever.<sup>1</sup>

After acquiring human-like consciousness, the focalizer “Pig 323” in *The Awareness* (2014) is plagued by confusion and self-doubt. In contrast to an unnamed bear, a circus elephant called Nancy, and pet dog Cooper, her knowledge about her position in society as a “livestock” animal puts the pig in state of depression and even sparks a desire to become human. Her sentimental reflections on a lack of meaning in her life juxtapose her literal, creaturely “hoofmarks” with the more metaphorical “markings” that other animals, “maybe humans,” are able to leave on the world.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the *living* “livestock” animals, the “absent referents” in modern meat culture, Pig 323’s

1 Gene Stone / Jon Doyle: *The Awareness*. New York: Stone Press 2014, p. 114.

2 Ibid. See Anat Pick: *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia UP 2011.

bodily marks disappear “until the proof she had stepped was gone forever.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this fictional pig eventually uses her “mind, [...] body [and] hooves” to reclaim control over her own fate as well as that of several other pigs, thus reinstating the significance of her piggish, albeit anthropomorphized steps.<sup>4</sup> Science and speculative fiction (SF) storyworlds<sup>5</sup> provide multiple access points to discuss human-animal relationships – especially as they can redefine, according to their own rules, who is facing whom in their portrayals. Nowadays, animal theorists, researchers, and activists are increasingly challenging conventional assumptions about a concrete human-animal boundary.<sup>6</sup> Among these voices, literary animal studies (LAS) scholars are exploring the interrelations between textual animals and the living nonhumans they represent, thereby advocating the ability of literary texts to challenge anthropocentric or species-oriented ways of thinking.<sup>7</sup> Connecting this to the human-animal studies’ (HAS) focus on relationality, the SF genre performs these functions effectively, as Sherryl Vint notes in *Animal Alterity* (2010):

In SF, the animal is us and we are the animal, all continually involved in a never-ending process of becoming, of imagining new ways of conceiving humans and animals, new ways of organising our social relations, new futures to inhabit.<sup>8</sup>

3 The concept of the “absent referent” is based on Carol J. Adams: *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York / London: Continuum 1990. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501312861> (accessed: January 24, 2022). See also Annie Potts: What Is Meat Culture? In: Idem (ed.): *Meat Culture*. Leiden: Brill 2016, pp.1–30. <https://doi.org/10.52537/humanimalia.9532> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

4 Stone / Doyle: *The Awareness*, p. 193. See section 5 in this article.

5 See David Herman: Storyworld. In: Idem et al. (eds): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London / New York: Routledge 2005, p. 570.

6 See Björn Hayer / Klarissa Schröder: Vorwort. In: Idem (eds): *Tierethik transdisziplinär: Literatur–Kultur–Didaktik*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2019, pp. 9–22, here p. 10. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839442593-017> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

7 See Sean McCorry / John Miller (eds): *Literature and Meat Since 1900*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2019, p. 8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26917-3> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Roland Borgards: Tiere und Literatur. In: Idem (ed.): *Tiere: Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch*. Stuttgart: Metzler 2016, pp. 225–240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05372-5> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

8 Sherryl Vint: *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP 2010, p. 227. <https://doi.org/10.5949/upo9781846316135> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

While SF has always explored questions of alterity – whether it manifests itself in aliens or the animal-aliens on our own planet – SF “thought experiments” have been increasingly imagining alternative models of human-nonhuman coexistence in recent decades.<sup>9</sup>

This article thus brings the SF genre to the fore in order to explore how literary texts can be productively taught in the light of HAS. In their contribution to discussions about animal rights,<sup>10</sup> Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka advocate exploring and embracing the myriad potentials inherent in human-animal connections instead of cutting them off.<sup>11</sup> Literature invites readers to undertake such exploratory ventures: *What* would happen *if* animals could communicate in human language, for example, or were superior to humans in their intelligence? Would they subdue humankind, domesticate it, or coexist harmoniously? *What* would future animals look like *if* genetic engineering and tissue culture technologies advanced further? These and other scenarios can be enacted in literary storyworlds to yield insights into the current and future challenges of coexistence.<sup>12</sup> What would happen if humans stopped consuming animal products altogether? Would all cows, pigs, chickens, etc. become extinct? Narratologist Brian McHale has famously claimed that SF often envisions highly unlikely worlds that can encourage readers to critically reflect on current realities:

9 Ibid., p. 1. On the concept of literary thought experiments, see Brian McHale: *Science Fiction, Or, the Most Typical Genre in World Literature*. In: Pirjo Lyytikäinen / Minna Mäkelä (eds): *Genre and Interpretation*. Helsinki: Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies & The Finnish Graduate School of Literary Studies 2010, pp. 11–27; see also Frank Bornmüller / Johannes Franzen / Mathis Lessau (eds): *Literature as Thought Experiment? Perspectives from Philosophy and Literary Studies*. Paderborn: Fink 2019. <https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846764299> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

10 See Tom Regan: *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley / Los Angeles: U of California P 1983; idem: *Von Menschenrechten zu Tierrechten*. In: Frederike Schmitz: *Tierethik: Grundlagentexte*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2014, pp. 88–114; Reingard Spannring / Reinhard Heuberger / Gabriela Kompatscher / Andreas Oberprantacher et al. (eds): *Tiere – Texte – Transformationen: Das Mensch-Tier-Verhältnis im Wandel*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2015.

