

**UNIwersYTET RZESZOWSKI**  
Wydział Filologiczny



Dyscyplina: literaturoznawstwo

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**Reprezentacje zwierząt we współczesnych anglojęzycznych  
powieściach kanadyjskich**

[Representation of Animals in Selected Contemporary Canadian Novels in English]

Rozprawa doktorska  
napisana pod kierunkiem  
prof. dr hab. Oksany Weretiuk

Rzeszów 2025

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Oksana Weretiuk, whose mentorship, guidance, and patience have been invaluable over the years.

This dissertation was supported by the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Participation in the Animal Studies Summer Institute 2023 and 2024 significantly enhanced my understanding of the interdisciplinary character of animal studies and its critical role in making the world more suitable for other-than-human beings.

This dissertation turned out to be a challenging and intricate journey, yet thanks to the invaluable support of Professor Jane Desmond, and Professor Kim Marra, I was able to find my way through the complexities of animal studies.

I am thankful to the staff of the Rzeszów University Doctoral School for their understanding and help throughout my project. I greatly appreciate the support in the form of a STER mobility grant, offered by the Rzeszów University Doctoral School, which allowed me to pursue a month-long research and training internship at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2024.

I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the PROM scholarship exchange, which enabled my scholarly visit to the Canadian Studies Centre at Masaryk University in Brno in 2022. This two-week stay made a considerable contribution to gathering materials for this doctoral thesis, and the exchange of academic interests with Dr. Martina Horáková and Dr. Denisa Krásná proved to be both inspiring and helpful.

I would also like to thank my husband, Szymon, for enduring my long journey through the writing of this dissertation; my family and friends, who have been by my side for years, for their patience despite my constant lack of time; and the friends I met during the work on this thesis, for their invaluable support and the ongoing exchange of academic experiences. I am also grateful for the support of many people not mentioned here by name. Throughout the writing process, I was accompanied by my cats, Zora and Bystra, who were always willing to listen to my doubts and concerns.

## Introduction

“Sentient Persons”<sup>1</sup> by Michalina W. Klasik was exhibited in December 2023 at Minus1.artspace Gallery in Katowice. The installation consisted of a table with a white cloth and place cards, on which the artist wrote species names followed by the phrase “sentient person,” using soil-based paint. A fragment from the *Universal Declaration of Animal Rights*, “All animals are born with an equal claim on life and the same rights to existence,” was displayed on the wall. Through these minimalist tools the artist inverted the roles and invited animals to the table as equals during this particularly significant time of year, marked by Christmas.

Justifications for human domination over animals almost always rely on comparing human and animal abilities and traits. We humans are the species with language, with rationality, with complex emotions, with two legs and opposable thumbs. Animals lack these traits and abilities and therefore exist outside of our moral responsibility, which means we can dominate and use them. But isn't it ableist to devalue animals because of what abilities they do or do not have? (Taylor 2017, 64)

The references to Klasik's bitter artwork and Taylor's pragmatic book sketch a situation in which speaking about animals demands constant reminders of their subjectivity. Yet this subjectivity is paradoxically acknowledged only through comparisons to human traits, which are treated as benchmarks of sentience and rationality. Literature is one of the fundamental means of expression, which can serve to explore this tension. By shaping worldviews, it has the power to support philosophical reflection. One of the essential features of narrative, particularly in the form of speculative fiction, lies, as Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz argue in its ability to encourage critical thinking in more engaging ways than abstract philosophical experiments (2015, 60–61). Although the nature of literature, as a rule, precludes nonhuman animals from aware participation in creating texts, there are

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation is available on Michalina W. Klasik's personal website: [michalinawklasik.com/sentient-persons](http://michalinawklasik.com/sentient-persons).

innumerable ways in which they might influence written forms of expression—directly, indirectly, or by their absence. In order to recognise the whole spectrum, there is an urgent need to employ a perspective that reaches beyond the traditionally settled frames and allows re-reading literary texts in a more empathetic and attentive way.

The following dissertation focuses on the representations of nonhuman characters in selected contemporary Canadian novels in English through the lens of animal studies. My aim is to present diverse methods of portraying animals in literary texts, paying special attention to nonhuman particularity that might serve as a tool for blurring the traditionally enforced human-nonhuman borders. The analysis covers physical and discursive levels, such as plot, characters, narrators and narration, as well as stylistic devices used to recreate nonhuman actors and their language. Furthermore, juxtaposing scientific facts with the literary representations, frequently burdened by anthropomorphism and symbolism, challenges cultural stereotypes about nonhumans. In my dissertation, I wish to demonstrate, as Derrida claims, that there is not a single border between humans and nonhumans but instead multiple lines with an aim to enforce human particularity.

As the field of animal studies has developed in close connection to postcolonial studies, feminism, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, in Chapter 1, I aim to demonstrate the possible intersections of these fields, as well as their common roots. I also discuss philosophical approaches towards animals, which strongly influence their representations in literature. Finally, in subchapter 1.6, I survey selected language strategies for presenting animals, including narration and its components, as well as anthropomorphism and its limitations, in relation to culturally rooted systems of representation and the structure of language in conveying nonhuman mentality. The theoretical apparatus developed in Chapter 1 is not limited to the human perception that values nonhumans by comparing them to humans. I perceive the interdisciplinary field of animal studies as a tool that helps deconstruct human exceptionalism, comprehend the oppression of nonhumans, and recognise unnecessary divisions.

My decision to focus on selected Canadian novels in English as primary sources is motivated by the need to embed the research within a historical context. In my non-exhaustive overview of the historical background in Chapter 2, I concentrate on the

narratives of the first European settlers, in search of the roots of *animal story*—a distinctive Canadian genre. Since their arrival, the newcomers were heavily exposed to the power of nature; efforts to settle down against its influence are reflected in their literary texts. Apart from the realistic depictions of nature, they also use allegorical and symbolic figures, typical of English Romanticism. Initially, animal characters were occupying marginal positions within their texts; as the narratives became more complex, however, the nonhuman characters acquired greater visibility. No earlier than at the end of the nineteenth century, several authors employed nonhumans as key characters in their novels and short stories, giving rise to the animal story genre. This chapter traces the development of representations of the nonhuman world in the first settlers' literary texts, leading up to the point at which the animal story appear and are analysed through a critical lens.

The central analytical part of the dissertation is organised into four thematic chapters. Chapter 3 focuses on Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* (2009) and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* (2013). I examine distinctive forms of nonhuman narration and the language used by the authors to represent nonhuman intellectual capacity. These novels are discussed in Chapter 4 together with Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, with particular attention to its opening volume, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), in the context of animal exploitation in medical research and the transgression of genetic boundaries between humans and nonhumans. The analysis in Chapter 5 turns to Alissa York's *Fauna* (2010) and Cary Fagan's *The Animals* (2022), which contribute to the discussion of human–nonhuman communities and the concept of zoopolis. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the second volume of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Year of the Flood* (2009), alongside Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* (1998), to consider bees as a collectivity and to examine their relationship with their caretakers. Among these novels, only the *MaddAddam* trilogy has been translated into Polish so far.

The research nature of these chapters requires a more detailed discussion. In Chapter 3, the modes of nonhuman narration are examined through a close reading of Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*. Apart from the human perspective, the first novel also employs a first-person tortoise narration. The latter, on the other hand, attempts to make the collective primate narrator credible by imagining a

nonhuman language that is based on distorted structures of the human communication system. The core of the methodological approach in this section, primarily informed by Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* and Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, is complemented with several critical texts on the role of anthropomorphism, such as Anna Barcz's *Animal Narratives and Culture: Vulnerable Realism* and Hank Davies's "Animal Cognition Versus Animal Thinking: The Anthropomorphic Error." I also reach for scientific insights on the language and cognitive experiments conducted on primates. This chapter was converted into an article and published in the *Word and Text* journal.

The fragmented plot of *Come, Thou Tortoise* presents events out of chronological order, intertwining human and nonhuman narration. The reader gets to know Audrey, the human protagonist, when she begins a journey to her hometown because of her father's accident. The story of Winnifred, the tortoise, appears in the novel simultaneously with Audrey's tale. The woman keeps Winnifred after ending the relationship with her partner; what makes the tortoise's history even more prominent is the fact that he had inherited the animal from the previous tenant of the flat where he lived. Winnifred's utterances are highly anthropomorphised and shaped in such a way as to appear more erudite than Audrey's. The tortoise possesses self-awareness, a certain sense of humour, elementary knowledge about the world, as well as a desire to describe things according to her own logic. Not only does she comment on the current situation around her, but she also offers an insight into her past and Audrey's past. The reader is the only recipient of the tortoise's utterances—no character is able to hear her, while she perfectly comprehends human speech and texts. However, knowledge of Winnifred's species requirements allows the keeper to take individual care of her, even without direct communication.

Colin McAdam's novel, *A Beautiful Truth*, is set in the 1970s, when the growing interest in primate language abilities was noted. It starts with the story of Looee, a baby chimpanzee, who is adopted by Judy and Walt. The couple, unable to have children of their own, use the animal to fill the emotional void in their lives. Bringing Looee up as their child, they face the hardship of keeping the ape at home. Even though most of the chimpanzee's needs appear to be satisfied, interspecies differences ultimately hinder Looee's integration with humans;

once he attacks humans, he is expelled and transferred to a medical laboratory. It is the second chapter that marks the beginning of a story about chimpanzees living at the Girdish Institute in Florida, whose social life is juxtaposed with vain attempts to blend Looee into human society. Both threads draw together when Looee, after being exploited in a medical laboratory, finally joins the group of chimpanzees at the Girdish Institute. The voice of collective nonhuman narration, which does not emerge directly, draws attention to the fact that nonhumans subjected to research are deprived of their identities. It also reinforces the realistic mode of the novel, since chimpanzees live in communities with a complex hierarchy. Applying collective narration emphasises the natural bond between individuals.

The presented novels demonstrate contrasting modes of nonhuman narration. Although their authors rely on different techniques to grant nonhumans a voice, they both highlight the relevance of animal particularity and the recognition of nonhuman subjectivity. As a tortoise narrator, Winnifred is anthropomorphised to such an extent that her utterances, reflections, and humour display little linguistic specificity; the human and nonhuman narrations differ in terms of tone and range of vocabulary. Winnifred's perspective serves as a tool that provides the reader with a different or broader perspective on current and past events. The tortoise, passing from one keeper to another, seems to be entirely dependent on human actions. It should be noted, however, that Audrey's actions are motivated by Winnifred's needs, such as vulnerability to low temperatures. The nonhuman voices proposed by McAdam differ considerably from the human narration, especially as they seem to be based on real experiments on the apes' ability to use American Sign Language. The so-called nonhuman collective narrator concentrates on species particularity, thus making the extraction of an individual perspective nearly impossible. Nonetheless, such a mode of narration reaches a higher level of reliability, in which nonhuman subjectivity is more apparent. The narrative technique employed by McAdam adopts a nonhuman-oriented perspective; the third-person narration, focalised through chimpanzees, can be understood as a collective narrator that represents the apes living in the research centre.

Chapter 4 examines literary representations of animals in the context of science. This section opens with a discussion of genetically modified nonhumans in Margaret Atwood's

science-fiction trilogy *MaddAddam*. With particular emphasis on the first volume, *Oryx and Crake*, I focus on the case of pigoons—a laboratory-bred species whose genome combines pig and human genes. I delve into the subject of the physical and discursive borders between humans and nonhumans, and how they affect the image of pigoons. Then, I proceed to the investigation of laboratory animals, referring again to Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*, as both novels, apart from the compelling cases of nonhuman narration, offer meaningful contexts for elaboration on laboratory experiments on animals. My aim is to examine issues related to the physical and mental barriers that separate animals and humans, the ethics of scientific research, and the reception of research by both scientists and individuals outside the field. To achieve this goal, I refer to the following critical studies: Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, Margo DeMello's *Animals and Society. An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*, Lynda Birke's 'Exploring the Boundaries: Feminism, Animals, and Science', as well as publications on the demand for animals in research. I also employ a psychological perspective, which allows me to investigate the problem of attitudes towards exploiting animals for scientific purposes. The methodological approach in this chapter is developed within the scope of posthumanism that rejects the idea of unlimited human supremacy over the world and, as a result, the instrumental treatment of nonhumans.

The protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy, also known as Snowman, struggles to survive in a post-apocalyptic world; after the so-called Waterless Flood—the pandemic which annihilated human beings almost completely—he is convinced that he is the last of his kind. He lives in the ruins of civilisation, collecting the remaining food and everyday items. Snowman's flashbacks provide the reader with insights into the world from before the pandemic. It was a period of relentless exploitation of natural resources that accelerated climate change, resulting in a deepening of environmental injustice. Profit-oriented corporations overtook traditional governments, and as a result, social and political structures experienced a profound transformation. Since the process unfolded gradually and the police could no longer maintain order, the majority of people accepted it. It soon became apparent that corporations, such as CorpSeCorps, established global hegemony;

they were capable of interfering in every aspect of the citizens' lives, from weapon possession to fertility (controlled by dietary supplements).

The social structure before the apocalypse was designed to emphasise human exceptionalism, especially intellectual capacities. The system imposed specific rules that enforced borders between nonhumans and humans in a surreptitious yet effective way. Physical barriers allowed the scientists to work uninterruptedly, and as a result, their achievements contributed to reinforcing the discursive line between humans and nonhumans. Isolated from nonhuman beings in their daily lives, humans were unable to develop empathy, and this deficiency visibly affected their relationship with other beings, both in laboratories and outside of them. On the other hand, they contributed to the literal crossing of this barrier that took place at the moment of combining the genomes of pigs and humans. A very unique part of the human body, the neocortical tissue, was added to the pigs' genome, hence humans and nonhumans became much more similar to each other from a genetic point of view.

Apart from Winnifred's story, the novel *Come, Thou Tortoise* touches on the issue of laboratory mice, who, by definition, are forced to serve humanity and sentenced to suffering. Although this is not a central thread of the story, it strongly influences the human protagonist's life. As a child, Audrey visited her father at work, where she could observe experiments involving mice, such as the Forced Swimming Test. It was, in fact, a struggle for life: the animals were placed in the water in containers whose high rims made escape impossible; the mice's only chance to survive was swimming to keep their heads above the water. Using the mice's fundamental instincts, Audrey's father tried to prove his theory that it was possible to train the cells in order to prolong their youth. Similarly, in *A Beautiful Truth*, the tests to which Looee is subjected after being taken from his first family are invasive: for instance, some apes were infected with HIV. The narrative focused on Looee highlights the cruelty of the procedures and the animals' suffering and pain. On the contrary, the laboratory space of the Girdish Institute seems to be adapted to carry out ethological research—the animals, although kept in captivity, are able to express their natural behaviour.

The countless cases of nonhumans' mistreatment, which have their roots in speciesism, are imperceptible or ignored in many industries. Placing human well-being above that of nonhumans is justified in the name of the "greater good." Advocates of animal experimentation strive to demonstrate the indispensability of specific animal models for scientific research. Medical sciences are no exception; like other fields that rely on animal use, they frequently obscure acts of cruelty through neutral or technical terminology. Such scientific discourse employs specialised language that hinders human empathy and inhibits the formation of meaningful connections with the animal subjects of research.

The key objective of Chapter 5 is to examine the types of relationships formed between humans and nonhumans in human-dominated societies, referring to the underlying theoretical background offered by Margo DeMello in *Animals and Society*, Dona Haraway's concept of companion species, and Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's theory of zoopolis. Alissa York's *Fauna* and Cary Fagan's *The Animals*, employed in analysis in this chapter, provide entirely different fictional depictions of coexisting with nonhumans. Set in the suburbs of Toronto, Alissa York's novel tells a story of a group of people connected by their uneasy relationship with human society and, at the same time, exceptional empathy for nonhumans. A Wildlife Officer, Edal Jones, haunted by the flashbacks of wildlife crimes, struggles with a mental breakdown caused by her demanding work. One day, she observes a girl who collects wounded and dead birds. Following her, Edal discovers a wrecker's yard that serves as an animal sanctuary, where wounded wild animals receive help and care. It turns out that the girl she traces, Lily, escaped from home and also found relief among the inhabitants of this peculiar place. She established a unique bond with her companion, an enormous Bernese dog, Billy. The novel features several other human protagonists, such as Kate, a physical therapist for dogs; Stephen, a war veteran; and Guy, an animal shelter worker, juxtaposing them with an antagonist, the coyote pursuer Darius. Their stories become tightly interwoven; however, the continuity of the narrative is disrupted by the excerpts focused on the lives of wild nonhumans, such as raccoons, skunks, or squirrels—species that have adjusted to living in urbanised areas.

In his novel, Cary Fagan poses the question of whether wild animals can live in the city together with people. The story, presented through the lens of the main character, Dorn,

unfolds in a small tourist village where the inhabitants form a close-knit community. After quitting his architectural studies, Dorn started living off making miniature models of shops and other public buildings. One day, however, after realising that his next-door neighbour, Leev, has not left his home for some time, Dorn discovers that he lives with a wild wolf. It turns out that this situation is a part of the Wild Home Project—an experimental program arranged by the government aimed at introducing individuals of wild species into the homes of ordinary people. According to the principles, each inhabitant is entitled to apply for an animal licence that allows them to become a caretaker of a wild animal, such as a wolf, bear, otter, or mink. While the program is gaining in popularity, Dorn observes it sceptically, mainly when Leev is found dead with his throat ripped. The authorities seem to dismiss the idea of the wolf's involvement in this situation.

Chapter 6 investigates the problem of the representation of bees, putting together the eponymous *Apis mellifera* from Gail Anderson-Dargatz's novel, *A Recipe for Bees*, and those presented in Atwood's trilogy, particularly in *The Year of the Flood*. The collectiveness of bees marks the nature of the relationship between humans and bees – a swarm of bees is customarily perceived as a complete organism by humans. Developed in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, the concept of multitude reveals its democratic possibilities and potential in the embodiment of danger. Understanding bees as a collectiveness makes a starting point for examining the female (in most cases) characters' relationship with bees and analogies between the swarm and women's communities. Hence, apart from the references to entomological research, the methodological apparatus of this chapter involves an investigation into posthumanism and feminist studies, employing such texts as Tyson E. Lewis's "Swarm Intelligence: Rethinking the Multitude from within the Transversal Commons" and Lauren Wilcox's "Drones, Swarms and Becoming-Insect: Feminist utopias and Posthuman Politics."

Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* tells the story of Augusta, a woman whose life is marked by a difficult marriage and by social exclusion resulting from the stigma attached to her after rejection of widely accepted rules. Even her attempt at independence on her parents' farm fails to bring fulfilment, as her existence remains overshadowed by isolation and conflict with her daughter. Despite the fact that Augusta's involvement with beekeeping

is motivated by economic reasons, it reintroduces her into a form of collective social life. The traditional understanding of bees as a multitude or even a single organism can be associated with a model of a democratic community that stands in contrast to patriarchal structures. However, her dependence on bees as a source of income complicates their potential emancipation: she appropriates the bees' labour to restore her own social position. The conflict between exploiting and relating to animals reveals a more general tension in human–animal relations.

In Atwood's trilogy, before the *Waterless Flood*, *God's Gardeners* are depicted as deeply engaged in beekeeping. The insects live in symbiosis with humans, who provide them with a safe space to live so that they can contribute to plant cultivation. The Gardeners, who claim that the insects' goodwill is critical for cooperation, rely on bees for the production of medicines. Bees are understood as an organism composed of thousands of individuals; in order to interact with them, it is necessary to address their whole community. The Gardeners believe that bees expect their keeper to provide reports on the current state of affairs; it is further assumed that bees are attached to their caretaker and that a new person has to be introduced appropriately. Keepers devote time and energy to observing the bees' behaviour, while the bees are thought to sense changes in human conduct. Communication is not as fluent as among humans, but it is reciprocal enough to be described as a form of interspecies understanding. Importantly, only female members of the community can develop a close relationship with the bees: first, Pilar, who later passes this role on to Toby.

The selected novels present a broad spectrum of nonhuman figures: protagonists, narrators, animals depicted as individuals or groups, beings engaged in relationships that approximate equality with humans, as well as those entirely subordinated to human interests. The narratives also introduce liminal and wild animal species whose survival does not depend on direct contact with humans, yet that have learned to adapt to urbanised environments. Just as European settlers once colonised Canadian forests, these animals, often in subtle and unobtrusive ways, infiltrate human spaces and imaginations. The position they are assigned depends to some extent on individual and collective empathy, yet more often it is determined by legal structures and cultural frameworks.

My primary aim is to concentrate on diversity in the depiction of animals in literature rather than featuring authors of a particular origin or cultural background. Obtaining comprehensive examples of representations of nonhuman characters was a key factor behind the choice of the novels; hence, it is not possible to observe a plain inclination towards the subject of animals in the literary output of the authors whose texts were chosen for this dissertation. Their attitudes towards creating animal characters vary considerably, ranging from Alissa York, who declares a scientific interest in the nonhuman world, to Cary Fagan, who freely juggles the animal characters in his novel and, as he claims, abandons research on the subject (Fagan 2022, par.14). In an interview for Open Books, Colin McAdam respectfully admits that he wanted to write the entire novel from the chimpanzees' point of view but creating the language for such creation became an obstacle. Still, however, the apes' perspective was crucial for him (McAdam 2013, 3:20-4:20).

Despite the fact that Jessica Grant was not convinced of involving the tortoise as a narrator (Grant 2017, 2:40-2:46), this technique allowed her to achieve a "unique style of playing with language and narrative structure" that "sets the novel apart from the romantic realism of Newfoundland and Labrador's early literary canon"<sup>2</sup> (Marr 2017, 205). Born in 1972 in St. John's (Newfoundland), Grant holds a BA (Honours) from the University of Toronto, an MA from Memorial University of Newfoundland, and a PhD in English specialising in creative writing from the University of Calgary. Her short stories have appeared in various journals and anthologies; more importantly, she published the short story collection *Making Light of Tragedy* in 2004 and her novel *Come, Thou Tortoise* in 2009. As a creative writing instructor, she has worked at several institutions. *Come, Thou Tortoise* was enthusiastically received by critics<sup>3</sup> and readers as it "was short-listed for the 2010

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<sup>2</sup> Contemplating the connection between humans and landscape, the authors put emphasis on the natural beauty and harshness of the region. This movement sought to capture both the romantic ideals of nature and the realities faced by communities. Key representatives are E.J. Pratt, known for his poetry that captures the region's rugged beauty and human struggle, and A.J. McMurray, whose works explore local folklore and identity. Other notable figures include Bernice Morgan and Wayne Johnston, who raise themes of community and resilience.

<sup>3</sup> In her article, Gemma Marr highlights the complexity of Grant's novel as a narrative interwoven with queer themes, approaching the home space "as a means of contesting the heteronormative construction of home and family." She argues that "the rejection of the heteronormative family and the subsequent remapping of

Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book Award, was long-listed for CBC's Canada Reads 2011 competition, and won the Winterset Award (2009), the Amazon.ca First Novel Award (2009) and the Newfoundland and Labrador Downhome Fiction Award (2010)" (Moran 2013, para. 3).

Colin McAdam (born in 1971), the author of four internationally acclaimed novels, teaches creative writing at Humber Polytechnic. His third novel, *A Beautiful Truth*, won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize in 2013. His works have been nominated for such awards as the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor General's Literary Award. With a PhD in English from the University of Cambridge, McAdam has also contributed essays and memoirs to publications like *Harper's*, *Granta*, and *The Walrus*.

One of Canada's most celebrated novelists, Margaret Atwood (born in 1939), began her literary career as a poet. She has published over fifty books, including fiction, poetry, graphic novels, and critical essays, some of which were translated into more than 45 languages. Her latest novel, *The Testaments*, co-won the 2019 Booker Prize and serves as a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has since been adapted into an award-winning television series. The subsequent volumes of the *MaddAddam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*) were published between 2002 and 2013. Through these post-apocalyptic novels, Atwood displays her deep interest in the ethics of technology and genetics, the environmental impacts of climate change, and the complex relationship between humans and nonhumans.

The literary output of Alissa York (born 1970) is noticeably influenced by her enthusiasm for the nonhuman world. Initially engaged in zoology and biology, she decided to switch to English literature at McGill University due to her passion for storytelling. Her fiction often explores the complex relationships between humans and animals, as seen in *Effigy* (2007), where the protagonist is a taxidermist, and *Fauna* (2010), featured in this dissertation. Her debut short fiction collection, *Any Given Power* (1999), won the Mary Scorer Award, and her first novel, *Mercy* (2003), was critically acclaimed. York teaches at the

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space in *Come, Thou Tortoise* offer a means of recognition for non-normative families in writing from the region" (2017, 221).

University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies and at the Banff Centre for the Arts (*The Canadian Encyclopedia* 2014, para. 1-7).

Born in 1957, Cary Fagan is known for his collections of short stories and books for children. He pursued a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Toronto before combining his work as an editor and freelance writer with active involvement in Toronto's small-press community. The publication of his short story collection *History Lessons* in 1991 marked the beginning of his literary career. His notable publications include *The Student*, a finalist for the Governor General's Award, and *A Bird's Eye*, selected as an Amazon.ca Best Book of the Year. In the field of children's literature, he has received several prestigious awards, including the Vicky Metcalf Award for Literature for Young People. Fagan currently resides in Toronto, where he teaches writing for children at the School of Continuing Studies of the University of Toronto.

In respect of the beginning of her career, Gail Anderson-Dargatz's initial interest in poetry and short stories resembles that of Atwood; it also indicates that fiction, rather than poetry, was the field that eventually secured her popularity. Her first novel, *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, was widely recognised and awarded with the UK's Betty Trask Award, the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and the Vancity Book Prize. Published two years later, *A Recipe for Bees* (1998) was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. The story, analysed in this dissertation through the lens of the collective nature of bees, was inspired by her personal experiences with family secrets. Born in 1963 in British Columbia, after graduating from the University of Victoria, she teaches creative writing at the University of British Columbia. The 2020s marked a shift in her writing toward crime fiction and thrillers, genres that once again received a highly positive reception.

Although Canadian literature includes animal-themed novels whose recognition places them within the canon, I have narrowed my selection to those published after the closing years of the 1990s. This approach allowed me to engage with texts that have not yet been widely studied, and one of them, *The Animals*, was published after I had already begun working on the dissertation. Including it within the scope required a rearrangement of the original research plan; nevertheless, it enables my work to fill a gap in the study of contemporary Canadian literature more comprehensively. What is worth noting is the fact

that most of the analysed novels, with the exception of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, were not translated into Polish and published for the Polish book market.

# Chapter 1

## Animal Studies in Contemporary Literary Criticism

### 1.1. Introduction

The transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century brought a gradual shift of attention away from the human, redirecting focus to the nonhuman as well as to the quality of the relationship between humans and all that is not human. This turn disrupts the deeply entrenched anthropocentrism of Western thought and directs critical attention toward what is nonhuman: animals, ecosystems, objects, and technologies. Animal studies, a key part of this broader movement, interrogates the roles of nonhumans in literature and examines how animal literary representations shape and reflect human attitudes toward nonhuman life.

While not all strands of animal studies adopt the same degree of political engagement, Critical Animal Studies (CAS) provides a remarkably sharp lens for investigating the entanglement of ethics, activism, and representation. As such, it offers a valuable point of entry into the field, emphasising the urgency and scope of questions that appear in literary criticism as well. As articulated in works such as *Critical Animal Studies: Toward Trans-Species Social Justice* (2018), edited by Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson, CAS insists on linking “intersectional forms of exploitation involving class, gender, race, and species” and on examining how this exploitation is rooted in and justified by societal and cultural discourse (2018, 2). As a consequence, any attempts to undermine the legitimacy of systemic oppression of nonhumans (and, by extension, humans) are frequently perceived as controversial. The eponymous trans-species justice is understood as the “consideration of interests of all animals (including humans) in order to achieve institutional conditions free from oppression and domination” (Young 2011, 70 qtd. in Matsuoka and Sorenson 2018, 15).

A central tenet of CAS is that ethical engagement requires more than theoretical critique. The practical implementation of CAS ideas within activist initiatives may include

non-violent actions—for instance, the practice of “bearing witness,” which “is defined as a duty to be present at the darkest sites of injustice, to let others know of this injustice, and to do all one can to stop the injustice, as an individual and together with one’s community” (Purdy and Krajnc 2018, 48). Responsibility for other beings and opposition to cruelty may take more indirect forms—such as documenting acts of cruelty—yet these remain active practices, each contributing to increasing nonhuman visibility.

While these actions foreground human responsibility, CAS also highlights the agency of nonhuman animals themselves. Sarat Colling’s “Animal Agency, Resistance, and Escape” describes how intentional escapes from farms or slaughterhouses reveal the subjectivity of animals refusing objectification. Colling suggests that “farmed animals transgress several borders: they transgress the material walls, fences, and gates of agribusiness and they transgress the conceptual borders between ‘in place’/‘out of place’ and between ‘domestic’/‘wild’ by human society” (2018, 38). Such events may trigger intraspecies breakthroughs: when individual animals go through physical barriers and attract public attention, they are often perceived as having earned individuality. CAS scholars emphasise that such acts of resistance destabilise the human-animal binary and broaden the very notion of political and ethical agency.

Like feminism, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, animal studies belongs to the field of cultural studies. Its methodological inconsistency is often emphasised by critics. However, its interdisciplinary nature, which allows engagement with even seemingly distant fields, is key to providing posthumanist perspectives that complement natural science. Unlike humanism, posthumanism rejects the idea that human beings should be the centre of research; consequently, it considerably broadens the scope of literary analysis within the field of human-nonhuman relationships (Buchanan 2010, 374; Braidotti 2013, 142). With its strong emphasis on expanding ethical interests, the posthumanist perspective enables readers to understand less obvious aspects of literature, such as the position and significance of nonhumans, rather than treating them as symbolic elements. According to Mario Ortiz-Robles, literature creates a special space where alternative ways of coexisting with animals can be imagined; readers can therefore perceive “the migratory

patterns of animals rather than the history of nations; genera rather than genres; biomes rather than languages; taxa rather than texts” (2016, xi).

Given that animal studies has evolved in close dialogue with postcolonial studies, feminism, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, this chapter explores the conceptual intersections and shared roots of these fields. It also provides an overview of philosophical approaches to the moral status of animals, which have significantly influenced the ways animals are represented in literature. Finally, it addresses the fundamental challenge of language in capturing animal subjectivity, examining how linguistic structures shape, limit, or distort our understanding of nonhuman minds and identities.

## **1.2. Animal Studies and Postcolonial Criticism**

This section draws attention to the intersection of animal and postcolonial studies, endeavouring to present parallels as well as highlight areas of contention. In postcolonial theory, the relationship between knowledge and power has been a central concern for understanding how imperial dominance was constructed and enforced. This mode of domination through representation is not confined to human subjects. Similar mechanisms of control and knowledge production have been applied to the objectification of nonhuman animals. The colonial project often entailed not only the classification and exploitation of colonised peoples but also the reordering and commodification of animal life, landscapes, and ecosystems.

One of the foundational thinkers in the field of postcolonial criticism, Edward Said, demonstrates how empires did not rely only on military force or economic exploitation but also on the production of knowledge about colonised peoples and lands. This knowledge—often considered as objective—served to reinforce control over the colonised. Said shows that the act of representing non-European societies through discourse and institutions was itself a deeply political gesture, reinforcing hierarchies and sustaining domination. An example of this mechanism appears in Arthur James Balfour’s 1910 speech before the House of Commons, where he defends British control over Egypt not primarily through appeals to military might but through claims to superior knowledge.

On June 13, 1910, Arthur James Balfour lectured the House of Commons on “the problems with which we have to deal in Egypt.” These, he said, “belong to a wholly different category” than those “affecting the Isle of Wight or the West Riding of Yorkshire.” (...) Two great themes dominate his remarks here and in what will follow: knowledge and power, the Baconian themes. As Balfour justifies the necessity for British occupation of Egypt, supremacy in his mind is associated with “our” knowledge of Egypt and not principally with military or economic power. Knowledge to Balfour means surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline—and of course, it means being able to do that. Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a “fact” which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. (Said 2003, 31)

Through Balfour’s words, Said uncovers the deeper logic of colonial discourse: knowledge operates as a form of power capable of transforming societies into fixed forms available for governance; he does not emphasise physical oppression of the native lands, but concentrates on invaders’ intellectual and cultural claims to heritage. By emphasising English exceptionalism, Balfour takes advantage of Western-acquired knowledge to establish internal control of overseas territories; domination of this kind leaves a permanent cross-generational imprint on conquered nations. Said’s attitude toward Balfour’s explanation is highly critical; it highlights the fact that Balfour perceives Egypt as an object—something that can be studied, judged, and ruled by outsiders. Although he presents Balfour’s speech in a descriptive way, the underlying critique is clear: Said shows that Balfour’s emphasis on knowledge is not neutral. Instead, it serves as a tool of imperial domination. Even when Balfour claims to understand Egypt’s civilisation in depth, he flattens it into a static and inferior entity.

Colonialism, as Kyle Whyte defines it, is “a form of domination in which at least one society seeks to exploit some set of benefits believed to be found in the territory of one or more other societies, from farm land to precious minerals to labor” (2017, 154). Thus, supremacy at the level of discourse is intricately linked to the pursuit of material profit. The

strategy of expanding direct and indirect control over overseas territories became particularly characteristic of French and British foreign policy from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. However, as Ania Loomba points out, its roots stretch much further back: “colonialism in this sense did not begin with the expansion of various European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas from the sixteenth century onwards; it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history” (2015, 20). Recognising this history is crucial for understanding how colonial practices have left lasting cultural, political, and discursive legacies, which postcolonial criticism seeks to unravel.

Postcolonial literary criticism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, responded to the cultural and material devastation caused by centuries of European imperial domination. It examines the complex power relations between colonisers and the colonised, analysing recurring patterns of domination, dependency, and resistance. Postcolonial studies also recovers creative works and voices that were previously suppressed; it uncovers representations, themes, and literary figures that had been concealed by colonial influence. Re-reading colonial texts allows for a deeper understanding of the profound loss of agency endured by indigenous peoples. As Edward Said asserts, “the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society” (2003, 332). Such an approach reveals that colonial texts were active participants in sustaining the hierarchies that continue to shape contemporary cultural and political realities. Although the Second World War marked the formal collapse of the British Empire, the colonial influences outlasted the political regimes that had given rise to them. In many cases, the process of decolonisation proved to be nearly as disruptive as colonisation itself. Indigenous populations found themselves in a condition that Homi Bhabha describes as “unhomeliness”—a disorienting experience of partial belonging, caught between traditional cultural identities and practices imposed by colonial powers (1992, 141).

In searching for intersections between animal and postcolonial studies, the ecological context offers one of the broadest and most productive areas of investigation. Referring to Alfred Crosby’s theory of ecological imperialism, Buchanan observes that colonisation “was not only a form of cultural and political tyranny, it was also a form of environmental terrorism” (2010, 144). Because of what Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan describe as “a long

history of ecological concern in postcolonial criticism,” postcolonialism cannot be regarded as “inherently anthropocentric (human-centred)”; they define “ecological imperialism,” “biocolonisation,” and “environmental racism” as possible areas of inclusion of the nonhuman world into the postcolonial considerations (2003, 3-4). The intersection of postcolonial and ecological studies, therefore, questions the assumption that imperial histories concern only human actors and institutions. It highlights the extent to which landscapes, living beings, and ecosystems were integral to colonial enterprises and remain central to postcolonial recovery.

*Ecological imperialism*, the theoretical framework developed by Alfred Crosby, pays special attention to the nonhuman world, the exploitation of which contributed to the successful colonisation of new lands, particularly in the Americas and the Pacific, by Europeans (Buchanan 2010, 145). This approach assumes that “European imperialism has a biological, an ecological, component” (Crosby 2004, 7), in forms of animals, plants, and diseases; colonisation, therefore, “was not only a form of cultural and political tyranny, it was also a form of environmental terrorism” (Buchanan 2010, 144–145). Although positioning environmental issues as the dominant force in colonisation has raised significant doubts, particularly in the Canadian context, as Liza Piper and John Sandlos observe in their article “A Broken Frontier: Ecological Imperialism in the Canadian North,” the concept of ecological imperialism continues to play a significant role in postcolonial analyses of ecological impact<sup>4</sup>.

As mentioned, the flexibility of the term *ecological imperialism* allows it to integrate ecological and postcolonial concerns. This approach sheds light on animals, one of the biological components described by Crosby, as involuntary contributors to colonial invasion. As early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nonhumans served both as a labour force

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<sup>4</sup> According to Liza Piper and John Sandlos, some lands of present-day Canada were notably difficult to transform as ecosystems did not readily accommodate European ambitions. As a result, colonial efforts did not result in widespread ecological change, as they did in more temperate regions. On the contrary, they exposed the limits of European assumptions about the universality of their social and economic systems. As the authors put it, “in many respects, the Canadian North can be characterized as a region where ecological imperialism has failed” (2007, 762). Nevertheless, in places where colonial intervention was more extensive, the resulting damage to the natural environment was visible. A striking example is “the deforestation associated with farm clearance and prospecting in the northern edge of the boreal forest[, which] destroyed large tracts of prime winter caribou habitat in the 1930s” (780).

and as a food source for overseas expeditions. Crosby notes that “[t]he first generations of European settlers in most of the colonies in America and Australasia ate pork more often than any other flesh” (176). This biological dimension is further explored by Margo DeMello, who presents several examples of animals that reinforced the power of colonisers. For instance, equine species “played a major role in the conquistadors’ domination of civilisations such as those of the Aztec and the Inca, and in the spread of Spanish culture from Mexico southward into South America and northward into North America.” In addition to horses, certain dog breeds were trained to play an active role in warfare on invaded lands (2012, 70).

Throughout the ages, indigenous fauna also experienced the detrimental effects of European colonial aspirations. Non-native species introduced to new territories caused the extinction of numerous native nonhuman inhabitants of these lands, including endemic ones. As Crosby notes, certain species, such as pigs, cattle, and horses, could effectively inhabit large tracts of land. Although swine can survive only under specific conditions, “in most of the early colonies in the Americas and Australasia there was enough moisture and shade to satisfy pigs”; their presence thus profoundly influenced certain types of the natural environment (Crosby 2004, 174). Pigs’ expansion also resulted from the kind of breeding: they often roamed freely, interfering with unique habitats without human oversight (175). Similarly, cattle, “more tolerant of heat and direct sunlight,” were used in areas unsuitable for pigs, while “[e]ven in coastal Brazil, where the climate is too hot to be ideal for horses, there were plenty of them by the end of the sixteenth century” (177, 182). The European settlers did not pursue complete control over the introduced animals; thus, “[t]hese herds of only semidomesticated animals wandering in the forests and canebrake” became feral, and it was not unusual for many individuals to escape and go wild (180). The non-native species evolved to adapt to new environments:

After a few generations, feral pigs revert to a type very different from what we are accustomed to seeing in the barnyard. Long-legged and long-snouted, slab-sided, narrow-backed, fast and vicious, and equipped with long, sharp tusks, they earned the same name in both North America and Australia: razorback. (Crosby 2004, 176)

The lack of supervision over non-native animals facilitated their integration into the local environment and enabled further adaptations. This tendency could also be observed among species classified as undesirable in human nomenclature, such as rats, whose presence not only brought about significant environmental damage but also resulted in tangible losses for humans. It is therefore evident that “the humans were seldom masters of the biological changes they triggered in the Neo-Europes” (Crosby 2004, 192). Matthew Chrulew and Rick De Vos further elaborate on the scale of damage suffered by native environments:

The majority of animal extinctions recorded since the late seventeenth century, when dodos were believed to have disappeared from the island of Mauritius, have been attributed to European imperialism and colonialism, in particular the activities of sailors, traders and settlers. Many species had disappeared in the preceding two centuries, before they had even been identified and described, particularly those endemic to islands where they had no escape or defence from sailors, soldiers, cats and rats. (2018, 188)

Beyond the ecological damage caused by invasive species, local wildlife also faced increasing threats from human exploitation, particularly by European hunters. Their voracious greed deeply disturbed the environmental balance of various valuable natural locations; moreover, they also strongly influenced the way local people perceived nonhumans:

The presence of European hunters in Africa transformed the native Africans’ views and uses of wildlife, which until that time had been important for subsistence as well as trade. After the Europeans began their trade in ivory, trophies, and other parts of animals, Africans also began to exploit these resources more intensively. (DeMello 2012, 70)

Across various colonised regions, the colonial economy thrived on the persecution of native nonhuman species in a way similar to that observed in Africa. The fur trade, for instance, became a driving force behind the settlement of Canada. European avarice visibly

influenced First Nations, whose involvement in fur supply networks directly contradicted the romantic stereotype of the “ecological Indian.” In fact, the fur trade and commercial hunting, initiated by European settlers, decimated numerous North American species. Because local species had not evolved to withstand such intensive and sudden hunting pressures, “the hunters were able to slaughter them in such quantities as to eliminate most of them completely” (Crosby 2004, 276). Species such as the grey wolf, swift fox, Canadian lynx, American marten, pronghorn antelope, plains bison, and muskox were extirpated from Canadian provinces, while others, including the black-footed ferret, eastern elk, and Dawson’s caribou, are believed to be extinct (Osborn n.d., para. 3). Moreover, according to Kerrie Lowitt, beavers, whose population was almost entirely wiped out, survived because of two factors: “first, a change in fashion preference from felt to silk which drastically reduced the demand for beaver pelts and secondly, the rise of a beaver conservation movement, began under the leadership of Grey Owl in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century” (2014, para. 3).

Apart from the mass slaughter of native species, colonial usurpation also involved the export of living individuals to European menageries. As Ann-Sofie Lönngren highlights, the fate of indigenous animals, captured and transported to European zoos, circuses, and private collections, parallels the violent history of human enslavement (2015, 146). The forced removal of animals from their native habitats demonstrated imperial dominance and served as an example of the commodification of nonhuman life for entertainment. Some regions of Africa, because of their strategic location, became emblematic of this exploitation; for instance, Zanzibar “not only has a long history as a slave market but is also known for its wildlife, including the Zanzibar leopard, possibly extinct today, as well as the Zanzibar red colobus, which is one of Africa’s rarest primates” (147). Therefore, both humans and nonhumans were subjected to processes of displacement and violence.

Another aspect of colonial influence that affected all beings, regardless of the species, is the widespread appropriation of land. The high reproductive capacities of introduced species enabled them to colonise new lands swiftly; simultaneously, intensive farming and breeding practices further disrupted vast areas of land (Crosby 2004, 173). As Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka argue in *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011), the destruction of habitats remains a persistent injustice:

Wilderness animals live on their own territory, typically avoiding human contact as much as possible... As a general rule of thumb, we do best by simply “letting them be.” But the reality is that this rule of thumb has proven incomplete and ineffective in countering the injustices humans inflict on wilderness animals. Even when they are not directly harmed by being hunted or captured or subject to wildlife management regimes, their territory is regularly subject to human invasion, colonization, displacement, and habitat destruction (2011, 62).

This growing awareness has led to significant interdisciplinary efforts to address the problem<sup>5</sup>. Ideas such as integrating nonhumans as legitimate citizens in urban spaces or recognising wildlife as property owners<sup>6</sup> are gaining attention, offering potential responses to animals’ suffering under colonial structures. Donaldson and Kymlicka’s work delves into these challenges, particularly in relation to the legal possibilities of granting nonhumans certain rights and coexisting with them in urban settings. They argue that while animal advocacy movements have had initial successes, they have lost momentum, shifting attention away from the deeper system of exploitation: “they distract attention from the underlying system of animal exploitation, and at worst, they provide citizens with a way to soothe their moral anxieties, providing false reassurance that things are getting better” (2011, 2). Recognising nonhumans as political subjects could become a crucial step toward dismantling the legacies of colonial exploitation.

The inhibition of progress within animal advocacy movements, combined with the unchecked expansion of urban areas, continues to create numerous physical dangers for nonhumans, including “cars, electrical transformers, tall structures and wires, window glass,

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<sup>5</sup> Published in 2020, *ZOEpolis* (ed. Małgorzata Gurowska et al.) offers ideas for peaceful multi-species coexistence in urban areas. As clearly stated in the introduction to the publication, the need to include nonhumans and their species-specific requirements in the process of urban planning became the driving force behind this book (2020, 7). The authors’ meticulous observations allow readers to imagine the complexity of ecological dependencies observable in cities. At the same time, artistic projects are treated as research tools to explore different ways of co-living with other-than-human species.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the title of Karen Bradshaw’s 2020 book, *Wildlife as Property Owners*. The author addresses the problem of the appropriation of natural resources, which have been taken from wild animals, and the potential consequences of such a policy. In an interview conducted by Marc Bekoff, Bradshaw argues that “Granting people a monopoly on owning property has proved disastrous for all living things. Landowners expropriate wildlife habitat from wildlife, which causes biodiversity loss” (2020, para.14).

backyard pools, pesticides” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 244). These hazards not only threaten the lives of countless animals but also highlight the inadequacy of current political and ethical frameworks in addressing their needs. Donaldson and Kymlicka propose rethinking “citizenship theory,” suggesting that nonhuman beings should be recognised as members of society with corresponding political rights (54). By extending the notion of citizenship beyond humans, they offer a framework for imagining more inclusive forms of coexistence with other species in shared environments.

Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest applying different categories of citizenship to nonhumans, depending on the nature of their relationship with humans. Rejecting the hierarchical order that has shaped human approaches to animals for centuries, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that “[w]e need to attend to what sorts of relationships animals themselves want to have with us (and with each other), which are likely to develop over time, and to vary from individual to individual” (2011, 100). The authors’ key argument is that the vast diversity of human-nonhuman encounters, including the penetration of wild animals into zones traditionally considered human, leads to conflicts in which nonhumans are denied the right of defence. Human duties and moral obligations towards animals would depend on the category, as keeping the welfare of different groups of animals requires various levels of human engagement.

Tiffin and Huggan state that ecological imperialism continues to operate through the traditional culture-nature dichotomy that “once helped secure and sustain European imperial dominance, but now proves ruinous in the face of mass extinction.” At the same time, it “[acknowledges] those forms of instrumental reason that view nature and the animal ‘other’ as being either external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endlessly replenishable resource” (Tiffin and Huggan 2010, 4). Categorisation plays a crucial role in this system, as colonisation excludes from protection anyone who is not a European coloniser. This logic is embedded at the level of discourse, particularly through the constructed status of *others*. Otherness, as a category, implies exclusion from intersubjective relations; the referent is perceived as inferior to the subject who defines them as *other*. The exclusion and rejection from the realm of knowledge, however, do not refer exclusively to Indigenous people; animal studies trace

these concepts across much broader contexts, which also cover nonhumans, nature, and resources. The exclusionary mechanisms are reinforced by the marginalised status of Indigenous people, as well as perceived racial and lifestyle differences. As Said notes, “[b]eing a White Man, in short, was a very concrete manner of being-in-the-world, a way of taking hold of reality, language, and thought” (2003, 227). The position imposed on others reinforces passivity and lack of agency. Power relations between humans and nonhumans are thus closely intertwined with broader structures of oppression.

Undeniable parallels between the fate of marginalised humans and that of nonhuman animals shed light on the close relationship between the terms *speciesism* and *racism*. Regarding racism, Donna Haraway argues that “the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal—all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution” (2008, 18). First introduced by Richard Ryder in 1970, the term speciesism became widely known through Peter Singer’s literary activism. Speciesism manifests as a form of discrimination based on species difference. It is most clearly visible in the unequal treatment of nonhumans, whose status varies according to the functions they are assigned within a given society or culture. Some animals are treated as companions, others as resources for food, transportation, or entertainment, yet all are subordinated to human superiority.

In postcolonial discourse, the inclusion of animals encounters difficulties due to deeply rooted and deteriorating metaphors. European discourses of dominance often categorised others as animal-like, implying their inferiority. It complicates postcolonial analyses of animals and highlights the discomfort such discussions frequently provoke:

dominant European discourses have expressed that dominance by constructing others—both people and animals—as animal, both philosophically and representationally. The history of western racism and its imbrication with discourses of speciesism; the use of animals as a basis for human social division; and, above all perhaps, the metaphorisation and deployment of ‘animal’ as a derogatory term in genocidal and marginalising discourses – all of these make it difficult even to discuss animals without generating a profound unease, even a rancorous antagonism, in many postcolonial contexts today. (Tiffin and Huggan 2010, 135)

The dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples within colonial discourse often relied on comparisons with animals, typically burdened with strongly pejorative connotations. The role of nonhuman animals was to reinforce the perceived opposition between so-called civilised and intellectual societies and those deemed primitive. As a result, “any direct or metaphorical connection between the treatment of Africans as slaves and the treatment of animals today is a politically dangerous one to argue” (Tiffin and Huggan 2010, 136). Since the superiority of European invaders was rooted in the belief that they were the sole embodiment of humanity, attributing animality to others served to strip them of fundamental rights. Historically, postcolonial scholars have focused primarily on restoring the humanity that colonised peoples were denied—an approach that has, in turn, contributed to the continued marginalisation of nonhuman beings.

Animal categorisations and the use of derogatory animal metaphors have been and are characteristic of human languages, often in association with racism and sexism: “you stupid cow”; politicians with their “snouts in the trough”; “male chauvinist pig.” The history of human oppression of other humans is replete with instances of animal metaphors and animal categorisations frequently deployed to justify exploitation and objectification, slaughter and enslavement. (Tiffin and Huggan 2010, 135)

Subsequently, the implications of these animal metaphors and categorisations continue to influence contemporary postcolonial thought, often inadvertently reinforcing the marginalisation of both humans and nonhumans. As postcolonial scholars have traditionally focused on reclaiming the humanity of oppressed peoples, the corresponding devaluation of nonhuman animals has contributed to their continued exclusion from political and ethical consideration. Confrontations between animal studies and postcolonial studies have often been hindered by the flawed assumption that such engagement diverts attention from the struggles of peoples subjected to colonial oppression. The belief that “post-colonialists have concentrated upon ‘other’ humans, cultures, and territories but seldom upon animals,” shared by Philip Armstrong, aptly illustrates the challenge faced by postcolonial scholars (2002, 413). The deep entrenchment of postcolonial studies in

outdated humanist paradigms risks ignoring “both epistemic and corporeal violence against [nonhumans],” which leads to a situation in which “[a] more-than-human community” remains impossible to establish as long as nonhuman subjectivity continues to be denied (Chagani 2016, 620).

### **1.3. Animal Studies and Feminist Criticism**

The oppression of women rooted in gender discrimination is closely related to animal studies. While feminism has developed as a political and social movement primarily in the twentieth century, efforts to challenge inequality can be traced throughout history. Beginning with the second wave in the mid-twentieth century, feminism became increasingly visible in academia, giving rise to diverse sub-movements and theoretical approaches. Certain strands of feminism introduced broader research perspectives on topics such as women’s lives and writing, which had previously been severely marginalised. Inequalities have always resulted in the establishment of distinct categories; in this case, sex-based distinctions or gendered categories are used to deepen discrimination in society. Women, perceived as physically weaker, are positioned as subordinate and identified with traits such as irrationality and emotional instability. Patriarchal societies not only objectify those marked as physically weaker but also reinforce biological essentialism, legitimising male dominance over women—and human dominance over nonhumans—by appealing to fixed traits. These assumptions reflect a biopolitical logic: one that governs and stratifies life based on perceived biological value. Within this mode of thinking, bodies, whether human or nonhuman, are subject to regulation, exploitation, and control according to their productive or reproductive utility, reinforcing systems of domination through the management of life itself.

Among movements that flourished along with the second wave of feminism, ecofeminism<sup>7</sup> seems to be the one that specifically emphasises the points of contact between female and nonhuman oppression. Ecofeminism, understood as “a philosophical and political position which postulates that there is a connection between the social

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<sup>7</sup> The term proposed by Françoise d’Eubonne in 1974 (Buchanan 2010:144).

mentality underpinning the domination of women in patriarchal society and the domination and degradation of nature by industrial capitalism,” focuses on analogies between women’s and nature’s reproductive capacities, as well as the way they become objects of male dominion (Buchanan 2018, 144). However, it is also worth mentioning that, regardless of species, female reproductive capacity is cruelly exploited under the industrialised capitalist system, particularly in the intensive production of milk and eggs. In industrial meat and egg production, relentlessly commodified female bodies are reduced to vessels of reproduction and exploitation. For instance, hens are confined to cages and forced into perpetual cycles of egg-laying, whereas cows are constantly impregnated, and their calves are torn from them to divert their milk for human consumption. They, as well as sows, are deprived of the possibility of establishing maternal bonds with their offspring. The suffering of female individuals across species is central and embedded in a system that sees their reproductive abilities as a resource to be extracted, disregarding their agency, pain, and right to exist beyond exploitation.

Justice cannot be achieved without recognising that nonhumans deserve equal treatment not only because of their suffering. As Maneesha Deckha emphasises, “Cartesian dualistic norms and ways of thinking,” which “have been instrumental in structuring hierarchies and oppressions among human groups, in justifying the human subjugation and oppression of animals,” are no longer applicable (2012, 528). Additionally, “a point of connection between posthumanist theory and critical yet humanist theories is the need to deconstruct purportedly biological differences and naturalized bodies as social constructions” (528). The author argues that “liberal animal ethics” introduced by male scholars such as Singer or Regan does not cover the full spectrum of the issue; therefore, feminist insight considerably extends the perspective of animal studies:

The vegetarian ecofeminist scholarship of authors such as Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan pointed to the masculinist orientation of this logic and its central premises. They noted the concerns with arguing for moral consideration for animals by valuing sameness rather than difference, as well as the disconnect in elevating the capacity for reason, the presumed absence of which in animals has long been a primary source of justification for their

exploitation and moral disregard. Instead, Adams and Donovan integrated insights from cultural feminist theory to demonstrate, along with other criticisms of masculinist animal ethics, the value of emotions and of attending to context in crafting ethical responses (2012, 258).

Furthermore, Carol Adams, in her study *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, ascribes meat consumption to a misguided notion of masculinity. She also notes that people in positions of power have always eaten meat, and that meat-eating tends to be associated particularly with masculinity. Adams acknowledges that:

According to the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods. Visions of meat-eating football players, wrestlers, and boxers lumber in our brains in this equation. Though vegan weight lifters and athletes in other fields have demonstrated the equation to be fallacious, the myth remains: men are strong, men need to be strong, thus men need meat. The literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat. (2015, 51)

Adams demonstrates that meat has been inscribed into the ideology of patriarchy. Its power, like the myth of masculinity, relies on the repetition and reinforcement of emotionally charged symbols. Culture implants images that depict a symbolic manifestation of physical strength into the collective imagination as a norm. Meat, as a tangible substance (the body of a killed animal) and as a metaphor for domination, embodies power in a literal and symbolic way. The man consumes meat; that is, he consumes strength, dominance, and masculinity. This symbolic economy of power finds one of its most literal expressions in the act of hunting—an environmentally harmful activity traditionally seen as a male pursuit and a site of masculine self-affirmation. Crucially, the point is not to make hunting more accessible to all members of society, but to question its very foundation as a ritual of patriarchal dominance and as a socially sanctioned form of violence against the innocent.

The previously mentioned “liberal animal ethics,” which is based on scientific reasoning, should not exclude an empathetic perspective, as “compassionate responses to animals’ suffering [serve] as appropriate guides for ethical judgment” (Deckha 2012, 258).

Lynda Birke argues that “seeing other kinds of lives as situated like our own might promote empathy with them, a shift paralleling growing demands for more empathy in scientific studies of nonhuman animals” (2002, 432). Emphasising compassion allows researchers to move beyond “reductionist science” and to recognise the complexity of human–animal relationships in which others can gain individuality (432-433). Feminist theory foregrounds the ethical value of each individual being<sup>8</sup>. As Birke argues, empathy must be relational and particular, hence “must involve relating to others who are different—of whatever species—and whose individual life histories are seen as part of that relation” (2002, 433). Yet, Deckha signals potential narrowing of the field, noting that:

[P]osthumanist feminist theory is replicating the problematic and now discredited premises of second-wave feminist theorizing in addressing animal suffering by implicitly prioritizing gender while hoping and claiming to address women’s and animals’ oppression in a way that stresses context, complexity, and multiple differences. (2012, 529)

The academic warns, however, that even progressive theories, such as the aforementioned posthumanist feminism, may inadvertently reproduce entrenched assumptions. This includes treating women as the default subjects of oppression or prioritising gender differences above other intersecting forms of inequality. Such an approach may unintentionally reinforce anthropocentric or androcentric hierarchies.

#### **1.4. Animal Studies and Ecocriticism/Environmental Studies**

Ecocriticism can be considered a relatively new approach to literature, dating from the late twentieth century. Its growing importance in literary studies comes from rising concerns about environmental degradation and the fact that the strategies used so far to address it have been insufficient. Apart from the term *ecocriticism*, treated by Lawrence Buell as a

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<sup>8</sup> While feminism has played a key role in foregrounding the ethical significance of particularity, it is not the only theoretical framework to do so. Postcolonial theory, critical race studies, queer theory, and disability studies have all contributed to a critical reevaluation of positionality, embodiment, and difference, insisting that ethical consideration must begin with the lived realities of specific beings, not abstract categories.

“convenient shorthand,” this approach is also referred to as “literary-environmental studies, [or] literary ecology, [or] literary environmentalism, [or] green cultural studies” in academic publications; yet the scholar argues for the term *environmental criticism* (2015, 12). The prefix eco-, derived from the Greek *oikos* (home), draws attention to the ecological approach, according to which the environment constitutes a home for all living creatures. Ecocriticism, therefore, investigates its representations in culture. The most widely acclaimed definition of ecocriticism seems to be “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” coined by Cheryll Glotfelty (1996, xvii).

As Buell argues, the development of ecocriticism occurs in two stages, the first of which “became especially identified with the project of reorienting literary-critical thinking toward more serious engagement with nonhuman nature” (2011, 89). First-wave ecocritics are often associated with such philosophical approaches as post-Heideggerian phenomenology and the principles of deep ecology, which suggest that “human being and human consciousness are thought to be grounded in intimate interdependence with the nonhuman living world” (Buell 2011, 89–90). In practice, this meant focusing on Romantic poetry and prose, especially on authors such as Wordsworth, Thoreau, and those who engage both literary and activist traditions (2011, 101). However, attempts to conceptualise nature using models drawn from biology and ecology were often seen as naïve, as they relied on mimetic strategies loosely based on the natural sciences. This approach was also criticised for narrowing the field to wilderness landscapes and for reinforcing an artificial division between nature and culture.

The second wave of ecocriticism moves away from the ecocentric paradigm in favour of “cultural studies and cultural theory” (Buell 2011, 94). Buell points out the problem of “the maldistribution of environmental benefits and hazards between white and nonwhite, rich and poor,” stressing a shift towards the recognition of structural inequalities and conflicts within the sphere of environmental protection (2011, 96). Consequently, ecocriticism expands its analytical apparatus to include urban and degraded environments, drawing on tools from postcolonial theory and feminist criticism, as well as incorporating the literatures of ethnic minorities and marginalised communities into the discourse. Moreover, this strand of ecocriticism broadens the ethical debate by emphasising human responsibility

toward the nonhuman world, calling for a re-evaluation of our relationship with animals, ecosystems, and the planet itself.

