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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

# **Diplomová práce**

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## **Rethinking the Animal: Post-Humanist Tendencies in (Post) Modern Literature**

Přehodnocení zvířete: posthumanistické tendence v (post) moderní  
beletrii

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Some of the arguments used in the 4th chapter of this thesis were presented at Prva Stran: International Student Conference of Comparative Literature in Ljubljana in December 2016 with the title “The Critique Of Reproductive Sexuality In Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*,” and an eponymous article is going to be published in the conference proceedings.

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# Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce interpretuje post-humanismus jako filozofický směr zabývající se problematikou anthropocentrismu. Jejím předmětem je analýza pěti literárních textů (*Odysseus* od Jamese Joyce, *Flush* od Virginie Woolfové, *Nightwood* od Djuny Barnesové, *Hackenfeller's Ape* od Brigid Brophy a *Elizabeth Costello* od J.M. Coetzee), které nevycházejí z obecních předpokladů o tom, co je zvíře a jakou má funkci v kultuře a diskurzu, a tím pádem komplikují hranici mezi člověkem a zvířetem. Zvířata tady neslouží jako nástroj pro zobrazení lidských záležitostí a vlastností, ale mají svoji vlastní hodnotu a jsou pojímána nad rámec antropocentrických předpokladů.

Úkolem této práce je popsat strategie, které tyto texty používají k zobrazení zvířat, a způsob, kterým komplikují binární opozici člověk-zvěře. Teoretický rámec této práce poskytují díla autorů, kteří patří k vznikajícímu oboru Animal Studies, a díla jiných současných filozofů, především Jacquesa Derridy, Gillesse Deleuze a Felixe Guattari. Velkou ambicí tohoto projektu je přispět k rozvoji nové post-humanistické etiky, definované tendencí k inkluzi a lhostejností vůči binaritám.

**Klíčová slova:** zvíře, Animal Studies, carno-phallogocentrismus, post-humanismus, James Joyce, Virginia Woolfová, Djuna Barnes, Brigid Brophy J.M. Coetzee.

# Abstract

This thesis posits post-humanism as a philosophy that engages directly with the problem of anthropocentrism and is concerned primarily with the metaphysics of subjectivity. It studies five literary texts (James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, Brigid Brophy's *Hackenfeller's Ape* and J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*) that challenge the humanistic or classical subject through critical engagement with what this subject traditionally saw as its antithesis – the animal. These texts contest various fixed assumptions about animality and disrupt the status-quo of the human. Breaking with the tradition that treats animals exclusively as a metaphor for the human, they attempt to see and understand animality outside the framework of anthropocentric suppositions.

This project aims to describe the strategies these texts employ to conceptualize animality as well as the methods they apply to delineate its subversive potential and to disrupt the human-animal binary. Its theoretical framework combines the work of thinkers belonging to the new but thriving field of Animal Studies with the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It is this project's great ambition to contribute towards the development of new post-humanist ethics defined by its propensity for inclusion and disregard for binaries.

**Keywords:** animal, Animal Studies, carno-phallogocentrism, post-humanism, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Brigid Brophy, J.M. Coetzee.



*Dead Man* (1995) dir. Jim Jarmusch, USA.

# Table of Contents

|    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Introduction: Rethinking the Animal, Revising the Human .....   | 8   |
| 2. | Liminal Creatures: Animals in <i>Ulysses</i> .....  | 22  |
| 3. | Virginia Woolf’s <i>Flush</i> as an Anti-Anthropocentric Project .....  | 34  |
| 4. | “A Stop the Mind Makes Between Uncertainties:” Post-Humanist<br>Subjectivity in <i>Nightwood</i> .....                | 52  |
| 5. | Looking for Animals in Brigid Brophy’s <i>Hackenfeller’s Ape</i> .....  | 66  |
| 6. | Animal Representation, Meat-Eating and Responsibility in the Two<br>Animal Lessons of <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> ..... | 83  |
| 7. | Conclusion.....   | 102 |
|    | Bibliography .....  | 106 |

# 1. Introduction: Rethinking the Animal, Revising the Human

Philosophy, and perhaps philosophy alone at this point, is able to hold open the possibility that thought might proceed otherwise in regard to animals, without the assurances of traditional concepts of animality and the human-animal distinction. What thought will encounter once reliance upon these categories is surrendered cannot be known in advance; however, it is certain that any genuine encounter with what we call animals will occur only from within the space of this surrender.

Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies*

This work is inspired by the tendency in philosophical thought that is sometimes referred to as post-humanism. However, due to the confusion that surrounds this term and in view of the multiple meanings it has assumed, in this introduction I feel first of all the need to specify what this particular project interprets as post-humanist.

As the epigraph to this introduction indicates, this work is partly informed by the idea of surrender. It calls for the relinquishing of claims to certain rights and privileges that have been enjoyed by something we call “human” and is consequently mostly concerned with the metaphysics of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> It is post-humanist in the sense that it seeks to undermine “the self-evident status attributed to human nature as the common sense belief in the metaphysically stable and universal validity of the European humanistic subject.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is concerned with what Jacques Derrida calls “the decentering of the subject,”<sup>3</sup> a process predicated on the refusal to confine meaning to the realm of the human, which in its turn leads to rethinking of the ways we see and understand other forms of life. This thesis, therefore, posits post-

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<sup>1</sup> If anything, this research is opposed to transhumanism, a branch of post-humanist theory – rather fashionable today – that seeks enhancement of the human through technological and other means.

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) 6.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Who Comes after the Subject?*, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (New York; London: Routledge, 1991) 101.



humanism as a philosophy that engages directly with the problem of anthropocentrism and is linked to a certain historical moment. This historical moment is one in which the human subject simply can no longer afford to occupy the all-allowing position it has been enjoying so far, and is in need of a generative tool to help to rethink the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as the “Anthropocene”; this historical moment at which the human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet.<sup>4</sup>

However, although intricately connected to ecological thought, this thesis operates within narrower boundaries. As indicated in the title, it studies five literary texts that challenge the humanistic or classical subject through critical engagement with what this subject traditionally considered its antithesis: the animal. It aims to describe the strategies these texts employ to conceptualize animality as well as the methods they apply to delineate its subversive potential and to disrupt the human-animal binary. It is, therefore, heavily indebted to the field of Animal Studies, a relatively new but thriving interdisciplinary approach to animals, their role and place in culture and discourse.

So far, Animal Studies (sometimes called “human-animal” studies) does not have a standardized or widely accepted definition, but it is still clear that the main stakes of the field lie in the effort to place questions concerning animals at the center of critical inquiry.<sup>5</sup> Thinkers in the field approach the problem of the animal from various vantage points proceeding from a wide range of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, and biological and cognitive sciences,<sup>6</sup> their common goal being to establish animality as a construct and to outline the ways in which the “human prerogative and exceptionalism might work through societies and cultures to reify the human being at the expense of all other beings.”<sup>7</sup> I see this thesis as a contribution to the field of Animal Studies and therefore adhere to the use of pronouns that has become

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<sup>4</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Nik Taylor and Richard Twine, “Introduction: Locating ‘Critical’ in Critical Animal Studies,” *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: from the Margins to the Centre*, eds. Nik Taylor and Richard Twine (London; New York: Routledge, 2014) 6.

conventional among academics pursuing similar goals. When referring to animals, I refrain from using “it” and employ either gender-specific pronouns “he” and “she”, or, if the sex of the individual is unknown, the gender-neutral “they”. Furthermore, when in need of a relative pronoun, I refer to animals as “who” rather than “that”.

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This work argues against what Derrida criticizes as the “Cartesian fixity”<sup>8</sup> of the subject and its ontological other, the animal. Foucault notes in “What is Enlightenment?” that “at least since the seventeenth century what is called humanism has always been obliged to lean on certain conceptions of man borrowed from religion, science, or politics. Humanism serves to color and to justify the conceptions of man to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse,”<sup>9</sup> emphasizing that for centuries Western metaphysical thought was focused on delineating with all possible clarity and distinctness a self-present, detached and autonomous human subject. In this delineating process, there emerged a notion of the animal as an antithesis of the human; according to this line of thinking, therefore, the animal should be transcended, or sacrificed, in order for the human to emerge. Since “the notion of what constitutes animality has traditionally been figured over and against what is supposed to constitute humanity,”<sup>10</sup> the animal became everything the human did not want to be. This tendency is epitomized in the works of René Descartes who viewed animals as “biological mechanisms without any subjective awareness.”<sup>11</sup> While many thinkers admitted that Descartes was taking the argument of animals’ unawareness a little too far, the inscription of human superiority was accomplished exactly through the opposition between the automatic, instinctive behavior presumably characteristic of all beings fitted into the category of the animal, and the autonomous self-awareness of the human subject.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” *Zoologies: the Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 124.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” trans. Catherine Porter, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 43–44.

<sup>10</sup> Calarco, *Zoographies*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 93.

The literary texts analyzed in this thesis contest various fixed assumptions about animality and disrupt the status-quo of the human. They break with the tradition of treating animals exclusively as “screens for the projection of human interests and meanings”<sup>12</sup> or, in other words, the tradition that only ever regards animals as a metaphor for the human. Instead, they attempt to see and understand animals outside the framework of anthropocentric supposition and recognize them as carriers of agency and significance. This, in its turn, inevitably leads to the displacement of the human subject.

This thesis considers texts written in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that have been associated with modernism and postmodernism, hence the shorthand I use in the title. The title, however, is not meant to indicate any serious attempt to consider, compare or contrast the concepts of modernity and postmodernity as such. I start with the analysis of three novels belonging to the modernist canon that seek to register the change in the literary representation of animality brought about by the modernist momentum towards overall aesthetic transformation. James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf’s *Flush* and Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood* have been chosen for this analysis not only because animals and animality constitute an important component of the representational structure of these texts, but also due to the challenge they present to the supposed fixedness of the animal-human divide and Cartesian subjectivity. *Ulysses* provides an appropriate starting point since in spite of it being one of the most studied novels ever written, the reevaluation of human-animal relationships that it offers has largely gone unnoticed.

The first chapter focuses on three episodes of *Ulysses* which interrogate the concept of the animal from various different perspectives. First, I consider Bloom’s “conversation” with the “pussens” in “Calypso” to demonstrate how the interaction represents an episode of “moral schizophrenia,”<sup>13</sup> a term used by Gary Steiner to outline the contradiction between the assumption of moral responsibility towards animals that fall into the category of pets and the tendency to ignore the moral and ethical problems of exploiting other categories of animals. The examples of nonlexical

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2.

<sup>13</sup> Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism*, 155.

onomatopoeia in the episode are considered as an attempt to stretch the representational limits of human language to embrace animality. Subsequently, I focus on “Lestrygonians” and the relationship between humans and the animals used in the meat industry. I use two key concepts to discuss how this relationship is construed in the episode; namely the concept of sacrifice as it appears in the writings of Jacques Derrida, and the concept of cannibalism presented in Maud Ellmann’s writings on animals in *Ulysses* that becomes entangled with the Christian sacramental rite. Lastly, I discuss the appearance of the dog Garryowen in “Cyclops”. I maintain that the episode draws attention to the problems of animal representation as it denounces the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric approach that literature tends to adopt towards animals. I argue that in “Cyclops” Garryowen is transformed into a metaphoric figure overloaded with multiple levels of human symbolism that adds nothing to our understanding of him as a dog or an animal. As he seems to transcend the ultimate animal-human border and acquires the ability to use language, he nevertheless remains confined to the realm of instincts and basic physiological needs conceptualized within Western thought as an animal realm.

Joyce’s engagement with the animal question, although compelling and transgressive, remains sporadic with the animal enduring in the margins of the encyclopedic enterprise that is *Ulysses*. This is clearly not the case in either *Flush* or *Nightwood*, texts pervaded by a sense of crisis. Both novels reveal an acute awareness of how the old system of meaning as well as the narratives supporting it had lost balance and cohesion. Consequently, the novels attempt to provide new systems of coordinates by which humanity can navigate itself, perceiving the animal as an agency through which such a system can be discovered. However, the approaches that the two texts develop differ dramatically.

In *Flush*, Woolf anthropomorphizes a dog in order to make his diverse experience of the world more relatable for the humans. I argue that contrary to most interpretations of the text, Flush the dog need not be perceived as a mere metaphor for the human, but as an animal with its own agency and role in the text. I discuss the problems that anthropomorphism poses for animal representation, but ultimately argue that Woolf’s use of it is not marked by the intention to simplify animality or render it familiar. Rather, she uses imagination and empathy as powerful tools that can provide

access to the world as experienced by a dog. I then proceed to discuss the link between the oppression of women and the oppression of animals that the text exposes only to reveal a more complicated network that connects the oppression active on a private familial level to the way that societies function on a global political level. Furthermore, I focus on the strategies that the text employs to picture human sensibility, predicated upon reason and language, as restrictive and prohibitive.

*Nightwood*, although written only three years after *Flush* and concerned with similar issues, refuses to incorporate animality into the project of renewing human civilization. While Woolf humanizes a dog in order to make his diverse experience of the world accessible to humans so they can embrace this diversity and learn from it, Barnes animalizes her protagonist to envisage a new type of subjectivity. I read *Nightwood* as a novel that engages with the conventions of a degeneration narrative and uses them to denounce the very logic of progress or regress that modernist narratives tend to depend on. I consider Robin as the character of new post-humanist subjectivity as well as the many ways in which she disrupts the human-animal binary. I also consider *Nightwood* as marked by anti-Freudian discourse that resists the restrictions Freudianism forces onto human sexuality. In my interpretation of *Nightwood*, I rely on the critique of Freudianism offered by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as well as on the concept of becoming-animal outlined in their writings.

The fourth chapter is marked by a shift towards fiction in which the animal question constitutes the central concern. While *Ulysses*, *Flush* and *Nightwood* do express an interest in the social and philosophical practices through which animality is constructed, it is still the human with which they are ultimately concerned and it is for the benefit of the human that they venture to undermine the meaning of animality in culture. Both *Hackenfeller's Ape* and *Elizabeth Costello*, however, express interest in animality for its own sake, insisting that the animal question presents valid moral and ethical concerns.

*Hackenfeller's Ape*, by Brigid Brophy who was herself an animal rights advocate and a vegetarian, is concerned with the way in which people treat animals, as well as with the strategies that legitimize this treatment. I discuss the logic of speciesism as exposed in the text by focusing on zoos as places that validate and reinforce this logic. Furthermore, I discuss subconscious automatism and the

sadodispassionate scientific approach as constitutive elements in human interaction with animality. I also address the representational strategies that Brophy employs in the novel and her unconventional use of anthropomorphism to satirize the concept of human superiority.

Finally, in the last chapter devoted to the third and the fourth lessons of *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, I address the two issues of special importance to the text: the representation of animals in human discourse and the practice of meat-eating as well as the intensive animal farming industry that sustains it. Here, I discuss the publication history of the two lessons to outline J.M. Coetzee's understanding of the issues behind the very act of talking about animals, and animal representation as such. I employ Derrida's concept of carno-phallogocentrism to indicate the complete incompatibility of the animal question with the genre of public lecture. I interpret Costello's concept of "sympathetic imagination", which provides the basis for her ideas on animal representation, as indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming'. Analyzing the reasons behind, and the rhetoric effectiveness of, Costello's employment of the contentious comparison of the treatment of Jews in the Holocaust the treatment of animals in the food industry today, I conclude by using Derrida's idea of excessive responsibility to outline the new post-humanist concept of responsibility introduced in the novel.

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The texts analyzed here are simultaneously the product and the repudiation of two massive ideological shifts that took place in the modern age and that define our understanding of what constitutes animality even today; namely Darwin's theory of evolution and Freud's theory of organic repression. Here, I should like to sum up the ways in which the two theories both revolutionized our understanding of animality and reinscribed previous assumptions, both undermining and reinforcing the human-animal binary.

The work of Charles Darwin made scientists, theologians, politicians, and eventually the average European rethink the most elementary contours of human

identity and the human connection to other sentient life.<sup>14</sup> It has become commonplace to point out that Darwin's theory placed out of reach the definitive break with animality by contradicting the belief that the origin of the human was not a singular event delivered by the intervention of some sublime agent (the Judeo-Christian myth of origin) in his proposal of an evolutionary continuum that rendered the difference between a human and an animal "as one of degree and not of kind."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Darwin's theory did offer liberation from the fixity of individual categories and insisted on the provisional nature of species boundaries. As Margot Norris puts it:

Darwin replaced this cybernetic model of Nature as a machine with his theory of natural selection, which removed intelligence [...] altogether as the source of life and put in its place innumerable, dispersed, trivial organic forces operating unconsciously and irrationally, on an ad hoc basis subject to chance, over time.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, the development of life could no longer be seen as a series of closed and calculable processes the reason could uncover, explain and describe. Instead, there emerged a concept of chaotic, uncontrollable and inherently ungraspable development within which the category of species becomes profoundly unfixed:

Certainly no clear line of demarcation has as yet been drawn between species and sub-species – that is, the forms which in the opinion of some naturalists come very near to, but do not quite arrive at the rank of species; or, again, between sub-species and well-marked varieties, or between lesser varieties and individual differences. These differences blend into each other in an insensible series; and a series impresses the mind with the idea of an actual passage.<sup>17</sup>

Combined with the exhaustive dismantling of the uniqueness of human emotional and mental capacities, as in *The Descent of Man* when Darwin famously states that "there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals,"<sup>18</sup> Darwin's theory ostensibly had the capacity to bring about a fundamental change in human-animal relationships. However, as Carrie Rohman notes, "despite the fact that Darwinism contains what could be considered the most radical philosophical blow to

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<sup>14</sup> Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia Press University, 2009) 2.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin, 2004) 151.

<sup>16</sup> Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 6.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Gramercy, 1979) 107.

<sup>18</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 86.

anthropocentrism in the modern age, that blow was not immediately or consistently registered.”<sup>19</sup> This can be attributed to a number of coping mechanisms and compensatory theories that strove to soften the blow. The key element in this struggle to preserve the existing order was, Rohman points out, “an overinvestment in the notion of progress.”<sup>20</sup> As a result, the evolutionary process came to be seen as “a force driving nature towards a morally significant goal” and “the basis for human superiority was considered not so much eliminated as reframed in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>21</sup> People now see themselves, although not qualitatively different from the rest of the animal kingdom, as its most developed and most successful species, and therefore still entitled to dominate and exploit it. This line of thought informs one of the most influential social theories of the post-Darwinian era: social Darwinism, which “with its clinging to traditional notions of power and the development of civilizations, can be understood as a reinstatement of human privilege projected onto racial and gendered taxonomies.”<sup>22</sup>

The threat to humanism manifested in Darwin’s work is matched only by the implications of Sigmund Freud’s theories that appeared at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, Freud openly acknowledged that his work depended on Darwin’s intervention. As Akira Mizuta states in *Electric Animal*, “Freud later credited Darwin with forging a passage toward the world of unconscious activity, claiming that Darwin’s theory of descent ‘tore down the barrier that had been arrogantly set up between man and beast’.”<sup>24</sup> However, Freud’s own discourse can be considered as an attempt to compensate for the damage done to human superiority by the idea of the evolutionary continuum, as it is precisely with reinscribing the human-animal barrier that Freud’s own work is concerned. This is most clearly manifested in his theory of “organic repression” that states that the human emerges as the abjection of the animal. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud imagines man’s transition from a quadruped

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<sup>19</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 76.



to a biped and the various results of this rising up from an animal way of being.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, walking upright means rising above blood and feces spread on the ground that, instead of exercising a sexually exciting effect in humans, now seem disgusting, leading in turn to a cultural trend toward cleanliness and the creation of sexual repression resulting in the foundation of the family, and from there on to the threshold of human civilization.<sup>26</sup> As Cary Wolfe points out, the transition to a biped also involves a “shift of privilege in the sensorium from smell to sight, the nose to the eye.”<sup>27</sup>

The texts analyzed in the following chapters will incorporate both Darwinism and Freudianism in their ideological framework and will offer a reevaluation of the implications that these theories offer for human subjectivity. The conceptual apparatus employed in this work in order to analyze this dynamic includes many thinkers that have contributed to the field of Animal Studies as well as other 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers. However, it is mostly through the ideas of Jacques Derrida that the methodological framework for this thesis has been developed.

The importance of Jacques Derrida’s philosophy to this project, as well as to the whole enterprise of Animal Studies, cannot be exaggerated. Deconstruction, as a mode of thought with enormous potential for questioning the status quo and unsettling assumptions, has proven to be a very effective tool for developing animal problematics. Referring to “the question of the animal”<sup>28</sup> Derrida famously states, “[f]or me that will always have been the most important and decisive question. I have addressed it a thousand times, either directly or obliquely, by means of reading of all the philosophers I have taken an interest in.”<sup>29</sup> However, it is in his later works appearing round the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, that this question starts to occupies a more central position.

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<sup>25</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, 2002: 378.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 402.

Throughout his work, Derrida interrogates the ways in which Western metaphysical tradition approaches the question of the animal. In “The Animal That Therefore I Am” he argues that the animal only ever interests philosophers as an instrument for defining the human, exposing Western metaphysics as a discourse of “anthropocentric subjectivity that is recounted or allows a history to be recounted about it, autobiographically, the history of its life.”<sup>30</sup> In this autobiography of the human, “the writing of the self as living,”<sup>31</sup> the animal is always conceptualized through notions of lack or impoverishment (for example, the lack of language, reason, or the ability to die or mourn and so on) to be something less than human. Not only does this logic secure “the unconditional superiority”<sup>32</sup> of the human, but it also generates a limit whose function is to separate and to enclose “*all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers.”<sup>33</sup> It is exactly this limit that Derrida ventures to deconstruct. This deconstruction happens not in the name of homogeneity, however, but rather is meant to reinscribe the multiplicity that has always, Derrida feels, been suppressed in the autobiographical discourse of human subjectivity. This suppression is manifested in the very term and the “catch-all”<sup>34</sup> concept of “the animal”. “The animal” in general singular claims to “designate every living thing that is held not to be a man”<sup>35</sup> and abolishes “the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat”<sup>36</sup> and so on. Derrida points out that

[t]his agreement concerning philosophical sense and common sense that allows one to speak blithely of the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest, and most symptomatic idiocies of those who call themselves humans.<sup>37</sup>

He then proceeds to coin the neologism “animot” that, instead of effacing the limit between the animal and the human, “multiplies its figures.”<sup>38</sup> Not only does this word

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<sup>30</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 399.

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 415.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 389.

<sup>33</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 402.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 400.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 402.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 409.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 398.

reinscribe the plural in the singular because it rhymes with “animaux”, but it also implies that the only thing known to us about animals are the names we have given them; the words, but not the beings themselves. Moreover, the proximity between the seemingly contrary words “mot” and “muet” (mute) suggests that animals can have language without having words:

If, in order to hear it in myself, I were to undertake to overinterpret what the cat might be saying to me, in its own way, what it might be suggesting or simply signifying in a language of mute traces, that is to say without any words.<sup>39</sup>

This thesis will not venture to replace all the general singulars of “the animal” with “animot”, but following Derrida’s example I ask the reader to silently substitute animot for every “animal” they come across while reading this work.