11 Sue Donaldson / Will Kymlicka: *Zoopolis: Eine politische Theorie der Tierrechte*. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2013, p. 255.

12 See Catherine Z. Elgin: *The Laboratory of the Mind*. In: John Gibson / Wolfgang Huemer / Luca Poggi (eds): *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative and Knowledge*. London: Routledge 2007, pp. 43–54.

Science fiction serves the valuable function of enabling us to imagine alternatives to received reality, empowering us to think of the world as *otherwise than it currently is*. By projecting new models, not just individuals, science fiction throws our own received reality-models into high relief; it estranges them, and encourages us to reflect on them.<sup>13</sup>

Along similar lines, Donna Haraway stresses that “SF is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come.”<sup>14</sup> Since they both estrange and release readers from the governing principles of their actual worlds, these strictly fictional models reveal the very *imaginary* space needed to think beyond the constraints of speciesism or livestock animal exploitation.

## 2. Bringing textual and living animals into dialogue

To render this space productive for teaching HAS (THAS), the study of literary animal representations needs to connect to living animals in a meaningful way. Literary scholars in HAS assume that “real” animals’ behavior shapes emergent literary animal portrayals, while these texts, vice versa, shape our knowledge about and the treatment of them.<sup>15</sup> Roland Borgards argues that textual animals are always “material-semiotic hybrids” – human-made representations of living beings and simultaneously the result of a multitude of social, political, and cultural, discursive processes.<sup>16</sup> Discussing with students how famous films and novels, such as *Babe*,<sup>17</sup> *Jaws*,<sup>18</sup> or *Black Beauty*,<sup>19</sup> have shaped human attitudes toward pigs, sharks, or horses can teach them about this reciprocal relationship.<sup>20</sup> Such critical reflections on the constructed and therefore modifiable nature of animal conceptions should always include a

13 McHale: Science Fiction, p. 23.

14 Donna Haraway: *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke UP 2016, p. 31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1lcw25q> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

15 Gabriela Kompatscher: Literary Animal Studies: Ethische Dimensionen des Literaturunterrichts. In: Hayer / Schröder (eds): *Tierethik*, pp. 295–310, here p. 289. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839442593-017> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

16 Borgards: *Tiere*, p. 240.

17 *Babe* (AU / US 1995, D: Chris Noonan).

18 *Jaws* (US 1975, D: Steven Spielberg).

19 Anna Sewell: *Black Beauty* [1877]. London: Penguin 2007.

20 See Kompatscher: *Literary*, p. 297.



self-conscious acknowledgement of the students' own, inherently anthropocentric perspective. Hence, by recognizing that signifiers such as "human" and "animal" are performative instead of static ontological categories, they can eventually gain a reflective perspective as privileged, advanced, and therefore responsible human *animals*.

A two-dimensional approach to THAS thus emerges that fosters students' sense of relationality to the more-than-human world and encourages them to question human-animal binaries.<sup>21</sup> Gabriela Kompatscher's animal-sensitive approach to teaching literature focuses on a pedagogy that recognizes the intrinsic value of animals, draws attention to their needs, and thus sets the course for fair future human-animal relations.<sup>22</sup> Lauren Corman's and Tereza Vandrovcová's critical animal pedagogy emphasizes the value of practically involving living nonhuman animals in teaching contexts to raise students' awareness of the exploitative structures in which these are caught up.<sup>23</sup> For example, field trips to animal sanctuaries or farms, or keeping diaries about everyday animal encounters can certainly enrich THAS models.<sup>24</sup> The approach suggested here, however, involves nonhuman animals in the classroom more indirectly: by complementing narratological analyses of animal representations with discussions on questions relating to animal ethics that emerge from the novels' content, the living models for the fictional characters are brought to the table.

21 For a more in-depth depiction of this approach, see Liza B. Bauer: *Mit anderen Tieren leben: Lernen an der Schnittstelle zwischen fiktiven Tiertexten, lebendigen Tieren und tierethischen Bestrebungen. Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*. In: Simone Horstmann (ed.): *Interspezies Lernen: Grundlinien interdisziplinärer Tierschutz- und Tierrechtsbildung*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2021. <https://doi.org/10.14361/97838389455227> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

22 Kompatscher: *Literary*, p. 310; see also idem: „Wir knieten um dich, alle im Rund, / Und keiner dachte: da stirbt nur ein Hund“ (F. Avenarius): Literarische *companion animals* des 19. Jahrhunderts als Subjekte tiersensibler Didaktik. In: Klarissa Schröder / Björn Hayer (eds): *Didaktik des Animalen: Vorschläge für einen tierethisch gestützten Literaturunterricht*. Trier: WVT 2016, pp. 17–28.

23 Lauren Corman / Tereza Vandrovcová: *Radical Humility: Toward a More Holistic Critical Animal Studies Pedagogy*. In: *Counterpoints* 448 (2014), pp. 135–157, here p. 149.

24 The relatively young field of environmental education often stresses the value of human-animal encounters. See Jan Oakley / Gavan Peter Longley Watson / Constance Russell / Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles: *Animal Encounters in Environmental Education Research: Responding to the "Question of the Animal"*. In: *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 15 (2010), pp. 86–102; see also: June Bane: *The Animal as Fourth Educator: A Literature Review of Animals and Young Children in Pedagogical Relationships*. In: *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 38:2 (2013), pp. 57–64.

