

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**Moving the Frontier of Conscience: Representations of Animal Ethics in
Selected Works of Contemporary Anglophone Literature**

Posouvání hranic svědomí: Zobrazení etického přístupu ke zvířatům ve vybraných dílech
soudobé anglofonní literatury

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Studijní obor (Subject):

Anglistika – amerikanistika

Praha, duben 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all, I would like to thank to my supervisor, doc. Justin Quinn, PhD, for his dedicated support and guidance throughout the process of writing this thesis. I am very grateful for all his continuous encouragement and motivation in my endeavour.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Zvířata v kontextu etiky, týrání a vykořisťování zvířat, antropocentrismus, antropomorfismus, posthumanismus, beletrie 21. století.

KEY WORDS

Animal ethics, animal cruelty and exploitation, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, posthumanism, twenty-first-century fiction.

ABSTRACT

This MA thesis examines how selected works of contemporary anglophone literature reflect ethical principles in human behaviour towards animals. It begins by explaining basic ethical theories and their development in Western philosophy. The first chapter also presents several works of literary criticism that explore literary animal studies, with reference both to representations of human-animal interaction in literature, and to new ways of interpreting literary texts. The second chapter analyses Karen Joy Fowler's novel, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013), along with the collection of short stories by the Australian writer Ceridwen Dovey *Only Animals* (2014). Both works illustrate the possibilities of human communication and emotional relationships with animals. Blurring the physical boundaries between human and non-human animals, and associated ethical considerations come to the fore in Michel Faber's sci-fi novel *Under the Skin* (2000), and in the novel *Animal's People* (2007) by Indra Sinha, discussed in the next chapter. The final chapter deals with the novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), in which J. M. Coetzee consciously crosses the boundaries between moral philosophy, literary theory and fiction.

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá, jakým způsobem reflektují vybraná díla současné anglofonní literatury etické principy jednání člověka vůči zvířatům. Vlastní analýze literárních textů předchází teoretická část, v níž jsou vysvětleny základní etické teorie a jejich historický vývoj v rámci západního filozofického myšlení. V úvodní kapitole jsou rovněž představeny literárněkritické práce autorů, kteří zkoumají současný rozvoj “animal studies” v krásné literatuře, a to nejen z hlediska charakteristických způsobů zpracování tématu interakce člověk – zvíře, ale také s ohledem na alternativní způsoby čtení a interpretace literárních textů korespondující s nově se rozvíjejícími anti-antropocentrickými přístupy. Druhá kapitola představuje obsahovou analýzu románu americké autorky Kare Joy Fowlerové *Všichni jsme z toho úplně na větví* (2013) a sbírky povídek australské spisovatelky Ceridwen Doveyové *Jen zvířata* (2014), jež ilustrují možnosti překračování mentálních hranic člověka v komunikaci a citových vztazích se zvířaty. Stírání fyzických rozdílů mezi lidmi a zvířaty a s tím spojené etické úvahy vystupují do popředí ve sci-fi románu *Pod kůží* (2000) Michela Fabera a v románu *Zvířetovi lidé* (2007), jehož autorem je Indra Sinha; tato díla jsou předmětem diskuze ve třetí kapitole. Závěrečná kapitola se věnuje románu *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), v němž jeho autor J. M. Coetzee vědomě překračuje hranice mezi morální filozofií, literární teorií a beletrií.

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Introduction

Humankind has always searched for its origin. Also, it explores its identity through gender, the colour of skin, ethnicity and many other social, cultural and biological variables, which have drawn many lines of division, but equally they have spurred the desire to cross those lines. In parallel, there is a long history of reflections on the differences between human beings and other beings, which mostly fortified the prime position of *Homo sapiens*. The turn of the millennium, however, saw the emergence of posthumanism, a philosophy that attempts to expand humanism beyond anthropocentrism and speciesism; in other words, to do away with the concept of Man as the only self-conscious active subject, to whom all the other entities remain subordinate. Such a change in the perception of oneself, one's position in the environment and relationships with other subjects with whom one shares this environment has influenced ethics. As philosophy and literature have always been connected, it is only logical that ethical considerations accentuating human-animal relations are increasingly apparent in the literary works of the new millennium.

This thesis analyses selected works of contemporary anglophone literature in relation to the topic of animal ethics. What are some of the main ways that literary fiction represents the human-animal interface? How does it reflect animal abuse and cruelty in the name of human interests? It contributes to the recently emerged field of animal studies, within which cross-disciplinary scholarship seek to understand human-animal relationships. The underlying idea in all these biological, philosophical, anthropological and other studies is that human and nonhuman animals live in the relatively closed system of the planet Earth, where everything is connected to everything else, and “change is the only constant in life”. Such learning destabilizes a number of human constructs, particularly the concepts of anthropocentrism and associated hierarchies. What are the distinguishing human traits? What is the difference

between animal pain and human suffering? Do humans have a moral right to use and abuse animals? Animal studies raises such questions, and this thesis explores their implications for literature.

The selected works deal with ethical problems resulting from intentional abuse of animals, such as industrial processing of animals or animal experimentation, but they also describe the indirect lethal consequences of human agency on animal populations. They vary in terms of genre, narrative structure, setting, and perspective. Nevertheless, all the works have something in common: they emphasise the right to life, condemn organized violence and force us to rethink established patterns of ethical thought. And they all were published in the new millennium.

The first chapter furnishes the theoretical framework. It maps the basic concepts and trends in the history of animal ethics, and introduces some works of literary theory and criticism that focus on the representation of human-animal relations in literature. The next chapter is dedicated to the authors whose works are concerned with crossing human mental boundaries in communication with animals. The American writer Karen Joy Fowler explores in her novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) human-animal emotional bonds resulting from questionable scientific psychological research. Ceridwen Dovey, who is at home in at least two countries, for she was born in South Africa, grew up between South Africa and Australia, and studied social anthropology in the United States, writes in her collection of short stories *Only the Animals* (2014) about animals in human conflicts. The following chapter deals with the novels by Michel Faber and Indra Sinha that approach human-animal interactions from a different angle. These point out changeability of physical boundaries between sentient beings. Michel Faber, a Dutch-born Australian author living in Scotland, wrote a sci-fi novel *Under the Skin* (2000), which shows the human-animal duality in a story of dog-like aliens haunting humans for meat. Indra Sinha is a British writer,

translator and activist of Indian and English descent who grew up in India and lived in England and in France. His novel *Animal's People* (2007) expands human-animal bodily boundaries with regard to another dimension – social justice. The final chapter deals with the South African/Australian author J. M. Coetzee who, in his book *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), crosses the lines between literary fiction, literary theory and philosophy.

Chapter 1

Animal Ethics, Animal Studies in Literature

While other organisms are driven by instincts, as they satisfy their needs for food, safety and procreation, and use skills that remain unchanged from one generation to the next, Homo sapiens is the only species that has been gifted with reason and imagination, which has allowed it to separate itself from the ingeniously balanced network of natural processes. With reason, imagination and enhanced emotionality came belief systems and ethics as “the study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning: good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality,”¹ which includes human-animal relations. Homo sapiens now dominates the planet. It has managed to eradicate wild animals from most urban areas – Europe and densely populated areas on other continents – and has populated the world with livestock in order to provide its own increasing population with animal meat and other products. Humans have become the most dreaded predators, using animals as slaves for a wide variety of services: food; material for biological experiments for military, pharmaceutical and other industries; and for entertainment and therapeutical aid. Engagement with sentient beings has always raised ethical considerations. In this chapter, I outline the concepts and development of animal ethics.

There is no general consensus regarding the classification of ethical theories, although the basic division of ethics into three realms remains fixed. First is metaethics, which is the study of ethics per se, its ontological, epistemological and semantic presumptions. Second is normative ethics, which gives general guidance in moral judgement. And third is applied ethics, which concerns practical morality in particular areas of human activity. The types of

¹ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121.

the normative and applied ethical theories vary with the viewpoint of individual authors and also with time, as ethics is re-examined in the light of new scientific findings, and reacts to technologies and social developments. Hence, C. D. Broad distinguished five types of ethics, naming them after their authors: Spinoza, Butler, Hume, Kant and Sidgwick.² David Copp identified at least eight normative ethical theories: value theory, consequentialism, deontology, moral rights, virtue ethics, the ethics of care, intuitive ethics, and particularism.³ Tom L. Beauchamp included within normative ethics Kantian theory, virtue ethics, Humean theory, utilitarian theory, rights theory, and capabilities theory.⁴ Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson added a few other types of normative theory, for example, contractarianism, libertarianism, and feminist, or continental ethics.⁵ For the purpose of this thesis, I distinguish three major groups of normative theories based on their principal driving force in moral judgements: virtue theories, deontological theories, and consequential theories.

According to Aristotle, virtue ethics assumes that human beings, as unique subjects endowed with reason, are inherently capable of acting or learning to act virtuously, and they can do so in order to live a happy life, to achieve “eudaimonia”:

The nature of happiness depends on the proper function of Man. As every part of Man, e.g. his eye, his hand, his foot, has its function, so has Man himself. What is his function? Not the life of nutrition and increase, for that is common to man with the plants; nor the life of sensation, for that is common to man with the lower animals. It is the practical life of the rational part of man’s being. [...] Activity in accordance with virtue implies pleasure, as if a person is good, he finds pleasure in noble actions. Lastly, activity in accordance with virtue implies nobleness. Happiness then is the best and pleasantest and noblest thing in the world.⁶

² C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

³ David Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴ Tom L. Beauchamp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵ Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. J. E. C. Welldon (London: MacMillan and Co., 1920), xi-xiii.

Modern versions of the virtue approach include the ethics of care, feminist ethics, and capabilities theory; they do not refer to eudaimonia directly, though the dominant idea is immanent virtue.

Deontological ethics is based on the obligation of humans to observe the rules of divine or earthly authority. The most respected exponent of this type of normative ethics, Immanuel Kant, also put the human being in the first place, considering morality exclusively in terms of its benefit for mankind. He was also critical of unnecessarily cruel treatment of animals on the grounds that such behaviour may detrimentally affect one's moral feeling:

As far as reason alone can judge, a human being has duties only to human beings (himself and others), since his duty to any subject is moral constraint by that subject's will. [...] With regard to the animate but nonrational part of creation, violent and cruel treatment of animals is far more intimately opposed to a human being's duty to himself, and he has a duty to refrain from this; for it dulls his shared feeling of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other men. The human being is authorized to kill animals quickly (without pain) and to put them to work that does not strain them beyond their capacities (such work as he himself must submit to).⁷

At the present time, we might include contractarianism and the theory of animal rights among deontological theories, for both advocate a predefined set of rules.