For much of its development, animal studies was treated as conceptually distinct from ecocriticism. As Buell notes, this distance is partly due to a historically narrow understanding of the aims of animal studies, which has at times elicited scepticism among ecocritics (2011, 106). Indeed, analysing nonhuman animals without reference to their environmental contexts risks a reductive or compartmentalised approach. Posing the question of whether animal studies can be situated within ecocritical discourse, Greg Garrard argues that although “environmentalism and animal liberation conflict in both theory and practice,” animal studies “may be seen as an important ally of ecocriticism if not strictly a branch of it” (2004, 139-140). This suggests a potential for convergence between the two fields, even if their emphases and theoretical foundations are not entirely consistent. Despite the mentioned uncertainties, the growing interest in ecocriticism and animal studies makes it possible to sketch out intersections between the two fields. As Buell observes, “the combination of common ground and complementary vulnerabilities in environmental and animal advocacies make it highly desirable to strive for closer rapprochement” (2011, 106). Anna Barcz similarly notes that while “vulnerability and resilience are used to differentiate the actions of humans with regards to environmental changes such as global warming or natural catastrophes, (...) animals are not included in this discussion”; what is particularly significant is the fact that their exposure to such crises is equal to humans’ (2017, XI). The concepts of vulnerability and resilience form important areas of overlap, questioning the nature of representation and ethical responsibility. Barcz further argues that “[t]he effect of reality” in literature relies on a deliberate “connection with reality and the mimicking—or intermediating—of it in a text.” In this view, referentiality and representation, inherited from nineteenth-century realism, can be reoriented to describe nonhuman life without anthropocentric bias (Barcz 2017, 16). This approach allows for depicting the natural world that is not strictly allegorical, but heads towards conveying the experience of real animals.

Realism<sup>9</sup> here does not imply “an objective reality” but rather reflects “the cultural content of experience”, as characteristic of modernist modes of representation (2017, 22). In this way, ecocriticism, rooted in this expanded view of realism, opens up possibilities for considering how literature can better represent nonhuman experiences and challenge anthropocentric narratives.

By moving beyond textual analysis, ecocriticism situates literature in direct relation to physical and material realities. As Barcz explains, “the literary theoretical link between literature and physical (material) reality or even the influence which literature has on reality (and vice versa—how reality shapes literature) are questions addressed through ecocritical considerations” (2017, 14). In a similar way, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin emphasise the need for “a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment” (2009, 12). Although nonhuman agency and communication may remain limited from a literary standpoint, insights from biological, cognitive, and ethological sciences make it possible to recognise nonhuman particularity and exceptionality—thereby enriching both ecocritical and literary analysis.

### **1.5. Animal Studies and Trauma Studies**

Along with the development of cognitive science, humans have gained better access to the nonhuman mind. However, direct communication with nonhumans—comparable to that which occurs among human beings—remains inaccessible. Despite advances in the means of exchanging information between species, there persists a wide range of muteness: a sphere of cognition, emotion, and experience that cannot be shared between humans and animals. As trauma studies revolve around unspeakable experiences, a certain *silence* in human–animal communication appears to be an inextricable element of animal studies. Trauma, understood from a posthumanist perspective, can be recognised not only in discrete events

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<sup>9</sup> Realism, according to Anna Barcz, is a narrative and interpretive strategy aimed at introducing the real experience of animals—their sensitivity, presence, and suffering—within cultural texts. It also marks a departure from portraying animals as symbols, shifting towards representing them as beings with their own experience that is not easily translatable into human language (2017, 3-4).

of suffering but also in ongoing processes of environmental degradation that affect both individuals and populations. For instance, the loss of biodiversity or the severe effects of climate change impact not only particular entities but also destabilise entire ecosystems, resulting in what might be termed collective ecological trauma.

Caruth's understanding of trauma is based on the Greek meaning of the word trauma as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (1996, 3). This kind of mental suffering, unlike a physical injury, is difficult to define as it is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (1996, 4). Dominick LaCapra points out its "relation to extreme events (such as rape, abuse, and genocide)" (2018, 159). Trauma functions on the edge of expressibility and therefore reality: abjuration of the traumatic experience does not lead to the healing of the mental wound—it not only still exists but also is expressed through symptoms such as flashbacks, hallucinations, and emotional numbing (Caruth 1996, 130).

Traumatic experiences are not expressed openly, as Michael Rothberg explains, "the very absence of the events signals their overwhelming impact" (2000, 1). Because of the unspeakable character of trauma, its manifestations appear directly in the story only to a lesser extent. The immense value of literature as a medium lies in the formal devices that allow for conveying the message indirectly. The narrative nature of literature, which, according to LaCapra, determines "hesitations, indirections, pauses, and silences" as well as "nonlinear movements that allow trauma to register in language and its hesitations," is capable of conveying a traumatic experience of both individuals and collectives (2004, 122).

The roots of trauma studies lie in multiple scientific disciplines, including modern psychology (particularly psychoanalysis), sociology, and history; thus, they are decidedly anthropocentric. Clinical research into trauma is essential not only for "the practitioners concerned with post-traumatic stress syndrome in soldiers" but also "to the theorists like Felman and Laub concerned with testimony and Holocaust survivors" (Catherine Ann Collins and Jeanne Ellen Clark 2013, ix). Cathy Caruth emphasises that beyond the field of war studies, "the impact of the experience, and the notion of trauma" can be observed across various aspects of "culture such as literature and pedagogy, the construction of history in

writing and film, and social or political activism”—areas in which narrative and therefore language play a crucial role (1995, 4). Although rooted in disciplines that focus on the human context, trauma studies can and should transcend species boundaries, just as human history is inextricably linked with the often overlooked presence of animals. From the human perspective, then, engaging with nonhuman experiences is “fundamental to the problem of identity and ‘identity formation’” (LaCapra 2018, 108). An identity based on distancing oneself from animals is a falsification of history, primarily because the human being is not self-sufficient.

The inter- and transdisciplinary aspects of trauma studies, as mentioned above, enable scholars to “cross disciplinary boundaries within the humanities, applying to humans and to other animals” (LaCapra 2018, 159). Just as in trauma narratives the direct testimony is often unattainable, Anna Barcz highlights that “in relation to animal experience we lack access to factual records” (2017, 18). Moreover, while indirect testimonies remain entirely anthropocentric (“genocide, even when extended to other than national or ethnic groups, remains confined to humans while excluding animal species, and the related notion of crimes against humanity is not crimes against humanity or other animals”), they should nonetheless “involve a careful, comparative study of memory, trauma, affect, and identity with respect to other animals, along with a noninvidious comparison of humans and other animals with an emphasis on their interactions and coevolution” (LaCapra 2018, 108-109).

In the context of trauma and “experiences which are completely alien and inexpressible for human beings,” Barcz proposes focusing on nonhuman muteness (2017, 17).

Animal vulnerability read through the textual medium frames the experience, enabling the recognition of muteness as exteriority(...); the voices of animals who, if they could speak, would show how different they are (...); and how our language, which would like to grasp animal experience, rejects animal dignity (...); and how rare the examples of animals showing resilience are (Barcz 2017, 165).

The key focus of reading the nonhuman through the lens of trauma studies is the relationship between humans and nonhumans, as well as the language used to describe this bond. Through the noninvidious comparison of humans and nonhumans, critics can establish a point of reference from which the position of nonhumans may be analysed. Rejecting an anthropocentric perspective makes it possible to recognise the animal as a victim, objectified being, or sufferer, marked by vulnerability, or as a resilient survivor. Animals experience traumatic events in real life, for instance, during their exploitation in medical experiments<sup>10</sup>; yet their testimony is doubly concealed: first, due to the unspeakable nature of trauma; second, because of the impossibility of comprehensive, direct communication.

Literature, through its formal devices, possesses a unique ability to represent trauma; even trauma experienced by animals can be conveyed through various narrative strategies. Indirectness, fragmentation, and the limited access to animal consciousness make literary tools essential for articulating mute suffering. Focalisation, where the narrative is filtered through an animal or an external observer, enables the depiction of pain without necessarily attributing full consciousness to the animal. Defamiliarisation, in turn, exposes the violence concealed within familiar portrayals of animals as pets or companions. This shifting of meanings compels the reader to confront suffering that typically remains invisible and unspeakable. In these ways, literature transcends the barrier of interspecies silence, offering modes of expression for traumatic experiences that cannot be conveyed directly.

## **1.6. Philosophical Approaches Towards the Moral Status of Animals**

This section addresses the problem of the moral status of animals. While animal studies often draw on the work of contemporary philosophers, it is important to note that this issue is neither exclusively modern nor new. Animals were already the subject of

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Singer describes the behavioural changes and physiological reactions of animals subjected to experimental violence, which can be directly perceived by humans through vocalisations, body language, and stereotypic behaviours (such as aimless circling or self-mutilation), as well as physiological indicators such as changes in blood pressure and dilated pupils (2011, 10–11, 127). Emphasising the structural similarity between the human and animal diencephalon and cerebral cortex, he concludes that similar stimuli must elicit similar subjective experiences (Singer 2011, 11).

reflection in ancient philosophy<sup>11</sup>, although their status was consistently regarded as inferior to that of humans. However, approaches grounded in close observation of the environment sometimes led to conclusions that appear more progressive than those of many later philosophical traditions. In ancient Greek philosophy, the nonhuman world was an inseparable part of thought; it appears both in the Ionian school and in Plato's figurative language, as well as in Cynic philosophy. However, the philosophical foundations for vegetarianism and the recognition of nonhuman sensory capacities—topics quite engaging from a contemporary perspective—were largely devalued in later periods<sup>12</sup>.

The faith in metempsychosis (transmigration of souls) is believed to contribute to the philosophical vegetarianism among the members of the Pythagorean community. If human souls can reincarnate in animal bodies and vice versa, eating meat becomes a moral risk — you might end up consuming someone you once were, or someone you may become.

The following argument is an idealized version of the reasoning that appeared throughout the Pythagorean tradition (...):

1. Human beings should not be killed or eaten.
2. Animals might well be past or future human beings.
3. Therefore, animals should not be killed or eaten. (Dombrowski, 2014, 779)

Belief in metempsychosis was the main, though not the only, foundation of Pythagorean vegetarianism. If human souls could be reincarnated in the bodies of animals and vice versa, eating meat became a moral risk — one might consume someone one once

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<sup>11</sup> The status of nonhuman animals in ancient thought has been the subject of numerous substantial volumes. In the following three paragraphs, I wish to indicate the complexity of this issue rather than provide an exhaustive account. Among the most important works are Aristotle's *History of Animals*—a groundbreaking zoological and philosophical text for its time, offering a classification of animals and an analysis of their functions and behaviours—as well as *Generation of Animals*, which explores animal cognitive processes. Early arguments against meat consumption, such as Plutarch's speech "On Eating Flesh" and Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, are similarly noteworthy. In "On the Nature of Things," Lucretius argues that animals and humans are subject to the same laws of the atomistic world, and that the differences between them are gradual rather than fundamental. Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* presents nature as a higher order to which all beings, including animals, are subordinated.

<sup>12</sup> These ideas reappear in contemporary approaches to animals, but the underlying foundations are radically different. Generally, Greek philosophers did not consider animals as subjects of moral law, since they did not regard animals as rational beings.

was or someone one might become. This belief also shaped the direct treatment of animals, as evidenced by the story of Pythagoras stopping the beating of a dog after recognising, in its whimpering, the soul of someone he had known. As John Dombrowski suggests, there is reason to believe that the Pythagoreans regarded animal suffering as morally significant. The act of showing pity (*epoiktirai*) implies that the suffering of the animal itself mattered, which may support what the author calls “the argument from sentience” (2014, 781).

Employing observation as the principal research method, “Greek philosophers prior to Aristotle tended to regard humans and non-human species as beings analogous in fundamental physical, psychic, and intellectual categories” (Newmyer 2014, 739). In his treatise *On the Soul*, Aristotle formulated a theory of three types of souls, among which animals were assumed to possess the “Sensitive Soul”—responsible for emotions, pain, stress, and similar functions. While Aristotle recognised and described specific differences between humans and nonhumans, he also identified the mental capacities of nonhumans, such as “‘resemblances of intellect’ and ‘comprehension’” (204, 752). The denial of these aspects was later expressly postulated by Thomas Aquinas<sup>13</sup>, René Descartes<sup>14</sup> or Kant<sup>15</sup>, to name only a few.

The philosophical approach towards nonhumans has influenced the ethical, political, and legal status of animals, while their moral standing has been continuously (re)negotiated. Mary Anne Warren’s definition of moral status highlights the complexity of this issue:

To have moral status is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations. If an entity has moral status, then we may not treat it in just any way we please; we are morally obliged to give weight in our deliberations to its needs, interests, or well-being. Furthermore, we are morally

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, perceiving animals as irrational beings (not persons), claimed that humans have no moral obligations toward them.

<sup>14</sup> Descartes, understanding the soul (*res cogitans*) and body as separate, viewed animals as soulless automata whose lives are merely mechanical processes.

<sup>15</sup> According to Kant, inflicting pain on beings capable of experiencing it should be condemned, as cruelty is unacceptable from a moral point of view. However, only humans are rational beings to whom moral obligations can be applied. In this sense, animals deserve neither rights nor obligations, as they are merely means, while the end is the human.

obliged to do this not merely because protecting it may benefit ourselves or other persons, but because its needs have moral importance in their own right (2019, 3).

In this context, Descartes's concept of animals as automata and Kant's restriction of rationality to human beings effectively exclude nonhumans from moral consideration. However, equipped with tools far more advanced than those available to ancient thinkers, contemporary philosophers increasingly adopt interdisciplinary approaches. Scientific findings on nonhuman cognition, pain perception, and communication leave little doubt that nonhumans must be included within the scope of moral status.

The extent to which the concept of moral status applies to animals is widely discussed, and the most important ideas are presented below. Peter Singer, known for his contribution to the development of the animal rights movement, argues that animals, as sentient beings, have full moral status (Warren 2019, 66). As a utilitarian, he claims that "[w]e ought to consider the interests of animals because they have interests and it is unjustifiable to exclude them from the sphere of moral concern" (Singer 2015, 245). Humans are morally obliged to avoid inflicting pain on other beings, as there are no reasons strong enough to justify the suffering of others. Singer clearly states that civilisational development makes it possible to satisfy all human needs without exploiting animals (2015, 51–78).

Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* is a theory where philosophical and legal arguments intersect. The crucial concept assumes that there can be moral agents as well as passive moral subjects. Developing Kant's categorical imperative to such an extent that it finally covers also animals, he formulated the idea of "subject-of-a-life."

To be the subject-of-a-life is to be an individual whose life is characterized by those features (...): that is, individuals are subjects-of-a-life if their beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independently of their being the object of anyone else's interests. (Regan 1983, 243)

Hence, humans cannot be the only group towards which moral obligation is applicable. While Regan assumed (at the time he was writing his book) that this group should also include all nonhuman mammals over one year of age, he emphasised that this boundary may be subject to change<sup>16</sup>. Similar to Singer's postulates, Regan's theory was widely acclaimed by animal activists.

Peter Singer's position on animal rights is particularly clear in his publication *Animal Liberation*, which is a foundational text in the animal rights movement. It advocates for the ethical treatment of animals and the rejection of speciesism. Speciesism, as Singer defines it, "is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (2002, 6). This concept parallels other forms of discrimination such as racism and sexism, where arbitrary characteristics like race or gender are used to justify unequal treatment. His central argument against speciesism is that sentience—the capacity to suffer or experience pleasure—is the critical moral criterion for considering the interests of all beings, human or nonhuman (2002, 7). He asserts that denying equal consideration to nonhuman animals on the basis of species is morally indefensible, just as it is wrong to discriminate against humans based on race or sex.

In his critique of speciesism, Singer highlights several practices in which this bias manifests, including animal experimentation, factory farming, and the use of animals for entertainment. He points out human inconsistency in shaping attitudes toward animals, noting that many who oppose one form of cruelty, such as bullfighting, may still participate in other speciesist practices, such as eating meat (2002, 230). This discrepancy allows defenders of animal exploitation to accuse critics of hypocrisy, thereby diluting the moral force of anti-cruelty arguments.

The belief that human intelligence or moral reasoning capacities entitle people to exploit animals does not justify speciesism. Singer dismantles this argument by pointing out

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<sup>16</sup> Contemporary supporters of Regan's theory highlight that this assumption was valid given the state of knowledge when the book was published. However, it should now be updated in accordance with present-day discoveries and research in fields such as cognitive science, ethology, and biology (Biernacka and Wydrych 2017, 24).

that intelligence is not a valid criterion for moral consideration. If it were, it would also justify exploiting humans with lower cognitive abilities, such as infants or those with severe mental disabilities (2002, 240). Thus, using species membership as the basis for moral exclusion is no more defensible than using race or gender. Singer calls for a radical shift in how society treats nonhuman animals, advocating the abolition of factory farming, the end of animal experimentation, and the widespread adoption of vegetarianism or veganism. He argues that humans can live healthy lives without exploiting animals, and that the suffering inflicted on animals for food, clothing, or research is unnecessary and morally unjustifiable (2015, 175).

Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am (Following)* is another attempt to challenge the human–nonhuman boundary. The essays, based on a lecture given by Derrida in 1997, focus on “the autobiographical animal” (2008, 12). As noted earlier by Singer, the problem of humans’ unchallenged supremacy over nonhumans and its deplorable consequences (primarily for nonhumans) are thoroughly examined. Derrida does not hesitate to juxtapose nonhumans’ otherness with the situation of victimised groups of people, such as Jews and homosexuals, and to compare the scale of nonhuman slaughter to human extermination.

Being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish. (2008, 28)

Derrida searches for a perspective that could be capable of revealing the atrocities carried out daily around the world. He points out that pain perception can no longer be considered in terms of ability, as the question “Can they suffer?” might imply. Rejecting the debates about defining the rationality of animals (“whether the animal can think, reason, or speak, etc., something we still pretend to be asking ourselves”), Derrida shows that the

understanding of nonhuman suffering should constitute a crucial aspect of people's relationship with animals (2008, 27).

The author criticises the vague philosophical language that obscures the fact that referring to *the animal* as a single entity is both inaccurate and biased, as “each time a philosopher, or anyone else, says ‘The Animal’ in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be human” (2008, 31). In this way, the animal becomes a tool to maintain human supremacy and a means of ignoring the richness of the other-than-human world. What is crucial is that Derrida calls into question the strict border between humans and other animals, as he has “never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls itself man and what he calls the animal. I am not about to begin to do so now” (2008, 30). Positioning a single dividing line between humans and nonhumans, which results in categorising one group of beings as other-than-human, is a sweeping generalisation.

While questioning the line(s), Derrida demonstrates that the intermittency of the human–nonhuman intersection is a matter of underlying constructs that position the animal as a foreign other. Andrew Benjamin, in his publication *Of Jews and Animals* (2010), develops these considerations by pointing to the problem of a certain lack of relation—or a “without relation”—between humans and nonhumans (2010, 11). Benjamin builds on Derrida's perspective, which allows for “detailed investigation of the conception of difference within the without relation and in so doing open up the possibility of another thinking of difference” (2010, 12). This concept arises from an embedded attitude according to which humanity is achieved through killing the animal, as “the animal is positioned as the other whose death reinforces and sustains human being” (2010, 117). Accordingly, the human internal struggle involves the attempt to annihilate animality, as “[o]pposed (...) to the definition of ‘man’ in terms of the rational is human animality” (2010, 25).

Benjamin's approach fluctuates between the term *figure* and *particularity*, which are confronted in order to re-establish the human–nonhuman relationship, with the understanding that “the interplay between human being, human animality and non-human animals involves divisions that are both porous and infinitely negotiable” (2010, 188). The ‘figure of animal’ seems to be particularly significant in the anthropocentric context as it

[C]an be defined therefore as the constitution of an identity in which the construction has a specific function that is predominantly external to the concerns of the identity itself. Not only will this play a significant role within the imposition of the quality of being other, it will sanction, at the same time, the possible repositioning of the other as the enemy. (4)

An animal hidden within the construct of the figure is deprived of agency. Having no influence over its identity, it loses particularity, and the human–nonhuman division is thereby reinforced. Apart from the limitation of nonhuman autonomy, which is analogous to anthropomorphisation, Benjamin also emphasises other negative consequences of this separation: the extraction of the group of the other, which leads to racial and gender inequalities.

Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* belongs to a current of thought that is critical of human supremacy, opposing the view that humans are fundamentally different from—and superior to—non-human life forms. Post-anthropocentrism, as she explains:

[D]econstructs (...) species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, anthropos and bios, as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-humans, or zoe. What comes to the fore instead is a nature–culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self. (2013, 65)

This is particularly significant, as the line between human and nonhuman has become blurred because of technological advancements and bio-genetic innovations, such as genetic engineering, cloning, and artificial intelligence, that are creating hybrid forms of life. In such a situation, the ethical frameworks that govern human interaction with other forms of life need to be re-established; Braidotti advocates for an ethical shift that challenges the anthropocentric, human-centred worldview that has dominated Western thought. Posthumanism calls for “decentring human privilege” and recognising the intrinsic value of all living organisms, beyond their utility to humans (2013, 77). In this view, the commodification of animals is ethically unjustifiable because it fails to recognise the agency, sentience, and interconnectedness of non-human life. Animals should be seen as part of a

continuum of life that includes humans, animals, and ecosystems. By understanding species boundaries as fluid, people can rethink human relationships with other forms of life in more ethical and sustainable ways.

Furthermore, Braidotti critiques the extension of humanist values, such as moral and legal equality, to non-human animals, arguing that this approach reinforces human supremacy by positioning humanity as the normative standard. This form of hegemony, where animals are judged according to human values, erases their uniqueness; by treating animals as “emblems of the transspecies, universal ethical value of empathy,” we risk overlooking the distinct characteristics and complexities of different species (2013, 79). Braidotti suggests replacing this flawed anthropomorphisation with an understanding of the relationship between humans and animals as “constitutive of the identity of each,” whereby both humans and animals are transformed through their interactions with one another. Rather than maintaining fixed categories, Braidotti calls for the exploration of a middle ground—the “milieu”—where human and non-human life intersect (79). This interaction represents an open experiment that allows new possibilities for understanding to emerge. These new spaces of reciprocity, she argues, should remain “normatively neutral,” free from pre-existing moral judgments (80).

The philosopher agrees with Derrida on the issue of the conceptual violence embedded in the homogenised category of the animal.

Animals have long spelled out the social grammar of virtues and moral distinctions for the benefit of humans. This normative function was canonized in moral glossaries and cognitive bestiaries that turned animals into metaphorical referents for norms and values. (69)

Braidotti emphasises the way in which animals have been anthropomorphised and symbolically appropriated to illustrate human ideas about virtue, vice, and social order. These representations are less concerned with the animals themselves and more with using them to structure human moral understanding. In the process, animals are stripped of their own being—their material, living existence—and reduced to symbols serving human self-definition and moral education. They become referents and carriers of human meaning. Her

analysis is not limited to critiques of language and conceptual frameworks; she also calls for a “posthuman scientific method” to cultivate a post-anthropocentric perspective (168). Posthumanism offers a radical critique of the humanist tradition that placed a man—the rational, autonomous subject—at the centre of meaning and value, thereby legitimising capitalist extraction. She highlights that it is contemporary capitalism that perpetuates the humanist legacy by commodifying living matter rather than recognising it as a self-organising force.

Although Rosi Braidotti does not engage with the feminine figure of the Goddess in a literal sense, her posthumanist philosophy offers a framework in which the symbolic potential of this figure is rearticulated as a life force—zoe—a “non-human, vital force of life,” associated with exceeding the boundaries of the human and nature (60). In this context, zoe functions as a nonreligious version of the Goddess; similarly, femininity is not an essence but a dynamic subject of becoming: “made of constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, that is to say wilful choice and unconscious drives” (2002, 22). The figure of the Goddess can thus be read as a metaphor for this creative, nomadic force of transformation—connected to female bodies yet irreducible to them. For Braidotti, this force is not the exclusive domain of human beings, but part of a broader interspecies community, as “life is not the prerogative of humans only; it opens up a zoe-political or post-anthropocentric dimension” (2013, 111).

Becoming, rather than being, emerges as the key mode of existence, characterised by constant transformation. For Braidotti, the concept of becoming-animal marks a crucial shift away from thinking about animals as radically other and instead emphasises the continuum of life that humans share with other species. From this viewpoint, subjects are no longer perceived as isolated individuals but as embedded within networks of relations that cut across species lines (Braidotti, 2013, 136). Such a perspective sets the stage for reimagining symbolic figures beyond their traditional anthropocentric frames.

The concept of *becoming-with*, developed by Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet*, examines how animals appear as subjects capable of exerting a tangible influence on human beings and their everyday lives. In this sense, becoming-with is a practice grounded in embodied and affective relations that are continually renewed through daily experiences.

Particularly significant in this context is the notion of “companion species,” which focuses on coexistence among all forms of life, drawing attention to how they recreate each other. In contrast to Rosi Braidotti’s concepts of “becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine,” which emphasise processes of posthuman transformation and fluid subjectivities, Haraway places particular emphasis on the reciprocal and co-constitutive nature of interspecies relationships; by stressing *with* she implies the value of mutual response (Braidotti 2013, 66).

### **1.7. Language and the Limits of Representing Animals**

The presence of nonhuman beings in literature is entangled with the structure of narrative, as their representation depends not only on what happens, that is, the fabula, but also on how it is presented. Mieke Bal, in her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2009), offers a three-part model—fabula, story, and narrative text—which provides an apparatus for analysing the status of animals in narratives. A narrative text, she writes, is “a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee (‘tells’ the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof” (2009, 5). The story, in turn, is “the content of that text,” which “produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and ‘colouring’ of a fabula.” In Bal’s terms, the fabula refers to a sequence of raw events, “logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (2009, 5). The story structures these events through techniques such as temporal manipulation, focalisation, rhythm, and character construction, while the narrative text is the material realisation of that story—its concrete telling in a given medium.

H. Porter Abbott similarly distinguishes between story and narrative, referring to the latter as narrative discourse. He emphasises that readers never access the story directly; instead, it “is always mediated—by a voice, a style of writing, camera angles, actors’ interpretations” (2002, 17). Because of the unreliable nature of language, emphasised by, among others, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, narrative can never be objective or transparent as it is a shaped expression of the story, filtered through human perception and

cultural values. This observation is especially important when considering the narrative presence—or absence—of animals, whose subjectivity is often obscured or overwritten. Understanding narrative as a construction susceptible to mediation allows us to ask not just what roles animals play in a given story, but how and why they are made visible—or remain invisible—within the narrative frame (48).

Focalisation emerges as a key mechanism through which perspective is assigned in narrative. Unlike the narrator, who tells the story, the focaliser is, in Mieke Bal's terms, "a specific agent of perception, the holder of the 'point of view'" (2009, 18). Focalisation functions as a tool for constructing subjectivity by attributing perception, emotion, and judgement to a character within the story. In most narratives, focalisation is assigned to human characters, meaning that the world of the story is filtered through human needs, fears, and desires. This anthropocentric orientation shapes how other beings are represented, and whether they are granted presence at all. While focalisation theoretically opens the possibility of decentring the human subject, in practice it often reinforces the limitations of human understanding. When narrative attempts to ascribe perception to nonhuman actors, it frequently risks anthropomorphism—that is, projecting human thought patterns and emotional states onto animals. Although this concern will be addressed in more detail later, it is important to note here that focalisation remains a crucial device for examining whose perspective is privileged, and whether nonhuman subjectivity can be meaningfully represented through it.

According to Margo DeMello's "Introduction" to *Speaking for Animals*, language faces significant challenges in accurately representing nonhuman minds. She refers to philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous statement, "[i]f a lion could talk, we could not understand him," to illustrate the inherent gap between human language and animal experience. Even more striking is her observation that "our perception of animals is heavily colored by the social construction of those same animals," which further complicates any attempt to understand them on their own terms (2013, 4). Even if animals could speak, their perception of the world differs so fundamentally from ours that human language may fail to capture their true thoughts and feelings. This dilemma is explored in Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*, where the ape-protagonist, Red Peter, learns to imitate human speech and

behaviour in order to escape captivity. Yet in doing so, he does not achieve genuine understanding; instead, he loses his original identity, remaining suspended in a liminal state between species. His eloquent speech becomes a tragic performance rather than true communication, revealing the limits of imposing human language onto nonhuman consciousness.

DeMello's essay also highlights that human attempts to describe animal minds through language are often burdened by the risk of anthropomorphism. This results in a distorted view, where animals are portrayed through a human lens rather than from their own perspectives. Moreover, the human interpreter—typically the author—holds authority over shaping the animal's speech, thoughts, and subjectivity. As a result, these speculations are inevitably shaped by human assumptions. The fundamental divide in communication—animals not possessing human language, and humans not fully understanding animal communication—makes it extremely difficult to represent nonhuman minds with accuracy.

Anthropomorphism, as Alexandra Horowitz explains in the *Encyclopedia of Human–Animal Relationships*, is “a natural human tendency” to attribute “human characteristics to objects, events, or nonhuman animals” (2007, 60). Human observers often interpret unknowns, such as nonhuman behaviour, motivations, and feelings, through intuitive analogies, applying familiar emotions, desires, or gestures to the animal world. The difficulty of defining the psychological connection that anthropomorphism establishes between humans and animals is further explored by Robert Mitchell:

Anthropomorphism proposes a relationship between human and animal psychology, but how to characterize this relationship is unclear. For some, anthropomorphism results from reasoning by analogy or, as discussed above, reasoning from homology. Analogical reasoning involves extrapolating from a well understood base domain (in this case, knowledge of human beings) to a less understood target domain (knowledge of animals), and in some cases reasoning from homology does as well. (2004, 14)

Anthropomorphism often relies on the assumption that people can understand animals by comparing their behaviour to patterns of human conduct. Such interpretations

are justified by pointing to shared evolutionary traits between humans and animals, including similar brain structures, which suggest that animals might experience the world in ways not entirely different from our own. Both approaches attempt to make sense of animal minds using human knowledge as a starting point, though they may not always lead to accurate conclusions. As Hank Davis notes, “we do not know enough about the role of conscious thought in determining human behaviour to extrapolate to any other species,” which means that human psychology itself is not a reliable basis for such analogies (1997, 336). Thus, the anthropomorphic assumption may be flawed—at best “premature or incomplete, and at worst, dangerously misleading” (Horowitz 2007, 60).

Despite its limitations, anthropomorphism remains a crucial tool for supporting interspecies awareness and empathy. It is most commonly employed when humans form emotional bonds with specific nonhumans, such as dogs or primates. Horowitz notes that “frogs’ lack of anthropomorphizable characteristics led to their dismal fate at the dissecting table” in biology classrooms (2007, 64). Similarly, Anna Barcz argues that observing nonhumans’ vulnerability can reawaken human sensitivity to the world, making animals powerful cultural mediators:

The animal’s appearance, mostly vulnerable, brings back the ability to experience reality and enables the reconstruction of our bonds with the outside world, making it culturally significant. Animals seem the closest, the most special connectors, mediators between people and the impersonal world of nature, and their anthropomorphisation also serves this purpose. (Barcz 2007, 54)

By reducing the perceived gap between species, anthropomorphism can heighten empathy and generate cultural or ethical agency for animals. This imaginative power is particularly evident in literature. Giving voice to animals in literary contexts can serve multiple functions, with ethical responsibility often being a central motivation as it is shown by Gwendolyn Davies’s *Beautiful Joe* (discussed in the following chapter of this dissertation).

Not all animals are anthropomorphised in the same way: certain species are socially privileged and granted protections, while others are targeted for extermination or

neglected. As DeMello notes, “[a]nimals are defined through human linguistic categories—pet, livestock, and working animal—and those categories themselves are related to how the animal is used by humans” (2012, 15). Biological classifications offer objective guidelines through taxonomy, but social categories seem more fluid and ideological. Language, a uniquely human system of representation, shapes physical reality through discursive means:

Is this a wild rabbit? A pet rabbit? A meat rabbit? A lab rabbit? An Easter rabbit? Biologically, it is all of the above. According to the Linnaean taxonomy, this creature is a member of the species *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, commonly known as the domesticated rabbit. This species of rabbit is found in the wild in Europe and in people’s homes as pets, and it is raised for food, fur, and laboratory purposes. (DeMello 2012, 45)

The name given to the rabbit influences their fate, defined through their utility to humans. While the taxonomical label is permanent, other terms vary depending on where the rabbit is born and the humans who take care of them. Human attitudes towards a given animal may be shaped by the values and beliefs of a specific sociocultural group. In many cases, it enforces illegitimate colonial repressions, such as the view that consuming particular animal species constitutes savagery or a lack of proper (Western) education. The death of a pet is often deeply mourned and may inspire belief systems in which animal afterlives are imagined—sometimes more inclusively than in traditional religious frameworks. Nevertheless, as DeMello points out, “[t]here is nothing distinctive about the animals that we consider to be pets, other than the fact that they have been chosen by humans and turned into pets” (2012, 147). This artificial designation becomes more problematic when applied to exotic species, often trafficked through the illegal pet trade. These animals are “neither domesticated” nor adapted to human companionship, yet they are absorbed into domestic spaces under the category of pet (149). In this system, categories are not stable; a growing animal population can shift its label from “endangered” to “pest.” The implications of such linguistic fluidity reveal the profound influence of language in shaping animal destinies and human–animal boundaries.

## 1.8. Conclusions

Animal studies, drawing on such critical approaches as postcolonialism, feminism, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, and strengthened by a concern for the moral status of animals, enables a move beyond symbolic and allegorical readings of animal characters in literature. This shift in attention away from anthropocentric paradigms is especially important, as “[t]o think of animals as mere tropes rather than real, living entities has no doubt contributed to the ease with which we have killed, and continue to kill, wittingly and unwittingly, unconscionable numbers of animals” (Ortiz-Robles 2016, 19). Ignoring animal subjectivity sustains structural exclusion and a “global picture of structural exploitation” and the mechanisms through which dominance is produced (Almiron 2016, 56). Literary texts, to some extent, impose a perspective, since it is the author who decides which animals are granted a voice and which remain part of an anonymous background. In this context, literary studies shall remain sensitive both to narrative technique and to the language that may support institutionalised violence. Animal studies allow for a more nuanced analysis and interpretation of less obvious manifestations of nonhuman subjectivity on various narrative levels. Horowitz, Mitchell and Davies highlight the risks associated with anthropomorphism, whereas Ortiz-Robles notes that “anthropomorphic animal plots endow animals with more complex characters, but they are driven by human action rather than animal behaviour.” However, it seems that appealing to what is familiar to humans remains the most effective strategy for eliciting empathy towards nonhuman protagonists – especially their vulnerability, as accentuated by Barcz, which possesses the power to influence readers.

The parallels between postcolonial and animal studies lie in the mechanisms of exclusion caused by colonisation, which affected both human and nonhuman worlds. Although the structure of global violence against animals is interdependent with the violence inflicted upon colonised peoples, animals have been further devalued, as humanity was defined in opposition to animality. This inseparability also extends to the fact that animals, deprived of agency, became tools of colonisation, contributing to widespread and long-term ecological destruction. While some scholars concern about the fact that focusing on the

nonhuman may divert attention from the suffering of those affected by colonialism, the growing awareness of the inseparability of the human and nonhuman realms demonstrates that including the animal perspective helps deepen interdisciplinarity by confronting shared sources of exclusion. This is due to “uninterrogated anthropocentrism and the representational and physical violence which it legitimises” (Chagani 634).

Rejection at the level of discourse legitimises physical exclusion; both the commodification of land and natural resources and the production of knowledge that accentuates difference have served to establish distinctions that justified the dominance of colonisers — a dominance that, in environmental terms, affects both human and nonhuman lives. Within ecocriticism, animal studies bring to the fore the problems of capitalist engineering of nature: conventional approaches to environmental protection rarely acknowledge the individual suffering of animals. In this context, ecocriticism develops an awareness of interconnectedness — demonstrating that climate, ecological and species-related issues are overlapping catastrophes that require a unified ethical strategy. Particularly significant is the concept, proposed by Donaldson and Kymlicka, of extending citizenship rights to nonhuman beings, depending on the degree and nature of their interactions with humans: domesticated animals (citizens), wild animals (sovereigns) and liminal animals (denizens). Literary studies can therefore approach narrative as part of a material and political context. While the literary representation of the natural environment and climate change is the primary concern of ecocriticism, animal studies focuses directly on animal vulnerability in the face of natural disasters. Crucially, both ecocriticism and animal studies draw on realism, as this mode of representation does not rely heavily on allegorical or symbolic readings.

Systemic similarities in mechanisms of exclusion are visible not only in the analogy between speciesism and racism but also in gender-based oppression. Recognising that the female body and the animal body are both subjected to exploitation under the same regime leads to a critique of reproductive economies and violent rituals (such as hunting or industrial farming) as manifestations of patriarchal violence. Physical strength is used to justify men’s superiority over women, just as it is used to justify human dominance over nonhumans. Although early ecofeminism primarily highlighted discrimination against

women, Joan Dunayer, drawing on examples from the animal kingdom, argues that “Human superiority is as much a lie as male superiority” (1995, 32). It becomes necessary, therefore, to analyse literary texts through the lens of not only ethnic but also gender relations, taking into account the consequences of biopower.

Both the biological suffering of individual animals (such as victims of laboratory testing) and collective ecological wounds (habitat destruction, biodiversity loss) constitute a record of ecological trauma. Literature may express this through fragmented plotlines, polyphony, or the disruption of chronological order. At the same time, representation remains problematic — narrative, shaped by humans, privileges the human perspective. Attempts to articulate the “inexpressible” must therefore acknowledge the limitations of language; the limitations that results both from the unspeakable nature of trauma and from the insufficient knowledge on animal consciousness. Any form of animal speech is inevitably filtered through an anthropocentric conceptual grid.

Classical currents of modern ethics have historically placed animals outside the sphere of morality — Cartesian mechanistic views and Kantian restrictions on rationality excluded living beings from the domain of moral subjecthood. However, contemporary thinkers increasingly argue that “[n]ot assigning individuals of other species the same moral consideration we do human beings has no ethical grounding and is linked to human inequality, power relations, and economic interests” (Almiron 2016, 55), as exemplified in the positions of Regan and Singer. The interests of animals as “subjects-of-a-life” must be taken into account and addressed with regard to their real needs.

Literature appears to offer a unique opportunity to question the boundaries between subject and object, and through its capacity to shape reality, it can engage in counteracting violence—whether economic, cultural, or biological—towards all living beings. Both narrative strategies, realist and distanced, or anthropomorphic and emotionally charged, can expose different aspects of our assumptions about language, emotion and the animal world.

## Chapter 2

### Animals and Environment in Canadian Literature in English

#### 2.1. Introduction

“Not surprisingly in a country with a high ratio of trees, lakes and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere,” observes Margaret Atwood in her critical overview *Survival* (2012, 70). Official data consistently support these words. According to *The State of Canada’s Forests: Annual Report 2019*, forests cover almost 35% of the total area, meaning that “Canadians enjoy more forest area per person than most other countries in the world, over 17 times the world average” (2019, 18). This overwhelming physical presence of nature has left its mark on Canadian literature. As early as the nineteenth century, the natural world—forests, rivers, snow, wild animals—appeared not only as a background but as a significant literary concern. Nature’s thematic continuity is clearly visible in literary titles alone, from early colonial accounts such as Catherine Parr Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) and *Canadian Wild Flowers*<sup>17</sup> (1869), to works by temporary Canadian residents like Philip Henry Gosse’s *The Canadian Naturalist: A Series of Conversations on the Natural History of Lower Canada* (1840) or Robert Michael Ballantyne’s *Snowflakes and Sunbeams; or, The Young Fur Traders: A Tale of the Far North* (1856). This tradition extends to later works such as Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925) and Canadian-born Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993).

The role of nature in Canadian literature has been highlighted in classic critical works, notably *Literary History of Canada* (1965), which recognises the diversity of texts that fall under the label of nature writing. Alec Lucas, the author of the chapter titled “Nature Writers and Animal Stories,” identifies multiple nature-centred subgenres, including “the legend, the nature novel, [and the] animal story, in its various forms of children’s story, animal biography, and short story,” to name a few (2019, 393). He briefly outlines different strategies for representing nature over time, paying special attention to fables and myths,

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<sup>17</sup> Illustrated (painted and lithographed) by Traill’s niece Agnes Fitzgibbon Chamberlin.

which he sees as the roots of nature writing. In the context of the Canadian literary tradition in particular, mythologised depictions of nature are noted to have been inspired by English Romanticism. Certain genres—such as the sportsman’s book—tend to emphasise human dominion over nonhuman animals and the natural environment. Crucially, these genres do not appear to have developed in a linear fashion; rather, most of them seem to have evolved independently of one another.

In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Margaret Atwood introduces the problem of Canadian national identity, or rather the lack thereof. The author searches for recurring patterns by bringing together examples from both prose and poetry. Atwood herself acknowledges that the work is not “particularly original” since “many of the ideas that inform it have been floating around (...) for a number of years” (2012, 31). Among the themes she identifies, “Nature the Monster” and “Animal Victims” are particularly striking. The former focuses on the transformation of the personified image of Nature and the hostile ways it often appears in Canadian literature, thereby calling into question the traditional persona of the “Divine Mother.” Atwood, along with James Polk (author of the article “*Lives of the Hunted*”), also highlights the significance of Seton’s and Roberts’s animal story and their efforts to remain faithful to scientific accuracy (Atwood 2012, 44-46; Polk 1972, 51-52). This strategy ultimately allows for the depiction of animal emotion and suffering. At the same time, by defining the idea of survival and victims, both critics link the status of animals in Canadian literature to the broader challenge of establishing a national identity. Polk comments that there is “no choice but to identify with these persecuted bears as they struggle to survive and heroically accept a defeat which is inevitable” (Polk 1972, 53), while Atwood concludes that Canadians tend to identify with prey animals, which reflects a self-image as a threatened and marginalised nation (Atwood 2012, 104-105). This perspective goes beyond concerns about wildlife conservation and reveals a projection of cultural anxieties—namely, a perception of the nation itself as a victim<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Another form of identification with the victim is reflected in the concept of the garrison mentality, described by Northrop Frye: “[s]mall and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier,’ separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and

More recent contributions, such as the edited volume *Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination* (2017), take a more explicit animal studies approach. The collection demonstrates how animal figures shape and challenge categories such as the human, the national, the political, and the ethical. Working at the intersection of ecocriticism and critical animal studies, the contributors raise questions about voice, vulnerability, and agency, tracing the representational strategies used to construct (or deconstruct) animals in literature. As Janice Fiamengo notes in her essay “‘The Animals in This Country.’ Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination,” although the focus on animals may once have seemed part of a “lunatic fringe,” the issues of human–animal relations and the literary representation of other-than-human life have gained significant traction across disciplines and methodologies (Fiamengo 2007, 28).

In order to approach these representations with conceptual precision, it is necessary to reflect on the meaning of the term nature. In *What Is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper reveals the ambivalence of this term, presenting a paradox at the heart of Western thought: defining nature as something entirely independent of human activity, influence, technology, or cultural constructs leaves very little of what is commonly described as nature or the natural landscape that actually satisfies such criteria. Almost everything has been transformed—at least indirectly—by human intervention, whether through agriculture, forestry, tourism, climate change, or other means:

if nature is conceptualised and valued, as it sometimes is in environmental philosophy, as that which is independent of human culture, then rather little of environment corresponds to the concept: hardly anything we refer to as natural landscape is [italic in original text] natural in this sense, and its supposed value might therefore be seen to be put into question (Soper 1995, 124).

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formidable physical setting — such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality” (Fray 1971, 223). It refers to the specific psychology of a settler community enclosed within a small enclave, surrounded by hostile or indifferent nature and marked by a strong sense of threat and alienation. Among its members, the dominant concern is survival rather than expansion or exploration.

Challenging this narrow view, Soper locates a deeper contradiction in the legacy of Western thought, where “‘civilized’ man is representative of the ‘humanity’ that is nature’s antithesis” (1995, 67). By emphasising the multidimensional character of the term, she identifies three main concepts that describe different ways of thinking about nature: the “metaphysical,” the “realist,” and the “lay” or “surface” notion. The metaphysical concept centres on the traditional belief in human exceptionalism, grounded in the opposition between human and nature, and by extension, between culture and nature. It calls into question the very idea of humanity as separate from the non-human and introduces the notion of a “non-human” subject. The realist concept of nature refers to the forces that govern all processes in the physical world and fall within the domain of natural science. While humans may harness certain aspects of these natural forces, they ultimately remain subject to them. The third, the lay or surface concept, refers to the most immediate and commonly held understanding of nature—as that which stands in contrast to the urban or industrial environment. This understanding is associated with direct experience and aesthetic appreciation; it encompasses both nearby material landscapes such as local forests and meadows, as well as more remote ecosystems like boreal or tropical rainforests (156).

Nature is a concept that often functions simultaneously in multiple registers: as a metaphysical category, as an empirical reality, and as a commonsense term. This slippage between meanings makes it particularly productive as a critical site. Soper distinguishes between a realist and a constructionist view of nature, both of which are crucial for analysing literary texts (1995, 10–11). While the realist position refers to nature as a material world that exists independently of human signification, the constructionist view foregrounds the cultural and symbolic production of nature as an idea. Rather than treating the two as mutually exclusive, she emphasises the importance of recognising the tension between them. At the same time, she defends the position that, regardless of the cultural conditions shaping our perceptions of nature, nature itself—as a reality independent of humans—does exist and must serve as a point of reference for any responsible ecological policy, arguing “that, unless we acknowledge the nature which is not a cultural formation, we can offer no convincing grounds for challenging the pronouncements of culture on what is or is not ‘natural’” (8). This ambiguity also defines the concept of anthropocentrism, understood here

not as a straightforward ideology of human supremacy, but as a historically situated structure of thought in which the human is positioned against and above the natural.

An attempt to bring closer what seems to belong exclusively to humans, such as culture, and in particular literature, and the environment was undertaken in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Scottish writer and essayist Kenneth White. Through his concept of geopoetics, the outline of which had already emerged in his book *Le Poète Cosmographe* (1987), he proposed an alternative way of understanding the relationship between humans and the natural world. This approach, informed by Romantic traditions, emphasises a deep, experiential connection with nature and a poetic mode of thinking grounded in a specific place, in a geographical sense. According to Kenneth White's geopoetics, nature acts as a dynamic force that can influence human consciousness and creativity, fostering deep intellectual and poetic engagement. His approach emphasises direct, immersive experiences with the natural world, where geography and thought intertwine. Through geopoetics, White rejects anthropocentric views, advocating for a profound connection between humans and the Earth that transcends borders and cultural limitations. Geopoetics aspires to go beyond theory, serving as a guide for societies towards deeper environmental consciousness. The author believes that by studying social constructs through the ages, some particular symbolic orders that constitute the meaning of nature in a certain time can be recognised.

In 2013, Oksana Weretiuk, one of the Polish interpreters of White's geopoetics, made an attempt to define and systematise the meanings associated with this concept. In each of the six meanings the scholar outlines, the bond between people and the earth emerges as a key element. Drawing on the mentioned seminal text of the founder of geopoetics, Weretiuk emphasises that by adopting the perspective of intellectual nomads, White called for deeper interaction with nature, both socially and individually (2013, 26-28, 41). In this immense contact, human creation in the form of geopoetry can draw on the language of science—especially geology and geography—in a creative, metaphorical, and ethical way. What is emphasised by the scholar is the fact that the use of scientific terminology serves not only aesthetic purposes but also encourages deeper reflection on geological time, the endurance of inanimate matter, and human responsibility towards the planet and landscape (2013, 29-

30, 32). Weretiuk continues this thought in her article “Geopoetics and Comparative Literature,” arguing that the language of geology, geography, and ecology serves as a new set of tools for describing the relationship between humans and space as an active participant in narrative. As the author points out, “the point of the matter is that geopoetics tries to give meaning to the complicated relationship between human beings and the Earth, and to write about that relationship with the help of metaphor and other artistic means” (2017, 174). Hence, the geopoetic approach implies the need for an interdisciplinary and ethical turn in literary studies, understanding the Earth as a carrier of memory, a witness to history, and a source of ethical reflection.

In turn, Anna Kronenberg, adapting the concept of geopoetics in the field of Polish literary studies, proposes a redefinition of White’s approach as an “ecological turn”<sup>19</sup> (2014, 40). Kronenberg also advocates a Romantic understanding of nature, which situates it in closer proximity to the human and presents it as a potential catalyst for a meaningful change in the world. By exposing a range of meanings with which nature can be identified, such as the Holy Mother Earth, a living organism, or a key to human spirituality, Kronenberg draws attention to the fact that nature cannot be set apart from civilisation, as it constitutes its very roots (2014, 116). By foregrounding the cultural, ethical, and symbolic dimensions of nature—whether through the scientific metaphors explored by Weretiuk or the Romantic sensibility invoked by Kronenberg—these approaches challenge the nature–culture divide and emphasise the need to reimagine nature as an integral and active element of human history, identity, and responsibility.

My intention is not, however, to provide thematic criticism *sensu stricto*—not only because of its ambiguous position within contemporary literary research (as Faye Hammill bluntly puts it, “this approach (...) is now widely considered to be old-fashioned and—in some ways—misleading or reductive”) (2007, 61). From this perspective, I do not treat “nature” as a thematically isolated object of literary analysis, nor do I attempt to define it in strictly ecological or philosophical terms. Rather, I focus on selected textual moments in which the natural or the more-than-human becomes legible: where animals, landscapes,

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<sup>19</sup> “zwrot ekologiczny” Translated by M.J.

forces, or seasons are registered in ways that challenge the presumed centrality of the human perspective. Although I draw on the tools of ecocriticism, I am particularly interested in how animal studies enables us to rethink older texts without subsuming the animal figure into either allegory or ecological metaphor. My approach is selective rather than exhaustive; I do not aim to catalogue all references to nature in nineteenth-century Canadian writing, but to consider selected examples of how nature and nonhumans are constructed, encountered, and resisted in literary form.

It should also be noted that this chapter focuses primarily on Anglophone literature and does not include the rich and diverse traditions of Indigenous and Francophone writing in Canada. These bodies of work require a separate, dedicated analysis. Finally, the perspective developed here is shaped by the methodological lens of animal studies, with its emphasis on interspecies relations, the politics of representation, and the ethical dimensions of literary form, in which the Great Chain of Being that imposes a subordinated position on animals appears as a starting point.

## **2.2. Canadian Environmental Traditions of the Nineteenth-Century Literature**

In the discussion of nature in the literary traditions of the territories of present-day Canada, references to the term *nature writing* seem fully justified. The concept, initiated in American literary studies, is characterised by Peter Algren Fritzell as a “troublesome and often paradoxical blend of impersonal (and largely descriptive) science, on the one hand, and intensely (and often egoistic) personal narrative and reflection, on the other” (1990, 6). This quotation seems particularly appropriate, as early texts consist largely of personal writing enriched with descriptive sections based on observation.

Joanna Durczak, in *Rozmowy z Ziemią*, explains that nature writing can be found in genres such as “an autobiographical essay, a journal, a non-fiction travel book, a lyrical poem, a philosophical essay, a short story and a popular science dissertation,” and should be seen as a tradition that prioritises nature and the human experience of the natural

environment. The most basic set of features used to identify nature writing includes an environmental element and a human being who “contemplates their relation with it”<sup>20</sup> (Durczak 2010, 18-19). Furthermore, according to Alec Lucas, the roots of nature writing “lie deep in folklore, the Bible, and the myths, fables, and pastorals of Ancient Greece, for man has always been concerned with his relationship to the natural world” (2019, 349). Henry David Thoreau, one of the founders of nature writing, is evoked as an author deeply integrated with nature, both physically and spiritually. According to Durczak, Thoreau did not comment uncritically on the cycle of nature, in which he himself took part while living in the forest for two years; at the same time, he emphasised the illusory comfort of civilisation, which ultimately leads to emptiness. His admiration for the beauty of nature brought him closer to the absolute, and he sought the sources of creative power within it (2010, 26–27). All this positions nature writing as portraying the natural environment as a context rather than background for human actions, with literary creation aiming to awaken a sense of responsibility for the surrounding world (24).

In the chapter “Literary and intellectual expression of the British Canadian of the period of the first settlers, travellers and explorers,” Oksana Weretiuk does not explicitly define the term “first settlers,” yet through historical context and the description of their experiences, the author presents them as those who arrived in the territories of present-day Canada between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and had to confront a foreign, hostile natural world. The beginnings of Canadian literature are linked to the accounts of travellers and explorers who, although without literary ambitions, described landscapes and encounters with Indigenous Peoples, thus creating the first imaginative domestication of the new space (Weretiuk 2024, 84). Following the scholar’s line of thought, in this section I focus on examples of English-language writing produced in the nineteenth century.

The first settlers may have felt overwhelmed by the untamed diversity of nature in Canada; human vulnerability, however, was not a dominant theme in their diaries and notes. John Francis Bosher highlights that the initial presence of Englishmen in Canada was “exploratory and scientific” in character (2010, 25). Among the wide variety of personal

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<sup>20</sup> “esej autobiograficzny, dziennik, reportaż podróżniczy, wiersz liryczny, esej filozoficzny, opowiadanie i rozprawa naukowa”; “człowiek kontemplujący swoje z nim relacje.” Translated by M.J

writings, David Thompson's narratives provide an example of a pragmatic approach to the unknown natural world. Thompson arrived in Canada to work as a cartographer, and his writings reflect a particular curiosity and scientific precision; at the centre of his interest were both human cultures and the natural environment:

Of Berries there are twenty species all known in europe [sic]<sup>21</sup> but one. They are, the dry and swamp Cranberry, the Crow and Black Berries, two kinds of Raspberries; the Strawberry; two kinds of Cherry's, both are small. White and Red Currants; the black Currant, a mild purgative; two kinds of Gooseberries, two of Hipberries; the Juniper berry; the Eye berry: the Bear Berry<sup>22</sup>; this has a low spreading plant which lies flat on the ground, it has it's [sic] use in medicine; the Natives collect and dry the leaves, wherever it can be procured; it is mixed with tobacco for smoking, giving to the smoke a mild, agreeable flavour. (1916, 58)

David Thompson created a kind of written catalogue of plants and animals he encountered during his journey. This pragmatic sensibility is particularly evident in his list-like description of local berries, which serves as a kind of field inventory. The passage reflects a need to organise and interpret the unfamiliar environment in terms recognisable to European readers. His plain language conveys a sense of environmental sensitivity, though he primarily focuses on the functional qualities of particular species. The description of the bearberry stands out: Thompson notes its medicinal use and that its dried leaves were mixed with tobacco, attributing this practice to Indigenous knowledge. Although his tone remains neutral, such remarks suggest an awareness of the relationship between local communities and their environment. Thompson also acknowledges the depth and resilience of Indigenous beliefs, noting that "there is a general belief in some things, and to directly question them on their religion is of no use, as those that have lived long with them, know very well" (1916,

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<sup>21</sup> Irregularities in spelling and grammar have been retained from the original; [sic] marks are used to indicate these verbatim.

<sup>22</sup> The original text includes footnotes with the Latin names of each species, prepared by Edwin A. Preble, which are as follows: *Vaccinium vitisidæa*, *Oxycoccus oxycoccus* (Linn.), *Empetrum nigrum* Linn., *Rubus strigosus* Michx., and *R. chamaemorus* Linn., *Fragaria canadensis* (Michx.), *Prunus virginiana* Linn., and *P. pennsylvanica* Linn., *Ribes rubrum* Linn., *Ribes hudsonianum* Richardson, *Ribes oxycanthoides* Linn., *Rosa acicularis* Lindl., *Juniperus sabina* Linn., *Rubus arcticus* Linn., *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (Linn.) (1968, 58).

361). His writing records these details not to romanticise them, but to acknowledge their relevance within a broader process of cultural exchange. As a researcher, he considered it his duty to document every aspect of the wildlife he encountered. Nevertheless, he often relied on information provided by Indigenous people, drawing on their knowledge of the natural world.

While writers like Thompson document nature with precision, other settler narratives are shaped by a tradition rooted in European Romanticism. In such texts, the scientific impulse gives way to a more emotional and symbolic view of the landscape. As Lucas observes, “much romantic writing is highly subjective, since even the intimate details of the natural world tend to lose themselves in this same awe” (2019, 395). For many settlers, nature became a source of spiritual reflection and moral guidance. The moral framework of Romanticism, where beauty signifies virtue and ugliness implies corruption, shaped the way the environment was understood. Furthermore, the idea that “living organisms in their immense diversity and marvellous adaptations were the outcome of the intentional design and purpose of God”<sup>23</sup> gained popularity among nineteenth-century writers and thinkers who believed that, by studying nature, one could comprehend God’s law (Ayala 2010, 840). According to natural theology, the physical attractiveness of living organisms provided evidence of God’s intentional design; this tradition often merged religious belief with empirical observation. Colonial contexts also provide an additional dimension to this tradition: settler writers viewed their study of plants, animals, and weather patterns not only as a scientific pursuit, but also as a way of fulfilling a Biblical calling. In this framework, the Canadian landscape could appear both awe-inspiring and morally charged, and therefore a source of divine knowledge and a reminder of humanity’s fall.

Writing of Catharine Parr Traill provides examples for this dual vision. While she is praised for the precision of her botanical descriptions, her writing often reflects a moral and theological lens: “[t]here seems in the vegetable world, as well as in the mortal, two

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<sup>23</sup> Taken out of context, this quotation may suggest approval of the theory of intelligent design. In fact, Ayala is here reconstructing a mode of thinking typical of the pre-Darwinian theological tradition, in order to demonstrate that evolution explains biological complexity more effectively than recourse to divine purposiveness. As both a biologist and a former clergyman, Ayala was one of the most outspoken critics of this theory. For details, see e.g.: *Is Intelligent Design Viable? The Craig-Ayala Debate* (Reasonable Faith 2009).

opposite principles, the good and the evil” (2018, 22). In *Studies of Plant Life in Canada: or, Gleanings from Forest, Lake and Plain* (1885), she draws explicit parallels between Canadian flora and Biblical history:

The vine which might have formed a delightful portion of man’s food in the Endemic garden, must from henceforth yield its luscious grapes only by care and labour. The wild wines must be pruned and trained and kept free from noxious weeds and hurtful insects; they were no longer the fruit of the Lord’s vineyard. Who can tell but that our Wild Canadian Frost and Fox Grapes may not be the degenerated seed of the wild vines of the land of the east, into which Adam and Eve were banished. (Parr Traill 2018, 177)

Traill combines practical advice on plant cultivation with a moral interpretation of the natural world. The plant, described in detail and with a degree of scientific accuracy, is also framed as a remnant of Eden, which was given by God, yet altered by human fall. The contrast between nutritious fruit and undesired animal and plant species suggests that nature is no longer an unspoiled paradise, but a space marked by labour and potential moral significance. Traill presents the environment as a site where divine order and human responsibility intersect; the land becomes not only a source of nourishment, but also a reflection of human conduct and its consequences.

This moralised vision of nature contrasts with the more ambivalent stance found in Susanna Moodie’s novelised memoir *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852). Described as “in love with the idea of nature but always suspicious of the actual wilderness,” she recounts the daily challenges of adapting to an undomesticated environment with humour and irony. A “reluctant pioneer,” who was shaped in her works, became “a kind of prototype for cultural memory” in Ontario (New 1989, 71). Similarly to Coleridge, who, according to Wesling, constituted “the landmark instance of writing for noticing’s sake—feeling tone of sky, landforms, the way leaves look on trees, local weather,” she often focuses on small sensory impressions and fleeting shifts in the natural world (2019, 4). Yet this poetic sensitivity does not lead to idealisation, as at one point, she admits that her “love for Canada was a feeling very nearly allied to that which the condemned criminal entertains for his cell—his only

hope of escape being through the portals of the grave” (Moodie 2003, 104). Her sharp observations reflect an ambiguous attitude towards nature, and the life situation shaped by physical hardship and emotional strain.