What Derrida also finds worrying in the autobiographical project that is philosophy, is its “automatic, automobile, autonomous, auto-referential”<sup>40</sup> nature: “Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for itself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected.”<sup>41</sup> The problem of automatism of thinking and the self-generating nature of thinking about animals constitutes the central concern of Derrida’s other lecture, namely “And Say the Animal Responded?” Here Derrida identifies the difference between response and reaction as the key one in establishing the single indivisible limit between animals and humans. It has always been assumed, he points out, that the animal is an instinctual being “capable only of a coded message or of a meaning that is narrowly indicative, strictly constrained; one that is fixed in its programming,”<sup>42</sup> while the human, on the contrary, is defined by the ability to react independently and spontaneously. However, he argues, Freud and Lacan have demonstrated that a fully self-present Cartesian subject is in fact a fiction. The unconscious “should prevent us from having any immediate and conscious assurance of the freedom presupposed by any notion of responsibility” and hence there is “some automaticity of the reaction in every response.”<sup>43</sup> This also indicates that the way in which animals are treated by

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 387.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 415.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” 122.

<sup>43</sup> Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” 127.

philosophy and by what Derrida refers to as common sense (indeed, the very fact that philosophy and common sense are in agreement here is symptomatic) has more in common with reaction than response because it is characterized by confident and repetitive resort to the logic of the lack, and is furthermore predicated on the assumption of simple homogeneity lying on the other side of the boundary between the human and the animal. It is this reactive thinking of the animal question that Derrida attempts to expose and overcome.

For Derrida, the unconditional limit enforced on the animal-human relationship is inherently connected to the abyss that separates two types of killing, sacrifice and murder. In the interview with Jean-Luc Nancy entitled “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject” he argues that philosophy has never been able to “sacrifice sacrifice”<sup>44</sup> and to challenge the “sacrificial structure” of the subject. The human-animal limit, constitutive of human subjectivity, empowers the logic within which the term “murder” applies only to “thy neighbor” and “thy brother”; in other words, a human other. Murder constitutes the ultimate transgression while sacrifice acquires the status of “a noncriminal putting to death”<sup>45</sup> through which human superiority is manifested. In order to preserve the status of the master and the subject, the human has to sacrifice the animal both symbolically (in establishing that the human is realized through the abjection of animality), and physically (in the eating of animal flesh, etc.). This prompts Derrida to coin the term “carno-phallogocentrism”<sup>46</sup> that refers to “the dominant schema of subjectivity”<sup>47</sup> within which authority and autonomy are attributed “to the man (...) rather than to the woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal.”<sup>48</sup> The logic of carno-phallogocentrism is, therefore, exposed as the logic of violent exclusion. At the end of the interview, Derrida argues that it is only through the deconstruction of this dominant schema that a new post-humanist concept of ethical responsibility can be achieved.

Although not written as an ideological statement, my project is not opposed to the idea of producing socially relevant knowledge. Its great ambition is to contribute

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<sup>44</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 113.

<sup>45</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 112.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 114.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

to the development of this post-humanist responsibility, envisaged in the writings of Jacques Derrida and defined by its propensity for inclusion. Therefore, I bring together the canon of authors and thinkers who free the animal from the connotations of simplicity, homogeneity, impoverishment and fixity that normally persist unquestioned. My reading of their works is meant to place animality at the intersection of various representational strategies and approaches, in order to outline the principle features of post-humanist responsibility, and perhaps even ways in which it can be practiced.

## 2. Liminal Creatures: Animals in *Ulysses*

Apart from so many other things, Joyce's *Ulysses* is a narrative of living with animals, who feature profusely in the text of the novel. However, the animal question most certainly does not constitute the novel's central concern. Nevertheless, as Derrida famously pointed out, *Ulysses* "plays with an entire archive of culture," and in creating "the encyclopedic field of *universitas*," it cannot ignore the question of the animal altogether.<sup>1</sup> Joyce's critics rarely pay much attention to the theme of animality in the novel although Joyce himself expressed keen interest in the blurry division between the human and the animal in his Paris notebook of 1904<sup>2</sup> and wrote at least two articles for different periodicals that dealt with animal-related issues.<sup>3</sup> While these facts do not mean that Joyce was an animal rights advocate, they still signal the importance of the animal motif for his writing. In *Ulysses*, animals are not only omnipresent, but also cleared of the status of the known and simple. Here, Joyce problematizes many discourses that pretend to have an authority over animality, including the discourses of religion and literature.

In the fourth episode of the novel, "Calypso", Mr. Bloom is introduced through his interaction with "beasts."<sup>4</sup> This interaction is twofold, as it comprises two very different processes, namely devouring and communication. Indeed, the dichotomy between an attempt at understanding and a purely consumerist attitude is at the core of Bloom's approach to the animal and runs through the whole text. It is also characteristic of "moral schizophrenia,"<sup>5</sup> a term used by Gary Steiner to outline the contradiction between the assumption of moral responsibility towards animals that fall into the category of pets and the tendency to ignore the moral and ethical problems of exploiting other categories of animals. Pet keeping as we know it today did not really

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York; London: Routledge, 1992) 281.

<sup>2</sup> Maud Ellmann, "Ulysses: Changing into an Animal," *Field Day Review* Vol. 2, 2006: 77.

<sup>3</sup> Ellmann, "Changing into an Animal," 81-82.

<sup>4</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Garland, 1984) 4.1. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 155.

emerge until the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was already a well-established commercial industry alongside the meat industry. The inconsistencies characterizing the ways people understand and treat animals in an industrial society were noticed already by an 18th century thinker Jeremy Bentham, and later by theosophists who are mentioned in the text on more than one occasion. Thus, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that Joyce was exposed to these discourses and employed them to challenge certain received ideas on animality.

By far the most memorable animal of the episode is “the pussens”. In fact, most readers would not even notice that other animals are actually present in “Calypso” for the simple reason that these obscure creatures are dismembered and deprived of their completeness:

Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liverslices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencods' roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine. (*U* 4.1-5)

The cat, on the other hand, is not only alive and still complete with all her organs, but is actually perceived as a companion whom Bloom watches “curiously, kindly” (*U* 4.21).

Maud Ellmann in her article “Ulysses: Changing into an Animal” suggests that pets, *animaux familiers*, especially cats and dogs, blur the boundary between the human and the inhuman and that it is precisely the problematization of this fine line that Joyce is preoccupied with in the first couple of pages of “Calypso.”<sup>7</sup> The text demonstrates that the border is very flexible as it allows Bloom to move swiftly from eating animals (reinforcing the border) to talking to them (subverting the border). Simultaneously, the text gives us an impression that although the border is flexible and can be easily manipulated into suiting one’s purposes, its nature and premises are rarely questioned as even curious and sympathetic Bloom does not register the strangeness of the situation in which he loves one animal and eats another. However, pussens, being a liminal creature who has almost crossed the border and established

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<sup>6</sup> Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ellmann, “Changing into an Animal,” 76.

herself as belonging to the human part of the binary, successfully provokes Bloom into questioning common assumptions about animals.

The interaction that happens between Bloom and his cat can be loosely described as a conversation. On the one hand, the words “answer” (*U* 4.18) and “to say” (*U* 4.32) are used to describe the cat’s contribution to the exchange; but on the other, it is more likely that the narrator renders what Bloom hears, rather than what the cat speaks, which means that the reader is presented with a monologue after all. The hypothesis that it is Bloom’s consciousness that we follow and not the cat’s also provides us with a likely explanation of why the pussens’ statements gradually become longer and more complicated. John Gordon connects this oddity to the fact that Joyce’s aim was not to render passive registration of external reality but rather to depict the very process in which meaning is apprehended.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, he argues, the first “Mkgnao” (*U* 4.16) “comes out of Bloom’s and not [the pussens].”<sup>9</sup> Being curious, Bloom is truly interested in the message the cat is trying to deliver, he starts “pricking up his ears”<sup>10</sup> and achieves a more refined perception with each successive hearing. However, in his interpretation Gordon ignores the fact that just a couple of pages later Bloom answers to pussens with a lexicalized “miaow” (*U* 4.462). While at the beginning of the episode it was not clear whose consciousness is attempting a better understanding of the cat’s message, here the structure of the sentence leaves no space for doubt that this “miaow” belongs to Bloom: “Miaow! he said in answer” (*U* 4.462). Thus, there remains a possibility that in his discussion of “Calypso”, Gordon misattributes the curiosity to Bloom when in fact it is another undetected presence that is picking up its ears.

To what extent the narrator is present in *Ulysses* is the issue that critics are still trying to resolve. In his monograph *Voices and Values in Joyce’s Ulysses*, Weldon Thornton looks at many critical statements about the intentional absence or presence

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<sup>8</sup> John Gordon, “Mkgnao! Mrkgnao! Mrkgrnao!’: The Pussens Perplex,” *Bloomsday 100: Essays On Ulysses*, ed. Morris Beja and Anne Fogarty (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) 32.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon, “Mkgnao! Mrkgnao! Mrkgrnao,” 34.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon also gives an interesting explanation as to why it is the sound “r” that is initially missed by Bloom: “I would suggest it is not accidental that the sound added each time, “r,” is the one that most likely would be missed by an inattentive, or less attentive, human listener. It is, in phonemic terms, a liquid, prone to blend with other sounds and at times to be crowded out in the process” (34).



of the narrator in the text and then proceeds to insist that the attempts to see Joyce's *Ulysses* (and, more generally, modernist fiction as a whole) as a text aiming at complete effacement of detectable authorial presence are diminishing the novel's scope of achievements. Thornton argues that Joyce does not eradicate the narrator, but uses it in an innovative manner and with a different goal in sight. He points out that instead of choosing a technique that would allow to conceal the authorial voice, namely first-person point of view or sheer interior monologue, in the first part of the novel Joyce chooses to present his material through the narrator who speaks in third person and past tense.<sup>11</sup> He also argues that the authorial voice is detectable in the qualitative and evaluative statements that cannot be attributed to any of the characters<sup>12</sup> as well as in the scope of allusions present in the text:

The allusive elements within the novel can originate from either the character or the author. Allusions introduced through the characters can be conscious, or they can exist more implicitly, on the margin of the character's awareness. For example, when Bloom [thinking of Queen Victoria's numerous progeny] says, 'Old woman that lived in a shoe she had so many children' [U 8. 394], his invocation of the nursery rhyme seems fully conscious, whereas when a few lines later he thinks, 'Old Mrs Thorton was a jolly old soul'[U 8.394], the allusion to Old King Cole may be coming through him rather than from him.<sup>13</sup>

Thornton agrees that the narrator does not attract attention to itself or "projects a characterizable persona,"<sup>14</sup> instead it merges with the characters' perspectives. This technique, he insists, enables various degrees of affinity between individual characters and the narrative voice invoking "something like a gravitational field,"<sup>15</sup> which is important to the project that Thornton identifies behind the novel, namely to the simulation of the collective mentality or psychic milieu that combines society's ideas, values, beliefs, but also all kinds of narratives existing within it.

In line with Thornton's argument, the attempt to hear what the cat is saying can be attributed to the narrator's blurred subjectivity that is closely connected to the characters' perspectives but is not identical with them. This interpretation becomes even more plausible if we consider the fact that the narrator indeed makes itself visible

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<sup>11</sup> Weldon Thornton, *Voices and Values in Joyce's Ulysses* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000) 46.

<sup>12</sup> Thornton, *Voices and Values in Joyce's Ulysses*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Thornton, *Voices and Values in Joyce's Ulysses*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Thornton, *Voices and Values in Joyce's Ulysses*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Thornton, *Voices and Values in Joyce's Ulysses*, 53.

at the very beginning of the episode when the text suddenly switches from Bloom's dining table to the narrator's writing table: "The cat mewed in answer and stalked again stiffly round a leg of the table, mewing. Just how she stalks over my writingtable. Prr. Scratch my head. Prr" (*U* 4.18-20). Therefore, when Bloom thinks "They understand what we say better than we understand them" (*U* 4.26-27) immediately after hearing "Mrkgnao" the impulse for this thought may come not only from the pussens but also from the narrator or rather from this "gravitational field" that connects the narrator and the characters of the novel.

Whether it comes from Bloom, from the narrator or from both, the episode demonstrates the tendency to avoid thinking about animals in Cartesian terms as beings simple and knowable. In doing so, it breaks with tradition and anticipates the way Derrida will approach the problem of animality one hundred years later. In his essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am" Derrida conceives of the animal as a being "that refuses to be conceptualized."<sup>16</sup> As language, our best instrument of understanding and constructing reality is alien to it; "animot" remains inconceivable to us. This approach to animality, which always starts with a genuinely curious look cast at a being who has been deemed undeserving of any philosophical curiosity, characterizes all texts analyzed in this thesis. However, the character of Bloom is especially emblematic of intellectual curiosity and the tendency to question even most basic assumptions and beliefs. Although in this episode Bloom's doubts are very cautious and focus almost exclusively on his pet, in "Lestrygonians" he makes a step forward and starts challenging the practice of meat-eating.

While "Calypso" starts with mutton kidneys and then swiftly switches the pussens, "Lestrygonians" is not interested in pets, providing instead a deeper insight into the relationship established between people and animals used in the meat industry. In this episode concerned with killing and eating, "sacrifice" and "cannibalism" become key concepts.

In his essay "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—between Two Infinities, the Poem" and later in "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" Derrida

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, 2002: 379.

describes carnivorous sacrifice as having fundamental importance for establishing and preserving the fundamental principles of Western civilization. For him every death, human or animal, is equal to the end of the world, the world as it was seen by a unique being that has disappeared.<sup>17</sup> However, the Bible, which contains defining myths of Western Judeo-Christian civilization, maintains the distinction between a sacrifice and a non-sacrificial killing; the latter is explicitly forbidden while the former is not merely allowed, but perceived as necessary and encouraged. This distinction, Derrida argues, has its roots in the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. When God is satisfied with Abraham's loyalty, he intervenes and a sheep is sacrificed instead of the child: "When the wood finds its proper destination and is set aflame, sacrificial law is restored; a passage is made from a morally contemptible slaying to one that is codified in Biblical law."<sup>18</sup> Thus, sacrifice becomes a legitimized killing which is immune to pity and, more importantly, is justified because it reinforces people's connection with "God", the concept that resists death: "God signifies this: death can bring an end to one world, but death does not signify the end of the entire world."<sup>19</sup> While animal sacrifice brings the end to one world, it does not signify the end of the entire world. Rather, animal sacrifice forges it "generating an aura of a higher life even as the animal is excluded from it."<sup>20</sup> The sacrifice sustains the order in which humans are seen as higher creatures and the masters of this world and its repetition permits us "to prove our identities time after time."<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, when Bloom thinks to himself, "[w]e are washed in the blood of the lamb. God wants blood victim. Birth, hymen, martyr, war, foundation of a building, sacrifice, kidney burnt offering, druids' altars. Elijah is coming" (*U* 8. 10-11), he feels the burden of a long tradition upon his shoulders and suspects that the cruelty of the sacrificial order established in the Old Testament has made its way into his times. This

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<sup>17</sup> Anne E. Berger and Marta Segarra, "Thoughtprints," *Demographies: Thinking (of) Animals after Derrida*, eds. Anne E. Berger and Marta Segarra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011) 15.

<sup>18</sup> Adeline Rother, "Say the Ram Survived: Altering the Binding of Isaac in Jacques Derrida's 'Rams' and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Demographies: Thinking (of) Animals after Derrida*, eds. Anne E. Berger and Marta Segarra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011) 151.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Rother, "Say the Ram Survived," 148.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Rother, "Say the Ram Survived," 146.

sentiment becomes even clearer later in the passage that is often quoted by animal rights advocates:

Pain to the animal too. Pluck and draw fowl. Wretched brutes there at the cattlemarket waiting for the poleaxe to split their skulls open. Moo. Poor trembling calves. Meh. Staggering bob. Bubble and squeak. Butchers' buckets wobbly lights. Give us that brisket off the hook. Plup. Rawhead and bloody bones. Flayed glasseyed sheep hung from their haunches, sheepsnouts bloodypapered snivelling nosejam on sawdust. Top and lashers going out. Don't maul them pieces, young one. (U 8. 722-728)

Bloom starts feeling even more uncomfortable with the system whose functioning is secured by brutal sacrificial practices when he enters the Burton restaurant and is utterly disgusted by the sight of the present-day Lestrygonians:

Couldn't eat a morsel here. Fellow sharpening knife and fork to eat all before him, old chap picking his tootles. Slight spasm, full, chewing the cud. Before and after. Grace after meals. Look on this picture then on that. Scoffing up stewgravy with sopping sippets of bread. Lick it off the plate, man! Get out of this. (U 8. 673-677)

As Maud Ellman points out in her essay in *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, throughout his work Joyce “reinforces the association between food and violence,” making visible certain disturbing aspects of eating rituals, the aspects that through their daily repetition and routinization become practically unnoticeable and thus are almost never reflected upon.<sup>22</sup> In “Lestrygonians”, eating is exercised through violence, through fierce disintegration into pieces with the help of sharp tools:

A pallid suetfaced young man polished his tumbler knife fork and spoon with his napkin. [...] A man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle: gums: no teeth to chewchewchew it. Chump chop from the grill. Bolting to get it over. Sad booser's eyes. Bitten off more than he can chew. Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us. Hungry man is an angry man. Working tooth and jaw. (U 8. 656-663)

By seeing, paying attention and reflecting upon the process of devouring (which he was still unable to do in “Calypso”) Bloom here breaks the unwritten law of animal sacrifice: he starts analyzing it, defamiliarizing its individual aspects and refusing to see things through the lenses of Judeo-Christian sacrificial laws.

It should be pointed out that this is not the first time that Bloom is reflecting on the methods and strategies behind the meat industry and meat-eating per se. In

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<sup>22</sup> Maud Ellmann, “James Joyce,” *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, ed. Adrian Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 333.

“Hades”, the funeral cortege is delayed by a drove of cattle. Upon seeing the cattle, Bloom remembers that “tomorrow is killing day” (*U* 6. 392) and half-automatically starts to dismember and process the animals: “And then the fifth quarter lost: all that raw stuff, hide, hair, horns. Comes to a big thing in a year. Dead meat trade. Byproducts of the slaughterhouses for tanneries, soap, margarine” (*U* 6. 394-397). However, he does not particularly like the path his thoughts have taken as he immediately suggests to his companions that “all those animals could be taken in trucks down to the boats” (*U* 6. 401-402) essentially saying that these animals and the purpose for which they are bred should not be made a spectacle of. In other words, Bloom thinks that animals doomed for slaughter should be concealed because they signify the dark and appalling part of the life in the city. As Declan Kiberd points out, Bloom thinks that eating is an activity that should be exercised in privacy and in a way that conceals the violent nature of the act, hence his disgust with the manner in which people consume their food at the Burton.<sup>23</sup> In “Lestrygonians”, the reason behind Bloom’s urge to hide and to render invisible is uncovered. The episode demonstrates that the traces the meat industry leaves in the city, when noticed, invites further scrutiny that can lead to a dangerous outcome. Instead of delight and enthusiasm (which are the proper emotions to feel when one makes an offering to God) Bloom starts pitying dismembered brutes.

It happens because in this episode Bloom is not absolutely sure that they are indeed brutes and not something entirely different. When Bloom thinks of the customers at the Burton (“See the animals feed” [*U* 8. 652]) he, to his own horror, fails to see the difference between the human and the animal. The same failure is evident in his human-animal comparisons: “Strong as a brood mare some of those horsey women” (*U* 8. 346) or “[t]hen having to give the breast year after year all hours of the night. Selfish those t.t’s are. Dog in the manger” (*U* 8. 366). Moreover, the episode is full of images that accentuate the “animality” of humans, their instincts and urges to eat and to copulate. Thus, as a result of Bloom’s careful consideration of the sacrificial order, the animal and the human merge in his mind and the object of sacrifice becomes unclear.

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<sup>23</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) 132.

In Homer's *Odyssey* the distinction between the human and the animal is also very blurry and needs to be constantly reinstated. The ultimate test of humanity in Homer is hospitality:

[s]trangers who feed their guests are human, whereas those who eat their guests are monsters. What makes them monsters, however, is the fact that they are cannibals; which means they must be human, not animals. In the land of the Lestrygonians, Odysseus sends forth scouts to determine "what men, eaters of bread, might live here in this country," but the inhabitants prove to be eaters of men.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, as Ellmann points out, the blurry border between the animal and the human infinitely complicates the notion of cannibalism and Joyce's "Lestrygonians" has this problem for one of its central motifs. "Who eats who?" – is the question that the episode asks but does not answer. Not only are the customers at the Burton portrayed as cannibals,<sup>25</sup> but also Bloom himself feels as if he has been "eaten and spewed" (*U* 8.695). Thus, by the Homeric logic of hospitality, the humans are turned into monsters that devour each other. Also, the multiple hints at cannibalistic tendencies in a meat-eating society signal that the long-standing line between the human and the animal is disappearing and meat eating becomes one of the forms of cannibalism. After all, it is the moment in history when the ideas of vegetarian theosophists, who make an attempt to unsettle the unhealthy relationship between humans and animals, acquire certain popularity. Although neither Bloom nor Stephen sympathize with them, their discourse exists and leaves traces everywhere in the city.

In *Ulysses*, cannibalistic elements that underpin civilized society are exposed not only through Homer's unclear distinction between people and monsters and the discourse of theosophists, but also through the Christian sacramental rite based on a cannibalistic metaphor. Bloom's choice to have some bread and wine at the end of "Lestrygonians" can be interpreted as an allusion to this important Christian ritual, although the cheese also included in his meal "violates the patriarchal purity of the Communion service, in which the male priest appropriates the role of the maternal breast, feeding the communicants the 'substance' of the son, as opposed to the mere 'matter' of the mother's milk."<sup>26</sup> Thus, trying to escape from one set of cannibalistic

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<sup>24</sup> Ellmann, "Changing into an Animal," 77.

<sup>25</sup> Ellmann, "Changing into an Animal," 82.

<sup>26</sup> Ellmann, "James Joyce," 336.

aspects and making a vegetarian choice, Bloom comes dangerously close to the symbolic cannibalism of Catholic Church that he repudiates in “Lotus Eaters”: “Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse. Why the cannibals cotton to it” (*U* 5. 352). Therefore, eating in *Ulysses* is never just a simple satisfaction of a physical need. Rather, food consumption in the novel often illustrates the scavenging nature of a creation in which everything feeds of everything else and thus alludes to the method of *Ulysses* “that spits back half-masticated gristle, each time it summarizes and reprocesses earlier material.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, through rendering visible the typically unnoticed aspects of meat-eating, Joyce makes the unstable symbolic structure behind these practices observable and therefore vulnerable.