Consequentialist ethics measures morality according to its consequences; moral judgement is right if it produces beneficial consequences. Various consequentialist theories consider the beneficiaries and extent of benefits. The most prominent, utilitarianism, is connected with the work of Jeremy Bentham, who stated that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."⁸ Bentham was, indeed, in many ways ahead of his time, when he wrote in 1776:

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-193.

⁸ F. C. Montague, ed., *A Fragment on Government by Jeremy Bentham* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 93.

It may come one day to be recognised, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate [slavery]. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?⁹

Notions of reason, language and suffering are integral to animal ethics up to the present, which demonstrates that there are no clear divisions between individual theories; on the contrary, the whole system is interconnected and evolving. As I will show in the following brief history of animal ethics, major thinkers often interweave meta-ethics with normative and applied ethics, and all three levels depend on social developments and levels of knowledge in the natural sciences.

Considering human-animal relations, the Western philosophical tradition has sought what is *natural* in what it views as a *hierarchically* structured world, in which man (as a species but also as a male) has a *superior* position. Within this framework, there are two major tendencies: the prevailing one approves the killing of animals and cruelty towards them; the weaker one advocates the well-being of animals. Both trends moreover demonstrate how flexible the words “natural” and “nature” can be. Among pre-Christian thinkers Plutarch (46–119 CE) let Gryllus make an argument in the dialogue with Odysseus:

In the first place his [man’s] eating of flesh is caused by no lack of means or methods, for he can always in season harvest and garner and gather in such a succession of plants and grains as will all but tire him out with their abundance; but driven on by luxurious desires and satiety with merely essential nourishment, he pursues illicit food, made unclean by the slaughter of beasts; and he does this in a much more cruel way than the most savage beasts of prey. Blood and gore and raw flesh are the proper diet of kite and wolf and snake; to man they are an appetizer. Then, too, man makes use of every kind of food and does not, like beasts, abstain from most kinds and consequently make war on a few that he

⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation by Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 311.

must have for food. In a word, nothing that flies or swims or moves on land has escaped your so-called civilized and hospitable tables.¹⁰

Plutarch obviously did not consider it natural for humans to kill and eat animals, and argued that animals are in fact more rational as they stick to a biologically essential diet, appropriate for the species and available in its habitat. In contrast, Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who was most celebrated by later Christian philosophers, regards human supremacy over animals and the inferior classes of humans to be entirely natural and rationally defensible:

So that clearly we must suppose that [...] plants exist for the sake of animals and the other animals for the good of man, the domestic species for both his service and for his food, and if not all at all events most of the wild ones for the sake of his food and of his supplies of other kinds, in order that they may furnish him both with clothing and other appliances. If therefore nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of men. Hence even the art of war will by nature be in a manner an art of acquisition (for the art of hunting is a part of it) that is properly employed both against wild animals and against such of mankind as though designed by nature for subjection refuse to submit to it, inasmuch as this warfare is by nature just.¹¹

At the same time, however, Aristotle concedes that “as man is the best of the animals when perfected, so he is the worst of all when sundered from law and justice. [...] the worst in regard to sexual indulgence and gluttony,”¹² with no reference to nature.

For Christian thinkers, nature was equal to God, the Creator and supreme judge of all. God’s instructions to humanity ran as follows: “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.”¹³

¹⁰ Plutarch, “Beasts Are Rational,” *Plutarch’s Moralia XII*, trans. H. Cherniss and W. C. Helmbold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 525.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics, Book I*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 37.

¹² Aristotle, *Politics*, 13.

¹³ Genesis 1:1-3.

The Copernican revolution laid the foundations of humanism and cemented the concept of anthropocentrism. As Alan Lacey remarks, scientific humanism represented “[a]n appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and the nature and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality.”¹⁴ René Descartes (1596–1650) strictly separated man as the unique possessor of an immortal soul from the animals, whom he considered to be mere “automata”, mechanically feeling pain but unable to suffer or think over anything. Though Descartes’s reductionist view of the “animal machine”¹⁵ was disputed in his own time, and its potential misinterpretation challenged quite recently, for example by John Cottingham¹⁶ and Katherine Morris,¹⁷ Descartes, as of one of the founding fathers of modern Western philosophy, has greatly influenced the development of animal ethics. For him animals were well constructed machines, sensitive to various kinds of stimuli, but, unlike humans, lacking an immortal soul and thus incapable of thinking, speaking, and suffering:

But though I regard it as established that we cannot prove there is any thought in animals, I do not think it can be proved that there is none, since the human mind does not reach into their hearts. But when I investigate what is most probable in this matter, I see no argument for animals having thoughts except this one: since they have eyes, ears, tongues and other sense-organs like ours, it seems likely that they have sensation like us; and since thought is included in our mode of sensation, similar thought seems to be attributable to them. This argument, which is very obvious, has taken possession of the minds of all men from their earliest age. But there are other arguments, stronger and more numerous, but not so obvious to everyone, which strongly urge the opposite. One is that it is more probable that worms, flies, caterpillars and other animals move like machines than that they all have immortal souls. [...] For brevity’s sake I here omit the other reasons for denying thought to animals. Please note that I am speaking of thought, and not of life or sensation. I do not deny life to animals, since I regard it as consisting simply in the heat of the heart; and I do not even deny sensation, in so far

¹⁴ Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 402.

¹⁵ René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode, Part V* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1910), 109.

¹⁶ John Cottingham, “‘A Brute to the Brutes?’: Descartes’s Treatment of Animals,” *Cartesian Reflections: Essays on Descartes’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163-172.

¹⁷ Katherine Morris, “Bête-machines,” *Descartes’ Natural Philosophy*, ed. Stephen Gaukroger, John Schuster, and John Sutton (New York: Routledge, 2000), 401-421.

as it depends on a bodily organ. Thus my opinion is not so much cruel to animals as indulgent to human beings—at least to those who are not given to the superstitions of Pythagoras — since it absolves them from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals.¹⁸

The last sentence is the most relevant to animal ethics; nonetheless, the reasoning behind the statement is essential for understanding Descartes. His mechanical approach may be regarded by some with contempt, if not outrage, at present time, however, modern science still largely applies it when exploring human/animal physiology and even psychology. Darwin’s approach was not principally different from Descartes’s; he formulated his theory of evolution through the process of natural selection based on his observations of fossils and living animals in different parts of the globe. They physically adapted in response to the changing conditions. Other scientists later collected evidence to confirm the idea that even humans have physically developed from primates; the sequence of skull development from a chimpanzee to Australopithecus to Homo sapiens, and their genome similarities are undeniable. Nevertheless, the primary impulse, which let the chimpanzee unchanged and sent humans on the path of intellectual evolution, remains unknown.

The Cartesian dualistic view of the mortal human body and immortal soul, and thus man’s unique consciousness, which separates him from all the other animate and inanimate objects, has also justified his freedom to treat animals how he wishes. Consciousness, subjectivity, and moral status are still the key terms and concepts in current considerations about animal ethics, though new trends in philosophy and discoveries in natural sciences continue to influence their definition and understanding. As Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack emphasized:

Wherever a human’s sympathy lies with the ethical status of the animal in contemporary society, all parties are forced to negotiate via this singular playing field of discourse, which is the anthropocentric,

¹⁸ René Descartes, “A Letter to Henry More” (February 5, 1649), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. III The Correspondence*, trans. John Cottingham, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 365-366.

signifying, subjectifying and absolutely human mode of knowledge and representation. In this game, the nonhuman animal or their allies can never win. Speaking the animal requires an ‘about’ or an ‘of’.¹⁹

But as Thomas Nagel asserted in his influential essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974), it can hardly be otherwise, because consciousness of any subject is principally subjective and complete insight into the consciousness of any other subject is impossible. Subjective experience goes beyond the possibility of objective scientific description defended by adherents of physicalism:

At present we are completely unequipped to think about the subjective character of experience without relying on the imagination—without taking up the point of view of the experiential subject. This should be regarded as a challenge to form new concepts and devise a new method—an objective phenomenology not dependent on empathy or the imagination. Though presumably it would not capture everything, its goal would be to describe, at least in part, the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences.²⁰

This, with regard to the current level of scientific knowledge, indubitable standpoint is, however, often cited in relation to animal ethics as a cornerstone argument by those who question animal rights and welfare. They often ask: how can one know what an ox likes or dislikes if one does not know what is it like to be an ox? In other words, any subjective assessment of the mental state of animals inherently calls into question the arguments of animal welfare activists, and animal ethics theorists.

Contemporary with Nagel in the 1970s, the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, came up with philosophical concepts that predated the rise of posthumanism at the turn of the twenty-first century. They accentuated a rhizomatic instead of arborescent schema of the development of thought currents and of society, challenged humanism and human supremacy, and advocated the traditionally suppressed minor groups by introducing

¹⁹ Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack, eds., *Deleuze and the Animal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2.

²⁰ Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83.4 (Oct 1974): 449.

the concepts of nomadism, deterritorialization/reterritorialization, and becoming-minoritarian – among others “becoming-animal”, which should not be understood as a form of charity but rather as a reminder of their [the suppressed minorities’] revolutionary potential:

It can be said that becoming-animal is an affair of sorcery because (1) it implies an initial relation of alliance with a demon; (2) the demon functions as the borderline of an animal pack, into which the human being passes or in which his or her becoming takes place, by contagion; (3) this becoming itself implies a second alliance, with another human group; (4) this new borderline between the two groups guides the contagion of animal and human being within the pack. There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic.²¹

It should be noted that Deleuze and Guattari are not primarily concerned with animal ethics or animals per se, but exclusively with human beings. All their colourful examples of “becoming-animal” in literature, cinema and art are about human affairs; after all, the notion of ethics is a human product, and it is not up to animals but humans to alter their dominatory approach to nature not only to fulfil their moral postulates, but also to ensure their sustainable existence.

Jacques Derrida also sought to deconstruct the concept of “the animal” and the distinctive difference between man and animal:

The distinction might appear subtle and fragile but its fragility renders fragile all the solid oppositions that we are in the process of tracking down (*dé-pister*), beginning with that between symbolic and imaginary which underwrites finally this whole anthropocentric reinstitution of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living, and so on, wherever such a subtle form of phallogocentrism seems in its way to testify to the panic Freud spoke of: the wounded reaction not to humanity’s *first* trauma, the Copernican (the Earth revolves around the sun), nor its third trauma, the Freudian (the decentring of consciousness

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 247.

under the gaze of the unconscious), but rather to its *second* trauma, the Darwinian.²²

For Derrida, as for Deleuze and Guattari, the human being is the centre of attention, which is not incongruent with challenging anthropocentrism. Derrida describes his encounter with a cat in whose eyes he can see himself naked, and reflects on his human feeling of shame for his exposed, normally covered, animality (his genitals), while the animal seems to be completely indifferent to it. The situation prompts ontological and ethical questions: Why should man be ashamed of his nakedness? Who or what is “the animal”? and Who am I?