Despite being distanced from reality, SF storyworlds are not at all detached from the contemporary socio-political discourses from which they emerge. Narratological analyses of Margaret Atwood's representations of genetically modified pigs (Pigoons), for instance, may examine the narrative situation (is the text narrated by or the story world perceived through the eyes of an animal character?), the degree of agency the Pigoons have (do they actively shape the story and their own fates?), or how strongly anthropomorphized they are (can we detect the real animal behind its human-like representation?). If the effects that these narrative forms have on readers are discussed further (does the text invite readers to take a nonhuman's perspective? Does it encourage empathy for animal characters?), it quickly becomes obvious that such analyses of textual animals rarely remain on a strictly formal level but always bear traces of their material counterparts.<sup>25</sup> To make these explorations even less abstract, questions that go beyond the text can be addressed: does the text reflect contemporary biological knowledge on the respective species?<sup>26</sup> How does it portray inter- and intraspecies relationships – does the story leave human-animal binaries intact, blur, or question them? Additionally, ethical discussions on genetic manipulation or farming practices can be triggered by these texts, which teach students about the realities that real nonhumans are facing and help them to develop their attitudes toward such topics in conversation with one another. In a condensed manner, the following examples show how animal-sensitive readings of SF encourage students to critically explore human-animal relations from perspectives that invent new subject forms (3), reverse species hierarchies (4), and blur human-animal distinctions (5).

25 See: Wojciech Małecki / Bogusław Pawłowski / Piotr Sorokowski / Anna Oleszkiewicz: Feeling for Textual Animals: Narrative Empathy Across Species Lines. In: *Poetics* 74 (2019), pp. 101–334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.11.003> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Wojciech Małecki / Piotr Sorokowski / Bogusław Pawłowski / Marcin Cieński: *Human Minds and Animal Stories: How Narratives Make Us Care About Other Species*. New York / London: Routledge 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061424> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Alexandra Böhm: Limitrophe Mensch-Tier-Begegnungen: Empathie für tierliche Nicht-Personen in Karen Joy Fowlers *We Are All Completely Besides Ourselves*. In: Stephanie Catani / Stephanie Waldow (eds): *Non-Person: Grenzen des Humanen in Literatur, Kultur und Medien*. Leiden / Paderborn: Brill / Fink 2020, pp. 247–268. [https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846764428\\_015](https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846764428_015) (accessed: January 24, 2022).

26 See, for example, Borgards' process of historicizing the animal text (Borgards: *Tiere*, p.231).

### 3. Redistributing agency in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* (2003–2013)

Most LAS scholars understand animal agency as something that unfolds in cause-and-effect relationships that emerge in interactive networks of humans, nonhumans, plants, and other entities described as agents or actants in new materialist thinking.<sup>27</sup> If nonhuman animals are understood as having an impact on the production of literary texts, taking these literary forms seriously can shed light on their impact in the real world, too.<sup>28</sup> Students thereby learn that nonhuman animals are individuals with their own subjective experience, interests, and sensations, who significantly shape history and society, even though their agency often remains hidden in consumer culture.<sup>29</sup> The corona crisis has made it painfully clear that, as significant agents in complex relational networks, nonhuman animals can become part of a global phenomenon that puts entire societies on hold.<sup>30</sup> The pedagogic potential of animal texts lies in their ability to dynamically redefine which human / nonhuman or even organic / inorganic individuals have which degrees of agency.

A particularly dynamic case of this manifests itself in the aforementioned *Pigoons*. These biotech pigs develop from being perceived as mere commodities at the beginning into being fully acknowledged as social agents of a multi-species society at the end of Atwood's trilogy.<sup>31</sup> This mostly unfolds in the plot,

27 See Susan McHugh: Literary Animal Agents. In: *PMLA* 124:2 (2009), pp. 487–495. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.2.487> (accessed: January 24, 2022); idem: *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2011. <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816670321.001.0001> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Bruno Latour: *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford / New York: Oxford UP 2005.

28 Gabriela Kompatscher / Reingard Spannring / Karin Schachinger: *Human-Animal Studies: Eine Einführung für Studierende und Lebrende*. Münster / New York: Waxmann 2017, p. 220. <https://doi.org/10.36198/9783838556789> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

29 See, e.g., Gesine Krüger / Aline Steinbrecher / Clemens Wischermann (eds): *Tiere und Geschichte. Konturen einer „Animate History“*. Stuttgart: Steiner 2014.

30 See, e.g., a webinar hosted by *Compassion for World Farming* on June 2, 2020: [https://www.ciwf.eu/news/2020/06/jane-goodall-tells-eu-if-we-dont-do-things-differently-were-finished?utm\\_campaign=factoryfarming&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=ciwf&fbclid=IwAR2E7fRsqnAwJRwqZlPcMPUcjvyZgpKH0EXO3MW5IyoLKV4ZKlR6TbVUnPM](https://www.ciwf.eu/news/2020/06/jane-goodall-tells-eu-if-we-dont-do-things-differently-were-finished?utm_campaign=factoryfarming&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=ciwf&fbclid=IwAR2E7fRsqnAwJRwqZlPcMPUcjvyZgpKH0EXO3MW5IyoLKV4ZKlR6TbVUnPM) (accessed: January 18, 2021).