The tension between attraction and alienation forms a distinctive element of Moodie’s narrative voice. Margaret Atwood also argues that “faith in the Divine Mother and feeling of hopeless imprisonment—follow each other without break or explanation” (2012, 62). She emphasises that a lack of safety, and therefore limited trust in nature, is a characteristic feature of Canadian settlers’ texts. This is understandable, as vulnerable people at the very beginning of their pioneering lives experienced a destructive yet fascinating natural world. The critic argues that this attitude ultimately transforms into two ways of reading nature: “awe at the grandeur of Nature” and recognising it as “a kind of Mother or Nurse who would guide man if he would only listen to her” (Atwood 2012, 60). Consequently, nature, personified as sublime goodness and as a mother who cares for her children, was juxtaposed with a strict and remote God: “in some cases [she] replaced God the severe Father in Heaven” (61). Trusting the “Divine Mother,” who would lead a man and not let him down, requires, however, the rejection of goods and habits from the past (62). Moodie noted that “[it] was impossible to be nice about food and dress in the bush”; to follow the laws of nature, “people must learn to eat what they could get, and be content to be shabby and dirty, like their neighbours” (2003, 60). In her writing, nature becomes not only a space of physical challenge but also a site of moral revision. The settler’s values are tested and reshaped in accordance with the demands of the land.

Alec Lucas classifies nature novels as a separate genre, which is a combination of romantic and scientific approaches. The aim of nature novels is to present a human deeply immersed in the wilderness, like a “veritable [child] of the wild” (Lucas 2019, 394). The best-known representatives of this genre include Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton<sup>24</sup>. Patricia Morley sees William Alexander Fraser, Arthur Heming, and Archibald McKishnie as authors who enriched Canadian nature writing in a more romantic and less realistic manner. Fraser, a friend of Rudyard Kipling (whose influence is evident in

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<sup>24</sup> Their works will be discussed later in the dissertation, specifically in the context of the Animal Story.

his work), was a prolific author of short stories set in Nova Scotia. Among these, *Mooswa and Others of the Boundaries* (1900) stands out for its evocation of idealised biblical scenes, as it seems that “Fraser’s ideal is the: the peaceable kingdom, where the lion will lie down with the lamb—or the wolf with the rabbit” (Morley 2008, 353). Fraser’s work draws on the language of the Great Chain of Being, positioning humans as rulers over all creatures with a hierarchy shaped by a sense of benevolent stewardship, where animals accept their subordination as part of the natural order. His animal fables, such as *The Outcasts*, reinforce this moral framework: the story of an old buffalo and a wolf-dog teaches that “treachery is self-defeating, and loyalty and valour the best policy” (353). Arthur Heming, both a writer and a visual artist, combined literary description with artistic representation. His books—such as *The Drama of the Forests: Romance and Adventure* (1921) or *Spirit Lake* (1923)—pay homage to the lives of trappers, portraying nature as a space of mystery, beauty, and danger, while also serving as the background for adventure and survival stories. Through words and images, Heming crafts a vision of the wilderness as a source of aesthetic fascination as well as a theatre of human endeavour. McKishnie, by contrast, focuses more directly on the conflict between the wild and the encroaching forces of civilisation. In stories like *Love of the Wild* and *Openway*, he expresses both admiration for nature and anxiety about its fragility in the face of technological progress and hunting. In *Love of the Wild* (1910), the protagonist ultimately chooses “the little wilderness community after being initiated into ‘the Brotherhood of the Untamed,’” suggesting a form of belonging that resists the civilising pressures of modern life (353). In *Openway* (1922), McKishnie takes a more explicit stance in favour of animals, depicting a sanctuary as a refuge for creatures persecuted by humans.

Outdoor and sportsmen’s publications also represent a popular form of writing that emerged in the nineteenth century. According to Lucas, these texts “[revealed] the influence of romanticism as obviously as that which advocates a return to nature” (2019, 387). They, however, explicitly emphasise human distinctiveness. The necessity for people to dwell in the natural environment is fully justified by their God-given right to exercise power over the wilderness. The narratives emphasise stereotypically masculine traits such as courage, endurance, and outright audacity. Descriptions of harsh conditions serve to indicate

dominance over nature and a lack of fear. Greg Gillespie points out that sportsmen's narratives often take the form of journals or travel diaries written in the first person, which highlight the subjective experience of the male traveller. The scholar exposes and analyses this tendency, noting how adventure stories and landscape aesthetics served to "reveal a desire to present the land from the perspective of the colonizer" and reinforce male supremacy (Gillespie 2001, 26). In practice, toxic masculinity is evident, for example, in the "discriminating code of conduct to their sport," which claimed that "unlike lower-class pothunters, (...) the 'true' hunter claimed the pleasure of sport emerged from the intellectual aspects of the chase — not from the kill itself" (5). By insisting that a gentleman should hunt only during the proper season, they revealed their contempt for both poachers and Indigenous peoples — all the while engaging in "wholesale slaughter when confronted by the sheer abundance of grouse, deer, moose, and buffalo in nineteenth-century Canada" (6). As beings who stood higher in the hierarchy of living creatures, the sportsmen felt authorised to use nature for their own political and economic purposes. Even "the right to destroy it" was considered acceptable because of "man's dominion" (Lucas 2019, 387).

The authors of these works were not always Canadian-born, nor were their texts always first published in Canada. However, whether as permanent settlers or temporary explorers, they spent years immersed in the Canadian wilderness, and their literary output constitutes a significant contribution to Canadian nature writing. These works, through their detailed descriptions of the landscape, form part of Canada's literary heritage, even though they often reflect imperialist and exclusionary perspectives. The narratives offer valuable insights into how nineteenth-century Canada was imagined, shaped, and culturally integrated into the British Empire. Sportsmen's books are referenced in nineteenth-century Canadian literature, such as Henry Scadding's *Toronto of Old: Collections and Recollections* (1873), as well as in more contemporary works like Doug Sadler's *Reading Nature's Clues: A Guide to the Wild* (1987). Among the key figures in this movement are Campbell Hardy, Thomas Magrath, and Frederic Tolfrey. Hardy's *Forest Life in Acadie* (1869) and Tolfrey's *The Sportsman in Canada* (1845) focus on the customs of hunting and fishing, offering detailed accounts of the Canadian wilderness. Magrath's *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada* (1833)

provides an aristocratic perspective on early Canadian life, including reflections on outdoor pursuits.

The development of technology significantly influenced literary trends in the nineteenth century. Nature was often positioned in opposition to culture — which was linked to progress and urbanisation — and the rural world began to lose its former value. In this context, nature came to be seen as gentle and passive, a characterisation that reinforced its perceived weakness and subordination. Technology and science became symbols of power that allowed humans to finally feel justified in their drive to exert control over nature. As William Herbert New points out, “science offered explanations of environment, and technology seemed to put control into human hands” (1989, 92). From this perspective, nature can be regarded as a relic of Romantic sentimentalism, which idealised the wild as a source of beauty and moral instruction but also presented it as subordinate to human authority. As a result, “man’s kinship with the wild creatures was usually expressed with rod and gun” (Lucas 2019, 397). The growing value of technology and science systematically devalued nature and the traditions of Canadian Indigenous peoples. These traditions, which emphasised reciprocal relationships with the land, were often dismissed as unscientific or primitive, contributing to the erasure of Indigenous epistemologies. Ceremonial and spiritual practices, including vision quests, smudging, and land-based rituals, were marginalised or even criminalised in the past, as scientific rationalism and institutional religion took precedence. At the same time, oral storytelling—a vital means of preserving history, law, and identity—was overshadowed by written records and digital media because of “erroneous Western beliefs that the written word is more trustworthy than oral histories” (Caroleen Molenaar 2020 par. 4). Such colonial practices contributed to the erasure of Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews.

Contrariwise, the sentimental treatment of nature in Anglophone Canadian writing began to shift. Wilderness started to assert its presence on its own terms, not only as a background for a white man’s adventure.

The world of nature represented a moral crucible in which to test manliness, strength, courage, heroic resources. It was also a world of science, apparently verifiable. At a time when

it was deemed Canadian literature could do no better than to imitate the proved virtue of English literary models, nature was also a subject or setting that concurrently proved Canada's distinctiveness. (New 1989, 112)

The myths of wilderness, which are crucial for Canadian heritage and identity, are well established, and, as Faye Hammill argues, critics have often sought to identify common thematic categories within this tradition (2007, 64). One category of Canadian nature writing tends to depict the wilderness as a hostile and treacherous environment, as can be seen, for instance, in Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and John Richardson's *Wacousta; or, A Tale of the Canadas*. Another category presents nature as a source of "healing, escape and self-knowledge and may also teach humans about their kinship with animals" (64). The latter mode becomes more prominent in later Canadian literature, as discussed in this section. However, the boundary between these categories is not fixed—*Wacousta* shows how a seemingly hostile wilderness can also reflect deeper moral questions. *Wacousta*, with its nuanced portrayal of the natural world and its historical setting during the conflict between French and English colonies, is often regarded as one of the first Canadian historical novels. This recognition also reflects Richardson's background: born in Canada and connected through his maternal lineage to Indigenous communities. While the novel appears at first to follow the tradition of wilderness-as-terror, it ultimately suggests that the real source of fear lies not in nature itself, but in human nature: the violence, vengeance, and betrayal that emerge within the colonial community. The Canadian forest, though dark and unfamiliar, is presented as a morally neutral environment governed by harsh natural laws. By contrast, it is the characters—especially the white settlers—who bring destruction and suffering through their actions.

### **2.3. From the Animal Figure to the Animal Story as a "Distinctly Canadian"**

#### **Genre**

In contrast to the theme of nature, which appears even in the first settlers' narrative texts, the presence of animals was not always prominent; for a time, nonhumans were

regarded as little more than animate parts of the environment. Seen as inseparable elements of boreal forests, prairies, and other biomes, they evoked images of landscapes and natural resources. The harsh and demanding lives of the first settlers led them to consider wild forest animals primarily as a source of food, and this instinctive approach should be seen as thoroughly rationalised.

The attitude of the reluctant pioneer, mentioned in the previous section, is reflected in Moodie's biography. Melissa Edmundson notes that Moodie strongly refused her fiancé's proposal to move to South Africa due to "her fear of the wilderness and wild animals, particularly large animals such as elephants, lions, and tigers" (2018, 25). However, she eventually agreed to emigrate to Canada, where her family had already settled. One of her settler narratives, *Roughing It in the Bush*, combines various genres, including autobiography, travel writing, and fiction. In this work, the narrator can be identified with the author herself; as Edmundson observes, "Moodie establishes herself as the Gothic heroine of the tale, naïve and well-meaning, at the mercy of nefarious strangers, and trapped in an unforgiving, often hostile, frontier setting" (2018, 26).

The Canadian wilderness was not without its own dangers. Large predators such as bears and wolves were a source of rational fear and respect for Moodie. She adjusted the tone of her stories depending on the nonhuman character she described. For instance, one of the bears is depicted as a "shaggy monster," while the wolves, though potentially dangerous, are presented with a degree of nuance: "except in large companies, and when greatly pressed by hunger, they rarely attack men" (Moodie 2021, 228). In contrast, the story of a dog named Chance has a more touching and sympathetic tone. The nonhuman character reveals its presence in a conversation with "the old hunter," Brian (88).

"I found him," he said, "forty miles back in the bush. He was a mere skeleton. At first I took him for a wolf, but the shape of his head undeceived me. I opened my wallet, and called him to me. He came slowly, stopping and wagging his tail at every step, and looking me wistfully in the face. I offered him a bit of dried venison, and he soon became friendly, and followed me home, and has never left me since. I called him Chance, after the manner I happened with him; and I would not part with him for twenty dollars." (Moodie 2021, 89)

This passage presents Chance as an individual living being with a story of suffering, survival, and ability to establish relationships. Brian's account invites the reader to witness the encounter through a lens of empathy, emphasising Chance's vulnerability and physical pain. The details of the dog's approach, expressed through his wagging tail and careful movements, show his body and behaviour as a form of nonverbal communication that makes his plea for care and connection visible. Chance is not presented as a generic dog but as an individual with a name and a relational identity shaped by his bond with Brian. However, this seemingly positive story of interspecies relationship ultimately meets the harsh realities of settler life: when Chance later developed a habit of killing sheep and was caught killing eight individuals belonging to a neighbour, he was shot. Brian mourned Chance's loss deeply. His words, "I would have restored the sheep fourfold (...) if he would but have spared the life of my dog" prove the genuine value of their bond from the human perspective (Moodie 2021, 142).

Subsequently, Moodie's description of the encounter with the deer reflects the influence of English Romanticism, a tradition that idealised nature as a source of beauty and spiritual insight. The passage presents a vivid and emotionally charged image of the deer. The narrator foregrounds the animal's physical magnificence.

It was a noble sight, that gallant deer exerting all his energy, and stemming the water with such matchless grace, his branching horns held proudly aloft, his broad nostrils distended, and his fine eye fixed intently upon the opposite shore. Several rifle-balls whizzed past him, the dogs followed hard upon his track, but my very heart leaped for joy when, in spite of all his foes, his glossy hoofs spurned the opposite bank and he plunged headlong into the forest forest. (Moodie 2021, 454)

The use of adjectives elevates the deer to a near-heroic figure, while the imagery of the way the animal moves evokes a sense of natural majesty and defiance. Moodie's language draws attention to the aesthetic and emotional impact of the scene, drawing from the Romantic tendency to equip nature with symbolic meaning. At the same time, the tension in the scene is unmistakable as the deer, a creature of grace and strength, is

simultaneously the target of violence—a reminder of the colonial context in which hunting serves as a form of dominance over the land and its creatures. Yet the narrator does not celebrate the hunt. Instead, the emotional peak comes when the deer escapes. Even though the failure of the hunt may reduce the food supply, the narrator appears unconcerned with this fact; she tentatively expresses her delight in the view. Watching the deer's struggle for life, she quietly cheers him on. Her emotional involvement in the situation is also proved by references to her heart. Philip Armstrong claims that for Romantics, "animals were fundamental to the cultural task of literature: the definition of what it meant to be human, and the refinement of ideas about sensibility and sympathy as central components of individual and civic virtue" (2002, 342). Although the realms of people and wild animals presented in Moodie's writing remain separate, throughout her observations she expresses a genuine fascination with the nonhuman.

Similarly to the story of Chance, the relationship between humans and the animal other in *Roughing It in the Bush* is shaped by the harsh conditions of settler life, where survival often takes precedence over sentiment. The settlers' struggles frame the deer as a vital source of sustenance. Moodie's admiration for the deer's grace and resilience is finally overshadowed by a practical awareness of the animal's role in the food chain. Within this context, hunting becomes more than a mere act of subsistence—it transforms into a mark of skill and status. Capturing a buck trapped in a fence or felling a deer with a single, well-aimed shot becomes a story of pride in an otherwise difficult life. This approach, in which animals are both admired and used for human needs, finds resonance in the nineteenth-century sportsmen's books discussed earlier. These texts, while encouraging readers to immerse themselves in nature, often reinforce a division between humans and animals. The non-fictional character of such works suggests that the portrayal of the human as a conqueror of the land and an avid hunter reflected a widespread attitude among the nineteenth-century sportsmen.

The detailed manner in which Thomas William Magrath describes his experiences in the *New World* makes his *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada* (1833) a valuable guide for those interested in outdoor activities, particularly hunting. The publication gathers together

letters written by Irish emigrants, such as Magrath, William Radcliff<sup>25</sup>, and Bridget Lacy<sup>26</sup>, which were sent to recipients in their home country, offering reflections on settler life. Among these contributors, Magrath provides the most extensive sections on hunting, sharing not only vivid accounts of his pursuits but also practical advice on the necessary equipment, preparation techniques, and strategies for a successful chase. His letters present hunting primarily as a form of sport, focusing on the mechanical process of killing animals rather than on any reflection on their subjectivity or the ethics of the act.

In December, 1830, having arrived at the hunting ground, early in the morning, we found the tracks of deer so numerous on the snow, as to resemble those of a flock of sheep.

Getting forward, in great heart, we came to a ravine, where we spied at least twenty deer, gamboling about a spring. Each singled out his deer and fired. Without waiting to see whether they fell, we made off to a pass where I knew the herd would come out, and having re-loaded, we met them precisely at the expected place, bounding and clearing every obstruction. (Magrath 1967, 259)

The hunting scene opens with a striking image: abundance of deer tracks in the snow. This simile compares the deer to a pastoral image of sheep—creatures symbolically submissive, bred and managed for human purposes. It suggests not only the abundance of game but also the implicit right of the hunter to claim these animals as property. The passage's vivid imagery and action-driven pace mirror the hunters' experience of the chase, reinforcing a sense of human mastery over both land and animal life. Yet the narrative omits any sensory details of the deer beyond their number and location. Reduced to targets, the deer are unnamed, their deaths unrecorded, and their subjectivity entirely disregarded—they hold value only as symbols of masculine prowess, territorial knowledge, and colonial

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<sup>25</sup> "William Radcliff was an Irishman, the son of a prominent chaplain in the Church of England. He attended Trinity College prior to emigrating at the age of 26, presumably in hopes of improving his situation in Canada. William emigrated with a group of 13 family members and friends that included his expectant wife Rebecca, their little girl Mary, and some servants" (Forster 1991, 125)

<sup>26</sup> "Bridget Lacy, a young Irish domestic servant, was among the immigrants who sailed up the St. Lawrence to Quebec, having left the Emerald Isle for what some referred to as the wilds of America" (Forster 1991, 2). Although the Emerald Isle can today refer to certain territories in Canada—a township in Ontario or one of the Canadian Arctic islands—it stands here as a poetic name for Ireland.

entitlement. The hunter is portrayed as a predator, but unlike nonhuman predators who kill to survive, he kills for pleasure, seeking to maximise the number of his kills as a mark of skill. The death of animals is not framed in moral or ethical terms but as a form of entertainment. This portrayal of hunting as sport contrasts with Moodie's narrative, where hunting is framed as a necessity for survival.

In Frederic Tolfrey's *Sportsman in Canada* volumes, nonhumans are depicted as animate components of the Canadian wilderness; they are acknowledged primarily as potential trophies, namely objects of hunting and fishing. The author's authoritative descriptions seem a trustworthy source of knowledge. For instance, Tolfrey provides a report on the population of a particular species, commenting that "the wild turkey is rarely met within the Province of Lower Canada, although they have been seen and shot by the settlers on their first arrival to clear the land." By admitting, "the first wild turkey I ever saw was about eighteen miles above Toronto, in Upper Canada," he proudly expresses his satisfaction at having "had the good fortune to kill him" (1983, 279). Evidently, this statement does not convey even a slightest dose of empathy towards nonhuman beings, as the human does not perceive any intrinsic value in the animal.

The scene of fishing is another performance of human supremacy over another kind of being. Combining personal memory with romanticised nostalgia, it creates an almost mythic aura around the act of fishing:

We had a regular battle for it; but I had an old hand at my elbow to check my impatience, and owing to his masterly directions, I succeeded in killing my fish, which he landed for me. It weighed nearly ten pounds, and, as may be imagined, I was not a little elated at my success. I know not of any excitement, attended with such unqualified delight, equal to killing a salmon; and to a youngster as I then was, and passionately fond of fishing withal, the sensation I experienced on taking my first fish is scarcely to be defined, if expressed. I was nearly suffocated with joy if I may so express myself and never to my latest breath shall I cease to remember this eventful day. (Tolfrey 1983, 82)

What makes the author and his instructor satisfied is the collaborative effort that culminates in the killing of a salmon. While the animal has no chance of survival in this

unequal struggle, the humans seem unaware of their dominance, focusing on the thrill of the chase and the fulfilment of their goal. The author's elation is almost inexplicable, as if the death of the fish grants him a state of near-ecstasy. This event is framed as a remarkable ritual, marking the author's initiation into the world of angling and legitimising his status as a fisherman. The use of the word *battle* reveals a human-centred perspective in which nature is simultaneously an adversary and a source of pleasure. The language elevates the act of killing a fish to a moment of near-transcendence, and the hyperbolic expressions used to describe the pleasure suggest a sense of overwhelming emotional intensity, presenting this encounter with nature as a formative experience.

This image of nature as a stage for masculine achievement and dominance leaves little room for the animal as a sentient being. Such narratives, rooted in conquest and emotional gratification derived from killing, foreground the absence of empathy or recognition of animal suffering. The earliest representations of animals in Canadian narratives typically present them as game, markers of abundance, or symbols of faith, or masculine identity. What appears to be a straightforward series of events—tracking, killing, skinning—constitutes the story layer: a causally linked sequence of actions involving animals and human actors. However, as both Bal and Abbott stress, narrative involves a level of construction and mediation: a narrator presents the story through specific focalisation, temporal structure, and rhetorical framing. In the case of Canadian sportsmen's writing, the animal does not emerge as a narrative subject but as an object shaped entirely by the human narrator's perspective. The story may concern the hunt, but the narrative conveys dominion, utility, and the ideological logic of settlement.

The human-centred narrative structure, in which animals serve merely to advance the settler's story, stands in sharp contrast to the emerging genre of the Canadian animal story. And although Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1893) is not typically classified as a regular example of this tradition, as she did not pursue the story in the wilderness circumstances, her "'autobiography' of a dog reveals the sympathetic identification with the animal kingdom which marks the majority of Canadian writers" (Morley 2008, 344). Saunders's desire to approach an animal mentality strongly contrasts the concept of sportsmen's books. In this light, *Beautiful Joe* seems to be a unique fictional work, awarded

by the Humane Society in 1893. The head of the committee, Hezekiah Butterworth, expresses an urgent need “to see as animals see, and to feel as animals feel” in the novel’s introduction (2018, 3). The novel, directly inspired by the English *Black Beauty*, seems to “teach the reader how to live in sympathy with the animal world; how to understand the languages of the creatures that we have long been accustomed to call ‘dumb’, and the sign language of the lower orders of these dependent beings” (3). Although “[t]he animal biography began as a story of domesticated animals and is exemplified early in English Canadian literature by Mrs. Moodie’s *The Little Black Pony and Other Stories* (1850),” it was *Beautiful Joe* which “gave the animal biography the impetus it has retained to the present” (Lucas 2019, 396). At the same time, however, “their use of intrusive moralizing and their romantic and implausible plots make them technically less ‘realistic’” (Dean 2007, 371), Saunders’s<sup>27</sup> stories lay foundation for the whole generation of the sentimental stories that centre pets (Lucas 2019, 396). Here, the animal is no longer an object trapped within the story but the source of narrative discourse; in the case of Joe—a dog, becomes the narrator and central character of his own story. This shift not only reconfigures the position of the animal within the narrative but also challenges the terms on which narrative has been constructed. From Bal’s perspective, *Beautiful Joe* radically reassigns focalisation, allowing the story to be coloured by the perspective of a nonhuman subject.

Gwendolyn Davies lists key features of *Beautiful Joe* which, like *Black Beauty*, include narration “by an aged domestic animal, has strong moral overtones, and reveals the physical suffering of animals” (Dean 2007, 315). The first-person narrative is written in the form of an autobiography of a real dog, who experienced violence and cruelty at the hands of humans. What is worth noting is the fact that the author met a real dog, Joe, which was rescued by her family<sup>28</sup>. As a result, Saunders approached the narrative with a sense of personal involvement. The dog’s story, divided into chapters, presents the chronological events of his life. The observations, reflections, and judgements expressed by the canine narrator are strongly anthropomorphised. The author uses the animal to construct a specific type of

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<sup>27</sup> Lucas credits both authors Saunders and Sewell with popularising the genre of animal ‘autobiographies’ (2019, 397).

<sup>28</sup> Her family’s name is fictionalised as Morris in the novel.

narrative voice: Joe recounts his interactions with both human and nonhuman figures, repeats dialogues he overhears, and describes *his* emotions. It is difficult—if not impossible—to assess Saunders’s understanding of animal psychology; her attempt to craft a dog’s perspective appears to rely primarily on close observation of canine behaviour. Without access to the animal’s actual inner world, the portrayal comes across as somewhat speculative. From the stable, Joe begins to weave his tale:

I thought about my poor mother, and wished she was here to lick my sore ears. Though she was so unhappy herself, she never wanted to see me suffer. If I had not disobeyed her, I would not now be suffering so much pain. She had told me again and again not to snap at Jenkins, for it made him worse.

In the midst of my trouble I heard a soft voice calling, “Joe! Joe!” It was Miss Laura’s voice, but I felt as if there were weights on my paws, and I could not go to her. (Saunders 2018, 15)

Metaphorical expressions convey Joe’s emotional burden, as Saunders draws the reader’s attention not only to physical suffering but also to mental injuries. Among the most *doggish* elements are references to typical canine standards of behaviour, such as licking, which in the relationship between a bitch and her puppy serves not only for cleaning but also for expressing emotions. Still, the reflections that follow are shaped by a human overview of actions and consequences, and by the use of social codes, including using by animals titles such as *Miss*. It is difficult to look for justification for such a conceptualisation in the state of science, especially considering the colossal progress research on animal psychology made in the twentieth century. As Charles G. D. Roberts (a contemporary of Saunders whose output is also discussed later), observes:

The real psychology of the animals, so far as we are able to grope our way toward it by deduction and induction combined, is a very different thing from the psychology of certain stories of animals which paved the way for the present vogue. Of these, such books as “Beautiful Joe” and “Black Beauty” are deservedly conspicuous examples (2024, 5).

Although strong anthropomorphism may fail to capture the true nature of the dog in human language, Saunders aims to stress its subjectivity. Scholars such as Brian Johnson (2007, 335) and Oksana Weretiuk (2018, 99) have emphasised that literature provides a space to show that, although dogs cannot use language in the human sense, they nonetheless exhibit signs of understanding it<sup>29</sup>. In this context, the author's effort to convey the dog's comprehension contributes to a broader awareness of animals' needs and supports what Johnson calls a "presumption of a fundamental kinship between animal and human subjectivity" (2007, 335). Indeed, Saunders's literary work played a crucial role in shaping public perception of animals in her time, as she "advocated the alleviation of animal abuse, moral responsibility to the wider community, and ecological respect for bird and natural life" (Davies 2012, 170).

The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and, later, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) redirected both scientific and popular attention towards nonhuman life. Following the first publication, nature writers began to reconcile the apparent randomness of natural selection with a sense of order: as Thomas Dunlap observes, "[n]ature writers attempted to interpret evolution in ways that would emphasize law and purpose in nature" (1992, 56). At the same time, Darwin's systematic documentation of "the various forms of emotional expression that he found in animals (including human)," gave new weight to the idea that feelings were not the sole province of humankind (Donovan 2018, 70). Josephine Donovan argues that this recognition of shared affective capacities was crucial for dismantling the claim to human exceptionalism (270-71). By tracing emotion to evolutionary origins rather than to human culture, Darwin provided a scientific justification for literary experiments in animal psychology. Granting nonhumans a

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<sup>29</sup> Dogs have become remarkably adept at understanding human language. Thanks to modern brain imaging methods (fMRI), it has been established that, similarly to humans, dogs exhibit lateralisation — meaning that the left hemisphere is responsible for the meaning of words ("lexically marked"), while the right hemisphere processes emotional intonation. "In dogs, specific selective forces during domestication could have also supported interspecific communicative and learning skills" (Andics et al., 2016, 1032). Moreover, research conducted by Marianna Boros et al. revealed the N400 effect, which may indicate the ability to create "the mental representation of the object upon hearing its name" — although the researchers emphasise that this likely refers to a specific object rather than a general category (1752). There is growing evidence that communication between humans and dogs "has evolved as a result of domestication," and the use of elements such as message content, tone of voice, and intonation allows "dogs [to be] successful in following solely auditory signals for problem solving" (Langner et al., 2023, 9).

certain mental space, “the stories emphasized the perspective of the animal itself” (Lutts 1998, 1). And although “[t]he animal must remain central, for the authors stress and pride themselves on the truthfulness of their animal psychology” (Lucas 2019, 398) in ways that may appear naïve from a contemporary perspective, their efforts were culturally and intellectually significant at the time. Lucas pays attention to this scientific turn:

Stories about wild animals, like those about tame, may be either biographical tales, which present some episode or life history in simple narrative form, or short stories, and all may be either “true” or fictitious. Yet they differ, for the story about the wild animal has a greater scientific bent. It tries to avoid humanizing tendencies (...). (Lucas 2019, 397)

Saunders’s novel is not always classified within the canon of the animal story, partly because the genre is sometimes more narrowly defined as wild animal stories. According to Lucas, this distinction may reflect formal differences in the texts. Wild animals, not living in association with humans and bound by entirely different forms of connection than companion animals, are theoretically more resistant to misguided anthropomorphism. Lucas expresses the belief that wild animals have a better chance of being represented in a more objective manner, consistent with naturalistic observation. This highlights a difference in epistemological status: stories about wild animals may aspire to scientific knowledge, whereas those about domesticated animals more often fall within the realm of emotional or moralising narrative.

Ralph Lutts argues that the literary output of Charles George Douglas Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton makes it possible to identify a “realistic wild animal story” in which “the animals ‘live for their own ends’, rather than for human ends” (Lutts 1998, 1). New also observes that these authors sought to analyse animal behaviour in relation to animal psychology, motivated by a pursuit of *truth* in nature. Rather than treating behaviour as the product of instinct alone, writers began to consider the possibility of reasoned or emotionally driven responses in animals. As the critic notes, “it was not instinct alone that dictated animal behaviour but something akin to reason” (New 1989, 115). This perspective opened a way for presenting more nuanced portrayals of animal consciousness, however

speculative they might appear today. Consequently, and in contrast to pet biographies, where animals are often framed through their relationships with humans, the wild animal story demanded a different narrative structure. As Shakti Brazier-Tompkins concludes, “[h]uman activity in a wild animal story, in particular, must be marginal, or the human must function as an antagonist to the animal’s protagonist” (2017, 61). This marginalisation of the human figure can be understood as a device of the genre’s ethical orientation, which seeks to centre the nonhuman perspective. The key features—scientific accuracy (as far as it was possible at the time), psychological complexity, and limited (but still present) human interference—can be recognised in the works of Roberts and Seton, who are listed as the founders of this literary category.

A biographical note on the Ernest Thompson Seton Institute website introduces Seton as “an award-winning wildlife illustrator and naturalist who was also a spell-binding storyteller and lecturer, a best-selling author of animal stories, an expert in Native American Sign language, and an early supporter of the political, cultural, and spiritual rights of First Peoples” (“Biography” para. 1). His life exemplifies an insatiable curiosity about the natural world. Although he received formal training in art, his field expeditions were motivated by a desire to understand nature’s laws; one such journey was a 2,000-mile canoe trip through northern Canada with Edward Preble of the U.S. Biological Survey. His amateur but meticulous observations of Canadian wildlife are a vital part of his legacy, encompassing topics such as animal behaviour, morphology, and habitats. According to Misao Dean, Seton made considerable efforts to be recognised as a scientifically credible writer, and although these efforts “[led] to his collaboration with important biologists and museums, his role was almost always limited to that of illustrator” (2017, 286). Nevertheless, his ethical stance on animal life is exemplified by his belief that “the animals have a job to do for science that they can do, perhaps, by other means than simply dying”—a view that led him to adopt a more restrained approach in the field (293). To the surprise of his companion, he refused to kill more animals than necessary for specimen collection.

In accordance with his research, Seton dares to challenge the legitimacy and necessity of hunting, especially when practised as a form of entertainment. He is also noted for his efforts to reduce the consumption of food of (wild) animal origin. The ethical problem of

hunting emerges clearly in *The Arctic Prairies*, and is a direct consequence of his extensive fieldwork. Describing a scene in which wild geese are hunted while trying to protect their young, he “appeals to sentiment to condemn the results of this hunt,” as adult geese perform typically human kinds of behaviour, showing how devoted to their children they are (Dean 2007, 295). Although this is only one of many examples presented by Seton, it is worth noting that he was personally committed to altering the perception of nonhumans: by carrying his own food supplies, he sought to avoid killing animals for sustenance.

Based on personal experience and studies, he published non-fiction guides such as *Mammals of Manitoba* and *Birds of Manitoba*. A creative milestone, though, is the appearance of nonhuman beings as the main characters in his fictions. In the Introduction to *Wild Animals I Have Known*, Seton explained:

Although I have left the strict line of historical truth in many places, the animals in this book were all real characters. They lived the lives I have depicted, and showed the stamp of heroism and personality more strongly by far than it has been in the power of my pen to tell.

I believe that natural history has lost much by the vague general treatment that is so common. What satisfaction would be derived from a ten-page sketch of the habits and customs of Man? (2009, 2)

Seton highlights the aporia inherent in relying solely on dry, historical facts which although closer to scientific truth, can strip animals of their individuality. Writing about nature without emotional involvement fails to capture its complexity, as each animal is a unique being, not merely a representative of its species. He declares that the protagonists of his stories truly existed, yet his version of events may not be fully consistent with historical facts. By loosening his grip on factual accuracy, Seton aims to make the animals appear more as individuals than specimens.

Among the prevailing wild animal stories, Seton also attempted to portray his dog—but in a manner entirely different from that used by Saunders in *Beautiful Joe*. The short

story "*BINGO: The Story of My Dog*<sup>30</sup>" presents the emergence of a deep relationship between the narrator and his dog. From the very beginning, it becomes clear that the human figure is an active participant in this relationship:

Early in the spring I had begun Bingo's education. Very shortly afterward he began mine. (...) I soon noticed that Bingo never passed without minutely examining this mysterious post. Next I learned that it was also visited by prairie wolves as well as by all the dogs in the neighbourhood, (...) I made a number of observations that helped me to an understanding of the matter and enable me to enter more fully into Bingo's private life. (Seton 2009, 47)

The dog's caregiver strives for interspecies understanding. By paying close attention to the behaviour of this nonhuman companion, he seeks to identify patterns and regularities. As an eager learner, he makes a concerted effort to understand the dog's potential relationships with the wild animals living nearby. He not only endeavours to observe the dog's mentality with care but—above all—approaches the dog's life as an autonomous existence. However, the author's efforts become more naïve when he seeks to recognise and translate the dog's language into human terms. The dog's speech is conveyed by the human narrator who, as it is explicitly stated, feels entitled to extract its meaning:

Grrrh! woof! there's that dirty cur of McCarthy's. Woof! I'll 'tend to him tonight. Woof! woof! (...) A coyote track coming from the north, smelling of dead cow. Indeed Pollworth's old Brindle must be dead at last. This is worth looking into. (Seton 2009, 48)

Seton puts an anthropocentric perspective on the dog's supposed speech. The narrator appears not only to interpret but also to appropriate the dog's language, performing a gesture of epistemological dominance. The human assumes the existence of a shared linguistic code which, thanks to his supposedly more developed intellect, he believes he is able to decipher and translate—yet in doing so, he imposes his own categories of thought, morality, and agency onto the animal. It appears that the dog aims to convey some

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<sup>30</sup> Original title capitalisation retained.

information, but the importance of chosen words is defined by the human. To distinguish it from the language of *Homo sapiens*, he uses some onomatopoeic elements, without attributing them any definite meaning for the human recipient. The balance between the necessity of *realism* and the desire to present a nonhuman figure who could be understood by humans creates a situation in which, as Brian Johnson comments, “the traditional criteria by which realist representations of the animal might be judged have become so unstable that anthropomorphism returns through the back door” (2007, 335). The narrator attributes not only thoughts to the dog but also a logic of behaviour, causing the narrative to oscillate between behavioural realism and the literary construct of an anthropomorphised protagonist. Additionally, pets are inevitably objectified; despite a degree of freedom, the narrator’s expression—“having got possession of his person”—when speaking about Bingo reveals a possessive relationship that undermines the animal’s perceived autonomy (Seton 2009, 44).

Not only pets but also wild animals are “rhetorically tamed” because, as New observes, Seton “nonetheless humanised nature by giving the animals names” (New 1989, 115). In *The Biography of a Grizzly*, the protagonist is given a name by which he becomes recognisable to the reader. The story is told by a third-person external narrator who, at times, interjects with interpretations of the bear’s thoughts and behaviour. The sequence of events is also constructed in a way that aims to captivate the human reader—periods of success are interwoven with challenges and adventures. At a certain point, the bear overcomes the difficulties through a process of development, but finally, after losing his territory and position, he commits suicide. The plot follows the classic hero’s formative journey, a *Bildungsroman*—as a clumsy cub left on his own after his mother and siblings are shot by a human, he must learn to survive: “[I]f his Mother had lived to train him, Wahb would have known that a good range in spring may be a bad one in summer. Wahb found out by years of experience that a total change with the seasons is best” (Seton 2005, 22). His journey leads him to his key achievement, which appears to be his control over a large territory. The bear is thus placed in the role of a typical protagonist, whose growth and transformation conform to a narrative convention oriented toward human identification and emotional engagement.

In accordance with the conventions of wild animal stories, the human figure appears only marginally and in the role of antagonist; portraying humans unfavourably is a characteristic feature of the genre (Polk 1972, 54). Although the narrator refrains from explicit moral judgement, the depiction of Colonel Peak casts him in an undeniably negative light: he kills the bears, convinced that they pose a threat to his cattle. This action may appear unjust from the reader's perspective, as the story is told from the bears' point of view and reveals that it was the bull who initiated the attack, while the mother bear, already wounded, defended her cubs. The narrator further juxtaposes the man's pride—evident in his naming of the killing site 'Four-Bears'—with the cub's fear and disorientation. In this indirect way, Seton challenges the hunting tradition by exposing its overlooked consequences. The narrator not only undermines the dominant narrative of the noble hunter but also subtly redirects the reader's empathy towards the bear, portrayed as the victim of unprovoked violence.

The second of the creators of the wild animal story, Charles G. D. Roberts, born in 1860, is widely known as a national Canadian poet and a founding member of the Confederation Poets. Over the course of his professional career, he also served as editor of *The Week* and as a professor of English and French at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Although he was a prolific poet for many years, it is believed that he turned to prose for financial reasons as the early twentieth century marked a period of growing popularity of the animal story in North America<sup>31</sup>.

Roberts demonstrates his attitude towards animals in literature in the introduction to *The Kindred of the Wild* (1902). Reflecting on the way animals have emerged as symbols, he explains that "it was only the most salient characteristics of each species that concerned the practical observer. It was simple to remember that the tiger was cruel, the fox cunning, the wolf rapacious" (2024, 6). These stereotypical images reveal the symbolic functions of

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<sup>31</sup> Deep interests in nature and nonhuman life are characteristic of the whole of North American Literature. The origins of nature writing are, after all, associated with figures such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. Although my discussion focuses primarily on writers directly connected with Canada, it is worth noting that the subject itself is not territorially confined. Animal stories—or wild animal stories—in their realistic yet sentimental form, are, however, inextricably linked with Canada; they have been studied as "national allegories" by critics such as Margaret Atwood, James Polk, and Brian Johnson, to name a few.

animals within human storytelling and systems of thought. Individual members of a given species are thus stripped of their uniqueness and diversity, while the meaning of the entire group is reduced to a single, often negative, trait. These perceptual habits endure, shaping how humans relate to animals—as bearers of their own fears and biases. The reliance on such schemas leads to a human detachment from the actual nature of animals. Roberts further argues that, as civilisation progresses, contact between the human and nonhuman worlds is steadily diminishing:

as advancing civilisation drew an ever widening line between man and the animals, and men became more and more engrossed in the interests of their own kind, the personalities of the wild creatures which they had once known so well became obscured to them, and the creatures themselves came to be regarded, for the purposes of literature, as types or symbols merely,—except in those cases, equally obstructive to exact observation, where they were revered as temporary tenements of the spirits of departed kinsfolk. (2024, 6)

The progressive separation of humans from other animals, observed by John Berger among others, has accompanied the development of civilisation. Although Berger identified a different dimension of this divide than Seton—pointing to the increasing disappearance of animals from physical space, rooted in the Cartesian notion of the animal as automata, whereby animal-machines could be replaced by far more efficient mechanical ones<sup>32</sup>—animals have been pushed into the “receding past” (Berger 2000, 10-11). Moreover, even in instances where deeper meaning is ascribed to them, animals, according to Roberts, become sites of projection: human meanings are imposed upon them, obscuring the reality of their own existence. Roberts therefore opted for a new “possibility of understanding nature” that would also include animal psychology (New 1989, 116). Convinced of the existence of “elusive personalities which dwell in the back of the luminous brain windows of the dog, the

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<sup>32</sup> Paradoxically, this shift did not bring animals liberation. Although machines replaced them in the role of a labour force, they simultaneously transferred animals into a system in which every living being is viewed solely as raw material for the production of meat, fur, or bone. Berger demonstrates that the reduction of animals to machines was fully realised—not alleviated—by industrial farming, completing rather than softening the mechanisation of animal life: “[I]ater, in the so-called post-industrial societies, they are treated as raw material” (Berger 2000, 11).

horse, the deer, or wrap themselves in reserve behind the inscrutable eyes of all the cats, or sit aloof in the gaze of the hawk and the eagle,” he also perceived the animal story as the “highest point of development in a psychological romance constructed on a framework of natural science” (Roberts 2024, 24).

With his animal stories, Roberts tries to evoke empathy by depicting features and types of behaviour common to both humans and nonhumans, such as “common tasks of protecting, feeding and raising their young,” “the same moral ground and similar emotional and mental lives” (Lutts 1998, 8). In the short story “Wild Motherhood,” Roberts presents parenthood from three perspectives: a moose mother, a prospective wolf father, and a human father. The story begins with a heart-breaking scene in which a moose calf falls into a trap, and his mother decides to stay with him:

At last, when he stopped and stood with palpitating sides and wide nostrils of terror, she, too, halted. Dropping awkwardly upon her knees in the snowy bushes, with loud, blowing breaths, she reached down her head to nose and comfort him with her sensitive muzzle. The calf leaned up as close as possible to her caresses. Under their tenderness the tremblings of his gaunt, pathetic knees presently ceased. And in this position the two remained almost motionless for an hour, under the white, unfriendly moon. The herd had gone on without them. (Roberts 2024, 38)

The external third-person narrator describes the animals’ behaviour while clearly focalising through the moose’s point of view. The depiction of the animals’ emotions appears justified and avoids excessive anthropomorphism; the narrator does not attempt to interpret or mediate between the animals’ thoughts (or speech) and the reader. The portrayal is emotionally charged with the imagery directed toward highlighting the drama experienced by the moose family.

Subsequently, another nonhuman character appears: a wolf—the sole provider for his injured partner (“The she-wolf, heavy and near her time, lay agonising in the darkest corner of the cave, licking in grim silence the raw stump of her right foreleg” [Roberts 2024, 39]). The confrontation between these two natural enemies is interrupted by a human, who is also portrayed as a being fighting for the survival of himself and his family. By briefly

outlining the man's motives, Roberts succeeds in evoking compassion for all three creatures. In the final encounter, the human—armed with a shotgun—uses his advantage to kill both the cow moose and the wolf, securing meat for his family. An unexpected twist occurs when he decides against killing the moose calf, choosing instead to take it home to be raised alongside his own son. Roberts presents all three species as beings driven by the desire to protect their families, thereby raising the question of whether this behaviour stems from instinct (in which case humans are no different) or from another form of reasoning. By showing that parenthood is not dependent on species, he challenges the assumption that the divide between humans and other animals is as great as humans often believe.

While Roberts' approach appears to draw on Darwinian concepts, Johnson suggests that "numerous critics have warned us to be skeptical of Roberts' empirical and realist claims, pointing out that there is more 'romance' than 'natural science' in these fictions (2012, 199). Yet, Lutts argues that "Roberts' animals are immersed in the Darwinian struggle for survival and their deaths reflect this struggle" (1991, 5); animal stories, therefore, can be regarded as "an important expression of cultural responses to Darwinism" (9). The passage above demonstrates that Roberts captures the natural behaviours of both humans and nonhumans. Drawing on patterns of nonhuman social behaviour, he constructs a narrative that interweaves the experiences of all the characters. Through the story's dramatic form, the author seeks to engage the reader's imagination, encouraging them to recognise rationality in nonhuman beings. His effort to depict family relations in the animal world is a deliberate strategy; by highlighting parallels between humans and nonhumans, Roberts—as James Polk observes—attempts "to mediate between the best of two worlds" (1972, 52).

Roberts viewed the wild animal stories, which he and Seton created, as constituting a distinct literary genre. Traditionally, both authors have been recognised as the founding figures of this category, which is regarded as "a triumph of realism over allegory of Aesop's fables and anthropocentrism of Rudyard Kipling" (Johnson 2007, 333). Margaret Atwood also concludes that "English animal stories are about animal 'social relations', American ones are about people killing animals; Canadian ones are about animals *being* killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers" (1991, 74). Both Atwood and Polk observe a similar distinctiveness in Canadian animal stories compared with British and American

traditions: British stories are grounded in the “domestic world of farmyards and happy endings,” while the latter focus on the “celebration of the hunter’s world” (Polk 1972, 52). By the second half of the twentieth century, critics widely agreed on the deeper significance of the wild animal story within national literary history in relation to Canadian collective identity; they particular meaning is connected with the communities of settlers and their descendants. The way Canadians are often portrayed as survivors or the hunted mirrors the fate of nonhuman animals in these narratives. This motif also appears in more contemporary literature (Polk mentions here, for instance, the works of Sinclair Ross, Ernest Buckler, Mordecai Richler, and also Margaret Atwood) (1972, 57). Thus, the strategy of seeking more symbolic meanings in literary animals remains active, and certain interpretive attempts can be justified.

#### **2.4. Animal Stories Revisited: Tendencies in the Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Canadian Literature**

In reviewing the twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, I wish to draw attention to selected works that, in various ways, continue the tradition of the wild animal story, as well as those that expand this perspective to include nonhuman characters originating beyond the Canadian environment. Texts featuring animal protagonists written by committed naturalists (much like the traditional animal story) stand in marked contrast to the sportsmen’s books. The authors are not only documentarians but also activists engaged in efforts to protect the natural world, which has been severely impacted by colonial activity and the indiscriminate eradication of numerous species. The following discussion is guided by questions that, as in each subsequent chapter, contribute to the central theme of the analysis: anthropomorphism, the representation of human–animal relationships, the role of the animal protagonist, and issues of narration.

The example of Grey Owl’s literary and activist work illustrates significant progress in the development of empathy towards nonhuman animals. His non-fiction writings redefine the relationship between human and nonhuman animals, recasting the figure of the person moving through the forest not as a hunter but as a reflective being who, influenced by

empathy, alters their behaviour and begins to perceive those once regarded merely as game as sentient beings in need of protection. To understand his standpoint more thoroughly, some biographical facts should be provided. Born in East Sussex as Archibald Stansfeld Belaney, he sailed to Halifax in 1906 and later moved to northern Ontario. After adopting a false identity, Grey Owl or Wa-sha-quon-asin<sup>33</sup>, he introduced himself as the son of a Scotsman and an Apache woman, working as a fur trapper and forest guide. However, his deep interest in nature conservation emerged after he married Gertrude Bernard, known as Anahareo. It was she who convinced Grey Owl to care for two orphaned baby beavers—animals whose presence would profoundly impact on the course of his life.

Belaney's constant preoccupation with First Nations ways of living was revealed in many aspects, particularly his apparel and adopted identity. "Dressed in buckskins and wearing his long hair in braids" during public appearances, he presented himself as a bridge between Indigenous and white cultures (Smith 2025, para. 17). This constructed identity lent credibility to his writing and made his activist work appear more sincere and in accordance with Indigenous traditions. He maintained this persona until his premature death; exhausted by his lifestyle and alcoholism, he died of pneumonia in 1938. Shortly thereafter, his true identity was revealed, exposing him as a Canadian national impostor. According to Clive Webb, this revelation should not cast a shadow on "his great work as a conservationist" (par. 19). It is worth noting Belaney's initial involvement in beaver protection soon extended to all hunted and devastated populations of fur-bearing animals.

Albert Braz argues that Grey Owl "was able to persuade people that it was in their self-interest to preserve wild animals instead of slaughtering them" (2007, 217). In the introduction to *Pilgrims of the Wild* (1934), Grey Owl explains that:

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<sup>33</sup> The name Belaney adopted is that of a predatory bird found across Europe, Asia, and North America, including virtually all the southern provinces of Canada, and is characterized by its "secretive nature." This is due to the bird's notably silent behaviour and its activity primarily at dusk and during the night. It plays a crucial role in the boreal forest ecosystem—feeding mainly on small mammals, it helps regulate their populations. The mysterious nature of this bird has contributed both to its perception in popular culture and to its significant symbolic role in Indigenous traditions. For example, in the Anishinaabeg traditions, the owl functions as Gookooko'oo—"the spirit who represents all owls" (Wendy Makoons Geniusz 2008, 241). Although over the years the owl has sometimes been associated with negative connotations, the scholar argues that it is "a messenger who can give us important warnings, someone who helps those who have already passed on to reach the other side, and someone who can be our benefactor" (241). Thus, this mysterious figure seems in some ways to echo the symbolic significance traditionally attributed to the owl.

This is primarily an animal story; it is also story of two people, and their struggle to emerge from the chaos into which the failure of the fur trade, and the breaking down of the old proprietary system of hunting grounds, plunged the Indian people, and not a few Whites, during the last two decades. (Grey Owl 1934, 25)

In its underlying assumptions, his narrative aims to tell a story about nonhumans. In the shadow of the animal story, a personal struggle involving two protagonists attempting to navigate a changing reality unfolds. The collapse of traditional systems for managing land and natural resources signifies a loss of control over space and ways of life—particularly for Indigenous peoples—and coincides with the decline of the fur trade, which had long served as a counterbalance to dispossession. In the face of these transformations, all, regardless of species or race, has suffered. It is important to add that Grey Owl also turned against the killing of animals for fur, motivated not only by empathy towards animals but also by empathy towards people—especially the First Nations—who have endured exploitative trading arrangements for generations. With a critical approach to trappers' activity, he searched for a more harmonious relationship between people and nature in general.

The narrative demonstrates how Grey Owl goes from being a fur trader to an ardent conservationist. By contributing to the death of a female beaver who leaves behind orphaned cubs, the author sentences the kits to death as well.

They gave voice again, and at this time the sound was unmistakeable—they were young beaver! I lowered my gun and said:

“There are your kittens.”

The instinct of a woman spoke out at once.

“Let us save them,” cried Anahareo excitedly, and then in a lower voice, “It is up to us, after what we’ve done.”

And truly what had been done here looked now to be an act of brutal savagery. And with some confused thought of giving back what I had taken, some dim idea of atonement, I answered,

“Yes; we have to. Let’s take them home.” It seemed the only fitting thing to do.

(Grey Owl 1978, 53)

As in sportsmen’s books, the narrative is written in the first person; however, unlike those works, Grey Owl’s account places animals at the centre and prioritises protection over hunting. In a crucial scene, the human figure comes to realise that he owes something to nonhumans and begins to understand their nature. Nature is no longer a space to conquer,

but a wild refuge where a person may seek balance, rather than dominance. He begins to perceive his past actions—such as trapping wild animals for fur—as unethical, and eventually tries to redeem himself. Following Seton’s reluctance to kill wild animals, Grey Owl’s transformation represents a significant shift in the literary and ethical status of nonhuman beings. The portrayal of the young beavers as emotionally complex and dependent beings is contingent upon the attentiveness of their human caretakers; without this sensitivity, such depth of characterisation would remain inaccessible to the reader. Due to the beavers’ young age, the need for physical closeness becomes particularly prominent, helping to shape an interspecies emotional bond. When describing the beavers’ vocalisations—“squeals of joy” or “shrill childish treble”—the narrator employs language that evokes tenderness and vulnerability (Grey Owl 1934, 32). Such observations are possible only through full participation in the animals’ lives: the human becomes an active participant in the relationship, attempting to make amends for past wrongs through care, presence, and emotional availability.

A similarly perceptive insight into animal life, though conveyed through a third-person external narrator, is offered in Fred Bodsworth’s novel *Last of the Curlews* (1954). The narrative traces the journey of the last surviving individual of the Eskimo curlew, a species that once formed an integral part of the Canadian landscape. Like the previously mentioned black-footed ferret, eastern elk, Dawson’s caribou, and the beaver, whose population experienced a dramatic decline, the Eskimo curlew was decimated by hunters armed with modern firearms and nowadays is considered extinct<sup>34</sup>. In contrast to sportsmen’s books, focalisation in *Last of the Curlews* occurs through a nonhuman protagonist: a potential victim of hunting, standing in for the countless individuals who have already been lost. The ending embarks on an instinct-driven migratory journey in search of a mate. Although the narrative

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<sup>34</sup> Contemporary sources, including the novel’s afterword by Murray Gell-Mann, classify the Eskimo curlew as critically endangered—likely extinct, since the last confirmed sighting occurred in 1982–83 (see also: Lewis 2018, para. 13; Alaska Department of Fish and Game n.d., "Status"). In his article, Robert J. Craig describes the dramatic decline in the species’ population, noting that “populations collapsed below levels at which birds were regularly located after the first decade of the 20th century” (Craig 2019, 551). Despite its likely extinction, the image of the Eskimo curlew continues to circulate in North American visual culture. The novel was illustrated by Abigail Rorer, based on drawings by T. M. Shortt, and representations of the bird remain on display at institutions such as the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh and the Field Museum in Chicago.

is told in the third person, it follows the bird's fate with empathy, drawing on ornithological knowledge to depict its instincts, emotions, and the rhythms of avian life. Excerpts from historical sources, such as reports by the Royal Society and the Smithsonian Institution, are woven into the text, lending the novel both credibility and a documentary dimension.

The following passage comes from a narrative that centres on the solitary flight of a nonhuman character, depicting the moment of its departure from the cold northern regions toward warmer climates. Although the author creates a melancholic, contemplative atmosphere, the narrative avoids excessive sentimentality. While the focus remains on the animal, the narration deliberately refrains from overt anthropomorphism.

Far above him, the curlew could hear the faint, lisping notes of the arctic migrants pouring south to a warmer land. Needles of ice began forming at the shallow edges of the mudflat puddles. The bird's instinct rebelled at the idea of flying alone, yet when he called shrilly into the cold night there was no answer, and the time had come when he had to move. He turned into the breeze, held his wings extended outward and adjusted the angle—leading edge up and trailing edge down—until he could feel the lifting pressure of the wind beneath them. Of all the shorebirds' wings, the Eskimo curlew's—long, narrow and gracefully pointed—were best adapted for easy, high-speed flight. Even standing motionless with wings extended in the faint, night breeze, the bird was weightless and almost airborne. He pushed off gently with his legs, took a few rapid wingbeats with the flight feathers twisted so that they bit solidly into the air, and rose effortlessly. (Bodsworth 2011, 25)

The narrator remains external, yet the bird serves as the focalising subject—its physical sensations, impulses, and the absence of response to its calls are described in detail. Rather than resorting to elaborate references or comparisons to human mentality and psychology, the author infuses the narrative with ornithological and biological facts, thereby constructing the world of the ending with a degree of objectivity. This narrative strategy draws the reader into the natural world while leaving space for independent reflection. At the same time, the narrator seeks to underscore both the individual and species-level tragedy: the bird, as the last of its kind and compelled to undertake a solitary journey, becomes a figure of extinction, a symbol of disappearance from the world's landscape.

In addition to his literary work, Fred Bodsworth was a respected Canadian journalist, naturalist, and ornithologist who served as president of the Federation of Ontario

Naturalists<sup>35</sup>, an organisation dedicated to wildlife conservation, during the 1960s. He was also an active participant in the environmental civic movement, and his scientific and literary interests were closely tied to educational and public engagement efforts. Glenn Coady highlights Bodsworth's lifelong fascination with the natural world, which began in early childhood. He recounts an anecdote in which Bodsworth "traded a pair of his skates and a bicycle pump for his first butterfly guide" (Coady 2012, 169). His writing thus reflects both personal observation and a commitment to raising awareness about the human-driven extermination of animal species, often carried out for base or short-sighted motives.

Graeme Gibson (1934–2019), known as both a writer and environmental activist, played a key role in the establishment of the Pelee Island Bird Observatory<sup>36</sup>, which "serves as a node within the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, a chain of observation stations that gather data on passing avifauna" (Munroe, 2020, par. 6). In many ways, Gibson continues the activist tradition associated with Grey Owl, publishing works of non-fiction on Canadian wildlife such as *The Bedside Book of Birds* and *The Bedside Book of Beasts*. These volumes are the result of the author's profound passion; as a dedicated birdwatcher and birding tour guide he spent fifteen years collecting material for these books. Gibson integrates poetry, legends, fables, and folklore to position animals within a broader cultural and literary framework, viewing this collection as traces of the evolving relationship between humans and birds. He examines how human societies construct and interpret the natural world through the act of storytelling.

Gibson is also known for his "idiosyncratic and experimental novels"; *Communion*, published in 1971, is a meditation on the relationship between humans and animals ("Graeme Gibson..." 2019, para. 1). The author himself, embittered by the lukewarm reception of the novel by critics; while acknowledging its difficulty, he considers it "as a parable and as a technical exercise" (Benson 1984, 334). "Regarded by some as an attack on organised religions and their unsympathetic relationship with the natural world," the novel centres on a dying husky confined to a veterinary clinic, whose slow decline becomes an obsession for one of the clinic's employees ("Graeme Gibson..." 2019, para. 6). The

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<sup>35</sup> It continues to operate under its current name, Ontario Nature.

<sup>36</sup> Gibson's wife, Margaret Atwood, remains involved in PIBO's activities, upholding the family legacy.

protagonist's fixation on the suffering animal evolves into a broader existential crisis, as he begins to question the ethical implications of human interference in the natural order.

In an interview with Jean-Pierre Issenhuth, Gibson explains that *Communion* is a deeply personal book, rooted in his own inner experiences. He emphasises that he does not separate the external world from the internal one; events taking place in the minds or souls of the characters are just as real as those occurring in the "objective" world (1989, 27). Within these ambiguous and interpretively open settings, the position of the husky as a domesticated representative of the nonhuman world becomes increasingly complex. The dog is voiceless and deprived of agency by both human control and the progression of his illness; he is ultimately subjected to vivisection. It is Felix who recognises the animal's suffering and obsessively searches for signs of recovery, convinced that "[e]very day it's more alive, almost responsive... Felix saw something shiver inside the pupil, it was like something opening" (Gibson 1971, 24). His proposed solution, namely releasing the husky into the wilderness, is imagined not only as an act of salvation for the animal, but also as a means of redeeming himself. However, the animal's reaction subverts Felix's expectations: the dog does not reciprocate his emotional attachment and responds aggressively to his approach: "[a]nd so he reaches up to unlock the door... The sound in its chest is like an electric motor" (25). The comparison of the dog to a mechanical device is striking; it challenges Felix's longing for wildness and natural authenticity in the animal, suggesting a kind of technological or post-natural condition. In his introduction to the novel, Sean Kane further suggests that the eponymous communion may offer a potential path toward regaining a lost wildness, describing Felix as a "part-time veterinary assistant who tries to return a husky to the wild," and the dog as one "with its once wild nature reduced to a flickering dream behind its eyes" (7). Kane further suggests that the eponymous communion may offer a potential path toward regaining a lost wildness (8).

The canine protagonists of André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), whom I would like to introduce in reference to Gibson's *Husky*, are granted a different kind of literary presence and fulfil markedly different narrative functions. The plot of the novel centres on a wager between Apollo and Hermes, who endow a group of dogs with human intelligence as a kind of philosophical experiment. Apollo maintains that intelligence will only bring suffering to

the dogs, while Hermes argues the contrary; the latter will win the wager if even one of the animals dies happy. The way the dogs grapple with the consequences of heightened awareness and the internal conflicts initiates a reflection on language, consciousness, and the nature of happiness. The novel stages a tension between intellect and instinct, as the hypothesis that human consciousness places the animals in an acutely difficult position becomes accurate. Instead of a natural struggle for dominance, what emerges are conspiracies, exclusion, and even murder—driven by fear of losing one’s identity and a desire to restore a former sense of order. Hostility, in this context, appears as a direct result of human modes of thought which is based on self-reflexivity, insecurity, the desire for control, and the impulse to reject what is perceived as other.