Posthumanism attempts to transcend the boundaries of its historical predecessor, looking critically at the actual results of human reason which, like faith, have ensured neither sustainable progress nor morality. Exponents of this approach reconceptualize ontological and epistemological models in order to give humanity a more precise and objective position, not only in relation to the Earth and the universe as a space, in which man represents one among innumerable subjects, but also in relation to oneself, or more precisely, to many existing variants of *Homo sapiens*. What humanism called “exploring and describing nature,” posthumanism holds, is in fact “constructing culture” by all kinds of discourse. Though posthumanism is also constructed. Cary Wolfe builds on the work of Deleuze, Derrida, and Niklas Luhmann, keeping the door open to a new mode of thought towards non-human animals:

The sense in which the viral logic articulated here must be extended, as Derrida insists, to the “entire field of the living, *or rather to the life/death relation*”—that “the animal question” is part of the larger question of posthumanism. Indeed, for Derrida, these dynamics [complexities and paradoxes of self-referential autopoiesis] form the basis for deconstructing the various ways in which we have presumed to master or appropriate the finitude we share with nonhuman animals in ways presumably barred to them (as in the ability to know the world “as such” through our possession of language that is barred to animals, according to Heidegger). It is on the strength of that deconstruction that the question

²² Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 136.

of our ethical relation to animals is opened anew and, as it were, *kept* open.²³

However, certain limitations of anthropocentrism remain: human animals are restricted by human language and thus they can only reproduce anthropocentric narratives; they cannot replace their identity for another. They can deconstruct fundamental concepts or even subjectivity, though they will always struggle with the duality of “common and singular”, and with the meaning of words in their theses.

At present, Peter Singer is probably the most eminent philosopher dealing with animal ethics. In *Practical Ethics*, he challenges common stereotypes relating to this field of philosophy, arguing, for example, that “ethics is not based on religion,”²⁴ or that “ethics is not relative to the society in which you live,”²⁵ or that “ethics is not merely a matter of subjective taste or opinion.”²⁶ Singer asserts that ethical judgment can be supported by ethical reasoning; he is an exponent of consequentialist ethical theory – utilitarianism, which holds that the rational assessment of the positive effects of an action (more pleasure/less pain) on the majority of the affected counts more than strict adherence to the predefined ethical rules. For instance, “[t]he utilitarian will judge lying as bad in some circumstances and good in others, depending on its consequences.”²⁷ Utilitarianism, of course, must not be mistaken for mere opportunism or egoism. The ethical justification must overcome the interests of an individual or a group, and aspire to become a universal law, though with full awareness of the unattainability of this goal. In the classical utilitarian view, “to reduce pain and suffering and make the world a better place for others”²⁸ should be our ultimate end.

²³ Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi.

²⁴ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁵ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 5.

²⁶ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 7.

²⁷ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3.

²⁸ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 295.

Singer alters the classical view (of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick) by introducing the notion of “preference” (= one’s own wants, needs and desires) and balancing the preferences in the “moral ledger,” demonstrating the complexity of such ethical justification, among others, with the example of an ethical approach towards anthropogenic climate change.²⁹ All three major approaches involve strong arguments for preferring happy life of mankind although they do clash in some fundamental presumptions and thus in the outcomes. The first position, called “Business as Usual,” prefers the status quo (using current sources of energy, maintaining current lifestyle – diet, housing, transport, etc.), ensuring happy life of the existing population. The second one, “Sustainability,” opts for significant austerity measures in the name of non-existent future generations, while the third option, “Party & Go,” strives to maximize the happiness of the existing population and avoid dissatisfaction of future generations by preventing their coming into existence through sterilization of their potential parents. Singer does not provide a clear answer on this ethical problem but tends to object to the “Party & Go” and the “Business as Usual” options, which would be probably an intuitive choice of many people. Nevertheless, the “Business as Usual” policy, with episodic “Party & Go” extremes, generally dominate contemporary practice, in spite of the warnings from the scientific circles and from the United Nations regarding anthropogenic environmental disturbance. There is no powerful political party that would campaign for less comfortable future of its voters, and ethical considerations seem to be confined to the academic sphere.

Singer reminds us of the fact that, in a broader sense, the above-mentioned ethical problem – how to deal with the anthropogenic impact on the planet Earth – is related to a fundamental moral issue, the right to life. Who or what is entitled to live, or to take life? The most complex and contentious issues are abortion, euthanasia, and killing animals. Rational

²⁹ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 109-119.

ethical judgment in these cases is bounded by a range of presumptions, which are not purely philosophical, but to a great extent depend on the level of scientific knowledge in the fields of biology and psychology. Moral philosophers have attempted to crack the questions relating to animals' consciousness, self-awareness, personality, cognition, ability to feel pain, to suffer, mourn, plan a future or reminisce, and other attributes that make up their moral status.

Though the only unquestionable outcome of these considerations seems to be that, like in the fundamental difference between Newton's mechanics and quantum physics, we are dealing with a continuum of attributes, and our own knowledge is evolving. Singer provides multiple examples of some nonhuman animals (mainly but not only mammals) that fulfil the generally accepted requirements for personhood while some human animals (infants or mentally handicapped people) do not. He states:

Accepting these differences between normal mature humans and nonhuman animals, we could see the wrongness of killing, not as a black and white matter, dependent on whether the being killed is or is not a person, but as a matter of degree, dependent on, among other things, whether the being killed was fully a person or was a near-person or had no self-awareness at all, the extent to which, by our best estimate, the being had future-directed desires, and how central those desires were to the being's life. The criminal law can reasonably take a different view on the grounds that public policy is better served by laws that draw sharp boundaries, but the relevant moral considerations suggest a continuum.³⁰

As in the case of climate change, any moral justification of the killing animals is ambiguous and depends on a number of variables, such as the degree of the animal's self-awareness, the killing conditions (absence of pain and suffering, replacement of the animal by another), or the living conditions of humans (food insecurity). And also as in the case of climate change, the practice of factory farming and slaughtering of animals is far from the theoretical ethical considerations. Singer's book *Animal Liberation* (1975) has remained a benchmark in animal ethics as it responds to practical moral dilemmas and controversies that

³⁰ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 104.

a growing number of people in the developed world share, that is factory farming, meat eating and experiments on animals. His reasoning is fact-based and comprehensible to the wider public, and each new revision of the book brings further evidence that supports the principal argument that animal cruelty should be abolished, which would serve both human and non-human animals.

In the previous section, I tried to explain the notion of animal ethics and to outline the main types of ethical theory and their concepts, while emphasizing their interconnectedness not only within the domain of philosophy but also with regard to historical context and the level of scientific knowledge. Concerning human-animal relations, I briefly described the basic presumptions of Aristotelian virtue ethics, Kantian deontological approach, and Bentham's consequentialism/utilitarianism, which make up the major currents in normative ethics. Then I discussed the issues relating to meta-ethics, that is anthropocentrism, human-animal distinction, subjectivity and moral status, as they were dealt with by selected modern philosophers: René Descartes, Thomas Nagel, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, or Jacques Derrida. I also mentioned posthumanism, which is a recent, groundbreaking approach towards animals and other nonhuman agents. Finally, I presented the work of Peter Singer as one of the leading figures in the field of animal ethics at present; the philosopher who promotes preference utilitarianism and campaigns particularly against large-scale and commercial animal cruelty. Now I will turn my attention to animal studies in the field of literary theory and criticism.

Nonhuman animals have always accompanied humans in life and in culture/literature, representing a threat, a sacrifice, or a help in the fight for survival. Literature has used them as symbols and metaphors in order to depict human society, and only relatively recently, alongside "the nonhuman turn,"³¹ they themselves and their encounters with humans viewed

³¹ Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

(potentially) from the animal perspective have become the subjects of literary consideration. We may speak about some sort of emancipation of animals in the sense of deconstructing their arguably reductive presentation in literature, although it primarily implies changing the human perspectives on animals and their role in the world dominated by humans. I am going to look more closely at the works of literary criticism that deal directly with human-animal relations.

First, I will touch on a comprehensive anthology of animal studies from the viewpoint of literary theory and history, *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature* (2020), edited by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller. The essays in the theoretical part of the book analyse the multifaceted representation of animals in literature in terms of various types of narratives and tropes, but also with regard to the relevant philosophical and sociological concepts and social phenomena, such as anthropocentrism, racism and migration. The part of the book dealing with literary history maps animals in literature from the Middle Ages up until the present-day reflecting the climate crisis and the potential extinction of a large part of living organisms on Earth, including human animals. Throughout the course of the book, it is possible to identify a trend to read (and write about) animals not only as about objects representing and/or completing the picture of the human world, but also as autonomous subjects who inevitably come into contact with humans, in the vast majority of cases with fatal consequences for the animals.

Ann-Sofie Lönngren refers to the symptomatic, anthropocentric tradition, in which animals “function as metaphors for humans, who are consequently seen as signifying themselves,”³² and to the alternative way of “surface reading,” which is organized horizontally and relies on metonymy, emphasizing human-animal proximity: “while metaphor

³² Ann-Sofie Lönngren, “Metaphor, Metonymy, More-Than-Anthropocentric. The Animal That Therefore I Read (and Follow),” *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), 40.

has been accused of substituting and usurping the animal, metonymy is understood as a call for self-signification, connection, recognition, relation, and correspondence.”³³ Parama Roy, Katherine Ebury, and John Miller examine selected works of literature relating directly to the most debated ethical issues, such as meat eating, experiments on animals, and anthropogenic mass extinction, though in the essays of all authors, animal ethics is somehow contained and comes to the surface through the new, deconstructive ways of reading literature. As McHugh et al. pointed out:

[T]his volume is crafted to complement the inroads staked by Derridean deconstruction in literary animal studies by identifying possibilities for animal stories to transform the very terms of justice, upholding related claims of feminist and decolonial historians, philosophers, and others that animal discourses and embodied experiences are difficult to separate.³⁴

In *Writing Animals: Language, Suffering, and Animality in Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (2019), Timothy C. Baker examines a wide range of fiction that has taken rather unconventional view of nonhuman animals, challenging the tradition of “too human(ist), masculine, heterosexual, Western, Christian, white, imperialist, and ableist”³⁵ anthropocentrism. Baker shows that the traditional narrative forms, in which animals are either simply anthropomorphised or represented as Other, are being replaced, or expanded, as new forms accentuate what humans and animals have in common; instead of reproducing anthropocentric ideas, they in fact subvert the supposed divisions. Aware of the limits of human language and of trans-species communication, these narratives represent new ways of thinking; instead of drawing on binary oppositions and hierarchical structures, they experiment with mental and/or bodily transformations, and with parallel structures:

³³ Lönngren, 41.