31 See Liza B. Bauer: Eating Kin or Making Kin? Farm Animal Representations in Twenty-First Century Fiction. In: Ansgar Nünning / Vera Nünning / Alexander Scherr (eds): *Literature and Literary Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cultural Concerns – Concepts – Case Studies*. Trier: WVT 2021, pp. 297–314.

but in some instances becomes visible in the narrative form as well.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the fictional society considers the Pigoons to be a mere source of organs and research objects at first, the text implies their covert, threatening agency from early on<sup>33</sup>:

The pigoons were much bigger and fatter than ordinary pigs, to leave room for all the extra organs. They were kept in special buildings, heavily secured: the kidnapping of a pigoon and its finely honed genetic material by a rival outfit would have been a disaster [...]. [T]he adults were slightly frightening, with their runny noses and tiny, white-lashed pink eyes. They glanced at him *as if* they saw him, really saw him, and *might* have plans for him later.<sup>34</sup>

On their hunt for the human protagonist in the post-apocalyptic storyworld later on, their full capacity to act unfolds:

They've nosed the door open, they're in the first room now, twenty or thirty of them, boars and sows but the boars foremost, crowding in, grunting eagerly, snuffling at his footprints. [...] *What they see is his head, attached to what they know is a delicious meat pie just waiting to be opened up.* The two biggest ones, two boars, with – yes – sharp tusks, move side by side to the door [...].<sup>35</sup>

The focalization – the perspective from which the narrative is perceived – briefly switches from Jimmy to the Pigoons as the conditional “as if” from the earlier passage is replaced by the indicative “they see” here.<sup>36</sup> Yet at no point does the novel fully humanize the Pigoons or grant direct access to their thoughts, as the following depiction of them joining forces with the humans

32 See also: Anne F. Pusch: Splices: When Science Catches up with Science Fiction. In: *Nanoethics* 9:1 (2015), pp. 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11569-014-0216-8> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

33 Helen Tiffin: Pigs, People and Pigoons. In: Laurence Simmons / Philip Armstrong (eds): *Knowing Animals*. Leiden: Brill 2007, pp. 245–654. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004157736.i-296.84> (accessed: January 24, 2022); see also Susan McHugh: Real Artificial: Tissue-Cultured Meat, Genetically Modified Farm Animals, and Fictions. In: *Configurations* 18:1–2 (2010), pp. 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2010.0006> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

34 Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*. London: Virago 2003, pp. 29–30 (emphasis added).

35 *Ibid.*, p. 314 (emphasis added).

36 See William Nelles: Beyond the Bird's Eye: Animal Focalization. In: *Narrative* 9:2 (2001), pp. 188–194.

reveals: “The Pigoons alongside tilt their heads to look up at their human allies from time to time, but their thoughts can only be guessed. [...] Are they irritated? Solicitous? Impatient? Glad of the human support?”<sup>37</sup> Yet they still manage to integrate into the emerging collective of humans and Crakers (a posthuman race) as the latter are able to communicate with them. Their social agency becomes visible during a group vote near the end of the novel: “The Pigoons vote collectively, through their leader, with Blackbeard as their interpreter. ‘They all say *dead*,’ he tells Toby.”<sup>38</sup> Further underlining this development, it is striking that their name is capitalized for the first time at this point. The Pigoons have gradually transformed from “transgenic knockout pig hosts”<sup>39</sup> in part one, to “frankenbacon”<sup>40</sup> in part two, to celebrated heroes of the collective in the trilogy’s final part:

[T]he Pigoon in question flew like the wind. The telling was complicated by the fact that Toby could not pronounce the flying Pigoon’s name in any way that resembled the grunt-heavy original. [...] The children made up a game in which one of them played the heroic Pigoon flying like the wind, wearing a determined expression, and a smaller one played Snowman-the-Jimmy, also with a determined expression, clinging on its back. *Her* back. *The Pigoons were not objects. She had to get that right. It was only respectful.*<sup>41</sup>

By analyzing passages in which animal characters speak, express their thoughts, or either reveal or hide their agency, students’ further sharpen their critical reading skills.

Going beyond the text itself, such examinations invite students to reflect on the forced passivity to which consumer culture condemns most cows, pigs, or chickens. Their representations outside of literature – in newspaper articles, agricultural manuals, advertising, etc. – often depict them as mere commodities. Accordingly, the term “livestock” literally describes them as “stock” that is “alive.” When teaching HAS, this can be used to invite students to contemplate their own habits of representing animals in their everyday speech: Do they, for example, tend to anthropomorphize their pets or other animals? Do

37 Margaret Atwood: *MaddAddam*. London / New York: Bloomsbury 2013, p. 424.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 450.

39 Atwood: *Oryx*, p. 25.

40 Margaret Atwood: *The Year of the Flood*. New York: Doubleday 2009, p. 65.

41 Atwood: *MaddAddam*, pp. 426–427 (emphasis added).

they speak of pork or pigs, veal or lambs, cattle or cows? And do they use these nouns in connection with active or passive verb constructions? After experiencing the impact of narrative forms in the novel, students are thus invited to critically reflect upon cultural filters and categories of species such as livestock, pet, or vermin, and to deconstruct them along the way.<sup>42</sup> It has been argued that such learning processes could change students' perception of animals in the long term.<sup>43</sup> Whereas these shifts are directed at acknowledging the individuality and autonomy of living nonhuman animals, the next example focuses more strongly on students' perceptions of human-animal relations.