Canine life, governed by instinct and the stable hierarchy of the pack, is disrupted by the gift of intelligence. The dogs begin to question their place in the world, the meaning of existence, and their relationships with one another. Polarisation soon develops: some, such as Atticus, Frick, Frack, Max, and Rosie, reject the new consciousness and attempt to return to a previous mode of life, viewing those who embrace the gift—Majnoun, Prince, Bella, and Athena—as threats to the unity of the group. The rupture occurs not only within the group of gifted dogs but can also be observed in their relationship with dogs outside their pack.

Contrary to expectations, however, in the first weeks after their change, the worst confrontations were not with humans but with other dogs. No matter how polite the pack were or how non-committal, some would attack them at once, without so much as a snarl or a baring of teeth.

– They think we’re weak, said Atticus.

But it wasn’t as simple as that. The dogs who attacked were aggressive, but they also seemed afraid. (...) The dogs who did not immediately attack them were, at times, immediately submissive, and this was almost as strange. (Alexis 2015, 25)

Before the transformation, the dogs’ primary, albeit unwelcome, conflict was with humans; they were accustomed to facing human hostility. Now, however, it appears that other dogs, those outside the transformed group, begin to sense their difference, responding with either hostility or submission. This ontological disturbance is captured in the observation that “it was traumatic to know oneself to be a simple dog but to live in a world where other dogs treated you as something other” (Alexis 2015, 25). Endowed with human

intellect, the dogs begin to inhabit a liminal space—a position that, as I demonstrate later, also entraps the domesticated chimpanzee in Colin McAdam’s novel. Faced with ostracism from members of their own species, the dogs are compelled to confront the boundaries of both species and individual identity. Attempts to reassert value through binary distinctions (strength versus weakness) are reductive and fail to offer genuine resolution. From a narratological perspective, however, the situation seems particularly generative: anthropomorphism is embedded within the story as a diegetic event, which makes references to human-like thought processes a natural and integral element of the narrative. At the same time, the fictional world strives to remain grounded in scientifically accurate representations of typical canine behaviour.

The deities’ intervention disrupts the conventional boundaries of species cognition. This speculative scenario allows Alexis to experiment with defamiliarisation and explore sensory perception, highlighting the way dogs experience the world through heightened olfactory and auditory senses. As such, *Fifteen Dogs* contributes to broader discussions in literary animal studies about the limitations of anthropocentric worldviews.

Dogs, quite common in human households, are not native species to the Canadian environment, nor are tigers. Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi* (2001) has gained international recognition largely due to its film adaptation, but also for employing a tiger as one of the main characters. The novel raises philosophical and religious questions while focusing on a young boy who, after surviving a shipwreck, is forced to share a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. Unlike many literary depictions of animals that rely on anthropomorphism, Martel’s tiger retains its wild instincts, offering a stark contrast between human rationality and animal nature. Pi’s adventure is presented as his teenage memories, while as an adult, he is safely settled in Canada. This justifies the maturity of the observations that lead to the conclusions “[h]umans were not only capable of extraordinary cruelty, but even in loving animals, they revealed their self-absorption” (Stephens 2010, 45). What seems especially important in Pi’s perspective on the human-animal relationship is the fact that the protagonist graduated from religious studies and zoology.

The lifeboat does not appear to be a life-saving Ark where different species could stay together to survive until they get to a safe shore. In the apparent shelter, Pi is terrified at

first as the presence of the predator poses a real threat to the boy; he does everything to isolate himself from the animal, including building a separate mini-raft. He understands that unless he manages to establish control over the situation, he will soon fall victim to the tiger. The novel emphasises the impossibility of anthropomorphisation—in confrontation with a wild animal, any attempt to attribute human reasoning to it may result in a deadly attack. The apparent training methods based on behavioural control that gives Pi a semblance of hope for survival can also be understood in reverse and it is a “[m]an [who] becomes a servant of animal, and thus comes to believe he is serving God” (Stephens 2010, 48). This confirms that exploration of the human-animal relationship needs to reach spiritual approaches and the animal turn shall appear also within the space of religious dogmas.

The settings—limited space on the boat, lack of possibility to escape, highly limited resources—allow for the establishment of a bond between a representative of humanity and nonhumans anew; it is a nonhuman predator, with its strength and instincts versus a human being equipped with his knowledge and experience in the zoological field. While the story is focalised through Pi’s point of view, the tiger’s position can be analysed through roles he plays for the human. Immediately after the ship sinks, Pi, in a moment of emotional intensity, perceives the drifting tiger as a familiar presence from his former, pre-catastrophic world. For a brief instant, the tiger he had known for years is anthropomorphised in his imagination, becoming a being with whom he wishes to share his suffering. He quickly realises, however, that this is a dangerous illusion and that “I was to be the next goat,” the next victim the predator would consume to preserve its own life (Martel 2001, 73). Yet as it becomes clear that their shared journey is likely to be prolonged, Pi begins to reflect:

I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but of him and me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat. We would live—or we would die—together. He might be killed in an accident, or he could die shortly of natural causes, but it would be foolish to count on such an eventuality. More likely the worst would happen: the simple passage of time, in which his animal toughness would easily outlast my human frailty. (Martel 2001, 113)

Pi’s desire is to gain enough control over the tiger so that the two of them might become companions in the journey. He does not intend to surrender his life willingly—he tries to conceal his human vulnerability, yet at the same time, the idea of completely

eliminating the animal never crosses his mind. Although he would stand no chance in a physical confrontation with the tiger, Pi draws on his zoological knowledge and employs training methods similar to those used in circuses—asserting dominance, using a whistle, and controlling access to food and water to gradually establish spatial boundaries for each of them. The struggle to continue their shared survival is justified, as the presence of the tiger becomes crucial to Pi. He admits: “A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger. If I still had the will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker” (Martel 2001, 114). And although the tiger cannot be treated as a domesticated animal whose physical and emotional presence offers recognised benefits to human health, he nevertheless becomes a kind of companion species, to borrow Haraway’s term. Suppressing their respective instincts: fear in Pi, and predation in Richard Parker, both Pi and Richard Parker must cooperate in order to survive. Martel’s novel allows for rethinking the difference between civilisation and wilderness; the unfamiliar setting, neutral to both the human and the tiger, show how complex the desire to survive can be.

## **2.5. Conclusions**

The chapter offers an insight into the presence of animals and nature in Canadian literature in English, which historically has been drawing inspiration from the wilderness. Beginning with the early settlers’ writings, nature was initially perceived through a Romantic lens, which emphasised its awe-inspiring qualities. This approach, often influenced by European literary traditions, frequently depicted the natural world as both a source of moral instruction and an adversary to be conquered. The constant presence of nature in the lives of European settlers in the land of present-day Canada found its reflection in literature as a context and also as a force that participates in the event. Kenneth White’s geopoetics indicates that the experience of space and landscape is inseparable from the creative process – nature is treated as a spiritual force shaping writers and their texts. This approach promotes interdisciplinarity as the language of geology, geography, or ecology serves as tools for describing the relationship between humans and the world, and the treatment of

the Earth as a remembering participant in the story. Oscillating between reverence for the land and apprehension towards its untamed wilderness, early Canadian texts, such as Catharine Parr Traill's and Susanna Moodie's works, illustrate this duality.

The nineteenth century marked a growing divergence in the representation of nature and nonhumans. The emergence of nature writing as a literary form facilitated a closer examination of the natural world; such approaches allowed for bridging the gap between empirical observation and poetic interpretation. Figures such as David Thompson and other explorers documented their experiences with precision and scientific curiosity, while simultaneously acknowledging (and making use of) the complex relationships between Indigenous peoples and their environment. Despite this increasing awareness, many narratives of the time still positioned nature as an entity to be controlled and exploited, reinforcing the colonial imperative of land domination at the same time.

The representation of nature and animals in Canadian literature underwent a distinct evolution. In the second half of the nineteenth century, hunting literature also gained popularity; memoirs and manuals glorifying hunting and portraying animals as trophies became an expression of male domination over the land and its inhabitants. With the publication of Darwin's theories, however, animals came to be recognised as beings with rich inner lives, and, although still in an emotional and anthropocentric way, writers attempted to capture their experiences. The contributions of authors like Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G. D. Roberts were pivotal in shaping this transformation that led to the emergence of the animal story as a Canadian genre.

The empathy led Grey Owl to engage with nature and nonhumans a step further. The influence of real nonhuman beings shaped him as an activist and author who advocated for conservationist ethics and a reevaluation of human responsibility towards the environment. His legacy has been continued by more contemporary authors, such as Fred Bodsworth and Graeme Gibson. The former, through a realistic narrative grounded in scientific facts, presents an endling as the protagonist of an ecological crisis. Although the Earth is not struck by an apocalypse comparable in scale to that of Atwood's novels, the world of this bird comes to an end. The inevitability of species annihilation, even without resorting to strong anthropomorphism, leaves a powerful impression and functions as an ecological appeal. The

ending serves as a figure through which criticism of humankind's historical greed, technological irresponsibility, hunting excesses, and moral indifference is articulated.

Although Gibson's activist efforts take on a traditional form, his literary exploration of the human–animal boundary acquires a modernist character. His fragmented and ambiguous novel *Communion* examines the psychological and ethical costs of the caretaker–animal relationship. Here, emotions and obsession create a powerful yet dark bond. The husky becomes almost a cult figure—one that in some respects resembles Yann Martel's spiritual reflections, where the human becomes the servant of the animal. *Life of Pi* also probes the limits of instinct, positioning the tiger as a being that, despite its untamed nature, ensures the survival of the human protagonist.

While Martel refrains from anthropomorphising Pi's companion Richard Parker, André Alexis approaches this device in a radically different manner than the precursors of animal stories. In his novel *Fifteen Dogs*, canines receive the "gift" of human reason through a narrative intervention. In this way, the author does not claim access to canine subjectivity, but instead explores the cognitive boundaries of the human as well as the inadequacy of language to express how the world is perceived by nonhuman beings. At the same time, the dogs are forced to live in a liminal space: aware of their own identity, they also realise that other dogs perceive them differently. This ontological disharmony leads to intra-species tensions, in which they must negotiate their sense of otherness.

The emergence and development of nonhuman characters since the first settler narratives illustrate several important processes through which they gain textual visibility and approach subjectivity. Foremost is the correlation between empathy and anthropomorphism, addressed not only emotionally by Hezekiah Butterworth but also pragmatically by Anna Barcz. At the same time, among the discussed authors there is a characteristic combination of literary work and active involvement in animal advocacy, often rooted in scientific interests. Situating the nonhuman protagonist within a realist convention can transform it into the hero of an ecological tragedy. A clear shift in the animal's position also becomes visible: a striking contrast arises when comparing the sportsmen's books with Bodsworth's novel, in which game—once pursued as the very goal of death—emerges as the tragic hero of a narrative capable of exerting an educational impact on the reader.

## Chapter 3

### Nonhuman Narrators and Characters in Jessica Grant's Novel, *Come, Thou Tortoise* and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine nonhuman narration and the nonhuman-character-bound focalisation in two selected contemporary novels: *Come, Thou Tortoise* and *A Beautiful Truth*. By nonhuman narration, I refer to passages in which the narrative voice is not human, while nonhuman focalisation refers to the guiding of narrative perspective in a way that draws the reader's attention to the experiences of an animal. My analysis focuses on how these narrative strategies influence the evocation of empathy and the understanding of animal subjectivity. My aim is to analyse how these novels give voice to nonhumans, and how narrative techniques highlight both the particularity of nonhuman beings and the cultural frames shaping their depiction. Drawing on the critical framework developed in Chapter 1, expanded by references to the natural sciences, I explore the narrative and formal techniques that enable authors to construct a nonhuman voice within the novel. I also investigate how shifts in focalisation shape the ethical dimension of the story and affect readers' experience, and whether the literary representations of Winnifred and Looee can be interpreted as examples of a moral impulse toward a more responsible engagement with the material world.

With the use of the ecocritical lens, nonhuman narration become a tool of connection between literary representation and material reality. Although anthropomorphism poses a threat to images of real animals, it remains a crucial tool that allows readers to approach animal minds with empathy. Following Mario Ortiz-Robles, who attempts to "imagine what it is like to listen to animals as they speak in literature through the verbal inventions of humans," I also consider how cultural traditions, scientific knowledge, and symbolic histories influence the portrayal of nonhuman characters, particularly in relation to cross-species

communication and agency (2016, 2). I explore how literary representations enable the reader to recognise nonhuman particularity and investigate the limits of human understanding. Ultimately, this chapter examines whether literature can offer meaningful insights into nonhuman experiences.

Nonhumans cannot directly participate in the creation of text; their presence, whether in the form of characters or, more importantly, narrators, makes an essential aspect of the exploration of the human-animal relationship. It should be highlighted, however, that an author speaking for an animal risks the appropriation of nonhuman voices for human purposes. Still, David Herman, agreeing with Hezekiah Butterworth on how the literary animal voices influence human recipients, describes them as “autobiographical acts that reach beyond the human,” and thus “ways of speaking for or in behalf of animal others, situating such acts within their broader sociointeractional and institutional—as well as narratological—contexts” (2016, 82). The two particular nonhuman characters at the centre of this chapter—Winnifred, a pet tortoise in *Come, Thou Tortoise*, and Looee, a chimpanzee raised by humans in *A Beautiful Truth*—represent two distinct models of human–animal relationality. While Winnifred's voice emerges through fragmented and poetic passages, the chimpanzee's narration is marked in the novel by language devices. These cases allow for an analysis of how nonhuman subjectivities are constructed across different narrative styles.

### **3.2. Anthropomorphised Tortoise's Narration in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise***

Created by Jessica Grant, the tortoise character Winnifred is not the first important tortoise narrator in North American literature. *Timothy: Or, Notes of an Abject Reptile*, published in 2006, employs the turtle viewpoint on the human world of the eighteenth century. Timothy, the turtle who narrates Verlyn Klinkenborg's novel, turns out to be a knowledgeable nonhuman and a self-aware, omniscient narrator. Not only does she comment on the human world accurately, but she is also perfectly aware of processes typical for a turtle, such as hibernation. Her intellectual capacities seem impressive;

Małgorzata Rutkowska highlights that, as with Aesop's turtle, Timothy uses her slowness to outsmart faster but inattentive, vainglorious people (2016, 84). These species-specific features are reflected in the narrative structure: the plot unfolds leisurely, without sharp chapter divisions, and uses simple sentences. The metafictional character of this novel and the observations of the turtle's life are connected with the fact that the author based his story on the diary of the historical figure Gilbert White, a resident of an English village who was a keen observer of the turtle living in his yard. Ryan Hediger comments upon the instrumental role of the tortoise, as the narration "focuses on humanity indirectly, using Timothy's imagined perspective as an estrangement device to investigate Homo sapiens" (2013, 44).

Turtles as literary characters draw a great deal from their traditional and symbolic meanings. Aesop's fable *The Hare and the Tortoise* shows that slow but continuous progress outweighs the arrogance of the potentially better equipped contestant. In the story, the tortoise, whose slowness becomes an object of ridicule, issues a challenge to the hare: he invites him to a race. The reception of this fable is consistent with the depiction of the turtle as the symbol of wisdom's triumph over impetuosity. The *Testudines* with their shells raise direct associations with movable houses or *domus optima* (Werness 2004, 416), and therefore, safety, precaution, and self-restraint (Kopaliński 1990, 507). Even the Latin word *Testudo* refers to a temporary architectural construction used by the ancient Romans for protection—a shelter unfolded above the heads of legionnaires. Consequently, the dome-shaped carapace and plastron raise broader associations of unity between sky and Earth (Kopaliński 1990, 507) or, quite the contrary, "separation between earth and underworld" (Werness 2004, 413). In the Senecan tradition, turtles also became canny warriors who easily manipulate people (Bastian and Mitchell 2004, 213, 220).

Under the order name *Testudines* (Chelonia), there are multiple species of mostly omnivorous ectotherms. A unique feature of this order is that the shell is indispensable to the turtle's body and grows with the reptile. The bony shell is claimed to have evolved from nine elongate vertebrae that joined the scapulae; after the loss of intercostal muscles, the ribs overgrew to form the dorsal shell (Lyson et al. 2013, 1116). During shell development, the breathing apparatus was also modified; turtles breathe atmospheric air, regardless of

their habitat. Furthermore, both the geological age of the order *Testudines* and the lifespans of individual turtles are rather impressive. Turtles have been colonising Earth for a considerable time, as fossils of the earliest proto-turtle, *Enotosauruse*, are approximately 260 million years old. *Proganochelys*, who in some respects resembles the contemporary turtles, lived no earlier than about 210 million years ago (Lyson 2020). There is some controversy when it comes to estimating the age of living turtles; traditionally several species, such as the Aldabra tortoise, Eastern box turtle, Bolson tortoise, Galápagos tortoise, Leopard tortoise, and Radiated tortoise, are considered exceptionally long-lived, but, as Carl Franklin argues, it remains challenging to measure their age scientifically. Theoretically, marks on the turtles' shells should appear annually and suggest an individual's age. However, "[s]ome individuals develop multiple annuli each year and many older specimen have shells worn smooth with age" (2007, 45).

It should be noted that tortoises evolved in many habitats, from freshwater to saltwater, satisfying their thermal needs. They are not comfortable exclusively in tropical climates; in colder regions, their growth strongly depends on seasonal conditions. Most have adapted to spend their entire lives in water, except during the breeding season, when they lay eggs on beaches. Turtles that are exclusively terrestrial and have more cylindrical limbs are called tortoises<sup>37</sup>. Although diversification of habitats allowed for evolving varied types of turtles, slight differences in habitat preference have made particular species adapted to specific locales and found nowhere else.

The turtle's body is protected not only by the bony shell but also by durable keratin scales, which in some species form spurs or spikes. Despite their armour-like bodies, these reptiles are vulnerable to numerous threats. The shell efficiently protects against small predators; however, it can be easily damaged by the teeth of larger animals, such as dogs. Birds of prey learn to handle the shell by dropping small turtles from high altitudes onto solid ground. At the same time, sea turtles struggle with sea lions, orcas, and sharks. *Testudines* are also exposed to a range of natural disasters, especially as global warming creates increasingly harsh conditions, for instance, severe fires. Human activity has,

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<sup>37</sup> Aware of this distinction, I use the terms *turtle* and *tortoise* according to their scientific definitions, or—when citing a specific source—I adopt the author's own nomenclature.

however, even a more grievous influence on countless species of turtles. Through human avarice, numerous turtle species have become extinct; currently, 161 species face extinction, while 51 are critically endangered (Heimbuch 2020, para. 1).

The tortoise from the novel *Come, Thou Tortoise, Winnifred*, is portrayed as a companion to Audrey, a young woman of Newfoundland origin living in the United States. When the tortoise's caregiver is informed of her father's accident, she decides to return to her hometown. After arranging a temporary home for Winnifred, she begins her journey; it unexpectedly lengthens when her father's critical condition prevents her from reaching him before he dies. The physical separation of the tortoise from her caregiver introduces two distinct narrative voices that complement each other and offer a broader perspective on the relationship between the human and the nonhuman.

Along with Audrey's physical return to her family home, the reader is immersed in a highly subjective first-person narrative that includes flashbacks to her childhood. Meanwhile, details from the tortoise's past gradually come to light. The young woman was not Winnifred's first caregiver; quite the contrary—she "inherited" her from an ex-boyfriend, who had found the tortoise in the flat he rented. When Audrey and Cliff ended their relationship, she agreed to take care of the reptile. She renamed the tortoise from Iris to Winnifred and built her a paper castle as a symbol of a new beginning. The sections of the tortoise's first-person narration intertwine with Audrey's tale. Although no distinctive stylistic device is used to highlight the tortoise's speech, the content and context of Winnifred's utterances clearly indicate the narrator's identity. Winnifred is first introduced as the subject of a conversation when Audrey entrusts her to Linda's care. Soon, she also starts to contribute to the narrative, developing an additional perspective for the plot. For instance, the scene of transporting Winnifred to Linda's apartment can be observed from both points of view. Audrey comments:

We drove out to Oregon City where the streets are all named after presidents in the order they were elected, so you can't get lost if you are American and know your presidents. Linda and Chuck live on Taft. When I pulled up, Chuck was outside smoking with his actor friends.  
Evening, Chuck.

Hey.

As I climbed the steps, one of the actor friends said, Am I hallucinating or is she carrying a castle.

Yes, a castle. (Grant 2010, 5<sup>38</sup>)

From Winnifred's perspective, the journey is described as follows:

It was weird, coming here last night, because normally in the car I ride the dashboard (hook my claws into the defrost vents and hang on!) but last night, since my castle and all its amenities as she calls them, were being relocated, I was shoved, castle and all, into the back seat. Cold back there. And the castle floor was sloped. So crawling up to the windows took even longer than usual. When I finally arrived I stuck my head out and the speedometer said 20 mph. Twenty! I can walk faster than that. She was saying, Which president comes after Harrison. Lincoln. No.

I looked around for a piece of lettuce to drop. Depends which Harrison.

Over the dashboard I could see little waves of heat, beckoning. Come hither, tortoise.

Here we are, she said. Taft Street.

Whereupon I was transported up some steps and transported into Linda's custody. I watched her go with my head out the window. Don't plane have dashboards. Why not take me with you. Why. (CCT, 17).

The tortoise travels from one place to another, entirely dependent on humans—she is literally transported, deprived of any control over her life. The self-aware nonhuman narrator expresses human-like thoughts and emotions, such as frustration over being displaced, irritation with slowness, or discomfort due to unsuitable living conditions. Her narrative bravery and sense of humour bear resemblance to what Bastian and Mitchell describe as the representation of the fearless Seneca tortoise. If only her voice were heard by other characters, her charisma might well enable her to manipulate them (2004, 215). The narration provided by Winnifred adds layers of detail that make the story more exhaustive and highlight the aspects that could be challenging to convey by Audrey's

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<sup>38</sup> Hereafter *CCT* with page references in the text.

narration, for instance, those connected with the past. First and foremost, however, Winnifred's utterances reveal erudition, curiosity about American democracy, reading proficiency, the ability to calculate speed, and linguistic sophistication far beyond that of her human companion. This contrast highlights how the tortoise's personality is shaped by the symbolic association of turtles and tortoises with ancient wisdom and knowledge, as Lobo explains, connected with their longevity (Lobo 2016<sup>39</sup>). This symbolic understanding does not diminish Winnifred's individuality but instead provides a background for her anthropomorphic identity.

The anthropocentric image of the world influences the style of Winnifred's narration; it is evident that she comprehends human language in both written and spoken forms. Her understanding of the environment develops through observation, accumulation of knowledge, and direct experiences. It can be observed when she complains about the proximity of the fridge: "[s]omeone once said that there is no such thing as cold, only degrees of heat. The person was an idiot. A fridge proves that cold is a thing. A fridge is a rectangle of cold" (*CCT*, 17). As a result, her interpretations often differ significantly from the actual principles governing how certain objects function.

While Winnifred's utterances are not characterised by specific language devices, the author distinguishes her narration through focalisation. This technique enables the reader to understand at least some of the inconveniences the tortoise faces, such as fluctuating temperatures: "a blast of cold air through [her] castle," which can be particularly harmful to ectotherms<sup>40</sup>, or a strand of human hair falling into her pool (*CCT*, 17). Moreover, the presentation of the tortoise's point of view involves equipping Winnifred with a considerable degree of self-awareness, metatextual interjections, and an ironic sense of humour. She passively accepts the limitations and dependence imposed by a human-oriented environment, as she is physically reliant on human care. The narration, however, becomes a

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<sup>39</sup> Accessed via Google Books; page numbers not visible.

<sup>40</sup> Patterns of temperature self-regulatory behaviour are discussed, for example, by Ana Vujović, Vladimir Pešić, and Roger Meek, who demonstrate that "in a low-quality thermal habitat with low temperatures and limited basking sites, the energy costs of locomotory movement to access basking sites (...) may constrain their ability for heat uptake" (2023, 59). As they explain, tortoises function more effectively in warmer environments, as they "thermoregulated very efficiently by operating in partially sunlit areas where small patches of sunlight and shade enabled efficient thermoregulation" (66).

space for expressing the inconveniences that any pet tortoise might encounter. As DeMello argues, “[b]y giving animals human voices to express their suffering (...), people are much more likely to listen to the message, and to relate”; hence, Winnifred’s voice can be read as an attempt to reflect on the position of nonhumans kept in domestic spaces (2013, 8).

The tortoise familiarises herself with the biological processes taking place inside her body; her poetic depictions include language devices such as simile and imagery:

When was the last heartbeat. I think yesterday. But do not be sad for me. When the heartbeats do come, they are magnificent.

Though of course they are followed by the ebb.

Let’s capitalize Ebb. The Ebb is rather sad, I do admit. And when the heartbeats are few, the Ebb stretches on. The Ebb is like a path that becomes less a path the further you travel along it. Until you are forced to stop because you are in some nondescript place and there is no path and what is the point of going forward. (*CCT*, 18)

The emphasis is placed on the tortoise’s biology and the process of blood circulation, which can be perceived differently than in the case of humans. In fact, tortoises’ average heart rate is 25 beats per minute, but it can drop to one in cold temperatures. Winnifred’s self-awareness allows her to observe her state, but she lacks precise terms from the natural sciences register to name the phenomena. Apart from neologisms, she uses the language of poetry, which seems capacious enough and more approachable to express her sensations. Such language results in readers’ spontaneous sympathy toward the tortoise, as through anthropomorphism, “the writers call on the readers to respect animals the same way they would a respectable human being” in the anthropocentric world (Mwangi 2019, 186). An insight into nonhuman psychology, offered by advanced neuroimaging techniques, may not be sufficient to increase spontaneous human sympathy toward nonhuman species in emergencies. Anthropomorphisation delivers certain ideas that help humans see a sentient being in a nonhuman and thus refer to contexts that go beyond the text. By becoming a representative of companion tortoises, Winnifred highlights the potential threats an individual can face in a human-oriented environment.

What is worth noting is the fact that only readers are entitled to acknowledge Winnifred's utterances. As mentioned earlier, human language does not permit the establishment of a communicative link between humans and turtles; thus, excluding human characters from the group of recipients may reinforce the reliability of the narration. On the other hand, "[t]he narrative privilege given to the animal who speaks in the story does not translate to ideological power within the internal dynamics of the plot"; hence, the nonhuman character is deprived of discursive agency and depends entirely on the actions taken by other characters (Mwangi 2019, 85). The readers become witnesses to Winnifred's inner monologue, yet neither they nor the other characters in the novel are able to respond to the tortoise's rhetorical questions and statements.

What scares me more than the sharks is the thought of being dropped. I mean, I love water as much as the next tortoise, but if you hit it with enough force, it's curtains. Especially if you have a flat plastron like me. You can skip me like a stone, so flat is my plastron. (*CCT*, 157)

The nonhuman narrator is designed in such a way that the reader can sympathise with her. Moreover, her fears are logical consequences of her past experiences: her anxiety about falling stems from being dropped by a seagull. As she recalls, "[a] previous tenant (quite previous, perhaps thirty years previous) threw me in the trash on the assumption that I was a doorstep left by the tenant before him." Later, she was found in a bin by a seagull who released her from a height in an attempt to break her shell (*CCT*, 157). Although Winnifred landed safely, she has been afraid of falling ever since.

Being a witness to Audrey's relationship with Cliff, Winnifred introduces threads that are painful for the woman:

After Cliff left she started climbing the walls, going round and round in sad circles, circumnavigating, as she called it, the flat that did not have Cliff in it anymore. Watching her was enough to penetrate any tortoise's plastron. Especially when she fell and crashed. Not that she had far to fall, but still. (*CTT*, 157)

The passage focuses on Winnifred's sympathy and attachment to Audrey, as the tortoise narrator understands not only her own states of mind but also human emotions. The observations and conclusions are highly anthropomorphic and aim to broaden the perspective on Audrey's life. Although in such circumstances, the nonhuman narration may appear somewhat instrumental, its closeness to human speech can affect the reader's perception of the tortoise. Since the human brain is naturally drawn to storytelling, the portrayal of an empathetic tortoise is likely to raise awareness of nonhuman experience. Projecting human mental schemas onto the fictional nonhuman narrator enables readers to identify more easily with the tortoise; the absence of marked language devices makes the analogy between human and nonhuman more apparent. Blurring the boundary between human and nonhuman narration may reinforce nonhuman agency and positively influence readers' perceptions of nonhuman species. References to physical features, such as the shell, claws, and eyelids that close from below, enhance the credibility of the nonhuman narrator.

Winnifred is entirely dependent on the humans who surround her. Human apartments are far removed from tortoises' natural habitats—designed to meet human needs, these spaces require infrastructure such as water delivery systems and constant human oversight to become even marginally suitable for nonhuman inhabitants. Unlike dogs and cats, who have evolved to coexist with humans and form relationships, tortoises as a species do not benefit from being kept in households. It can be assumed that *Testudines* would not naturally choose such a living space, and their presence in human homes and flats results from human intervention. Like many other domesticated animals, tortoises must be physically transported into these artificial habitats and are consequently forced to rely on human knowledge, empathy, and goodwill. In this relationship of power dependency, it is the human who carries the moral obligation to ensure the animal's welfare. Depending on the level of human involvement and care, the nonhuman may live a relatively comfortable life or perish in suffering.

When readers first meet Winnifred, it seems that her life is not threatened by negligence in care procedures. However, a closer look at her past, as presented in the

fragment by the human narrator, reveals a great deal of carelessness on the part of her previous caretakers.

Winnifred is old. She might be three hundred. She came with the apartment. The previous tenant, a rock climber named Cliff, was about to embark on a rock climbing adventure that would not have been much fun for Winnifred. Back then her name was Iris. Cliff had inherited Iris from the tenant before him. Nobody knew how old Iris was or where she had come from originally. Now Cliff was moving out. He said, Would you like a tortoise.

I would not say no to a tortoise, I said. (*CTT*, 4)

By passing the tortoise from one person to another without further ado, successive tenants handed over the responsibility of taking care of her, which raises the question of whether anyone truly benefits from keeping a tortoise at home. Because the human narrator lacked insight into the tortoise's relationship with one of her previous caretakers, Mitt, the story is told by Winnifred. Her species-specific needs were largely neglected; she "slept in a Panasonic printer box, sans heat lamp," which made her far less active. As "tortoises don't have irises," the act of naming her Iris (after the device the owner was selling) becomes especially telling, suggesting that Mitt paid little attention to her individuality (*CTT*, 65). He made no effort to form a bond with Winnifred—when he got promoted, he chose to leave the tortoise behind in the flat rather than take her to the United Arab Emirates (66). Winnifred's bond with her successive caregivers resembles a dog-like attachment, yet she lacks the means to express it fully.

Some comic scenes highlight the literal objectification of Winnifred in Linda and Chuck's home. Her size and physical traits, such as the shell and slow movements, make her useful: not only as a doorstop, but also as a bookmark. Chuck, who is not particularly fond of having the tortoise around, even begins to use her as a paperweight:

Once again I am Shakespeare's doorstop. Sorry, bookmark. While Chuck makes a tomato sandwich with all the remaining tomatoes from the thugs' Christmas gift. Linda will not be pleased.

My eyes close. My head droops. I have not recovered from my Christmas libations. I am thirsty as hell. My only thought is of my pool, inaccessible while I am on bookmark duty. (*CCT*, 339)

These humorous scenes show the power dependency between the tortoise and the humans, in which the nonhuman is completely subordinated to the humans. Compared to a human, her body is miniature and clumsy; hence, it is the human who can maintain control over the tortoise's whereabouts – simply by carrying her. While tortoises can vocalise<sup>41</sup>, this can hardly be expected in communication with humans. As Walter Auffenberg notes, tortoises use a very limited code of gestures to show their affection “because of the positional and visual limitations imposed by the shell and their proportionately short limbs” (1977, 244). They lack means of communication that might convey sudden inconvenience, as they “are probably unable to transmit the delicate shading or rapidly fluctuating moods of both courtship and combat as readily as some other reptiles” (244).

On the contrary, the story is intended to demonstrate that conscious awareness allows for the recognition of nonhuman needs.

You're using my tortoise as a paperweight, he says.

Bookmark, says Chuck. Last time I checked, that didn't qualify as cruelty to tortoises.

Cliff lifts me off the page, the page I'm on—and in. The page with the tortoise to the power of sixty. He holds me up in his big flat palm. She looks thirsty, he says.

How perceptive you are, Cliff. (*CTT*, 357)

Through her narration, Winnifred expresses her pleasure at being reunited with Cliff, who immediately acknowledges that the tortoise is in an unnatural position and needs to be watered. The juxtaposition of experienced care providers, such as Cliff and Audrey, with the temporary (and reluctant) one, reveals that an individual approach, as Justyna Tymieniecka-Suchanek emphasises, may affirm nonhuman subjectivity by recognising a being that deserves respect for their needs (2016, 35). Time spent with the tortoise allows for the

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<sup>41</sup> The calls of male tortoises are available, for instance, on the following website: <https://tortoise.org/tortcall.html>

establishment of a bond between the human and nonhuman and, as a result, enables Winnifred to be seen as a unique being.

Additionally, it is Audrey who recognises particular characteristics of this reptile, as confirmed by Winnifred's commentary: "[w]hen we were first introduced he [Audrey's new partner] called me a turtle and Audrey pointed out that I have claws, not fins" (*CTT*, 409). The woman is not only aware of tortoise nutrition in general, but also knows precisely when to provide Winnifred with specific nutrients—she reminds Linda to supplement Winnifred's diet with protein. Moreover, as Winnifred relies on external sources of heat, she provides Linda and Chuck with a smoke detector, since using a heat lamp near the paper castle carries a fire risk. Audrey and Cliff recognise Winnifred's exceptionality at the species level: she is not just a turtle, but a companion with her own history and habits. Therefore, although she does not speak directly to other characters, her influence on the narrative is evident in the unfolding of several events and in human interactions.

Winnifred's past is a significant part of her character. Her story extends back to the time before she became a pet cared for by humans:

The sky was not unfamiliar to me. I had crossed the desert century ago, before I became an object human beings could not say no to. I had seen many stars. The sky at night looks a lot like the inside of my shell. (...) I am not native to Arizona. I am native to Texas. But are people being smart enough to realize it. (*CTT*, 230)

Winnifred's travel metaphorically refers to the displacement of native species caused by the actions of white colonisers and, later, imposed by the capitalist demand for wild animals kept as pets. Although the climate of Texas differs from that of Arizona to some extent<sup>42</sup>, the most profound change is the relocation of the tortoise to the northern part of the United States. She turns out to be an experienced walker who has faced harsh desert conditions—difficult even for tortoises. Her story alludes to contemporary practices,

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<sup>42</sup> The climate of Texas and Arizona differs primarily due to Texas's diverse geography. Arizona features a desert climate with very hot summers and cool winters. In contrast, Texas has a more varied climate, ranging from humid subtropical in the south and east to dry and semi-arid in the west.

suggesting that the tortoise has a perfect sense of time. Interestingly, she doubts whether humans are capable of understanding her particularity. Anna Barcz suggests that one of the functions of animal narration is “expanding the knowledge about the world”; in the case of *Come, Thou Tortoise*, such knowledge is not provided directly (2016, 318). The novel, however, seems to encourage the reader to ask questions about tortoise visual perception, their problem-solving abilities, and memory<sup>43</sup> or the species to which Winnifred belongs.

### 3.3. Chimpanzees’ Voices in Colin McAdam’s *A Beautiful Truth*

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the cognitive abilities of primates, particularly chimpanzees and gorillas, drew special attention from scientists. Numerous research projects aimed to develop a method of communication based on human language. A prominent example of such experiments is described in the article “The Intellectual Development of a Home-Raised Chimpanzee” by Keith J. Hayes and Catherine Hayes. The scientists attempted to raise Viki, a few-day-old chimpanzee, in a manner similar to the way one would raise a human child, providing her with an environment designed to support cognitive development. While she was able to imitate many human behaviours with relative ease, the Hayeses’ efforts to teach her several human words, such as addressing the experimenters as “mama” or “papa,” and saying “cup” when she wanted something, took almost three years (1951, 105-106). According to William A. Hillix and Duane M. Rumbaugh,

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<sup>43</sup> Research on reptiles, tortoises in particular, can support the use of anthropomorphised narration. For instance, their intellectual abilities are more complex than they might appear to a casual observer watching the animals. As demonstrated by Anna Wilkinson et al., turtles possess the ability for social learning through imitation. A study conducted on red-footed tortoises (*Geochelone carbonaria*) revealed that these seemingly asocial reptiles are capable of learning by observing the actions of others. In the experiment, tortoises that had the opportunity to watch another individual overcome an obstacle were able to do so themselves, whereas those without such exposure failed to complete the task (2010). Similarly, Tamar Gutnick, Anton Weissenbacher, and Michael J. Kuba demonstrate that giant land tortoises (from the Galápagos and Seychelles), kept in zoos, can quickly learn through operant conditioning, distinguish colours in a two-colour choice task, and retain these skills—even after 95 days, and in one case, after 9 years. Interestingly, tortoises trained in groups acquired the tasks more quickly than those trained individually, which suggests a capacity for social learning, although this was not directly confirmed in the colour task. Additionally, the authors highlight a distinction between implicit memory (such as that involved in operant conditioning, which is resistant to the passage of time) and explicit memory (such as colour recognition, which is more difficult to maintain over the long term) (2020, 159-160). I wish to emphasise that these are only selected examples of such elaboration; nevertheless, they broaden our perspective on the tortoise mind.

several aspects of chimpanzees' vocal tracts differ from those of humans. Like human infants, chimpanzees' vocal cords are positioned higher in the vocal tract, allowing them to breathe and swallow simultaneously, without choking. In humans, the descent of the larynx results in the loss of this ability, but enhances speech capability, despite increasing the risk of choking (2004, 11). Additionally, chimpanzees have longer tongues, with less vertical mobility, limiting their ability to produce the full range of vowels found in human languages. The shape of their vocal tract also differs: uneven vocal tube lengths make it difficult for chimpanzees to produce certain vowel sounds, such as "i" and "u." However, research led by Philip Lieberman suggests that chimpanzees' neural control may also be insufficient for complex speech (2007, 47).

By employing non-verbal methods of communication, interactions with primates became more effective. Kanzi, a bonobo, learned language by observing his foster mother's training and demonstrated an ability to understand human speech, responding through the use of lexigrams. He is known for using ninety symbols and for forming basic grammatical rules. Washoe, a chimpanzee, was the first ape to use sign language. Her learning process involved repetition, reinforcement, and contextual learning, associating signs with specific objects, actions, and desires. Through consistent exposure, she acquired over one hundred signs and used them appropriately in various contexts.

Even today, past experiments continue to capture scientists' attention. In their article, Mark A. Krause and Michael J. Beran review the history and ongoing debates surrounding the ability of chimpanzees and bonobos to understand and use human-like language. By examining key language projects, such as Project Washoe, Project Nim, and studies involving lexigram use, they argue that apes primarily use symbols to obtain rewards rather than to share information or express thoughts spontaneously, as humans do. However, they also note instances in which apes in language studies, including chimpanzees and bonobos, have made spontaneous declarative statements, shared information, and used symbols in non-imperative contexts (2020, 8).

Some of these apes demonstrate higher levels of declarative communication, challenging the idea that their language use is purely imperative. Further research emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation in reinforcing language development. The

focus on rewards, as Krause and Beran argue, reduces the richness of language learning, leading apes to use symbols mechanically to achieve desired outcomes, rather than engaging in meaningful communication (2020, 9). Attempts to apply human language in human–nonhuman interactions can be seen as investigations into the boundaries of nonhuman mental capacities, given that language has long been treated as an indicator of the “capacity to know, understand, and rationally interact with the world” (DeMello 2013, 5). However, this approach remains highly anthropocentric—not only by excluding animals from the group of rational beings, but also by limiting human perception, since it does not account for the possible existence of other forms of consciousness. Such forms cannot be expressed through human language.

The case of Nim, a chimpanzee raised in a human household as part of Project Nim, was less successful and raised ethical concerns regarding the exploitation of apes. The project aimed to isolate Nim from other chimpanzees from the age of two months, in order to teach him American Sign Language (ASL). However, research revealed that Nim’s use of language lacked conscious structure and more closely resembled simpler, non-linguistic processes. Later in life, Nim was sent to a pharmaceutical laboratory, where an employee befriended him and refused to conduct further experiments on him. Nim’s story constitute a significant source of inspiration for Colin McAdam’s novel, although William C. McGrew lists several other influences as well.

The home-rearing of Looee (cf. Booe from Lemmon’s colony) derives heavily from Maurice Temerlin’s *Lucy* (1975) and Vince Smith’s *Sophie* (2004), including such events as giving a kitten to Looee, his learning to drink and smoke, learning to paint pictures, etc. (...) Specific references are easily discerned: “Girdish Institute” is Yerkes Primate Center, divided between the main biomedical center and the behavioral field station. Amongst pharmaceutical companies, “Marck” is Merck, “Pfintzer” is Pfizer, etc. Even individual chimpanzees are familiar: Mother and son Matata and Kanzi at Yerkes are “Mama and Mr Ghoul” at Girdish, but “Mama” is also Mama, the alpha female at Arnhem. (2020, 326)

*A Beautiful Truth* tells the story of Judy and Walt Ribke, as well as the history of the Girdish Institute and the group of chimpanzees living there. The character who connects all

these threads is Looee, a chimpanzee cruelly separated from his mother and brought to the United States for human purposes. Initially, he was intended to serve as the Ribkes' surrogate son, but later became a subject of medical experiments, before finally ending up among other chimpanzees under ethological observation at the Girdish Institute. Most sections of the story are narrated by a third-person limited narrator, complemented by the voices of the primates. The novel is set in the United States, around Mount Vermont and the Girdish Institute in Florida, and its timeline draws from the historical period when experiments on primates gained particular popularity.

The novel begins with the story of Judy and Walt Ribke, a childless couple living in Mount Vermont. This typical patriarchal family, in which Judy fulfils the role of a stay-at-home wife, experiences hardship upon discovering their infertility. The plot spans about thirteen years, beginning in 1972, when Walt learns that chimpanzees can be taught to communicate with humans. The author enhances the novel's credibility by referencing a real source—an article titled “Conversations with a Chimp” which was published in *Life* magazine in February of that year. This moment becomes a turning point for Walt, as he decides to adopt a baby chimpanzee as a substitute for a child. At certain levels of political discourse, humans with disabilities and children are compared to animals in debates about political rights. The argument that animals cannot be granted political rights due to their lack of political agency has also been used to argue against extending rights to specific groups of humans. In the case of the Ribkes, they are willing to accept a nonhuman as a part of their family, precisely as a substitute for a child.

As there are only two existing species of chimpanzees, both native to Africa, access to chimpanzees for most Americans is limited; they are bred and kept in captivity. While they can be found in zoos and circuses, social acceptance of circuses has been decreasing. The narrator's descriptive and pragmatic tone in explaining how baby chimpanzees are captured does not mask the cruelty and colonial injustice involved: the mother must be killed, and the baby is shipped without proper care. This process is coordinated by a European settler in Sierra Leone, who profits from exploiting local people and resources. The analogy between capturing the baby chimp and slavery becomes evident, considering the parallels: the location (the African coast), the mode of transportation (ship), and the purpose the animal

will serve—first, to satisfy human emotional needs, and later, to be subjected to drug testing. It is not clear whether Walt’s belief in human superiority over nonhuman beings caused him to ignore this unsettling truth, or if he did not care about the baby chimp’s origins.

To obtain the chimp, Walt contacts a circus employee, a clown, who has experience working with a young female chimpanzee. Walt’s encounter with the primate proves to be an unexpected experience.

the feeling of confusion had less to do with negotiating with a clown and more to do with the simple vision of that hairy little girl sitting on the couch across from him. Was she a person or a pet. The longer Walt drove, the more he realized that what he predominantly felt was excitement. This was an opening. She had seemed so energetic, so full of stories somehow... She was eight and the clown said that was different from an eight-year-old girl, but maybe not so different except for the menses and some peculiarities, he reckoned. (McAdam 2013, 9<sup>44</sup>)

The third-person narration focuses on Walt’s perspective on the situation and the means he uses to navigate the chimp’s sense of humanity. The encounter with the nonhuman becomes an opportunity to pose a question about human exceptionality, as Derrida puts it, “with a mixture of curiosity and authority and thus from the perspective of a superior being” (2008, 16). Human-like features become reference points that allow Walt to reflect on her history and inner life. They open up the possibility of being the author of narrative content—a space from which animals are, as a rule, excluded.

The initial role of Looee as a substitute for a child shapes how he is portrayed in the novel. At first, the narration does not present Looee’s perspective; instead, he is focalised through the eyes of the Ribkes and their understanding of him. The relationship with Looee leads his human caretakers to question his animality, particularly in terms of care and behaviour. As “[t]he truth was that Walt and Judy woke up most mornings with the happy suspicion that something today would be new,” Looee becomes a significant part of the family. This perspective is especially evident when health problems arise—when Walt asks:

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<sup>44</sup> Hereafter *BT* with page references in the text.

“[d]o we take him to a doctor or a vet?,” Judy replies: “doctor” without hesitation (*BT*, 11). Looee’s character is modelled on the idea of a human child, and the family’s struggles mirror those typically associated with raising a toddler. The early stages of his life are narrated in detail, emphasising interspecies similarities; nevertheless, the portrayal remains strongly anthropocentric since the human child serves as the implicit benchmark against which the chimp is assessed.

He caused quite a fuss later when he had to sleep in his own bed. He jumped on the dresser and kicked Judy’s makeup, jumped down and halfway up Walt to hit his chest, and sometimes he removed his diaper, smeared his mattress and returned with a look that said you can’t expect me to sleep there it’s disgusting. He would walk to Judy with his palm up and whimpering, and she was quite susceptible to that. But Walt prevailed and Looee later loved his bedroom and bed. (*BT*, 14)

Although Looee’s ways of expressing himself are more challenging to accept, the Ribkes engage in negotiations of boundaries in daily life, much as they would with a human child. Looee, though unwilling, is assigned the role of a human infant, a category used to assess him as a being. This framework allows the Ribkes to initiate contact with him by meandering across the intersection of humanity and animality, thereby establishing a common ground of understanding. As a result, they begin to recognise Looee’s individuality. Walt, for instance, notices that “Looee’s laugh was different” from the laughs of circus chimpanzees. He interacts with him as people tickle each other, marvelling at how Looee “smiled with his lower lip more than with his upper” and produced a chuckle “like the ‘uck’ in chuckle or the ‘ick’” (*BT*, 14). The facial expressions and response to Walt’s touch create a non-verbal, other-than-textual space of understanding. This space is crucial for two-way communication, as it is not only the humans who seek connection; Looee also expresses his desire to communicate.

Even without direct reciprocal exchange of linguistic messages, the multispecies family is able to work through a specific type of communication. The narrator shows the process of

Looee's learning, which seems idyllic yet is consistent with the outcomes of nineteenth-century experiments on apes.

He understood a lot of what they said, and they were regularly surprised. They sensed how he learned, and taught him the names of body parts. The three would sit on the couch, and Judy would say where's daddy's nose. Looee would point to Walt's nose. Where's daddy's eyes. Where's Looee's belly. Sometimes he stared off in space and sometimes he pointed to his own eyes when Judy asked him to point to hers. He was either getting it wrong or showing there was no difference. (*BT*, 15)

Intuitively, Judy and Walt train Looee as they would interact with a human child, while their approach also resembles scientific understanding. Apes exposed to language early in life, ideally within the first few weeks or months, tend to show more promising results in communication with humans. Raised in more human-like, conversational settings, they learn through spontaneous interactions. However, the Ribkes lack the basic tools necessary for reciprocal communication, as they neither use ASL nor lexigrams. Walt's belief that "there are people with words and people without words, and the ones with words think they run the world and the ones without words will get the job done" leads him to feel obligated to teach Looee how to speak. He wishes for Looee to be able to express himself, to "tell him what was wrong sometimes," and to follow instructions more easily, as managing him could be difficult at times. Although Walt recognises that they make "connections every day without words," he still reflects that "there could be so many more" (*BT*, 39). While he focuses on teaching Looee how to speak, he overlooks the potential for non-verbal communication and fails to acknowledge the richness of nonhuman expression.

With limited means of self-expression, Looee demonstrates his understanding and willingness to cooperate primarily through obedience, such as following instructions. In their book, Antonina A. Scarnà and Robert Ingersoll argue that "chimpanzees and humans are close enough that chimpanzees could be used as models of human behavior in research" (2024, 8). Despite lacking human-like language, chimpanzees can form strong non-verbal emotional bonds, as psychological studies show. These studies suggest that memory, emotions, and attachment exist in a pre-linguistic space, independent of verbal

communication (6). The text emphasises the importance of understanding these non-verbal attachments as a rich source of emotional and behavioural expression. However, adopting a nonhuman perspective is crucial to interpreting certain behaviours. Problems arise, from a human point of view, when Looee attempts to express anger or dissatisfaction, such as when he defecates on Judy's carpet (*BT*, 16).

Looee had been raised in a humanised environment and had never been exposed to other chimpanzees; hence, he was learning by mimicking his foster parents and by searching for analogies. His behaviour in such situations is presented by a third-person narrator who focalises his actions through human eyes, imposing an explanation that appears logical from a human point of view.

When Walt and Judy both had colds, Looee made them open the pantry. He got down from Judy's arms and found a bag of onions and took it to the garbage can. He obviously assumed the onions were making them both sniffle. (*BT*, 19)

This humorous correlation introduces Looee as a keen observer, evoking sympathy from readers. A certain tendency to attribute human traits to nonhuman entities, known as "intuitive anthropomorphism," often leads to unconscious errors in interpretation. Mike Dacey explains that this occurs when we interpret the behaviour of animals or inanimate objects based on human actions. He notes that "[t]here are also evolutionary reasons to think we should anthropomorphise: intuitive anthropomorphism is the kind of fast and frugal heuristic that can work for evolutionary purposes, even if it is not up to the epistemic standards of science" (2017, 5). The story, as told by the third-person narrator, may also be influenced by cognitive bias, particularly when using definitive expressions such as "obviously," which leave little room for alternative interpretations. An often overlooked ethical concern in humanising chimpanzees is that "[i]ntroducing human language to a chimpanzee" imposes "a mode of thinking and processing in a way which no chimpanzee is programmed to deal with" (Scarnà and Ingersoll 2024, 96). Additionally, cognitive bias may affect the understanding of nonhuman behaviour, especially when the observer is not the animal's close caregiver but a detached interpreter.

Looee's days seemed sad to Larry, sometimes, and he would feel angry with Walt for taking him from wherever it was he belonged. He looked around the high concrete room.

There was a scab on Larry's bald head from banging it on the doorframe of the car the other day. It made Looee sad for Larry. He picked at it and it bled. He hugged himself in apology.

Would you call yourself happy, Looee. You seem like a happy guy.

Looee made his happy smile because he thought Larry was telling him to be happy. (*BT*, 36)

The non-negotiable nature of Looee's participation in the human-nonhuman community created by the Ribkes necessitates more engaged and respectful communication practices. As indicated in the passage above, Looee's understanding of human language appears inaccurate from the human perspective. The third-person narration offers the reader insight into the chimpanzee's mind, highlighting potential errors in mutual understanding. It seems clear that if humans made more serious attempts to incorporate Looee's range of expressions into their communication, the outcomes could be significantly more reciprocal. However, the situation in which the chimpanzee is expected to engage in complex social interactions with humans often exceeds the comfort zones of both the animal and the unprepared humans.

As Looee demonstrates signs of understanding human language, Judy and Walt readily adopt the names "mummy" and "daddy" when referring to themselves. The structure of the novel reveals that Looee also acknowledges these names. In a dialogue between Judy and her friend, there are interjections that go unheard by the interlocutors, yet they comment on the situation from a distinctly nonhuman perspective.

I was visiting James at Harvard. His graduation.

Oh my god, already.

Yes. It's gone so fast.

Susan, you must be so proud.

Mummy was excited.

I'm relieved. I am very proud. (...)

Looee squeezed her boob and she jumped.

Looee.

Mummy was shouting.

Looee! No! (*BT*, 48)

Looee's contributions to the text resemble attributive verbs in dialogue, with the reader being the only one who perceives his inner commentary. Unlike Winnifred's silent remarks, which develop understanding of the scenes, Looee's nonverbal cues primarily reflect his understanding of his surroundings. The presented scene clearly illustrates that, as he is not included in direct verbal communication, he attempts to express his needs through the tools available to him, such as screaming and gestures, many of which may be perceived as rude by humans.

As the narrative progresses and Looee matures, his textual voice becomes more precise and distinct. Through the use of limited and straightforward language, his utterances convey an impression of other-than-human mentality. Although his verbal voice remains inaudible to Walt, the latter interprets Looee's intentions based on years of experience.

Looee was jumping from shelf to shelf and no one said no, Looee, no.

Walt was watching Looee jump from shelf to shelf, can Walt do this, it was fast. But Walt wasn't there.

Popcorn.

One more swing.

Two more swing.

Popcorn.

Looee wasn't in the grocery store, Looee was swinging over the creek. Look how far. Looee's not touching the water. Swing. Don't touch the water.

Popcorn.

Looee wanted popcorn.

Looee rang the bell.

Walt unlocked the door between houses and said mummy's asleep, it's Sunday.

Looee rang the bell again, and Walt said Mummy's asleep I said.

Looee was hugging Walt's waist and he took Walt's hand and took him inside Looee's house.  
Looee screamed louder than Walt could scream, and swung from bar to bar.  
Wow said Walt. That's great. Fast.  
Looee wanted popcorn.  
Looee swung and Walt said that's amazing. Don't hurt yourself.  
Looee took Walt's hand and pulled him down the corridor and Walt said I told you buddy,  
mummy's sleeping.  
Looee tasted popcorn butter and Walt knew his noises.  
You're hungry. I gotcha. (*BT*, 32)

The action unfolds in Looee's separate house, built when he was about ten years old, at a time when living with him had become nearly impossible due to his strength and volume. In the presented passage, Looee's utterances serve a narrative purpose: he asserts his presence in the story and takes ownership of the space. These physical and narrative boundaries highlight Looee's agency. As Laura J. McKay notes:

This domestic freedom, with constraints, allows Looee to develop in two directions: within the rules of human culture and within the rules of his innate worldview: a lonely world without the company of other chimpanzees, but one where certain needs can be met, such as climbing and swinging. (2016, 241).

The fragmentation and brevity of his narration encourage readers to envision a playful ape in a specifically arranged environment. Walt's explanations for why Looee should remain quiet are based on cognitive bias and are unlikely to be effective when Looee's needs go unmet. Although he has been taught to suppress his natural instincts and alter instinctive behaviours to conform to human standards, "you simply couldn't ignore him [Looee], and if he was complaining about something, it would have to be addressed with just as much care as with a child" (*BT*, 15).

The reception of Looee's presence in the city is far from enthusiastic, with many individuals, including the Ribkes' friends and neighbours, harbouring suspicions about the ape. This scepticism arises not only from legitimate safety concerns (given a chimpanzee's

strength and unpredictability, it can indeed pose a threat to humans) but also from a general discomfort that many people feel in proximity to Looee. His public appearances, characterised by his human-like attire and behaviours, such as eating, drinking, and understanding human language to some extent, inevitably draw attention. When one of the Ribkes' neighbours discovers that Looee has broken into his kitchen, he reflects that the "creature is neither wild nor owned" (BT, 47). This accidental encounter with *the other* prompts him to challenge conventional notions of humanity and animality.

Mr. Wiley got down on his knees and said Christ it's the neighbour's little gorilla.(...)

So how do I ... You're wearing some pyjamas on yourself.

(...)He opened the door and Looee took his hand and pulled him towards the fridge. Mr. Wiley couldn't help but smile and think that really is a hand.(...)

He had driven past Walt and Judy often and seen their little pet, but now that he was sitting across from him he was thinking that right there is not a pet. He was feeling just the right mixture of fear, curiosity and confusion required to make meeting a stranger memorable. (BT, 46)

Apart from exploring "[t]he territories of otherness (...) through bodily and perceptual differences," the physical alienation of Looee from the rest of the village society also takes place by marking the Ribkes' house as a different space (McKay 2016, 238). The first opportunity for the Ribkes' next-door neighbour, Mr. Wiley, to meet Looee arises when the ape crosses this physical boundary by escaping from home. Mr. Wiley's initial curiosity allows him to move beyond overgeneralizations about Looee to the point where he is ready to investigate and acknowledge Looee's uniqueness as a being. Over time, Mr. Wiley establishes a bond with Looee, who, in turn, becomes attached to him. In this context, Looee's remarkable resemblance to a human helps establish the connection between them, although it can also elicit discomfort. For some individuals, like Mike, the sight of Looee is highly disturbing; he remarks that he "couldn't stand the sight of Looee in camouflage; it was like a chihuahua in a tuxedo or a nasty comic telling jokes at Mike's expense" (BT, 37). This reaction can be understood through the concept of the uncanny valley, which describes the feelings of unease that arise when one encounters images or 3D representations—typically

robotic or digital humanoids—that possess many human features but remain noticeably distinct. Apes, particularly chimpanzees and gorillas, share numerous physical and behavioural traits with humans due to our close evolutionary relationship, potentially evoking a similar sensation. This phenomenon, initially introduced in robotics, is also evident in experiments led by Lara Geue, where individuals exposed to the faces of apes exhibit comparable reactions (2021, 28). The anthropomorphism of Looee, who is portrayed as Judy and Walt’s son, elicits reactions of discomfort or confusion in those who are not directly involved in his care. Furthermore, the challenge of confronting Looee’s otherness is compounded by human psychological processes, which is why his voice—whether verbal or non-verbal—often goes unheard.

The story about Looee unfolds simultaneously with the story of the group of chimpanzees kept in the Girdish Institute in Florida. The place was founded in the 1920s by William Girdish, who became fascinated by the behaviour and emotional complexity of chimpanzees during his first encounter with them in Buenos Aires. Believing that chimps could provide insights into human behaviour, Girdish was ahead of his time, gathering a significant collection and developing research methods to study their physical and mental abilities. Because of financial reasons, the main building housed biomedical research, but a field station dedicated to behavioural studies became a key part of its identity. The subsequent director, David Kennedy, emphasised the importance of observing the primates without judgment, guiding new assistants to focus on behaviour rather than moral assessment. His byword “[o]bserve, but never judge” serves as a direct recommendation for the readers whose assessments might be challenged by entering nonhuman-focused parts of the novel (*BT*, 13).

While the first chapter of *A Beautiful Truth* provides the background for Looee’s story, the entire second chapter leaves the space for the chimpanzees’ voice(s). The narration is strikingly different from that of the initial chapter. It opens with third-person narration focalised through chimpanzees – a collective nonhuman voice: “[t]he World needs fruit. The World needs sleep. The World needs touch and the quick pink heat” (*BT*, 15). Intricate bonds among group members allow the noun “World” to function as a plural pronoun, used to express their shared and most urgent needs. This third-person narration distances itself from

the human-centred viewpoint from the very beginning by altering the meaning of words to convey a nonhuman mind better. Bal argues that focalisation acts as a tool to guide readers' emotional responses and judgments, often subtly shaping their sympathies and biases based on whose perspective they are "seeing" through (2009, 145). The focalisation oscillates between an external one, resembling a non-judgemental scientific diary that focuses on the representation of facts—such as the history of the apes at the field station (for instance: "Mr. Ghoul was there from the beginning, before Podo, before anyone but Mama. No one remembers as well as Mr. Ghoul that the World was once white and square" [BT, 20])—and a character-bound one. The latter, seen through the chimpanzees' eyes, plays an important role in making the novel more nonhuman-oriented: it reduces the risk of far-fetched anthropomorphisation often associated with first-person nonhuman narration and allows for a degree of particularity in each nonhuman character.

Look to Podo if the food is taken from your mouths.

Look to him if you think all food can be yours.

He wants Fanta.

He will pound the eyes of detractors.