One limit that is not tested in “Lestrygonians” is the limit of language. While the cat in “Calypso” finds a way to communicate with Bloom, the brutes in the eighth episode are mute. The sounds that Bloom hears in his head thinking of their cruel fate (“Moo” and “Meh”) are lexicalized oversimplifications, the words of human language that have nothing to do with animals’ subjectivity. The situation, however, is different in “Cyclops”, where the dog Garryowen (or later Owen Garry) is not mute and is not communicating in its own language, but speaks Irish. While the previous episodes deal with animals in a more or less realistic manner, rendering animals organic part of the city’s life, Garryowen in “Cyclops” is not a real dog but rather a symbol and an example of what often happens to animals in literature. Deprived of unique personality, of the otherness “that refuses to be conceptualized,” the dog in this episode is a doppelgänger of its owner, the citizen. It is the second Cyclops of the episode whose cruelty and monstrosity, however, are recognized and acknowledged by the narrator as well as by other characters (“The bloody mongrel let a grouse out of him would give you the creeps. Be a corporal work of mercy if someone would take the life of that bloody dog. I’m told for a fact he ate a good part of the breeches off a constabulary man in Santry that came round one time with a blue paper about a licence” [*U* 12. 126-128]), while the monstrosity of the citizen goes unnoticed by everyone except Bloom. Much like the citizen is not (or is not meant to give an impression of) a real person but rather a conglomeration of stereotypes and

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<sup>27</sup> Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us*, 133.

expectations, Garryowen is a metaphoric figure overloaded with multiple levels of symbolism and, towards the end, anthropomorphized to a point of absurdity.

Taking after his master, Garryowen is unreasonably aggressive and excessively stubborn. However, according to some critics, the burden of anthropocentric symbolism that the dog has to carry is even heavier than metaphoric references to its master's dark personality. In his essay "Garryowen and the Bloody Mangy Mongrel of Irish Modernity," Sam Slote argues that the dog, being a mongrel, symbolizes the hybridity of Irish society: "For Joyce, however, dogs are always mongrels [...] and it is precisely in this mongrelization that they might have some affinity to the Irish."<sup>28</sup> Although this hybridity is repeatedly denied by the citizen, who refuses to recognize Bloom, a Jew, as an Irishman, it is emphasized by the fact that he himself speaks English as well as by the list of "Irish" heroes to which he belongs together with Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus and some others (*U* 12. 176-179). Thus, the dog symbolizes diverse Ireland that lies at the feet of its devoted citizen (and is almost entirely ignored by him) as well as this citizen's dark and conflicting unconsciousness.

The moment in the text when Owen Garry starts reciting poetry, however, remains highly problematic. By using human language he crosses the ultimate border between the species, language and, consequently, reason always being at the heart of humans' superiority. Unfortunately, however, his poem is lacking in philosophical depth and can add nothing to the discussion that has been happening in the pub. Essentially, he asks for water to quench his thirst. Therefore, even after he has been given the gift of language Owen Garry remains a dumb brute whose existence is defined and whose every motion is guided by hunger and thirst, the intimation being that unless human genius enriches it with some symbolism and connotations, the animal has nothing to offer.

However, the text of the novel does not restrict itself to the reductive approach to Garryowen demonstrated in "Cyclops". We also catch two glimpses of the dog through the eyes of other characters. In "Circe", Bloom thinks of the importance of talking to animals and calls the dog "Good Fellow" (*U* 15.663). In "Nausicaa", Gerty

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<sup>28</sup> Sam Slote, "Garryowen and the Bloody Mangy Mongrel of Irish Modernity," *James Joyce Quarterly* Vol. 46. 2009: 547.



ncludes a photograph of the dog in her fantasy of a perfect household: “and the photograph of grandpapa Giltrap's lovely dog Garryowen that almost talked it was so human” (*U* 13.233). Both Bloom and Gretty adopt a strikingly different approach than the one demonstrated by the narrative strategies of “Cyclops”. Instead of reducing Garryowen to a number of ideologically charged concepts and symbols, they view him as the other who needs to be understood and are willing to expand the borders of their sympathy. In this gesture of expansion, they disregard the most important animal-human divide and invest the dog with the ability to understand and even produce language.

In “The Animal That Therefore I Am” Derrida says: “For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry.”<sup>29</sup> He then proceeds to argue that only the language of fiction with its efforts to express the inexpressible and the recourse to succeed in this formidable task has a chance to contribute to our understanding of the absolute other, the “animot”. Unlike the discourses of science and philosophy, the language of literature can avoid the attempts to explain and simplify animals, accentuating instead their complexity. Joyce’s *Ulysses* is precisely the kind of literature Derrida has in mind: the text hints at the animal’s unknown subjectivity and problematizes the place animality occupies in culture and discourse.

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida. “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 377.

### 3. Virginia Woolf's *Flush* as an Anti-Anthropocentric Project

It is only recently that *Flush: a Biography* has gained entry into Woolf's modernist canon. For a long time the text was written off as a trivial escapade<sup>1</sup> with early critics dismissing it either as a diversion from Woolf's more demanding endeavors or as a piece of second-rate literature beneath the talent of its author.<sup>2</sup> When *Flush* did start attracting critics' attention, it was from the feminist perspective that most of them chose to approach it, presenting the text as a feminist allegory of the subjugation of women in Victorian England.<sup>3</sup> While this in itself has been an important step in the history of the text's critical reception, it is possible to develop an even more complex critical approach within which *Flush* the dog will not be perceived as a mere metaphor but as an animal with its own agency and role in the narrative. However, it can be argued that the very nature of the text resists such an interpretation. Indeed, critics like Jutta Ittner insist that because *Flush* in the novel is so thoroughly anthropomorphized, the traces of animality disappear from the text.<sup>4</sup> While Ittner is right in pointing out the danger of anthropomorphism that lies in subsuming the animal within a human world without taking on board the different experiences specific to different species, her reading remains blind to the post-humanist potential of the text.<sup>5</sup> This reading, on the other hand, will focus on the ways in which *Flush* subverts the logic of humanism and anthropocentrism. It will demonstrate that it is only through seeing and recognizing animal presence in the novel, that we can achieve a more complex interpretation of *Flush* within which patriarchy becomes inextricably intertwined with other forms of oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) 132.

<sup>2</sup> Karalyn Kendall-Morwick, "Mongrel Fiction: Canine Bildung and the Feminist Critique of Anthropocentrism in Woolf's *Flush*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 60.3, 2014: 507.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Smith, "Across the Widest Gulf: Nonhuman Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 48. 3, 2002: 349.

<sup>4</sup> Jutta Ittner, "Part Spaniel, Part Canine Puzzle: Anthropomorphism in Woolf's *Flush* and Auster's *Timbuktu*," *Mosaic*, April 2006: 190.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, 134.

The difference between the ways in which humans and animals experience the world is, indeed, often ignored in the novel. A good example of a rather blunt anthropomorphism in the text is the moment when Flush contemplates himself in a mirror and rethinks his identity. However, it can be argued that Woolf introduces such moments into the narrative not to eliminate the animal presence but rather to intensify it. Marjorie Garber writes in *Dog Love* that “anthropomorphism is another word for empathy,”<sup>6</sup> implying that it is a strategy of establishing an emotional connection with an animal and that it reveals willingness to focus on similarities between species rather than their differences. This perspective undermines the notion that nature and the animal can only be understood through objective, unemotional, scientific approach. Within this logic, art and imagination are powerful tools for exploring human nature, but nothing more than sentimental trifles when concerned with animality. Woolf, on the other hand, contends that a certain degree of anthropomorphism is inevitable when we try to understand the animal not as a biological machine, but a conscious presence in the world, as it is only through empathy and imagination that we can gain access to the consciousness that cannot express itself in words.<sup>7</sup> However, she also recognizes that any attempt to render the unique way in which one particular animal experiences the world is bound to be inaccurate. *Flush* uses third-person narration and has a fully realized teller, who is the source of the narration, and a reflector or the center of consciousness, through whose vantage point the narrated events are presented.<sup>8</sup> That Flush’s life is described to the reader by this narrative presence can be interpreted as Woolf’s recognition of the fact that we do not have an unmediated access to his experience and thus a part of it will always remain a mystery. Indeed, one of the novel’s primary goals is to establish the otherness of Flush, to emphasize that his sensibility differs dramatically from that of humans. Therefore, the novel presents itself as an imperfect attempt to capture Flush’s experience and constantly makes allowances for possible inaccuracies. The first chapter informs us that “all researches have failed to fix with any certainty the exact year of Flush's birth, let alone the month

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<sup>6</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Dog Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 23.

<sup>7</sup> A similar approach to animal representation is offered by Elizabeth Costello and is discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> David Herman, “Modernist Life Writing and Nonhuman Lives: Ecologies of Experience in Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 59. 3, 2013: 554.

or the day”<sup>9</sup> pointing out that animals live outside history and therefore its discourse cannot provide much information about them. In addition, the text repeatedly accentuates Miss Barrett’s inability to understand Flush as well as her tendency to misjudge and misinterpret him. This is sometimes attributed to her failure to distance her speculations on Flush from her own emotions: “But here Miss Barrett, absorbed in her own emotions, misjudged him completely” (44). Other times, however, the misunderstanding has no specific reason, apart from there being no means of accessing the dog’s consciousness: “When about this time Miss Barrett observed him staring in the glass, she was mistaken. He was a philosopher, she thought, meditating the difference between appearance and reality. On the contrary, he was an aristocrat considering his points” (23). Although, for reasons unexplained in the text, the narrator has infinitely more insights into Flush’s mind than Miss Barrett, it also has to acknowledge that there is only so much of Flush’s experience that it can include in this biography, one of the reasons being that “it was in the world of smells that Flush mostly lived” (86) and “there are no more than two words and a half for what we smell” (86). Because Flush’s reality is to a large extent olfactory and in this respect differs immensely from the one in which humans operate (vision being the most developed of our senses) language, the human system for conceptualizing experience, cannot give us a clear picture of Flush’s life. It is important that this idea appears rather late in the novel, in the second half of the penultimate chapter to be precise, thus undermining the idea of a dog’s biography after the reader has almost finished one. This humorous maneuver, therefore, further emphasizes the unreliability of the narrator that has already undermined itself through the constant use of irony and the unwillingness to fully show and explain itself. Thus, the narrator is not a reliable conductor of Flush’s experience. Instead, it represents some kind of agency that is willing to make an attempt at understanding the life of a dog but is fully aware of the inherent deficiency of such attempt. It posits itself somewhere in between the human and the canine world, which is emphasized in the frequent employment of free indirect speech that makes it hard to distinguish between the moments when the narrator

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, ed. Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 9. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

presents its own thoughts and the moments when it attempts to render Flush's thinking process. Thus, Flush's otherness is established on multiple levels and it is in this otherness and the ways it relates to the human that the message of the novel is to be found.

Flush's role and position in the human world as presented in the novel is best understood through his relationship with Miss Barrett. Here, the link between the oppression of women and the oppression of animals becomes visible and assumes crucial importance. The idea that the two are interconnected phenomena was circulating in English society at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when animal rights became a real concern in England and when the Cruelty to Animals Act was passed by the Parliament in 1835. This change in legislation became possible partly due to the active involvement of women. Current studies suggest that women have been at the forefront of animal activism in Great Britain at least since 1800,<sup>10</sup> consistently outnumbering men in clubs, societies and campaigns devoted to animal welfare. One of the reasons for such an active involvement of women in the animal cause may be traced to Victorian domestic ideology that insisted on separate spheres and separate roles for men and women. "Men worked in the world while women nurtured at home, instructing children in moral tenets."<sup>11</sup> Within this ideology, women as nurturers whose role in society demanded affectability and sensibility were far more likely to feel sympathy for animals than Victorian men whose self-identification was inseparable from rationality and pragmatism. However, there is another reason for women's active involvement in the animal cause. As Coral Lansbury suggests, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the growing degree of women's identification with animals: "Women saw themselves as horses being flogged and beaten, and many saw their own condition hideously and accurately embodied in the figure of an animal bound to a table by straps with the vivisector's knife at work on its flesh."<sup>12</sup> Women's vulnerable

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<sup>10</sup> Emily Gaarder, "The 'Gender' Question of Animal Rights: Why are Women the Majority," *Allacademic.com*, All Academic Inc, <[http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/0/3/8/6/pages103868/p103868-1.php](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/0/3/8/6/pages103868/p103868-1.php) 2006> 12 April 2016

<sup>11</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 131.

<sup>12</sup> Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison, Wis.; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 84.

position in patriarchal society, their place in the medical discourse of the epoch (manuals of physiology and gynecology taught that women were incomplete males, with the clitoris and hymen as an undeveloped penis)<sup>13</sup> and, maybe most disturbingly, gynecological practices that required a woman to be fastened to a chair or table (thus reinforcing the similarity between gynecological practices and vivisection)<sup>14</sup> – all this contributed to the growing identification with suffering animals.

In the first chapters of *Flush*, the male and female realms are clearly separated. Miss Barrett is hardly allowed to leave her room and all her visitors are women. It is this realm, which is reduced to only one room of the house, walks in a park and occasional shopping expeditions, that Flush finds himself in. The novel then follows the development of an alliance between a woman and a dog formed against the forces of patriarchal tyranny. As in the social and political context of the period, in *Flush* a woman and an animal are brought together by the struggle for a freer existence. Woolf does not only capture the arrangement of Victorian society within which women and animals found themselves entangled together, but uses their entanglement to criticize the existing system. By focusing on their unfavorable circumstances, their struggle and eventual victory (the escape to Italy) she makes women and animals allies in whom the hope lies for a much needed transformation: “We are joined in sympathy. We are joined in hatred. We are joined in defiance of black and beetling tyranny. We are joined in love” (60). The novel, therefore, suggests that animals and women are both victims of patriarchal system and should resist it together. The best example of this cooperation is the moment in the novel when Miss Barrett decides to save Flush from the hands of the dognappers in spite of the fact that her future husband, her father and her brother all try to persuade her that it is a wrong thing to do. Eventually, however, he poet plucks up the courage for her first revolt and is able to resist the dominant patriarchal viewpoint within which Flush’s life is less valuable than abstract principles of justice and injustice and Miss Barrett’s attachment to the dog is interpreted as blameworthy sentimentalism. Mr. Browning writes to her that if she pays the ransom

she was giving way to tyranny; she was giving way to blackmailers; she was increasing the power of evil over right, of wickedness over innocence. If she gave Taylor his demand, “. . . how will the poor owners fare who have not money enough

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<sup>13</sup> Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, 89

for their dogs' redemption?" [...] He did not blame Miss Barrett – nothing she did could be anything but perfectly right, perfectly acceptable to him. Still, he continued on Friday morning, "I think it lamentable weakness. . . ." (60)

Miss Barrett, however, finds herself strong enough to resist this bizarre logic according to which the privileged (the owners) are poor and the poor are powerful. This gesture against patriarchy is the first step towards her ultimate rebellion against it – the elopement.<sup>15</sup>

Another important revolt in the novel is the revolt that Woolf accomplishes when she chooses to make a good-natured companion dog, almost a lap dog (at least one time in the novel Flush travels on Miss Barrett's lap [20]) the protagonist of her novel. In doing so, she rejects the modernist inclination to focus on wild, fierce and dangerous animals rather than timid domesticated creatures. This tendency is well represented by the works of D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway who were part of an intellectual movement known as primitivism, which became closely associated with the rise of modernist poetics:

The accepted account of modernism is that the movement arose as a challenge to the received verities of Victorian and Edwardian modernity, and gained its greatest momentum as a result of the First World War. Belief in the supreme humaneness of European civility, social advancement through technological innovation, and the imperialist narrative of progress was severely compromised by a conflict in which the metropolitan powers exterminated a generation of each other's citizens using the most advanced technologies yet produced – poison gas, tanks, flamethrowers, machine guns, battleships and bi-planes. Disgusted by the inventive brutality of modern "civilization", the modernists were propelled into its conventional opposite: primitivism.<sup>16</sup>

Primitivism perceives the influences of civilization as stiffening and deadening. It sees humanity's only chance of rejuvenation in its reconnection with the repressed animality and seeks a "relapse" into the primitive. While discussing modernist primitivism in connection with D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway, Philip Armstrong notices that both writers tended to focus their reconsideration of the animal-human relationship on formidable savage creatures (often domesticated but disobedient) while regarding docile domesticated animals as contemptible slaves who

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<sup>15</sup> Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008) 142.

have lost connection to the rejuvenating primordial energies.<sup>17</sup> Woolf, however, rejects this tendency. Although she is interested in animality, she chooses to focus on a companion animal undermining the wild vs. domesticated opposition and refusing to believe that a good-natured dog is less of an animal than a fierce bull; thus also forming a symbolic alliance with Flush in order to resist the ultra-male and patriarchal ideological framework of primitivism. However, Woolf's revolt has multiple layers. In choosing to focus on a lap dog or almost a lap dog Woolf also seeks to satirize and to reform another literary discourse, this time an openly misogynist one.

Lap dogs or lady's companion dogs, as well as ladies themselves, have been often treated unfavorably by literature. In her study of the animal in modern imagination entitled *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, Laura Brown notices that companion dogs, who became an important part of gendered image that was used to satirize femininity already by Chaucer, occupied an especially important place in the misogynist tradition of the 1680s and 1690s and, finally, played a significant role in the literary imagination of the 18th century.<sup>18</sup> Brown notices that in the late 17th and 18th century (the time of the rapid rise of pet culture) the satirists persistently portrayed lap-dogs and their mistresses as sexual partners. Unlike human suitors, dogs were allowed to the ladies' beds, to the forbidden place between their thighs and onto their chests. Moreover, caresses and kisses that ladies extended to their dogs were often seen as explicitly sexual acts:<sup>19</sup>

Securely on her Lap it lies,  
Or freele gaze on her Eyes;  
To touch her breast, may share the Bliss,  
And unreprou'd, may snatch a Kiss.<sup>20</sup>

Lap-dogs become undeserving rivals, "both an inappropriate sexual partner for the woman and also a metonym for female sexuality - a dynamic that places the animal simultaneously within and outside the realm of the human, or - from another

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<sup>17</sup> Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010) 70.

<sup>19</sup> Sexual aspects of nowadays pet-keeping is the topic that many Animal Studies theorists have discussed. It is one of the central issues of Alphonso Lingis's essay for *Zoontologies: the Question of the Animal* entitled "Animal Body, Inhuman Face". See Bibliography.

<sup>20</sup> Isaac Thompson, "The Lap Dog", quoted in Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 72.



perspective - places the woman both within and outside the realm of the animal.”<sup>21</sup> The satires achieve a twofold goal: they accentuate the woman’s affinity with the animal as well as, on a more obvious level, criticize common female vices: dullness of mind, sentimentality, idleness and so on. While Brown lists multiple examples of lap-dogs in 18th century satires, Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* seems to be the one most relevant to the story of Flush. In the poem where fashionable female is criticized for her proximity to her lap-dog in preference to her husband<sup>22</sup> there is a moment when Belinda is woken up by her dog Shock: “Shock, who thought she slept too long, / Leapt up, and wak’d his Mistress with his tongue.”<sup>23</sup> The tongue here functions as a “vivid signal of interspecies intimacy.”<sup>24</sup> In *Flush*, we encounter a very similar scene. When Miss Barrett lies on her bed thinking and apparently experiencing a fit of melancholia Flush wakes her up from this unpleasant daydream:

She was lying, thinking; she had forgotten Flush altogether, and her thoughts were so sad that the tears fell upon the pillow. Then suddenly a hairy head was pressed against her; large bright eyes shone in hers; and she started. Was it Flush, or was it Pan? Was she no longer an invalid in Wimpole Street, but a Greek nymph in some dim grove in Arcady? And did the bearded god himself press his lips to hers? For a moment she was transformed; she was a nymph and Flush was Pan. The sun burnt and love blazed.  
(27)

This is a landmark moment in their relationship as Miss Barrett remembers it later in the text when she considers whether she should forgive Flush for biting Mr. Browning: “Once he had roused her with a kiss, and she had thought that he was Pan” (48). This is also a reference to one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s most famous poems featuring her dog – “Flush or Faunus” – that served as one of the inspirations for the novel. The episode traces the events of the poem (Flush startling Miss Browning and reminding her of Faunus and Pan) but makes their intimacy far more visible. While in the poem the dog only rubs his ears against the poet’s face: “a drooping ear / Did flap me on either cheek,”<sup>25</sup> in the novel there is a kiss. In the poem, Flush is a “low creature”, a mere conductor between her and the abstract “heights of love”:

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, quoted in Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Barret Browning, “Flush or Faunus”, *Selected Poems*, eds. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor (New York: Broadview, 2009) 187.

But as my bearded vision closelier ran  
My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose above  
Surprise and sadness; thanking the true Pan,  
Who, by low creatures, leads to heights of love.<sup>26</sup>

Woolf, on the other hand, changes the accents drastically and presents the bedside intimacy scene as a climax in the relationship between Flush and the poet, a love scene, combining the events from Barret Browning's poem with the overemphasized sexuality so characteristic of the misogynist tradition and of the Pope's poem. Indeed, taking into account Woolf's tendency to avoid any straightforward depictions of sexual acts, her attention to quality and intensity of the sexual emotion rather than specific events,<sup>27</sup> we might see this episode if not as an act of bestiality, then at least as the moment that characterizes the connection between the two protagonists as not devoid of sexual undertones. That the scene is a straightforward reference to the poetics of 18<sup>th</sup> century satire and to the work of Alexander Pope is further accentuated later when Flush and Mr. Browning become rivals. Woolf, therefore, distances herself from rough primitivism with its taste for exotic locations, exceptional animals and humans as well as from the abstract idealism of Barret Browning choosing instead to go back to the tradition that saw the animal as an integral part of people's day-to-day lives. Woolf's poetic rendering of the scene clears this relationship of all negative and misogynist connotations presenting the union between a woman and a dog as a true friendship, indeed as love. Thus, while the satirists saw this relationship as whimsical and unnatural using it as a tool to criticize women and Barret saw it as a mere instrument for achieving the goal of transcendental love, Woolf sees it as full of affection, physical as well as spiritual, and, even more importantly, as having the potential for subversion of patriarchal system, because it is in this relationship that Miss Barrett finds the strength and courage for her revolt.