³⁴ Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller, “Introduction: Towards an Animal-Centred Literary History,” *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), 8.

³⁵ Claire Colebrook, “Futures,” *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. Bruce Clarke, and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198.

The novel can no longer tell a linear story of progress, or of cause and effect, but it can still suggest the necessity of looking past the human in order to propose a new version of the world, one that incorporates the past and present, the human and the creaturely, and the communal and the individuated. Rather than applying stable ideas of the human to nonhuman species, these novels look towards the possibility of multiple narratives and perspectives, even as they highlight the novel's inherent anthropocentric bias.³⁶

In this fiction, nonhuman animals narrate their accounts of encounters with humans, or, on the contrary, the humans experience life from the point of view of an animal either intentionally, in search of an expanded human perspective, like, for example, in Charles A. Foster's *Being a Beast: Adventures Across the Species Divide*, or unintentionally, by means of virtual metamorphosis, like in Sarah Hall's story *Mrs Fox*. Another example of fiction that blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals is the first part of Patrick Ness's trilogy *Chaos Walking*, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, in which the entire concept of communication, human and nonhuman, written and spoken, is inverted as all living creatures on the planet called New World, except for women, continuously emanate their thoughts in the form of Noise which is audible to everyone else. Thus, humans understand animals and vice versa, and the dictatorial regime controls all thoughts. Baker points out that experimental narrative content is often highlighted in the text by broken syntax, incorrect spelling or even visually, through typographic variations.

A number of the works examined by Baker deal with violence towards animals, referring to similarities in experiencing physical and mental abuse across species. All these narrative innovations aim to broaden human ideas of animals – their communication, rationality, ability to plan, mourn, or suffer, which goes hand in hand with the latest discoveries in the natural sciences, and with the ongoing re-evaluation of the limits of literature: “The destabilisation of narrative form emphasised throughout this book implies the

³⁶ Timothy C. Baker, *Writing Animals: Language, Suffering, and Animality in Twenty-First-Century Fiction*. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 152.

necessity of rethinking the way nonhuman animals appear in literature, and also the authority of written narratives more generally.”³⁷

Most works of literary animal studies deal with animal ethics rather obliquely, with minimal naturalistic depictions of animal cruelty, and so securing the status of non-partisan, academic authority. In contrast, we have Seán McCorry and John Miller’s edited volume, *Literature and Meat Since 1900* (2019). The hard data they collect about the scope and scale of the mass exploitation of animals in agriculture and meat industry reminds us of Peter Singer, whom a Kirkus reviewer called “a tactless boor” in 1975.³⁸ While the soft data, or the interpretations, resulting from critical analyses of the relevant body of literature may be disputable, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to deny their moral urgency. The contributors to the book hold that the deep-rooted culture of carnism, or, eating animals even if it is not biologically essential, is built on a number of ideas relating to “the imaginaries of patriarchy, individualism, and class power,”³⁹ “pervasive anthropocentrism,”⁴⁰ and “the Three Ns of Justification: eating animals is *normal*, *natural*, and *necessary*.”⁴¹ Their ambition is “to unravel meat’s complexities, to examine its affective, aesthetic, and ideological components, and to imaginatively attend to the animal lives and deaths on which the meat industry is constructed,”⁴² and thus they reveal the underlying ethical issues associated with large-scale meat production and consumption.

So Vicki Tromanhauser examines the memoirs and fiction written by nurse writers of the First World War, who in their depiction of the devastating injuries and body parts in different stages of decomposition often used butcher’s jargon, draws attention to the question

³⁷ Baker, 205.

³⁸ “Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement,” *Kirkus Book Reviews* 1 Oct 1975 <<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/peter-singer/animal-liberation/>> 23 Sep 2021.

³⁹ Seán McCorry and John Miller, “Introduction: Meat Critique,” *Literature and Meat since 1900*, ed. Seán McCorry and John Miller (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 6.

⁴⁰ McCorry and Miller, 7.

⁴¹ Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (Newburyport: Red Wheel Weiser, 2020), 86-87.

⁴² McCorry and Miller, 2.

of animality and the “meatness”⁴³ of human flesh with its ontological consequences. Adrian Tait focuses in his analysis of the novels by Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Taylor on those elements that point to the relevance of Derrida’s concept of carnophallogocentrism, whereby the Western heterosexual, carnivorous male validates his dominance over inferior humans, whether women, children, men of coloured skin, homosexuals or the handicapped, and, of course, animals. Although, Stewart Cole shows in his essay that facing an external threat, certain affinity to carnophallogocentrism can bring together even such originally diametrically opposed personalities like George Orwell and W. H. Auden. Other essays indicate that eating of meat, whether human or animal, represents a central ethical issue in a number of (not only) science fiction reflecting the growing concerns about irreversible environmental damage, overpopulation and food insecurity. Literary texts on this topic illustrate cross-species connectedness, and thus the need to take into account certain ethical principles not only in relation to cruelty to animals, but also to its consequent threat to human existence. In the next chapters I will turn my attention to the selected works of fiction dealing with human-animal relations, while applying or referring to the theoretical ethical and literary considerations discussed hitherto.

⁴³ Vicki Tromanhauser, “Inside the “Butcher’s Shop”: Women’s Great War Writing and Surgical Meat,” *Literature and Meat since 1900*, ed. Seán McCorry and John Miller (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 20.

Chapter 2

Crossing Mental Boundaries: Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, and Ceridwen Dovey's *Only the Animals*

What animals mean to humans in the emotional sphere, how people project their perception and concepts of the world into the imagined subjectivity of animals, how they strive to cross their own mental boundaries in communication with animals; these are the questions that arise when reading the selected works by two contemporary female writers: Karen Joy Fowler and Ceridwen Dovey. They both deal with the theme of the suffering of humans and animals under circumstances attributable to human agency. Fowler sets her novel in the research community in the United States, exploring the psychological consequences of experimenting with animals and humans; and Dovey's short stories give a multifaceted image of the suffering experienced by humans and animals in war, seen from the point of view of animals. In this chapter I will focus on animal ethics in these books.

Fowler's novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) brings to the fore a major ethical issue associated with the technological development of Western society, that is the animal testing. While accounts of the torture of animals in laboratories serving military, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic purposes remain mostly the subject of nonfiction books, the stories about pseudo-scientific experimenting on interspecies breeding or fostering have a long tradition, mainly in the genres of horror and science fiction. Fowler's book combines the elements of speculative fiction, literary realism and real-life events as Rosemary, the protagonist, tells the story of her unusual family affected by a highly questionable psychological experiment, directly referring to real research performed by a number of American psychologists, most notoriously by Harry F. Harlow.

The main value of Fowler's novel with regard to animal ethics lays in drawing attention of wide public to the problem of animal experiments. The book is a lament for Rosemary, a middle-aged woman who was, from birth to the age of five, the subject of an experiment led by her father, a research psychologist. The family, comprising of Father, Mother, their son Lowell and daughter Rosemary, adopted a young female chimpanzee called Fern, in order to study and compare the physical and intellectual development of both Rosie and Fern, who were exposed to the same stimuli and evaluated through the same psychological tests. In addition, the household was often visited by a number of graduate students participating in the experiment, and, like icing on the cake, Rosie was made to believe that Fern was her sister. The experiment, of course, got out of hand, ending abruptly in the disruption of the family. Depression, unspoken remorse, superficial communication, the loss of the son who left the family permanently and became a lone Animal Front Liberation fighter pursued by the FBI, as well as the psychological instability of the daughter who could not cope with separation from Lowell and Fern, who, as a "monkey girl", had problems establishing relationships with other people, and apparently suppressed remorse for the construct that she was the cause of the failure of the experiment; these were the major consequences of the "scientific" project.

This kind of human/animal testing was not Fowler's original idea – in the book she refers to several similar experiments performed in the United States since 1933. All of them caused permanent distress to the chimps who were subsequently unable to connect with other chimps, either in captivity or in nature, and often died prematurely. Fowler explores the fate of the other figure in the cruel game – the human child. So we are approached by Rosemary (the novel is narrated in the first person, occasionally addressing the reader directly) who longs to reconstitute the true story of her life, but as if driven by the "monkey" part of her personality, she jumps back and forth in time, repudiating some memories and cherishing

others, boldly describing even events that do not speak in her favour, but first and foremost, she constantly emphasizes her lifelong desire to reunite with her brother and sister. Although Rosie's narrative is somewhat unreliable – there is even an attempt to create some tension around her little lies and wiles as the possible causes of Fern's exclusion, the perceptive reader will probably realize the irrationality of such accusation and, primarily, the negative consequences of the experiment for all participants, the young in particular. Both components, unreliability and irrationality, are most evident in Rosie's insistence on calling Fern her "sister", and in her intention not to reveal Fern's identity – the fact that she was a chimp – until the first third of the novel.

The reader is thus prompted to reconsider the relations between human and nonhuman animals. On the one hand, it is impossible to accept that a five-year-old healthy child, living in a functional, complete family and surrounded by other relatives, friends and acquaintances, could believe that the hairy clever monkey growing up in the same household and running the same types of scientific tests with her father and grads, is really her sister. In basic psychological literature we learn, that "[a]t about 1 year of age, children begin to speak. One-year-olds already have concepts for many things (including family members, household pets, food, toys, and body parts, and when they begin to speak, they are mapping these concepts onto words that adult use."⁴⁴ In this point I differ from Matthew Calarco who conceptualized his essay about the book as a reflection on the "process of normalization, humanization, and domestication"⁴⁵ of Rosemary, her "becoming human"⁴⁶ as a parallel to Red Peter's adaptation to human society in Kafka's short story "A Report to an Academy." Even if this reflection probably follows Fowler's authorial intention. On the other hand, it is possible that

⁴⁴ Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, et al., *Atkinson & Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*, 14th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2003), 320.

⁴⁵ Matthew Calarco, "Boundary Issues: Human–Animal Relationships in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 60.3 (Fall 2014): 624.

⁴⁶ Calarco, 617.

in a close and long-term contact, humans and some animal species, particularly primates, may develop complex emotional relationships. Fowler does not go so far as to emphasize that it is always humans who initiate, create conditions for, control and terminate such relationships, and that animals would never leave their natural habitat and species to make friends with humans. Yet, she points out that these relationships exist, may play an important role in a person's emotional life, and stand in sharp conflict with some experiments on animals.