Show him your rosé.

A bird flies over the World.

Fifi watches Mr. Ghoul.

Mama likes Fifi.

Fifi likes Mama.

Magda slaps Bootie.

Bootie likes Burke and hitting Magda, his mother.

Podo is pinning Magda and neither really wants it.

Bootie and the new one are jumping all over Magda and Podo.

Bootie slaps Podo on the leg.

Podo is busy, sharp Podo.

Bootie and the new one want to understand. (BT, 10)

The passage offers a glimpse into the social hierarchy and behaviours of chimpanzees, particularly in how they interact and negotiate relationships within their group. The chimpanzees' agency is expressed through their capacity to act with intent, exert influence, and make decisions; it is possible to a certain extent, as they live in captivity. It is evident that Podo represents a dominant figure, potentially an alpha male or high-ranking individual, who controls access to resources and establishes social boundaries. Despite evidence of violence, such as aggression used by chimpanzees in asserting power or maintaining dominance within a group, their social relationships are characterised by a complex interplay of affection and alliances. The narration suggests that chimpanzees are capable of navigating social dynamics through both conflict and cooperation. The story flows smoothly, without employing any sophisticated language devices. Limited emphasis on nonhuman mental processes increases the reliability of narration; anthropomorphisation does not imply symbolic or traditionally fixed meanings. Fragmented utterances mirror the chaotic, instinctive nature of animal interactions (observed from the human perspective), as well as the possible mental or emotional states of the chimpanzees themselves. It demonstrates that chimpanzees might perceive or experience their world through immediate and sensory-driven snapshots rather than a continuous narrative.

Similarly to the second chapter of the novel, chapter seven also focuses only on chimpanzees and their interactions.

Podo's back hurts, and when he holds up a leaf to look at the ants on it, the ants grow invisible when he brings it near his face. He wonders where they are.

Fifi walks over and touches his balls and they both feel better for it.

Burke doesn't want to play with Bootie. He pushes him, and Bootie thinks he is playing and won't go away. Burke bites him.

Magda hits Burke and sticks her finger in his eye. She too finds Bootie annoying, but he is her son. Magda complains to Podo, who bluffs at Burke and nudges Bootie.

The rebuke stings Burke all the more because he wants to impress no one more than Podo.

Magda shows Podo her rosé, which looks to him as pale and unwilling as the winter sun.

He chooses to eat an apple. Fifi comes over and takes the apple from his hand, which he allows because she touched his balls. (*BT*, 36)

Without resorting to far-fetched anthropomorphism, the narration effectively evokes readers' sympathy for Podo by highlighting the similarities between his aging process and that typically observed in humans. His increasing vulnerability and potential loss of bodily control starkly contrast with his previously established dominance within the group. Fifi's touching of Podo's genitals is an intimate yet casual act that serves as physical and emotional comfort for them. In the context of primate behaviour, grooming and sexual contact can strengthen social bonds and affirm status or alliances within the group. However, Podo also exhibits a waning interest in deeper sexual engagement, as Magda's advances hold little appeal for him. Rather than pursuing intimacy with her, he opts for something more straightforward and satisfying, demonstrating his control over the situation and his emotional detachment from her.

The seemingly plain and minimalistic vocabulary joins the worlds of humans and nonhumans; the narration adapts meanings that are more fitting for the nonhuman realm. Readers are challenged to reconsider their understanding of the utterances by exploring possible associations and indirect meanings, such as "quick pink heat," which alludes to sexual intercourse that comprises a vivid aspect of chimpanzee life. Zanna Clay and Frans B.M. de Waal demonstrate that chimpanzee socio-sexual behaviours, unlike those of bonobos, are more frequently linked to reproductive contexts and competition for dominance rather than purely social bonding. Nevertheless, the apes' engagement in reassurance and affiliative behaviours, such as embraces, touching, and socio-sexual contact, particularly following aggressive encounters, is not uncommon. For instance, chimpanzees often reconcile with each other primarily through embracing and kissing; uninvolved bystanders may also initiate affiliative contact with one of the individuals involved, typically the former victim (Clay and de Waal 2013, 316). The descriptions focus on physical actions that have an immediate impact, directing readers' attention to the fact that chimpanzees communicate through bodily gestures and actions. Expressions like the double entendre "quick pink heat" and the wordplay "pinning" refer to the socio-sexual sphere, which holds

particular importance within the group. The bodily aspects of the narration are further emphasised by repetitions, such as “[t]he new one is looking at Magda’s rosé getting pin, pin, pinned by Podo,” which add rhythm to the action (*BT*, 16).

Human nomenclature penetrates this passage, making Fanta<sup>45</sup> an object of desire, but at the same time, the language seems insufficient to convey the nuances of chimpanzee communication. The neologism “oa,” as in the passage: “Podo feels the oa, grateful Podo. Magda feels safe. / There is oa in the ground and oa in the wind and everyone knuckles and bows, how-do,” represents a feeling or state of being (*BT*, 10). This abstract concept—a shared experience that unifies them with nature and connects all living beings—appears tied to a deep spiritual force to which chimpanzees are attuned and which influences their behaviour and emotions.

The living conditions at the Girdish Institute’s behavioural station allow chimpanzee voices to emerge more distinctly, as the apes can express the full range of their natural behaviours. Observing nonhumans in an environment free from laboratory constraints yields far more reliable insights into their behaviour. Subsequently, Mama and Mr. Ghoul are both able and willing to use a tool—a “machine”—to establish reciprocal communication with the human, Dave.

They wanted Mama and Mr. Ghoul to talk to each other with their hands. They only did it sometimes when Mary was around so she wouldn’t hit them.

Then Mary disappeared, like Orang and the others.

Dave liked the dirty machine, and Ghoul liked Dave. (*BT*, 14)

Despite their experience in ASL, the chimpanzees are reluctant to use this form of communication due to the harsh training they endured. The apes’ preferences and their willingness to maintain contact with Dave significantly influence their engagement in the task. Their utterances, similar to those observed in Project Nim, resemble human language; however, specific syntactic deviations, based on expressions produced by real apes using

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<sup>45</sup> M&M’s, vodka, cassette, and microwave are other examples of brand names that appear in the vocabulary used by the chimpanzees.

ASL, highlight their nonhuman uniqueness. Passages that introduce human-nonhuman communication through chimpanzee-character-bound focalisation illustrate the complexities and limitations of employing human language for interactions between humans and nonhumans.

The picture for Why was this: ↔.

He knows the answer for When is Then and Where is There and What is That, and What is that, it's a coin. But there is no answer for Why, neither in the World nor in the Hard nor in the dreams of young Ghoul or old. He never understood it. (*BT*, 17)

Mama and Mr. Ghoul learn to associate images and symbols with objects or actions, using a lexigram device. Despite his ability to use the machine to describe concrete objects, Mr. Ghoul struggles with more abstract concepts. When asked “Why,” he is unable to answer or understand the question, signifying the limitations of symbolic communication in conveying deeper emotional or philosophical understanding. Furthermore, the demands of communication with humans happen to become overwhelming for Mr. Ghoul who reacts with frustration and confusion. His inability to provide the correct answer may be caused by more complex reasons than a simple misunderstanding of the words. For instance, when Dave repeatedly asks Mr. Ghoul “what color-of eyes Visitor” or to identify the “dirty thing in the corner” (a cockroach), Mr. Ghoul’s reluctance and fatigue suggest a disconnect between human expectations and his capacity to comply (*BT*, 27). He feels tired and resistant, likely because he finds the process of naming and identifying objects tedious and stressful.

He wanted the machine to make music while he and Dave made sentences but in the earliest days the dirty machine could not. There were simple things that the words, the machine and Dave could never understand. Things in Ghoul that were part of the World. (*BT*, 12)

The narrative supports DeMello’s position that human language and comprehension differ too greatly from the way chimpanzees understand reality, showing Mr. Ghoul’s inability to express his inner life. She argues that the “problem exists, to a much greater extent, when trying to understand, and put into human words, the minds of non-human

animals.” The character of Mr. Ghoul is endowed with a sufficient degree of self-awareness to realise that his thoughts can be easily misinterpreted, as “[h]umans, from a position of superiority, can either choose to ignore what animals are saying, making them silent, or can interpret for them, which runs the risk of doing so from the human point of view” (DeMello 2013, 5). Mr. Ghoul’s reluctance to communicate is an attempt to escape the role of a subordinated research subject and to understand his position within human-language reality.

Kurt Kotrschal identifies four levels at which emotions shape individuals and their responses to environmental conditions:

Emotions (1) have ultimate functions in motivating individuals to execute their evolutionary strategies and individual tactics towards fitness optimisation; (2) have a mechanistic (neuronal/hormonal/cognitive) substrate and show a species specific form of behavioural expression; (3) are individually shaped and modulated during ontogeny between genes, maternal effects and early [socialisation]; individual emotionality also forms the substrate for ones “temperament” and (4) emotions are conservatively maintained in structure and function over considerable periods of vertebrate evolutionary history. (2012, 4)

Emotions function as adaptive tools shaped by evolution to support survival and reproductive success. They drive behaviours that, over time, enhance an individual's chances of staying alive and transmitting their genes. Although emotional expression varies across species, its foundations lie in shared physiological mechanisms embedded in the nervous, hormonal, and cognitive systems of all vertebrates. These mechanisms operate in comparable ways across taxa, reflecting a common evolutionary origin. An individual's emotionality, that is, the intensity and manner in which they experience emotions, constitutes the basis of temperament, understood as a relatively stable set of behavioural tendencies characteristic of a given species. McAdam presents the chimpanzees as characters with their own personalities and inclinations. Mama, who distinguished herself by her preference for the colour red, was influenced by it in her communication and possibly in her perception of words. Her emotional responses to her favourite objects and colours

obstructed the achievement of research results that could be reliable from a human perspective.

Dave taught them colours, and colours were the way you could describe the pictures that can't be pictured.

Mama liked red.

Dave would talk through the machine and hold up the fire truck.

? Mama what colour-of fire truck.

Red colour-of that.

? Mama what colour-of lipstick.

Red.

And then Dave held up one of their favourite things, the whistle. Dave could put the whistle to his mouth and fling a twirl into the air that made your ears and hair and back stand up and look for what no one could see. And Ghoul knew the whistle was black.

? Mama what colour-of whistle.

Red.

? Mama what colour-of whistle.

Red colour-of that.

No.

Dave held up a black pen.

? Mama what colour-of pen.

Black colour-of that.

And he held up the whistle again.

Red.

Red red red.

And she was happy.

She called magazines red, her blue hairbrush red, the blind uncovering the window red, and Dave grew excited. He gathered the other people to his window and he and some of them smiled because they knew that anything Mama really liked was red. When the Hardest grew softer and they saw the trees, Mama went to the machine and said

That red. (BT, 24)

Her strong attachment to the colour and the way she persistently identifies things as red, regardless of their actual colour, manifest her preferences. By labelling different objects as red, she might be using the colour to communicate her emotional attachment rather than expressing actual perception. For her, it is not an abstract colour category; what humans perceive as descriptive, Mama uses as evaluative. Red becomes a marker of positive emotional engagement, not an optical property. David's attempts to teach the chimpanzees human language are, in fact, projections of his own linguistic and cognitive structure onto them. When he asks about colour in his own terms, as an objective feature of things, Mama does not respond within the same system. It seems that the word "black" is not so much alien to her as simply devoid of meaningful content. Black carries no meaning, and therefore it is not worth her attention. McAdam shows that Mama's language does not fit within human conceptual frameworks. It is saturated with cultural and emotional categories, and if interspecies communication is to be possible, it must be acknowledged that the other may understand the world differently.

### **3.4. Conclusions**

The examination of nonhuman narrators and characters in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* sheds light on the complexities of the human-animal relationships and the role of narrative in shaping our understanding of nonhuman agency. Both novels employ literary devices that challenge traditional anthropocentric perspectives, revealing the limitations of human language and cognition in fully comprehending nonhuman experiences. The process of analysis that draws on the natural sciences makes it possible to present taxa as a more neutral image, as Ortiz-Robles (2016, 24) suggests—particularly in light of Herman's emphasis on "the advantages of pursuing an integrative, cross-disciplinary framework for investigating self-narratives attributed to nonhuman tellers" (2016, 14). By giving voice to nonhuman characters, these works emphasise the tension between anthropomorphism and the authentic representation of nonhuman subjectivities.

The character of the turtle narrator in Jessica Grant's novel is situated within the literary history of turtle representation, sharing traits with Aesop's tortoise and the turtle narrator in Verlyn Klinkenborg's novel. In the portrayal of Winnifred's character, her species-specific traits, such as slowness and the ability to hibernate, serve as metanarrative tools that shape her personality and the narrative flow. Although a turtle's shell is a complex anatomical armour that suggests self-sufficiency and inward wisdom, a closer examination of this structure, which evolved from modified ribs and respiratory muscles, reveals the species' vulnerability. Winnifred's narration shows that not only wild turtles but also those in human care are exposed to unfavourable living conditions.

The interweaving of the two female narrators' voices in *Come, Thou Tortoise* expands the perspective to include the experience of the animal, whose presence is crucial to the human protagonist. This narrative strategy highlights the complexity of their relationship, allowing readers to imagine the turtle's biological experiences while also understanding the degree of her dependence on human care that is essential outside of the turtle's natural habitat. The novel highlights the moral responsibility of the caregiver, showing that caring for an animal requires knowledge, empathy, and attentiveness to species-specific needs. Readers are confronted with the consequences of anthropocentric domestication, not only for the species but above all for this particular individual; the novel strongly emphasises Winnifred's particularity through the character of her relationship with Audrey. Simultaneously, anthropomorphism, as argued by Ortiz-Robles, plays an important role in bridging the communicative gap between humans and nonhumans (2026, 78). Winnifred's voice, despite its clear humanisation, serves as a narrative tool that reinforces empathy and recognition of nonhuman individuality. Her internal monologues offer insight into the life of a tortoise living within human society, demonstrating both her cognitive limitations and her emotional depth.

The invasive research conducted on great apes in the twentieth century, which took the form of physical interference with their bodies and attempts to alter their intellectual, emotional, and social dispositions (mentioned, for instance, in Singer 2015, 31-33), sparked the curiosity of scientists and creatives. McAdam's novel reflects these interests by addressing the overtly cruel experiments causing physical suffering and those seemingly

more benign at first glance. The similarity between human and chimpanzee vocal apparatuses and nervous systems may have seemed to offer an opportunity to impose human language systems on animals. However, these parallels seem insufficient to gain access to or comprehend a nonhuman mind. McAdam subtly yet effectively illustrates the differences, for instance, in value perception, such as the use of colour, which ultimately obstructs the possibility of achieving an integrated human-chimpanzee language. It turns out that the human, as the initiator of this type of contact, must search for alternative systems to avoid aggressive attempts to colonise nonhuman minds.

McAdam employs distinct narrative strategies to depict the two storylines: first, that of Looee, and the other of the chimpanzees at the Girdish Institute, as their situations differ fundamentally. From an early age, Looee is forced to adapt his instincts to human life as he depends on the care of Walt and Judy, who become his primary social companions. Since he is raised among humans, the narrative begins with a third-person external narrator focalising through the human caretakers' perspective. As he matures, the narrative gradually shifts to include Looee's own point of view. This progression feels natural: at the beginning, the story conveys the disorientation and fascination of his human guardians, and over time, as they learn to interpret Looee's behaviour, the same opportunity is extended to readers.

Meanwhile, as the narrative presents how the chimpanzees living at the Girdish Institute are given the chance to develop social bonds, they are granted their own collective voice in the novel. While this voice is less attuned to individual specificity (not so much erasing it as simply not emphasising it), the narrative is formally distinct; it is marked by a unique speaking subject, sentence construction, neologisms, and attention to matters of importance to the chimpanzee group. Since chimpanzees rely heavily on collaboration with their kin (as argued, for instance, by Melis, Hare, and Tomasello 2006, 1229), the use of a collective voice in the novel reflects this natural characteristic. In this case, the third-person narration stresses a nonhuman sense of community while simultaneously distinguishing it semantically from the human world.

Looee's experiences highlight the ethical dilemmas surrounding the domestication and captivity of primates, as well as the psychological impact of being denied access to one's own species. His suspension between human and animal worlds illustrates the dramatic

consequences of attempts to use human resources to accommodate a primate among humans. Sections enriched by the narration offered by the chimpanzees at the Girdish Institute further develop this theme, as their fragmented, instinct-driven language challenges human-centred interpretations of intelligence and emotionality. Their social interactions, hierarchical struggles, and emotional attachments demonstrate that nonhuman communication and behaviour cannot always be fully understood or interpreted through a human lens. These narrative choices emphasise the importance of respecting nonhuman autonomy and acknowledging the limitations of anthropocentric storytelling.

Both novels question the assumed supremacy of human language and the belief that verbal communication is the primary indicator of sentience. The difficulty of representing nonhuman minds through human language, as explored in Margo DeMello's analysis of linguistic limitations, is evident in both Grant's and McAdam's works. Winnifred and the chimpanzees possess a form of self-awareness and agency, but their modes of expression of the latter differ significantly from human expectations. This highlights the need for alternative approaches to interspecies communication that do not impose human linguistic frameworks onto nonhuman subjects. By engaging with these nonhuman-centred perspectives, readers are encouraged to reconsider how intelligence, emotion, and autonomy manifest beyond the confines of human cognition.

Another critical issue addressed in both novels is the ethical responsibility humans bear towards nonhuman beings, particularly regarding how captivity and domestication influence the equal consideration of interests, as postulated by Singer (2015, 4–9). Winnifred's history, which conveys the experience of being passed from one owner to another, often without consideration for her well-being, reflects a broader societal tendency to commodify nonhuman lives. Similarly, Looee's journey from a surrogate child to a research subject presents dramatic consequences of human desire to impose their lifestyle on an ape. The depiction of the chimpanzees at the Girdish Institute further exposes the fraught nature of scientific research involving primates, raising questions about the balance between knowledge production and ethical considerations. The contrast between individual bonds, such as those between Audrey and Winnifred, and the impersonal treatment of

primates in the research facility highlights the contradictions in human attitudes toward nonhuman life.

The portrayal of nonhuman narrators in these novels serves not only to critique human dominance over other species but also to advocate for a more inclusive understanding of nonhuman agency. Through their distinct narrative strategies, Grant and McAdam reconsider the boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds, evoking a sense of empathy towards their nonhuman characters. While anthropomorphism remains quite an unreliable tool, it nonetheless provides a crucial entry point for engaging with nonhuman perspectives. By granting narrative space to nonhuman characters, these novels offer a valuable attempt to challenge anthropocentric assumptions and the philosophical implications of interspecies coexistence.

## Chapter 4

### Species Boundaries and the Representation of Experimental Animals in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* and Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise*

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of selected literary narratives that address the role of nonhuman animals within systems of laboratory experimentation, biotechnology, and industrial exploitation. The theoretical framework draws on contemporary approaches from animal studies, bioethics, biopolitics, and critiques of anthropocentrism. The aim of the chapter is to identify literary strategies for representing animals in relation to their ontological, moral, and political status in literary settings. Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*, and Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* present various models of animal existence within systems of biotechnological control and experimentation, as well as potential forms of resistance to their objectification. The analysed texts expose the linguistic and ideological strategies that enable the transformation of living beings into production units, research models, or morally indifferent objects, regardless of their cognitive complexity, capacity for suffering, or relationality.

The methodological apparatus employs Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist ethics, which criticise the commodification of animals under advanced capitalism. Braidotti argues that genetic interventions are burdened with the threat of turning nonhuman beings into objects of economic value (2013, 7–8). Her considerations reveal zoe as a shared, interconnected force that traverses interspecies boundaries. She advocates for a shift toward a relational ethics that acknowledges the intrinsic worth and singularity of nonhuman lives without subsuming them under human categories (60). Subsequently, Peter Singer's critique of speciesism challenges the arbitrary prioritisation of human interests over those of other sentient beings, arguing that the capacity to suffer should be the basis of moral consideration (2015, 7). His work emphasises the scale of nonhuman suffering, especially in

scientific facilities, where animals are frequently subjected to painful tests with little scientific justification or benefit. I also draw on the works of Carol J. Adams, Donna Haraway, and Monika Bakke in relation to the perception of animals as well as the linguistic and cultural mechanisms, such as the absent referent, which conceal violence against them.

The scope of this chapter includes, among others, the problematisation of the human–animal boundary in the context of genetic engineering, the question of subjectivity in animals exposed to violence within research institutions, and the visibility of animal exploitation. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which literature, through emotional perspective, childlike naivety, or stark depictions of violence, can challenge dominant scientific and economic narratives by exposing the moral cost of technological progress. I focus not only on the presence of animals in literature but also on the structures of exclusion that make their suffering invisible. From a biopolitical perspective, as Braidotti argues, human and nonhuman bodies are entangled in the logic of capital as carriers of information and sources of profit (2013, 60).

The point of departure for this analysis is a scepticism toward the rhetoric of progress and *summum bonum* that is used to justify violence against animals. The narratives of Atwood, McAdam, and Grant, despite their differing tones and styles, confront the reader with the problem of blurred species boundaries as a means of more effectively managing nonhuman bodies. This chapter explores how literature can restore visibility to those whose presence has been reduced to experimental data, transplantable organs or metaphors. In this sense, the texts under discussion not only comment on but also contest the order that enables the exclusion of nonhuman beings from the sphere of ethical concern.

## **4.2. Genetic Engineering in *MaddAddam* Trilogy**

Although Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy is often categorised as science fiction, she prefers the term speculative fiction, which she defines as fiction presenting futures grounded in contemporary scientific realities. As the author explains, speculative fiction

explores futures as extensions of present-day scientific ideas, making them more credible than traditional science fiction, which often involves entirely fantastical elements<sup>46</sup>. However, this distinction is not consistently applied in literary studies. Brian Stableford, for instance, argues that speculative fiction refers to works predating the modern understanding of science, particularly those exploring the potential outcomes of new discoveries and technologies (2003, 15). On the contrary, Atwood's speculative fiction relies heavily on its connections to present-day realities, which lend credibility to the dystopian worlds she creates, especially, as Krzysztof Uniłowski argues, the use of scientific terminology and principles helps embed fictional worlds in a realistic framework, strengthening the literary message (2019, 431). For example, the *MaddAddam* trilogy reflects real-world scientific research, such as the decades-long efforts to create transgenic animals whose organs could be used in xenotransplantation. In 2022, the first successful transplant of a genetically modified pig heart into a human was carried out, although the patient, Mr Bennett, died two weeks later. Similarly, warnings about the threat of a virulent virus have long been issued, and the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how vulnerable humans are to such outbreaks.

Atwood sets the action of her *MaddAddam* trilogy in a not-too-distant future. It begins with *Oryx and Crake*, which portrays the fall of civilisation—both before and after the apocalypse. In *The Year of the Flood*, the second volume of the trilogy, Atwood shifts the narrative to the period before and during the pandemic. The story introduces the God's Gardeners, a religious community into which Toby, another key character, is gradually integrated. The final part, *MaddAddam*, continues the storyline left off in the final chapter of *Oryx and Crake*, featuring characters from both the first and second parts. Snowman, known as Jimmy before the Waterless Flood, is the son of scientists employed by one of the leading bio-corporations. Snowman-Jimmy serves as the focaliser for the experiences of genetically modified nonhumans before the pandemic, while Toby's perspective becomes central in the

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<sup>46</sup> Atwood's stance is discussed by Marvin Keith Booker in the *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction in Literature*, where he notes that although she initially distanced herself from the label of science fiction, she later acknowledged its importance to her development as a writer (2015, 33).

second and third parts of the trilogy. In contrast to Jimmy-Snowman, her fight for survival in the pleeblands shows the perspective from the other side of the border.

The position of nonhumans, those genetically modified in particular, is shaped by socio-political structures driven by post-industrial capitalism, whose desires influence both human and nonhuman lives. The shifting economic status of nonhumans affects not only their treatment by humans, but also their narrative construction and potential for subjectivity within the text. The connection between living beings, burdened with varying degrees of instrumentalisation, and the dominant political system in the trilogy is noted by Sławomir Koziół, who argues that:

Atwood uses the pigeons to explore, often in an ironic way, the status of genetically modified animals from an ethical perspective, as she shows how their perception and evaluation by humans changes depending on the circumstances and professed ideology. (2018, 262)

The situation of non-human beings thus becomes an indicator of how a system, where ethical assumptions lagged behind or were not meant to keep pace with the development of natural sciences, shaped successive generations. As a result, profit extraction was not limited by ethical standards. Biopolitical mechanisms ensure that their existence is governed by economic imperatives rather than intrinsic value. As Rosi Braidotti explains, “advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives,” especially when “market forces (...) happily trade on Life itself” (Braidotti 2013, 59). Nonhumans become both objects of technological advancement and symbols in ethical debates, while their status shifts according to fluctuating market demand.

An ecocritical perspective, particularly the second-waved, emphasises that the fates of these groups are intrinsically linked; environmental changes invariably affect the most vulnerable populations, who, when marginalized from protective social structures, gradually lose their sources of livelihood (Buell 2011, 95). The settings in Atwood’s novels depict a society divided into rigid social classes due to years of private corporate dominance during a period of environmental crisis. Society is burdened by capitalist pursuits while the

corporations' insatiable hunger depletes natural resources and drives scientific developments that disregard human and nonhuman dignity. In line with Braidotti's claim that "advanced capitalism reduces bodies to carriers of vital information, which are invested with financial value and capitalised," the class of intellectuals specialising in genetic engineering emerged as a key profit-generating sector for corporations (2013, 117). As a result, social mobility into this class was nearly impossible; for instance, scientists were raised within closed systems, and their children were educated in prestigious schools designed to groom them as future members of the intellectual elite. This separation reinforced a stark divide between the general population, who resided in the pleeblands, and the scientists, who are isolated from the unpredictability of the outside world in the Compounds.

The house, the pool, the furniture – all belonged to the OrganInc Compound, where the top people lived. Increasingly, the middle-range execs and the junior scientists lived there too. Jimmy's father said it was better that way, because nobody had to commute to work from the Modules. Despite the sterile transport corridors and the high-speed bullet trains, there was always a risk when you went through the city. (Atwood 2003, 15<sup>47</sup>)

Advanced capitalism exacerbates inequality, creating new forms of exclusion and disposable classes of beings. The Compounds, with their security and controlled amenities, provide selected humans not only with a sense of exclusivity but also with a dependency on corporate protection—whether that protection is genuinely necessary or not. Corporations leverage fear to justify their isolation. As Braidotti puts it, "this political economy of difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued and therefore disposable others"—people who could be left without systemic support and even executed by corporate guards for trivial reasons (2003, 28). The narrative of the city as dangerous discourages scientists from leaving the Compounds, restricting their interaction with people beyond their professional circles. This barrier highlights the prioritisation of corporate interests over ethics and helps explain the scientists' limited ethical and

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<sup>47</sup> Hereafter *OC* with page references in the text.

empathetic awareness. The district serves as a microcosm: scientists live in isolated comfort, creating profit-generating products and organisms while remaining physically and discursively disconnected from the consequences their innovations have on the external world. Due to intense competition among corporations, employees operated under strict security protocols, as headhunting and corporate espionage are constant threats.

Society is engineered to be exclusively and selectively human-centred; nonhumans are relegated to laboratories, where exploitation is systematic yet largely invisible. As Singer explains, referring to methods of animal experimentation, “research facilities are usually designed so that the public sees little of the live animals that go in, or the dead ones that come out” (2015, 217). The hidden suffering of genetically modified animals in these controlled environments shields the public from the ethical implications of their use. Deprived of everyday, neutral contact with nonhumans, humans become emotionally detached, which facilitates indifference and exploitation, reflecting what Braidotti identifies as “a radical disruption of the human-animal interaction” inherent in advanced capitalism (2003, 7). Nonhumans, particularly those used for scientific experimentation, are absent from the social fabric. Confined to laboratory spaces, they are denied a role in human life other than as subjects for manipulation. As a result, humans become desensitised to their needs and existence.

Likewise, the educational system was structured not only to maximise corporate profits but also to entrench their influence over social structures. The curriculum prioritised natural sciences, leaving minimal space for ethical or moral reflection. Within the Compounds, only fully controllable entities—subordinated people and genetically modified nonhumans—were permitted. In such an environment, empathy was stunted as children, rarely exposed to living animals, became increasingly desensitised to nonhuman suffering. Ashley Young et al. emphasise:

Socially, children begin seeing animals as anthropomorphic peers but improve their understanding of diverse perspectives as they practice social relationships and develop their theory-of-mind. These social relationships with parents, peers, and animals have the potential to support or hinder empathy development. (2018, 6)

Through interactions with animals, parents, and peers, children practise perspective-taking, a skill crucial for developing empathy. The inclination to use anthropomorphism, typical in early childhood, supports the growth of mental abilities, while regular relationships with animals—especially those that respond to human emotions—promote social development on a par with human relationships. Supportive social environments help children recognise and respect differences in others, whether human or animal. Conversely, when such relationships are limited or discouraged, this may hinder their emotional sensitivity. The systemic separation of human children from other beings in the compounds served to build up social callousness among younger generations.

Physical barriers, such as walls and fences, were the most basic and visible, yet also effective ways of segregation. They served not only to protect the corporations' possessions against enemies—both nonhuman, such as microbes, and human spies—but also to delineate a certain area for the privileged class. The isolation function of barriers was to dull empathy so that scientists could carry out their work without interruptions.

“Those walls and bars are there for a reason,” said Crake. “Not to keep us out, but to keep them in. Mankind needs barriers in both cases.”

“Them?”

“Nature and God.”

“I thought you didn't believe in God,” said Jimmy.

“I don't believe in Nature either,” said Crake. “Or not with a capital N.”(OC, 242)

Crake's statement about walls and bars points to a fundamental belief in containment, both physical and ideological; his comment that he doesn't believe in “Nature” or “God” (with capital letters) proves his rejection of the traditional reverence or sanctity these concepts often carry. He sees the boundaries as necessary not to protect humans from nature but to control nature itself, suggesting that he views nature as something that can be profitably used when controlled. He plays God pursuing his genetic engineering projects, in which he seeks to reshape life according to his own designs, reflecting humanity's desire to dominate and control natural processes. His philosophy leads him to believe that he can

design a “better” species without the supposed flaws of human nature, showing his disdain for both natural evolution and traditional human belief systems. The physical barriers that kept the pigoons tame were later recreated in the scientists’ minds. They understood that although their power was tremendous, they could exercise it only in laboratory spaces where nonhumans could be kept under strict control. The buildings and safety systems separated scientists from nature, which could have posed a threat to capitalistic exploitation; restricting nonhumans from exhibiting their natural behaviours and instincts ensured scientists’ safety and authority. Subjugating nature in the laboratories put the scientists in a position of power, reinforced by their belief in omnipotence.

The traditional great chain of being, which laid the foundation for Western supremacy, assumes that humans are the most powerful beings on Earth—the representatives of God. Because of their affinity with the Creator, Earth is entrusted to them so they can exploit it according to their understanding. In Atwood’s trilogy, it is not God who boosts humans’ self-confidence, but the development of science and technology, which equips people with the skills to manage and modify all types of beings. Jimmy’s father was one of these professionals, a “genographer” whose job involves working on genetically modified swine:

at OrganInc Farms, he’d been one of the foremost architects of the pigoon project, along with a team of transplant experts and the microbiologists who were splicing against infections. Pigoon was only a nickname: the official name was *sus multiorganifer*. But pigoon was what everyone said. Sometimes they said Organ-Oink Farms, but not as often. It wasn’t really a farm anyway, not like the farms in pictures. (OC, 12)

The language used by the scientists distances them from the implications of their work, and trivialises the pigoons’ purpose of existence at the same time. OrganInc Farms, a high-tech facility, does not resemble the pastoral image often associated with traditional farming. Its nickname, “Organ-Oink Farms,” also shows how real animals and their suffering were removed from human imagination and replaced by satirical labels. Similarly, the casual use of the nickname “pigoon” instead of the clinical term *Sus multiorganifer* reaches far beyond mere convenience in communication—it reflects the casual attitude towards genetic

engineering that blurs the boundaries between species. Genetic modifications involved adding human DNA to the swine genome to produce organs compatible with those of humans, making them suitable for transplantation. “Animals provide living material for scientific experiments,” such as in the case of swine who became factories for spare hearts, kidneys, and livers (Braidotti 2003, 6). Their bodies had to be adapted to accommodate this additional physiological burden, resulting in a more massive build than that of regular pigs. Due to financial motivations, modifications could go as far as necessary for scientists to produce highly efficient, disease-resistant beings, sacrificing life “without the charge of murder being brought” (Haraway 2008, 121). In pursuit of a theoretical *summum bonum*—human health—scientists disregarded moral boundaries, prioritising corporate gains over ethical considerations. On the other hand, the narrator’s impersonal portrayal of genetically modified beings, described with encyclopaedic accuracy, emphasises their existence as engineering achievements.

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year. A rapid-maturity gene was spliced in so the pigoon kidneys and livers and hearts would be ready sooner, and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs, much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one. That would be less wasteful, as it took a lot of food and care to grow a pigoon. (OC, 25)

The pigoon project was designed to tackle the demand for organs, addressing issues such as organ rejection and the biological limitations of human donors by utilising transgenic organisms. Scientists prioritised productivity and resilience, accelerated pigoon growth rates, and treated them as customisable tools for more efficient organ production. In this pre-apocalyptic world, technology and language worked together to objectify—killing became harvesting, and the body was reduced to a set of interchangeable parts. The pigoon was an investment, guaranteeing a steady return in the form of perpetually grown organs. The

genetically modified creatures were designed, created, and used, with alterations introduced whenever necessary. Their existence did not elicit emotional or moral reflection—exploitation was concealed beneath scientific terminology, as Singer explains:

Detachment is made easier by the use of technical jargon that disguises the real nature of what is going on. Psychologists under the influence of the behaviorist doctrine that only what can be observed should be mentioned, have developed a considerable collection of terms that refer to pain without appearing to do so. (2015, 51)

This linguistic approach, revealed through “the matter-of-fact, business-minded, and scientifically accurate description of the cruel practice,” creates a formal acceptance of animal exploitation, resulting in profound suffering (Kozioł 2018, 266). It separates humans from nonhumans and obscures their true nature—including autonomy, cognitive abilities, and capacity for pain, which parallels that of humans. Consequently, the pigeons are reduced to objects, even at the level of discourse. Jimmy’s father dismisses concerns about the morality of “interfering with the building blocks of life,” calling it “just proteins” (OC, 64). Viewing nonhumans as collections of proteins precludes any deeper recognition of their complexity. Unlike anthropomorphism, this perspective strips nonhumans of any qualities that might evoke empathy from humans, who assume authority over their futures.

Both the physical barriers that separated the scientists from the pigeons and their upbringing in systemic callousness created a mental barrier that prevented them from attempting to form a bond with the pigeons. They showed no willingness to establish an interspecies way of communication, imagining the genetically modified nonhumans as beasts or monsters that should be held in the laboratory boxes. When young Jimmy visited the laboratory, his father warned him, “Don’t fall in (...) They’ll eat you up in a minute” (OC, 32). The father, though in a joking manner, conveys to his son the need to distance himself from the unknown other. The pigeon project requires severing bonds because a relationship would imply recognition of their subjectivity, which would threaten the entire order of controlled life production.

The history of *Sus domesticus* is closely intertwined with human history; like dogs and cats, pigs have been developing alongside humans, evolving through the ages. The physical traits and behaviour of domesticated pigs differ significantly from those of their wild ancestors. Over time, selective breeding—driven by the growing demand for meat—has produced pigs with compact, sparsely furred bodies, relatively short legs, and distinctive snouts. The genetic modification presented in the novels appears as a natural next step in the ongoing exploitation of pigs.

The pigoons were much bigger and fatter than ordinary pigs, to leave room for all of 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. When Jimmy went in to visit the pigoons he had to put on a biosuit that was too big for him, and wear a face mask, and wash his hands first with disinfectant soap. He especially liked the small pigoons, twelve to a sow and lined up in a row, guzzling milk. Pigoonlets. They were cute. But the adults were slightly frightening, with their runny noses and tiny, white-lashed pink eyes. (OC, 14)

The boy, who was not yet prejudiced to such an extent, was convinced that friendship with nonhumans was possible. The small pigoons, although genetically modified, evoked warmth and affection in Jimmy, showing that even in a world of laboratory coldness, natural childhood curiosity endures. His interest, however, was limited by the strictly controlled and sterile environment. Isolated from any natural context, the pigoons' quality of life resembled that of animals in contemporary industrial farming, meaning their species-specific needs were not met. Although their appearance had undergone visible changes, they still resembled contemporary pigs and were bred conventionally, with sows nursing their young.

According to human standards, as explained by Balakowska, the intelligence of *Sus domesticus* is relatively high; compared to other nonhuman animals, they are assessed at a level similar to that of dogs, while their ability to focus is comparable to that of primates (2018, para. 5). Pérez further notes that unlike dogs, even pigs raised as companion animals tend to rely more on themselves when solving problems (2020, 34). Their independence, intelligence, and curiosity often present challenges for keepers, particularly in industrial farming. Animals kept in pens quickly become bored and, in seeking stimulation, may easily

damage any amenities within reach. Furthermore, Atwood's portrayal of future exploitation of swine "becomes problematic with the arrival of transgenic experimentation involving human genes, which is responsible for the mutual contamination of the heretofore clean and clearly separated fields of the human and the animal other" (Kozioł 2018, 267). As physical detachment grew, pigeons and humans became more alike on the molecular level. In the novel, human characters attribute the remarkable intelligence of pigeons to the application of human neocortex tissue, viewing this as the key factor that elevates them above other animals.

The boar lowers its head, hunching its massive neck and shoulders and swaying uneasily back and forth, making up its mind. But the others have already begun moving away, so the boar thinks better of it and follows them, marking its contempt and defiance by dropping a pile of dung as it goes. Snowman stands still until they're all out of sight, then proceeds with caution, looking frequently behind him. There are too many pigeon tracks around here. Those beasts are clever enough to fake a retreat, then lurk around the next corner. They'd bowl him over, trample him, then rip him open, munch up the organs first. He knows their tastes. A brainy and omnivorous animal, the pigeon. Some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads. (*OC*, 121)

As a former corporate insider, Snowman does not see the pigeons as ordinary animals; he is fully aware of the modifications they have undergone. His fear that they might contain fragments of human brain tissue mirrors a deeper anxiety about the possibility that they possess a quasi-human consciousness—something far more terrifying than any natural force that humans had previously managed to suppress. "The human-pigeon relationship moves beyond the traditional scope of animal studies when it starts to be influenced by the pigeons' intelligent behavior," as from Snowman's perspective, during the post-Waterless Flood period when all animals are freed, pigeons seem to be uniquely intelligent and strategically capable creatures (Kozioł 2018, 262). Their boar-like behaviours, such as defiant dung-marking and calculated movement, highlight their regained independence and territorial instincts in the post-apocalyptic world. This autonomy marks them as a potential threat; genetic modifications have endowed them with qualities that are no longer under

human control. Snowman's wariness of their tactics reveals an unsettling level of intelligence that borders on human cunning. The suggestion that some may possess fragments of human brain tissue further blurs the line between animal and human cognition, pointing to the unintended consequences of genetic experimentation.

The literary portrayal of pigoons and their behaviour accurately reflects the ways in which pigs act, communicate, and interact in reality. As Emeline Nogues note, when kept in free-range conditions, *Sus domesticus* live in hierarchically organised communities. Composed primarily of sows and their offspring, they resemble the social structures seen in elephant herds. Complex bonds are formed as they learn by observing other individuals. The social structure begins to establish itself from the earliest days of a piglet's life, with a position in the hierarchy that appears to be partly inherited (2025, para. 5–10). In the post-apocalyptic world, pigoons form groups with complex structures, creating a coherent system of social organisation:

There are fifty or so in all. Fifty adults, that is: several of the sows have litters of piglets, trotting along beside their mothers. In the centre of the group, two of the boars are moving side by side; there's something lying crossways on their backs. It looks like a mound of flowers – flowers and foliage. (Atwood 2013, 279<sup>48</sup>)

Among *Sus domesticus*, communication between individuals relies on a range of acoustic, visual, and olfactory signals. Scientists have identified approximately 20 “distinct vocalizations,” as well as specific tail and ear movements, which are essential for expressing mood (Nogues 2025, para. 12). Similarly, the pigoons “trot through first, snuffle around the walkway to the gatehouse, nose their way in.” Their repertoire of signals includes “[s]ubdued grunting [and] eye-to-eye staring” (*MD*, 292). Atwood goes even further in creating her world. After the apocalypse, pigoons develop human-like moral standards and cultural conduct—they feel affronted by the killing of their relatives, especially piglets. At the same time, they understand that humans have the power to prevent other, more hostile humans from killing them. They also mourn their young and prepare a basic funeral

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<sup>48</sup> Hereafter *MD* with page references in the text.

ceremony (with a humorous twist at the end—they allow the people gathered around Toby to eat their dead young, whom they have already lamented).

In pre-apocalyptic times, apart from animals exploited for supposedly higher motives, such as developing new solutions for human healthcare, scientists also used their knowledge and abilities purely for entertainment: driven by curiosity, they crossed the genomes of different species. By creating a world in which technological infrastructure enables such manipulations, and in which none of the characters feels the need to intervene, Atwood gives herself free rein to present further examples of genetically modified creatures.

The rakunks had begun as an after-hours hobby on the part of one of the OrganInc biolab hotshots. There'd been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God. A number of the experiments were destroyed because they were too dangerous to have around – who needed a cane toad with a prehensile tail like a chameleon's that might climb in through the bathroom window and blind you while you were brushing your teeth? Then there was the snat, an unfortunate blend of snake and rat: they'd had to get rid of those. But the rakunks caught on as pets, inside OrganInc. They hadn't come in from the outside world - the world outside the Compound – so they had no foreign microbes and were safe for the pigeons. In addition to which they were cute. (OC, 47)

The scientists were unscrupulous in working on nonhuman hybrids; crossing species was also a form of entertainment, even when target individuals died or had to be euthanised. Examples of hybrid creatures like rakunks, snats (snake-rat hybrids), and toads with prehensile tails show how animals are reduced to experimental material, valued only for novelty, utility, or aesthetic appeal. The mode of development, in which science is detached from ethical responsibility, reveals a culture that prioritises personal gratification and corporate gain over animal welfare or ecological integrity. The scientists played God, wielding unlimited power to create new beings or sentence them to death when deemed “necessary” – with necessity always defined by the compound's internal regulations. Monika Bakke argues that human creators are responsible for their creations and are therefore morally obliged to provide them with hospitality and protection (2014, 80). The scientists,

however, completely failed in this task, disposing of the lives without a second thought. Nonhuman value was assessed solely in commercial terms, determined by two factors: visual appeal and safety (particularly compliance with hygiene standards). The safety reasons also underlay the assumption that non-modified animals were not allowed to coexist with humans as companions. When Jimmy, as a child, expressed a desire for a pet, reflecting an innate need for connection with other-than-human beings, his wish was clearly rejected by his mother, who was convinced that “[c]ats might carry diseases that would be bad for the pigeons” (OC, 17).

Apparently, traditionally bred nonhuman species failed to meet the safety requirements of the corporations, and thus they could not live in proximity to the valuable laboratory facilities. On the other hand, laboratory-bred individuals did not pose a threat to any aspect of the system, since genetic engineers eliminated unwanted features in the process of genome selection, and their microbiological cleanliness was also ensured. On very rare occasions, humans decided to relocate genetically modified animals from the laboratory to the Compounds so they could serve as pets. One such animal was a rakunk, an experimental hybrid of a raccoon and a skunk, which Jimmy once received as a pet.

The little rakunk let Jimmy pick it up. It was black and white – black mask, white stripe down its back, black and white rings around its fluffy tail. It licked Jimmy’s fingers, and he fell in love with it.

“No smell to it, not like a skunk,” said Jimmy’s father. “It’s a clean animal, with a nice disposition. Placid. Raccoons never made good pets once they were grown up, they got crabby, they’d tear your house to pieces. This thing is supposed to be calmer. We’ll see how the little guy does. Right, Jimmy?” (OC, 24)

The rakunk becomes a focal point for the strained relationships within Jimmy’s family. The boy’s father compensated for his lack of involvement in his son’s life by giving him the genetically modified pet, while his mother, appearing emotionally detached and indifferent, expressed her discontent with keeping this nonhuman creature at home. Her disapproval seems to originate from an understanding of the nonhuman’s subjugation; later, when she decided to flee, she also liberated the animal. The rakunk, as a genetically modified being—

engineered to be odourless and docile, but whose phenotype remained consistent with that of the contemporary raccoon—illustrates that human intervention in nature extends beyond noble goals, such as curing fatal diseases. Instead, it draws attention to the trivial pursuits of Jimmy's father, since the desire to create and have a pet can be associated with domination, as DeMello points out: "the linkage of affection toward pets on the one hand with the notion of control and domination on the other" (2012, 162). Quite the contrary, Jimmy's attachment to this artificially designed creature is an expression of his need for connection, as his social needs were severely neglected.

The focalisation of the narrative through the perspective of a young boy allows for the recognition of the division between humans and animals in Atwood's pre-apocalyptic world on multiple levels, such as through direct contact with pigeons or the noticeable lack of contact with pets. As a child, Jimmy also took part in the disposal of animals that did not meet sanitary requirements. Although his father tried to reassure him, Jimmy "was anxious about the animals, because they were being burned and surely that would hurt them" (*OC*, 9). It is precisely the perspective of a child that makes it possible to notice what Carol J. Adams calls the "absent referent" (2015, 14) in "the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes," instead of "steaks and sausages, [only] they still had their skins on" (*OC*, 9). As this narrative strategy extends into Jimmy's adolescence, the separation between "the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product" becomes even more visible (Adams 2015, 14). Meat production moved from industrial farms to laboratories, where students were carrying out experiments on molecular meat. They were modifying animal bodies in order to produce food more efficiently; the flesh was altered to such an extent that it was difficult to recognise the species. Jimmy was stunned by the form of poultry on the production line.

"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.” (OC, 237)

In the process of meat production, parts of the animal body became individual products, directly available to customers under the brand name ChickieNobs. Chicken parts are no longer recognisable as chickens; they are biological production units, reduced to function alone and designed solely to provide the desired cuts of meat. In the laboratory, with the use of genetic engineering, the animal body is turned into a machine that develops the most desirable products, such as chicken breasts and drumsticks. The organism is constructed to minimise unnecessary traits—the absence of a head, eyes, or beak reflects the complete elimination of any need for perception, communication, or even autonomous feeding. Despite his prior exposure to transgenic organisms such as pigeons, Jimmy’s reaction to the sight of these creatures reveals the limits of moral acceptance of the radical technologisation of life. While pigeons still retained certain animal characteristics, chicken parts represent a radical ontological reduction of the organism to the level of pure biological utility. Beth Irwin connects this technological advancements phenomena with the spreading detachment from interspecies empathy:

Through the marketing of chicken to a globalized economy that does not interact with live animals but sustains itself on their parts, the economy has essentially already reduced animals down to their parts in the minds of consumers; the creation of an animal made only of parts is simply the next step in this cultural trend. (2009, 48)

The marketing of poultry products, severed from any contact with the living animal, reinforces in consumers’ minds the image of animals as sources of body parts circulating on the market. In this context, the creation of an organism that physically embodies this reduction into an entity without a head, sensory capacities, or even species identity appears

to be the logical culmination of a cultural process. Through this seemingly exaggerated depiction, Atwood exposes the extent to which the logic of industrial farming has subordinated life itself to the principles of efficiency and consumption. Laboratory animals were modified into what Monika Bakke calls liminal lives—life forms resulting from microbiological processes, whose ontological status is difficult to define. After such advanced procedures, they could survive only in strictly controlled environments equipped with life-support systems (2014, 77). The scientists claimed that the elimination of the nervous system was said to allow these beings to live without pain, yet the chickens evoked negative emotions, and their form was hard to accept by an outsider. Their ontological status remains unclear, as they combine characteristics of a parasite, which is a less developed organism than the original chicken, with the ability to provide animal proteins, which are highly valued by humans. Evolutionary regression allowed humans to maintain absolute control over these beings. The theory of the absent referent assumes, as Adams emphasises, that violence against nonhumans is concealed—in this case, it was hidden under laboratory procedures (2009, 49).

Laboratory cultivation of animal proteins did not satisfy the hunger of human carnivores. Commodities made of wild endangered species became luxury products. Even supposing that killing such animals was officially forbidden, potential clients supervised executions to be sure about the originality of the products.

On the floor below her there was an endangered-species luxury couture operation called Slink. They sold Halloween costumes over the counter to fool the animal-righter extremists and cured the skins in the backrooms. The fumes came up through the ventilation system (...). Sometimes there was roaring and bleating as well — they killed the animals on the premises because the customers didn't want goat dressed up as oryx or dyed wolf instead of wolverine. They wanted their bragging rights to be genuine. (Atwood 2009, 36<sup>49</sup>)

The description of Slink's activities reveals violence against nonhuman animals that is accepted in the pursuit of luxury, with only physical scarcity, such as in the case of

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<sup>49</sup> Hereafter *YF* with page references in the text.

endangered species, being able to provoke public awareness. Atwood pushes the visibility of this form of violence beyond the boundaries of law, social perception, and linguistic representation, yet simultaneously restores the animal's identity. To create a luxury product that allows the client to spectacularly perform their status, an authentic skin is needed, and thus the suffering of that particular animal. The artificially created luxury becomes the factor of higher importance than ecological implications and empathy towards others. While fur and skin were used in textile workshops, meat was bought by upscale restaurants and sold as a delicacy. The endangered status of a species, ensures the client's elevated status.

### **4.3. Experimental Animals in Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth***

Countless instances of nonhuman mistreatment go unnoticed across various industries, routinely justified by the pursuit of *summum bonum*—a principle, rooted in speciesism, that prioritises human wellbeing and subordinates nonhumans. *A Beautiful Truth* addresses the plight of experimental animals whose suffering is concealed from public view within laboratory spaces. One of the novel's settings, the Girdish Institute, is depicted as a complex facility dedicated to the study of primates, primarily chimpanzees. Looee's journey through the different areas of the institute—from the Congo wing and biomedical wing to the field station—allows for an exploration of the differences between biomedical experimentation and behavioural research. The wing called Congo appears as a dark and isolating area that serves as a transitional space for young chimps awaiting placement in long-term studies. The individuals in this section are often juveniles raised in captivity, unaccustomed to life outside their cages. Another section, the biomedical wing, contains sterile cages for individual chimps subjected to invasive medical research, including experiments related to diseases such as HIV and respiratory illnesses. By contrast, the field station offers a more natural environment, providing a stark contrast to the other areas. Focused on chimpanzee group behaviour, this section allows the apes to establish social hierarchies, interact, and express their personalities in a more natural way.

By employing third-person narration with Looee as a focaliser, *A Beautiful Truth* explores how a subject of experimentation might perceive his position. When he reached his

adolescence, his natural behaviour became unacceptable in human society. After an outburst of anger in which he severely injured his caretaker, Judy, and the Ribkes' family friend, Larry, he was transferred to the Girdish Institute. Looee experiences shock, as the living conditions differ dramatically from those he was accustomed to; for most of his life, he had been treated as the Ribkes' child. The literary depiction of Looee's forced stay at the Girdish presents fictional yet vividly imagined scenes that evoke the misery of laboratory animals. His perspective on the laboratory setting introduces the space as foreign and dehumanising.

He had never seen chimpanzees before. He was put in the darkest wing in Girdish which was nicknamed Congo. It was a long, yellow-lit corridor with fifteen chimpanzees and, at the end, a group of small stacked cages for macaques.

The apes and monkeys in Congo were transitionally used. Many of the chimpanzees were juveniles who had been born and raised in the nursery at Girdish. They were destined to be part of longer-term studies but were kept in Congo until their futures were determined. (BT, 142)

There is a striking contrast between the environment where Looee used to live with humans and the laboratory space—although neither meets the requirements necessary for a chimpanzee, the latter appears to be particularly harmful. Its name, “Congo,” brings ambiguous connotations. First, it refers to the place where chimpanzees live in the wild, Africa. Their distribution spans the west coast of Africa, including countries such as Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana, as well as central Africa, covering the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have the largest populations of chimpanzees and bonobos. However, its nature, as Daniel Vogel notes, is far closer to the meaning in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—imperialistically assigned to the centre of Africa around the nineteenth century but metaphorically referring to “archetypal evil that is latent in every human being” (2012, 106). Meanwhile, Laura Jean McKay sees it as “an example of fictional representation of colonisation and othering” (2016, 243). It suggests various forms of cruelty humans could apply to animals kept in small cages with minimal resources—just enough to keep them alive—while serving as subjects of cruel medical tests.

At the same time, practices evoke vicarious trauma in any third party involved in or observing such procedures.

The story highlights a problem also signalled by Peter Singer: in numerous cases, experiments on animals are conducted for trivial or unimportant issues rather than world-changing research. This was the case with Looee, who was initially assigned to investigations into medicine for the common cold and only later to research on HIV and AIDS. The fatal epidemic of HIV, which spread during the 1970s and 1980s, appears not only as an objectively justifiable reason to employ all possible means to investigate the matter but also, to some extent, satisfies Jeremy Bentham's "principle of utility." This principle evaluates the ability to prevent pain (and, in this case, the death rate) within a larger community, considering factors such as "intensity, duration, certainty, and extent" (2018, 22). However, this reasoning is implied from a simplified anthropocentric perspective, as detailed statistics on the death rate of chimpanzees involved in HIV research are not available. In this light, the common cold does not appear to be a problem that warrants equal priority, given the suffering of chimpanzees. Singer emphasises that the impact of newly developed medicines is lesser, as research is driven more by commercial profit than by a genuine contribution to public health (2015, 53). The lives of chimpanzees were commodities on the pharmaceutical market: "[Looee] was now owned by Girdish but was leased that year by divisions of Monroe Pharmaceuticals" and "used intermittently for rhinovirus studies, mostly for drugs that were meant to cure the common cold. The descriptions of the experimental procedures are accurate and detailed:

The chimpanzee was anaesthetized and strapped to a table. A suspended solution of rhinovirus strain 30 was placed in a number 40 DeVilbiss glass nebulizer which was put in the animal's mouth. Its nose was pinched shut, a plastic surgical mask was placed over the nebulizer, and the virus was sprayed as an aerosol into its mouth. More of the virus was then introduced into each nostril. (BT, 144)

The description of the experiment on the chimpanzee is striking in its precision and the cold, technical tone of the language. At the centre of the account is not the suffering or the

living being, but the sequence of actions and the tools used. The focus on the equipment diverts attention away from the chimpanzee's body and makes what is happening to it seem routine, almost mundane. The imagery in this description raises questions about the necessity of such procedures. Through these emotionless words, the narrator conveys the animals' severe discomfort, which they would instinctively attempt to resist. Although in the passage below Singer depicts the experiments performed on rabbits, the circumstances do not differ significantly in the case of other species:

The animals are restrained so that they do not scratch at their irritated bodies. The skin may bleed, blister, and peel. Immersion studies, in which animals are placed in vats of diluted substances, sometimes cause the animals to drown before any test results can be obtained. In injection studies, the test substance is injected directly into the animal, either under the skin, into the muscles, or directly into an organ. (2015, 55)

The main difference between these two extracts lies in the fact that McAdam offers more individual insight into the suffering of the fictional character. However, the accuracy with which he introduces the laboratory settings faithfully captures their appearance. Such unfavourable laboratory environments and procedures trigger animals' instinctive responses—innate reactions to perceived threats, driven by their evolutionary programming to protect themselves in hostile or unnatural conditions. Jonathan P. Balcombe, Neal D. Barnard, and Chad Sandusky, in their article, demonstrate that even captivity in laboratories and “routine handling, venipuncture, and orogastric gavage (...) conducted on other animals also significantly [elevate] physiologic parameters indicative of stress, at least in rats, mice and monkeys.” In this light, “most laboratory research on animals is intrinsically and significantly stressful, and it is therefore difficult to conclude that any studies using these procedures could be characterized as humane under any reasonable definition” (2004, 49). Hence, it seems obvious that, without subduing, chimpanzees would resist deep interference with their bodies; they lack agency, as all their power has been suffocated by the medical procedure. Paradoxically, they have become victims of the development of medicine to which they themselves have contributed.

The impersonal medical language used to recount his state after having been infected is juxtaposed with references to Looee's feelings and memories, particularly those involving Judy and Walt.

Looee awoke back in Congo.

He was very sorry and reached out a hand to a woman in a white coat.

He lay on his side and slept with open eyes.

He awoke with a sore throat. He was hungry and found a piece of monkey chow which he had earlier rejected. He sniffed at it but couldn't smell it. He ate it and his throat hurt.

Rhinovirus 30 was similar to the cold Looee had caught when he and Walt fixed the pickup and they were both laid out for a week.

Looee had partial immunity and a minimal response. He was anaesthetized on day 2 of the study for a throat swab and a bleed, and infected with more of the virus.

He slept.

His cage was hot and cold.

A labtech noted diarrhea dripping from the animal's anus. (*BT*, 144)

Looee appears disoriented and helpless—he wishes to express his apologies, as he connects the feeling of discomfort with his guilt, since he was trained. His physical suffering is linked to a sore throat, inability to smell, and the painful act of eating rejected monkey chow—a very basic, tasteless kind of food he is not used to. The third-person narration covers all aspects of Looee's experience: medical procedures, his feelings, and external observations of the test results and his behaviour. Although descriptions of Looee's feelings play an instrumental role in shaping him as a character, the focalisation is not limited to his perspective. Specific information about the procedures, to which Looee has no access because of differences in language and intellectual capacities, is suggested by the narrator throughout the novel. The entries on the chimp's medical condition are smoothly intertwined, providing a broader picture of the laboratory setting.

In order to introduce the full spectrum of inconveniences Looee is forced to face, McAdam also draws attention to the clumsiness of interactions between chimps raised in

different environments and the danger this poses. As the research strategy involves examining the efficiency of the medication against virus transmission, two cages are connected:

Looee's sense of smell was gone when he awoke. The labtechs had raised the partition between his and Dusty's cage so the two could roam freely between their cages. The purpose was to see whether the Narase would protect Looee from catching Dusty's cold. (...)

The vet and labtechs knew that it could be dangerous to house two males together, but transmission of the virus was probable whether they fought each other or groomed. (*BT*, 146)

As the experimental procedures are subordinated to financial considerations, the lab technicians knowingly placed two males in a potentially volatile situation, disregarding the wellbeing of nonhuman subjects. The decision to raise the partition between the cages reduces the chimpanzees to mere vectors of disease transmission; as the cages were small, physical contact was unavoidable. The invasive experiments deprived Looee of sensory agency, and such conditions generate an additional layer of distress, as he can no longer rely on his perception. The accumulated tension, built up in response to environmental factors, leads to violence during direct encounters between the chimpanzees:

Looee hit the cage with the back of his arms and Dusty had nowhere to go. He wouldn't look at Looee but was grinning in fear.

Looee saw the grin, saw it as fear instead of a caricature of an ugly man's smile. He understood Dusty for a moment, and then reverted to understanding nothing.

Looee bit into Dusty's head and opened his scalp. The labtechs were alerted in time and tried to hold Looee back with prods while the trapdoor was lifted for Dusty.

The bottom grid of the cage was dripping with Dusty's spit and diarrhea. Looee's nose rested there but the Narase prevented a cold.