However, Woolf does not stop at accentuating the revolutionary potential of the cooperation between a woman and an animal. She is willing to complicate matters even further by pointing out that Flush's relationship with Miss Barrett is dramatically

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Morgne Cramer, "Virginia Woolf and Sexuality," *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 186.

unbalanced and thus demonstrating that inequality upon which English society is based contaminates its members in so many ways that sometimes they are hard to trace or recognize. While their friendship has a positive, inspiring effect on the poet, the impact it has on Flush is rather dubious. While Flush is developing a loving and affectionate relationship with Miss Barrett, he is also gradually losing his vigor. From a dog that ran through the fields and responded to the calls of hunting and love, he is changing into something passive, something too gentle for any outdoor activities, something that is almost not a dog any more:

Such an education as this, in the back bedroom at Wimpole Street, would have told upon an ordinary dog. And Flush was not an ordinary dog. He was high-spirited, yet reflective; canine, but highly sensitive to human emotions also. Upon such a dog the atmosphere of the bedroom told with peculiar force. We cannot blame him if his sensibility was cultivated rather to the detriment of his sterner qualities. Naturally, lying with his head pillowed on a Greek lexicon, he came to dislike barking and biting; he came to prefer the silence of the cat to the robustness of the dog; and human sympathy to either. (30)

Flush's residence with Miss Barrett is referred to as sacrifice in the text: "She was too just not to realize that it was for her that he had sacrificed his courage, as it was for her that he had sacrificed the sun and the air" (33). The change from the green fields of Reading to the dangerous streets of London proves to be a drastic experience for the dog. On the whole, London, where Flush receives his "education", is portrayed by Woolf as a place where pretense, discipline and oppression prevail. It is an environment where all Flush's instincts are "thwarted and contradicted" (24). The oppressive discipline of the city is emblemized in Flush's experience of Regent's Park. Trees and grass are there not for enjoyment but for a mere spectacle:<sup>28</sup>

But now a heavy weight jerked at his throat; he was thrown back on his haunches. Were there not trees and grass? he asked. Were these not the signals of freedom? [...] He paused. Here, he observed, the flowers were massed far more thickly than at home; they stood, plant by plant, rigidly in narrow plots. The plots were intersected by hard black paths. Men in shiny top-hats marched ominously up and down the paths. [...] Setting one thing beside another, he had arrived at a conclusion. Where there are flower-beds there are asphalt paths; where there are flower-beds and asphalt paths, there are men in shiny top-hats; where there are flower-beds and asphalt paths and men in shiny top-hats, dogs must be led on chains. (22)

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<sup>28</sup> In "Mongrel Fiction: Canine Bildung and the Feminist Critique of Anthropocentrism in Woolf's *Flush*" Karalyn Kendal-Morwick points out that Flush's first visit to Regent's Park closely resembles an experience of the fictional woman writer who narrates *A Room of One's Own* and who becomes aware of a male-authorized social code that restricts her movements in the fictional Oxbridge (509).

In the novel, Wimpole Street is a place where dogs are stolen and tortured because they are perceived as commodities. It is a realm of excessive and meaningless consumerism. Miss Barrett only ever leaves home to go shopping although her bedroom is already packed with various useless objects:

On top of the wardrobe stood three white busts; the chest of drawers was surmounted by a bookcase; the bookcase was pasted over with crimson merino; the washing-table had a coronal of shelves upon it; on top of the shelves that were on top of the washing-table stood two more busts. (16-17)

However, the most significant element of Wimpole Street's environment and the one that forces the Brownings to move to Italy is its tendency to accumulate and thrive on domination in its various forms. Even Mr. Browning's courtship is not free of connotations of domination: "Twisting his yellow gloves in his hands, blinking his eyes, well groomed, masterly, abrupt, Mr. Browning strode across the room. He seized Miss Barrett's hand, and sank into the chair by the sofa at her side. Instantly they began to talk" (38). On a subtler note, meat-eating is also conceived as an extension of tyranny and domination into the culinary habits of those involved in this structure. In one long sentence at the end of the first chapter Woolf portrays meat-eating as one of the key elements of the existing order:

Indeed, when the world seems tumbling to ruin, and civilization rocks on its foundations, one has only to go to Wimpole Street; to pace that avenue; to survey those houses; to consider their uniformity; to marvel at the window curtains and their consistency; to admire the brass knockers and their regularity; to observe butchers tendering joints and cooks receiving them; to reckon the incomes of the inhabitants and infer their consequent submission to the laws of God and man--one has only to go to Wimpole Street and drink deep of the peace breathed by authority in order to heave a sigh of thankfulness that, while Corinth has fallen and Messina has tumbled, while crowns have blown down the wind and old Empires have gone up in flames, Wimpole Street has remained unmoved and, turning from Wimpole Street into Oxford Street, a prayer rises in the heart and bursts from the lips that not a brick of Wimpole Street may be re-pointed, not a curtain washed, not a butcher fail to tender or a cook to receive the sirloin, the haunch, the breast, the ribs of mutton and beef for ever and ever, for as long as Wimpole Street remains, civilisation is secure. (14)

Thus, in an almost primitivist move, the bitter irony of this sentence connects oppressive discipline and tyranny of Wimpole street with the notion of civilization in which, Woolf understands, domination and tyranny are omnipresent.

Domination logically presupposes inequality and it cannot be a coincidence that under the influence of London's environment Flush becomes preoccupied with the issues of inequality among dogs as well as people. After all, the first section of the novel that deals with the regulations of The Spaniel Club, its breeding policies and its focus on purity ("to be born with a light nose or a topknot is nothing less than fatal" [7]) appeared in the first installment in the October 1933 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* alongside a review of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* by Alise Hamilton.<sup>29</sup>

Early in the second chapter, Flush discovers that dogs in London "are not equal, but different" (22) and rushes home to look at himself in the mirror and is soon relieved to find out that he is indeed "a dog of birth and breeding" (23). Therefore, Flush's education prompts him to adopt certain prejudices against some of the representatives of his own species or, in human terms, to become a racist.

In order to avoid the corrupting effects of London, the Brownings and Flush flee to Italy that is portrayed as an idyllic place where all dogs are equal and Flush quickly renounces the notion of aristocracy: "Flush suddenly bethought him of Regent's Park and its proclamation: Dogs must be led on chains. Where was 'must' now? Where were chains now? Where were park-keepers and truncheons? Gone, with the dog-stealers and Kennel Clubs and Spaniel Clubs of a corrupt aristocracy!" (77). In Italy, the relationship between Flush and Mrs. Browning changes dramatically; it loses in intimacy but both partners gain in happiness. Flush becomes independent, roaming freely the streets of Italian cities, while Mrs. Browning, with her health improving, learns how to enjoy the outside world:

She was a different person altogether. Now, for instance, instead of sipping a thimbleful of port and complaining of the headache, she tossed off a tumbler of Chianti and slept the sounder. There was a flowering branch of oranges on the dinner-table instead of one denuded, sour, yellow fruit. Then instead of driving in a barouche landau to Regent's Park she pulled on her thick boots and scrambled over rocks. Instead of sitting in a carriage and rumbling along Oxford Street, they rattled off in a ramshackle fly to the borders of a lake and looked at mountains; and when she was tired she did not hail another cab; she sat on a stone and watched the lizards. She delighted in the sun; she delighted in the cold. (75)

Italy is a world where there are "no fathers" (78), the rooms are empty and spacious ("He had never been in a room - if this were indeed a room - that was so hard, so

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<sup>29</sup> Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory*, 151.

bright, so big, so empty” [73]), and there is no need for artifice and pretense (“Everything was itself and not another thing” [79]). Significantly, while in London it was mostly chicken and mutton that Flush fed upon, in Italy he switches to the diet of cheese and grapes: “He devoured whole bunches of ripe grapes largely because of their purple smell; he chewed and spat out whatever tough relic of goat or macaroni the Italian housewife had thrown from the balcony – goat and macaroni were raucous smells, crimson smells” (87), “The peasant women in the marketplace made him a bed of leaves in the shadow of their baskets and tossed him a bunch of grapes now and then” (96), “She had often cuffed him for stealing a grape, or for some other misdemeanour” (103). *Flush*, thus, points towards the idea that all forms of oppression, domination and inequality are profoundly connected. Just as the tyranny in England contaminated all kinds of relationships and interactions, in Italy, the text suggests, freedom and equality are omnipresent.

The idea of tyranny as the kind of danger that spreads across the whole spectrum of human relationships serves as the foundation for Woolf’s other works from the 1930s, most notably her long essay *Three Guineas*. Here, she draws parallels between tyrannical patriarchs and fascist dictators: “The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England, or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain is now apparent to you.”<sup>30</sup> *Flush*, working on an interspecies level, makes the vicious circle of dictatorship even more inclusive.

Therefore, *Flush* advances the idea that also forms the basis of *Three Guineas* the oppression that works on a private familial level also determines the way societies function on a global political level. However, here we have to resolve an apparent contradiction of *Flush*. While being fully aware of the fact that in 1930 Italy is already a fascist state, Woolf still portrays its way of life as alternative to that preferred in Britain, as a place where oppression does not exist. The answer to this is to be found in anti-anthropocentric project of the text. When the Brownings move to Italy, the novel seems to lose all interest in the life of the poets and focuses almost solely on Flush’s experiences. Except for the moment the baby is born, Flush becomes

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<sup>30</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press: 1968) 101.

increasingly indifferent to changes and events in the lives of his humans. The text suggests the logic within which as the reader's distance from the human increases, their chances to discover the historical motives for the rise of fascism diminish. In other words, Woolf seems to see fascism and the war that follows in its wake as something exclusively human. She suggests that much like animals can be useful in women's struggle against patriarchy, humanity as such can find a way to improve itself if it improves its understanding of animality and accepts it as a source of inspiration for building a better society. This is why in *Flush* she contradicts the Western conceptualization of animals as lacking something, as being (unlike a human being) incomplete, which ultimately implies that animal experience of the world is less rich than that of a human being. Woolf is willing to contest this idea firstly by portraying Flush's experience as infinitely more rich and diverse than that of his human companions; and secondly, by undermining language and reason-based superiority of the human.

As to the richness of experience, the olfactory reality that is lived by Flush is portrayed in a manner that is supposed to make the reader envious of the impressions that are available to the canine protagonist:

Mr. Browning wrote regularly in one room; Mrs. Browning wrote regularly in another. The baby played in the nursery. But Flush wandered off into the streets of Florence to enjoy the rapture of smell. He threaded his path through main streets and back streets, through squares and alleys, by smell. He nosed his way from smell to smell; the rough, the smooth, the dark, the golden. He went in and out, up and down, where they beat brass, where they bake bread, where the women sit combing their hair, where the bird-cages are piled high on the causeway, where the wine spills itself in dark red stains on the pavement, where leather smells and harness and garlic, where cloth is beaten, where vine leaves tremble where men sit and drink and spit and dice--he ran in and out, always with his nose to the ground, drinking in the essence; or with his nose in the air vibrating with the aroma. He slept in this hot patch of sun--how sun made the stone reek! he sought that tunnel of shade--how acid shade made the stone smell! (86-87)

The quote juxtaposes writing in seclusion with Flush's olfactory explorations and presents the latter as infinitely more exciting. Within this juxtaposition, language, the ultimate privilege and the border that separates the animal from the human elevating the latter and denouncing the former, becomes an affliction, something that stands in the way of the unmediated experience of the world. That Flush is defined in terms of excess rather than lack is further emphasized by the spectrum of sensations available

to him. Although the smell is established as his primary mode of interacting with reality, his vision is by no means portrayed as deficient. Maggie Humm in her essay “Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture” for *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* points out how the visual for Flush is not less important than the olfactory.<sup>31</sup> She points out that Flush gains the first sense of his individual subjectivity not through smell, but by witnessing himself in a mirror.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, apart from the refined sense of smell and adequate sight Flush is able to experience the world in one more way that is largely inaccessible to humans:

Nor was his sense of touch much less acute. He knew Florence in its marmoreal smoothness and in its gritty and cobbled roughness. Hoary folds of drapery, smooth fingers and feet of stone received the lick of his tongue, the quiver of his shivering snout. Upon the infinitely sensitive pads of his feet he took the clear stamp of proud Latin inscriptions. In short, he knew Florence as no human being has ever known it. (87)

Flush’s tactile sensitivity, therefore, further contributes to his excessive appreciation of the world. By juxtaposing “infinitely sensitive pads” with “proud Latin inscriptions” Woolf draws attention to the deficiency of human understanding predicated upon the abstract system of language as well as to human pride that prevents any recognition of this deficiency.

The question of human language is given special attention in the text. After all, it is a biography of a writer’s dog. Language remains the most important argument in establishing the human-animal hierarchy. Referring to Heidegger and Benjamin in “The Animal That Therefore I Am” Derrida notices that while the animal’s deprivation is manifold, the most important element that the animal finds itself always lacking, at least from the human point of view, is language.<sup>33</sup> The narrator of Flush, however, seems skeptical about language: “But suppose Flush had been able to speak--would he not have said something sensible about the potato disease in Ireland?” (27). This sentence implies that language would change Flush completely replacing his unique sensibility with human reason. Had Flush been a man (and here gender is important as

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<sup>31</sup> Maggie Humm, “Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture,” *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 215.

<sup>32</sup> Maggie Humm, “Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture,” 220.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, 2002: 388.



Woolf seems to be aiming her irony at a stereotypical conceptualization of men as more rational and sensible), he would have ignored the immediate reality of his love for Miss Barrett and would have hidden behind abstract attempts to explain away the tragedy that had been taking place in Ireland.

The key to Flush's relationship with Miss Barrett is not their similarity but their difference: "The fact was that they could not communicate with words, and it was a fact that led undoubtedly to much misunderstanding. Yet did it not lead also to a peculiar intimacy?" (27) Eventually, even the poet herself starts feeling skeptical about language: "'Writing,' – Miss Barrett once exclaimed after a morning's toil, 'writing, writing . . .'" After all, she may have thought, do words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words?" (27). The uniqueness if not superiority of Flush's wordless reality is further emphasized towards the end of the fifth chapter: "Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words" (87).

Nevertheless, there is one moment in the novel when Flush is indeed longing for the ability to use language:

So, too, Flush felt strange stirrings at work within him. When he saw Miss Barrett's thin hands delicately lifting some silver box or pearl ornament from the ringed table, his own furry paws seemed to contract and he longed that they should fine themselves to ten separate fingers. When he heard her low voice syllabbling innumerable sounds, he longed for the day when his own rough roar would issue like hers in the little simple sounds that had such mysterious meaning. And when he watched the same fingers forever crossing a white page with a straight stick, he longed for the time when he too should blacken paper as she did. (43)

It is important, however, that this passage comes immediately after the love scene between Flush and Miss Barrett and rather than signifying a profound lack in Flush's nature it points towards his desire to become even closer to Miss Barrett and eliminate all defects in their understanding. Flush's longing for language is a part of the unbalanced relationship that they share, the relationship that forces him to sacrifice his freedom and change his whole nature. In order to become Miss Barrett's companion he has to stop being a dog, or be less of a dog and acquiring human language would be a big step in this direction. Flush is swept out by the humanizing effect that London is having on him. Language, just like racism, aristocratic arrogance and agonizing

discipline, is an inherent part Flush's becoming-human in London. The need for all of this will disappear in Italy once he is allowed to be a dog again.

Freed from London's propensity to civilize or humanize, Flush becomes increasingly suspicious of language and human ways as such. This is best exemplified by the scene on the balcony when the Brownings watch thousands of people marching the streets of Florence to thank Leopold II and cannot help feeling the excitement of the occasion. Flush, on the other hand, finds the demonstration rather absurd. The narrator, trying to guess at his thoughts and to interpret his yawn, says: "Who was this Grand Duke and what had he promised? Why were they all so absurdly excited? – for the ardour of Mrs. Browning, waving and waving, as the banners passed, somehow annoyed him. Such enthusiasm for a Grand Duke was exaggerated, he felt" (80). It is significant that the demonstration, Flush senses, is a linguistic event where words are made visible on the banners and the articulation of promises, which he prophetically feels to be empty, takes place. To all this he prefers something quite different: "While she had found an inexplicable satisfaction in the trampling of forty thousand people, in the promises of Grand Dukes and the windy aspirations of banners, Flush infinitely preferred the little dog at the door" (81). Italy, where Flush is able to lead an existence free of the constraints of human notions of propriety and aristocracy, weakens the connection between him and Mrs. Browning and liberates him from any envy of human language.

This is a scene that contains a more or less clear allusion to fascism whose spreading influence in Europe became associated with big gatherings of people in support of an authoritarian leader. While "Mr. and Mrs. Browning stood with six candles burning on the balcony, waving and waving" (81) without, it seems, any real understanding of what it is exactly that they are supporting, Flush feels the sinister potential of the event: "A weariness, a doubt, a ribaldry possessed him" (81) and makes the decision not to be part of it. With his disbelief in the language of banners and his refusal to cheer an abstract Grand Duke that can in time turn into Il Duce, Flush becomes the only presence in the novel who can already feel the danger that is soon to sweep across Europe. Unfortunately, the message Flush's reaction to the march is carrying is overlooked by the people around him. The beginning of the next paragraph informs us: "It cannot be doubted that Mrs. Browning and Flush were reaching

different conclusions in their voyages of discovery” (81), and indeed, in Italy Flush learns to overlook all superficial differences between dogs and live freely, while the Brownings cannot fully reject the oppression-based system as they are not able to recognize the Grand Duke, an authoritative figure of male power, as an element of this system.

*Flush* is, therefore, a novel that carries an anti-fascist message. Yet, this message can be fully discovered only through the consideration of the animal in the novel and the ways it is represented and conceptualized. Although thoroughly anthropomorphized, Flush the dog embodies otherness and is meant to remind the reader about other-than-human modes of experiencing the world. The novel also exposes human society as contaminated by countless forms of oppression and implies that it is through interaction with animality and, therefore, through rethinking of the very opposition between the human and the animal that the vicious circle of oppression can be broken.

#### 4. “A Stop the Mind Makes Between Uncertainties:” Post-Humanist Subjectivity in *Nightwood*

*Nightwood* is another novel from the interwar period. Much like *Flush*, it contends that the old system of meaning as well as the narratives supporting it had lost their balance and cohesion. It constitutes an attempt to provide a new system of coordinates by which humanity can navigate itself and, hopefully, avoid stumbling upon another deadly conflict. It also sees the animal as an agency through which such a system can be discovered. Simultaneously, however, Barnes’s take on animality differs dramatically from that of Virginia Woolf. While Woolf humanizes a dog in order to make his diverse experience of the world accessible to humans so they can embrace this diversity and learn from it, Barnes animalizes her protagonist to envisage a new type of subjectivity. In order to do so, Barnes employs the idea of degeneration but only to undermine it dramatically. If typically the animal is seen as the feared endpoint of degeneration, in *Nightwood* it becomes excluded from the very logic of progress or regress becoming instead the beginning and the foundation of entirely new subjectivity.

*Nightwood* is a text that can be described as a “night book,”<sup>1</sup> a sibling of the ultimate “night book” published in 1939 – James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. The novel is an excursion into darkness not only in the sense that for the most part its events take place at night, but also because it constitutes a withdrawal from rationality.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is even emphasized in the title that the world of the novel is a night world of possibilities not limited by the linear logic of the day, a world of dreamlike openness populated by ideas and sensations usually censored by rationality.<sup>3</sup> *Nightwood* is a novel where the night stands in opposition to the day and represents everything that has been repressed, from the center to the fringes, in order to create an illusion of cohesion and constancy. As Western subjectivity has been constructed through the abjection and repression of animality, it is not surprising that the animal becomes the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 546.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Whitley, “Nations and the Night: Excremental History in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*,” *Journal of Modern Literature*, Fall 2000: 83.

<sup>3</sup> Whitley, “Nations and the Night,” 85.

central presence in the night of the text and the catalyst for one of the worst fears of the epoch – the fear of degeneration.

Indeed, many critics have noticed that *Nightwood* can be interpreted as a “degeneration narrative”<sup>4</sup> informed by the sociobiological concepts of social Darwinism and natural selection.<sup>5</sup> Social Darwinism is based on the ideas of progress and the necessity of moving up the evolutionary ladder but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Herbert Spenser’s ideas grew in popularity, there emerged the discourse of regress and degeneration, an unwanted but powerful shadow of social Darwinism. “If we could evolve as a culture, could we not also degenerate?” – this is the question that all the degeneration narratives share in their fear of cultural deterioration.<sup>6</sup> The motifs of degeneration are abundant in *Nightwood*. The text is haunted by images of downward movement. The title of the first chapter of the novel is “Bow Down” and the central images of the last chapter, “The Possessed”, are those of Nora’s falling unconscious and of Robin’s walking on all fours: “at the moment Nora’s body struck the wood, Robin began going down.”<sup>7</sup> The chapter that casts the last glance at doctor Matthew O’Connor is entitled “Go Down, Matthew” and the one that concludes Baron Felix’s story is called “Where the Tree Falls”. The most noticeable instance of regress in the novel is Robin’s<sup>8</sup> gradual degeneration into an animal throughout the text of the novel with the culmination of this process happening in the last chapter when she starts crawling on all fours and according to some interpretations engages in an act of bestiality.<sup>9</sup> However, in order to understand the meaning of Robin’s regress it is important to take into account the complicated structure that the novel builds around the motif of degeneration.

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<sup>4</sup> Dana Seitler, “Down on All Fours: Atavistic Perversions and the Science of Desire from Frank Norris to Djuna Barnes,” *American Literature*, Vol. 73, September 2001: 526.

<sup>5</sup> Seitler, “Down on All Fours,” 527.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber&Faber, 2015) 152. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>8</sup> Robin carries a bird’s name which in the novel fulfils a double function. On the one hand, it refers to Robin’s unstable personality and the fleeting nature of her attachments thus confirming the symbolism usually attached to birds in culture; on the other hand, the novel resists this symbolism by portraying Robin as a bird who is not drawn to the sky, but rather to the earth, never going up, but repeatedly and insistently going down.

<sup>9</sup> Juliana Schiesari, *Polymorphous Domesticities: Pets, Bodies, and Desire in Four Modern Writers* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2012) 48.

If Robin is the one who becomes associated with degeneration and is sliding down into the feared animal state, Baron Felix is the character who fights the downward drift of the novel and instead tries to achieve perfect stability. While all the other protagonists of *Nightwood* find themselves in a space “bounded on the one side by the church and on the other by the court” (26) but not fully included by any of these powerful authorities, always moving in the margins of law and religion, Baron Felix is the one who “wishes to be correct at any moment” (9), to conform to every convention and to show respect to every authority. This is best expressed in his “obsession for what he termed ‘Old Europe’: aristocracy, nobility, royalty” (8). Felix constantly needs to pay homage to “the great past” (8) and therefore he bows “slightly to anyone who looked as if he might be ‘someone’” (9). His whole life is arranged around his obsession with the great names of history: “His rooms were taken because a Bourbon had been carried from them to death. He kept a valet and a cook; the one because he looked like Louis the Fourteenth and the other because she resembled Queen Victoria” (9). Thus, in the text the Baron poses as a conscious member of the traditional order, the one that had led to the First World War and the one that the novel ultimately ventures to criticize. The relationship that the text builds between the Baron and the animal is crucial as it indicates that the system Felix represents is predicated upon exploitation and subjugation. Early in the text, the Baron is compared to a dog: “he knew figures as a dog knows the covey and as indefatigably he pointed and ran” (7). This quote not only points out Felix’s connection to rationality by portraying him as a skilled mathematician, but it also relates him to a specific kind of animal – a trained dog, an animal that has been taught how to serve humans, a slave and simultaneously a symbol of human superiority. Another example comes later in the text when the reader is given the reason for Felix’s fondness for the circus – “that sweat-tarnished spangled enigma that, in bringing the beast to heel, had somehow turned toward him a face like his own” (10). Here again, the relationship of control and subjection become defining of Felix’s relationship with animality.