Preference utilitarianism, as we learned earlier, holds that “we should do what, on balance, furthers the preferences of those affected.”⁴⁷ Peter Singer also clarified and significantly expanded the term “those affected” within the frame of the principle of equal consideration of interests: “Although the principle of equal consideration of interests provides the best possible basis for human equality, its scope is not limited to humans. When we accept the principle of equality for humans, we are also committed to accepting that it extends to some nonhuman animals.”⁴⁸ Extending the principle of equality logically implies the rejection of speciesism, which is “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species.”⁴⁹ Throughout his work in the field of animal ethics, Singer consistently demonstrates that experimentation on animals and factory farming are the most flagrant and yet the most widespread manifestations of speciesism in practice. In *Animal Liberation* he collected evidence about animal experiments whose scientific contribution was negligible if any, and which suggested the incompetence and even sadistic tendencies of their designers, as well as the overriding aim of financial gain. The idea that highly competent and responsible scientists conduct only experiments necessary for protecting human life and health is a myth; the psychological tests in particular are often absurdly drastic and do not benefit humans, let alone animals. As Singer put it:

⁴⁷ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 13.

⁴⁸ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 48.

⁴⁹ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 35.

Among the tens of millions of experiments performed, only a few can possibly be regarded as contributing to important medical research. Huge numbers of animals are used in university departments such as forestry and psychology; many more are used for commercial purposes, to test new cosmetics, shampoos, food coloring agents, and other inessential items. All this can happen only because of our prejudice against taking seriously the suffering of a being who is not a member of our own species.⁵⁰

The strong points in Fowler's novel with regard to animal ethics include its concern for the treatment of some laboratory animals, and the effort to expand the boundaries of emotional relationships and ways of communication between humans and animals. It should be also noted that her book may serve as a good starting point for the readers interested in animal testing ethics as it contains many references to real experiments and conflicts between their supporters and opponents. However, the novel prioritizes some animals over others, and in places trivializes the differences between human and selected nonhuman animals. Calarco rightly argues that the accentuation of human-animal intellectual differences serves primarily to justify our abusive attitude towards animals:

Concerns about "what makes us us" are most often not neutral questions about mind-independent states of affairs; they are, rather, forms of navel-gazing, human narcissism, and anthropocentrism that function both to establish and protect a deeply unjust and hierarchical established order that allows for the unchecked exploitation of animals and other nonhuman beings.⁵¹

Nonetheless, the opposite tendency of downplaying or ignoring the differences is similarly misleading and, in fact can retard the abolition of animal cruelty. There are undeniable physical and mental differences among various species, though they cannot be expressed in discrete values/concepts; humans and great apes are more like each other than, say, humans and bats. But with regard to the right of animals to happy life (borrowing the utilitarian

⁵⁰ Singer, *Animal Ethics*, 78.

⁵¹ Calarco, 622.

terminology), their ability to suffer should be of primary concern, not their supposed subjectivity, mental faculties, or other cultural and historical aspects.

Fowler and most of her reviewers overlook this issue and focus primarily on the touching description of the family shattered by the loss of two “children”, “particularly with regard to Fern — who happens to be a chimpanzee,”⁵² or of “Rosemary’s grief for her missing alter ego and sister.”⁵³ They fail to emphasize that Fern was not a child and Rosemary’s sister, that Rosemary’s parents were not victims but instigators of the family collapse, and that Fern was one of many abused laboratory animals. However, it is also possible that the reviewers might not have registered the deliberate ambiguity of Fowler’s text. The description of Lowell’s heart-breaking encounter with Fern in the lab facility basement shows emotional bias, and because it makes up one of the highlights in the book, I am going to look at it in detail. First, Lowell describes the first contact with Fern – an emotional occasion after his long efforts to find her:

She was in a cage with four large adults. [...] It was as if she felt me coming. I remember thinking Dad should do a study on chimp precognition. [...] Then she spun around and leapt for the bars of the cage. She was shaking them and swinging back and forth, by then she was looking right at me. By then she was screaming at me. [...] I ran toward her and when I got close enough she reached through, grabbed my arm, and pulled me so hard she slammed me into the bars. [...] She hadn’t had a bubble bath in a long time or a good tooth-brushing. She kind of stank, to be honest. [...] I started talking to her, telling her I was sorry, telling her I loved her. But she was still screaming, so I know she didn’t hear.⁵⁴

⁵² Chris Barton, “Karen Joy Fowler Monkeys Around with the Family,” *Los Angeles Times* 13 Jun 2013 < <https://www.latimes.com/books/la-xpm-2013-jun-13-la-ca-jc-karen-joy-fowler-we-are-all-completely-beside-ourselves-20130616-story.html>> 13 Oct 2021.

⁵³ Liz Jensen, “*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* Review – ‘A Provocative Take on Family Love’,” *The Guardian* 20 Mar 2014 < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/20/completely-beside-ourselves-family-love-review>> 13 Oct 2021.

⁵⁴ Karen Joy Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2014), 206-207. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

But then the narrative slips into passionate romance about a good chimp girl and the bad chimp guys, which in its simplicity and one-sided pathos disrupts the ethical argument and betrays, in a way, the legacy of Kafka's Red Peter:

By now, she'd gotten the other chimps pretty worked up. Another one, a big male and fully erect, came and tried to take my hand from her, but she wouldn't let go. [...] The big guy dropped my arm and backed away with his mouth wide open, showing his canines, I swear they looked like shark teeth. He was trying to threaten her, but she wasn't paying him any attention. She was signing with her one free hand to me. My name, her fingers in the L with that slap against her chest, and then good, good Fern. Fern is a good girl. Please take me home now. I'll be good. I promise I'll be good. [...] The big chimp came crashing in from behind [...] opened these long, bloody wounds on her back with his feet. And all this time, she was still screaming, all the chimps were screaming, and I could smell blood and fury and terror, all that acrid copper and musky sweat and ripe feces, and my head was spinning from the blows I'd taken. (207-208)

The dreadful scene culminates and ends with the arrival of local staff – just the sight of their cattle prods is sufficient to drive the frightened animals into the far corners of their cages:

By now, people had arrived [...] They were big, and one of them was carrying a cattle prod, and I remember thinking, how is that going to work? [...] Turned out, they didn't need to shock anyone. The male chimp saw the prod and backed right off, whimpering, to the rear of the cage. Everyone got quiet. They showed it to Fern, and she finally let go. [...] Fern was trying to press herself through the bars, still signing my name and also hers. Good Fern, good Fern. (208)

Fowler, through the mouths of her novel's characters, follows the conventional, reductionist view on animals. She presents Fern, the chimp, purely as a victim of wilful janitors controlling the lab cages, and of the sadistic Dr. Uljevik (the foreign name perhaps suggesting that he is antagonistic); Fern who understands English, speaks in sign language, loves humans and protects them from attacks by stupid, uneducated chimps who do not know the benefits of brushing their teeth and of regular foam baths. In contrast, those primitive apes are equipped with the disgusting canines resembling the teeth of another, also profoundly monstrous animal species, the shark.

Fowler here passes up an opportunity to uncover a more fundamental problem: humans tore the animals from their natural habitats, exposed them to the harsh experiments, for example, the cross-fostering, and distorted their behavioural paradigms, damaging them psychologically and socially, and rendering them unable to live in either of the artificial environments (the human family in the house or the chimpanzee group in the cage). She does not register that Fern's suffering is the same as that of her companions in the cage, and that no one, including the Cookes, can be relieved of the responsibility for the animals' abuse. Although she points out in her book some unethical practices in research involving animals, in essence, her viewpoint remains anthropocentric and speciesist. In the afterword, Fowler venerates her father who carried out tests on rats, and condemns their neighbour who performed pest control work in his house:

In my family, we had a house full of beloved pets and a lab full of research subjects. At dinner when we talked about rats, as we often did, the conversation was all about their intelligence, how they learned. [...] Yet our neighbour dealt with the rats in his basement by poisoning them all, killing my little dog Snippet and some of the neighbourhood cats at the same time. (312)

From the animal ethics point of view, the actions of both agents, Fowler's father and the neighbour, are similar. The former abused the rats for his experiments, in which animals are usually stimulated to perform the required tasks through a combination of food restriction and supply, loud noises, drugs, or electric shocks,⁵⁵ and their short lives most often end in gas chambers filled with carbon dioxide.⁵⁶ While the latter killed wild animals entering his house by means available on the market for that purpose. Neither take the interests of the rats into consideration. As Singer put it, "[e]thics does not demand that we eliminate personal relationships and partial affections, but it does demand that, when we act, we assess the moral

⁵⁵ National Research Council (US) Committee on Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Neuroscience and Behavioral Research, *Guidelines for the Care and Use of Mammals in Neuroscience and Behavioral Research* (Washington: National Academies Press, 2003), 123.

⁵⁶ Daniel Cressey, "Best Way to Kill Lab Animals Sought," *Nature* 500 (8 Aug 2013): 130-131.

claims of those affected by our actions with some degree of independence from our feelings for them.”⁵⁷ In the next section I will deal with a book, in which human-animal relations and the related ethical considerations are reflected in situations of acute danger for both, humans and animals, while employing different literary devices.

Nonhuman animals are the tragic heroes in Dovey’s collection of short stories *Only the Animals* (2014). Using the first-person narrative, Dovey’s anthropomorphised animals give their accounts not only of their death but mainly of human agency and the complex relationships between humans and animals. Morality lies at the bottom of all the stories, and it is the kind morality that considers humanity anchored in the natural, we may say, planetary environment. Each story is introduced with a picture of the star constellation referring to the animal narrator, which implies multiple meanings. First, it shows the inseparable connection between humans and other natural subjects, and how humans, since ancient times, projected animals into their explorations of natural phenomena as well as to their legends and myths. Second, it aims to show human affairs from a more distant perspective. Third, the distant view is mediated through the voice of animals, who, although they are bound to use human language and logic, often show more wisdom and better moral judgement than humans, amplifying humans’ irrationality and wickedness.

This arrangement, however, does not ensure impartiality; Dovey’s ideological partiality, which permeates, for instance, the story about the US Navy Marine Mammal Program (“A Letter to Sylvia Plath”) is so obvious that it might be even perceived as an irony. It does not and cannot fully comply with the concept of “the point of view of the universe” introduced by the nineteenth-century utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick, which ethics

⁵⁷ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 69.

should provide;⁵⁸ while literature, in contrast, enjoys the freedom of poetic licence and philosophizes against the background of subjective fictional stories, only rarely transcending their contextual boundaries.