The PI in Detroit was encouraged and wished to test an aerosolized version of the solution. They repeated the protocol with different animals and the thinner solution, but results were inconclusive and never published. (*BT*, 176)

The prioritisation of results over animal wellbeing deprives them of agency, as the effectiveness of the medication remains the sole focus of the research. Vivid depictions of excrement intensify the portrayal of the gruesome conditions the animals endure, highlighting the imbalance between potential scientific advancement and the moral cost of animal experimentation. Biopower exerted over the chimpanzees' bodies permits an invasion of their personal space, already disrupted by testing, and further disintegrates it through forced interaction that extends beyond the physical. For Looee, this becomes a moment of confrontation with "his own otherness: he sees the chimpanzee as he himself has been seen by humans" (McKay 2016, 243). As "he has been taught that looking and behaving like a human is correct, and looking and behaving like a chimpanzee is incorrect," he responds with violence to his mate's natural gestures (244). Language removes emotions and relationships from view, yet they cannot be fully erased. A fleeting moment of understanding between Looee and Dusty is abruptly cut off, as if the narrator were suggesting that Looee rejects this relationship and his otherness. Readers are confronted with a linguistic dissonance as brutality and corporeality are conveyed through a medical register. In this setting, the ethical burden of fully grasping what has taken place is shifted onto the recipients.

During his time with Judy and Walt, Looee was entangled in the human world in numerous ways, such as communication with Judy and Walt, eating habits, or being surrounded by other human beings, hence he did not perceive himself as one of apes. Kept in a laboratory, Looee challenges his identity as a chimpanzee as he "was bigger and older than many of the chimps in Congo but was more confused than most because they had grown up in cages." (*BT*, 170). His attitude, presented by the narrator, shows the chimp's confusion:

Looee was tired of the snacks. The only food they brought him was monkey chow, a biscuit-like concoction. He wanted chicken. He didn't know how to drink the water. He saw the dogpeople across from him drink it and he didn't want to be like them. (*BT*, 171)

Stressed by craving for chicken, his refusal to eat monkey chow reflects a lingering connection to his past life with Walt and Judy, where he was given a variety of foods and treated like a family member (to the extent it was possible). Looee hesitates to drink the water, even after watching the other chimps do it. By seeing them not only as "dogpeople," but also as "desperate creatures from some dark dream, the products of dogs and strangers" he highlights his distinctiveness; he is not one of them, yet it is uncertain whether he sees himself as human (*BT*, 170). Looee refrains from mimicking them in order to hold on to his sense of self, clinging to the identity he had before becoming just another lab animal. This quiet resistance shows his self-awareness and determination not to fully give in to the laboratory circumstances.

Looee's gaze dehumanises the other chimps, as he perceives them as strange creatures and is unable to recognise them as kin: "he could see pale young faces like he used to have, staring through the grids, but he wasn't able to associate them with himself or consider himself one of them." The chimpanzee has become a product of categorisation, intensified by capitalism, in which "difference on a hierarchical scale [serves] as a tool of governance" (Braidotti 2013, 68). Looee does not recognise himself in other chimpanzees because, as a result of living with humans, he has lost the perceptual tools to acknowledge them as subjects of potential relationship. For instance, as "[t]hey made familiar sounds but used them in different ways," he is faced with communication obstacles (*BT*, 170). Vocal communication represents a potential space of encounter, yet Looee is unable to make use of it despite his biological kinship. The disruption of identity and experiential continuity has led Looee to perceive other chimpanzees as strangers. The laboratory space hinders the establishment of bonds between individuals; their interactions are subordinated to medical procedures or reduced to the exchange of sounds and gestures through cage bars.

The time Looee spent in the laboratory was divided between Congo and the Chimpanzee Infectious Diseases Wing (CID), where invasive biomedical experiments were

conducted. What is particularly striking is that when Looee is transferred from Congo to CID, his name is mistakenly heard as “Lonee.” This moment signals not only the loss of his previous identity but also his difficulties in adjusting to a new and hostile environment. Looee, like a loony individual, does not understand his position and repeatedly loses orientation due to the effects of medication. The phonetic resemblance to “lonely” also reflects his emotional state; accustomed to human company, he now feels completely abandoned. Even if he were to see the apes in the surrounding cages as potential companions, the bars would prevent any meaningful connection.

Laboratory settings not only hinder the possibility of establishing bonds between individuals but also trigger internal conflicts that can lead to self-injurious behaviours (SIB). Among laboratory primates, SIB is relatively common, particularly in stressful or restrictive environments, and, according to Melinda A. Novak et al., occurs in approximately 14% of singly housed laboratory primates (2003, 16). Looee’s confusion develops into self-aggressive behaviours, described as a mixture of reality and flashbacks:

Looee’s right hand is heavy but weightless. The big black boat could float among the bubbles. He can’t lift his hand but it rises like a balloon. (...)

Mummy sang a song.

Looee doesn’t trust his hand. He wakes up and it is pulling of the nails of his other hand and won’t let him scream.

Looee is ignoring his hand. He wants to move away from it.(...)

Looee’s hand helps him make a circle. Four sticks of monkey chow. He thinks about eating the circle. He forgets again whose hand that is. (*BT*, 138)

The narration aims to convey the elusiveness of Looee’s traumatic experience, which, in the case of a chimpanzee, encounters an additional obstacle in its translation into (human) language. Looee’s trauma is expressed through a somatic and mental splitting which, following Caruth’s understanding, returns in a fragmentary form that resists

symbolisation and linearity. This return usually takes the form of intrusive symptoms, such as flashbacks, which are difficult to integrate into a coherent narrative. Looee's inability to recognise his own hand highlights the loss of control over his physical being, as the hand, strongly associated with agency and interaction, becomes an external force he no longer trusts. Hands serve as a means of bonding for primates (e.g., grooming), but here they become a source of fear and estrangement. The dissociation functions as a coping mechanism, as Looee attempts to distance himself from the pain and betrayal of his body, which "has been effectively remade into human commercial territory" (McKay 2016, 245). He tries to resist in "a space that takes human territorialisation to a level where other bodies are, as Plumwood suggests, resources to be owned, manipulated and discarded," yet the tools available to him are severely limited (251). Therefore, he resorts to SIB in an attempt to reclaim control over his body: by pulling his nails, Looee acts against this appropriation. Würbel explains that stereotypic behaviours are associated with the experience of mental suffering in animals, yet they do not lead to the temporary alleviation of the pain. However, when distress results, for example, from frustration, observations of human<sup>50</sup> and ape patients imply possibility of finding brief relief in self-aggressive behaviours (2006, 114). By focusing on the visible signs of Looee's suffering, the third-person narration enables the portrayal of the character's lack of integrity without appropriating his voice.

#### **4.4. Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise*: Emotional Bonds and the Invisible Lives of Laboratory Animals**

Apart from Winnifred's story, the novel *Come, Thou Tortoise* touches on the issue of laboratory mice, which are a group of beings by definition forced to serve humanity and sentenced to suffering. Although this is not a central thread of the story, it accurately depicts certain aspects of human-nonhuman relations. As a child, Audrey had the opportunity to

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<sup>50</sup> The author clearly notes that, although projecting human experience onto nonhuman subjects raises doubts, further exploration of the subjective dimension of wellbeing in relation to SIB remains crucial, and paradoxically, in light of this chapter, "it could be the first in which human subjects come to play guinea pigs for animals" (Würbel 2006, 114).

observe her father conducting experiments on animals in a lab. B-4 or “Before Building” was crucial in their relationship; it was a place where they could spend time together contesting each other – the father with his pragmatic scientific approach and the daughter, who was developing her emotional attachment to nonhumans. The story is presented as Audrey’s memory, told in her first-person narration which includes her child-like understanding of the situation.

The fact that the protagonist is seven years old is central; as a child, her perspective is marked by curiosity, imagination, and a sense of right and wrong that contrasts with her father’s clinical indifference. The main subjects of the tests are mice who, together with rats, are primarily portrayed as undesirable animals, which, according to Ortiz-Robles, seems somewhat justified due to their association with spreading diseases and feeding on human supplies. However, this is also “ironic,” because “they have evolved among humans and thrived on our garbage, and can thus be said to reflect the condition of human communities.” Unlike domesticated species endowed with positive sentiment, such as dogs or cats, these small rodents provoke instinctive fear and disgust in people. These reactions are emotional and cultural in nature, with the rat and mouse becoming figures of the other that should be pushed beyond the boundaries of social order (2010, 156). The language Audrey uses to describe the experiments is empathetic and does not convey the pejorative associations. However, it also conceals the cruelty of the experiments when Audrey focuses on the animals, anthropomorphising what happens to them.

It is mouse vacation. Each mouse has his own pool. There are five pools. Twenty mice. There are cages like hotel rooms stacked against the wall. Each hotel room has a room number. Each mouse has a room number tattooed on his left ear.

The left ear is the key.

Five mice go swimming for ten minutes. Then five more. Then five more. (CTT, 49)

The child’s perspective initially portrays a surreal image of a mouse on vacation. The privilege of staying in a hotel with a swimming pool, as the girl tries to present it, is in fact an expression of control over the mice and their lives. She starts her story in a light-hearted

way; the reality seems infantile. However, Audrey soon mentions how miserable the mice look, concluding that it is “a Forced Swimming Test” (CTT, 49). Low costs make the forced swimming test (FST) “a common test used for evaluation of the efficacy of anti-depressant drugs and the effects of various behavioral and neurobiological manipulations in basic and preclinical research,” currently still conducted by many pharmaceutical laboratories<sup>51</sup> (Can et al. 2012, 4). Participation in the FST is, in fact, a struggle for life: the animals are placed in containers filled with water; high rims prevent them from escaping; their only chance to survive is to keep swimming in order to keep their heads above the water. Using the mice’s most basic instincts, Audrey’s father tries to prove his theory that it is possible to train the cells in order to “[r]emember how to be young” (CTT, 50).

To analyse the perspective of a seven-year-old girl on animal experimentation, which provides additional context for the representation of complex relationships among humans and between humans and animals, I wish to draw selectively on Anna Freud’s<sup>52</sup> contributions to psychoanalytic child psychology, particularly her observations concerning children’s defence mechanisms. In addition to her theories that were framed in the context of early twentieth-century psychoanalysis, contemporary perspectives suggest that girls’ defence strategies may also be influenced by evolving gender norms and individual differences. For instance, introjection and reaction formation may reflect broader relational and cultural expectations about how girls should manage their emotions and interact with others.

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<sup>51</sup> According to the protocol outlined by Adam Cana et al., the assessment of antidepressant drugs or manipulations intended to induce or prevent depressive symptoms in rodents is based on the amount of time the animals spend attempting to escape from a tank in which they are forced to swim. The “total time immobile” (TTI) is treated as an indicator of a depressive state. A longer TTI is interpreted as behaviour analogous to “behavioural despair,” that is, apathy or lack of motivation. Antidepressant drugs are expected to reduce immobility time, which in such tests is interpreted as an antidepressant effect—assuming they do not affect general motor activity (Can et al. 2012, 1-5). Currently, an increasing number of scientists are raising their voices against both the cruelty of such tests and their doubtful reliability, especially as “[t]he rodents’ high stress levels could complicate the results” (Reardon, 2024, 1279).

<sup>52</sup> Anna Freud, the youngest child of Sigmund and Martha Freud, is regarded as the founder of psychoanalytic child psychology. Her legacy comprises eight volumes, among which *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (first published in 1936) presents her clinical observations, drawing on her father’s psychoanalytic theory and focuses on how children develop the ego to cope with internal psychic conflict. In the foreword to the 1966 edition, she acknowledges the need to supplement her early research with more recent findings but insists that “the ego as a psychic structure has become a legitimate object of psychoanalytic study” (Freud 2018, 5). Her approach also included studies of children within the context of family and environment, which highlighted the significance of the relationships they formed.

Freud's observations of children's stress, however, highlight the role of the ego in managing difficult situations the young face; as "the ego has (...) ten different methods at its disposal in its conflicts with instinctual representatives and affects," the defence mechanisms influence the perception and understanding of reality (Freud 2018, 40). Despite—or perhaps precisely because—the bloody injuries of the mice are not visible, Audrey is able to employ several defence mechanisms while describing the cruel experiments on animals.

The first-person, diary-like narration gives access to the variety of Audrey's experiences and outlets for how she has dealt with difficulties, thereby allowing for the tracing of Anna Freud's assumptions in the novel. Ignoring the fact that mice (involuntarily) take part in experiments appears as a symptom of repression which occurs without the individual being aware that the process is happening. The repressed material is not deliberately forgotten but becomes inaccessible to the conscious mind while the "defensive measures of the ego against the id are carried out silently and invisibly" (Freud 2018, 15). Witnessing the violence towards mice, she represses the truth to avoid the associated fear and pain. Moreover, the fact that Audrey still reports how the tests look, suggests *isolation* that "removes the instinctual impulses from their context, while retaining them in consciousness." In this state, the child patient continues to speak but "severs the links between his associations and isolates ideas from affects" (33). Finally, denial, which leads to the creation of the fantasy about the hotel, essentially aims to "narrow reality and sometimes completely reverse the real situation." Childhood fantasies are easy to distinguish from reality because "[t]he ego's capacity for denying reality is wholly inconsistent with another function, greatly prized by it—its capacity to recognise and critically test the reality of objects" (63). Therefore, the goal of the newly created reality is not to be indisputable but rather to form a protective barrier that blocks the unpleasantness the child's psyche is not prepared to face. Such unpleasantness is the harming of animals, which even in adults causes cognitive dissonance<sup>53</sup>. Yet, as the action progresses, her interpretation of the FST as nothing more than the mice's "vacation" seems sufficient to

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<sup>53</sup> In this light, Peter Singer draws attention to children's initial unwillingness to eat meat, which is further normalized by cultural mechanisms of speciesism. The philosopher argues that people are raised to eat meat against their instinctual sympathy towards animals (1990, 214-215).

keep her impassive. This strategy, however, becomes ineffective when one of the mice starts drowning.

I point at the third pool. That's funny, he says. No it's not. He's drowning! Give him a sec.

So we give him five. He lands on the bottom of the pool. Doesn't move. I would not say no to a life vest. Bubbles fly up.

He can't swim. All mice can swim.

I splash my arm into the water, but I'm not tall enough. Dad! Okay. He plunges his own arm in.

I turn away. Is he alive. Don't look at him. He's fine, Audrey. Look.

So I look. Some very rapid mouse breathing. Some very wide mouse eyes. (CTT, 52)

The girl strongly empathises with the mouse, and even though she is unable to change the lives of all the laboratory beings, she cannot look on the despair of the individual impassively. His suffering is apparent not only because the reader may imagine how the nonhuman feels in the water from which he cannot escape, but also because his suffering is observable in the way his appearance and breathing are described in the protagonist's narration. Despite the fact that Audrey is not tall enough to rescue the mouse, her struggle convinces her father to pull the mouse from the container. He remains unaffected by the drowning nonhuman; undoubtedly, his action is not galvanised by compassion towards the nonhuman, but rather by love for his daughter. The mice become the "analytic animal"—in other words, they undergo a transformation through experimental procedures into data" (Birke 2002, 51). For him, nonhuman suffering is merely an indicator of his theory; the death of one of the mice is simply a problem in his experimental system.

The relationship between daughter and father is marked by his engagement in animal experimentation—a situation that is difficult for a child to process. Audrey understands that it is her father who plans and supervises the experiments, and therefore he is responsible for the suffering of the mice. At the same time, she chooses to blame someone else—Verlaine, the Swiss caregiver in the Animal Care office located in the basement of the B-4 Building. Verlaine is in charge of the animals used for scientific experiments. The girl describes her with curiosity, noting her accent and distinctive personality; she simultaneously uses another defence mechanism, displacement, to redirect her emotions about the mice. When she asks

Verlaine what happens to mice that can no longer participate in tests, Verlaine says, still writing: “I feel like a mouse sandwich, says Verlaine, still writing. That is what’s going to happen” (*CTT*, 59). This apparent joke becomes a source of distrust of Verlaine, who is subsequently depicted as someone capable of harming mice. Blaming her parent could jeopardise the balance of her family relationships; hence, directing her negative emotions toward Verlaine becomes a strategy to maintain the bond with her father.

In fact, the mouse that fails to swim will be euthanised and disposed of. Understanding this, Audrey tries to negotiate with her father to take the “useless” animal home. Her strategy is based on her belief that she understands the mouse’s purpose, as well as in an attempt to engage in scientific discourse that could justify keeping the animal alive. The girl watches her father, and although he causes animals to suffer, he remains a role model for her—so she tries to mimic his behaviour.

I want to do an experiment with number 18. My own experiment. I want to youthenize him myself.

My dad says nothing for a moment. Then he lifts his chin. Oh Audrey—

Like the frog who turned back into a tadpole. Why not. Why not.

You don’t understand.

Yes I do.

We can’t bring lab animals home every time—

Verlaine wants a mouse sandwich!

We can’t bring lab animals home. Period.

I say nothing. I keep holding the door.

My dad pretends to carry on home. Then looks over his shoulder.

Comes back. Okay. Tell me your experiment. (*CTT*, 60)

The interaction with her father highlights the tension between his scientific pragmatism and her empathetic approach towards the mouse. Although her father initially dismisses the idea, his eventual willingness to listen shows a moment of compromise, as he recognises Audrey’s earnestness. On the other hand, she attempts to use what she believes to be scientific reasoning, as a reasonable attitude seems to support the image of him that

she has constructed. In these negotiations, she refuses to accept the utilitarian view of the mouse as merely a lab subject. This desire to save Number 18 demonstrates her belief in the mouse's right to a better, more dignified existence. Ultimately, her endeavours succeed, and she is allowed to keep the mouse, who accompanies her under the name Wedge but does not take on the role of a narrator, as Winnifred does.

Wedge liked being held. So I held him a lot. My dad said there had been some research (not his) that showed that mice who were cuddled when they were young lived longer. He wasn't sure he believed this. He disapproved of cuddling lab animals. Drying them gently with a towel behind the ears and making them go all dreamy with happiness, that was one thing. (*CTT*, 283)

Thanks to Audrey's involvement, Wedge crosses the boundary of otherness; he is singled out from the crowd of other mice—those less fortunate than he was. The narrator's relationship with Wedge is grounded in emotional closeness that reveals the nonhuman particularity as his history and needs become apparent and significant. He becomes a secondary character who relies on Audrey's care, yet this change does not grant agency to the animal. He remains dependent on human care, serving as a symbolic link between the narrator and her childhood. The narration reveals an important connection between Wedge, Audrey, and her father: the mouse's appearance occurs as a result of Audrey's act of resistance, and he goes missing after her father's funeral. Her frantic search for the mouse reveals Audrey's feelings of loss and distress.

Audrey's first-person narration offers a perspective broad enough to acknowledge the nuances of language that deprive laboratory animals of subjectivity, as "individuals have been studied largely as exemplars of particular species; within that framework, animals are denied emotions or feelings, as scientists insist on avoiding anthropomorphism" (Birke 2002, 49). Neutral language, desirable in scientific discourse, is indifferent to specific individuals – their histories and suffering become invisible and are instrumentalised to the extent explored by Derrida in his analysis of the term "The Animal" (2008, 31). Scientific discourse demands specific yet neutral language that prevents those who are not involved from seeing a genuine, suffering being. References to animals' emotions or cognitive processes are

typically avoided unless they are the explicit subject of study. In this context, it is easier and more acceptable for professionals working in animal laboratories to understand animals in a Cartesian manner—as automata whose pain is merely an impulse. This is particularly clear in the scene where (adult) Audrey, while searching for Wedge, returns to the B-4 building and is guided by Verlaine.

The mice in Dr. O’Leery’s lab have crushed spines. I walk up and down the rows. The spines have been crushed but the mice are alive. They drag their lower bodies around.

A mouse-sized sob rises in my throat. What is this research for. (...)

The mice have alphanumeric codes on their ears like licence plates. No simple numbers.

How do their spines get crushed.

No response. She is holding the door open. Big arms folded.

Okay. Moving right along. Who tattoos their ears. You do, don’t you.

Sorry.

How many mouse ears have you tattooed.

It is not exactly tattooing.

How many.

She turns off the light. Over the years, I don’t know. Too many to count. (*CTT*, 332)

Clashing again with the reality of animal experimentation, Audrey uses plain, emotionless language. The animals’ pain is presented as a matter-of-fact consequence of research; the narrator makes an attempt but does not dwell on the subject long enough to explain the purpose of the experiments. The animals’ physical vulnerability—and their diminished agency—is evident in their struggles to move their disabled bodies. Although the alphanumeric codes reduce them to data points, Audrey’s approach challenges this degradation: she tries to uncover the real number of tattooed mice, pushing back against the normalisation of these procedures and acknowledging the scale of exploitation. This contrasts with Verlaine’s indifferent remark summarising her years in the laboratory. Biological science is not an exception—as every domain that benefits from the exploitation of nonhumans disguises cruelty through emotionally detached language. In his book, Singer refers to Alice Heim, who draws attention to this mechanism:

The term “avoidance” is O.K. because it is an observable activity. The term “painful” or “frightening” stimulus are less O.K. since they are anthropomorphic, they imply that the animal has feelings-and that these may be similar to human feelings. This is not allowable because it is non-behavioristic and unscientific (and also because this might deter the younger and less hard-boiled researcher from pursuing certain ingenious experiments (Heim 1971, 150, cited in Singer 2015, 51).

Audrey’s narration presents her father as a person who refuses to form bonds with laboratory animals, as shown by the example of Wedge’s adoption, initiated by the girl. As DeMello argues, “[a]nimals must be ‘de-animalized,’ just as they are in modern agriculture, in order to justify all the things that are done to them in the lab.” As she further explains, the word “animals” is often replaced by “models” because it is more difficult to identify models with “specific animals” (2012, 180). At the same time, a dissonance arises because, although the father does not allow for the possibility of forming an attachment to a nonhuman, he sees the nonhuman as a sufficient model for a human in research.

Consider the distance between a mouse and a person in my dad’s brain. It is very long. There are miles and miles of words between them. Just look at one of his articles. You will probably not see the word mouse. But the mice are in there. And so are the people. And the word mouse, cleverly disguised, eventually leads to the word person, also cleverly disguised. But the mouse never equals the person. My dad would not write: The mouse hated swimming and longed to be back in his hotel room. (CTT, 51)

Supporters of carrying out experiments on animals endeavour to prove that certain animal models are indispensable in research. According to a statement from Stanford University, animals are still used in research because of their short life span, susceptibility to numerous diseases, and biological proximity to humans, as for instance mice share over 98% of their DNA with humans (Stanford University School of Medicine n.d., para. 1-3). However, this proximity does not pose a moral problem for scientists like Audrey’s father when it comes to the cruel treatment of animals. While carrying out experiments on humans would

be reprehensible, a 2% difference in DNA between humans and other species is enough to justify ignoring the intellectual abilities and emotional development of nonhumans. Audrey, in her individual narrative voice, expresses her concerns about this proximity, exploring the problem of disregarding the mice's particularity through their physical differences.

We share most of our genes with mice. We are closer to mice than we are to cats or dogs or horses. And yet if I were rollingpinned flat—I mean all my heart, my brain, my cells, everything, rolling-pinned to a thickness of a millimetre—I would cover 200 acres and Wedge would cover one. Still, one is nothing to sniff at. (*CTT*, 284)

The narrator juxtaposes different biological aspects of her and Wedge's bodies—she points out that despite the size differences, there is still considerable genetic proximity between them. Her reflection serves to acknowledge the mice's individuality while grappling with the irony of their shared biological formation. The comparison serves to undermine the rigid human-animal hierarchy, emphasising that the boundaries separating humans and other animals are far thinner than traditionally assumed. Animals used for research are perceived as being of lesser importance, so that they can be sacrificed for the sake of science. The claim that humans are genetically closer to mice than to cats or horses challenges deeply rooted hierarchical thinking; throughout most of human history, it was the latter that were seen as important and useful. In this sense, the text raises the question of whether human identity is better understood as a continuity with other forms of life rather than in opposition to them. The narrator employs irony in her descriptions, a device that serves an ambivalent function: it both distances her from full emotional involvement and allows her to subtly expose the absurdity of the situation. The image of her elongated body contrasts with Wedge's tiny frame, reinforcing the paradox of viewing oneself as inherently more significant than a mouse — particularly when both are composed of the same biological components.

Audrey's observations suggest that even laboratory workers are not indifferent to the suffering they contribute to. They are forced to balance a possible (personal or professional) concern for the animals with the demands of scientific work, which instrumentalises

nonhumans. By avoiding the representation of animals, they also avoid confronting their moral responsibility.

Verlaine looks after my dad's mice and Dr. O'Leery's cats, as well as some pigeons, chickens, and rats. She says the situation is saddest for the pigeons because they have to watch their free confrères parading back and forth on the third-floor window ledges.

All four walls of the Animal Care office have pictures of horses on them. There are no pictures of mice, cats, pigeons, chickens, or rats. (*CTT*, 58)

The fact that the walls of the Animal Care office are decorated with pictures of horses, but not of the animals actually under Verlaine's care, illustrates how the concealment of laboratory animals and the avoidance of their representation serve as strategies to avoid constant confrontation with suffering and moral responsibility. The conflict between empathic responses and professional obligations to inflict suffering burdens laboratory animal personnel with what Megan R. LaFollette et al. describe as "emotional dissonance and moral stress" (2020, 2). Their extensive research, which includes a survey completed by 801 laboratory workers from various North American institutions, shows that compassion fatigue—prevalent among laboratory animal workers—"is associated with less social support and more painful/stressful research, difficult euthanasia, enrichment<sup>54</sup>, and workplace setting" (7). The narrative suggests that the previously mentioned concern for animals is indeed present among laboratory workers, as evidenced by Verlaine's comment. Her words imply compassion and an awareness of the suffering of other beings — yet this sensitivity is selectively directed, reinforcing species-based discrimination, as observed by Singer (2015, 230–231). Audrey's narration thus exposes a system in which ethical concern is not absent, but strategically limited to enable ongoing violence against certain species while preserving the illusion of compassionate care.

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<sup>54</sup> The authors state that "in this study, we consider animal enrichment to be any attempt to improve animal welfare by enhancing the quality of a captive animal's care by providing stimuli necessary for psychological and physical well-being" (Shepherdson 1998, 1–12 cited in. Megan R. LaFollette et al. 2020, 4).

## 4.5. Conclusions

This chapter has examined the representation of experimental animals in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth*, and Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise*, highlighting how these works confront traditional boundaries between humans and non-humans. These literary texts expose the ethical dilemmas and socio-political implications of animal experimentation, revealing the ways in which scientific progress comes at the expense of non-humans. What unites the three analysed texts is the diagnosis that systems of violence against nonhuman beings are effective precisely because they are rationalised and, as Singer points out, pushed out of sight (2015, 217). Laboratory animals and genetically modified beings are presented as victims of biopolitical violence but at the same time as entities with the potential for forming relationships.

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy outlines an uncomfortably realistic vision of the future in which the boundary between the human and the animal has been deliberately blurred, not to foster interspecies community but as a result of mechanisms inherent in advanced capitalism. Through the pigoon project, which focuses on developing transgenic pigs bred for easy organ harvesting, Atwood reveals how the industrial logic of capitalism leads to the erosion of the ethical value of life. The pigoons, partially endowed with human brain tissue, exemplify both the transgression of species boundaries and how easily such transgressions can be overlooked when encoded in technical language and sanctioned by institutions. As Peter Singer points out, scientific discourse often serves as a tool of emotional neutralisation; the use of technical nomenclature allows one to see animals solely in terms of their function (2015, 51). The case of the pigoons offers an exaggerated example of this mechanism, as they become living factories. Their situation is observed through the perspective of Jimmy, which highlights how insensitivity toward nonhuman beings is imprinted from early childhood through language, education, physical barriers and the lack of genuine contact with animals as sentient beings. Jimmy is not so much cruel as inexperienced in relationality. The empathy he eventually shows towards the rakunk is incidental, which proves insufficient for developing sustainable ethical attitudes.

Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* expands the perspective by employing a narrative that focalises the point of view of a chimpanzee, Looee, seeking to depict the violence

inflicted on animals in laboratories from the victim's perspective. Unlike beings such as the pigeons, Looee was not created in a lab—he arrived there after having lived among humans, during which time his identity was shaped through relationships with people. His later confinement in the Girdish Institute reveals a form of violence that leads to both physical and psychological suffering. Though he had come to mentally identify, at least in part, as human, he is now forced to re-experience his animality, only to be reduced, within the laboratory structures, to an experimental tool. In the lab, he no longer recognises even his own hand; his bodily expressions are reduced to symptoms and clinical data. Looee's perspective presents his suffering as it manifests through dissociation, self-harm, and disorientation. His maladaptation to the institutional environment is a consequence of his past experiences, rather than his animal nature. McAdam thus presents the inverse of Haraway's becoming with: a subject stripped of the relational contexts he was forced to develop after being taken from his biological mother.

Against such an intimate look at the realities of animal testing, the first-person narration of Audrey in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* presents this world through the eyes of a child who is indirectly involved in the testing procedures. The violence that Audrey cannot consciously process is filtered through defence mechanisms such as denial, isolation, and introjection—yet it still reaches her. Her response to the system's impassivity is an immediate and unconditional emotional reaction. The novel foregrounds the cognitive dissonance that enables humans to exploit some nonhuman beings while simultaneously forming emotional bonds with the other.

The way the rescue mouse, Wedge, is treated emphasises the deprivation of subjectivity experienced by other mice in the laboratory. Laboratory rodents are often regarded as “animal collectives,” as research facilities do not allow for animal particularity to emerge; Ortiz-Robles also identifies in this trope “the figurative burden of social movements” (2010, 145). Both *Come, Thou Tortoise* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy explore the issue of human collectiveness, which erases individuality at the species level and through the strict hierarchical division between humans and animals. At the same time, in *A Beautiful Truth* and *Come, Thou Tortoise*, it becomes possible to distinguish an animal protagonist who attains subjectivity by standing out from the group: in McAdam's novel, this is achieved

through narrative construction, while in Grant's, it results from the actions and engagement of the human protagonist.

## Chapter 5

### Interspecies Spaces—Discursive and Psychological Categories in Cary Fagan’s *The Animals* and Alissa York’s *Fauna*

#### 5.1. Introduction

The urban population is far from homogeneous, yet for centuries, planners failed to recognize that humans have never been the only inhabitants of cities. Because the human share of agency in shaping cities is undisputed, it is up to us whether and to what extent nonhuman presence will be acknowledged and their perspective integrated into future planning. This shift of perspective is not only due to growing empathy and awareness, since every city occupies land that once belonged to nature, but also due to the financial and social costs linked to human–animal interactions, such as traffic accidents involving wildlife. In this chapter, I focus on literary representations of human–nonhuman relationships constructed within human-dominated spaces of cities and suburbs. The primary sources are Cary Fagan’s *The Animals* and Alissa York’s *Fauna*; in both novels, animals play significant roles, yet each narrative offers a distinct portrayal of interspecies connections. Fagan’s work stands out for its surreal nature among the primary sources previously discussed.

Cary Fagan’s novel, *The Animals*, examines the destabilisation of human–nonhuman boundaries through the lens of enforced interspecies cohabitation. The novel follows Dorn, whose community becomes a site of The Wild Home Project; this experimental governmental initiative aims at the integration of wild animals into human households. In contrast to his scepticism, the residents’ growing acceptance serves to underline the arbitrariness of spatial boundaries. Similarly, Alissa York’s *Fauna* explores the porous line between species in and around Toronto, where formal urban infrastructures intersect with the residual territories of nonhuman life. By bringing injured animals and traumatised humans together in an improvised sanctuary in a wrecking yard, York investigates the fragility and potential of multispecies assemblages. This becomes especially clear when the antagonist, Darius, who expresses hostility towards coyotes, shows how strongly the idea of human dominance over animals continues to resist change. Both novels encourage a critical

view of spatial organisation, species categorisation, and relational ethics, especially in light of contemporary research.

Against this literary background, the chapter examines how language and spatial organisation shape human–animal relationships. Language functions as a crucial tool for organising social order and establishing species hierarchies. An animal’s fate is determined by the function ascribed to it, embedded in categories that determine nonhuman utility for humans, such as pet, livestock, or working animal. This naming, despite its apparent neutrality, reproduces an anthropocentric logic of subjugation. The labels, despite their apparent neutrality, reproduce the anthropocentric domination. Although Margo DeMello acknowledges the epistemic value of biological taxonomy, she emphasises that socially constructed categories primarily determine an animal’s position within human societies. Moreover, the traditional division into “human” and “nonhuman” domains assumes that these spheres can be clearly separated. However, as Donna Haraway together with Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka point out, human and nonhuman spaces are constantly interwoven, and any attempt at strict delineation proves futile. Efforts to confine animals to fixed spaces such as homes, zoos, laboratories, farms, or isolated wilderness areas serve regulatory purposes that, in practice, often become oppressive. Crucially, some categories are subject to change based on cultural background or human interests; on rare occasions, their arbitrariness results from respecting nonhuman needs.

In light of these challenges, the need for inclusive models of interspecies community becomes increasingly evident. Haraway's concept of “companion species” emphasises the relational and processual nature of coexistence that results from recognition of more-than-human subjectivity. Donaldson and Kymlicka further develop this idea by proposing a reformulation of citizenship theory to include animals within frameworks of political representation. In their view, the diverse forms and intensities of interspecies relationships should define the scope of human moral and legal obligations towards animals. Accordingly, they advocate a shift from hierarchical models of dominance towards a politics of cohabitation, based on empathy, interdependence, and respect for the diversity of life forms.

## 5.2. Reimagining Human–Animal Boundaries in Cary Fagan’s *The Animals*

The plot of Cary Fagan’s novel *Animals* (2022) revolves around the main character, Dorn, to show the enforced introduction of wild animal species to the city in which he lives. It is a small tourist village whose inhabitants form a close-knit community; their peace is disturbed by a new governmental program. According to the objectives of The Wild Home Project, wild animals shall be accommodated with city residents, regardless of their potentially conflicting ecological traits. Although some residents remain sceptical, the popularity of the program is growing; in consequence, an increasing number of animals are appearing in the city. Dorn is one of those inhabitants who does not express much enthusiasm for the project; for some time, he does not even realise that it has already started. Living his introverted life, he is devoted to making small building models commissioned by local entrepreneurs and authorities. He becomes even less convinced, observing his next-door neighbour, Leev, who shares his house with a female wolf.

For the purposes of my interpretation, I refer to the author’s comment cited in CBC Books.

I tried to write a fairly realistic novel in which various unlikely things happen. What if people brought wolves and bears and minx into their houses — what could possibly happen? I thought of it on the level of actuality. Anything involving the metaphorical, the symbolic or social commentary — I know that it is there. (Fagan 2022a, para. 3)

Moreover, Fagan in the interview for the Book\*hug Press admits that general human understanding of animals deprives them of their real nature:

But I was thinking about both the human and natural environments, our hubris, and the ways in which we like to think about animals—as creatures like ourselves, only cuter and not as smart, there to serve our emotional needs. I think they are much stranger and far more wild than we want to believe. (Fagan 2022b, para. 7)

The conception of introducing wild animal species into human households can serve as a thought experiment. Although the circumstances of this process are rather improbable, history shows countless examples of impetuous decisions resulting in environmental damage. I also refer to realistic representations of animals, analysing how they interact with humans in the given environment, their language and social functions. As Haraway argues, “the inherited categories,” such as “human or nonhuman, nature or culture” are unable to contain posthumanist values and dependence; yet they serve as tools to describe certain divisions that can be traced in the novel (2008, 26). Daily contact with other species could become a tool for blurring the boundaries between “us” and “them” and for shaping new forms of coexistence, in which humans and animals function as partners and the world becomes more interdependent and open.

The Great Divides of animal/human, nature/culture, organic/technical, and wild/domestic flatten into mundane differences—the kinds that have consequences and demand respect and response—rather than rising to sublime and final ends. (Haraway 2008, 15)

In their relationship with another being, humans have the opportunity to learn its language, customs, and needs, allowing their own categories through which they perceive the world to become less absolute. Such encounters require attention to ensure the creation of a common space where differences become a source of mutual understanding. The scope of these differences guides the methodological apparatus towards recognising injustice and discrimination. While the author boldly attempts to reshape human-dominated space, the situations presented in the novel serve as starting points for exploring real-life issues.

The limited third-person narration allows the reader to know the “exciting new pilot project,” called “Wild Home Animal Project,” only to a certain extent (Fagan 2022c, 30<sup>55</sup>). It is a governmental program which aims at introducing wild animals to the residents’ apartments. A few months after its inauguration, about one-third of the residents decided to apply for an “animal licence” at the Village Hall and a number of them have already received

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<sup>55</sup> Hereafter *The Animals* with page references in the text.

their tenants (32). There might be some noble reasons behind the creation of this project, as the newspaper article read by Dorn declares that the program is designed as a tool to fight environmental crisis. It seems, however, to be based on a utopian assumption that human initiative is enough to establish a fully functional human-nonhuman society. According to DeMello and Haraway, awareness of the signs displayed by nonhumans, which leads to respecting their needs, is a necessary yet primary step in establishing an interspecies community (e.g. DeMello 2012, 209; Haraway 2008, 23). Humans should be particularly aware of the negative signals conveyed by wild animals, such as growling and snarling, which indicate their wish to live apart from people. Dorn encounters precisely these sounds when he approaches Leev's door. It becomes apparent that there is no chance to establish understanding between humans and wild animals as the latter lack initiative. Nonhuman agency is suppressed by the forced introduction to human space and by ignoring the signs through which they try to express their unwillingness to participate. The question about the main beneficiaries of the project is also vital, as in general, neither nonhumans nor humans experience its positive effects.

Even though the target nonhuman group, wild animals, are not entirely separated from human influences because of historical, political, and geographical dependencies, they are the ones who usually benefit the least from encounters with humans. As long as "we have no economic, social, or political relations (or at least none that generate positive duties)" with wild animals, "[t]he goal, in short, is to make animals independent of human society in a way that precludes the very idea of positive relational duties" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 7). In order to provide wild animals with the care they need, it is necessary to abandon the desire to exercise power over them and leave them out of society; in this case, human obligations are not limited to the animals but cover care of their natural environment as well. This attitude is adopted by Dorn, who distances himself from the project because of his innate fear of predatory animals, "felt his own heart pounding" when observing his neighbours adopt a bear (*The Animals*, 81). Making human space available to nonhumans cannot be even a symbolic act of compensation for the damage humans have been inflicting on the natural environment, as the animals cannot benefit from it. Dorn assesses the situation on the sidelines; expressing his doubts about the program: "[w]hy not say that

Leev made an insane decision to take a carnivorous animal into his house and that the wolf showed her appreciation in the only way she knew how? By eating him,” he takes the side of the wild animals (77). Focalisation through Dorn’s perspective positions the reader to experience the grotesqueness of the situation as he does.

Through Dorn’s perspective, the reader witnesses other instances of wild animals being brought into villagers’ homes, including a mink acquired by his brother, Vin. The animal appears suddenly when the brothers are talking. The animal becomes a narrative device that not only shapes the depicted world but also exposes the characters’ divergent personalities through their varied responses to its presence:

Just then something made Dorn jump. An animal, dark and sleek, raced out from under the sofa towards him, veering at the last moment to slip under a closet door.

“What in the world was that?”

Vin grinned. “Oh, that’s just my mink.”

“Your what?”

“From the Wild Home Project. They approved me away; it helps when they know you at the village council. I thought of getting something bigger, but a mink seemed like an animal the ladies might like. It’s been a little disappointing, to be honest. Hides most of the time.” (*The Animals*, 51)

The mink themselves (the narration does not state whether it is male or female) are portrayed as a swift and elusive creature; their resistance to confinement within the definition of a typical pet emphasises both their otherness and the characters’ instrumental approach to wild animals. Their nature is conveyed through dynamic verbs that highlight the abruptness of their movements and lend the passage a rhythm corresponding to the animal’s natural behaviour. The animal’s sudden appearance disturbs the calm and acts as a narrative catalyst, enlivening the otherwise static dialogue between the characters and introducing an element of drama and tension. Vin, who maintains distance and self-assurance, is presented as someone who remains in control and justifies his decision to keep the mink with status-based arguments. His social position is also emphasised, as through his

contacts within the village council he quickly secured permission to participate in the project.

Vin's case proves that the reasons behind taking animals home are not altruistic; people satisfy their own needs believing that wild animals can perform representative functions in domestic spaces, as in ancient Rome and the Aztec Empire, where they "intended to demonstrate their mastery over nature" (DeMello 2012, 151). Referring to Keith Thomas's historical research on pet keeping, DeMello points to the category "exotic pet" that includes wild animals such as "turtles, snakes, frogs, hedgehogs, spiders, or primate ... that have been moved into a domestic environment," which are "allowed into the house, and never eaten"; the status of the mink seems similar (148). Keeping pets at home is to exercise control over them as "we see the linkage of affection toward pets on the one hand with the notion of control and domination on the other" (162). While insightful observation of animal behaviour, which leads to attempts to understand their experience, is a key to coming closer to them, Vin treats it as a reason to be discontent as he cannot fully exercise his power over the mink. Although he can use his political connections to bring the animal home effortlessly, his home becomes a space where he loses influence. The choice of species is not accidental, since minks, whose fur is still used in the clothing industry in many countries, can be indirectly associated with luxury. Being a personification of another capitalist product diminishes their subjectivity, as according to Adams, "living, whole animals are the absent referents not only in meat-eating but also in the fur trade" (2015, 138). Animal-derived luxury goods exist only because the living animal is effectively erased and replaced with a symbol of social prestige. Although Vin attempts such a reduction, the fact that the mink is alive allows them to resist it to a certain extent. The living untamed animal seems to deconstruct male self-confidence based on patriarchal, political and civilisational foundations to such an extent that Dorn feels fear for his masculinity: "I thought for a moment I was going to lose my left ball" when the animal pounces to catch their meat (*The Animals*, 52). When he visits Vin for the second time, the situation gets worse:

[H]e came around the sofa and saw the mink. It was crouched just before the chair, its luxurious fur puffed out, its fulsome tail swishing back and forth. The animal's pointed teeth

were bared, and as Dorn came around, it turned its triangular head and hissed at him. Dorn took a step back. “Why is it acting this way?”

“How the fuck do I know? It’s a wild animal. And it’s trying to kill me.

“Did you try to hurt it somehow?”

“Just go and get my gun, will you? It’s in the drawer by the bed.”(...)

At that moment, the mink sprang up and bit Vin on the thigh before landing back on its feet. Several dots appeared on Vin’s skin and then welled with blood. (*The Animals*, 99)

The mink’s appearance at the centre of the action reveals their unpredictability. The juxtaposition of contrasting adjectives creates tension, highlighting its incompatibility with the reality it is forced to inhabit. Similarly, the accumulation of verbs conveys the animal’s dynamism while simultaneously evoking a sense of danger for humans. The scene exposes the fundamental problem of the Wild Home Project: the absence of a plan for interspecies understanding. As a result, the mink, held captive and deprived of the conditions required by its species, responds with violence against humans. As noted earlier, Adams’ reflections are equally relevant when the absent referent evokes associations with the fur industry; she stresses that male power in this “racist, patriarchal world” is exercised in “both in the public sphere (employment and politics) and in the private sphere (2015, 41). The apartment, once an exclusively human space, becomes the site of an unexpected attack, as the humans fail to anticipate such insubordination. What appears to be Vin’s act of self-defence is, in fact, his response to the mink’s attempt to break free from domination. From the moment of its arrival, the animal’s voice is silenced, and lacking any means of interspecies communication, it acts instinctively, seeking escape by force. Vin’s desire to use a gun reflects his conviction that whatever resists male power and defies domestication deserves to be destroyed.

Interactions between humans and the “unpredictable” and “mysterious” mink clearly demonstrate the absence of genuine communication or any willingness to establish it. The animals’ tendency to hide most of the time further emphasises their reluctance to interact with humans. Humans, on the other hand, neither understand the mink’s perspective nor the stressors behind its aggressive or withdrawn behaviour, and make no attempt to see the situation from their point of view. Instead, they interpret its actions according to their own human categories and expectations: Vin sees the mink as an object of prestige or

entertainment, whereas Dorn attempts to understand their sudden reactions but lacks the tools or knowledge to anticipate them. The mink thus remains an example of untamed wildness that cannot be approached without careful reflection.

Haraway describes a cartoon representation of a wolf who, armed with scientific equipment, returns to nature. She interprets the female wolf as a liminal figure, bridging the gap between the world of science (and thus humans) and the world of wild animals (2008, 13-15). The clash of the wolf and human realm in Fagan's novel does not seem equally harmonious. Dorn's neighbour, Leev, who decides to adopt the female wolf, mysteriously disappears from public view. When Dorn delivers the order to Leev, it becomes apparent that neither the animal nor Leev is comfortable with each other. Leev's "human" space is invaded by the wolf more than he predicted, while the wolf's species-specific needs cannot be satisfied there. Undoubtedly, countless examples of people living in harmony with wolves can be found, yet the circumstances and the levels of proximity are entirely different from those presented in the novel. Wildlife sanctuaries can serve as an example of such a space where nonhumans "are dependent on humans for certain supports (supplementation of free-roaming diet, security, veterinary care)" and "[a]t the same time, they are integrated into a larger ecosystem" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 122). Since "[c]aring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity," it requires the empirical engagement of the caretaker in a relationship with the subject of care. All of this assumes taking into account the agency of the subject of care, their expressed needs and undertaken initiatives. The Leev-wolf relationship does not develop in such a way. Dorn identifies some disturbing signs, such as "a terrible growling followed by a smack," "scuffling and then Leev's stern voice," and "barking" intuitively bring associations with a threat (*The Animals*, 20). As the different representatives of the canine family react in a similar way while distressed, Dorn is initially convinced that his neighbour had a dog, which is the kind of animal he expects to meet in the "human" space.

"Go back, I tell you!" Leev gave the creature a hard shove. "That's quite the pooch you've got," Dorn said, trying to sound light-hearted despite his visceral fear of the animal. "What is it? A shepherd? A husky?"

“It’s a wolf, actually.”

“Yes, ha ha, why wouldn’t it be?”

“No, seriously. It’s pure wolf.” (*The Animals*, 20)

The image of the wolf and the human characters’ relationship with her is constructed using stylistic devices that focus attention on the animal’s physicality and predatory nature. Adjectives and descriptive phrases emphasize these qualities, creating a contrast with the everyday elements of the scene. They appeal to the reader’s senses, primarily sight and hearing, as well as instincts. The dialogue serves an informative function; however, its ironic tone reveals the dissonance between the attempt to normalize the situation of not understanding the animal and its brutal consequences. The portrayal of the wolf’s body and human actions also creates an image of asymmetrical communication: the gives orders, while the animal responds in the only way available to her, through warning sounds and attack. This contrast between language and body reinforces the thesis that communication between humans and wild nature cannot occur in a forced manner imposed by humans.

The exaggerated and comic scene shows that the atmosphere during this interspecies encounter is tense and full of misunderstandings; all participating beings seem confused. Discursively settled categories change: the female wolf is moved from her natural habitat and placed in the human household, where she unsurprisingly expresses violent behavior. This deprives her of everything that distinguished her, as a wild animal, from pets: “[w]ithin this frame, only wild animals in the conventional Western sense, as separate as possible from subjugation to human domination, can be themselves” (Haraway 2008, 207). Although the contact with the nonhuman was initiated by Leev, who decided to share his home with the wolf, Leev is terrorized by her.

Dogs and wolves possess common taxonomical roots, but the special bond which can be established between humans and dogs results from domestication of the latter. The sudden introduction of wild animals into human households seems to be an act of distorted domestication that aims at enforcing human supremacy. Reaching the etymology of the term domestication, Online Etymology Dictionary refers to human superiority over the object of domestication, for instance, “convert to domestic use, tame, bring under control or

cultivation” or “to cause to be attached to home and family, accustom to remain much at home,” while Latin domesticus means “belonging to the household” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.). As research shows, the domestication of dogs was a process which mutually influenced humans and nonhumans; it “constructs both animals and humans in historically situated interrelationships.” Currently, the oldest archaeological discoveries are dated back to 15 000 years ago, but the first dog skull, predecessors of people and dogs started to cooperate for survival (Haraway 207, DeMello 85).

In the novel, the meaning of domestication is limited to taking a wild animal home, which involves “[bringing] under control” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.). The wolf, kept in the human household by force, expresses her reluctance to Leev; this situation shows the sudden intermingling of the discursive spheres, as now the wild animal belongs to the human environment. Contrary to DeMello’s assertion about wild animals who do not stay fully out of human control, the novel shows a distorted and symbolic example of such power: the animals are taken into human society instead of being kept away (DeMello 2012, 75). However, the rules of the Wild Home Project assume preserving a specific border between humans and nonhumans, such as refraining from naming, which is an act of preserving their “mystique” (*The Animals*, 21). The role of naming is to create such a picture of a nonhuman so that they can exist as subjects in human discursive space:

most important criteria for being a pet is having a name because having a name symbolically and literally incorporates that animal in the human domestic sphere. Having a name also allows for human-animal communication: We can talk to animals. Even though nonhuman animals do not possess human verbal language, we can and do still talk to them, and many companion animals understand much of what we say, based on our tone, inflection, body language, and facial expressions; many animals know the meanings of specific human words including, but not limited to, their names. (DeMello 156)

Therefore, even one-sided communication between humans and nonhumans still gives a chance to assert the discursive position of a nonhuman – speaking to and speaking about animals is the crucial starting point for further development of the bond. The differences between species diminish due to mental images and, as a result, the possibility of attributing

certain human features to nonhumans (anthropomorphisation). In the case of Leev and the wolf, communication is marked by violence, and when Dorn asks him about his stitches, he only responds: “[w]ell, it takes a bit to get used to a new roommate.” This is why Dorn has no doubts that the wolf killed Leev, even though the newspaper comments describe it as her “assistance” in his suicide.

The Wild Home Project ends when the fire, which completely changes the structure of the village, breaks out. The wolf’s position is being revised since her true origin is discovered.

“She’s part husky and part torkl<sup>56</sup> and a bit of shepherd.”

“She looks scary, anyway.”

“To be honest, she doesn’t much like kids.”

The boy backed away as they continued on. After the fire she’d been found and given a DNA test; it turned out she hadn’t been wild but only mistreated and abandoned. (*The Animals*, 143)

The moment the light the wolf’s ancestry is debunked, Dorn decides to adopt the animal. After the fire, the image of the dog, previously mistakenly identified as a wolf, is constructed in a way that presents it as a being that can be controlled. Its behaviour in everyday situations appears to be based on a bond of cooperation with Dorn, who is actively involved in this relationship. Dorn gives the animal a name based on its representation in popular culture, specifically after a cartoon dog, which connects personal memory with the process of taming the animal. The act of naming gives this relationship a nostalgic and symbolic dimension, suggesting that humans can reinterpret the wild nature of an animal even through their own experiences. The protagonist seems to conduct in accordance with Hawaray’s observation that wolves “are more noble (natural) than dogs precisely because they are more indifferent to the doings of people; to bring animals into close interaction with human beings infringes their freedom” (2008, 222). The assurance given by scientific tests releases the animal from the label “wild” making her susceptible to training that begins

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<sup>56</sup> The dog breed created by the author. This is most likely purely the product of Fagan’s imagination, yet the combination of letters and the description of the dog may suggest some resemblance to the Bosnian-Herzegovinian sheepdog, Tornjak.

the relationship. The DNA test becomes the tool capable of changing the animal's status; this goal which could not be achieved earlier as Leev did not try to cross the border of "otherness." The training, as Haraway argues, requires reciprocity, and while the wolf/dog is getting into society, subordinated to rules, such as using the leash, Dorn seems to "respond to the authority of the dog's actual performance" by being open to understanding when she uses her own language to communicate her needs (221).

The Wild Home Project appears to have resulted from political decisions driven by a capitalist system; Dorn's brother comments: "[i]f there's money to be made, I don't see why some of it shouldn't come to me. Let's not mention a certain forestry operation or a transportation company" (*The Animals*, 51). The sudden growth in the number of patients in the Emergency Ward is commented on by the village mayor as "unrelated to the program," while he also refers to the general public opinion: "[a]nd has even a single participant complained?" (86). On account of this, the decision is made to expose the advantages of the Wild Home Project, distracting public attention from its failure; for instance, the newspaper article describes Leev's death as follows:

Leev was an employee of the village brewery, a position he'd held since leaving school. He was also one of the first residents to participate in the Wild Home Project. It is possible that the animal in his care, a female wolf, may have tried to assist him. Authorities are currently trying to locate the animal (*The Animals*, 74)

The rhetoric of the obituary differs significantly from the images of animals that emerge from the project as the narrative develops, and it seems that public opinion does not wish to question the project's "success." Even in the face of the death of one of the human participants, no one attempts to place the blame on the animal. Having witnessed tensions in the relationship between Leev and the wolf, Dorn is sure that the wolf is the sole contributor to the man's death. A police officer, who is asked what punishment should be imposed on the animal, replies: "[i]f it were a domestic animal there'd be no debate-they'd put it down. But a wolf? This is more a question for the lawyers" (*The Animals*, 70). The instinctive behaviors of the introduced animals are accepted on a larger scale than those of

companion animals who are expected to live in harmony with humans. The wild animals' "privilege" results from the position artificially assigned to them by the authorities, rather than from deepening relations based on interspecies understanding and the challenge of each other's "otherness."

### **5.3. Shared Vulnerabilities: Healing and Human–Nonhuman Relations in**

#### ***Alissa York's Fauna***

The beginning of the novel emphasises one of the most pressing issues of human-centred urban planning, as architectural structures pose a direct obstacle in birds' migratory paths. The protagonist, Edal observes an unknown girl who seems to behave in a strange way. In fact, she collects the birds that collided with the skyscrapers. Donaldson and Kymlicka mention that "wild animals are vulnerable to harm not just from direct violations of their basic rights, or from encroachment on their territory, but also from a range of inadvertent harms due to the impact of human activity," enumerating, among others, tall buildings, which interfere with birds' migratory paths (2011, 161, 195). As research shows, "[a]ll taxonomic groups of birds are subjected to significant human-caused mortality"; data illustrate "extensive avian collision mortality associated with buildings and similar structures such as smokestacks or monuments." Urban structures profoundly influence imagination, as "[o]ver a 3-year period in Toronto, Ontario, Ogden (1996) counted 5,454 dead birds at 54 tall glass buildings and estimated that 733 birds (mostly passerines) were killed per building per year" (Erickson et al. 2001, 9). Facing the problem of the lack of systemic solutions on the governmental level, Lily, led by her empathy, collects unconscious individuals and takes them to the wrack yard where she has been living since she escaped home.

The community at the wrecking yard consists of humans and nonhumans who have experienced difficulties in the past. Guy, the owner of the place and another leading character, shares it with Stephan and Lily, who, after joining him, took certain nonhumans into their care. When Lily delivers the birds to the Howell Auto Wreckers, Guy supports her in assessing their condition:

Guy stands, glancing down into the box. "Not so many this morning."

"Nope."

"Any live ones?"

"A few."

"Good stuff. Bring 'em in and we'll take a look."...

The little bird lies motionless in her palm, but she can feel the quickened beat of its breathing, the faint sensation of warmth.

"Another ovenbird," Guy says.

"Yeah." At the shadowy foot of the tower, she could be certain of little beyond general colouring and size. Here in Guy's kitchen, she can make out the speckled belly and pinkish legs, the Mohawk stripe at its crown, the white rings around its tightly closed eyes.

"He's a beauty," Guy says quietly. "Needs a little longer, I guess."

"Yeah."

She slides the ovenbird back into papery darkness. Laying it carefully on the newspaper, she reaches into the box again. (York 2010, 16<sup>57</sup>)

The narration is conducted in the third person, but limited to the perspective of the group of characters, revealing their struggles in the fight for the animals. The safe environment of the kitchen allows for a clearer recognition of the creature, which previously could only be perceived in fragments. The mood of the entire scene is sustained in a tone of gentleness and care, evident in the way the heroine handles the bird. York focuses on detailed descriptions of the species' characteristics that prove her personal interest in wildlife and make the novel deeply rooted in the natural world. Recent studies, as indicated in an article published by Jared A. Elmore et al., show that ovenbirds are particularly vulnerable to building collisions (2001, 600). Considering the vast number of birds dying in such accidents, the efforts Lily puts into saving the survivors may seem vain. Her actions are, however, not only acts of resistance against human-centred urban planning but also an egalitarian desire to save the lives of individuals who suffered as a result of the human urge to appropriate available resources.

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<sup>57</sup> Hereafter *Fauna* with page references in the text.

The girl establishes her own rituals to deal with the numerous individuals she collects, as both dead and alive individuals need to be cared for. There is a special place in the wrecking yard where she eagerly buries the dead birds observed by moved Stephen. At the same time, she celebrates when some birds can be released into the wild.

Her pockets are alive. Seven survivors this morning, the whole vest bursting with birds. She waits until they're north get of the viaduct before wading out into the weeds; might as well clear of the most obvious obstacle. (...) The ovenbird is lively, definitely ready to try. Lily parts the paper and reaches in, closing her fingers around its breast. The peck it gives her scarcely registers, her hands drunk with the silken overlap of its feathers, the fluttering protest of its heart.

As always, there comes the moment of doubt as she cradles the bird in her closed hands. "Ready?" she whispers through her fingers. "One, two, three!" (*Fauna*, 22)

The description is strongly sensual: the heroine experiences the bird not only through sight, but also through touch and even kinaesthetically. This sensory imagery makes the reader almost physically feel the presence of the nonhuman, introduced in the very first sentence, where life is metaphorically extended even into objects. Keeping the birds who survived in the pockets located close to her body allows her to experience unique bodily proximity. Within her simplified rituals, she celebrates the birds' survival instead of their death, as happens in numerous religious or spiritual practices described by DeMello, which concentrate on killing animals (2012, 34). Although Lily's rituals are strictly nonhuman-oriented, with their main aim being to release the healed birds, they are one-sided, as the birds are not bonded with Lily. The female rescuer realises the danger caused by anthropocentric civilisation constructions and tries to save innocent beings in accordance with a sovereignty approach, postulated by Donaldson and Kymlicka. General wild animal sovereignty cannot be secured if the space they use has already been "invaded, colonized, or robbed" by humans. Lily's actions take place on a micro-scale: she is not able to provide solutions to protect whole species, yet they are enough to save individuals with respect to their belongingness to certain territories and communities (2011, 205).

Most of the caregiving work is carried out by women, but care for the nonhumans at the wrecking yard is not provided solely by women. Guy, having observed a debilitated hawk, did not hesitate to help it.

He was hopping around like in the grass, looked like he was trying to hunt. I let him wear himself out before I got close.”

“How’d you catch him?”

“Threw my coat over him.” He shakes his head. “You could feel how skinny he was.” (*Fauna*, 101)

The injured animal was highly vulnerable to environmental or ecological conditions, yet Guy used his advantage to help him. His behaviour stands in contrast to the stereotypically male desire to tame wildlife, described by Maneesha Deckha, which is expressed, for instance, by hunting (Deckha 2012, 258). Guy does not have professional knowledge; he acts intuitively and emotionally, in a way traditionally ascribed to female irrationality. He feels he is shrewd enough to understand whether an animal under his care should be treated by a veterinarian. When Edal asks him why he did not seek help from professionals and how he was sure that the hawk did not require medical treatment, he replies:

“I told you, you could tell what the trouble was. He was starving. I felt his bones to be sure. His breastbone was like a butter knife, all the muscle shrunk away. I figure somebody tried to make a pet of him, maybe in one of those condo towers along the valley. Maybe they weren’t feeding him right, or else he just wouldn’t eat. I have this picture of him making a break for it from a balcony, you know, leaping off and finding out he was too weak to really fly.” (*Fauna*, 101)

The protagonist’s explanations regarding the bird’s health are realistic, yet they convey a strong emotional undertone. The story of the escape from the balcony also becomes significant, as it may reflect the experience of confinement that the bird was subjected to, much like the animals in Fagan’s novel. In accordance with Donaldson and Kymlicka’s words,

“[w]ild animals do not need to be included within human citizenship regimes: rather, what they need is precisely to be protected from interaction with, or interdependency on, human beings,” Guy stands against the anthropocentric desire to exercise power over every being, in this case by keeping a wild bird at home, which had probably taken place before he met the animal. Being convinced that the hawk had already been a victim of humans, Guy decided to intervene; by violating the bird’s “sovereignty,” he realises a positive obligation towards the bird, which entails “compensate animals whom we injure” (2011, 206). Guy’s knowledge of birds is broad enough to provide the hawk with appropriate living conditions: the man builds a dedicated aviary and feeds him with mice. The subjectivity of the nonhuman actor is emphasised through the language used by the author to describe the hawk, which highlights the species’ characteristics.