However, animals are not the only ones who are being subjugated within the system that Felix is trying his best to protect and perpetuate. This system is also strictly patriarchal. In the novel, Felix becomes the perfect symbol of traditional patriarchy when he admits that for him the ultimate purpose of any marriage is the birth of a male

heir. When the doctor asks him whether he intends to get married the Baron says that he does as “he wished a son who would feel as he felt about the ‘great past’” (35). Given that a patriarchal system is “rendered powerful through bodies that are ‘purely’ bred”<sup>10</sup> and because it values birthrights as cultural capital, it is entirely dedicated to producing heirs who then would be brought up in a certain manner (in a family) to perform their function in the ever-running mechanism of the establishment and thus would ensure the perseverance of the existing system of power relations. Within this system, a woman is merely a breeding machine who is valued mostly for her reproductive function, which is precisely the sentiment that is expressed in Felix’s answer to the doctor.

In the novel, Robin embodies a revolt against the old patriarchal system Felix is trying to preserve as well as an alternative path, a chance at reform. She is not only a wild beast that refuses to be domesticated, but also a woman who refuses to submit to the patriarchal law. Indeed, every time Robin’s animality is emphasized in the text, her femininity is accentuated too: “Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human” (33) or “Robin was outside the ‘human type’—a wild thing caught in a woman’s skin” (131). In *Nightwood*, having given birth to a boy, Robin feels that she has been exploited: “As he came toward her she said in a hurry, ‘I didn’t want him!’ Raising her hand she struck him across the face” (44). Subsequently, she leaves her husband forever – something Felix is never able to recover from, because by his standards this act constitutes an awful crime. By containing an animal and a woman, the character of Robin unites the two in their struggle against the old system (something that has already been foregrounded in *Flush*) that in the text is presented as defective and destructive.

*Nightwood* is a narrative of fallen penises (another downward movement) and dead children. Impotence haunts the novel. Count Onatorio Alamonte, the first nobleman that Felix meets, “suspected that he had come upon his last erection”(23), later we witness doctor Matthew’s unsuccessful attempt to masturbate when in spite of all his efforts “Tiny O’Toole<sup>11</sup> was lying in a swoon” (119). Moreover, in the middle

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<sup>10</sup> Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia Press University, 2009) 129.

<sup>11</sup> The nickname Matthew gives to his penis.

of the novel there comes an elaborate curse of erection:<sup>12</sup> “May you die standing upright! May you be damned upward! May this be damned, terrible and damned spot! May it wither into the grin of the dead, may this draw back, low riding mouth in an empty snarl of the groin!” (85). An erect penis, the main symbol of patriarchy, in *Nightwood* is also a signifier of order and uprightness<sup>13</sup> and the haunting presence of impotence is an indication that the patriarchy has failed and the system is not working anymore. Another indication of the collapse of the patriarchy is the grim fate the children suffer in *Nightwood*. In some cases they die, like the tenor’s son in Matthew’s story. The boy is bitten by a rat and although his father wants to spend every living moment with his sick child, he leaves to perform his duty to society:

But did he leave his bedside for a moment? He did because, though the son was sick, the fleet was in. But being a father, he prayed as he drank the champagne; and he wished his son alive as he chucked over the compass and invited the crew home, bow and spirit. But when he got home the little son lay dead. (120)

In this case, the demands that the system places upon the father result in his son’s dying alone. Other times in *Nightwood* children do not die but become exploited by the system. When Count Onatorio Alamonte comes upon his last erection, it is a young girl who, in absolute silence and not given much attention by neither the guests of the ball nor even the narrator, has to stay with the count and be the object of this last erection (22). Guido, a sick boy born of Robin and Felix’s unfortunate union, is exploited in a different manner. First, before he is even born, he becomes a victim on whom Felix puts the burden of his unfulfilled dreams and ambitions. Later, when Felix brings himself to accept the boy’s decision to enter the church and thus never to have offspring, which would effectively end Felix’s bloodline, he starts to deteriorate: “in accepting his son the Baron saw that he must accept a demolition” (97). Therefore, the boy is doomed to a life with a miserable, disappointed father, an unhappy existence that is best summarized at the end of “Where the Tree Falls”:

Many cafés saw this odd trio, the child in the midst wearing heavy lenses that made his eyes drift forward, sitting erect, his neck holding his head at attention, watching his father’s coins roll, as the night drew out, farther and farther across the floor and under the feet of the musicians as Felix called for military music, for Wacht am Rhein,

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<sup>12</sup> Jane Marcus, “Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman’s Circus Epic,” *Cultural Critique*, Autumn 1989: 171.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus, “Laughing at Leviticus,” 161.



for Morgenrot, for Wagner; his monocle dimmed by the heat of the room, perfectly correct and drunk. (110)

Just as the doctor predicts in the first chapter, Felix becomes an alcoholic. He also gives up his career in the bank and ends up being life-partners with a sexless circus acrobat whom he previously regarded as one of the “gaudy, cheap cuts from the beast life, immensely capable of that great disquiet called entertainment” (10). Felix deteriorates by his own standards but even finding himself at the very bottom of the hierarchy that he has forced upon himself, he refuses to doubt it. The last time Felix is mentioned in the novel he thinks he sees the Grand Duke Alexander of Russia and he cannot stop himself from making “a slight bow” (110-111). It is at this point that he is compared to an animal, but this time not to a proud servant of humanity, but an animal who is ashamed of the human ways: “his head in his confusion making a complete half-swing, as an animal will turn its head away from a human, as if in mortal shame” (111). However, this quote also reveals that there is still hope for Felix. While his bow is a gesture of his final submission to the idea of nobility, his transformation into an animal who is ashamed of a human is an indication of the possibility that he has at least partly realized the emptiness of his beliefs in pure and superior humanity.

Thus, as the narrative develops, Felix is transformed from a symbol of an outdated patriarchal system into a symbol of degradation. Robin, on the other hand, provides a counterpoint to this system. If Felix stands for purity and uniformity, Robin signifies inclusion and hybridity. Animality and femininity in her character do not only form an alliance against the demands and restrictions of patriarchy, they also prefigure a fundamentally new type of sexuality. It resists the kind of Oedipalized sexuality that is predicated upon reproductive function. Rather, it envisages the notion of sexuality as an alliance discussed in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. In their work the philosophers see heterosexual normativity, the institution of family and most of all the Oedipal organization of society (the kind of organization in which all human interaction is predicated upon the Oedipal triangle of a father, a mother and a child) as a “rock on which Man has chosen to take his stand.”<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari as well as

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, Preface, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) xvi.

Barnes see this rock as something that lies in the way of humanity's neurosis-free well-being and blocks the possibility of experiencing this world in a more complete and authentic manner. Deleuze and Guattari's approach to sexuality is based on the new understanding of the body: "A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils."<sup>15</sup> They connect the view of the body as a biological machine with fixed functions and possibilities to the ideology of the Western State<sup>16</sup> that seeks to program a body in a certain way in order to achieve its goals. Essentially, they insist that being a biologically and medically defined body today in Western capitalism "means that your organs are Oedipally patterned for hetero-marriage and work."<sup>17</sup> The body is stolen from us "in order to fabricate opposite organisms"<sup>18</sup> and thus its potential is severely restricted. To escape the Oedipal understanding of the body one has to let go of the stability provided by the ready-made ideas about it.

In *Nightwood* we notice very similar logic. First of all, by placing only women at the corners of the love triangle Barnes rejects the gender-defined idea of love and makes it clear that the relationship that people choose to engage in should not be defined by what we have between "the one leg and the other" (126). Simultaneously, the novel demonstrates that although gender and the system it informs are superficial they are still very powerful. In *Nightwood*, the character of Nora is emblematic of this danger. As a lesbian, Nora is ostensibly free from the Oedipal structure, but she still remains bound by it, doomed to play the role of a caring mother/wife. In the novel, Nora becomes associated with family, religion and traditional values. The house she

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<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 260.

<sup>16</sup> In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault suggests that since the 17th century, when the discourses on sexual practices started to proliferate in Europe, sexuality became inextricably linked to reproduction: "For was this transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the endeavor to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation?" (36). The strict economy of reproduction has as its goal to ensure the perseverance of the existing system of power relations that is still largely based on the patriarchal model: there has to be an heir that would be brought up in a certain manner (in a family) to perform their function in the ever-running mechanism of the State.

<sup>17</sup> John Protevi, "Deleuze and Life," *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. Daniel W. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 260.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 276.

lives in “had been in the family two hundred years” (45) and “by temperament Nora was an early Christian; she believed in the word” (46). Although outwardly Nora overcomes the gender binary in choosing a female lover for herself, she still remains deeply rooted in it throughout the novel, as a typical mother/wife, she seeks to restrict Robin’s wanderings and to confine her to family structure and to the gender-defined role-distribution inherent in it: “Out looking for what she’s afraid to find – Robin. There goes mother of mischief, running about, trying to get the world home” (55). Throughout *Nightwood* Nora remains a woman in the patriarchal sense of this word, unable to liberate herself from the constructed femininity and Oedipal compulsions. She, therefore, finds herself in a conundrum. On the one hand, it is on this model that she bases her idea of happiness and it is within this model that she tries to imprison Robin. On the other hand, as a lesbian she cannot fulfil the main condition that this model imposes – she cannot have a child: “We give death to a child when we give it a doll it’s the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane; so when I saw that other doll” (128). Thus, Nora is caught within the symbolic economy of Oedipal family and reproductive sexuality that it presupposes. Although Nora does sustain a certain relationship with animality, as she has a dog, this relationship fails to help her. Before Nora’s dog enters the relationship of “unnatural participation”<sup>19</sup> with Robin, he remains what Deleuze and Guattari call an “Oedipal animal”<sup>20</sup> – an animal devoid of its revolutionary potential to “uproot one from humanity,”<sup>21</sup> which necessarily means abandoning socially imposed formulas. Before the scene in the chapel Nora’s dog is a well-behaved domesticated animal who is fully integrated into the normal life of society: “... sitting about her oak table before the huge fire, Nora listening, her hand on her hound, the firelight throwing her shadow and his high against the wall” (45). This immobilized animality whose shadow becomes a part of a familiar home is opposed to Robin’s animality that is always moving unable to stay in one place.

In *Nightwood*, Robin is not just an animal, but an animal that “[knows] herself astray” (52). Robin, in other words, is a wild animal who cannot be domesticated, who

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<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 285.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 233.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 265.

cannot bear to be kept: “Robin was outside the ‘human type’ – a wild thing caught in a woman’s skin” (131). She is always moving somewhere, “wandering without design” (150). Even her thoughts are “a form of locomotion” (54). When Robin meets Nora for the first time they are in a circus and Robin seems to have no clue as to why she is there: “‘I don’t want to be here!’ But it was all she said; she did not explain where she wished to be” (49). This feeling of being lost never leaves Robin; she is an aimless “traveler” (51) in the world who does not know where she is going. Moreover, Robin’s wanderings are nearly always sexually charged: “Every bed she leaves, without caring, fills her heart with peace and happiness” (132). Robin is unable to sustain any stable relationship, throughout the novel she is wandering from partner to partner. Jeanette Winterson confidently connects Robin’s wanderings to sexual promiscuity: “Seedy Paris of whores and cheap bars has not yet begun to change. It is to this world that Robin Vote is drawn; the night-time world, where she will not be judged, and where she can find the anonymity of a stranger’s embrace.”<sup>22</sup> And indeed Robin is indirectly compared to a whore when Nora hears her singing: “[Nora] knew that Robin was singing of a life that she herself had no part in; snatches of harmony as tell-tale as the possessions of a traveller from a foreign land; songs like a practised whore who turns away from no one but the one who loves her” (51). Robin’s promiscuity effectively puts her outside the Oedipal triangle and its constraints. Instead, she represents the type of sexuality envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari: “there is a circulation of impersonal affects, an alternate current that disrupts signifying projects as well as subjective feelings, and constitutes a nonhuman sexuality.”<sup>23</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, sexuality becomes one of the movements of “becoming”. This becoming, possibly one of the most complicated concepts in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, is inextricably connected to the interaction with animality. It is through becoming-animal that our body receives a chance to uproot the organs from their specificity and acquire an absolutely new experience of living: “I must succeed in endowing the parts of my body with relations of speed and slowness that will make it become dog, in an original assemblage proceeding neither by

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<sup>22</sup> Jeanette Winterson, Preface, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 2006) xi.

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 233.

resemblance nor by analogy.”<sup>24</sup> While becoming cannot proceed by resemblance or analogy, it proceeds by making alliances with sexuality as the dominant power in this process as “a power of alliance inspiring illicit unions or abominable lovers.”<sup>25</sup> This is precisely what happens in the last chapter of *Nightwood* where Robin makes her sexually charged alliance with a dog. It is important to point out that it is with Nora’s dog that the alliance is formed. Although before the dog was only mentioned in the text as a representative of Oedipalized animality devoid of any revolutionary potential, in “The Possessed” he undergoes a transformation which undermines the very opposition between wild and domestic animals. This transformation is initiated and achieved through Robin who, crawling on all fours, invites the dog to participate in “something that troubled him” (153), pressing him against the wall until he is backed “into the farthest corner” (153). Only then does the dog stop being a compliant domesticated creature and attacks Robin. After this uprooting of the animal from his Oedipalized disposition is accomplished, the alliance can be made and both start running “head to head” (153). This alliance is not an alliance of sentimental friendship or love. Rather it is an agreement between two powers that gives both of them an impulse needed for a transformation to happen as both Robin and the dog undergo a change in this last chapter. It is of outmost importance that Nora, for whom Robin was searching, faints as soon as she sees Robin, making any kind of exchange impossible between the two. Nora’s rigid identity based on her inflexible beliefs and ideals prevents her from making an alliance with the other and therefore in the last chapter she is substituted for a dog who turns out to be more capable of transformation. Therefore, “The Possessed” summarizes Robin’s relationship with animality and emphasizes hybridity that becomes accessible through interaction with it.

In the novel, this hybridity becomes the foundation of a new post-humanist identity. Within this identity, animality is transformed from the feared endpoint of the degeneration process into an agency through which a new type of presence in the world can be developed. While Robin is the main representative of this new type of presence, its main features are theorized not by Robin but by other characters, chiefly by the

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 258.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 171.

most eloquent of the protagonists – doctor Matthew O’Connor. This is the result of the fact that Robin in the novel embodies the rejection of language and linguistic communication. This is evident in Robin’s multiple “linguistic refusals.”<sup>26</sup> When she walks with Baron Felix around Paris “he felt that he could talk to her, tell her anything, though she herself was so silent” (37). When Nora looks at Robin she feels that her forehead speaks of “some awful silence” (52). Most of Nora and Robin’s interaction are silent and when Nora follows Robin to the cafes where she spends her wondering nights, Nora notices that she stands there “sometimes laughing, but more often silent” (44). Robin is an anonymous force (“in her gestures there was a desperate anonymity” [151] or “Two spirits were working in her, love and anonymity” [49]) a force, in other words, for which there is no word in any language. She is opposed to language because it seeks and imposes stability while she is conceptualized as an utterly unstable hybrid. Thus, the Baron describes her in the following manner: “I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties” (100). The doctor, on the other hand, is the one whose monologues constitute two thirds of the novel. As he puts it himself: “I’ve given my destiny away by garrulity” (81). However, the doctor is also the main critic and the main prosecutor of language in the novel. He recognizes language as a system that separates us from the phenomena of the real world and ultimately reduces this world, forcing it into abstract formulas: “Yes, we who are full to the gorge with misery should look well around, doubting everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy” (75). Also, Matthew criticizes Nora for her reliance on language and the categories it imposes: “There is no truth, and you have set it between you; you have been unwise enough to make a formula; you have dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known” (123). However, it is mainly through his monologues that Robin becomes a linguistic and philosophic presence and it is to him that Nora and Baron Felix come, in the futile attempt to comprehend the experience they shared with Robin. Therefore, the doctor’s relationship with language is of a contradictory nature. On the one hand, he uses it extensively to theorize about Robin and the night as such; on the other hand, he

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<sup>26</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 129.

understands the futility of any such attempt because Robin has moved above (or under) language. This is precisely what Matthew cannot accomplish himself. With all his insights into the nature of human subjectivity, he remains opposed to hybridity, which in the novel is predicated upon the rejection of linguistic formulas. This is evident in his inability to overcome the gender binary as well as in his relationship with animality. Although doctor does recognize the linguistically imposed nature of gender (“It’s a gruesome thing that man learns only by what he has between the one leg and the other! [...] You never know which one of your ends it is that is going to be the part you can’t take your mind off” [126]) he still remains torn between the masculine and the feminine. In the novel, he keeps regretting the fact that he was born a man. In “Watchman, what of the Night” he wonders: “...am I to blame if I’ve turned up this time as I shouldn’t have been, when it was a high soprano I wanted, and deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king’s kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner?” (81). While the doctor longs for traditional femininity, Robin can effortlessly combine both genders. In the novel, she is a “girl who resembles a boy” and also someone who freely alternates female and male clothing (133, 152).

The doctor’s relationship with animality has similar dynamics in that he cannot accept and combine both. Rather, he always remains on the human side of the binary unable to let go of language and the thinking process predicated upon it. This is best expressed in the story he tells Nora in “Go Down, Matthew” about Father Lucas instructing him “to be simple like the beasts in the field” (118) and yet think. Matthew finds this mission too hard to accomplish: “This is a terrible thing that Father Lucas has put on me – be simple like the beasts and yet think and harm nobody” (118). It is significant that in the anecdote animals feature as “simple” beasts as Matthew’s other stories concerned with animality also portray animals as simple, not in the sense that they are uncomplicated and knowable, but rather in the sense that they are innocent and not to blame for the cruelties and absurdities of the manmade world. The first story is told during the very first conversation Felix has with the doctor towards the end of “Bow Down”. It takes place during the war and is concerned with a cow who shares a cellar with people hiding from a wave of bombing. The doctor treats the animal in a

very sentimental manner expressing much concern and compassion in both his actions and his language:

At that a flash of lightning went by and I saw the cow turning her head straight back so her horns made two moons against her shoulders, the tears soused all over her great black eyes. 'I began talking to her, cursing myself and the mick, and the old woman looking as if she were looking down her life [...]. I put my hand on the poor bitch of a cow and her hide was running water under my hand [...]; and I thought, there are directions and speeds that no one has calculated, for believe it or not that cow had gone somewhere very fast that we didn't know of, and yet was still standing there. (20)

The cow in the story is not an uncomplicated creature as the doctor recognizes that the animal might know more about the world than we do, but the cow is innocent because the story puts her in the context of the war, a disaster for which only humans can be blamed, and portrays the animal as an innocent and helpless victim. Significantly, Matthew's other animal anecdote is very similar in setting to this one. This story is told to Felix in "Where the Tree Falls":

Take the case of the horse who knew too much," said the doctor, "looking between the branches in the morning, cypress or hemlock. She was in mourning for something taken away from her in a bombardment in the war—by the way she stood, that something lay between her hooves – she stirred no branch, though her hide was a river of sorrow... (102)

Here, the animal is again the ultimate and affecting victim of a disaster brought about by people. Although the horse and the cow are pitied and recognized as someone who can experience pain and suffering, they are not viewed as independent agencies capable of generating change and development. Rather, they are passive beings who are always at people's mercy. Thus, the animality that the doctor keeps alluding to is impotent in the sense that just like Nora's dog (before her interaction with Robin) it cannot initiate any alliances and result in any hybridity.

Therefore, it is only Robin with her shifting identity who in the novel represents a new kind of post-humanist subjectivity. This subjectivity is characterized by utter instability and hybridity. Within Robin, binaries become meaningless as she melds together the human and the animal, the male and the female. Her rejection of language helps her attain anonymity and results in her "lack of identity." However, Barnes does not portray this new subjectivity as a new goal for humanity. In other words, she undermines the idea of degeneration refusing to see the animal as the feared



endpoint of this process, but she also refuses to turn her novel into a progress narrative. Instead, Robin is conceptualized as an influence, the consequences of which cannot be known. She represents “something not yet in history” (40). She is both a figure of immortality (“she who is eaten death returning” [34]) and a “figure of doom” (37). What will come of the “obscene and touching” (153) union between a woman and a dog remains unexplored and unexplained, possibly because language just cannot be stretched that far.

## 5. Looking for Animals in Brigid Brophy's *Hackenfeller's Ape*

*Hackenfeller's Ape* sets itself apart from the previous texts, as here for the first time the question of the animal constitutes the novel's central concern. While *Ulysses*, *Flush* and *Nightwood* do express interest in social and philosophical practices through which animality is constructed, it is still the human that they are ultimately concerned with and it is for the benefit of the human that they venture to undermine the human-animal binary. *Hackenfeller's Ape*, however, is different in that it expresses interest in animality for its own sake, insisting that the animal question presents valid moral and ethical concerns.

Throughout her life, Brophy was outspoken in her condemnation of various kinds of animal abuse. She was a member of numerous animal welfare groups and delivered speeches advocating vegetarianism and addressing issues such as hunting, angling, vivisection and animal testing. Her most celebrated contribution to the cause is her 1965 article "The Rights of Animals" collected in the 1971 anthology *Animals, Men and Morals*. Without actually naming it, the article criticizes the logic of speciesism<sup>1</sup> – the exclusion of animals from moral and ethical consideration based solely on their belonging to a different species and without concern for their mental and emotional capacities: "But where animals are concerned humanity seems to have switched off its morals and aesthetics [...]. Only in relation to the next animal can civilized humans persuade themselves that they have absolute and arbitrary rights - that they may do anything whatever that they can get away with."<sup>2</sup> The challenging of the logic of speciesism and human supremacy as such is also something that Brophy focuses on in her first novel *Hackenfeller's Ape*.

The critics of speciesism insist that "animal" is by no means a descriptive term, but rather a political one, and as such it presupposes a certain distribution of power. In other words, the term is not meant to describe who the animal other is or any of their

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the term "speciesism" was first used by Richard D. Ryder in his essay "Experiments on Animals," which was also published in *Animals, Men and Morals*.

<sup>2</sup> Brigid Brophy, "The Rights of Animals," *Don't Never Forget: Collected Views and Reviews* (London: Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square, 1966) 16.

crucial characteristics, it only designates what we can do to this other. Regardless of the fact that “the traditionally distinctive marks of the human [first it was possession of a soul, then ‘reason’, then tool use, then tool making, then altruism, then language, then the production of linguistic novelty, and so on] flourish quite reliably beyond the species barrier,”<sup>3</sup> the logic of speciesism allows relentless exploitation of the animal other solely on the basis of a “generic characteristic – in this case, species”<sup>4</sup> and thus functions similarly to other -isms such as racism or sexism. In the first chapter of *Hackenfeller’s Ape*, Brophy draws our attention to the ideologically constructed nature of the species divide by humorously applying the type of discourse usually used to describe animals’ social practices to the human visitors of the London Zoo: “...the Park was alive with the murmuring vibration of the species which made it its preserve. The creatures, putting off timidity at the same time as winter drabness, abounded now with no ascertainable purpose except to sun themselves.”<sup>5</sup> Parodying the discourse of nature documentaries, Brophy focuses on the same aspects these films tend to accentuate: “The ground, too hard to receive their spoors, shook beneath games that revealed a high degree of social organization” (11) or “On the gravel paths, scuffles and hoots gave evidence of courting rites” (11). It is only after this demonstration of the arbitrariness of the discourse of species that Brophy offers a serious comment on the animal question, making it harder for the reader to disagree with her: “This was, moreover, the only species which imprisoned other species not for any motive of economic parasitism but for the dispassionate parasitism of indulging its curiosity” (12). However, the text does not sustain this serious and accusative tone. The comic attitude returns with the next line that serves as another statement on human social organization: “That curiosity, however, was not to be indulged on Sunday before half-past two” (12). With its ironic treatment of the discourse of species, the novel can be

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<sup>3</sup> Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 2.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Brigid Brophy, *Hackenfeller’s Ape* (London: Allison and Busby, 1979) 11. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

described as a comic satire<sup>6</sup> that takes for its object the logic of speciesism as well as other attitudes and practices empowered by it.