#### 4. Domesticating humans through vegetal eyes in Sue Burke's *Semiosis* (2018)

I wanted more service animals so that the city could prosper, so that someday we could go to the stars. Instead, I could not control the situation. I failed my animals and myself.<sup>44</sup>

Sue Burke's *Semiosis* (2018) takes the perspective of plants on an alien planet, describing humans as particularly useful "service animals" within a multi-species society. While the vegetal narrator<sup>45</sup> Stevland considers Fippocats,<sup>46</sup> Fippolions,<sup>47</sup> Glassmakers,<sup>48</sup> and Pacifists<sup>49</sup> to be diversely gifted at tending

42 Kompatscher: Literary, p.304; see also: Miriam Lind (ed.): *Mensch – Tier – Maschine: Sprachliche Praktiken an und jenseits der Außengrenze des Humanen*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2022. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839453131> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

43 Aaron M. Moe: The Cultural Work of Literature in a Multispecies World. In: Suzanne Rice / A. G. Rud (eds): *The Educational Significance of Human and Non-Human Animal Interactions: Blurring the Species Line*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2016, pp. 133–150, here p. 144. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137505255\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137505255_9) (accessed: January 24, 2022).

44 Sue Burke: *Semiosis*. London: Harper Voyager 2018, pp. 299–300.

45 See Erin James: What the Plant Says: Plant Narrators and the Ecosocial Imaginary. In: Monica Gagliano / John C. Ryan / Patricia Vieira (eds): *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*. U of Minnesota P 2017, pp. 253–272.

46 Fippocats are described as easily tamed and playful creatures who remind of hybrids between rabbits and cats.

47 Fippolions are related to the Fippocats, but due to their horse-like size, these collaborating creatures are treated with caution.

48 The Glassmakers are a native alien species on the planet Pax.

49 The humans who fled from Earth committed themselves to living in harmony with the alien ecosystem, hence labeling themselves as Pacifists.

to his and several other plants' needs, he concludes that they are all "only animals" in need of domestication.<sup>50</sup> The author thus not only reverses hierarchies between humans and plants but also dissolves – at least in the passages narrated by Stevland – human-animal distinctions, hence facilitating a powerful thought experiment. Strictly speaking, the novel even reconfigures *inter-* into *intra-*species relationships as animal-like creatures, humans, and aliens are all referred to as "animals" by the plants. Other passages are narrated by humans and leave species boundaries more intact, but most of the characters still seek symbiotic relationships with the other members of the collective.<sup>51</sup> Eco-pedagogical approaches call for learning processes to foster feelings of responsibility and relatability to the more-than-human world to ensure the continuing well-being of humans and the entire planet.<sup>52</sup> *Semiosis* can be understood as a challenge to the anthropocentric premises of most current realizations of both human-animal encounters and ecosystem management to an extent that demolishes human-animal binaries.<sup>53</sup> Staging a nonhuman, first-person narrator is an effective narrative strategy to draw readers in.<sup>54</sup> Nonhuman narrators encourage readers to step into a nonhuman's paws, hooves, or into a bamboo stem, as is the case here, while immersing themselves in the novel. This can provide them with both an outsider's perspective on humanity as well as with an insider's perspective on

50 Burke: *Semiosis*, pp. 123, 247.

51 Applying Donna Haraway's theoretical concepts of entangled, co-shaping relationships in what she calls "naturecultures" or companion species relations lends itself to more advanced analyses. See Donna Haraway: *How Like a Leaf*. New York: Routledge 2000. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315022888> (accessed: January 24, 2022); idem: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago / Bristol: Prickly Paradigm 2003.

52 Richard Kahn: *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement*. New York: Lang 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-012-9267-7> (accessed: January 24, 2022); see also the approach toward "interspecies education": Julie Andrzejewski / Helena Pedersen / Freeman Wicklund: Interspecies Education for Humans, Animals, and the Earth. In: Julie Andrzejewski / Marta Baltodano / Linda Symcox (eds): *Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education*. London: Routledge 2009, pp. 136–154. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203879429-16> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

53 See further examples in Vint: *Animal*, ch. 6 and 7.

54 Alternatively, texts can be narrated in the third person while being perceived through a nonhuman focalizer, or they can focus on the narration or perceptions of humans and merely have nonhumans appear in the story, as is the case in Atwood's trilogy. See also Frederike Middelhoff: *Literarische Autozoographien: Figurationen des autobiographischen Tieres im letzten 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart: Metzler 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05512-5> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

nonhuman experientiality.<sup>55</sup> Notwithstanding such narrators' obvious shortcomings in terms of portraying any accurate *what-is-it-likeness*<sup>56</sup> of nonhuman experience, such reading experiences create emotional links between human readers and nonhuman narrators.<sup>57</sup> Stevland's vegetal perspective on the human settlers is rendered possible by the SF novum – the specific novelty on which the construction of the SF world depends<sup>58</sup> – according to which these alien plants possess central nervous systems that resemble human ones. Thus, by adding innovative variants to a long literary history of nonhuman narrators and focalizers, SF novels are increasingly portraying their storyworlds through unfamiliar eyes.<sup>59</sup>

Reflecting on the concept of domestication is a way to connect this formal reading with more contextual analysis. Domestication processes can be regarded as one of the roots of exploitative human-animal relationships, which means that it seems essential to explore them when teaching HAS. The novel sheds light on such processes from two sides: firstly, despite the aforementioned symbiotic and non-exploitative approach, the narrative repeatedly reveals a lack of innocence in each species' motivations and acts.<sup>60</sup> As