Between the branches and the tree they came from lies a run some twelve metres long. A stump stands at the midpoint. Guy sets the pie plate down on the round, ringed surface and steps back.

Invisible until this moment, the enclosure’s inhabitant appears. Forsaking its private branch at the back of the oak, it stretches one yellow, reptilian leg along a leafless side limb, then the other. Talons gripping bark, the hawk balances. Its gaze sweeps the cage, touching briefly on Guy before returning to the plate of mice.

Guy catches his breath when the bird takes to the air. It’s over in seconds—only a half-dozen pumps before it reaches out with its feet and lands, retracting its long, mottled wings.

The hawk settles on the edge of the stump then begins to sidle round, showing Guy its layered back, the rusty, spreading wedge of its tail. (*Fauna*, 13)

In describing the hawk, the author does not resort to anthropomorphism, attributing intentionality only to his gaze. The bird is described from Guy’s perspective, reflecting the observer’s impressions. The focus is primarily on conveying the bird’s behaviour and capturing the uniqueness of his appearance. The man does not interfere with the bird’s actions; the hawk chooses the moment to take flight and the places to land, not submitting entirely to human control. It is apparent that despite being in a cage, the hawk retains his wildness.

According to the Canadian Raptor Conservancy, the Red-tailed Hawk is legally protected in North America under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which “prohibits the take (including killing, capturing, selling, trading, and transport) of protected migratory bird species without prior authorization by the Department of Interior U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service” (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service n.d., par. 3). Guy, suspecting that somebody might have already broken the law by keeping the hawk at home in inappropriate conditions, is determined to help it yet without any official assistance. His lifestyle suggests that he neither trusts the government nor the official services, which is why he decides to help the animal in the way he believes is most appropriate. DeMello explains, bringing the example of professional shelter workers and rescue volunteers, that these kinds of discrepancies can exist even within the structures of an organisation: “[r]escue volunteers often feel that they care more about animals than shelter workers and that they are more knowledgeable about the particular breed or species of animal that they rescue” (2012, 222). Providing the hawk with unprofessional yet tender care, Guy ensures that the hawk keeps its particularity; he is not becoming one of the many cases in wild animal rehabilitation. The man does not wish to change the status of the hawk, tame it, or let it get used to living in captivity. When Edal asks him, “You won’t keep him?,” he replies: “Only till he’s strong enough to make it on his own” (*Fauna*, 101). The subjectivity of the animal is emphasised by Guy’s understanding of the uniqueness of this individual, which involves respect for its wilderness. Because it is the only large animal he takes care of, his approach can be personal and subjective; he attends to its species-specific needs and recognises its unique habits. His empathetic approach is also highlighted by refraining from naming the hawk as it “[m]akes it harder if you name them, you know, when it comes time to let them go”; his main aim is to release the bird to the wilderness as soon as its health improves (101).

The same pragmatic and respectful approach is adopted by Stephen, who takes care of the orphaned raccoon kits. The raccoon is a representative example of liminal animals, the wild animals who, adapting to live in cities, are either indiscernible or “stigmatized as aliens or invaders who wrongly trespass on human territory, and who have no right to be there” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 212). Stephen feels partially responsible for the accident in which their mother died. The man stopped his car to let a raccoon cross the road, but the

driver in the other lane did not brake and hit the animal. Burdened with remorse, Stephen decided to take care of the baby racoons, which involves deep emotional engagement.

Stephen nods, his mind going to the four chubby little racoons asleep in their dog-carrier den beneath his bed. They'd be dead if it wasn't for him. Stop it. Starved or eaten or both, plucked out of hiding and picked clean—a crow, maybe, or a feral cat. (*Fauna*, 19)

The description of Stephen's experiences connected to the moment when he witnesses the death of the raccoon and subsequently takes care of her offspring is strongly focalized through Stephen's perspective. This point of view reveals how traumatic the animal's death was for him, as well as the close bond that ties him to the young ones. The contrast in the narration, where intrusive thoughts and flashbacks intertwine with the calmness of the sleeping racoons, intensifies the emotional charge of the scene. From the very beginning, it is clear that he is determined to keep the kits in good condition so that "[n]ot one of them would die in his care" (*Fauna*, 49). As Donaldson and Kymlicka explain, liminal animals deserve similar positive obligations (not limited to the sphere of avoiding interference with the nonhuman world, for instance, to "not to kill, confine, torture, enslave them, or rob them of the necessities of life") to what wild animals should be eligible to possess (2011, 161). Through his dedication, Stephen fully fulfils these obligations. His mind is occupied by the kits while his daily schedule is arranged so that he can feed them and perform other care duties. His preoccupations with the kits make their social status closer to that postulated by Donaldson and Kymlicka for citizens or permanent denizens, contrary to the situation in which their "invisibility (...) leads to a de-legitimization of their very presence" (2011, 212). Respecting the kits' sovereignty, he understands that he is only a temporary caretaker and makes a plan to reintroduce them into the wilderness.

Likewise Guy, Stephen stands against the stereotypically rooted division between female and male social construction, fully committing himself to the care work. As Adams notes, upbringing in patriarchal structures makes it difficult for men to recognize "the complex feelings of sadness, depression, horror, and other emotions, including anger, that arise in response to caring about animals' suffering and exploitation" (2007, 216). The

narration, however, shows that Stephen not only does not shy away from an emotional approach to rescuing animals, but also deepens his experiences through his respect for the natural environment. He discovers intimacy within the creative power of nature when he reaches for the kits out of the tree hollow: “he’d never felt anything that private. The kits were like warm, lightly furred organs in the torso of the tree” (*Fauna*, 48). Ecofeminist scholars, as Donovan claims, “encourage the development of forms of attention that enhance awareness of the living environment, that foster respect for its reality as a separate, different but knowable entity” (1996, 181). The unity of wild animals with nature can be overwhelming for an “outsider” human, yet choosing an intuitive path may, in some situations, be literally and metaphorically more natural.

Stephen is unable to trust systemic, rationally-oriented animal protection, being convinced that it lacks effectiveness. Immediately after witnessing the raccoon being hit, he concluded that the status of a nonhuman tragedy in society is so low that reporting it to the authorities would be pointless: “He squinted to get the plate number. What for? Officer, *I want to report a hit and run*” (*Fauna*, 48, italics in original). The novel juxtaposes this attitude (amateur, arranged by the people gathered in the wreck yard) with the professional approach, represented by Edal and Kate. After graduating from Fleming College, where Edal was trained as a wildlife and fish technician, she worked as a deputy conservation officer. Understanding that “only a fool would pass up better job security and higher pay,” she applied for a position at Environment Canada when the opportunity arose (255). As a wildlife officer who fights wildlife smuggling, she is exposed to high levels of cruelty and violence against animals.

Nearly four hundred little egg-shaped depressions, a juvenile Indian star tortoise in every one. Those in the carry-on bag fared better: a third of them had suffocated and only two had been squashed. Those that had travelled cargo saw the worst of it. Edal opened carton after carton while the sweet-faced lady looked on. Every crushed carapace leaked colour, the cardboard soggy in places, swollen with blood. (*Fauna*, 7)

York does not hesitate to use brutal details of violence against animals, occurring, for instance, when they are smuggled. In constructing this imagery, she employs metaphor and synecdoche to convey the scale of the tragedy experienced by turtles crushed alive in luggage. The witness to all this, and at the same time the person responsible for stopping the animal abuser, is Edal. She is the one who must confront nonhuman suffering, and the mentioned situation is only one of many such instances. Although Edal discovers products made from animal body parts on a daily basis, she has been particularly vulnerable to the sight of living animals, suffocated or smashed during transportation, or found in agony when she discovers them. Her empathy makes her unable to carry out her duties: “now, only five years on the job and she’s living off a store of sick days, unsure when she’ll feel steady enough to go back” (*Fauna*, 7). As DeMello argues, compassion fatigue is not an unusual state: “animal rescuers are at risk for being overwhelmed and traumatized by the constant animal suffering, and the knowledge that what they do is never enough” (2012, 222). According to Holly Monaghan et al., professionals working with animals who witness their suffering or contribute to euthanasia are vulnerable to “high levels of exhaustion, relationship conflict, poor well-being, sadness, sleep difficulties, and feelings of guilt and anger” (2024, 1). Edal experiences a severe mental breakdown; her flashbacks, which appear throughout the story (*Fauna*, 3, 23, 96, 137), can be associated with serious secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Although her job is more than merely a profession, “she’s starting to feel as though the federal wildlife officer uniform belongs to someone else” (6). Edal stays constantly alert to signs of animal abuse; for instance, she is suspicious of Lily, who collects birds, and of Guy’s reasons for keeping the hawk. Referring again to DeMello, the reason professional animal workers do not trust volunteers is that they see the latter “as untrained, unprofessional, and unaware of the realities” (2012, 222). On the other hand, Edal refrains from revealing her professional identity for fear of being rejected by the others.

Some actions taken against animals, however, remain unnoticed by professional workers. The tension between coyotes and humans is the central theme of the epistolary part of the story, which depicts the Toronto suburbs. The messages are exchanged between Darius and Stephen as follows: Darius expresses his hatred for coyotes using his blog, while Stephen defends them in the comments. Darius attempts to evoke human prejudice towards

coyotes, using persuasive language, in which he conjures up the coyotes' image as a mutual enemy: "[w]hy start now? Because this city is in trouble. I have one word for you. Coyotes. And if you think I'm joking you better think again" (*Funa*, 31). He refers to the expansionary character of coyotes' existence in North America, especially as they appear "practically [in] downtown," seeing them as invaders who dare to "multiplying like rats" and, according to him, "that's the thing about vermin" (31). Stephen, on the other hand, discerns how well they are prepared for living in the area, noting that "vermin is just a word for creatures that do well where we do" and that they "are smart and resourceful" (44). He refers to research to argue that coyotes are not farmers' adversaries, but because their diet in majority consists of small rodents, they are their actual allays (87).

Coyotes have no access to the human discursive zone, yet their constructed image has a significant influence on the individuals living in the Don Valley. The "sociozoologic scale" shows the general value of nonhumans based on the benefits they provide to humans, or on whether "they are cute or majestic and have characteristics that appeal to humans" (DeMello 51, 53). Such evaluation is based on speciesist bias, granting greater privileges to the animals at the top of the scale. Lauren E. Van Patter emphasises that "increasing numbers, or increased visibility – either physically or discursively" make the status of coyotes unclear, particularly in Western cultures, which usually ascribe them pejorative traits. According to the researcher, clashing views, such as the ones represented by Darius and Stephen, result in "conflicting management priorities: lethal removal, translocation, or more humane efforts to coexist" (2021, 2217). Yet, the question of whether coyotes are pests or vermin is not critical from the point of view of animal rights activists.

When AR<sup>58</sup> theorists say that animals have a basic right not to be killed, critics often ask whether this extends to 'pests' as well, or whether an exception should be made when humans and pests come into ineliminable conflict. The general AR view is that humans can kill animals only in situations of self-defence, and other circumstances in extremis, as in the human case. These rights do not evaporate simply because an animal is viewed as a pest by humans. (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 294)

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<sup>58</sup> animal rights

Expressions such as pests or vermin name animals whose activity is not profitable for humans; in some cases, the animals are blamed for posing a threat to crops or stores, in others they may contribute to the spread of microbes, etc. The categories, as DeMello explains, seem fluid: in some circumstances, an animal may be moved from the category vermin to valuable resources – for instance, rats can be pests in cities and subjects of experiments in laboratories (2012, 51). Coyotes' utility lies mainly in their fur; due to their pest status, some people consider killing them for fur justified, as Colton Morris admits, “[p]eople don’t understand how this is an animal like sheep and cattle and chickens, and we manage and use them as a renewable resource” (2019, par.5). As the cultural anthropologist emphasises, coyotes are one of numerous species whose existence is reduced to providing humans with food or clothing, and hence experience institutional violence (DeMello 2012, 237).

Darius's attitude represents the Western coloniser's desire to subordinate the land with all beings living there, aiming, as Buchanan describes, to engage in “environmental terrorism” (2018, 149). Blinded by human exceptionalism, he admires the wolf extermination in the US, which revealed human persistent imperialistic aspiration in the field of ecology. James W. Hody and Roland Kays list unreasonable attempts to manage the distribution of large predators as one of the factors contributing to coyotes' expansion in North America; persecution of wolves left an environmental niche for coyotes (2018, 82). Darius encourages people to perform underground organised actions, aiming at annihilation of the coyote as he understands this species as elusive, strongly connected with the surroundings.

[W]hen he looked down from his and spotted a canine with no true colour of its own. Its coat was made of the same clean, shifting light as the sky. There was something different about the way it moved too – none of the nose-down, empty-headed zigzag dogs tend to favour when forsaking a human path. This creature had knowledge of the field it was crossing. It advanced at a steady pace, its stride an easy median between a lope and a stroll. (*Fauna*, 43)

In constructing the image of the coyote, York draws on its unique role in the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Native Americans<sup>59</sup>. The animal acquires an ethereal, almost immaterial character, emphasized through colours that reflect its surroundings. It seems as if the coyote is an inseparable part of its environment, yet entirely autonomous from humans. The narrator, describing it from a certain distance, attributes knowledge and intentionality to its movements, as though it were a reflective or magical being. The animal possesses knowledge about the place, while their unity with the environment seems to have an almost supernatural character. Darius sees them as a threat to human exceptionality, as such an animal would not accept (White) human supremacy. The man does not hesitate to use any possible weapon against them; he advises his followers to use guns or cyanide as well as start a fire in dens with pups (*Fauna*, 199).

The presence and visibility of coyotes trigger hostility among the people who see themselves as guards of the border between humans and animals. Numerous other liminal species, however, evoke less pejorative feelings, either because they are positioned higher on the sociozoologic scale or they are simply less visible in the urban areas. The uniqueness of York's novel lies not only in how adequately she addresses these issues in the main plot, presenting such animals as vivid parts of the society but also in a way she physically intertwines humans' stories with the sections dedicated to a selected liminal species. The group of nonhuman protagonists is comprised of raccoons, squirrels, skunks, and coyotes who tolerate us, because we are one of the costs of living in a human environment with its attendant opportunities, but they do not seek our company or our cooperation. According to Donaldson and Kymlicka, liminal animals benefit from human environments, but not from human contact per se (2011, 228).

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<sup>59</sup> The coyote belongs to the group of tricksters, figures in Native American culture who possess supernatural abilities and, travelling between the spiritual and material worlds, take on various forms, both animate and inanimate. Tricksters differ across cultures; however, Jenny L. Davis emphasises their moralizing function: "there are different degrees of Tricksters, and they're often a reminder and a check to make sure your doing things in a good way. You're not supposed to be too gullible. You're supposed to be thinking for yourself about what's going on in a given situation" (2023, 222). The Coyote is usually depicted as a cunning trickster, whose actions cause mischief, but at the same time, it "has a gift from creation, the ability to transform or overcome people-eating monsters. Monsters are technologies, practices, ideas and/or cultural patterns that are destructive and unsustainable" (Okanagan College 2020, para. 10).

The animal-centred passages interrupt the human-dominated sections, much like real liminal animals disrupt human hegemony in urban spaces. The author shows how animals are drawn to urban infrastructures and make use of them, yet without direct contact with humans. The reader is given the opportunity to see the city through the eyes of a raccoon who survives on human food leftovers: “chicken bones and pig fat, softening apples and half-eaten ears of corn,” deposited in the waste containers (*Fauna*, 29). Having learned human behaviours and how human facilities function, the raccoons should be regarded as denizens, “co-residents of our urban spaces” who “are neither capable of, nor interested in, being recruited into our cooperative scheme of citizenship” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 15).

Tonight’s the night when the lonely, feast-filled vessels stand unguarded, fastened with nothing but a clip any yearling could undo. He’ll wait until the street is quite before making a move. A flick of the fingers, a well-placed push and, one after another, they’ll spill. (*Fauna*, 30)

The author presents the raccoon without excessive anthropomorphism, focusing instead on how the animal acquires the skills necessary to survive in the city. Foraging in garbage has become its default mode of feeding, and thus gaining access to a container is crucial for survival. The comparison between the movements of a human hand and the raccoon’s fingers highlights their similarity and suggests that one does not have to be human to make use of the same facilities. The raccoon is presented as an animal who fits perfectly into a habitual niche created by humans; moreover, the way his preferences and history are described emphasises his subjectivity and particularity at the same time. This way of portraying the animals draws the reader’s attention to their agency - they are perfectly aware of what they want or need to do. Learning that the raccoon lost his tail, that he mated with a female raccoon, and how he can still hunt insects when hungry makes it a unique individual of its kind.

## 5.4 Conclusions

Literary representations of human-nonhuman relationships in urban environments in Cary Fagan's *The Animals* and Alissa York's *Fauna* draw readers' attention to the complexity of interspecies coexistence. The novels depict a range of human responses to nonhuman presence, from forced domestication and commodification to genuine empathy and cohabitation. A central theme in both novels is the problematic nature of human attempts to integrate wild animals into domestic and urban settings.

In *The Animals*, the Wild Home Project represents a utopian yet misguided initiative that disregards the agency and needs of nonhuman beings. By strengthening the friction between wild animals and humans, the project leads to tragic consequences, such as the violent resistance of the mink and the death of Leev. The narrative demonstrates the failure of the imposition of human structures on animals that took place without consideration of their natural behaviours. As Haraway's concept of companion species suggests, authentic interspecies relationships cannot be based on hierarchical control.

Conversely, *Fauna* presents a more nuanced portrayal of the human-animal relationships, emphasising acts of care and protection for nonhuman beings, regardless of how they are socially categorised. The wrecking yard functions as a sanctuary where displaced or harmed beings, regardless of species, find care. The efforts to rescue nonhumans injured by widespread human activity appear to be a form of ethical compensation for the damage caused to the nonhuman world. The novel illustrates that effective interspecies relationships require acknowledgment of animal agency and respect for their autonomy, a principle supported by Donaldson and Kymlicka's *Zoopolis*, which calls for political recognition of nonhuman inhabitants in human societies.

Both texts critique the anthropocentric biases embedded in urban planning and human governance over animal lives. The discussion of liminal animals—those who exist in human spaces but are not domesticated—further highlights the contradictions in human attitudes. In the light of DeMello's argument that animals are being socially constructed through human language, the coyote can be either identified as vermin or survivor and cultural figure. The conflict between Darius, who advocates for the extermination of coyotes, and Stephen, who defends their right to coexist, illustrates the tensions concerning the

management of wildlife in urban spaces. As Donaldson and Kymlicka argue, wild and liminal animals should not be subjected to human-centric control; their autonomy must be granted over their own ecological spaces.

The novels serve as literary case studies that expose the human-driven integration projects as well as grassroots actions to protect animals. The contrast between the misguided intervention in *The Animals* and the spontaneous animal advocacy in *Fauna* reveals doubts about how urban spaces can be shared with nonhuman residents in a way that benefits them all. It is demonstrated that small-scale, empathetic acts of care offer more viable models for ethical coexistence. However, the challenge of connecting theoretical understandings of nonhuman rights and the practical implementation of policies that truly account for animal agency in urban spaces persists.

## Chapter 6

### **The Bee Community as a Representation of Open Forms of Democracy in Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*.**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The inclusion of nonhuman beings into human-established structures requires a fundamental reorganisation of those structures. Lauren Wilcox argues that modern technology enables the creation of self-regulating systems, analogous to natural forms of self-organisation. She highlights that swarm intelligence, a type of collective intelligence inspired by insect behaviour, allows for decentralised decision-making without explicit leadership. As a result, decentralisation—although seemingly conducive to freedom—can also open the door to hidden control, making systems vulnerable to manipulation by centralised power centres.

The concept of the multitude, more extensively developed by Hardt and Negri, appears to have strong potential for evolving into a posthumanist community. This collectivity is not a homogeneous mass with a unified identity, but rather a living organism composed of countless and diverse elements. It enables the emergence of open forms of democracy. This approach is rooted in the belief that processes of communication, collaboration, and creation not only bring individuals together but also serve as foundations for shifting power structures based on decentralisation and participation. However, it is Tyson E. Lewis who points out that treating nature and animals as metaphors to illustrate the possibilities of self-organisation limits the potential of the ideas of multitude and swarm intelligence as “without recognizing the multiplicity of subjectivities across species boundaries, the multitude remains a largely anthropocentric construction, and the problematic of formulating trans-species demands” (2010, 232). His critique emphasises that, in order to fully understand new forms of power and resistance, it is necessary to include not only the

human dimension in the analysis, but also the ways in which non-human beings participate in processes of bioproduction and in shaping post-capitalist reality.

Bees, often used as an analogy for collective intelligence, reflect the actual, complex dynamics of interaction between the multitude and the external world. By observing the structure and functioning of bees, one can see how decentralisation and diversity play a key role in forming stable and flexible systems. Each bee, acting based on local stimuli and communication with other colony members, contributes to the functioning of the whole without the need for centralised control. The same phenomenon is emphasised by the theory of multitude of emancipatory democratic nature, in which centralised power is replaced by a network of cooperation. Similarly, the mechanisms of swarm intelligence demonstrate that responsiveness and adaptability can be achieved through distributed decision-making systems.

In bee societies, no central leadership is observed; the functioning of the hive relies on self-organising mechanisms, where each member fulfils its role autonomously, yet in full cooperation with others. As Seeley emphasises:

there is no all-knowing central planner supervising the thousands and thousands of worker bees in a colony. The work of a hive is instead governed collectively by the workers themselves, each one an alert individual making tours of inspection looking for things to do and acting on her own to serve the community. (2010, 5)

Such a system allows bees to rapidly adapt to changing environmental conditions. Cooperation is based not only on chemical communication or the transmission of information through dance, but also on internal mechanisms that regulate individual behaviour. As the author notes, a particularly intriguing process is the selection of a new nesting site by a bee colony. Scout bees initiate the consensus-building phase following initial exploration, during which various potential sites are proposed. Over time, however, the majority of bees converge on a single, most promising location. They use the waggle dance to communicate information about direction, distance, and the quality of the potential nest site—the better the conditions, such as spaciousness, insulation, and protection, the more vigorously they advertise that location. As the process unfolds, bees

supporting less favourable options gradually cease dancing, which enables the best option to dominate. When the number of bees favouring a particular site exceeds a certain threshold—a quorum—the entire group moves into the commitment phase, mobilising to leave the old nest and relocate to the new one.

Basing on local interactions, this mechanism enables the colony to reach accurate collective decisions despite the limited cognitive abilities of individual bees. It resembles decision-making mechanisms in the mammalian nervous system. Mushroom bodies, central structures in the brains of bees, play a crucial role in integrating sensory information and enable various forms of associative learning. According to Heisenberg, “mushroom bodies protect short-term visual memory traces against context changes and when they contribute to making the strength of the current sensory signals the arbitrator between two competing memory templates,” which affects “[d]ecision-like processes” (2003, 273). It is this efficiency in processing complex sensory signals that allows bees to rapidly adapt to changing environmental conditions and to communicate effectively within the colony. As Menzel emphasises, even with their limited brain size, their learning abilities are a “robust and fast phenomenon,” while they represent a “rich behavioral repertoire” (2001, 53). Research on abstract concept learning in bees indicates that their ability to recognise and respond to a variety of stimuli differs among individuals and groups. Furthermore, Giurfa notes that “the animal will adopt the behavioural strategies leading to adaptive solutions, either boosting or sacrificing what researchers would view as cognitive sophistication,” which may serve as an evolutionary foundation for more complex social mechanisms (2007, 820).

An example of a molecular mechanism influencing social organisation is the role of vitellogenin, whose function has been thoroughly examined by Nelson et al., who state that “the vitellogenin gene influences social foraging specialization” (2007, 674). Thanks to such genetic and hormonal regulation, bees exhibit a high degree of flexibility in the division of labour and tasks, which allows them to make efficient colony-level decisions without the need for hierarchical leadership. Decentralisation within the hive promotes the synchronisation of actions—individuals respond to local signals and their own physiological states. It is this ability for self-organisation that makes the hive an example of a complex community, where cooperation and mutual dependence are key to survival.

The physiologically and genetically conditioned ability of bees to form effectively cooperating collectives is not unique on a global scale (similar cooperation can be found, for instance, in colonies of termites or ants). Yet, for humans, such forms of organization are often difficult to accept. In Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, as in the real world, bees are presented in the context of their relationship with humans. The individuality of the human caregivers contrasts with the collective nature of bee communities; however, this relationship opens human characters up to nonhuman influences and the richness of the more-than-human world. In this chapter, I wish to focus on the impact of bee communities both on human communities and on the individual, as well as on how bee communities embody the principles of the multitude.

## **6.2. Communities of Bees and Humans in Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees***

Gail Anderson-Dargatz's second novel, *A Recipe for Bees* (1998), tells the story of Augusta, a woman who forms a unique bond with her son-in-law, Gabe, by sharing her passion for beekeeping with him. The narrative spans from the early years of her marriage to the moment when Gabe unexpectedly falls seriously ill. When young and inexperienced Augusta marries Karl, she does not anticipate that the following years will bring her much suffering. After moving to the farm of Karl's father, Olaf, she immediately falls under his dominance and lives in fear of his dog. Karl, entirely subjugated by his father, not only fails to support his wife in her endless conflicts with her father-in-law but also proves completely inept at developing their own relationship. Seeking solace, Augusta befriends a pastor and has an affair with Joe, a man she meets in the city. When she becomes pregnant, and since Karl's infertility is widely known, the family becomes the subject of malicious gossip. Augusta's life remains lonely and unfulfilling even after she leaves Olaf's farm and takes over the property of her late parents. Her relationship with her daughter is strained, as the girl constantly rebels against her mother.

A central motif in the novel is Augusta's relationship with the bees. Due to the short lifespan of individual insects and the collective nature of their community, she cannot form

bonds with specific individuals, and the term “bees” comes to encompass the entire bee society. Thus, it is the bee community, instead of individual bees, that becomes a character in the novel. Unlike the chimpanzee community in *A Beautiful Truth*, the bees are not given their own voice. They appear primarily in the third-person narration focalised through Augusta’s perspective, as well as in her spoken stories and conversations.

Although Gail Anderson-Dargatz directly indicates the similarities between bee and human communities, her novel simultaneously points towards more compassionate modes of partnership. Lewis suggests that the comparison between human societies and insect colonies is not based on an assumed similarity in their identities; it rather challenges the idea of the individual as an independent entity.

It is not that insect colonies are the same as human societies, but rather that there are differences of degree rather than differences of kind within the manifestation of collectively embodied swarm intelligences. Although this analogy is called upon to question the humanist assumptions of the autonomous, fully rational individual, the swarm intelligence of nonhuman animal life remains on the level of analogy only, merely helping to clarify the particularly human demands of the multitude. (Anderson-Dargatz 2010, 321<sup>60</sup>)

The author argues that there is a certain kinship in the ways different forms of collective intelligence function, and that the differences lie more in the degree of complexity, self-awareness, and perhaps the scale or intensity with which collective intelligence manifests itself, rather than in the very nature of the phenomenon. Taking into account Lewis’s position, a beehive can be compared to a small-scale republic that opens up a space for rethinking alternative models of community: the ones that can be situated beyond anthropocentrism and capitalist-patriarchal logic of power. The swarm of bees, which functions as a collective organism, becomes a representation of community based on affect and bodily responsiveness instead of hierarchy and coercion.

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<sup>60</sup> Hereafter *RFB* with page references in the text.

A hive was so like a nation in miniature, complete with customs officials and border guards. Augusta could pick a guard bee out by its authoritative stance. It sat back on its haunches, on its four back legs, and raised its front legs and antennae to scrutinize every bee passing through the tiny entrance to the hive. The guard bees could tell their nestmates from bees of another hive by scent and by behaviour. Each hive had its own customs; different races of bees had different dialects to their dance language. (*RFB*, 70)

Although this description evokes the language of state institutions and biopolitical surveillance apparatuses, the *modus operandi* of the hive guardians is based on sensual cognition. The beehive, a community that communicates through scent and dance, opposes the violence of biopolitics and proposes a form of social organisation in which boundaries are negotiated through bodily signals and difference. The multitude, as shown by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is capable of resisting traditional forms of authority. According to them, a model of decentralised and dispersed community can be “based fundamentally on communications,” thus on relationships and cooperation (2004, 91). The beehive, composed of many individuals acting in dynamic synchrony without central command, perfectly illustrates this model as it is the corporeal manifestation of a politics based on collective action. Contemporary forms of resistance and organisation no longer need to be based on a party or the state, but can take the form of swarm intelligence, dispersed but intentionally integrated. This posthumanist organisation transcends the category of the human; by rejecting the violence of control in favour of relationality, it draws on feminist principles.

The functioning of the swarm cannot be predicted according to simple patterns; on the contrary, it becomes an organism capable of adaptation and embodied communication. This constitutes a form of collective subjectivity that goes beyond traditional notions of instinct, as is particularly evident in the description of the guard bees’ behaviour towards outsiders:

Even so, guard bees did let foreign workers in, especially novice foragers and deferential bees who had become lost or had drifted to this new hive on strong winds. But the new workers were only accepted after a diligent and lengthy inspection. Guard bees combed the body of the outsider with their front feet and antennae, assessing the stranger’s willingness to submit.

The guard bees weren't above accepting bribes. Newcomers hauling loads of pollen and nectar were readily admitted. (*RFB*, 81)

The beehive, as a community, is not entirely closed. Its boundaries are porous and can be crossed if the outsider brings value and poses no threat. It represents a model of a negotiable society, where belonging is determined by actions and intentions. Acceptance into the community requires mutual recognition, but it is not based on violence, coercion, or assimilation understood as unification. In light of Deborah M. Gordon's research, which describes ant behaviour as an example of distributed intelligence emerging from the self-organising interactions among ants, "[t]he behavior of the colony is the sum of the behavior of the ants, but the behavior of each ant depends on more than its own attributes" (2010, 23). This process allows for rapid adaptation to changing conditions without centralised control. Unlike in human societies, decisions in a bee colony are taken locally, in response to environmental conditions and interactions between individuals.

Augusta's knowledge of bee behaviour allowed her to intervene in colony structures to the extent that two bee families could merge into one. This situation illustrates the vulnerability of the swarm to central control and its susceptibility to manipulation, as argued by Wilcox (2017, 33). Bee colonies are neither hermetically sealed nor inherently hostile towards members of their own species, and this trait has long been exploited by beekeepers.

If Augusta wanted to unite two colonies, all she had to do was lay a single sheet of newspaper on top of one colony, then set the box of the second colony on top of it. As there were no floors to these bee boxes, all that separated the two hives was that sheet of newspaper. By the time members of both communities ate through the paper, they had become accustomed to each other's scent and they wouldn't fight. (*RFB*, 81)

Although the merging process is imposed and directed by a human, who occupies the position of an external agent, it unfolds peacefully and with the bees' full acceptance. In the case of the bees' multitude, a simple assimilation ritual, in which both colonies chew through a sheet of paper together, engages both groups. Through collective cooperation aimed at a shared goal, the worker bees familiarise themselves with each other's scents,

recognise one another, and establish acceptance. This understanding of integration contrasts with the logic of assimilation found in colonial history, where the Other must be transformed into the Self to be accepted. No hierarchy emerges that would force one family to submit to the other at the expense of its own interests. Yet the human still holds a position of power, which allows Augusta to intervene in and reconfigure the bees' community from the outside.

The multitude, in the form of a swarm of bees, can be not only a stable colony but also a dynamic community whose actions are shaped by external circumstances. Being aware of the bees' needs and tendencies, Augusta took advantage of them to settle the colony in a given place.

If she didn't give the bees enough room, half the hive would turn emigrant on her and swarm off to find a new home. But if she could catch swarms from wild hives, or swarms that had taken off from other beekeepers, early enough in the year she could put them into new hives. The swarm, like immigrants, would be much more productive than the established hives. (*RFB*, 205)

Augusta admits that taking over foreign swarms is more profitable than working with established colonies, which seems unsettling in the context of an exploitative logic where mobility and lack of rootedness become commodities. The protagonist does not explicitly comment on this mechanism, but her dispassionate tone reinforces the significance of this action. This neutrality is in itself a sign of the naturalisation of economic violence, which no one questions anymore. The comparison of the swarm to immigrants may serve as a reference to the neoliberal approach to migration and productivity. A swarm that leaves its original place to build a new one becomes a fresh resource easily exploitable if intercepted early enough. Productivity becomes the condition for acceptance. The immigrant, whether a bee or a human, gains value only as a worker, not as a being with a right to exist. In this sense, the bee colony fits the model of biopolitical management of life, as "the multitude is the common subject of labor, that is, the real flesh of postmodern production, and at the same time the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global

development” (Hardt and Negri 2004, 101). Thus, the threat to the multitude lies in its fundamental property: its multiplicity, which has the ability to unite. As “the two processes – the accumulation of men [or other-than-human beings] and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated,” capitalism readily takes advantage of a flexible workforce capable of adapting to the demands of the economy (Foucault 1995, 221).

The author describes the beginning of the protagonist’s relationship with bees in a nostalgic and almost intimate way. References to touch and sound draw attention to the physicality of this connection, as a beekeeper must be fully engaged in it.

It was from her mother, Helen, that Augusta had learned beekeeping, and she had learned it almost as soon as she could walk. As a child she had walked barefoot through the orchard, carefully, slowly, lest she step on a bee or stir them into stinging.

Helen taught Augusta to pet the hives. She brushed her hand affectionately across the many bees climbing across the frames of honeycomb, and Augusta followed in kind. It felt like petting the belly of a loudly purring cat, except the wings beating against the palm of her hand tickled. But she just did this with the calm hives, and only on a day when the bees had a good supply of nectar and pollen, and the weather was fine. The mood of the hives varied from day to day, depending on the supply of nectar and whether or not they had been pestered by robber bees or pillaging skunks (*RFB*, 30)

Helen is portrayed as a wise and caring figure whose bond with bees embodies matriarchal strength. Through beekeeping, she passes on not only practical knowledge but also values such as patience and respect for nature. By introducing Augusta to the world of bees from an early age, she teaches her attentiveness to the other. According to Levinas, recognising the other is a necessary condition for the emergence of ethical responsibility, which later enables her to form an interspecies connection by interpreting signals beyond human language (2007, 178-181). The mother demonstrates how bees respond to calmness and gentleness, linking beekeeping to the emotional balance of the beekeeper. Her knowledge of beekeeping is depicted as both practical and spiritual, suggesting that it is not merely about honey production but also about achieving harmony with nature.

The beehive community is a society capable of affective response. The swarm operates as part of an emotional ecosystem, in which the individual and the collective coexist and influence each other.

She found beekeeping meditative, relaxing. It was work that involved her completely; she lost herself in the concentration required to handle the bees, and soon learned that if she entered into the work fearful or upset, the bees would smell it on her, and read it in her suddenly clumsy actions, and sting her. But if she worked in a calm manner, keeping her movements slow and deliberate, she was stung much less frequently. (*RFB*, 208)

The protagonist's relationship with the swarm reveals that emotions and the body are not separate from intelligence; rather, they constitute its medium. The way one interacts with the swarm depends on emotional state and attentiveness, as the swarm interprets affects and responds to them. An intimate interaction emerges in place of institutional surveillance—one that enables interspecies harmonisation. Although such behaviour might be interpreted as purely instinctual, Seeley challenges this interpretation. He maintains that the hive demonstrates a high degree of attentiveness, affective responsiveness, and collective decision-making, implying that democratic practices are not exclusive to human societies (Seeley 2010, 73-74).

Signs of reciprocity in this interspecies communication are not obvious: “[i]t’s a one-way experience, this relationship with bees, but no less powerful for being unilateral in fact” (Winston 2014, 221). It seems that the absence of violent actions on the part of the bees suggests a conciliatory attitude, or even affection towards humans. This is a particular feature of the relationship between Gabe, Augusta’s son-in-law, and the bees.

He rarely got stung, though Joy was stung all the time when she helped him. Augusta herself could expect ten stings a day when harvesting. Honeybees tended to sting people in places where they sweated, like under the arms or waistband, where their animal scent was strongest. The bees were grumpy at the end of honey flow, as there was less nectar to collect and nothing to keep them occupied. (*RFB*, 34)

Numerous nonhuman species, including those that are partially domesticated, do not seek contact with humans, treating them as intruders. In such cases, attack or violent behaviour serves to establish a boundary between the nonhuman and the human, justified by the need for safety. Although bees have developed various defence strategies—such as raising their body temperature to one hundred degrees (Weaver 2016, para. 5) or deceiving opponents by placing “spots of animal feces around their nest entrances” (Mattila 2020, 1)—only stinging is effective against humans. In the novel, the bees’ passivity is interpreted as a sign of their friendly attitude towards humans, particularly towards Gabe. In reality, however, stinging comes at a tremendous cost, as the bee dies when its stinger, left embedded in the enemy, becomes detached from its own body. It is crucial, however, that Gabe is singled out for his engagement in beekeeping, which is evident in the way his relationship with the insects is described.

It wasn’t that the bees ignored Gabe. They were interested in him, attracted to his sweet scent. They swarmed around him, lit on his arms and face, and got tangled in the fine hairs at the top of his head where his hair was retreating. Like all good beekeepers he kept his movements slow and steady to avoid agitating them. (*RFB*, 34)

In comparison with the other human characters, the participation of bees in this relationship is more extensive, reaching the point of physical contact with Gabe. There is also an element of magical realism: the unusual smell he emits may influence the bees’ friendly behaviour. He is portrayed as a person immensely interested in bees, but his talent appears to manifest itself through this physical, supernatural trait.

Gabe, as a man, stands in contrast to the widely recognisable motif of the woman who, in ecofeminist theory, preserves unity with nature, but this portrayal seems coherent with Braidotti’s concept of the goddess, which emphasises that gender is not a stable feature. In the novel, the most archetypical female figure is Helen; Augusta remembers her mother as a dedicated apiculturist whose bond with bees was unique. She was the one who taught the young girl how to deal with the hives. In Augusta’s memories, her mother was a woman who fulfilled the social expectations of the time, seeking happiness in her bond with bees.

Apparently, due to their preoccupation with the material world, men did not try to engage with nature, and kinship with nonhumans is passed down the maternal line. This rule is, however, broken, as her daughter does not inherit the calling for bees. Unexpectedly, Augusta finds a soulmate in Joy's husband.

Augusta endeavours to approach bees by searching for equivalents in the human world. Since corresponding elements, such as bees' social groups and customs, can be recognised through careful observation, advanced scientific knowledge is not required to develop sympathy with bees. The process of observation is democratic – accessible to all social groups and dependent only on the observer's sensitivity. A similar approach can be seen when Augusta tries to explain bees' funeral behaviour to her friends by using vivid imagery.

"Did I ever tell you there are undertaker bees?" asked Augusta.

"No," said Rose. "Surprisingly, I can't recall you ever telling me that."

"Most bees die outside, while foraging. But some die inside the hives. The undertaker bees carry the dead body through the hive and deposit it outside the opening. They leave it there a day or two until it's dried out a bit, so it's lighter. Then one of them collects the dead bee and flies into the sky, away from the hive, where it drops the body. Isn't that a fitting funeral for a bee? A sky burial."

"A hell of a lot more exciting than the funerals we go to" (*RFB*, 152).

The portrayal of the burial ritual reveals a spiritual dimension in the understanding of this process. The bees' practices are interpreted not as a biological process but as a ceremony; it appears as a liminal experience that connects life with transcendence. The metaphor of ascending upwards fits with familiar cultural tropes: "[h]appiness, health, life, and control—the things that principally characterize what is good for a person—are all up" (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 28), yet it is filtered through a feminist sensibility that appreciates corporeality, care, and ordinariness. The swarm crosses the boundaries between nature and culture, showing the potential for a community that embraces death without excluding it, where the body is not a waste but part of a cycle. Still, romanticising bee behaviour as a spiritual ritual is tinged with anthropomorphism, which reinterprets biological processes as

cultural ceremony. This move, though empathetic, may inadvertently obscure the material and non-symbolic reality of the nonhuman. There are straightforward reasons for the way bees treat their deceased, but humans can see its beauty and metaphysical aspect: a human soul taken to heaven. Because Augusta believes in God and resurrection, her fascination with the bees' burial procedures is justified by her faith. From a Christian perspective, the rising of the bees' dead bodies appears to have a posthumous mystical dimension connected to the concept of an immortal soul. However, it also touches upon the affirmation of life rather than death itself.

Augusta keeps talking about bees to her friends, regardless of whether they are willing to listen. Her tendency to repeat the same anecdote numerous times may be related to her age, but these stories might also hold a deeper significance for her. One such anecdote describes a queen bee mating with drones, as Augusta explains the fertilisation ritual to her interlocutor:

"Have I told you the drone's penis snaps off during intercourse with the queen bee?" asked Augusta." (...)

"They won't mate at all unless they're way up in the sky," said Augusta. "The drones won't take a second look at a queen coming out of a hive. But when she's thirty, a hundred, feet up in the air, then she gets their interest. They'll seek her out, flying this way and that to catch her scent until there's a V of drones—like the V of geese following a leader in the sky—chasing along behind her." (*RFB*, 10)

This story is not only a biological curiosity, but also a reference to the reproductive instrumentalisation of the body, which is part of a biopolitical analysis. The droning male is reduced to a tool whose only function is to impregnate the queen once. From this perspective, the body is a vessel of function, not an autonomous subject. In his reflections on biopower, Michel Foucault points out that modern societies no longer exercise power through physical violence but rather through the management of life—regulating reproduction, health, and sexuality. The leper in Augusta's story becomes an exemplary figure of the biopolitical subject: his life ends the moment he fulfils his reproductive duty. Interestingly, it is the male body that is objectified here, a subversion of the traditional order

in which women, as bearers of life, are reduced to the function of mother. In this sense, the scene depicting the queen's mating with the drones can be read as an ironic reversal of patriarchal narratives of male sexual dominance. Here, the man is a medium, a means that is used up and discarded. This symbolism corresponds with the feminist argument that the fundamental oppression of women stems from their biological role in reproduction. Anderson-Dargatz subversively applies this argument to men, demonstrating that biological reproduction—when detached from subjectivity—inevitably becomes a source of violence, regardless of gender.

This scene may serve as a commentary on Augusta's family and personal relationships—her sexual and emotional experiences. Her freedom is severely restricted by the social structures in which she is entangled: after marrying Karl, she moves into his father's house, where the older man holds authority. His abusive behaviour towards Augusta also extends to his dog, who becomes a secondary source of her suffering. Terrorised by both the man and the animal, she struggles to maintain the illusion of wellbeing and receives no support from her husband. Moreover, she constantly experiences sexual dissatisfaction not only because Karl turns out to be infertile, but also because he is reluctant to engage in any intimacy with her. The story of the bees becomes a tool for reflecting on her femininity; like a queen bee, she sees herself as desired only during the brief mating flight, then pushed to the margins and replaced by the younger generation. This moment of erotic flight during her affair with Joe becomes an experience of reclaiming agency and subjectivity. However, just as in the world of bees, the price of this act is high: the drone dies or disappears after mating, and the queen returns to the hive to fulfil her reproductive function. Undoubtedly, all the men in Augusta's life are absent in their own way: silent and passive Karl remains emotionally distant; Joe disappears after their affair; Olaf's presence is marked by coldness and oppression; and Gabe, though physically there, retreats into illness. The situation forces Augusta to navigate her struggles alone.

As time goes by, Augusta feels increasingly pushed aside, even by her own daughter. This becomes especially evident when, despite Augusta's close bond with her son-in-law, Joy refuses to let her be present during Gabe's surgery. For Augusta, it is a painful experience, almost as if she has been symbolically replaced by a younger queen.

"You can tell if a queen bee is getting old, you know," she said.

"Ah-huh," said Rose.

"Her movements are slower. She's got less get-up-and-go. She lays fewer eggs. When she's failing, her daughters simply replace her."

"Oh, yeah."

"They build a queen cell and put in a freshly laid egg. Then they'll feed that new larva enough royal jelly to make a new queen. The old queen lives out her days in a corner at the bottom of the hive." (*RFB*, 25)

The protagonist's statement, though delivered in the tone of an indifferent biological fact, is spoken by Augusta in the context of the rejection and marginalisation she experiences as an older woman. By comparing herself to the queen bee, she exposes the social mechanisms that determine a person's, especially a woman's, value through the lens of their perceived usefulness. When the queen's efficiency declines and her reproductive function is disrupted, she is both symbolically and physically removed from the sphere of interest. From the perspective of Michel Foucault's biopolitics, this passage illustrates the logic of modern societies, in which an individual's worth is subordinated to normative productivity. The traditional power of the sovereign was based on the right over life and death of subjects. In modern societies, power has transformed into a power over life, which focuses on managing population, health, reproduction, and the productivity of individuals, where the body of the individual becomes a resource. In "the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes," there might not be space for the elderly, who are gradually losing their working force (Foucault 1978, 141). Here, power over life no longer manifests as brutal extermination but rather through social erasure, particularly evident in the case of postmenopausal women.

Apparently, the rejection of the queen bee might look like an act of ageism and structural exclusion of the elderly, who in neoliberal societies are perceived as a burden. The mechanism of replacing the queen becomes a reference to the practice of institutional and cultural invalidation of older women, whose reproductive ability has ended and thus whose social usefulness has expired. Nevertheless, this passage can carry a more posthumanist

message. In the beehive, there is no place for individuality, as Braidotti argues: “sustainable ethics for non-unitary subjects rests on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the nonhuman or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other” (2013, 190). In Augusta’s story, the queen leaving the central place appears to be a bitter experience; it is, however, necessary for keeping the community healthy and well-functioning.

The analogy suggests that the construction of human social structures is not unique in the context of nonhuman worlds. As Anna Barcz argues, the re-creation of natural networks in literature draws attention to human treatment of the nonhuman realm, revealing the whole range of connections between the human and nonhuman worlds (2016, 90-91). Understanding bees as a collective may serve as a tool that makes nonhuman behaviour more comprehensible, and therefore, bees’ subjectivity more determined and tangible. The scholar emphasises that embedding the text in a real-life context affects how the recipient perceives the real beings. Beekeeping, in Andreson-Dargatz’s view, like in real life, requires the ability to perceive and interpret subtle shifts within the hive; this sensitivity allows Augusta to recognise changes in the bees’ mood:

Augusta stood up from the table and went over to the balcony to look down at her bees. They were still agitated, buzzing excitedly around the hive. Karl joined her, carrying his cup.

“I take it you checked on the bees already,” he said.

“Yeah. They’re upset, like something’s been after them.

“Boys,” said Karl, “throwing rocks at the hive.” (*RFB*, 32)

When Augusta returned home that day, she was able to recognise a certain anxiety in the bees’ behaviour. Although the communication is rather one-sided, as it consists of reading certain behaviours of the bees, the years she has spent observing them have equipped Augusta with the knowledge to interpret such situations. As Mark Winston points out, “[b]ees aren’t communicating in any verbal way that’s familiar to us; nevertheless, they are deeply engaged with each other, passing along information about the world outside and

conditions within the colony.” Hence, beekeeping requires awareness and patience to recognise “a nonstop, colony-wide conversation similar to human interactions,” which consists of “a rapid flurry of body parts touching and whole bodies vibrating” as well as “movements that provide the channels through which news, data, and perceptions flow” (2014, 199). As Augusta is an experienced beekeeper, her suspicions are confirmed by the eyewitness account describing the harm done to the bees. Still, there are ways of reciprocal non-linguistic communication, as Haraway argues:

An embodied communication is more like a dance than a word. The flow of entangled meaningful bodies in time—whether jerky and nervous or flaming and flowing, whether both partners move in harmony or painfully out of synch or something else altogether (...). (Haraway 2008, 26)

Contact with bees reveals to the attentive observer that communication does not have to rely on language in the human sense of the word. In line with Derrida’s deconstruction, language is not the sole carrier of meaning, which suggests that interspecies communication may be richer than it is traditionally assumed. The logocentric belief that only human language enables full-fledged meaning transmission tends to prevent humans from appreciating other forms of communication, such as dolphin echolocation, animal body language, or the dance of bees. The protagonist directs her thoughts precisely toward the latter:

Bees danced their elaborate dances to tell each other where the best nectar was. It was a language that had for so long gone unnoticed, and then been misunderstood by beekeepers, because bees danced in the dark of their hive and on the vertical floor of the honeycomb, hidden away. It was a language of touch and smell, not sound, as they gleaned information by touching the bodies of the dancing bees with their antennae. They deduced the type of flower the dancing bee had located by the scent of it still lingering on its body. Dancing bees offered other foragers tastes of the nectar they’d collected so they would know what they’d find. It was a language so unlike that of humans as to be nearly unrecognizable. Was the language of

visions and dreams—the strange, nearly incomprehensible images and symbols—God’s language? (*RFB*, 39)

Augusta’s fascination with the language of bees, a nonverbal communication system based on sensory perception and physical contact, represents a paradigm shift in understanding. The bees’ dance, performed in darkness on the honeycomb, encodes vital information about food sources, challenging the dominant role of words in conveying knowledge. This alternative mode of communication is particularly significant for Augusta during a difficult time, as her son-in-law struggles with potential damage to the area of the brain responsible for verbal communication. Her sensitivity to nonverbal forms of expression also invites broader reflection on the function of communication in society. Hardt and Negri emphasise that “communication is productive not only of economic values but also of subjectivity, and thus communication is central to biopolitical production” (2004, 283). In contrast, Foucault suggests that history takes “the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.” Communication operates within historically conditioned regimes of knowledge and truth, often serving as tools of power. Dialectics reduces history to a logical game of opposites, while semiotics presents it in an overly peaceful, linguistic form (1980, 115).

In contrast, the bees’ dance offers an accessible, non-verbal outlet for emotions and thoughts that cannot be verbalised, providing Augusta with a means to transcend the confines of language during her personal struggles. Although it is possible to reach a point of understanding between humans and individuals of a nonhuman species, this is more likely in the case of nonhuman mammals. Therefore, the beekeeper is responsible for reading and understanding the signs, such as the dance, expressed by bees. Seemingly, the more attentive and thoughtful the caretakers are, the more likely they are to prevent violent events. This is particularly important in the case of bees, who often die immediately after stinging.

Honeybees tended to sting people in places where they sweated, like under the arms or waistband, where their animal scent was strongest. The bees were grumpy at the end of honey

flow, as there was less nectar to collect and nothing to keep them occupied. They were protective of the ripening honey as it was all they had to see them through winter. The gloves she wore while working with them at such times were peppered with stingers. When she held the gloves up to the light, the stingers that stuck out of the leather looked like thistle spurs. (RFB, 35)

Though earlier passages evoke the possibility of interspecies dialogue, the relationship between humans and bees remains shaped by structures of productivity and control. The utopian image of a human–post-human community does not fully resonate because beekeeping is shaped by economic factors, as the bees’ labour brings profit to humans. Their restlessness at the end of the honey season reflects the capitalist cyclical nature of production and resource exploitation, subordinated to rhythms imposed by social structures. The violence present in this description, namely the stinging of the stingers that penetrate the gloves, becomes both an experience of aggression and an act of resistance.

While nonhumans cannot fully benefit from their relationship with humans, their decentralised, swarm-like community may appear as a method of emancipation from patriarchal structures. However, this potential emancipation remains ambivalent, as beekeeping itself is embedded in capitalist exploitation; the bees’ labour produces honey for human profit, and their autonomy is limited by human control.

The society of other women was a side benefit she had never guessed would come of beekeeping. Or maybe it wasn’t a side benefit at all; maybe it was the point. Maybe it was conversation, more than independence, that had driven Helen to sell honey hand to hand all those years ago, and maybe company, not charity, had been the reason she carried syrup cans of stew to Mrs. Grafton. (RFB, 209)

In this case, the swarm serves as a model for creating a society of resilience. Without supervision and hierarchy, such a community is reminiscent of a feminist model of gift economy, which is based on exchange and mutual recognition. Hardt and Negri’s project suggests the need to move away from capitalist and state structures toward new forms of community that are distributed and networked. The women’s community surrounding the

bees aspires to function outside the logic of productivity and surveillance, drawing on values of care and mutual support. However, it remains entangled with the very economic structures it attempts to resist, as beekeeping continues to rely on the exploitation of nonhuman labour.

Bees, regarded as creatures living under human care, are highly dependent, and their agency is limited. Their function in the narrative structure, which is their direct or indirect impact on plot development, also revolves around human issues. Key processes of change in Augusta's life seem connected with the presence of bees; she suffers years of ostracism within the village society as she does not fully accept the established norms of conduct. The community punishes her for her intercourse, extramarital child, and purely platonic friendship with a reverend. The decision to take up beekeeping also marks a new beginning in her relationship with society. Moving around the village to announce that she can capture swarms hanging nearby, she not only does a marketing job but, first and foremost, begins to reclaim her position as a member of the village community. In the story, Martha used to be one of the most hostile antagonists, whose gossip significantly contributed to Augusta's ostracism. However, the bees trigger a chain reaction of Augusta's reintegration and directly influence her relationships with several villagers. Even as the bees catalyse transformation in Augusta's life, they remain largely symbolic, with their agency flattened into metaphor. The narrative frames them as instruments of human insight rather than autonomous actors.

### **6.3. People and Bees—Community and Survival in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood***

In Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, particularly in the second volume, *The Year of the Flood*, bees are portrayed as a collective entity that appears to resonate with models of the multitude which, as conceptualised by Hardt and Negri, can gain political power and influence. The relationship between the beekeeper and the insects illustrates practices aimed at establishing linguistic and non-linguistic methods of communication, through which the human can become part of a transspecies community. At the same time, the novel sheds light on the dangers posed by the unchecked development of technology, which is not

accompanied by an equivalent advancement in ethical thinking. Hence, in corporations' desire to accumulate profits, "the body is reduced as a 'political' force at the least cost and maximized as a useful force" (Foucault 1995, 221). This is exemplified by the subjugation of swarm intelligence to the logic of corporate technology, leading to its extreme objectification and enslavement. The concept of the multitude, as enacted by the bees and their interaction with humans, offers a potential model of posthumanist democracy founded on empathy and embodied communication; however, this potential remains threatened by mechanisms of biopolitical surveillance.

The novel begins by introducing Toby in the aftermath of the Waterless Flood. The narrative then weaves together the post-disaster present with scenes from the past, gradually revealing the disintegration of her life until she managed to start anew on the rooftop of Edenclyff. This was the location chosen by God's Gardeners to establish their garden, aiming to make them independent of corporate influences. Their pursuit of self-sufficiency was driven by their conviction of an impending catastrophe, so they stockpiled supplies, learned survival skills, and delved into knowledge about medicinal and edible plants. They believed that with their knowledge and skills, they would be able to survive and rebuild the world after the disaster. The religion of God's Gardeners forms a belief system in which a harmonious relationship between humans and nature takes centre stage, and emphasises the necessity of restoring an original state of ecological balance, modelled on the idea of the Garden of Eden. The principles of God's Gardeners are based on a reinterpretation of the biblical creation story, where the traditional figures of Adam and Eve are transformed into archetypal roles within the community. Rather than being governed by authoritarian hierarchies, the organisational structure of God's Gardeners is built on a system of roles assigned according to areas of expertise—both male and female; Adams and Eves, distinguished by specific numbers, represent certain sets of practical skills. The ritual practices of God's Gardeners include numerous celebrations and ceremonies, such as Creation Day or the Festival of Arks, which serve not only to commemorate an original state of harmony but also to mobilise the community for active participation in the regeneration of the Earth. By merging ecological knowledge, mysticism, and ethics of care for the entire ecosystem, this religion offers a critical response to the dominant model of advanced

capitalism, proposing an alternative vision of the world—one where humans are capable of meaningful dialogue with nature.

In the novel, bees appear as beings living together with God's Gardeners, whereas Pilar acted as their interpreter for the rest of the community. Similar to Gail Anderson-Dargatz's novel, care for the bees was entrusted to an experienced woman whose life wisdom was attuned to the subtle interspecies dependencies. This is particularly evident in the fact that she was also responsible for fungi, whose ontological status and ability to create mycorrhizal symbiotic associations make them a prime example of striving toward interspecies community and peaceful coexistence with organisms from another kingdom. This approach, as Braidotti argues, can be called posthumanist because "it rather implies a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental inter-connections" (2013, 190). Pilar not only understood the complexity of such communities but paid attention, for instance, to the collective nature of the hive: "[a]ll the bees of a hive are one bee: that's why they'll die for the hive" (*YF*, 104). By equating their self-sacrificial instinct with a singular, unified entity, she underscores the notion of swarm intelligence and interdependence, which she simultaneously ascribes to the God's Gardeners community. This parallel suggests that just as the survival of the hive depends on the cohesion of its members, so too does the endurance of the Gardeners rely on mutual care and shared purpose. Their rooftop garden, where the beehives are placed, presents this interconnection; it forms a network of reciprocal benefits, as the bees pollinate the plants that serve as the community's primary food source and are essential for survival.

The bees not only function physically within God's Gardeners' ecosystem, but they are also present in the collective imagination of the community, forming part of the shared mythology and symbolism. Traditional sayings rooted in folk superstition include "A bee in the house means a visit from a stranger, and if you kill the bee, the visit will not be a good one," while others reflect actual observation, such as the belief in the healing properties of honey. Among the proverbs mentioned by Pilar, one holds particular significance: "If the beekeeper dies, the bees must be told, or they will swarm and fly away" (*YF*, 104). This belief points to an almost mystical bond between the beekeeper and the bees. The suggestion that

the bees may react unpredictably to the death of their caretaker if they are not properly informed of it highlights the complexity of human–nature relations, which in this community are grounded in mutual respect and a commitment to balance.

Pilar’s experience made her realise that she needed to find someone who could take over her duties in the future. Toby, a woman who had managed to escape from a mobster with the help of the Gardeners, turned out to be the right candidate.

One day, old walnut-faced Pilar — Eve Six — asked Toby if she wanted to learn about bees. Bees and mushrooms — these were Pilar’s specialties. Toby liked Pilar, who seemed kind, and who had a serenity she envied; so she said yes.

“Good,” said Pilar. “You can always tell the bees your troubles.” So Adam One wasn’t the only person to have registered Toby’s worry. Pilar took her to visit the beehives, and introduced her to the bees by name. “They need to know you’re a friend,” she said. “They can smell you. Just move slowly,” she cautioned as the bees coated Toby’s bare arm like golden fur. “They’ll know you next time. Oh — if they do sting, don’t slap them. Just brush the sting off. But they won’t sting unless they’re frightened, because stinging kills them.” (YF, 65).

Pilar’s relationship with the bees is based on a deep understanding of their otherness; by recognising them as living subjects, she acts in a way that, according to her knowledge, allows for a form of interspecies communication. Treated with respect, the bees reciprocate—they remember, recognise, and refrain from attacking unless they feel threatened. Pilar passes on to Toby not only the knowledge of beekeeping but also a fundamental way of being in the world, which is rooted in attentiveness, responsibility, and maintaining the delicate interspecies balance. The relationship with the bees appears to follow Haraway’s concept of becoming-with, in which both parties evolve and change through their interaction, developing closer bonds with one another. Using bees as an example, Pilar teaches that violence against others can become not only an act of aggression but also one of self-destruction as bees die after stinging. This lesson reflects the philosophy of God’s Gardeners, in which humans should not view animals and nature through the lens of exploitation but rather as part of a complex ecosystem where every action has consequences.