As part of this movement, the novel exposes the zoo as a space that not only epitomizes the ideology of speciesism, but also reinforces it. Zoos appeal to their visitors as tokens of a collective unconscious fantasy of Edenic perfection<sup>7</sup> and position themselves as sites of scientific research and “an emblem of conservation policy.”<sup>8</sup> However, the educational value of zoos is problematic. Historically, zoos have presented animals as “freaks, as objects divorced from nature, belittled, distorted, out of context.”<sup>9</sup> Deprived of everything except their value as museum exhibits, these animals are also deprived of their complexity as beings. In the circumstances of a zoo, visitors cannot come into contact with animality; they cannot see and recognize animals as autonomous and complete beings whose existence is not defined or shaped by human indentations. Instead, the lesson that zoos teach their visitors is the lesson of human superiority. As Dale Jamieson puts it: “Zoos teach us a false sense of our place in the natural order.”<sup>10</sup> Such a moment of teaching appears in the first chapter when a boy, a random visitor to the zoo, “his attention caught by the mournful aspect of the Hackenfeller’s Ape” (28), tries to feed a nut to the monkey. The boy’s dilemma is fully expressed in the passage a few lines later: “Still stretched over the barrier, he dared not to go inside. Percy’s sulkiness baffled and unsettled him, and he held himself ready to jerk away if the animal should prove dangerous” (29). He is overwhelmed by two emotions: fear and confusion. His fear is informed by the assumption that everything that belongs to the realm of nature, especially wild nature (as the boy perceives Percy as a wild animal) is dangerous to a human. This assumption is a result of the nature-culture dualism, which defines our understanding of the world. As Val Plumwood points out, within this dualistic framework “wilderness” becomes the

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Maslen, *Political and Social Issues in British Women’s Fiction, 1928-1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) 55.

<sup>7</sup> Randy Malamud, *Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) 13.

<sup>8</sup> Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia Press, 2011) 104.

<sup>9</sup> Malamud, *Reading Zoos*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Malamud, *Reading Zoos*, 2.

underside of reason and civilization and as such, it is always alien and fearful.<sup>11</sup> While the boy's fear signifies his dependence on cultural stereotypes, his confusion is an act of independent thinking. Percy's "mournful aspect" (28) is the very reason the boy notices the monkey and as he comes closer it is Percy's "sulkiness" (28) that confuses him. The boy is thus disturbed by Percy's unhappiness. It "baffles" (28) him because it does not fit in with the idea of a zoo inhabited by happy animals, the idea to which most children are exposed from an early age. This is a moment in the boy's life when he is about to challenge the taught imperative and, through his own independent perception of the animal's emotions, discover the inaccuracy of the ideologically imposed formulas which define the perceptions of zoos and their prisoners. However, this never happens as when he complains to his mother about Percy not wanting to take the offered nut, she replies: "Save it for one that does [want it]" (29). The mother's reply presents Percy's behavior as inappropriate. Instead of seeing the monkey's sadness and passivity as the result of the emotional response animals have to captivity, she perceives him (and teaches her son to do the same) as a shameful anomaly that spoils her family's visit to the zoo. Interestingly enough, the lesson that the mother is teaching to her son, is also the lesson she herself has just learned from her husband:

"They don't look very happy, do they?"

"That's just their expression."

"It doesn't seem right to keep them shut up."

"They're all right," the man said. He refused to have his son's pleasure spoiled, even though his son could not hear, by any suggestion that it was unkind. (28)

This dialogue precedes the boy's interaction with Percy by just a couple of lines. It thus becomes clear that while Brophy does see the zoo as a space within which the power of one species to rule over the other is manifested, she does not perceive it as completely devoid of the potential to unsettle our expectations and received opinions on animals.

The problem of teaching and transmitting certain patterns of thought is also present in *Hackenfeller's Ape's* exploration of the issue of pre-programmed and non-autonomous ways of understanding animality. In the novel, it is best visible in the

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<sup>11</sup> Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002) 163.

characters of Gloria and Tom. At the very start of her first conversation with the Professor, Gloria says, “All these animals shut up. It does not seem right, really. I know they don’t really feel anything, animals” (71). Gloria here suppresses her sympathy for animals and prefers to rely on the received formula. Her dependence on such formulas is further emphasized in the passage where she daydreams about a date with a man. This daydream exposes her fantasies as determined by pop-culture’s stereotypical love narratives. The plot of this fantasy is a typical plot of a gangster movie and its hero is “a mixture of Burt Lancaster and Marlon Brando” (87). It is Gloria’s dependence on Hollywood narratives that makes Tom a hero in her eyes after he kills Percy. She is attracted by the image of a man holding a gun and a man who is brave enough to kill, even if it is just a helpless monkey who becomes the victim of this alleged bravery. Tom, in his turn, is also unable to perceive Percy outside the pattern he has learned as a child:

He had been an evacuee. The country town where he stayed was bombed on three successive nights and, one Saturday afternoon, machine-gunned from the air. There had been, not only on the days of actual danger but for a year afterwards, an infectious spirit, almost a genius, of crisis. [...] This feeling returned now as he patrolled the zoo. The very shotgun he carried [...] provoked memory. His father had taught him how to use it - in case of parachutists. (100)

Although initially Tom says to his supervisor that “Percy would not hurt a fly” (97) he ends up killing the monkey almost instinctively: “The joy of sharing a manly pursuit with his father came back; he remembered all the lessons and took aim with classic correctness” (101). In “And Say the Animal Responded?” Jacques Derrida sees this automatism of action and reaction as undermining the very border between the animal and the human. It has always been assumed, he points out, that the animal is an instinctual being and the human is defined by the ability to react independently and spontaneously. However, as Freud and Lacan has demonstrated, a fully self-present Cartesian subject is in fact a fiction. The unconscious “should prevent us having any immediate and conscious assurance of the freedom presupposed by any notion of responsibility” and “hence some automaticity of the reaction in every response.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the very reaction that Tom and Gloria have towards animality shows their

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” *Zoontologies: the Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 127.

dependence on subconscious automatism and undermines their difference from the animal.

The only character who partly escapes this automatism of thinking about and interacting with animals is Professor Darrelhyde, a zoologist who regularly comes to the zoo hoping to see the monkeys' mating ritual. As a scientist, he has been trained to treat his animal subjects in a certain manner, so when he first starts observing Percy he tries to practice an objective approach, which is predicated on excluding emotions and, in the case of animals, any ethical considerations: "The professional part of his mind observed that the animals were in good condition: not over-verminous; skin and eyes healthy in appearance. Evidently their diet and the space allotted to them were adequate" (18). The text conceptualizes this type of relationship as one-sided and unbalanced stating that when the professor thought of Percy's imprisonment he "had for a long time hedged, declining to admit there was torment, refusing to stand in the receiving position of this enquiring relationship, disinvolving himself from the monkey's affairs" (18). The scientific approach attempted by the Professor is described in Teresa Brennan's book *History after Lacan* as "sadodispassionate."<sup>13</sup> She insists that "when directed towards another, the dispassionate merges readily with sadism in that it denies or cuts off empathy or identification with the other."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Professor's main goal is to erase any possibility of empathy or identification from the scientific record of Hackenfeller's apes' mating rituals. While Hackenfeller's account of the mating presented it as "a ceremonial so poetic, so apparently conscious that, if it were true, it must mark a stage between the highest beast and Man" (19), the Professor hopes "to replace the confused, anonymous, undated tradition, which had been preserved among untrained minds, by a couple of sentences packed and precisely descriptive" (19). Although initially determined not to commit pathetic fallacy and remain an objective observer, the Professor cannot help feeling emotional when he witnesses the drama that takes place between the monkeys, Percy and Edwina. Percy does not want to commit to reproduction in spite of being healthy and having just enough space in his cage ("The animal was healthy enough: why didn't it do what it

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<sup>13</sup> Teresa Brennan, *History after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2003) 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

was in its nature to do and at the same time benefit science?" [20]), and thus the problem appears to be emotional or psychological in nature, the two realms that the scientific framework denies animals. Thus, Darrelhyde realizes that the mating ritual does not take place for a reason that the scientific approach cannot be stretched to cover. Consequently, the Professor abandons it: "It was then that the Professor entered a relationship with the monkeys. At first, he simply crooned to Percy, because the sound soothed the pain - usually something from *Figaro's Marriage*. Then he had begun to talk" (20). The moment the Professor starts talking to the monkey he crosses the species boundary and starts treating Percy as a human. He also, however, contributes to the novel's comic effect. That Brophy portrays the relationship the Professor ends up establishing with the monkey as somewhat ludicrous and amusing to the reader (an old man spending hours in front of a monkey's cage talking to him and singing him Mozart's arias) signifies the fact that this relationship is also inherently flawed – the issue that will be discussed later in the chapter.

Another source of the comic in the text is Percy himself. Hackenfeller's ape is an invention, it is "the missing link,"<sup>15</sup> a creature that marks the transition between a human and an animal: "Working on specimens alive and dead, they had established that the eyesight of Hackenfeller's Ape, and the composition, temperature and pressure of its blood, came closer to the human model than those of any other animal" (16). It is also for this reason that the Professor is so eager to jump the species barrier: he was already prepared by scientific research to recognize Percy as more human than other animals (by pointing out the fact that scientist worked on "specimens alive and dead" the quote emphasizes the irony of the fact that to be recognized as almost human the apes had to be treated as fully non-human, i.e. killed for no other reason than the increase in scientific knowledge). However, the text does not share the affectionate attitude the Professor adopts towards Percy. In the novel, the monkey functions as a caricature of human arrogant expectations about the essence of animality and its position in the species hierarchy.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Axelrod, "Mozart, Moonshots, and Monkey Business in Brigid Brophy's *Hackenfeller's Ape*," *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 1995: 18.



The fact that Percy belongs to an invented species allows for an unconventional use of anthropomorphism in the novel. In *Flush*, anthropomorphism is used in an attempt to understand animality through imagination. Flush in the novel is a typical animal and it is through his anthropomorphized figure that the reader is supposed to achieve a better understanding of animality per se. Brophy, on the other hand, does not see anthropomorphism as an appropriate tool to explore animality. Percy is meant to represent not so much a typical animal as an exceptional one and this exceptionality lies in him being physically more like a human than any other animal. In *Hackenfeller's Ape*, he does not represent animality, rather he represents humanity. Brophy invents this almost human monkey in order to satirize various strategies developed in order to rationalize the concept of human superiority. Percy is described as “an animal discontent with his monkeydom, already exercising the first characteristic of Man, which Man had never satisfactory explained, self-restraint” (22). The word “discontent” serves as a reference to *Civilization and its Discontents*, where Freud offers a detailed explanation of the theory of organic repression. The connection is further emphasized by how Percy’s is a restraint from sexual intercourse and in Freud’s theory, it is precisely sexual repression that “leads to the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization.”<sup>16</sup> By rendering a humorous portrait of a monkey who demands “intellectual illumination” (18) and seeks “enlightenment” (21) Brophy exposes Freud’s theory as informed by the notion of progress and demonstrates how it sees the animal as just a lower step in the process of humanization. Another discourse that the character of Percy exposes as inherently progressive and deprecating towards animals is the discourse of evolution. “Evolution” is one of the first words that Percy learns to understand (22) and it is also in terms of evolution that the scientists understand the value of the newly discovered species: “[London zoologists] had allotted to the species its place in the Evolutionary progress, and had devised its Latin name” (16). Within both frameworks, a hierarchy emerges that positions the animal below the human. This hierarchy is internalized by Percy in his aspiration to become human and in his tendency to see people “as omnipotent and all-responsible” (57). This internalization is the key to the comic effect

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<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961) 46-47.

Percy has on the reader. The notion that an animal agrees with the hierarchical and progressive understanding of nature embodied in the theory of organic repression and in the discourse of evolution is rendered utterly ridiculous. Both frameworks are thus exposed as inherently anthropocentric and biased.

However, there is another important consequence of seeing the difference between individual species in terms of progress. As Cary Wolfe notices in *Animal Rites*, the theory of organic repression and the theory of evolution imply that

the subject of humanism is constituted by a temporal and evolutionary stratification or asynchronicity in which supposedly “animalistic” or “primitive” determinations inherited from our evolutionary past (...) coexist uneasily in a second-order relation of relations, which the phantasmic “human” surfs or manages with varying degrees of success or difficulty. (3)

In other words, the human is not seen as something stable and substantial, but as an evanescent quality whose origin and nature remains forever unknown. A clean break from animality, therefore, can never be achieved. Consequently, the human becomes a matter of negotiation and fluctuation. As has been mentioned before, in *Hackenfeller's Ape* the human is first and foremost the position of power.

The character of Kendrick makes it clear that this position of power is achieved through the use of the sadodispassionate approach to nature and the animal other. Kendrick, who makes his appearance at the end of the first chapter, is the scientist who wants to use Percy in a space exploration programme. It is through Kendrick that the concept of the sadodispassionate approach is elaborated in the novel. His attitude towards Percy is characterized by complete disengagement. He is practicing scientific objectivity and excludes all the emotional and the personal from the consideration of the animal. Kendrick is described as “unemphatic” (30) and “reasonable” (27). When asked about the sensations that Percy would experience in the rocket Kendrick plans to put him in, the man is confused: “‘Sensations?’ Kendrick wrinkled his nose, puzzled” (29), thus effectively demonstrating that he is not interested in any kind of subjective feelings. Commenting on this kind of interaction with the other, Val Plumwood points out,

The insistence on such a concept of impartiality or disengagement imposes a rigid barrier between subject and object which excludes relationships of care, sympathy and

engagement with the fate of what is known, constructing connection as a source of error and the object known as alien to the knower.<sup>17</sup>

The necessary result of this approach is that the scientific exploration is never truly interested in the other but is always “narrow, focusing on just those aspects of the other that can be exploited rather than aiming at a more rounded form of knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, this form of knowledge, while presenting itself as unbiased and objective, is in fact power-ridden and dominated by the goals of the knower or the subject, while all the characteristics of the object that can undermine it are ignored or marginalized: “[i]t is inevitable that the knowledge relation is constructed as one in which the known is merely a means to the knower’s ends or to the ends of power which they, in the absence of respect and care, will come to serve.”<sup>19</sup> Plumwood argues further that this kind of knowledge is always and necessarily political:

Power is what rushes into the vacuum of disengagement; the fully ‘impartial’ knower can easily be one whose skills are for sale to the highest bidder, who will bend their administrative, research and pedagogical energies to wherever the power, prestige and funding is.<sup>20</sup>

The sadodispassionate approach, as an exploitative and objectifying approach is, therefore, supported and reinforced by the political and social structure of society as it always reflects the agenda of the powerful.

This is precisely the sentiment expressed in the figure of Kendrick who from the very start becomes connected to the notions of rigid hierarchy and authority. He has “an Air Force look” (25) and the mission that he wants to appropriate Percy for is “top priority” (27), with orders coming “from the highest level” (31). His appearance also exposes other binary oppositions that are reinforced by the object-subject division of the sadodispassionate approach. First of all, Kendrick is described as “manly” (26) and “clean” (25), cleanliness, or the cultural trend toward cleanliness being one of the main characteristics distinguishing humans from animals in Freud’s theory of organic repression. The Professor, on the other hand, starts moving towards the animal side of the human-animal opposition: “he had learnt from Percy one animal faculty. He felt

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<sup>17</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

neither fear nor aggression, but a general wariness of danger” (26). The other opposition that is explored here is the gender binary. While Kendrick is “manly” (26) and displays all the characteristics of traditional masculinity (“physical courage” [25], strength and fitness [25] and self confidence), when we first see the Professor he is making “a womanish noise” (13) and imagining himself the Countess from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*: “He became the middle-aged Countess, tragically and with dignity calling on Love to restore her treasure - the affections of her Count” (17). That manhood is a more powerful position to occupy in society is also expressed in the fact that from the very start the Professor refuses to consider the female monkey Edwina as deserving of his attention focusing all his interpretative energy on Percy. The text thus exposes the power imbalance in society demonstrating again how the animal and the woman are united by their underprivileged position.

However, Kendrick himself does not occupy the highest position in the hierarchy. This is expressed early in the book when the Professor says: “You send male monkeys [...] where male men dare not go” (31) and learns that Kendrick indeed “would give [his] back teeth to go” (31) but cannot disobey “orders from the highest level” (31). This becomes crucial for the ending of the novel when Kendrick puts on Percy's skin to get in the rocket to fulfil his dream and “see the stars” (31). This episode points to yet another type of relationship between animality and authority. As Derrida notices in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, the sovereign, the ultimate authority, and the beast have in common their “being-outside-the-law.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the law can be ignored by either the sovereign, the very creator of the law, or the animal who is “never in infraction of the law”<sup>22</sup> and cannot commit a crime. Therefore, animality always contains the potential for transgression. This is already the case in *Nightwood* where the inhabitants of the night and the transgressors of the law exist on the vanishing border between the human and the animal. Here, Kendrick also has to lose his human status in order to deceive authorities. To defend his right to sacrifice himself he has to become a being whose sacrifice the system views as acceptable. Interestingly

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Volume 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 17.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 147.

enough, the two adversaries, Kendrick and the Professor, become strangely paired as in both cases the transgression is enabled by animality.

When the Professor, in his turn, refuses to submit to the power of authority and allow the monkey to be destroyed, his struggle is not against one institution or one official, he unwittingly engages in a battle against the whole system of meaning that supports the existing power structure and the oppositions it is predicated upon. The Professor thus becomes a rebel, which is also emphasized by the fact that he cannot stop thinking about *The Marriage of Figaro* that Brophy herself describes as the opera of the rebelling oppressed: “*Figaro* in which the alliance of the Countess, Susanna, Figaro and Cherubio, representing all the oppressed classes - servants women and the young - triumphs over the count, is a revolutionary document.”<sup>23</sup>

His rebellion takes the Professor on a quest within which he tries to negotiate the meaning of animality with various other characters. His first visit is to his sister whom he cannot bring to acknowledge the importance of his enterprise. In her case against Percy the Professor’s sister relies on the logic of speciesism. “All this for a monkey” – she says and then continues: “Don’t you know [...] that people human beings, Clem – are starving in India; that men are dying in Malaya; that we still haven’t cured cancer...” (38). She implies that as long as human suffering endures, addressing the problem of animal suffering is immoral. Brophy focuses on this kind of argument in “The Rights of Animals” and exposes it as an excuse for passivity: “Human fantasy often fabricates a dilemma as an excuse for inertia [...]. It is a principle of ‘divide and do nothing’” (19). As the dialogue continues, however, the sister makes a more interesting point. When the Professor argues that all the mentioned wrongs and injustices do not “make it right or just to sacrifice an innocent monkey” (38), his sister replies: “It doesn’t make the case right, but it makes you wrong [...] Here you are with all your brain – far more than I ever had – and all this needing to be done in the world, and you spend your time and energy on an animal!” (38) What is significant about this argument is that the monkey slips between its lines. While the original problem was with the animal, this logic makes Darrelhyde its new center (“It doesn’t make the case

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<sup>23</sup> Brigid Brophy, *Mozart the Dramatist: the Value of his Operas to Him, to His Age, and to Us* (London: Libris, 1988) 112.

right, but it makes you wrong”). The Professor is, therefore, unable to defend his case as the animal for whom he cares is excluded from the very line of reasoning he is presented with.

After the Professor faces the first defeat in his quest (he describes it as a “false start” [37]), he proceeds to visit a newspaper office hoping to raise public outrage. However, as soon as the reporter learns that the matter in question and the mission for which Percy is being taken is “top priority, and top secret” (43) he states that he cannot publish such a story because the paper has been “pressing on with defense. Don’t relax and that sort of thing” (43) and because the paper runs “a space corner every Saturday” (43) and cannot be discouraging space travel. In other words, Percy’s tragedy cannot become public as it is meant to remain invisible within the existing system of power distribution. Again, he is viewed as merely a means to accomplish something this system views as important. It is significant, that the reporter does not learn anything about Percy except for his name and the fact that he is a monkey. In fact, he is not even sure whether he is a monkey or an ape until the Professor tells him there is no difference (42). The questions about the animal’s ability to feel suffering, fear and other emotions, the questions of whether it is moral to send a sentient and feeling being to his ultimate destruction have no place in the discourse of power where the word “animal” functions as a label undeserving of further scrutiny. The reporter’s ideologically pre-programmed inability to view Percy’s situation as a tragedy is emphasized at the end of this episode when the Professor asks him for the weather report (hoping the weather will not allow the launch of the rocket) and the reporter assumes that Darrelhyde has already forgotten about his “monkey business” and wants to be sure the weather will be good for his picnic.

The Professor’s next appointment is with the coordinator of scientific studies named Post. Post is also unable to help the Professor, however, he is more than willing to explain why the Professor’s crusade is doomed. According to Post’s theory, humanity is and always has been fundamentally cruel and incapable of acting out of kindness. He refers to this fundamental cruelty and the drive to kill as “the mark of Cain” (49) that cannot be erased:

“Why must we kill animals? You know as well as I do that Man can live perfectly healthily on a vegetable diet. Everyone knows. But we still say it’s necessary to kill

animals. The figures show that you can stop hanging murderers without encouraging murder, but we go on behaving as if hanging was necessary. The last two wars brought economic ruin to Europe but we still think that war is an economic necessity”  
“We made a mistake.”  
“Mistake nothing! Mankind invents necessities right and left to justify what it enjoys doing.” (50)

Post’s theory advocates passivity on an even larger scale than the sister’s theory does, but, most importantly, it is again uninterested in animality. In this case too, the human comes to occupy the central position in the discussion. It is even visible in the quote above in how having started with the animal issue, Post swiftly moves to discussing human tragedies.

The Professor’s last opponent and his last hope to save Percy without having to break the law is an animal rights activist named Colonel Hunter whose very surname suggests an opposition toward the issue of animal welfare. The Professor eventually finds out that the only thing Hunter and his League for the Prevention of Unkind Practices to Animals are doing is collecting horrifying images of animal suffering: “It was many years since the Professor had done any dissecting, yet, looking back, he was sure that not even in his greenest student years had he felt such nausea” (63). Hunter proceeds to show the professor “a real prize” (63) - “one of Pavlov’s original dogs” (63). Finally, when the Professor is about to leave Hunter asks him to send the pictures of Percy when he comes back from space and when Darrelhyde points out that Percy probably would not come back in one piece Hunter replies “That [...] would be even better” (65). Hunter is, thus, revealed as a sadist who enjoys bearing witness to suffering and probably even extracts sexual pleasure from it, which is hinted at in the following passage: “The Colonel bent down beside the cabinet and looked for a moment inside. Then he locked the door, put away his keys, and rose, puffed but with refreshed geniality” (64). In his monograph *Electric Animal* Akira Mizuta Lippit discusses the visual images of animal suffering as sources of sexual excitement and argues that the animal in this case serves as a mere tool to bypass “the responsibilities of reason, language, and consciousness” (181) that would forbid extracting pleasure from the images of human suffering. The fact that Hunter is a colonel also emphasizes the similarity between the two ultimately sadistic activities - hunt and war - that are both predicated on the disregard for suffering and the rejection of empathy.