55 See Lars Bernaerts / Marco Caracciolo / Luc Herman / Bart Vervaeck: The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators. In: *Narrative* 22:1 (2014), pp. 68–93. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2014.0002> (accessed: January 24, 2022); Margo DeMello (ed.): *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*. New York / London: Routledge 2012. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203085967> (accessed: January 24, 2022); David Herman: Animal Autobiography; Or, Narration Beyond the Human. In: *Humanities* 5:82 (2016), pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h5040082> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

56 See David Herman: *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT 2013. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9547.001.0001> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

57 According to Andrea Klatt, teaching texts which attribute language capacities to non-human animals helps to acknowledge them as members of the ethical community (Andrea Klatt: Can the Animal Speak? Sprechende "Tiere" in literarischen Texten. In: Hayer / Schröder (eds): *Tierethik*, pp. 231–246. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839442593-013> (accessed: January 24, 2022)).

58 See Darko Suvin / Gerry Canavan: *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* [1979]. Oxford: Lang 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3507501> (accessed: January 24, 2022), qtd. in McHale: *Science Fiction*, p. 16.

59 See, for example, the bird-quid-human hybrid focalizer in Jeff VanderMeer's *The Strange Bird* (New York: MCD X Fsg Originals 2017) or the postanimal narrator of Adam Roberts' *Bête* (London: Gollancz 2014), analyzed in Liza B. Bauer: "Four Legs in the Evening": Post-animal Narration in Adam Roberts' *Bête* (2014). In: *SubStance* 50:3 (2021): Ecocriticism & Narrative Form, pp. 53–73. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2021.0028> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

60 Barbara Noske refers to a well-known example of ant societies domesticating aphids, a mutualistic relationship. See Noske's take on symbiotic or mutualistic domestication practices in: *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* [1989]. Montreal / New York: Black Rose



the Rainbow Bamboo (Stevland) is by far the most intelligent plant on the planet, he manages to communicate with the human settlers from Earth and makes them believe they are forming an alliance of equals. In fact, the humans become highly efficient, obedient laborers by eating different varieties of Stevland's hallucinogenic fruit and farm the land in line with the ecosystem that is entirely managed by the bamboo:

Meanwhile, I contact the pineapples. They are intelligent but stubborn. The agreement I brokered long ago between them and the humans was simple. The pineapples produce terminal tuft fruit in the spring and fall. Spring fruit must be replanted by the humans. Fall fruit may be harvested. Humans provide protection, cultivation, and labor. The pineapples add flavors and nutrients to fall fruits in exchange. But now their fruit is being harvested even though it is spring, and they are furious. *I suggest drugging the spring fruit [...].*<sup>61</sup>

Similar tactics are applied by the humans as well, who do not always remain true to the pacifist ideals to which they have committed themselves. Due to the novel's polyphonous form, which provides numerous instances of human first-person narration alongside Stevland's telling of the story, students can easily adopt these perspectives. They are thus invited to both imagine the reversal of domesticating processes and to critically reflect on the underlying mechanisms of the real-world domestication of animals and plants. Secondly, the novel exemplifies the reciprocity inherent in this facet of human-animal relationality by exemplifying how human and nonhuman agents actively co-shape one another in such encounters. In collaboration with "his" human service animals, Stevland initiates a second process of domestication – this time directed at the native aliens, the Glassmakers:

Lentils [...] are hapless plants that need assistance to determine the best way to arrange their leaves to gather sunlight. "Help me." "Prune me," the trees beg. Glassmakers are ignoring the lentils, although their buds and twigs are edible, as humans and scorpions know. I wish it were different.<sup>62</sup>

1997, pp. 1–21, here pp. 3, 10. Haraway famously addresses the inability to fully overcome violence in multispecies co-flourishing: "There is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace." (Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 2007, p. 295.)

61 Burke: *Semiosis*, p. 244 (emphasis added).

62 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

Whereas the other plants want Stevland to kill these unhelpful “pests,” Stevland convinces the pineapples, locustwoods, etc., that the Glassmakers will be of value once they are domesticated and taught “how to make contracts.”<sup>63</sup> Several human-narrated passages reveal that they mistake themselves to be superior, domesticating subjects who rely on Stevland’s help as well as the help of the other animals to domesticate the Glassmakers: “They wouldn’t care, and besides, children and [Fippo]kats were waiting to dance for them. Our message couldn’t be clearer: *We want to be your friends, so get domesticated.* And their answer was clear: *Drop dead.*”<sup>64</sup> Burke’s novel thus imagines a world in which humans are not only domesticating but simultaneously domesticated subjects – the latter quite tellingly taking place without their knowledge. This shift in perspective points out the difference between an ecocentric and an anthropocentric conception of domestication: the former views domestication as the starting point of a reciprocal relationship, whereas the latter sees domestication as something that is initiated in *human* society alone. The second understanding, which *Semiosis* addresses critically, sets domesticating human subjects in opposition to domesticated animal objects. Recognizing reciprocity in domestication can teach students that not only domesticated animals but also plants are subjective beings that co-shape these processes alongside humans and deserve their respect.