Dovey composed her collection of stories as a meticulously elaborated constellation of literary, political and historical references, as a pastiche, which draws on works of other authors, incorporating entire passages from other texts. First, as she declares at the end of the book, she wanted to “pay homage to many authors who have written about animals.”⁵⁹ Second, the technique of pastiche illuminates the continuity and diversity of discourse about human-animal relations. And, finally, intertextuality may influence the reader and expand his understanding of the text based on his previous experience. Dovey’s stories allude to Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, Collette, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Tom Stoppard, Jack Kerouac, Julian Barnes, and J. M. Coetzee, among others. Animals were not the primary focus of the author – their voice and perspective serve to mediate the horror of human violent conflicts and to enrich the narrative style; in other words, Dovey does not intentionally go beyond the limits of anthropocentrism:

The task I set myself for this book was to see if I could take [...] these human conflicts from late colonial times at the turn of the last century all the way through to the aftershocks of 9/11 and the war on terror at its end – and, by gazing at the same conflict through the eyes of an individual creature, a non-human animal, shock myself [...] into feeling something authentic. I wanted to short-circuit the rational retelling of these conflicts in history and avoid the usual dry focus on technology and leaders and outcomes and politics through the absurdity of a talking animal soul speaking from beyond the grave about the way he/she died in a particular conflict. And perhaps – because you’re not morally obliged to feel anything, as you would for a human – you can let yourself see that conflict from the oblique angle [...] It’s that alienating effect of gazing through an animal’s eyes that I think can be most powerful.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1962).

⁵⁹ Ceridwen Dovey, *Only the Animals* (New York: Picador, 2017), 248. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

⁶⁰ “Interview with Ceridwen Dovey, Author of *Only the Animals*,” *Potts Point Bookshop*, 30 May 2014 <<https://www.pottspointbookshopblog.com/blog/2014/05/interview-with-ceridwen-dovey-author-of.html>> 17 Nov 2021.

At least two points in Dovey's statement can be directly linked to animal ethics: the first relates to her strategy to replace "the rational retelling" by a more affective device, which a dead, talking animal certainly is; and the second point concerns the idea that "you're not morally obliged to feel anything, as you would for a human." Moral philosophy, and utilitarian theories in particular, seek to find answers on the question "What I ought to do?" primarily on the rational basis; as Henry Sidgwick put it: "It is not the possibility of merely indeterminate choice, of an 'arbitrary freak of unmotivated willing,' with which we are concerned from an ethical point of view, but the possibility of choosing between rational and irrational motives."⁶¹ Engaged fiction, on the other hand, may have a similar ambition – to make the reader reconsider common, seemingly unshakeable moral paradigms by using the literary devices creating affects, emotions and feelings. One such paradigm concerns moral obligations towards human versus nonhuman animals. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to demonstrate how Dovey's stories may affect readers who are open to broader interpretations, and who include in their moral considerations not only human, or especially human animals, but also their non-human companions in the life on this planet.

Theory of affect has come to the fore in recent years, and among many "turns" the "turn to affect"⁶² is also traceable in critical theory. Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) is usually thought to be foundational. He defined affect as the "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections."⁶³ Spinoza asserted that affects "have certain properties as worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing,"⁶⁴ and he strived to "treat the

⁶¹ Sidgwick, 65.

⁶² Mireia Aragay, Cristina Delgado-García and Martin Middeke, eds., *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre: Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3.

⁶³ Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Group, 1996), 70.

⁶⁴ Spinoza, 69.

nature and powers of the affects, and the power of the mind over them.”⁶⁵ In other words, a human being is naturally affected by passions, evil or virtuous, and it is the power of his intellect that allows him to understand and make distinctions between them, acquiring freedom and the capability to act morally, because:

[n]o life, then, is rational without understanding, and things are good only insofar as they aid man to enjoy the life of the mind, which is defined by understanding. On the other hand, those which prevent man from being able to perfect his reason and enjoy the rational life, those only we say are evil.⁶⁶

Modern theories of affect approach its body-mind duality from various angles in attempt to understand its dynamic and effect, which includes aspects of ethics, and political and social critique. The most intensive interplay between bodily affection and intellectual response usually comes in life-threatening situations; the characters in Dovey’s stories find themselves in the midst of military conflicts where practical ethics is completely distorted; on the one hand, violence and wickedness develop on a mass scale; on the other, opportunities to show the best of human traits – heroism, solidarity, self-sacrifice, or simple human decency (which might be equal to the utmost heroism) are frequent. Dovey’s narratives use unexpected perspectives and juxtapositions to represent the absurdities of the situation.

For instance, the story “Hundstage” shows that the same people, the Nazi leaders, who were responsible for the worst crimes against humanity in occupied countries, paradoxically demonstrated so much respect for animals that they could be role models in today’s animal rights movement. Hermann Göring’s (authentic) radio address from 1933 turns animal ethics literally upside down: “To the German, animals are not merely creatures in the organic sense, but creatures who lead their own lives and who are endowed with perceptive facilities, who feel pain and experience joy and prove to be faithful and attached” (76). The bizarre effect of

⁶⁵ Spinoza, 69.

⁶⁶ Spinoza, 155-156.

the statement is amplified when delivered through the mouth of Heinrich Himmler's faithful dog who is trying to console his master, moved to tears by Göring's words. Later in the story, the dog protagonist sees action on the Eastern Front and encounters the enemy who does not have the same concern for animals as Germans (they train dogs with explosives attached to their backs to search for food underneath the German tanks). But instead of fulfilling his sordid task, the famished though faithful animal tries to get to his own camp, and dies, still reminiscing about the old legends, which his master recited "in his hypnotic voice: *I am the great wolf Fenris, broken free from my chains...*" (96). The story becomes a parable of the German nation whose unshakeable conviction, ignited by a group of extreme and extremely skilled nationalists, led to economic devastation and spiritual desolation.

We find another ethical lesson in absurdity in the story "Red Peter's Little Lady," which draws on Franz Kafka's brilliant and frequently cited "A Report to an Academy" (1917). While in Kafka's story it was Red Peter, the chimp, or in a broader sense, a member of an inferior race, who ironically demonstrated his wisdom and moral superiority over his captors, in Dovey's narrative, Red Peter paradoxically becomes an example of those humans who deny their natural connection to animals and believe that sophisticated language and outward manners, which Red Peter so eagerly learned to emulate, place them above the natural world. In times of war (though not only, of course), they are reminded of the fallacy of such a belief. And so, Herr Hagenbeck, succumbing to an instinctive urge to escape danger, recklessly abandons Frau Oberndorff and her children, but does not spare them the enthusiastic, indeed patriotic proclamation in his farewell letter: "Trust in our German nation. We shall prevail" (63). Eventually even Frau Oberndorff, who used to call Red Peter "darling" (66), puts him under lock and key, while he realizes, dreadfully late, that the marmalade she feeds him is to fatten his flesh which will be served for her Christmas dinner.

In contrast to Red Peter's spiritual and social degradation, it is his would-be fiancée Hazel, the chimp in training, who provides the irony in Dovey's sequel to Kafka's story. The more Peter succumbs to unfounded illusions and supercilious criticism of Hazel's behaviour, the more her good judgement and insight into human affairs stand out. After Frau Oberndorff read her excerpts from *The Entropy of Reason* (an allusion to I. B. Singer's short story "A Friend of Kafka"), in which the author contemplates the value of words, Hazel asks Red Peter disquieting questions: "Will you toss words at me when I swing from the curtains towards you and display my asshole? Will I throw words at you when you thump your chest and sink your fangs into my rump? [...] Would you like me to be more human, or less human, or more or less human?" (60). While Frau Oberndorff and Red Peter share a concern for Hazel's mental health, consciously or unconsciously denying their own animality, she understands reality and can predict upcoming events better than both.

Dovey's animal heroes are not only higher animals, such as dogs or apes, who are close to humans due to their history of companionship or evolutionary kinship, and therefore more amenable to personification. In her menagerie we also find a mussel who provides an original account of the Pearl Harbour attack, knowingly alluding to Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957), and the Merry Pranksters' acid trip in 1964. Dovey draws surprising parallels between the adventures of the Beatniks and the carefree wandering of mussels across the American continent and the Pacific towards a beautiful lagoon in Hawaii, especially suitable for spawning and feasting:

The smell of sex was almost as strong as the smell of food – there was food everywhere in the harbour, so much that we all got fat, quick and fast, fatter and fatter. I wasn't so sure this was what we'd been searching for, this life of plenty. But it felt pretty damn good, damn damn damn good, gorging and humping ad infinitum. (112)

But before the mussel counterparts of Sal and Dean can make any conclusions from their philosophical and political debates with the lobster (who, in addition to hallucinogenic drugs,

brought them information about Sartre, Apollinaire, and the war in Europe), something hit the battleship to which their colony was attached. Those not killed immediately, panicked: “this isn’t the way it was meant to be, me, hunter-gatherer of all experience, dying at sea!” (116).

“A Letter to Sylvia Plath” is exceptional as the narrative is close to the real story of a dolphin who was involuntarily involved in human affairs and later committed suicide; and also for its foregrounding of ontological and ethical questions about human-animal relations. The plot of the story loosely refers to “bizarre, unconventional research on dolphin–human communication” (212) performed by Dr John Lilly and his followers in the 1960s, including Margaret Lovatt, who was so enthusiastic about speaking with a dolphin named Peter that she came into a close contact with him.⁶⁷ But because the publicly-funded research did not bring expected results, the dolphinarium on the island of Saint Thomas was closed, and experimental animals were moved to other, less convenient facilities. Peter, probably due to mental frustration, committed suicide, which is a phenomenon empirically observed though difficult to prove scientifically.⁶⁸ Using dolphins for military purposes, however, turned out to be a more vital project than Lilly’s communication experiments, and the combat dolphins trained to perform various classified tasks within the U.S. Navy Marine Mammal Program have been deployed on a number of occasions since the Vietnam War.⁶⁹

Dovey takes these real events as a point of departure for an account of a fictional romance about a military dolphin named Sprout and her gentle trainer, Petty Officer First Class Bloomington. While Sprout “loved him deeply, and not in a Stockholm syndrome sort

⁶⁷ Christopher Riley, “The Dolphin Who Loved Me: The Nasa-funded Project that Went Wrong,” *The Guardian* 8 June 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jun/08/the-dolphin-who-loved-me>> 24 November 2021.

⁶⁸ “Do Dolphins Commit Suicide in Captivity?” *Marine Animal Welfare*, 6 August 2012 <<http://marineanimalwelfare.blogspot.com/2012/08/do-dolphin-commit-suicide-in-captivity.html>> 24 November 2021. Richard O’Barry, “Of Dolphins and Decency,” *Oceans: The Threats to Our Seas and What You Can Do to Turn the Tide*, ed. Jon Bowermaster (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 218.