The Professor's unsuccessful quest reveals the inability of discourse to sustain the discussion of animality. The fact that Percy is a special monkey, almost human and presumably capable of experiencing every emotion does not once enter into the conversation. It is partly because the animal always occupies the lowest position in the hierarchy of power and thus the Professor's intention to make the monkey's case visible encounters the resistance of a system predicated upon animal exploitation. However, the quest also reveals an inherent quality of discourse and human subjectivity as such. In *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* Susan McHugh addresses the issue of representing animals in literature. She points out that in the discourse of literature the animal more often than not serves as a metaphor for the human. While providing new and more elaborate ways for conceptualizing the human, the animal inhabits the literature "without somehow being represented therein."<sup>24</sup> However, this is not only the case of literature. Based on the abjection of animality, human subjectivity emerges as the opposite of the animal and so in the whole of discourse the subject's inscription is achieved through the erasure of animal traces.<sup>25</sup> Hence the structural impossibility, the impossibility that ensures the Professor's failure, of making the animal the center of a discussion. In order to acquire a valid position in discourse the animal should represent or entail a human concern, otherwise it is always confined within the margins of discourse. This structure also ensures the irrelevance of an animal's faculties and intelligence. Percy's status as almost human only makes him a better target for researchers because he "would be nearest to human in its reaction" (29) while the question of whether his emotional capacity is almost human as well is never asked except by the Professor. In this respect, Percy does indeed represent a typical animal as he embodies the omnipresent tendency to deny animals any kind of subjective experience, thus making them perfect targets for exploitation.

The Professor's blindness to the scale of the issue is the source of the comical in the text and the reason his relationship with Percy is portrayed as inherently flawed.

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<sup>24</sup> Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) 6.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, 2002: 401.



After having been rejected five times, he thinks to himself that “humanity had proved wanting in humanness” (66). In fact, it is precisely the excess of humanness and the anthropocentric structure of discourse that has insured his defeat. From the very start, Darrelhyde’s rebellion against the system is portrayed as ridiculous in its pettiness. First of all, the female monkey Edwina is excluded from his concerns from the very start. He even makes a feeble attempt to save Percy by suggesting that Edwina be put on the rocket (“Why don’t you take the female” [30]) – a move he later comes to regret as ungallant. However, the most important point that betrays the shallow nature of the Professor’s approach is that it is also biased by anthropocentricity. It is Percy’s humanity that initially attracts the Professor’s attention, his apparent ability to appreciate Mozart and his “idealistic obstinacy” (41) from sexual intercourse. Furthermore, the instructions that the Professor gives Percy after learning about Kendrick’s plans also focus on humanity’s concerns rather than the monkey’s: “You’ve got to survive, and you’ve got to procreate. We may need you. When my species has destroyed itself, we may need yours to start it all again” (33). However, this point sounds more like a rationalization of the Professor’s sentimental attachment to the monkey than a valid argument. First of all, according to the text, Percy is not the last Hackenfeller’s Ape on the planet, the species is not even endangered. Secondly, the Professor never mentions this argument to any of the people he seeks help from. The Professor’s overall incompetence is further emphasized in the chapters that follow his attempts to liberate Percy. It is only after the cage is broken and Percy disappears into the night that Darrelhyde remembers “the notes Hackenfeller had made about these animals’ agility when they were free” (83). The question that keeps bothering him, on the other hand, is the question of “whether his landlady would accommodate Percy” (80).

Populated by caricatures of human arrogance and, in the Professor’s case, feebleness and incompetence, *Hackenfeller’s Ape* appears to be without a hero. It also appears to be without an animal, as Percy is a caricature of an idealized and sentimentalized animality. However, it is behind this irony and satire that the genuine concern of the text is to be found. It is visible in a number of brief passages like the one that shows the Professor not particularly enjoying his meal in the Corner House:

It turned out to be a rissole of hashed meat. His knowledge of comparative anatomy was no use; the meat has gone through a mincing machine and he could not identify it. It seemed to him a macabre reflection that a human body was so sacred that soldiers would break off in the middle of war to collect it and give it a solemn burial, whereas an animal's body could be mangled pas recognition and still not offend the human taste. (45)

It is also in the pictures from Hunter's office that a zoologist cannot look at without experiencing nausea; and in the fact that almost all characters of the book eventually reveal their uncomfortableness with zoos or sending animals to space (even the controller of the space mission eventually admits that "it's a pretty poor show to use animals" [110] and that he, a soldier, could not help feeling sentimental watching what he thought was Percy walking to the rocket); and finally in the images of all the dogs and monkeys who, after having been "called to higher things" (27), never made it in one piece – the text never names them, but their shadows are bound to appear in the imagination of every reader. The very structure of Brophy's novel reflects the marginal position of animals and especially of animal suffering in human society's discourse. However, the text also emphasizes that this marginal position is not completely powerless as its very existence unsettles and confuses this discourse and undermines the stability of human subjectivity. As Derrida puts it: "The treatment of animality, as of everything that finds itself in submission by virtue of a hierarchical opposition, has always, in the history of (humanist and phallogocentric) metaphysics, revealed obscurantist resistance."<sup>26</sup> By acknowledging this resistance and rejecting the traditional ways of approaching animality, Brophy's novel opens the dialogue on animal representation as such.

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 474.

## 6. Animal Representation, Meat-Eating and Responsibility in the Two Animal Lessons of *Elizabeth Costello*

I believe one has a duty (an ethical duty? – perhaps) not to submit to powers of discourse without question

J.M. Coetzee

J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* explicitly addresses the problem of human-animal relationships. This issue is present in all of Coetzee's fiction, but it is in *Elizabeth Costello* that the animal question and the concern with the ways in which humanity treats animals become central. In the third and the fourth 'lessons' of the novel ("The Lives of Animals: The Philosophers and the Animals" and "The Lives of Animals: The Poets and the Animals"), two issues assume special importance: the representation of animals in human discourse, and the practice of meat-eating as well as the intensive animal farming industry that sustains it.

The problem of animal representation is already suggested by the publication history of these two lessons. Originally presented in 1997 and 1998 at Princeton University as part of the Tanner Lectures series on human values within, the lectures were published two years later as *The Lives of Animals*, accompanied by responses from four thinkers from various disciplines. They finally became part of *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, Coetzee's ninth novel, in 2003. Of the two stages the text passed through to becoming a novel, the first one is of special importance because it signifies Coetzee's refusal to comply with certain formal requirements of the lecture series and thus becomes an act of resistance. The nature and the object of this resistance must necessarily be identified in order to outline Coetzee's understanding of the problems underlying the act of discussing animals and animal representation per se. Derek Attridge, who was present in 1997 in the auditorium when Coetzee surprised the public by reading a work of short fiction instead of a proper lecture, summarizes the unsettling effect of Coetzee's performance in the following sentence:

What made the event in which we were participating all the more disquieting was our gradual realization that it was being mirrored, in a distorted representation, in the fiction itself: the central character was revealed to be a novelist from the Southern

Hemisphere who had been asked to give a lecture at an American college, and who had chosen to speak on the human treatment of animals.<sup>27</sup>

The quote emphasizes how instead of remaining outside the text's focus, the event of the lecture becomes its central concern. As a result, the stable and authoritative meaning that is conventionally expected of a lecture is opposed to the plurality of meaning that is the province of fiction.<sup>28</sup> In other words, Coetzee forgoes the right to voice his opinion from the powerful and ultimately monological position of a lecturer (and a prominent authority on the subject) assuming instead the far less powerful position of a fiction reader. This new role, however, allows him to criticize the very format of the event he was invited to participate in and to address the problems such a format presents to the discussion of animal-related issues.

The narrative of the two lessons is internally focalized and the reader perceives the events from the perspective of Elizabeth's son, John Bernard. This device allows Coetzee to consider the complexity of the network of relationships at the center of which Elizabeth finds herself, and to demonstrate how the discourse within which animal-related issues are framed is always already embedded within other discursive contexts in relation to which it operates.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the two lessons, Elizabeth's son repeatedly undermines her and her ideas, viewing his mother's visit to the university and particularly her determination to give a talk about animals as a dangerous intrusion upon his private and professional life. The flow of his private life becomes disrupted by the fact that "his wife and his mother do not get on"<sup>30</sup> and it is later revealed that at the heart of Norma's dislike are Elizabeth's opinions on animals: "As for Norma, she has never hesitated to tell him that his mother's books are overrated, that her opinions on animals, animal consciousness, and ethical relations with animals are jejune and sentimental" (61). However, the narrator also exposes the possibility of other factors Norma's antagonism towards Elizabeth: "Having moved with him to Appleton, she

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<sup>27</sup> Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 193.

<sup>28</sup> Robert McKay, "Metafiction, Vegetarianism, and the Literary Performance of Animal Ethics in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*," *Safundi* 11, January 2010: 71.

<sup>29</sup> McKay, "Metafiction, Vegetarianism, and the Literary Performance," 76.

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (London, Vintage Books, 2004) 59. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

has been unable to find a teaching position. This is a cause of bitterness to her, and of conflict between the two of them” (61). Thus, the text raises the possibility that Norma’s dislike might be at least partly inspired by factors completely unrelated to animal issues, but rather to do with their specific family dynamic. That John “is not sure he wants to hear her [Elizabeth] once again on the topic of animal rights, particularly when he knows he will afterwards be treated, in bed, to his wife’s disparaging commentary” (60-61) points to the fact that the topic Costello has chosen for her lecture cannot be confined to the realm of the academia and the purely theoretical. Indeed it signifies that the cause of John’s resistance is not the ideas Elizabeth promotes, but their implications for his everyday life. The same can be said for Norma’s reaction to the lecture: at the end of the second lesson she says, “I would have more respect for her if she didn’t try to undermine me behind my back, with her stories to the children about the poor little veal calves and what the bad men do to them. I am tired of having them pick at their food and ask, ‘Mom, is this veal?’” (113-114). Here Norma explicitly connects her feelings regarding Elizabeth’s talk to the impact her ideas have on the family’s daily routine. Thus, the mode Coetzee chose for his performance at Princeton, with its capacity to explore the characters’ private lives, allows him to highlight the extent to which the issues Elizabeth discusses in her lecture are interconnected with concerns seemingly external to the philosophical understanding of animality: the concerns of a purely practical nature. This in its turn suggests that talking about animals is always complicated by the fact, that, even when discussed at an academic gathering, the topic always invades people’s private lives, casting a shadow over their daily practices and indirectly demanding a change.

However, it is not only the family’s private life that Coetzee focuses upon. The text also repeatedly accents John’s anxiety regarding the effect Elizabeth’s lecture might have on his professional life. He assesses Elizabeth’s success (or rather, failure) as a performer, making it clear that the ideas Elizabeth voices from the stage are in conflict with what the institution expects of her. John describes her role as that of “the paid entertainer” (86) and thinks that she should try to satisfy the expectations of the public, but instead of pleasing her audience Elizabeth provokes them, which eventually causes John’s silent outburst:

He wishes his mother had not come. It is nice to see her again [...] but the price he is paying and the price he stands to pay if the visit goes badly seem to him excessive. Why can she not be an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman's life? If she wants to open her heart to animals, why can't she stay home and open it to her cats? (83)

This shows that the reason John is so irritated with his mother can be formulated in the following manner: she does not know her place. Indeed, that John sees his mother as first of all “an old woman” is emphasized already in the first lesson of the book, “Realism”, which is also told from John's perspective, where he thinks to himself, “She has never taken care of her appearance; she used to be able to get away with it; now it shows. Old and tired” (3). In “The Philosophers and Animals” this point is accented even further: “Two years have passed since he last saw his mother; despite himself, he is shocked at how she has aged” (59). By constantly underlining his mother's feebleness and old age, John suggests her incompatibility with the powerful role of a teacher or a lecturer. The thought that runs through his discourse is that “she should not be doing this” (82). Robert McKay in his essay “Metafiction, Vegetarianism, and the Literary Performance of Animal Ethics in J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*”, suggests that the reason behind Coetzee's portrayal of the public lecture as a tense, nerve-wracking experience is that a senile old woman lecturing on the topic of animal suffering amounts to an ultimate breach of the standards imposed by the logic of carno-phallogocentrism,<sup>31</sup> which requires that the position of power be occupied by a virile male figure who “accepts sacrifice and eats flesh”.<sup>32</sup> While the influence of carno-phallogocentrism can wax and wane depending on the circumstances, the text indicates that “the public speech, as a prime site of ‘authority and autonomy,’ is the carno-phallogocentric arena par excellence”.<sup>33</sup> In other words, a public lecture is an exercise in subjectivity – here the ultimate subject, rational and knowledgeable, occupies the center of everybody's attention and therefore the most powerful position. In order to seem appropriate and to satisfy the expectations of the organizers and the audience, the presenter, even if she is a woman, has to at least partly

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<sup>31</sup> McKay, “Metafiction, Vegetarianism, and the Literary Performance,” 75.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Who Comes after the Subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (New York; London: Routledge, 1991) 114.

<sup>33</sup> McKay, “Metafiction, Vegetarianism, and the Literary Performance,” 75.

embody strength and virility, or to let oneself “be translated into a virile and heroic schema,”<sup>34</sup> if not in their appearance then at least in the strength and coherence of their argumentation. To be otherwise risks objection regarding why this person was given the right to speak.

Elizabeth fails in all these respects. On the stage, she looks “old and tired” (62); her delivery is flat, since “she does not look up from the page” (63); and her lecture appears to be “ill-gauged, ill-argued” (80). However, all these negative appearances merely reveal or highlight the main reason the lecture is called a failure: its content undermines the concept of the human as “the center of the universe” (69) and subverts the sacrificial order upon which human subjectivity is built. The “strange talk” (80) Elizabeth gives is therefore ontologically incompatible with the format of a public lecture, in exactly the same manner that Coetzee’s speech, had he chosen to respect the organizers’ expectations and given a proper lecture, would have been ontologically incompatible with the format of the Tanner Lectures. Hence, the endless deferral of authorship witnessed here. To avoid occupying the position of the ultimate subject and to expose the conflict between the format of the lecture and the topic he wanted to discuss, Coetzee prefers to speak through Costello, using the character of an elderly woman to expose the logic of carno-phallogocentrism that would have been less visible had the stage been given to a man.

It is important that John as well as other characters misconstrue the discursive strategies that Elizabeth uses to undermine carno-phallogocentrism. To render his mother’s agenda more comprehensible for himself, John connects her ideas to the discourse of animal rights advocacy (61) as does Thomas O’Hearne, professor of philosophy and her opponent in a debate, who starts his first question with “My first reservation about the animal-rights movement...” (105). During her talk, however, Elizabeth tries to distance herself from the discourse of rights.

And being human, or humanoid, these voices go on, the great apes should then be accorded human rights, or humanoid rights. [...] At least those rights that we accord mentally defective specimens of the species *Homo sapiens*: the right to life, the right not to be subjected to pain or harm, the right to equal protection before the law.

That is not what Red Peter was striving for when he wrote, through his amanuensis Franz Kafka, the life history that, in November of 1917, he proposed to read to the Academy of Science. Whatever else it may have been, his report to the

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<sup>34</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 114.

academy was not a plea to be treated as a mentally defective human being, a simpleton.  
(70)

This quotation reveals that Elizabeth's problem with this discourse is that it replicates the supposed mistake of measuring and estimating all beings according to the degree of similarity they bear to human beings. She condemns the "misguided logic driving the animal rights movement, showing how it inadvertently reinscribes the priority of the human in its very defense of the capacity of animals for humanlike interaction".<sup>35</sup> The discourse of rights remains profoundly humanist in its nature and once again relies on the notion of the rational and self-present subject who can create a functional hierarchy of beings and their rights. This logic is deeply alien to Costello who is trying to find a way of thinking and talking about animals that goes beyond humanism. She does so by undermining reason as the central element of human subjectivity and the justifying principle of human supremacy.

When at the beginning of the fourth lesson, John and Norma discuss Elizabeth's talk in the privacy of their bedroom, Norma sums up her opinion as follows: "There is no position outside of reason where you can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason" (93). Here Norma identifies Costello's intention accurately, but she is not able to see that in her talk Elizabeth attempts both to construct such a position outside of reason and to show why this enterprise is doomed to failure. It is important to remember that Norma does not present a counter argument to Elizabeth's statements, but merely repeats and rephrases what Costello herself says in her lecture:

Of course reason will validate reason as the first principle of the universe – what else should it do? Dethrone itself? Reasoning systems, as systems of totality, do not have that power. If there were a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total. (70)

Costello thus recognizes the theoretical impossibility of passing judgment on reason without resorting to it. Her lecture, therefore, contains an ostensibly unresolvable contradiction. On the one hand, she renounces the "discourse of old philosophers" (67)

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<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Susan Anker, "Elizabeth Costello, Embodiment, and the Limits of Rights." *New Literary History*, volume 42, number 1, winter 2011: 175.



who saw reason as the organizing principle of all life and used this idea to establish and justify human supremacy:

The universe is built upon reason. God is a God of reason. The fact that through the application of reason we can come to understand the rules by which the universe works proves that reason and the universe are of the same being. And the fact that animals, lacking reason, cannot understand the universe but have simply to follow its rules blindly, proves that, unlike man, they are part of it but not part of its being: that man is godlike, animals thinglike. (67)

Instead, she insists that reason is “the being of human thought” (67) or even “one tendency in human thought” (67). The fact that humans possess reason and other beings probably do not does not give us the right to create hierarchies and draw borders that mark certain beings as disposable. On the other hand, Costello repeatedly and insistently emphasizes her willingness to resort to the discourse of reason: “indeed for a while [I] will be resorting to it [philosophical language]” (66) and later, “So let me, to prove my goodwill, my credentials, make a gesture in the direction of scholarship and give you my scholarly speculations, backed up with footnotes” (71). To resolve this contradiction it is important to understand that, for Elizabeth, reason is not only the “tendency in human thought” that justifies the killing (indeed first birthing and then killing) of astronomical numbers of beings, but is also a representational impasse. As reason operates through ideas, its only means of approaching animality is through abstraction: through the idea of the animal. However, the idea of the animal is merely part of the “system of totality” (70) that is reason and as such, it serves only to support the “narrow, self-regenerating” (69) intellectual tradition of Western metaphysics. In other words, the idea of the animal has little connection to animality as such; its only purpose is to ensure that a certain order remains intact. For a reason-based order to acknowledge that animal life (which presumably lacks the capacity to reason) has value would be to effectively deconstruct itself, or at least acknowledge the emptiness of its claims to totality and universality, which it naturally resists. Thus, according to the logic of Costello’s argumentation, the discourse of reason, which to her is best represented by “philosophical language” (66), can never access animality. Facing the necessity of employing this language to give a public lecture, Costello invents a new, hybrid discourse that uses reason and renounces it at the same time.

This hybrid discourse is created by engagement with the master of radical heterogeneity: Franz Kafka. As part of the aforementioned deferral of authorship, Costello delegates her authorial privileges to the protagonist of Kafka's short story "A Report to an Academy": a monkey named Red Peter. At the very start of her talk, she compares herself to this fictional talking ape and emphasizes that this comparison is to be taken at face value: "I want to say at the outset that that was not how my remark – the remark that I feel like Red Peter – was intended. I did not intend it ironically. It means what it says. I say what I mean" (62). This seemingly unimportant and whimsical remark creates a new dimension to Elizabeth's talk which transforms it dramatically. At the heart of Kafka's story, of an ape who masters human language and gives a report to an academy in order to earn and preserve his freedom and possibly life, is the denunciation of reason. In the story, the discourse of reason and the status of the human become matters of imitation, reenactment and performance<sup>36</sup> that do not guarantee access to any transcendental meaning. Rather, reason is exposed as the means of justifying violence committed both against oneself by processes of restraint and repression; and against others, most importantly for Elizabeth's talk, animal others. As Margot Norris puts it: "[Red Peter] can indict humans for cruelty without offending them by supplying them with the cultural and rational motives consistent with the self-congratulatory vanity that allowed post-Darwinian man to consider himself the pinnacle of creation."<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth's reference to Kafka's story similarly reveals the satirical dimension of her talk. Just as in "A Report to an Academy" it is the "honored members of the Academy"<sup>38</sup> who are being ridiculed, in Elizabeth's mock lecture it is the event itself, its audience and its requirements that are satirized.

However, there is also a more sinister level to Costello's engagement with Kafka. In the story, Red Peter's successful imitation of human ways is something he was forced to do in order to save his life and secure his freedom. In a similar way, Costello's rational argumentation, and her lecture as a whole, is something she believes she has to do to save lives, albeit not her own life but the lives of countless

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<sup>36</sup> Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 54.

<sup>37</sup> Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories* (New York, Schocken Books Inc, 1983) 161.

suffering others who “refuse to talk to us” (70). As “Red Peter took it upon himself to make the arduous descent from the silence of the beast to the gabble of reason” (71), so Costello attempts to swap the role of paid entertainer for the role of messenger and judge. For her message to be heard and her criticism to have value, however, they have to come from both within and outside the order she seeks to criticize. She therefore employs the discourse of reason while constantly referring to something that, to her mind, cannot be rationalized: the wound, the pain that serves as the link between her, Red Peter, and all those who suffer:

Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behavior but a branded, marked, wounded animal presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak. (70-71)

Elizabeth realizes that the position outside reason cannot be a human one, but weary of labels, she does not push this perspective over the imaginary border to the animal side. Rather, she demonstrates that the position outside reason can be located with the realization that not one of us is purely human in the way reason, “the language of philosophy” imagines us to be. Costello affirms that it is from this non-human place within himself that Kafka writes his fiction: “Of all men Kafka is the most insecure in his humanity” (75). In both Costello’s and Red Peter’s cases this place is located through the experience of pain, which resists rationalization in both her talk and in Kafka’s lecture. In “A Report to an Academy”, Red Peter both mentions and does not mention the barbaric methods of his humanization and civilization, as Elizabeth notes: “Kafka’s story deals with the cost: we learn what it consists in through the ironies and silences of the story” (72), and similarly Elizabeth exhibits, yet does not exhibit, her “wound”: her acute awareness of the immense suffering that cannot be expressed in the language of reason. This inexpressible and unjustifiable suffering and pain, which make readers of Kafka’s story side always with the monkey, adds yet another dimension to Costello’s talk: the dimension beyond reason and beyond humanism, in which Costello and Red Peter, whether human or animal, fictional or real, are one and the same.