## 5. Blurring divides between anthropomorphized animals in Gene Stone and Jon Doyle’s *The Awareness* (2014)

Moreover, learning how to read and evaluate anthropomorphic animal representations can benefit students’ understanding of the reciprocal dynamics at work in human-animal relationships in another way.<sup>65</sup> Whether as a research strategy or a literary motif, attributing human-like emotions, behaviors, or motivations to nonhuman animals suggests a relatability or likeness between human and nonhuman animals, and thus bridges perceptual and conceptual gulfs.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, however, it imposes human frameworks on the

63 Burke: *Semiosis*, pp. 144–245.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

65 The term and concept lead back to ethological research in biology, particularly to Frans de Waal: Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial: Consistency in Our Thinking About Humans and Other Animals. In: *Philosophical Topics* 27:1 (1999), pp. 255–280.

66 See Roman Bartosch: Storying Creaturely Life. In: *Idem / Dominik Ohrem* (eds): *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide: Creaturely Lives in Literature and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2017, pp. 153–66, here p. 157. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-93437-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-93437-9_8)

latter. In terms of representations of livestock animals, it becomes particularly relevant that, while an anthropomorphized pig in a slaughterhouse might trigger an inconvenient empathetic reaction in readers, it simultaneously provides an easy way out of this sensation as it stresses the fictionality of the suffering animal. Strictly speaking, language-based representations of nonhuman animals in and outside of literature cannot *not* anthropomorphize; students of HAS must therefore learn how to assess these anthropomorphic forms. They can do so by searching for the “real” animals behind the human-made symbols by taking their material traces seriously into account.<sup>67</sup> For example, comparisons drawn between the portrayed animal behavior and factual accounts from animal research or the students’ own animal observations help to determine whether a text remains in line with these factual accounts or not.<sup>68</sup> Besides learning to respect the animals’ perspectives, they learn to critically assess textual animal representation in and outside of literature, ethological studies, for example, carry an anthropocentric bias as well.

In order to evaluate textual anthropomorphization, LAS scholars have developed various strategies: Kari Weil’s critical anthropomorphism in particular has prevailed among various sub-categories seeking to differentiate between anthropomorphic forms that encourage empathy for nonhuman animals and others that lead to their Disneyfication.<sup>69</sup> The key to the ethically responsible and attentive representation of animals seems to be

remind[ing] the reader of the real animals that hover outside the human-created text, both inviting the reader to identify with the nonhuman animal as a fellow living being and reminding him or her of the inevitable differences between humans and other species,

(accessed: January 24, 2022); see also Vinciane Despret: *What Would the Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, transl. from the French by Brett Buchanan. Minneapolis / London: U of Minnesota P 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816692378.001.0001> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

67 Björn Hayer, for example, demonstrates how animal fables can invite critical reflections on speciesism through a therio-centric reading practice. See: Björn Hayer: Gegen den Strich gelesen: Gorthold Ephraim Lessings Fabeln aus Sicht der Literary Animal Studies. In: Idem / Schröder (eds): *Tierethik*, pp. 281–291, here p. 283. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14361/9783839442593-016> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

68 See Kompatscher: *Literary*, p. 299.

69 Bartosch: *Storying*, p. 154; Kari Weil: *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* New York: Columbia UP 2012, p. 20.

as Karla Armbruster puts it.<sup>70</sup> By examining how closely an animal text adheres to human frameworks, students can gain an understanding of these nuances.

Narratologist David Herman has developed a useful, open-ended continuum, which seeks to reflect degrees of anthropocentrism in animal representations.<sup>71</sup> At the more anthropocentric end, he places the animal allegory (human figures being narrated through animal forms<sup>72</sup>), while he labels the least anthropocentric category as *Umwelt* modeling<sup>73</sup> – finely-grained representations of the respective real animal’s lifeworld.<sup>74</sup> In his human-source-animal-target projections (HSAT), human behavior or experientiality is transferred onto animal representations, as, for instance, in the human-like sentimentalities expressed by the horse narrator in *Black Beauty*. In contrast, animal-source-human-target projections (ASHT) apply the lifeworlds of non-human animals to representations of *humans*, as the oppressed and abused humans in Dietmar Dath’s *Die Abschaffung der Arten*<sup>75</sup> exemplify. Herman emphasizes that most texts oscillate between these points of orientation to avoid static categorizations.<sup>76</sup>

In Gene Stone und Jon Doyle’s *The Awareness* (2014), anthropomorphization not only serves as an overarching theme but allows the entire plot to unfold. As hinted at in the introduction, all animals on this fictional planet Earth suddenly gain human-like consciousness as well as the capacity to speak – how exactly this SF novum is facilitated remains opaque. In a climactic scene, Pig 323 goes about exploring the home of a farming family and wishes that she was human:

70 Karla Armbruster: What Do We Want from Talking Animals? Reflections on Literary Representations of Animal Voices and Minds. In: DeMello (ed.): *Speaking for Animals*, pp. 17–35.

71 David Herman: *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2018, pp. 139–141. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190850401.001.0001> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

72 E.g., Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. New York: Pantheon / Random House 1973.

73 Herman refers to Jakob von Uexküll’s concept of *Umwelt* here, which was coined in *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* [1909]. Berlin / Heidelberg: Springer 2014.

74 E.g., Virginia Woolf: *Flush: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt 1933; or Laline Paull: *The Bees*. New York: HarperCollins 2014.