⁶⁹ Pierre Bienaimé, “The US Navy’s Combat Dolphins Are Serious Military Assets,” *Business Insider* 12 March 2015 <<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-navys-combat-dolphins-are-serious-military-assets-2015-3>> 24 November 2021.

of way” (211), Officer Bloomington used to say that “we related as subject to subject, not subject to object, and communicated with our whole beings” (215). When Sprout gave birth to a dolphin-girl, he “literally jumped up and down beside the pool, yelling and whooping [...] and named her Officer” (219). Both Sprout and Officer Bloomington were thrilled to serve in the US Navy and diligently performed their duties in the Middle East. Neither could have imagined that the small device that Sprout learned to attach to divers in the San Clemente naval base were not trackers but killers. When she later realized this after killing the first human during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, she chose to commit suicide as “We take killing a human very hard. It is as taboo for us as killing our own babies” (229).

The story depicts Sprout’s life and relations, framed by literary-philosophical reflections and talks with three largely opposing personalities: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, famous poets and spouses, and Elizabeth Costello, the fictional author created by J. M. Coetzee. For Sprout the fundamental question is: “Am I human or animal?” (206), which emphasizes the fact that there is no clear answer, but ethical questions ensue: “Why do you sometimes treat other people as humans and sometimes as animals? And why do you sometimes treat creatures as animals and sometimes as humans?” (206). She identifies with Sylvia Plath as a woman and mother: “you helped me understand [...] that human women need no reminder that they’re animals” (206). In contrast, Ted Hughes, in Sprout’s gender-coloured interpretation, needed to “justify the animal in the human” (204) in his poetry: “I saw right through his mythologising of the poetic process, the animal as symbol of the poet getting in touch with his deepest, wildest, most predatory instincts” (204). Elizabeth Costello alludes to a reconciliatory perspective, embracing the human-animal duality: “It [Hughes’s attitude to animals in his poetry] is deeply masculine, masculinist. Its ramifications in politics are to be mistrusted. But when all is said and done, there remains something attractive about it at an ethical level” (207).

Dovey's anthropomorphized animals relativize the foundations of liberal humanism, which holds that humans stand above the natural world and are entitled to exploit it. Her innovative narrative form – the posthumous animal autobiography – in which the souls of animals' comment on human affairs and demonstrate specific abilities and self-awareness, invites readers to reflect on the human-animal relations and ethics. As David Herman put it:

Dovey's ventriloquizing acts both reflect and help constitute an alternative ontology; this other way of configuring creatural life allocates to a whole range of animals' possibilities for selfhood that more restrictive ontologies limit to humans – or even to just a subset of the larger human population.⁷⁰

Both texts discussed in this chapter push the boundaries of human perception in relation to animals. They represent animals as sentient beings with their own mental capabilities, which are largely unknown to humans. In spite of their anthropocentric approach – humans remain in the centre of interest and animals are either their subservient companions, or comment on human affairs through borrowing human consciousness – they mediate human-animal interactions and touch on related ethical issues. Ethical issues play an even more prominent role in the novels that will be analysed in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ David Herman, *Narratology beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 195.

Chapter 3

Crossing Physical Boundaries: Michel Faber's *Under the Skin*, and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

The theme of suffering of humans and animals caused by humans recurs in the fiction of Michel Faber and Indra Sinha, although they differ from the previously discussed texts insofar as they do not talk about animals or through an animal's mouth, but attempt to cross the physical, or more precisely the bodily, boundaries and experience "being an animal". In these works, physical transformation and perception of the animal body and its environment enables new perspectives on human affairs, and not only in relation to human-animal interactions.

Faber's novel *Under the Skin* (2000) blurs distinctions between species and offers surprising perspectives on the dichotomies human/nonhuman, predator/prey, us/them, or self-reliance/solidarity, as well as on linguistic ambiguity, and also on ethical questions relating to industrial meat production and consumption. The novel is set in contemporary Scotland, and blends realistic depiction of unspoilt highland countryside and of marginalized people, with sci-fi elements. Isserley, the protagonist and focaliser of the story, belongs to a handful of aliens who were sent to the planet Earth to hunt animals and process their delicious (and extremely expensive) meat on a small farm. They work in secrecy, and only two of them have been surgically transformed into the form of the hunted animals – one sets out to hunt hitchhikers along Scottish roads, and the other ensures necessary communication with local animals.

Faber uses perspectival shift. In his novel, the predators and meat processors are an alien canine-like species of furred quadrupeds who call themselves "humans", and their prey, "the vodsel", is what we call *Homo sapiens*. The aliens are rational and emotional, have their own language, a rigid class system, and male dominate females. They are technically

advanced, travelling across the universe in search for the supplies that have already been depleted due to environmental destruction on their own planet. Even air and water became scarce and must be produced by a proletarian caste that lives and works deep underground on the home planet, while the Elite lives above them, on the surface, though their air is rationed. Isserley, who was once in the Elite's favour, became an outcast, but refused to submit. Through her story, Faber enriches Deleuze and Guattari's collection of potential becomings about yet another category: a becoming-vodsel.

Isserley, the hunter, embarks on the path of rhizomatic nomadism, a movement without maps, "such as becoming, heterogeneity, infinitesimal, passage to the limit, continuous variation,"⁷¹ in attempt to resist "civil, static, and ordinal rules"⁷² imposed by the despotic State, as Deleuze and Guattari formulate this. Her mental transformation is gradual. She first leaves her home planet as a migrant, in a desperate attempt to escape slave labour in the underground hell of the New Estates. She pays a high price for this: her beautiful body must be surgically disfigured into the form of the "vodsel" in order to become attractive for the vodsel males, whom she hunts for processing. Although she wishes to escape her home planet, she remains anchored in its culture and morals. She is upset by being expelled from high society, and on Earth deliberately isolates herself from the members of the lower caste, who are her co-workers. However, she shares her compatriots' indifference towards earthlings. She is untouched by the vodsel's stories or belongings that she carefully sorts after each successful capture; for her they are just items on her payroll, objects of her hard work, and of consumption. A fillet of voddissin costs "for an ordinary person, a whole month's worth of water and oxygen"⁷³ and is a delicacy that far surpasses the meals served at Ablach farm canteen, or junk food commonly consumed by the vodsels in the United Kingdom.

⁷¹ Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 363.

⁷² Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 363.

⁷³ Michel Faber, *Under the Skin* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2000), 234. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Taking a typical anthropocentric approach to nature, the aliens consider their own language the only real and fully-fledged, corresponding to their superior status. The vodsels, in contrast, are just “cackling and mooing in meaningless abandon like the cavorting oddities on television” (172). By introducing particular signifiers Faber points to the cultural difference between the two species that is used for the affirmation of the superiority of the one over the other. That the reader is not provided with an explanation of the unknown terms only amplifies the message. For Isserly, the absence of an equivalent of the vodsels word “mercy” in her language is insignificant, because first, vodsels, like all other animals, lack the concepts that, from her perspective, define a human being: “They couldn’t siuwil, they couldn’t mesnishtil, they had no concept of slan. In their brutishness, they’d never evolved to use hunshur; their communities were so rudimentary that hississins did not exist; nor did these creatures seem to see any need for chail, or even chailsinn” (174). Second, in Isserley’s view, that word cannot be of great importance as “she’d rarely encountered [it] in her reading, and never on television” (171). Isserley takes the same attitude towards vodsels as any other “reasonable” human being, brought up and educated in the spirit of humanism towards livestock: animals are mere objects without moral status, and as such may be legally exploited for the sake of humankind, though “unnecessary suffering” shall be minimized. In case of lurking doubts, she uses familiar reasoning:

The thing about vodsels was, people who knew nothing whatsoever about them were apt to misunderstand them terribly. There was always the tendency to anthropomorphize. A vodsels might do something which resembled a human action; it might make a sound analogous with human distress, or make a gesture analogous with human supplication, and that made the ignorant observer jump to conclusions. (173-174)

With the exchanged roles of the humans and vodsels, and the insistence of the extraterrestrial humans on their humanness, the novel shall be read not (only) metaphorically as a fable, in which the “other humans” stand for us, the “real humans”. There is no binary

opposition between the aliens and the vodsel; they both represent mankind and sentient beings, though with different physical constitutions and metaphysical concepts, and the reader can identify with both “species” in many ways. Instead, the novel lends itself to “metonymic and parallel readings on the surface,”⁷⁴ emphasizing proximity and likeness, and the fact that “the human *is* an animal among other animals.”⁷⁵ After all, it seems highly probable that there are many alien civilizations in the universe,⁷⁶ and we can hardly predict what kind of moral status they would grant us.

Isserley reflects on her moral views as if motivated by, in part, Aristotelian ethics, and by ethical egoism, which is “an *agent-relative* form of consequentialism ... according to which the right action is the action that would have the best consequences for the agent.”⁷⁷ Her second phase of deterritorialization in the Deleuzian sense occurs gradually. She begins to realize a sharp contrast between her mundane drives across the Scottish Highlands in search of prey (often overwhelmed by pain resulting from her extensive, crippling surgery and by fear of the police) and her solitary walks along the seashore during which she perceives with growing pleasure the infinite amount of fresh air, sea water, pebbles, endless pastures, and grazing sheep.

The climax comes when Isserley witnesses for the first time the processing of a vodsel at the farm. Faber depicts the incident with technical language that focuses on the setting and the butcher’s activities; this increases the dramatic effect:

The Cradle, constructed from pieces of farm equipment, was a masterpiece of specialized design. [...] Unser, the Chief Processor – or the butcher, as he still insisted on calling himself – was washing himself. [...] Unhesitatingly he snatched up an electrical appliance resembling a large star-point screwdriver and, squinting with concentration, guided it into the vodsel’s mouth. [...] The vodsel coughed: the first real evidence

⁷⁴ Lönngren, 41.

⁷⁵ Lönngren, 41.

⁷⁶ Seth Shostak, “Drake Equation,” *SETI Institute* July 2021 <<https://www.seti.org/drake-equation-index>> 5 October 2021.