Toby's inclusion in the community did not happen suddenly; it was a gradual process that required open communication and the building of trust:

The bees were agitated by her at first, but after a while they accepted her. They allowed her to extract the honey by herself, and she got stung only twice. "The bees made a mistake," Pilar told her. "You must ask permission of their Queen, and explain to them that you mean them no harm." She said you had to speak out loud because the bees couldn't read your mind precisely, any more than a person could. So Toby did speak, though she felt like a fool. What would anyone down there on the sidewalk think if they saw her talking to a swarm of bees? (YF, 105)

The initial anxiety exhibited by the bees in response to Toby's presence, arising from their uncertainty regarding her intentions, ultimately gives way to acceptance. This shift demonstrates that the collective organism does not operate mechanically, but is receptive to subtle sensory cues. Acting as a mentor and guide, Pilar instructs Toby not only in practical tasks but, more importantly, urges her to explain to the bees that she means them no harm. The emphasis on the need to verbalise her intentions, since bees cannot read minds, echoes the idea that communication requires the articulation of thoughts in a form the recipient can understand. The role of communication is also emphasised by Hardt and Negri as "[t]he conditions of the production and reproduction of the social life of the multitude, from its most general and abstract aspects to the most concrete and subtle, are developed within the continuous encounters, communications, and concatenations of bodies" (2004, 348). Atwood's literary portrayal of bees assumes the possibility that the bees can comprehend human language, provided the words are spoken aloud, which to some extent facilitates human initiation of contact. However, Toby is initially reluctant to speak to them aloud because her upbringing in a worldview that enforces a separation between humans and animals makes such behaviour seem absurd. The protagonist must first relearn the art of communication in order to participate meaningfully in any form of community.

"[C]onstant, free, and open interaction among singularities" allows Toby to acknowledge the value of "common norms" that are necessary to preserve the community (Hardt and Negri 2004, 204). Her decision to "cover her head—as was the custom" before

interacting with the bees can be seen as a gesture of respect or simply as a safety measure to avoid stings. Although she becomes a witness to the bees' internal systems of communication, including "wagging" or "semaphoric dances," their precise meanings remain unavailable to her, which marks the limits of human understanding in interspecies encounters (YF, 186). Instead of attempting to dominate or decode these gestures, Toby chooses to approach the bees through humility, attentively following Pilar's instructions. In doing so, she initiates a dialogue on the generally accepted terms, and the bees respond with a gesture of reciprocity:

Several bees flew around her head, golden in their fur. Three lit on her face, tasting her.

"Bees," she said. "I bring news. You must tell your Queen."

Were they listening? Perhaps. They were nibbling gently at the edges of her dried tears. For the salt, a scientist would say. (YF, 186)

The bees are portrayed as beings endowed with sensitivity and intentionality; they exhibit behaviour that is tender and sensory. Their touch on Toby's face, particularly near her tears, signifies the crossing of a boundary between species: the bees become active participants in a mourning ritual, recognising the presence of emotion and responding to it, even if, as the narrative ironically suggests, science might explain it as a reaction to salt. As Lewis argues, "transversal communication is not the revelation of a shared, universal language that exists across the human/animal divide (a 'natural language')" but its core lies in "creative involutions, contaminations and (mis)appropriations of organic and inorganic communicative systems." Communication between species needs to be "expanded (...) beyond anthropocentric concepts of human speech" and this is why Toby attempts to read bees' behaviour, expressed through sensual and bodily signals (2010, 230). The protagonist takes the role of mediator, someone who, though not without doubts, acknowledges the bee collective as an organism capable of receiving information. The uncertainty she experiences, oscillating between rational explanations of the bees' behaviour and the possibility of a deeper connection, illustrates how fundamentally human understanding

relies on language. In the absence of verbal feedback, she must rely on an intuitive interpretation of the bees' sensory signals.

In the ecosystem of the rooftop garden, human and nonhuman actors are bound together not only by physical interdependence but also through shared rituals and gestures that, together with the messages conveyed in human language, serve as tools of interspecies communication. Pilar nurtured daily practices grounded in respect for the bees' subjectivity, attributing human feelings to them and believing that it was necessary to share news with them so that they would not feel abandoned. Rooted in instinctive communication, her rituals, repeated with care and attentiveness, established a code of coexistence that enabled mutual recognition and response. In the face of Pilar's absence and the necessity to take over her role, Toby makes an effort to continue these practices, now with an awareness of the order she had until then only observed from the outside:

Pilar used to bring the news to the bees every morning. Would Toby be expected to do the same? Yes, she would. It was one of the functions of the Eve Six. If you didn't tell the bees everything that was going on, Pilar said, their feelings would be hurt and they'd swarm and go elsewhere. Or they'd die.

The bees on her face hesitated: maybe they could feel her trembling. But they could tell grief from fear, because they didn't sting. After a moment they lifted up and flew away, blending with the circling multitudes above the hives. (*YF*, 293)

According to Hardt and Negri, communication and cooperation shape and develop each other, forming the basis for all forms of social life, also at local levels (2004, xv). Acknowledging the need to communicate with the bees places them in an equal position within the community, ensuring they are included in the circulation of information. This constitutes a ritual practice essential for the survival of the symbiotic relationship established in the rooftop garden, from which both bees and humans derive benefits. The swarm here becomes an affective being, responding to reality, not just instinctively, but also emotionally. In this context, Wilcox comments that "the swarm relies on modes of communication and reproduction outside of evolutionary and heteronormative frames" (2017, 37). The bees on Toby's face are attuned to emotions; they can distinguish fear from

grief. They respond to mourning, thereby participating in the rhythm of human suffering. This collective body, as Wilcox suggests, acts and makes collective decisions. By following the rules, Toby becomes part of this community, and their coexistence is based on the ability to organise and respond to the changing environment.

Toby strives to overcome her limitations in order to remain loyal to another woman, Pilar, highlighting the value of the inheritance of knowledge within a feminist community. Despite finding the situation uncomfortable, she is convinced of the importance of Pilar's teachings and reproduces the transmitted rituals:

But she went to tell the bees. She felt like an idiot doing it, but she'd promised. She remembered that it wasn't enough just to think at them: you had to say the words out loud. Bees were the messengers between this world and the other worlds, Pilar had said. Between the living and the dead. They carried the Word made air. (*YF*, 292)

Thanks to Pilar's teachings, Toby overcomes her limitations and strives to move from being an individual toward becoming part of a community. Her relationship with Pilar allows her to be receptive to the benefits of communal existence—both among the God's Gardeners and the bees. Since Pilar introduced Toby to bees as beings that operate within the system of swarm intelligence, Toby is able to embrace, through imagination and perception, a mode of coexistence that moves beyond individual subjectivity. Their role as intermediaries in the transmission of language suggests that information and communication do not remain confined to the human domain but rather have the potential to be carried by other beings and to function within an interspecies community. At the same time, their function as mediators highlights their agency—the necessity of communication with them highlights their potential for equality in the relationship. The belief that words must be spoken aloud suggests that bees operate within a world of physical signals, where information flows through tangible stimuli, such as sounds, movements, and chemical signals.

Bees are perceived as an interspecies medium that connects humans, animals, the living and the dead. Their role as messengers is rooted both in mythological traditions and in

ecofeminist perspectives on communication, where language, sound and matter intertwine to form an inseparable whole; in her discussion of wolves Diane Antonio similarly observes that “the ecofeminist would properly empower the animal as part of the earth community,” which may be interpreted as a more universal message (Antonio 1995, 222). Although initially sceptical, Toby enters into this relationship, recognising the bees as an essential part of a community in which knowledge and memory circulate across species boundaries:

Another hurt: she was failing Pilar. Would she have time to say goodbye to the bees, and if she didn't, would the hives die? Who would take over as beekeeper? Who had the skills? She covered her head with a scarf and hurried out to the hives.

“Bees,” she said out loud. “I have news.” Did the bees pause in mid-air, were they listening? Several came to investigate her; they lit on her face, exploring her emotions through the chemicals on her skin. She hoped they'd forgiven her for tipping their hives. “You must tell your Queen I've had to leave,” she said.

“Nothing to do with you, you've performed your duties well. My enemy is forcing me to go. I'm sorry. I hope that when we meet again it will be under happier circumstances.” She always found herself using a formal style with the bees.

The bees buzzed and fizzed; they appeared to be discussing her. She wished she could take them with her like a large, golden, furry collective pet. “I'll miss you, bees,” she said. As if in answer, one of them started crawling up her nostril. She breathed it sharply out. Maybe we wear hats for these interviews, she thought, so they won't go into our ears. (YF, 311)

The farewell to the bees carries a deeply emotional dimension, as Toby will personally experience their absence. She appears to be convinced that the bees are discussing her situation since their reaction is not chaotic but coordinated. Even in descriptions of the bees' behaviour, which employ the imagery of them as a single being, it is evident that they are portrayed as a collective organism operating according to the principles of swarm intelligence. This suggests that the protagonist interprets their existence as collective. The formal, almost ritualistic speech shows that the bees are treated as a community of subjects capable of communication. As part of an interspecies multitude, Toby does not assume a position of power; she does not issue commands but explains her situation. Emphasising

interdependence gives rise to an ethic of care, one that is embodied in sensory and physical interactions and that crosses the boundaries of the human body. The bees do not conform to human expectations; they possess their own agency and act according to their own mode of being in the world.

Although God's Gardeners preach abstinence from meat and call for respect for all life, while their public sermons also seem to threaten the interests of entities such as the SecretBurgers business, it is the hatred directed at Toby that ultimately serves as a pretext to attack the community. Before joining the Gardeners, she had fled the company to escape persecution by Blanco, who had chosen her as his sexual victim. The assault harms the wellbeing of the entire community, including the people and the bees they live with, as well as the plants they cultivate. This time, however, Toby does not feel powerless:

She pushed the hives over—three of them. She was veiled, Blanco was not. The bees poured out, whining with anger, and went for him like arrows. He fled howling down the fire-escape stairs, flailing and slapping, trailing a plume of bees. (YF, 344)

The passage presents a scene in which Toby pushes over the beehives, prompting the bees to swarm out and attack the assailant, a man. Through this act, the woman steps out of the traditional role of passive victim; her courage to defend herself stems from her relationship with the bees and her understanding of how they function. The human-bee multitude appears to hold revolutionary potential, where individual initiative and the collective dynamics of nature converge toward a shared goal. Although on the surface Toby seems to be using the bees to protect herself, the plot of the novel clearly shows that the attacker and his accomplices would have been capable of destroying the garden and the hives simply to demonstrate their power. The bees thus become defenders of the collective in a form of an organised force of resistance, deployed for the purpose of protection. In fact, “[a]ccording to Pilar, the bees all over the world had been in trouble for decades. It was the pesticides, or the hot weather, or a disease, or maybe all of these — nobody knew exactly.” Pilar expressed her concern about the state of the natural environment, particularly the situation of the bees, while the causes she pointed to reflect real threats to bee populations,

threats widely discussed in both public and scientific debates, albeit with little success in identifying a clear source. Therefore, bees put in extra effort, for instance, to cool the hive, as “[f]rom inside the hives came the humming of wings as they fanned the air, cooling it, ventilating the cells and passageways” (YF, 186). In this context, bees can represent the fragility of the complex relationship between humans and the environment, a relationship further destabilised by the increasing influence of corporate actions. Corporations seem less interested in finding the root causes of problems with sustaining bee populations, which remain essential, and more focused on pursuing distorted solutions:

But a word of caution: we honour the Pollinating Insects, and in especial the Bees, but we are now informed that, in addition to the virus-resistant strain introduced after the recent honeybee die-off, the Corps have now developed a hybrid bee. It is not a genetic splice, my Friends. No: it is a greater abomination! Bees are seized while still in larval form, and micro-mechanical systems are inserted into them. Tissue grows around the insert, and when the full adult or “imago” emerges, it is a bee cyborg spy controllable by a CorpSeCorps operator, equipped to transmit, and thus to betray. (YF, 263)

Similarly to other transgenic creatures, a situation discussed more extensively in Chapter 4, biopower operates at the most basic level, intervening in the lives of organisms before they reach their full natural potential. Bees, which have symbolised ecosystem balance for centuries, are in this case colonised and objectified through corporate intervention. Even at the larval stage, before reaching maturity, they are taken over by micro-mechanical systems implanted into their bodies. Once the natural tissue accepts the implantation, the fully mature individual (imago) becomes a cyborg, functioning under the control of a CorpSeCorps operator. In this way, biopower reveals itself as a process in which technology not only supports life but also imposes its conditions of existence, subjugating biological organisms. The techno-bee stands as a postnatural figure, embodying the paradox of being alive while at the same time deprived of life in the traditional sense:

The ethical problems raised are troubling: Should we have recourse to insecticides? Is such a mechanized slave bee alive? If so, is it a true Creature of God or something else entirely? We must ponder the deeper implications, my Friends, and pray for guidance. (*YF*, 264)

Adam One's homilies become a critical commentary on the way humans interfere with nature. When bees perish as a result of environmental devastation, their place is taken by technological creations constructed by corporations. This means that fundamental life processes, including plant reproduction, fruiting, growth and renewal cycles, become dependent on human technology and are turned into instruments of control. In the full texts of the sermon, the symbolism of fruit and the bee is juxtaposed: fruit represents the cycle of life and renewal, while the bee, enabling pollination, is the guardian of this process. Once transformed into surveillance tools and obedient instruments of corporate power, the continuity of symbiotic life is threatened at its very source. Thus, the problem of the cyborg bee is not only a matter of biology but primarily a question of the limits of human intervention in natural structures and its long-term consequences. In this sense, human power becomes strong enough to enter the bee collective, destabilising it at its foundation. Thus, the swarm becomes a tool in conflict and a means of influence, in line with Wilcox's concerns.

#### **6.4. Conclusions**

Chapter 6 focuses on examining the relationship between literary portrayals of bees in the novels of Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Margaret Atwood and the concept of the multitude developed by Hardt and Negri, as well as the model of swarm intelligence. The literary analysis also draws on biological observations that make it possible to challenge anthropocentrism, since these depictions reveal natural mechanisms found in insect colonies, where systems of power are dispersed and therefore more democratic. In Hardt and Negri's view, the multitude emerges as the foundation of a new, open form of democracy with a special emphasis on communication and cooperation. However, animals

should not be treated only as metaphors because, as Tyson E. Lewis argues, doing so diminishes the political and ethical force of these concepts.

Through its third-person narration and the protagonist's reflections, *A Recipe for Bees* presents the hive community as a collective organism in which there is no place for individual distinction. The swarm can be interpreted as a posthumanist community in which decentralised power operates through nonverbal and embodied communication and negotiated boundaries. It is highlighted that nonverbal forms of information exchange, such as dances, the language of scent and touch, can become an alternative to logocentric models of interaction. The attentive caretaker discerns in signals from the hive the bees' emotional states.

In the novel, bees function both as a real community with a division of roles and customs and as a metaphor for political and social mechanisms, compared to a miniature state. Although Augusta's relationship with the bees includes moments of care and sensitivity toward the swarm, and the bees become catalysts for social change in her life (through her reintegration into the local community), these moments seem driven by an underlying need for exploitation. Augusta's story makes it clear that the economic aspect is important to her. The bee colony is therefore not a flawless model. First, there is an emphasis on productivity, for instance, in comparisons to immigrants or in comments on the queen's mating rituals. On the one hand, these serve to comment on the heroine's condition, such as the marginalisation of older women; on the other hand, they highlight the instrumentalisation of bodies in production and reproduction in accordance with the principles of biopolitics. Second, Augusta's ability to manipulate the colony's structure illustrates that self-organising systems are not immune to outside interference.

Unlike Anderson-Dargatz's novel, Atwood places bees in a world on the brink of apocalypse. The community of God's Gardeners, especially Pilar and her apprentice Toby, nurture an ethic of care and rituals of communication with the bees, such as passing messages to them. The care of the hives is entrusted to Pilar, whose practices, similar to those in Anderson-Dargatz's novel, are based on respect, empathy, and rituals of mutual recognition. The bees here are part of a symbiotic network because they feed by pollinating the plants grown in the community's garden and are also objects of protection in the face of

environmental threats. They also serve a symbolic function by co-creating the Gardeners' cultural heritage. Pilar introduces Toby to beekeeping, teaching her that bees need communication: asking for their consent, and expressing intentions. Attending to bees' needs is in accordance with Haraway's concept of "becoming-with." In human-bee relationships, reciprocity is evident as the insects respond to emotions and circumstances. The culmination of this relationship is the repelling of an attack on the garden, which on one hand might suggest that the bees want to protect the place, but in fact, Toby treats the bees as a weapon. Her relationship with the bees makes her feel not defenseless in the face of a male attack, but at the same time she makes instrumental use of the hives.

Thus, in *The Year of the Flood* as well, collectivity is not immune to manipulation by external forces. Moreover, the narrative reveals the dark side of technological intervention in the lives of bees: corporations transform them into bee-cyborgs by implanting micro-mechanical systems during the larval stage. These spy bees become tools of surveillance, exemplifying the biopolitical colonisation of life, which strips organisms of autonomy and reduces them to mechanisms controlled by algorithms. In this way, Atwood highlights the vulnerability of the posthumanist community to the influences of advanced capitalism.

In both novels, the relationship with bees demands attentiveness and a willingness to relinquish domination. The bees demonstrate a readiness to cooperate, which Anderson-Dargatz conveys subtly, while Atwood portrays more explicitly, showing bees' specific expectations. The quality of this relationship hinges on daily rituals and mutual recognition, particularly in terms of acknowledging and respecting otherness. Bee collectivism exerts an empowering influence on both human protagonists, who draw strength from this relationship to restructure their lives. However, a marked asymmetry persists between humans and bees, leading to the economic instrumentalisation of their labour and the threat of technological appropriation. Consequently, bees serve as a site for reflecting on post-anthropocentric, feminist models of collective life. They should also be seen as a cautionary example of how the logic of care can be subordinated to the logic of power.

## Final Conclusions

By posing his eponymous question *Why Look at Animals?*, John Berger, in fact, reflects on the consequences of the progressive separation between humans and animals. In his essay, he traces the path from animals' ubiquity, as he claims that "it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal," to the gradual disguising of their presence by capitalist structures (Berger 1980, 5). My aim in this dissertation has been to encourage reflection on how to read animals so that they become visible through their subjectivity, within the contexts and connections that authors have created for them in literary texts, and to recognise their presence even where it is not immediately apparent. In order for the analysis of literary representations of animals in Canadian literature not to be limited to evaluating their narrative utility, I aimed to adopt as broad a cognitive perspective as possible, also incorporating arguments from disciplines traditionally belonging to the natural science. It seems that the interdisciplinarity of animal studies and their posthumanist character allows for such a departure—especially since, as Baratay encourages, "[i]t is necessary to bridge the gap between the humanities and the natural sciences"<sup>61</sup> needs to be bridged (Baratay 2012, 50). Moreover, from the postmodernist standpoint of Stanley Fish and his reader-response theory, the text emerges through interpretation. The critique of the anthropocentric paradigm becomes a starting point here to see animals not only in terms of their value from a human perspective, whether that value is conveyed through content or narrative function, but also to recognise the full potential of nonhuman life *per se*. The blurring of division between a human and animal occurs when an even more inclusive viewpoint is adopted—namely, the search for interspecies community. Only this perspective allows the full spectrum of interspecies interactions to be seen, in line with the idea of Haraway's becoming-with, and this may constitute a value in mutual interaction, which requires the engagement of both parties, human and nonhuman.

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<sup>61</sup> "Il faut combler le fossé creusé entre les sciences de l'homme et celles de la nature." Translated by M.J.

In the novels selected for analysis, I seek to identify instances of the blurring of such boundaries on various levels, in order to present, as comprehensively as possible, the nonhuman characters they feature and the contexts that shape their relationships with humans, as well as their presence in often heavily human-modified environments. Most frequently, nonhuman protagonists are depicted as victims of exploitation for human purposes — such as laboratory mice in *Come, Thou Tortoise*, genetically modified pigeons and rakunks in *Oryx and Crake*; or the group of chimpanzees from the Girdish Institute in *A Beautiful Truth*. To some extent, this group may also include bees, whose presence near humans is primarily justified by human needs; however, since both *A Recipe for Bees* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy place significant emphasis on understanding the bees' needs and caring for them, these relationships take on a more positive character than laboratory exploitation. Animals also become objects of care and members of societies, such as Winnifred, the tortoise (*Come, Thou Tortoise*), and, initially, Looee, the chimpanzee (*A Beautiful Truth*), in a domestic context, as well as raccoons, coyotes, and the red-tailed hawk in the human-modified environments depicted in *Fauna*, and the wolf and mink in *The Animals*. However, only the settings portrayed in *Fauna* has the potential to move towards an interspecies community that respects the rights and needs of all species, in accordance with the principles of Zoopolis. The most crucial requirement is a change in human attitudes, and for this transformation, humans may find inspiration in the collective intelligence and cooperation of bees. The collective portrayal of nonhuman protagonists has an ambivalent character: in the case of bees, it highlights the uniqueness of the species, whereas in the case of laboratory animals, it deprives them of subjectivity by erasing the distinctions between individuals.

The relatively short history of English-language literature in the territory of present-day Canada limits the scope of the research material, yet also makes it possible to discern certain tendencies in the portrayal of animals. Initially, French settlement played the dominant role, with the first permanent French settlements established in the seventeenth century. Only French-speaking Catholic settlers could receive land in New France, and it was not until after the Seven Years' War, under the Treaty of Paris in 1763, that these territories

came under British control<sup>62</sup>. An important wave of English-speaking settlers consisted of Loyalists who arrived after the American War of Independence, the first political refugees, settling in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the territory of present-day Ontario. They became the vanguard of the development of an English-speaking society loyal to Great Britain. In the nineteenth century, the British authorities continued an active policy of colonisation, bringing in settlers from the British Isles and, to a lesser extent, from countries with a similar cultural profile<sup>63</sup>.

The North American forests differ significantly from the Biblical Eden, which is why European settlers' attempts to "replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28, King James Version) required strength and sacrifice. These struggles against the forces of nature and their own human frailties emerged as central themes in their writing, frequently taking on an autobiographical dimension. Initially, descriptions of nature served as settings for human actions, while animals were portrayed through a pragmatic framework, serving, for instance, as game or as symbolic embodiments of virtues and appeals to divine wisdom. This symbolic function was fulfilled by the entire natural world, both animate and inanimate, and not only by animals.

In nineteenth-century sporting and hunting literary texts, the narrative perspective centred on the challenges and achievements of human hunters, emphasising the dominance and utility of animals for humans. However, nature could serve not only as a source of resources, such as food and building materials, or as a means to satisfy masculine dominance, but also as a continual source of inspiration. It was curiosity, fulfilled through conscious observation of the world, that contributed to the emergence of the Canadian animal stories genre: tales in which animals become significant characters, and their feelings and fates gain narrative weight. Authors whose writing focused on animals and their experiences, such as Ernst Thompson Seton and Charles George Douglas Roberts, developed

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<sup>62</sup> As a result of the Quebec Act of 1774, which guaranteed the French community rights to their language, religion, and civil law, the French maintained a strong distinctiveness in Canada.

<sup>63</sup> Until the mid-twentieth century, immigration policies favoured white European settlers, particularly those from the British Isles, contrasting with today's stereotype of Canada as an open and ethnically diverse country. It was only after the Second World War that these criteria changed, shifting away from ethnic preferences toward considerations of age, qualifications, and family circumstances.

their interest in nature within professional and scientific contexts. Although they, like sportsmen, undertook expeditions into uninhabited regions of North America, their aim was to document the nonhuman world. Undoubtedly, however, the discursive and epistemological appropriation of the world, which I discuss in the second chapter, constitutes a form of domination. In the case of the aforementioned authors, as well as other writers whose works can be classified as Wild Animal Stories, the direct incorporation of real-world knowledge into their writing may result in increased sensitivity to the plight of nonhumans. Conscious observation could also be domesticated, as Margaret Marshall Saunders demonstrated in 1893 by casting a familiar dog as the narrator. In *Beautiful Joe*, the imposition of strong anthropomorphism on the canine narrator aims both to make the audience aware of the extent of physical and psychological suffering and to sensitise them to the richness of the intellectual world that can be intuitively discerned from a dog's behaviour by a careful observer. At the same time, the appropriation of the nonhuman perspective occurs in two ways. Firstly, due to the impossibility of fully accessing nonhuman minds; without reference to neurocognitive or ethological research, knowledge gained through observation, even if conscious and empathetic, cannot transcend human cognition. The inadequacy and impossibility of deeper understanding of the nonhuman mind also affect the construction of the nonhuman narrator, whose portrayal, while enabling sympathy, largely bears the marks imposed by the author. For example, in Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe*, the narrator uncritically reports overheard human dialogues, whereas in Seton's "BINGO, The Story of My Dog," onomatopoeic dog interjections appear. It is worth noting, however, that Bingo is not the narrator; his utterances are translated by a human storyteller, and thus their primary audience is the human narrator-character, who then conveys them to the reader.

The narrative strategies employed in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* recall the nonhuman voices found in the works of Saunders and Seton. Winnifred, an intelligent and witty tortoise, becomes a speaking character; however, she addresses only the reader—her voice remains unheard within the novel's diegesis. She comments on herself and on events, thereby supplementing the narrative thread, yet her utterances have no effect on her subjectivity, agency, or the course of events. These are determined entirely by Audrey's

perception of the tortoise's presence and needs. Winnifred's narrative appeals to the reader primarily for its entertainment value, as she describes her journey, reacts to her surroundings, and displays an ironic sense of humour—all of which foster sympathy for her character. At the same time, the narrative incorporates direct references to real issues in tortoise welfare, such as challenges posed by fluctuating temperatures or limited food availability. Her first-person narration is not distinguished by formal experimentation, in contrast to the third-person account of the chimpanzee troop in *A Beautiful Truth*, which reflects both the collective life of chimpanzees in natural environments and the tendency to perceive laboratory animals in such terms. Here, neologisms are used to draw the reader's attention to differences between chimpanzee and human modes of reasoning. Unlike Saunders and Seton, McAdam draws on decades of (often inhumane) chimpanzee research to signal the inadequacy of human language in conveying chimpanzee experience.

Returning once again to the history of English-language literature from the territories of present-day Canada, it is worth noting the work and activism of Grey Owl, especially in the context of drastic ecological changes brought about by colonisation. Many species were driven to extinction or displaced from their former habitats, which makes Grey Owl's efforts almost heroic. His memoir *Pilgrims of the Wild* stands as a clear counterpoint to hunting narratives, with animals and the commitment to their protection as its central focus. A thematic continuation of this concern, though realised through entirely different formal means, can be found in Alissa York's *Fauna*. In this novel, a group of people, such as shelter workers and amateur ecologists establish an unofficial sanctuary for injured wild animals on the outskirts of Toronto. As in Grey Owl's case, this is a grassroots initiative, marked by particular attentiveness to the needs of nonhumans. The lives of nonhuman characters (raccoons, skunks, and coyotes) alternate with human storylines, signalling the interpenetration of these worlds. York's narrative also draws on contemporary realities, in which cities built on land taken from nature provide no conditions for the return of its former inhabitants. When this does occur, however, land animals become vulnerable to traffic accidents, bird migrations encounter architectural barriers, and people perceive animals as pests that must be eradicated. There is a somewhat analogous relationship between the persecution of the coyote in *Fauna* and the relationship between Polish

residents and wild boars appearing in urbanised areas. The aversion to this species may be rooted in culturally charged pejorative associations (literature has acted oppositely here, with Jan Brzechwa's poem casting the wild boar as a city antagonist<sup>64</sup>). The shooting of wild boars near buildings, even schools, is often justified by residents' concerns for safety<sup>65</sup>. I do not intend to draw a symbolic comparison between the wild boar's significance for Poland or Europe and that of the coyote in North America, but the mechanism, whether systemic or grassroots, of attempting to isolate oneself from wild species in the city and its surroundings is evident. In this context, the character of Darius seems to represent one of the contemporary anthropocentric attitudes toward animals.

And certainly, Cary Fagan will not provide a solution to the problem, though it would be a misunderstanding to assume that this was ever his intention. His hyperbolic vision of the forced introduction of animals into cities reminds us of the detachment of the legislative system from reality. In Fagan's *The Animals*, wildness exists precisely where humans expect relationships through domestication and taming. The human characters are unable to form relationships with wild animals on the animals' own terms because the animals portrayed in the novel do not require such relationships. Their real needs, hinted at through realistic representations, remain invisible. The animal characters do not receive a narrative voice, yet their presence (as actors involved in the action) adds dramatic tension to the plot; their reactions (for example, attacks by trapped mink) escalate conflicts and lead to disaster. Surprisingly, however, no one attempts to enforce human laws on the animals when their (fully justified, yet still) aggression causes injury to the human characters. The absence of physical violence against the animals—aside from the obvious confinement in human homes—somewhat paradoxically places the (misunderstood) interests of the animals at the centre of the discussion.

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<sup>64</sup> A boar is wild, a boar is nasty,/His tusks are sharp but a bit rusty/Whenever you hear: "beware of the hog"/You better just run off! translated by Katarzyna Ciechanowicz-Gajewska (Ciechanowicz-Gajewska [https://www.profesor.pl/mat/n10/n10\\_k\\_ciechowicz\\_040512\\_1.php](https://www.profesor.pl/mat/n10/n10_k_ciechowicz_040512_1.php))

<sup>65</sup> The scale of media reports on this subject is considerable, ranging from seemingly justified interventions aimed at neutralising an aggressive individual (who, as it later turned out, had previously been hit by a car) (Konopka 2021), through mysterious, unexplained incidents, such as the shooting of a wild boar in a residential area in Przemyśl by an unknown perpetrator (Godos 2022), to an article concerning the shooting of wild boars on the grounds of a primary school, which openly condemns such radical measures (Dobiegała 2023).

Could multicultural Canada become a multispecies community that respects the rights and needs of nonhuman persons as well? To some extent, this question can be addressed by a successor to the naturalist tradition of Seton and Grey Owl, Alissa York, who in her novel constructs representations of animals<sup>66</sup> based on biological knowledge, hereby conferring a degree of realism. The concept of Zoopolis advocates granting animals citizenship rights on different levels: “citizens” (domestic animals), “denizens” (peri-domestic, liminal animals), and “sovereigns” (wild animals), depending on their degree of connection with humans. The human characters depicted in York’s *Fauna* seem aware of these distinctions and surround the animals in need, often adversely affected by human activity, with care, yet do not impose their presence on them. In *Fauna* we observe mutual respect and care. Lily and Guy, by caring for injured birds and predators, demonstrate a model of relationship where the animal’s welfare as an autonomous subject is paramount. Examples of human intervention, however, end in failure. The utopian Wild Home Project in *The Animals* triggers animal resistance, aggressive reactions from the devoted “wild” elements such as the fight involving the muskrat or the drama of the wolf-dog, vividly illustrating that imposing human schemes and spaces on animals leads to disaster. Both Alissa York’s *Fauna* and Cary Fagan’s *The Animals* explore the challenges of animal life in an urbanised world, although the latter does so in an exaggerated manner. Both novels reveal tensions between empathy and attempts to tame nature, featuring animals that to varying degrees seek to engage in relationships with humans.

Caregivers attuning to the nonverbal signals communicated by the bees appear as a first, yet necessary, step in balanced interspecies relationships. Their collectivity, treated as a

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<sup>66</sup> The total number of animal species and breeds appearing in the novel confirms the author’s particular interest in nonhuman world. Although only a fraction of them are active actors in the story, the list below is nevertheless impressive.

Mammals: mouse, rat, Virginia opossum, muskrat, porcupines, cottontails, raccoons, skunk, fox, coyote, wolf, vole, squirrel, kitten, cat, dog, Staffordshire terrier, Australian shepherd, Doberman, golden retriever, husky, dachshund, Shih Tzu, cocker spaniel, otter, beaver, deer, horse, ponies, donkey, cow, calf, goat, sheep, hare, rabbit, weasel, lynx, bear, moose, lion, giraffes, elephants, panther, wild pigs, guinea-pig.

Birds: osprey, chimney swift, ruffed grouse, turkey vulture, gull, crow, heron, cormorant, ovenbird, redwings, grackles, yellow-shafted flicker, pileated woodpecker, red-tail, red siskin, hyacinth macaws, California condor.

Reptiles and amphibians: Jamaican yellow boa, python, snake.

Fish and aquatic: crayfish, eels, fish, sucker-fish.

Invertebrates: Goliath bird-eating tarantulas, spider, ant, moth, midge, dragonfly, tick, snail.

species-specific trait, becomes evident in the works of Anderson-Dargatz and Atwood. Both authors also juxtapose bees with female characters, showing how attentiveness and mutual influence, grounded in continuous learning about one another, can create interspecies understanding. At the same time, bee communities are contrasted with human institutions, where swarms become a metaphor for community and a counterpoint to patriarchal structures. Human communities, in this view, could be modelled on self-regulating mechanisms observed in swarms: nonverbal communication and collective attunement, in which local signalling and distributed decision-making replace a uniform, centralised authority. While the hive can serve as a metaphor, it is also a tangible model of mutual dependencies with practical implications that capitalism often ignores or commodifies. Nonhuman beings and elements of the environment influence the life of the community and should be integrated into everyday practices of cohabitation so that they co-create each other in accordance with the ethics of “becoming-with.” A hive community, deeply embedded in the ecosystem and aware of this relationship, can offer a concrete response to the Zoopolis proposals, combining decentralised decision-making with a commitment to multispecies coexistence.

Language can obscure traces of violence or even support its institutionalisation and systematisation, as especially shown in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *A Beautiful Truth*. In Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, scientific projects lead to full, controlled manipulation of species. The example of pigeons illustrates the increasing colonisation of animal bodies in the name of progress. The author points out how scientific rhetoric neutralises suffering: the crime committed against pigeons is justified by objective and soothing language, which presents living beings as data sources. At the same time, legitimising violence in laboratories, as depicted in *A Beautiful Truth* and *Come, Thou Tortoise*, reveals a potential path toward systemic callousness, as seen in the *MaddAddam* trilogy.

The way in which the language of the novel, much like the mechanisms of systemic oppression, conceals the presence of animals can be observed in the description of laboratory settings and works in *Come, Thou Tortoise*, *A Beautiful Truth*, and the *MaddAddam* trilogy; in such cases, recovering animality requires deconstructing these discursive mechanisms. At the same time, appropriately employed linguistic devices

emphasise nonhuman presence: in the collective third-person narration of the chimpanzees in the field station at the Girdish Institute in *A Beautiful Truth*, and in Audrey's care of Winnifred in *Come, Thou Tortoise*. In both novels, anthropomorphism plays an ambivalent role: on the one hand, as Barcz observes, attributing human traits to animals, such as consciousness, emotions, or a sense of humour—as in the case of Winnifred—brings them closer to the reader, builds empathy, and makes them mediators between humans and the natural world. On the other hand, as Braidotti warns, the excessive projection of human categories risks erasing their distinctiveness and prevents the faithful portrayal of the specificity of animal consciousness. A similar process occurs with Looee, although the third-person narrator refrains from anthropomorphising while presenting his image to the reader; instead, the reader observes anthropomorphisation as a psychological phenomenon that takes place within the story and leads to the blurring of the chimpanzee's identity. The mediating effect is achieved through the choice of focalisation: Jimmy's perspective in *Oryx and Crake* and Looee's experiences in *A Beautiful Truth* reveal different ways of framing suffering and subjectivity. Looee conveys pain directly and movingly, whereas Jimmy's observations often require the reader to discern what is obscured by the language of the system. It is also worth noting that the symbolic representation of animals does not always entail the appropriation of their subjectivity. References to the symbolic significance of bee collectivity in both *The Year of the Flood* and *A Recipe for Bees* highlight their potential as communities with a decentralised system of governance.

Navigating between the categories of real, imagined, based in natural sciences, anthropomorphised, and ethical is difficult, and I myself often tend to question the truthfulness of what is imagined in favour of what has been examined through instruments and observation. In this dissertation, I have tried to clearly emphasize how ambiguous these categories are and that a complete picture requires constant negotiation, especially since even dogmas in the exact sciences are not fixed. What is important is that systems of hiding presence and the ambiguity surrounding the appearance of animals in literature require reaching for less intuitive tools so that these representations have a chance to resonate. The aim of my dissertation was to present the most diverse possible representations of animals, narrowing the research material to English-language Canadian literature published since the

closing years of the 1990s. This study is far from exhaustive, as it omits the vast heritage of First Nations literature. However, I wanted to focus on a logical sequence, beginning with the settlement of European colonists in the territories of present-day Canada, whose literary history has been so strongly influenced by animals that a separate genre was distinguished.

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## Summary

### Representation of Animals in Contemporary Canadian Fiction in English

Key words: Contemporary Canadian literature, Animal studies, posthumanism, animals in literature

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the representations of nonhuman characters in selected contemporary Canadian novels in English published since the closing years of the 1990s from the perspective of animal studies. The dissertation endeavours to present diverse methods of portraying animals in literary texts, paying special attention to nonhuman particularity that can serve as a tool to blur traditionally enforced human-nonhuman borders. The analysis covers physical and discursive levels, including plot, characters, narrators and narration, as well as the stylistic devices employed to recreate nonhuman actors and their language. Furthermore, juxtaposing scientific facts with the literary representations, frequently burdened by anthropomorphisation and symbolism, challenges cultural stereotypes about nonhumans.

The aim shall be achieved through the use of the posthumanist perspective that redefines the position human beings hold in philosophical discourse. On account of that, animal studies emphasise the significance of interspecies dependencies, nonhumans' subjectivity and agency, as well as their participation in historical and cultural events. The research methodology elaborated in Chapter 1 draws on various theories, including feminist literary studies, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, as well as interdisciplinary studies on animal language, cognitive abilities, emotions, and pain perception. Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents a historical context for the development of nonhuman presence in literature from the territory of present-day Canada.

The analytical part is comprised of four chapters that examine following novels: Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* (2010), Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* (2013), Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake* [2003], *The Year of the Flood* [2009]

*MaddAddam* [2013]), Alissa York's *Fauna* (2010), and Cary Fagan's *The Animals* (2022), and Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* (1998). Of these novels, only the volumes of the *MaddAddam* trilogy have already been translated into Polish. The texts are grouped into thematic chapters, starting with nonhuman narration and language in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise* and Colin McAdam's *A Beautiful Truth* (Chapter 3). The analysis shows that Grant's story interweaves human and nonhuman first-person narrative voices, revealing the moral responsibility of caregiving. In contrast, the collective chimpanzee's voice emphasises group bonds and instincts that resist human interpretation. Both novels, together with Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, in particular its first volume, *Oryx and Crake*, are subsequently analysed in the next chapter (Chapter 4) in terms of the exploitation of animals for medical purposes as well as crossing the genetic border between humans and animals. In scientific or experimental contexts, the animals are routinely portrayed as victims of systemic violence, especially when their individuality is effaced by technoscientific discourse. Using Alissa York's *Fauna* and Cary Fagan's *The Animals*, I investigate the problem of human-nonhuman societies, which is addressed in Chapter 5. Asserting that language possesses the power of enforcing species hierarchies, my analysis suggests that a sustainable interspecies community requires recognition of the needs of all participants. Employing Donaldson and Kymlicka's categories of citizenship helps to address nonhuman requirements regarding the benefits they derive from contact with humans. In Chapter 6, I juxtapose the second volume of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, and Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* to elaborate on bees as collectiveness and their relationship with the caretakers. The hives operate as a model of a decentralised community, in which communicative behaviours, expressed through complex somatic and sensual patterns, undermine the priority of human language in shaping a democratic community. The analysis highlights the inherently collective nature of bees, redirecting attention to the colony as a living whole.

In my conclusions, I assert that the dissertation fulfils its stated aims by demonstrating that contemporary Canadian novels in English employ a wide range of strategies to represent nonhuman beings that are able to destabilise the rigidity of human-animal boundaries. I argue that animal studies enable us to approach animals not only as tropes and symbols (though such readings are not erased) but as characters with specificity that

challenge anthropocentric norms. The analysis highlights recurring contexts in which animals are present: laboratories and biotechnological sites, domestic settings, and urban environments. I argue that nonhuman subjectivity can be achieved through narrative strategies, either by witty first-person narration or the collective chimpanzee voice, marked by linguistic distortion. Anthropomorphism, as I demonstrate, operates ambivalently: it can foster empathy and narrative proximity, but also risks effacing nonhuman particularity. By bringing this ambivalence into focus, the dissertation proves that a representation is a site of negotiation with context. Simultaneously, the amplification of nonhuman voices and anthropomorphisation shape a sensitivity to the needs of nonhuman beings. Across these modes, the tension between symbolic figures and embodied subjects is still present.

# **Reprezentacje zwierząt we współczesnych anglojęzycznych powieściach kanadyjskich**

## **Streszczenie**

Słowa kluczowe: współczesna literatura kanadyjska, studia nad zwierzętami, posthumanizm, zwierzęta w literaturze

Celem niniejszej rozprawy jest zbadanie reprezentacji pozaludzkich bohaterów w wybranych współczesnych (publikowanych od przełomu XXI wieku) anglojęzycznych powieściach kanadyjskich, z perspektywy studiów nad zwierzętami (animal studies). Rozprawa podejmuje próbę ukazania różnorodnych sposobów przedstawiania zwierząt w tekstach literackich, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem pozaludzkiej wyjątkowości, która może stanowić narzędzie do zacierania tradycyjnie narzucanych granic między tym co ludzkie a światem pozaludzkim. Analiza obejmuje poziomy fizyczne i dyskursywne, takie jak fabuła, postacie, narratorzy i narracja, a także środki stylistyczne używane do odtworzenia pozaludzkich postaci i ich języka. Odwołuje się także do interdyscyplinarnych badań nad językiem zwierząt, zdolnościami poznawczymi, emocjami i percepcją bólu. Zestawienie faktów naukowych z literackimi reprezentacjami, często obciążonymi antropomorfizacją i zakorzenioną symboliką, stanowi wyzwanie, podjęcie którego może doprowadzić do obalenia kulturowych stereotypów dotyczących istot pozaludzkich.

Cel ten zostanie osiągnięty poprzez zastosowanie perspektywy posthumanistycznej, która redefiniuje pozycję człowieka w dyskursie filozoficznym. W związku z tym studia nad zwierzętami podkreślają znaczenie zależności międzygatunkowych, podmiotowości i sprawczości istot pozaludzkich, a także ich udziału w wydarzeniach historycznych i kulturowych. Metodologia badawcza omówiona w Rozdziale 1 czerpie z takich teorii, jak krytyka postkolonialna i feministyczna, ekokrytyka oraz studia nad traumą. Studia nad zwierzętami zostają zdefiniowane jako obszar interdyscyplinarny, który – podobnie jak krytyka feministyczna i postkolonialna – podważa antropocentryzm i destabilizuje

hierarchiczne kategorie. W omówieniu zauważam, że dyskurs kolonialny często klasyfikował i wykorzystywał zarówno podporządkowaną ludność, jak i istoty niebędące ludźmi, tworząc w ten sposób powiązanie między krytyką postkolonialną a opresją zwierząt. W podobny sposób myśl feministyczna i ekofeministyczna wskazuje na strukturalne paralelizmy między patriachatem a hierarchią gatunków: systemy patriarchalne legitymizują dominację mężczyzn nad kobietami oraz ludzi nad zwierzętami. Rozdział omawia również perspektywy ekokrytyczne, podkreślając rolę literatury środowiskowej w rozpoznawaniu wyjątkowości istot pozaludzkich, a także ukazuje analogie do studiów nad traumą, sugerując, że nieme cierpienie zwierząt można analizować za pomocą ich aparatu pojęciowego. Centralne miejsce w tym rozdziale zajmuje posthumanizm, który kwestionuje możliwość pełnego poznania człowieka, jak i uznania go za istotę wzorcową dla innych manifestacji świadomości (Buchanan 2018, 386). Rozdział kończy się refleksją na temat etyki filozoficznej i ograniczeń języka oraz stwierdzeniem, że narracja i antropomorficzna metaforyzacja, pomimo swoich ograniczeń, mogą pozostać nieodzownymi narzędziami dla kształtowania reprezentacji istot pozaludzkich.

Rozdział 2 omawia historyczne i kulturowe tło reprezentacji zwierząt w literaturze kanadyjskiej. W tej części wykazuję, że natura stanowiła kluczowy temat w tekstach literackich osadników z Europy już od początku ich działalności pisarskiej. Zmagania z siłami przyrody, związane z podporządkowywaniem terenów do życia, przyczyniły się do rozwoju ich tożsamości narodowej, definiowanej między innymi przez doświadczenie bycia ofiarą warunków naturalnych. Narracje pierwszych osadniczek Cathariny Parr Traill i Susany Moodie opisują dzikie tereny z romantycznym zachwytem, ale jednocześnie lękiem, ukazując naturę zarówno jako nauczycielkę moralności, jak i wrogą oponentkę. Choć przyrodnicy tacy jak David Thompson dokumentowali florę i faunę z naukową precyzją, to osadnicy częściej utożsamiali się z romantycznymi wyobrażeniami, stawiając czoła niegościnnym krajobrazom. Pod koniec XIX wieku wyłonił się, jak ujmuje to Ralph H. Lutts, wyjątkowy kanadyjski gatunek literacki – *animal story* (1998, 1). Uważani za twórców tego nurtu Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles G. D. Roberts i Margaret Marshall Saunders zaczęli uwrażliwiać czytelnika na pozaludzkie stworzenia, łącząc darwinowskie podejście do natury i ewolucji z empatią. *Beautiful Joe* (1893) Saunders przedstawia autobiografię psa w taki sposób, by jego historia

budziła współczucie. Autorka obdarzyła zwierzę głosem i życiem wewnętrznym, co stanowiło wyraźny kontrast wobec nurtu opowieści myśliwskich, w których celebrowano śmierć zwierzęcia, traktując jego ciało jako trofeum. Co więcej *Pilgrims of the Wild* (1935) Grey Owla, ukazuje metamorfozę dawnego trapera, który przez lata zabijał zwierzęta dla futer, jednak poruszony historią jednostek (młodych bobrów) stał się ich obrońcą. Powieść ilustruje przejście od postrzegania zwierząt jako zwierzyny łownej do uznania ich za objekty troski. Podsumowując, Rozdział 2 śledzi ewolucję ukazywania natury i ujawniania się postaci zwierzęcych w tekstach pierwszych osadników do momentu, powstania narracji skoncentrowanych na zwierzętach, które na różnorodne sposoby przyczyniały się do podważania ludzkiej dominacji. Jak zauważa Lutts, na zmianę roli zwierząt w literaturze miał wpływ rozwój świadomości przyrodniczej i klimatycznej, dzięki czemu większy nacisk zaczęto kłaść na ich uwikłanie w problemy ekologiczne (1998, ix). Ewolucję tę ilustruje między innymi *Last of the Curlews* (1954) Freda Bodswortha.

Rozdział 3 ma charakter analityczny i omawia dwie współczesne powieści – *Come, Thou Tortoise* (2009) Jessiki Grant oraz *A Beautiful Truth* (2013) Colina McAdama. Koncentruję się w nim na sposobie ukazania narracji istot pozaludzkich. Jedną z pierwszoosobowych narratorek w powieści Grant staje się żółwica Winnifred, która pełni także rolę zwierzęcia domowego. Dzięki przeplataniu się ludzkiego i żółwiego głosu autorka uwidacznia zarówno biologiczne potrzeby Winnifred, jak i jej zależność od opieki człowieka. Opowieść akcentuje moralną odpowiedzialność wobec zwierzęcia objętego opieką, natomiast wiedza i empatia Audrey stają się czynnikami niezbędnymi dla przetrwania Winnifred poza jej naturalnym środowiskiem. W mojej analizie zwracam uwagę na fakt, że mimo silnej antropomorfizacji monologów żółwia, zastosowanie analizy opartej na symbolice oraz odniesieniach do cech biologicznych zwierzęcia, pozwala rozpoznać indywidualność pozaludzkiej bohaterki.

Powieść McAdama *A Beautiful Truth* pozwala na analizę postaci szympansów: wychowanego w ludzkiej rodzinie Looee'ego, oraz grupy naczelnych przebywających w Instytucie Girdish. W rozdziale wykazuję, że historia Looee'ego początkowo rozwija się z perspektywy jego ludzkich opiekunów, a własny punkt widzenia zwierzęcia zostaje włączany stopniowo, wraz z osiąganiem przez niego dojrzałości. Ostatecznie, Szypans,

który przez lata utożsamiał się z ludźmi, zostaje zmuszony do ponownego doświadczenia swojej zwierzęcości w momencie przeniesienia do laboratorium badawczego w Instytucie Girdish na Florydzie. Żyjące tam naczelne otrzymują zbiorowy trzecioosobowy głos narracyjny, który, dzięki zabiegom językowym, odzwierciedla ich społeczną naturę. Strategia autora, obejmująca użycie m.in. neologizmów kieruje uwagę czytelników na fakt, że intelektualność istot pozaludzkich wymyka się ludzkiej interpretacji.

Rozdział 4 analizuje sposób przedstawienia zwierząt poddawanych procedurom genetycznych modyfikacji oraz eksperymentów laboratoryjnych w trylogii Margaret Atwood *MaddAddam*, szczególnie w pierwszej części *Oryks i Derkacz* (2003, wydanie anglojęzyczne) oraz powieściach *A Beautiful Truth* oraz *Come, Thou Tortoise*. Odwołując się do posthumanistycznej etyki Braidotti oraz krytyki gatunkowizmu Singera, rozdział dowodzi, że wszystkie trzy teksty ujawniają przemoc związaną z eksperymentami na zwierzętach oraz ich uprzedmiotowienie w ramach systemów kapitalistycznych. W trylogii Atwood hybrydy człowieka i świni znane jako świniony, zostały zaprojektowane jako byty produkujące organy. Analiza sugeruje, że figura świniona jest wykorzystywana do zobrazowania komercjalizacji życia. Transgeniczne świnię, częściowo wyposażone w tkankę ludzkiej kory nowej, ilustrują zatarcie granic gatunkowych oraz normalizację tego procesu przez podporządkowaną korporacjom naukę. Zanik tej bariery nie prowadzi jednak do poprawy sytuacji zwierząt. Co więcej, użycie technicznego nazewnictwa wręcz wypiera ich podmiotowość i podtrzymuje społeczne znieczulenie.

W powieści Colina McAdama *A Beautiful Truth* obiektem eksperymentów medycznych staje się Looee oraz inne szympansy z ośrodka na Florydzie. Analiza ukazuje, że cierpienie, którego szympans doświadcza po formacyjnym okresie więzi międzygatunkowych wśród ludzi, jest nie tylko fizyczne, ale też psychiczne. Tożsamość bohatera ukształtowana przez kontakt z ludźmi ulega stopniowemu rozpadowi, ponieważ nie jest on rozumiany ani przez ludzi, ani przez inne szympansy. Realistyczny wymiar narracji zostaje osiągnięty dzięki łączeniu medycznej nomenklatury opisów eksperymentów z wnikliwym podejściem do przedstawienia doświadczeń szympansa.

Powieść Jessiki Grant *Come, Thou Tortoise* podejmuje ten temat poprzez perspektywę Audrey – córki naukowca, mimowolnie zaangażowanej w laboratoryjne eksperymenty na

myszach. Analiza podkreśla, że zdolności poznawcze dziewczynki nie były rozwinięte na tyle, by w pełni pojąć okrucieństwo, którego była świadkiem. Aby uporać się z tym obciążeniem, jej umysł uciekał się do mechanizmów obronnych zgodnie z psychoanalityczną koncepcją Anny Freud. Jej instynktowna niechęć wobec widoku cierpiących gryzoni uwypukla głęboki dysonans poznawczy: niektóre zwierzęta, takie jak jej żółw czy domowa mysz, są traktowane z szacunkiem dla ich podmiotowości, podczas gdy osobniki laboratoryjne zostają sprowadzone do roli materiału eksperymentalnego. Szczególnie znaczący w tym kontekście jest wątek narracyjny dotyczący uratowanej z laboratorium myszy o imieniu Wedge, który to poprzez ingerencję dziewczynki uzyskuje podmiotowość i wyjątkowość na tle innych osobników. Powieść ujawnia zatem sposób, w jaki instytucje naukowe traktują gryzonia jako nierozróżnialne zbiorowości zwierząt, skutecznie odrzucając wartość jako jednostek.

Rozdział 5 poświęcony jest przestrzeniom międzygatunkowym ukazanym w *The Animals* (2022) Cary'ego Fagana oraz *Faunie* (2010) Alissy York. Obie powieści kreują miasto jako miejsce współistnienia wielu gatunków, choć dokonują tego w zupełnie odmienny sposób. Tekst Fagana pełni funkcję satyrycznego eksperymentu myślowego: poprzez rządowy projekt Wild Home obywatele zostają prawnie zobowiązani do goszczenia dzikich zwierząt. Narracja podważa kategorie „dzikie”, „udomowione” i „oswojone”, eksponując ich niestałość. Absurdalność projektu szczególnie uwidacznia się w przypadku samicy „wilka”, do której zupełnie zmienia się podejście bohaterów, gdy ujawniona zostaje jej prawdziwa – psia tożsamość. Analiza sugeruje, że trwała wspólnota międzygatunkowa wymaga nie tylko uznania potrzeb wszystkich uczestników, lecz także zastosowania kategorii obywatelstwa zaproponowanych przez Donaldson i Kymlickę, połączonych z gotowością do uwzględniania wymagań zwierząt pozaludzkich.

*Fauna* Alissy York również podejmuje temat powiązań ludzi i zwierząt pozaludzkich w przestrzeni miejskiej, osadzając narrację wokół złomowiska, w którym to miejscu ludscy bohaterowie opiekują się rannymi dzikimi zwierzętami. W Rozdziale 5 zwracam szczególną uwagę na kwestię empatii i znaczenia wspólnotowego leczenia ran – zarówno dosłownego, jak i metaforycznego. Narracja sugeruje, że relacje międzygatunkowe wymagają uznania sprawczości zwierząt oraz ochrony ich autonomii. Pomysł ten jest spójny z koncepcją *Zoopolis* Donaldson i Kymlicki, którzy postulują, aby polityczny status

poszczególnych gatunków zależał od stopnia bliskości z ludźmi oraz od potencjalnych korzyści, jakie zwierzęta mogą odnieść z kontaktu z ludźmi lub od pozostania z nimi na dystans. Powieść ukazuje także przykłady ludzkiej odpowiedzialności za katastrofy dotyczące zwierzęta, spowodowane urbanistycznymi przekształceniami przestrzeni. Zwracam uwagę na fakt, że praca opiekuńcza, choć tradycyjnie przypisywana kobietom, w powieści wykonywana jest niezależnie od płci. Co więcej, kontakt ze zwierzętami pozaludzkimi pełni funkcję terapeutyczną, ponieważ umożliwia przewyciężanie narzuconych przez patriarchalne normy ról płciowych. Wykazuję także, że wprowadzenie fragmentów powieści, które przekazują historie zwierząt liminalnych, stanowi zabieg literacki, dzięki któremu struktura powieści odzwierciedla rzeczywistą pozycję tych zwierząt, wdzierających się do przestrzeni zdominowanych przez ludzi. Analiza obu tekstów ukazuje, że język w literaturze utrwała hierarchie gatunkowe. Ostatecznie, odnosząc się do *The Animals* i *Fauny*, argumentuję, że planowanie i organizacja miast powinny uwzględniać potrzeby innych gatunków.

Ostatni rozdział analityczny poświęcony jest dwóm powieściom, w których pszczoły pełnią funkcję politycznego modelu. W *A Recipe for Bees* (1998) Gail Anderson-Dargatz historia Augusty i jej praktyki pszczelarskiej ukazuje ul jako przykład zdecentralizowanej wspólnoty. Kobieta postrzega rój jako byt z natury kolektywny: krótkie życie pszczoły robotnicy uniemożliwia przywiązywanie się do jednostek, przenosząc uwagę na osobowy charakter całej kolonii. Ukazywane zachowania komunikacyjne w postaci wzorców somatycznych i zmysłowych podważają niezbywalność języka ludzkiego w kształtowaniu wspólnoty demokratycznej. Jej charakter podkreślają także przypadki odwrócenia ról płciowych: postać męska nawiązuje bliską więź z pszczołami, a ciała trutni zredukowane są do funkcji zapładniającej.

*The Year of the Flood* (2009) z trylogii *MaddAddam* Margaret Atwood także ukazuje polityczne analogie związane z kolektywnością pszczół, które w powieści są częścią ekologicznej i duchowej wspólnoty Bożych Ogrodników. W tej przed-apokaliptycznej komunie pszczoły są doceniane jako integralne członkinie ekosystemu. Podczas gdy Rozdział 4 analizował pejoratywne znaczenie kolektywności zwierząt, w tej części argumentuję, że organizacja społeczna pszczół służy podkreśleniu ich wyjątkowości. Narracja wiarygodnie

przedstawia rzeczywiste zachowania pszczół (taniec, podejmowanie decyzji w oparciu o kworum) jako przykłady inteligencji kolektywnej bez centralnej władzy. Analiza uwypukla jednak także strukturalną nieodporność demokracji zdecentralizowanej na zewnętrzne ingerencje. Atwood ukazuje tę słabość poprzez zagrożenia ze strony technologicznych hybryd oraz fizycznych ataków na ule, podkreślając niestabilność rozproszonej sprawczości w obliczu sił opresyjnych.

We Wnioskach końcowych podkreślam, że rozprawa realizuje założone cele, ukazując różnorodność reprezentacji zwierząt w wybranych współczesnych anglojęzycznych kanadyjskich powieściach, zaś niektóre ze strategii ukazywania zwierząt destabilizują sztywność granic między ludźmi a zwierzętami. Argumentuję, że studia nad zwierzętami pozwalają rozumieć zwierzęta nie tylko jako środki stylistyczne czy symbole (choć takie odczytania nie są pomijane), ale także jako postaci, które cechuje wyjątkowość

Historyczny zarys ukazuje kształtowanie się reprezentacji zwierząt od pisarstwa pierwszych osadników oraz opowieści myśliwskich po kanoniczne *animal stories* Setona, Robertsa i Saunders. Niniejsze opracowanie umiejscawia współczesne powieści w tradycji literackiej, której korzeni można upatrywać się w historycznych tekstach. Analiza uwydatnia powtarzające się konteksty obecności zwierząt: laboratoria, przestrzenie domowe oraz środowiska miejskie i związane z nimi mechanizmy zacierania podmiotowości. W kontekstach naukowych i eksperymentalnych zwierzęta są przedstawiane jako ofiary systemowej przemocy, a ich indywidualność zostaje zatarta przez dyskurs technonaukowy. W przestrzeniach domowych stają się całkowicie zależne od uważności swoich opiekunów, natomiast w przestrzeniach miejskich, w zależności od gatunku, ich status wymaga nieustannej negocjacji. We wszystkich tych przypadkach obecne jest napięcie między postaciami symbolicznymi a ucieleśnionymi bohaterami powieści.

Ponadto argumentuję, że podmiotowość zwierząt pozaludzkich można osiągnąć poprzez strategie narracyjne. Wykazuję, że antropomorfizm działa ambiwalentnie: może wzbudzać empatię i bliskość narracyjną, ale jednocześnie grozi zatraceniem zwierzęcej wyjątkowości. Kontynuując temat ambiwalencji, rozprawa pokazuje, że reprezentacja jest związana i zależna od kontekstu kulturowego, a ten kształtuje pozycje istot pozaludzkich w społeczeństwie.

Rozprawa kończy się bibliografią, zestawiającą wszystkie cytowane i przywoływane opracowania i teksty.