However, the density and multilevel structure of Costello’s speech prevent the audience from understanding her intentions. The speech receives “scattered” (80)

applause and the only person allowed to raise a question asks for clarification (81). Indeed, the performance Costello gives can only be comprehended in the form of a text. In this manner, Coetzee further emphasizes the complete incompatibility of the animal question with the genre of public lecture and asserts that the representation of animality can only be attempted through the complementary processes of reading and writing. This is also the reason that the text, which was originally performed, was later published twice as part of two different volumes.

This is also consistent with the ideas Costello voices during the literary seminar that follows the next day. If the lecture is a frustrating and exhausting attempt to inscribe animality in the discourse of reason, however feebly or inaccurately, the atmosphere of the seminar is conversely one of hopefulness. During the seminar Costello mentions two types of poetry about animals: the poetry that tries to find an idea in the animal (96) and the other that is “the record of an engagement with [the animal]” (96). This former type can be described in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms as the writing of becoming. Unlike the writing that always looks for metaphors and analogies in which, as Costello puts it, “animals stand for human qualities: the lion for courage, the owl for wisdom” (94-95), writing of becoming seeks for what Deleuze calls zones of proximity: “To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or undifferentiation.”<sup>39</sup> These zones of proximity are found through experience of the physical world; the experiences of the body rather than the spirit. They become a means to enter “new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalizes them.”<sup>40</sup> Costello describes Ted Hughes’ poem “Jaguar” as exactly this type of writing, as it expresses the animal through engagement with its particular, non-human motion in space. In the poem, she says, “we know the jaguar not from the way he seems but from the way he moves. [...] The poems ask us to imagine our way into the way of moving, to inhabit the body” (96). The quote also suggests that the discourse of literature is able to express “a different kind of being-in-the-world” (95) precisely because it is the

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<sup>39</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Winter 1997: 225.

<sup>40</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 13.

discourse of imagination which, according to Costello is the force that facilitates endless becomings: “If I can think my way into the existence of a being that has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee, or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substance of life” (80). This substance of life, or as she puts it in her lecture, “a heavily affective sensation – of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive in the world” (78), is the zone of proximity that humans have in common with all animals. Costello insists that rather than imagining ourselves as a “ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts” (78) and turning reason into an unclimbable wall that encircles the form of being in the world we designate human, we should seek communion with animals through acts of what she calls “sympathetic imagination” (80). For Costello, literature as a type of discourse that serves imagination rather than reason has greater potential for engagement with the animal other. Unlike the discourse of philosophy, which always keeps its distance from the body and operates on the level of ideas, literature according to Costello can virtually inhabit the animal body and recreate, at least to a certain degree, the animal’s unique way of experiencing the world. This claim is indeed problematic, however, it needs to be analyzed in connection with another aspect of literature concerned with animals (as Costello imagines it); namely, the issue of unintentionality. The question of authorial intent is touched upon in both Elizabeth’s lecture and the following seminar. Kafka figures in the text as the master of becoming, but in her talk, Costello pictures his becomings as ungovernable and unpredictable. “A Report to an Academy”, she says, was written through Kafka rather than by him: “That is not what Red Peter was striving for when he wrote, through his amanuensis Franz Kafka, the life history that, in November of 1917, he proposed to read to the Academy of Science” (70). When she speaks about Kafka the author Costello seeks to emphasize the extent to which he could not contain or control his own creativity: “The stare that we meet in all the surviving photographs of Kafka is a stare of pure surprise: surprise, astonishment, alarm” (75). This idea resurfaces in her discussion of Wolfgang Kohler’s *The Mentality of Apes*, “[b]ut the book we read isn’t the book he thought he was writing” (82); and later during the seminar when she answers a student question on the poetry of Ted Hughes with, “I would reply, writers teach us more than they are

aware of” (97). For Costello, therefore, literary becomings expose reading and writing as two inseparable processes and are, at least to some extent, unintentional.

This argument can also be understood as an extension of her denunciation of reason. Reason, the text suggests, is a position of power and control. The human, as long as it is defined through reason, gains its authority precisely by the ability to control, manage, predict and solve. From this perspective of a self-present, strong and effective subject, animality remains inaccessible and, therefore, any creative endeavor to engage with it should be made from a position different from that of a confident author and creator. In fact in order to gain understanding of other modes of being in the world, especially of animal mode(s) of being, one has to abandon any pretense of control and mastery. According to the logic of the text, therefore, any attempt to access animality is also an exercise in humility.

On this point Costello and her amanuensis are in complete agreement, as the main feature of the Coetzee’s chosen protagonist, as the vehicle for his ideas, is her incertitude. The question John repeatedly asks himself throughout the novel is, “Why can’t she just come out and say what she wants to say?” (82). When he finally confronts his mother on this point, she is not able to give him any definite answer:

“And that is what you want to cure humankind of?”  
“John, I don’t know what I want to do. I just don’t want to sit silent.” (104)

The same tendency is evident in Elizabeth’s interactions with other characters. When she is asked about the motives behind her vegetarianism and her concern for animals, she either refuses to give any answer, for example after the lecture in response to the request for clarification to which she replies, “I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles” (82), or gives an answer that places her beliefs beyond the reach of reason:

“But your own vegetarianism, Mrs. Costello,” says President Garrard, pouring oil on troubled waters: “it comes out of moral conviction, does it not?”  
“No, I don’t think so,” says his mother. “It comes out of a desire to save my soul.” (88-89)

Elizabeth’s resistance to clear-cut morals or principles is further emphasized by her dismissive response to President Garrard’s admiration for Costello’s “way of life” (89): “‘I’m wearing leather shoes,’ says his mother. ‘I’m carrying a leather purse. I

wouldn't have overmuch respect if I were you'" (89). All this points to Costello's determination to distance herself from the position of a self-present subject who has all the answers to hand. Coetzee creates in Costello a character for whom doubt is not a transition between two certainties, but a permanent position. When in the last chapter Elizabeth is asked to make a statement that summarizes her beliefs, she says, "I believe in what does not bother to believe in me" (218). This refusal effectively puts her outside the human category, as the mysterious gatekeeper has already informed her that "[w]e all believe. We are not cattle" (194).

While the concepts of sympathetic imagination and becoming can provide useful insights, they should not be understood as universal strategies for animal representation. Rather, these are concepts that put animal presence at the intersection of the reading and writing processes, and while affirming the possibility of animal representation as such, accent its incompatibility with the notion of literature as a controlled event emerging from the attempts of a self-present subject. Thus, the type of post-humanist subjectivity that Coetzee constructs through Costello is based on uncertainty as well as humbleness and consequently is opposed to Cartesian subjectivity predicated on its power to understand and explain. The main idea behind Costello's (and Coetzee's) discourse on animal representation is that there can be no final solution to that problem as within this discourse the very logic of final solutions is discredited as anthropocentric and profoundly biased.

Elizabeth's argumentation against reason, the restrictive outlook it affords, and its inability to create space for other forms of being leads to the condemnation of the custom of meat-eating and even more so, the modern food industry. In this case too, Elizabeth is "exhibiting, yet not exhibiting" (71) the main grounds for making, or rather repeating, the contentious comparison of what was done to the Jews in the Holocaust with what is being done to animals in food industry today. In her talk she mainly stresses the "certain willed ignorance" (64) of those who knew about the camps but did nothing. On the one hand, this strategy is part of Elizabeth's mimicking of the logic of "A Report to an Academy" in which Red Peter manages to make his audience the main focus of his report. Elizabeth tells a familiar (and still horrifying) story, but alters its inflections so that those who watched passively rather than the perpetrators of the crime are forced into the spotlight. Within this comparison, the audience of her

own talk becomes implicated in the crime of animal mass-slaughter, just as the passive “Germans of particular generation” (64) are implicated in the crime of the Holocaust.

On the other hand, however, this seems to be only the surface level of Elizabeth’s argumentation, the deeper currents of which remain again obscured by her complicated strategy of hints and silences. While she describes certain behavior as appalling, she is mainly interested in what “lies behind” (82) this behavior. Costello seems to blame the “willed ignorance” on a certain limit to sympathy: a border sympathy dares not cross:

The particular horror of the camps, the horror that convinces us that what went on there was a crime against humanity, is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice. That is too abstract. The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, ‘It is they in those cattle-cars rattling past.’ They did not say, ‘How would it be if it were I in that cattle-car?’ They did not say, ‘It is I who am in that cattle-car.’

In other words, they closed their hearts. The heart is the seat of a faculty, sympathy, that allows us to share at times the being of another. (79)

She never voices her opinion on the origin of this limit to sympathy that, to her, is the reason behind the tragedy of the Holocaust. However, it can be inferred from the specific vocabulary Elizabeth uses to refer to the death camps, as well as from her criticism of reason. In Elizabeth’s talk, both the extermination camps and the slaughterhouses become enterprises devoted to production. On more than one occasion she reminds her audience that it was “from the Chicago stockyards that the Nazis learned how to process bodies” (97). The implication is that the Holocaust was to a great extent inspired and facilitated by the emergence of new efficient means of production. It was, in other words, a factory “dedicated to the production of death” (66). This connection makes the Holocaust not a malfunction of reason, a failure to subdue certain violent, anti-human drives, but rather the culmination of reason combined with the modern ideals of efficiency and social engineering. Zygmunt Bauman writes in *Modernity and the Holocaust* that “it was the spirit of instrumental rationality, and its modern, bureaucratic form of institutionalization, which had made the Holocaust-style solutions not only possible, but eminently ‘reasonable’ – and



increased the probability of their choice.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, he argues that it is precisely the perfectly reasonable nature of the Holocaust as a means to overcome what was seen as a certain inefficiency in society’s functioning that made it acceptable in the eyes of the people:

The truth is that every ‘ingredient’ of the Holocaust – all those many things that rendered it possible – was normal; [...] in the sense of being fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilization, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world – and of the proper ways to pursue human happiness together with a perfect society.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, the extermination of millions of human beings fitted perfectly with the discourse of civilization and the necessity of progress it imposed; its morally abhorrent nature was thus rendered invisible. Consequently, the failure to sympathize with the victims becomes not a personal failure but a necessity programmed by the system and its discourse. Here one feels the need to quote the epigraph to this chapter again: Coetzee in his interview with David Attwell says, “I believe one has a duty (an ethical duty? – perhaps) not to submit to powers of discourse without question.”<sup>43</sup> This is the message Costello seeks to communicate to her audience. However, what she stresses in her talk and what constitutes grounds for the notorious comparison between the Holocaust and the meat industry is not merely the contention that the border between humans and animals is a construct akin to the border between Jews and their murderers. Rather, Costello aims to go deeper to underline the similarities between the discourse of fascism, which was in its turn dependent on the modern discourse of civilization and efficiency, and that of industrialism, that insists that viewing animals as a commodity and a resource to be processed by industrial means does not constitute a moral dilemma. In other words, Costello is not arguing against the practice of meat-eating as such, but against the industry that in contemporary times continues to sustain this practice: factory farming. She is trying to make her audience see that what is being hidden by the powers of discourse in both cases is not merely a crime, but a crime of massive, ungraspable proportions. It is with the magnitude of this crime that Elizabeth

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<sup>41</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989) 18.

<sup>42</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) 200.

is most concerned when she says, “These are numbers that numb the mind. We have only one death of our own; we can comprehend the deaths of others only one at a time. In the abstract we may be able to count to a million, but we cannot count to a million deaths” (63). By returning to the language of factories and production in both the animal farming industry and the Holocaust, Costello exposes the discourse of progress and efficiency as capable of rendering even mass killings normal and necessary, seemingly in the hope of preventing humanity from being taken in by it again.

However, in this case too, Costello is misunderstood. Abraham Stern, the poet who after Costello’s talk refuses to attend the formal dinner, writes in his note, “If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way” (94). Stern here overlooks Costello’s attempt to put what he calls “the familiar comparison” (94) into a new context and to look past the emotionally charged events into their causes. He is right, however, in pointing out the “cheap way” in which Elizabeth as well as other, non-fictional writers and activists use the comparison to pursue their goals, however honorable they may be. Although Costello is trying to appeal to a more profound similarity than one in which Jews become animals and vice versa, this surface level is still the one that, to her audience, remains most visible, most familiar, and therefore most clearly understood. She is well aware of this, as shown in her comment following the Holocaust-related part of her talk: “Pardon me, I repeat. That is the last cheap point I will be scoring. I know how talk of this kind polarizes people, and cheap point-scoring only makes it worse” (66). This point is striking in that Costello acknowledges the comparison is likely to be a failure rhetorically, but chooses to make it nonetheless. This is counterproductive and Costello does so only due to her own failure to practice sympathetic imagination. The idea that sympathetic imagination is required not only with animals but also with humans in order to achieve communion and communication, although present in the book, never becomes part of Costello’s discourse. Indeed, the text suggests Elizabeth’s failure to realize that our communion with other people is also to a large extent a matter of imagination. It is exactly her tendency to take communion with other people for granted that makes Costello such a tragic character; it is also with respect to this problem that the difference between Coetzee and Costello becomes most pronounced. Not only does

Coetzee repeatedly place his protagonist in situations where she is misunderstood but he also stresses her own inability to understand, an inability which brings her much pain, as is most evident in the moment of her breakdown at the end of the fourth lesson:

I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money. [...]

I look into your eyes, into Norma's, into the children's, and I see only kindness, human-kindness. Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you? Why can't you? (114-115)

However, Elizabeth's failure is not in her inability to ignore animal suffering. Rather, she is wrong to expect a perfect understanding between herself and her family. In portraying Elizabeth's visit as full of confusion, misjudgment and misconception, Coetzee recalls Derrida writing in *The Beast and the Sovereign*:

Every day, at every moment of the day and night, we are overcome with the feeling that between a given other, and sometimes the closest of those close to us and of those we so imprudently and stupidly, tenderly and violently, our own, and ourselves – those with whom we share everything [...] the feeling that the worlds in which we live are different to the point of the monstrosity of the unrecognizable, of the un-similar, of the unbelievable, of the nonsimilar, the non-resembling or the resembleable, the non-assimilable [...] the abyssal unshareable.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, Coetzee's text reminds its readers that while communion with animals and the inclusion of animals within the field of ethical consideration is a relatively new task, one has no right to forget that it is only by upholding imaginative communion with other people that this task can be carried out. This imaginative communion is not something we are born to as members of the same species; instead, it is a matter of constant effort and negotiation. This effort is bound to be endless, as every conclusion would bring with itself a new set of exclusive binaries. Thus on this level too the novel promotes uncertainty over certainty; movement over fixedness. Rejection of the thesis that understanding between humans, unlike understanding between humans and

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Volume II, Eds. M. Lisse, M. Mallet, G. Michaud, translated by G Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 266.

animals, is easily achievable, forms the basis of the new post-humanist concept of responsibility introduced in the novel.

This in turn is based on the idea that responsibility cannot be enclosed by any borders. When Costello says that “there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (80), she implies that every limit such an imagination can meet is a construct. Indeed, during the dinner at the Faculty Club following her talk, the guests attempt to “define our difference from animals in general” (86) and therefore to establish what it is exactly that makes the sacrifice of animal life acceptable (since as Derrida notes, “who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable”).<sup>45</sup> The answer is never established. Instead, the conversation is interrupted by a remark from president Garrard that can be interpreted as passive-aggressive, but which simultaneously exposes the extent to which our language is also predicated upon the sacrificial order: “A wonderful lecture, Mrs. Costello. [...] Much food for thought. We look forward to tomorrow’s offering” (90).<sup>46</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to think that Costello’s refusal to establish a border line between the human and the animal advocates ignoring the differences to agree on a homogeneity: “The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common [...] with other animals?” (79). Rather, her argument is closer to Derrida’s in “The Animal That Therefore I Am”:

This does not of course mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a single great, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree... [...] I repeat that it is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits. Among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” 112.

<sup>46</sup> Apart from the illusive nature of justification behind the social practice of meat eating, the scene with the dinner also demonstrates that the very questioning of this justification is usually attempted during meal times, simultaneously with the eating of flesh. Moreover, for such a conversation to even take place, a vegetarian needs to be present at a table, otherwise the question is rarely asked and the sacrificial order is taken for granted.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, Jacques. “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” Trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, 2002: 416.

For Costello, sympathetic imagination becomes the means to access this immense multiplicity and consequently to replace a single overbearing limit with countless and constantly proliferating differences. This is complicated further by Coetzee's refusal to agree that any kind of homogeneity exists between humans. Consequently, any being, human or non-human, becomes impossible to exclude from ethical and moral consideration. While the implications of this argument appear to be overwhelming, inflating responsibility to the extent that any action becomes potentially harming and irresponsible, it in fact merely repeats Derrida's idea that "responsibility is excessive or it is not a responsibility."<sup>48</sup> In other words, every system that seeks to impose a definite limit on responsibility, that empowers "the good conscience that dogmatically stops before any inherited determination of justice,"<sup>49</sup> and that looks for final solutions to the problem of responsibility, is a system driven by the dangerous logic of division. A symbolic economy in which we can engage in a "noncriminal putting to death" of all those who fall on the other side of the limit is thus potentiated.<sup>50</sup> The text suggests that this can happen and has happened to animal as well as human others, and that responsibility emerges not through the drawing of exclusionary borders, but through a never-ending effort that takes nothing for granted and makes potentially harmful but conscious choices. Systems that allow for a realm beyond responsibility create a dangerous space to which anyone can be banished. It is by and within these systems that massacres not only occur, but occur while everyone watches but nobody notices.

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<sup>48</sup> Derrida, "Eating Well," 118.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'", *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Ed. Drucilla Cornell and Michael Rosenfeld (New York: Routledge, 1992) 248.

<sup>50</sup> Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 6.

## 7. Conclusion

This project followed, analyzed and explicated various fictional “animots”, with the ambitious goal of demonstrating that nearly everything we know about the beings we choose to call animals amounts to fiction. Be it the arguable ‘fiction’ of science, history, philosophy, or literature proper, the animals that populate these discourses have been conceptualized by humans and for humans. Furthermore, it is on this “beastly” foundation that we have built the notion of what constitutes ourselves; the human “us”.

In these chapters, literary texts that resist the dominant discourse on animality were analyzed against a background of contemporary philosophy harboring the same ambition. As a result, the thesis has presented an intricate picture within which the concept of animality was challenged from various perspectives and developed in unexpected directions. In the first chapter I read “Calypso”, the 4<sup>th</sup> episode of *Ulysses*, where Leopold Bloom eats “with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls”<sup>1</sup> while simultaneously fondling and talking to his cat, through the notion of “moral schizophrenia,”<sup>2</sup> which allowed me to expose the contradiction between the loving and caring relationships people establish with their pets and the tendency to ignore the moral and ethical issues connected with the exploitation of other categories of animals, especially those within the meat industry. The problem of eating animals also constitutes the basis for my analysis of “Lestrygonians” where the line separating murder from sacrifice becomes blurred, thereupon obscuring the animal-human divide dependent on it. In the episode where it is not clear who eats whom and where cannibalistic imagery proliferates, the eating of any flesh becomes problematic. This theme returns in my analysis of *Elizabeth Costello* where the “willed ignorance”<sup>3</sup> surrounding the intensive animal farming industry is connected to a certain limit to “sympathetic imagination”, a constructed border beyond which sympathy dares not venture. This border is enforced by the concept of limited responsibility and gives rise

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<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Garland, 1984) 4.1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 155.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (London, Vintage Books, 2004) 64.

to a symbolic economy within which humans can engage in a “noncriminal putting to death”<sup>4</sup> of all those, human or non-human, who fall on the “wrong” side of it. In the novel, the idea of limited responsibility is rejected. Instead *Elizabeth Costello* envisages what Derrida understands as “excessive responsibility” that emerges not through drawing exclusionary borders but as a never-ending effort that takes nothing for granted to make potentially harmful but conscious choices.

Another set of ethical issues connected to animality emerges in Brophy’s *Hackenfeller’s Ape*. I argue that the novel constitutes a critique of the scientific or “sadodispassionate”<sup>5</sup> approach to nature, which erases any possibility of empathy or identification with the animal. Deeming any emotional engagement with animals to be sentimental and unreasonable, this approach denies their emotional lives and the capacity to suffer. The underlying goal of this discourse is to establish the human as the position of power and mastery, while rendering the animal to be an appropriate object of exploitation. The novel reveals that “the animal” is by no means a descriptive term, but rather a political one and as such it is not meant to describe what the animal is, but only what can be done to it.

*Flush* and *Nightwood*, on the other hand, are narratives in which the reinvention of the animal is contingent upon reinventing the human. In *Flush*, Virginia Woolf repudiates the metaphysical tradition that perceives animality according to notions of lack and impoverishment rendering animal experience to be less complex than that of the human. Woolf juxtaposes Flush’s olfactory explorations with Robert and Elizabeth Browning’s writing in seclusion to expose language, the ultimate human privilege, as an affliction and something that stands in the way of an unmediated experience of the world. My reading of the novel concludes with the claim that *Flush* carries an anti-fascist message. It exposes human society as contaminated by countless forms of oppression on both micro- (family) and macro- (political) levels, implying that it is through interaction with animality and, therefore, through rethinking the very opposition between the human and the animal, that the vicious circle of oppression can

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Who Comes after the Subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (New York; London: Routledge, 1991) 112.

<sup>5</sup> Teresa Brennan, *History after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2003) 72.

be broken. *Nightwood* constitutes a similar undertaking, attempting to provide a new system of coordinates by which humanity can navigate itself, and sees the animal as possibly its agent of discovery. The text envisages a new type of posthumanist subjectivity that rejects stability and moves swiftly between the animal and the human, ultimately exposing this binary to be untenable.

Another issue that assumed increasing importance in the course of this project is the problem of animal representation. Already in the first chapter I read “Cyclops” as an episode that satirizes the literary approach that reduces animals to metaphors for the human. I proceed to consider the use of anthropomorphism in *Flush* and *Hackenfeller’s Ape*, arguing that while the former interprets it as a means to establish an emotional and imaginary connection with an animal by focusing on our similarities rather than differences, the latter does not see it as an appropriate tool to explore animality, criticizing it instead as an anthropocentric and reductive strategy. Finally, I read *Elizabeth Costello* as a text in which the problem of animal representation takes center-stage. Here the idea of the human merging with the animal resurfaces and is linked to the concept of “sympathetic imagination.”<sup>6</sup> This concept, which I read through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming”, puts the animal presence at the intersection of the reading and writing processes. While affirming the possibility of animal representation as such, I highlight its incompatibility with the notion of literature as a controlled event emerging from the attempts of a self-present subject.

I see the problem of animal representation, which this project considers carefully but necessarily never fully resolves, as crucial to the development of the field of Animal Studies. It is only through the writing of new animal fictions that the limits of ethical responsibility can be challenged. The strange animals that will populate those new fictions might allow humans to reconceptualize themselves as something new, as something post-; however, for humans in the present moment the advances within Animal Studies may mean little more than becoming what we have always already imagined ourselves to be, becoming human. Since as long as there remains an enclosure within moral responsibility with walls so high the kindness of the kindest cannot leap them; an enclosure into which profoundly different beings are pushed to

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<sup>6</sup> Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 80.



face undeserved suffering whose intensity, if considered, baffles imagination; as long as such a hole exists in our hearts – we have a long way to go before we live up to our own expectations.

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