75 Dietmar Dath: *Die Abschaffung der Arten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2008.

76 Herman: *Narratology*, p. 140.

In her mind, babies were crying. She could hear them in the rooms down the hall. “They must be hungry,” a pig said to her. [...] “Father will be home soon, child,” 323 said to the boy pig. [...] “Can you believe she is getting married?” 323 said, stifling a cry. [...] “Oh I know. But you have to let me be a silly old pig, with silly old emotions.” The young female pig came out of her old room with the knowing glance of a full-grown animal. [...] 323 opened her eyes and studied herself. A wave of silliness passed over her. The fantasies drifted away, but they left something within. [...] How must it feel then to rest under blankets after the day’s toil?<sup>77</sup>

While this embedded narration mainly makes use of Herman’s HSAT projections, a meta-reflective doubling of this anthropomorphic practice occurs: as Pig 323 imagines being an even more thoroughly anthropomorphized version of herself, species boundaries are blurred to the point that it becomes unclear whether boy pig, silly old pig, father, child, full-grown animal, etc. are zoomorphic representations of humans or doubly anthropomorphized replicas of Pig 323.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, Herman’s HSAT projection entails concurrent ASHT projections here, revealing that anthropomorphic animal representation functions both ways and leaves neither the “animal” nor the “human” entirely intact in the process.<sup>79</sup>

If humans depend on anthropomorphic frameworks in their attempts to understand animal behavior, the irreducible otherness of animal experience must be acknowledged in respectful interpretations. Children’s stories in particular, like A. A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh*, tend to cause real animals to vanish from sight in their intensively anthropomorphic animal characters. In fact, this story imagines Piglet, Pooh Bear, and Eeyore in the shapes of stuffed animals, which distances them even further from the material creatures they represent.<sup>80</sup> Such texts may contribute to the perception of animals

77 Stone / Doyle: *The Awareness*, pp. 112–113.

78 Zoomorphization can be understood as the opposite of anthropomorphization as in this practice, animal attributes are transferred onto human characters. See Nanay Bence: Zoomorphism. In: *Erkenntnis* (2018). <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10670-018-0099-0> (accessed: January 13, 2021); see also Herman’s concept of “zoomorphic projections,” on which he elaborates in his introduction to *Multispecies Storyworlds in Graphic Narratives*. London / New York: Bloomsbury 2017, pp. 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350015340> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

79 See also Bartosch: *Storying*, pp. 157–158.

80 The stuffed animal shapes simultaneously emphasize the characters’ fictionality and human origin, which mitigates their intensive anthropomorphisation once again. However, this might not play much of a role in a child reader’s experience of the story.

as mere templates, symbols, or metaphors – empty and passive containers for human meaning-making – despite being material, living, thinking beings themselves. It thus seems urgent that humans learn to open themselves “to touch and be[ing] touched” by these unknowable “others” respectfully, so that human-animal bonds can be conceived of in ways that enable peaceful coexistence.<sup>81</sup> The degrees of anthropomorphic animal portrayal in SF texts – and other literary genres, for that matter – reveal that the multiple, individual differences and similarities between human and nonhuman animal species demand critical attention.<sup>82</sup> Examining how these differences and similarities find their way into literary representations and in turn inform readers’ understanding of real animal species can thus counteract conceptions of a cemented human-animal divide.

## **6. Learning to stretch the imagination**

Both in theory and practice, human-animal relationships are the result of reciprocal processes of negotiation between living and acting, human and nonhuman, subjective beings. Learning how to acknowledge, engage with, and talk about the nonhuman side of these co-shaping dynamics in an attentive and respectful manner seems to be a core goal of THAS. Physical encounters with living nonhuman animals might automatically lead students to recognize there is “someone” reaching out to us with his or her nuzzle, breathing us in, watching us through eyes that seem full of curiosity. In contrast, the potential of literature – SF texts particularly – lies in the way that it can detach readers from such real-world experience and encourage experimental thinking: What if these breathing beings started talking, what would they have to say? What if chickens, cows, or pigs had the chance to exist for their own ends? As humans will never truly know what is happening in the animals’ minds, immersing themselves in fictional worlds to practice multispecies living does not seem too far removed from reality. SF explores this very nexus between the impossible yet conceivable, thus providing students’ imaginations with instructive exercises.

81 Weil: *Thinking*, p.20.

82 See Jacques Derrida: The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow). In: *Critical Inquiry* 28:2 (2002), pp.369–418.

By involving “real” animals indirectly, these SF scenarios highlight the constructed nature of “animals” as they appear in human imaginations. This two-dimensional approach to THAS complements formal textual analyses with thematic and ethical reflections on human-animal relations in practice. Following this approach, Atwood’s re-distribution of animal agency demonstrates that the passivity to which most real animals are condemned in human societies is not irrevocable. Likewise, Burke’s outsider’s perspective on domestication processes reveals that hierarchical conceptions of real human-animal relationships are not immutable. The post-anthropocentric examination of Stone and Doyle’s anthropomorphic animal representations gradually reveals that the presumed human-animal divide is not unshakable. Yet these examples represent merely a fraction of what literary texts can do. Some scholars convincingly argue that the well-being of both human and nonhuman animals depends on theoretically and practically expanding students’ understanding of their entanglements with the more-than-human world.<sup>83</sup> In this multifaceted task of THAS, encouraging students to reflect on alternatives to animal exploitation and commodification in experimental SF storyworlds is a small but perhaps significant step.

83 Andrzejewski / Pedersen / Wicklund: *Interspecies Education*, p. 136.