⁷⁷ Copp, 27.

that, far from being dead, it was suffering from nothing more serious than icpathuasi. [...] As soon as he was satisfied with the state of the animal's mouth, Unser turned his attention to the genitals. Taking up a clean instrument, he sliced open the scrotal sac and, with rapid, delicate, almost trembling incisions of his scalpel, removed the testicles. It was a much more straightforward job than the tongue; it took perhaps thirty seconds. (210-214)

This routine job for the Chief Processor and his workmates was an epiphany for Isserley. She did not become suddenly concerned about the life and death of William Cameron, a kind vodsel, caring husband and father of two children, but she instinctively realized the parallel between herself and the vodsel in the Cradle. She was also castrated and mutilated in order to work to produce delicacies for her culture. Thus began the final phase of her withdrawal, her becoming-vodsel, and rebellion against the exploitative system. She decided for her own sake that she would no longer participate in it:

She wouldn't starve. There were potatoes growing in the fields, turnips scattered for the sheep, apples on the trees. These were all perfectly fit for human consumption, as the men on Ablach Farm proved every day in the Dining Hall. It wasn't enough, but she would survive. In time, she would discover foods she couldn't yet imagine, foods which would remind her of the delicacies of her childhood, foods which would make her feel languorous and satisfied and complete. It was all out there somewhere, she was sure. (116)

She did not then know how close she was to attaining absolute deterritorialization when “[m]y territories are out of grasp, not because they are imaginary, but the opposite: because I am in the process of drawing them.”⁷⁸ It came just a few days later, but she was prepared and committed to make the last step: “‘Here I come,’ she said” (282). The metaphysical aspects of Isserley's metamorphosis, her liberating revolt and transcendent, all-embracing relationship to nature, which I have attempted to explain with using the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, emphasizing the option of metonymical reading, need to be completed with the elements that point out directly to practical animal ethics.

⁷⁸ Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 199.

Faber's novel is, among other things, about the ethics of eating, and the commodification of sentient beings on an industrial scale. It obliquely suggests that "under the skin", there is no fundamental difference between the aliens/humans (and the vodsels/animals); their ethics and socio-economic systems are mostly identical. Their methods of processing meat may be disturbing for the reader precisely because they use the same hardware and the same rationalization. The reader is not used to that view. Massaged by advertising, and largely separated from the reality of industrial meat processing, he mostly wonders which cut of meat to choose. As Peter Singer put it:

In general, we are ignorant of the abuse of living creatures that lies behind the food we eat. Buying food in a store or restaurant is the culmination of a long process, of which all but the end product is delicately screened from our eyes. We buy our meat and poultry in neat plastic packages. It hardly bleeds. There is no reason to associate this package with a living, breathing, walking, suffering animal.⁷⁹

Amlis Vess, the handsome and enlightened heir to the powerful family enterprise, wishes to break the harsh, unethical system, but his actions seem to do more harm than good, although his sensitivity to the oppressed, and commitment to disseminate what he has seen and learned on Earth provide some hope. In terms of animal ethics, there is a qualitative difference between Isserley and Amlis's attitude, as Kirsty Dunn pointed out:

Isserley effectively acts as a proxy for the Western consumer at this point in the narrative, and these descriptions begin to 'fill the gaps' in consumer knowledge concerning intensive farming operations. And whilst, at this point in the narrative, Isserley does not share Amlis' concern for the vodsels' health and welfare and is more preoccupied with "how hard she must constantly be working" (169), the descriptions of the vodsels' close confinement is still intensely provocative and disconcerting for the reader in that they must picture, not chickens, hogs, or cattle in these dire conditions, but fellow human beings, who, like those animal species, have been physically mutilated in order to produce more docile and profitable bodies.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), 95.

⁸⁰ Kirsty Dunn, "'Do You Know Where the Light Is?' Factory Farming and Industrial Slaughter in Michel Faber's *Under the Skin*," *Meat Culture*, ed. Annie Potts (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 155.

Isserley, having undergone physical transformation from human to vodsels which triggered her perspectival shift, has a fluid identity. Her role is symbolic, raising fundamental ontological and meta-ethical questions, while Amlis, who does not need to become vodsels or prey in a socio-economic machinery in order to realize the moral aspects of killing/eating vodsels, is only beginning to search for answers to practical ethical issues. As the author himself noted in an interview: “it’s desirable to live with open eyes and to do or not do things because of an informed choice. The book is an invitation for people to make up their own minds about certain issues and to find peace with the choices that they’ve made.”⁸¹ The motifs of eyes and vision are noticeable throughout the text; in contact with the vodsels, Isserley has to mask her big eyes and perfect vision by wearing thick glasses; in order to do her nasty job, she must pretend that she can see as little as the vodsels can. In contrast, she must make an effort to see what is intentionally kept out of sight, which is one of the ethical aspects accentuated in the next book of my selection.

In spite of its teasing title, Indra Sinha’s novel *Animal’s People* (2007) seems to appear somewhat by mistake within the context of animal studies, because its central ethical issue is about the poor way humans treat other humans. Sinha draws attention to the Bhopal disaster and its aftermath, and he does so through an extraordinarily refined story, in which the lives of animals and humans are grotesquely intermingling together with variable identity, perspective, or language.

The Bhopal tragedy, in which about forty tons of poisonous gases escaped from a chemical plant and descended mainly upon the nearby densely populated slum districts, drew the attention of the Western mass media for a relatively short time period, and most American

⁸¹ “Michel Faber Interviewed by Ron Hogan,” *Beatrice Interview* <<http://www.beatrice.com/interviews/faber/>> 7 October 2021.

and European citizens now know little about it.⁸² It was the world's deadliest industrial disaster, with a death toll of at least 8,000 in the immediate aftermath, and with another 100,000 who died prematurely, or were permanently injured and/or giving birth to severely disabled children.⁸³ The American corporation, Union Carbide, which built and owned the controlling stake in the chemical factory in Bhopal, for a long time knowingly ignored breaches of good manufacturing practice, and was never tried and convicted for the damage caused by the incident. It was mostly poor Indians who were affected – the statistical data about the victims remain approximate – therefore the legal response and financial compensations have been grossly inadequate. Often illiterate, having no identification card,⁸⁴ deprived of possibility to speak, or more precisely, to be heard,⁸⁵ these humans, practically, had the moral status of animals. It suggests that more than ability to speak, suffer and contemplate the future and past, which are the typical distinctive features differentiating the moral status of humans and of animals, it is rather the social status of the subject in question that makes the difference in practical moral judgement.

The magnitude of the disaster has been immense. It included not only the apocalyptic scenes that took place in December 1984 in Bhopal:

Many of those who lived nearest to the plant died in their sleep. Most woke up because they were coughing and suffocating. Then they felt something like “burned chilli”, their eyes started to burn as well as their respiratory passages, and they began to vomit. When they looked outside, they saw a white mist. Some stayed in bed under a blanket, but most people went out, scared and angry, and tried to get away from the cloud. Some died instantaneously. The others ran, or used vehicles if possible, and moved away from the factory, following the direction of the cloud. Being blinded, they shouted for their family members – but soon their throats were constricted by the gas, their lungs choked. As they ran, they

⁸² “Van Maximilian Carlson Interviewed by Brenda Upright at Slamdance Film Festival,” 3 March 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHYsPX5sKak>> 25 Oct 2021.

⁸³ Ingrid Eckerman, *The Bhopal Saga: Causes and Consequences of the World's Largest Industrial Disaster* (Hyderabad: Universities Press, 2005), 94-97.

⁸⁴ Elliot Hannon, “For India's Undocumented Citizens, An ID At Last,” *NPR* 1 Mar 2012 <<https://www.npr.org/2012/03/01/147662322/for-indias-undocumented-citizens-an-id-at-last?t=1635176386276>> 25 Oct 2021.

⁸⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313.

inhaled larger amounts of the gases. [...] When the morning light came, the extent of the disaster was obvious. In the areas around the factory, every goat, cat, dog, cow and buffalo had died. Outside and inside the houses dead human bodies were lying. Only the birds and rats did not die. In a few days, all the leaves of the trees fell off, and the grass became yellow. [...] On the December 4th, a number of police trucks entered the area next to the factory. They loaded the trucks with the dead bodies they found and dumped them in the river. One or another was not dead, but woke up in the cold water, surrounded by dead bodies. We will never know how many people were burned or buried alive.⁸⁶

The contrasts in ethical attitudes taken by the key agents – corporate, authorities, and the groups working under the umbrella of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal – are reflected in Sinha’s *Animal’s People*, the novel, which oscillates between despair and hope, between poetic masterpiece and sentimental romance.

The protagonist of the novel is a young man, one of many survivors whose lives were forever damaged by “that night.”⁸⁷ He is an orphan, penniless, illiterate, and crippled by the poisonous leak from the pesticide factory. Toxic chemicals caused permanent damage to his spine and skeletal muscles, so he cannot walk upright but is doomed to move on all fours. Kids began to call him “Animal” and after a while he adopted this name as his own, partially as an expression of his defensive rebellion against the cruelty of the world, but also in a bid to cover his true feelings: “‘My name is Animal,’ I say. ‘I’m not a fucking human being, I’ve no wish to be one.’ This was my mantra, what I told everyone. Never did I mention my yearning to walk upright” (23). Yet in spite of the hardships, his story and the story of his friends reveals that humans are inseparable from the realm of nature and of animals, and that their destructive and self-destructive tendencies exercised mainly on the impersonal level of corporations and governments are always challenged by the efforts of those who work selflessly for the needy and downtrodden; in other words, who apply in practice Singer’s principle of equal consideration of interest. Even the antithetic title of the novel, *Animal’s*

⁸⁶ Eckerman, 85-86.

⁸⁷ Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People* (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2008), 1. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

People, suggests an unconventional mode of thinking, which destabilizes the dichotomies human/animal, superior/inferior, or noble/ignoble, using unusual structure, language, elements of magic realism, and brilliantly balanced humour.

Sinha's work is a kind of epistolary novel, though not written in letters (the narrator lacks the means to produce the letters) but recorded in Hindi on a series of tapes given to him by a foreign journalist, and addressed to Eyes, the people who would read Animal's testimony about the life in Khaufpur, the city of sorrows, which stands for Bhopal. Animal narrates the story in retrospect, and his primary motivation was to make up his mind before deciding about the surgery that might correct his spinal deformity. At the end of his narration, he not only realizes that he wants to stay as he is, but his story also emerges as a clear enunciation of all his poor/powerful people: "All things pass, but the poor remain. ... Tomorrow there will be more of us" (366).

In order to deliver his moral and political message, Sinha created a specific language and style complemented by the elements of magic realism. Animal can hear the thoughts of other subjects, speak with animals and ghosts, and he also easily learns other human languages, mixing them as he pleases, though in fact emphasizing the volatility and arbitrariness of linguistic signs, and the common need and ability of all sentient beings to communicate. While the diversity, instability and mutability of viewpoints on the one hand, and the danger of misunderstanding and misconception on the other, are intricately reflected within heteroglossia – the stratification of language in this particular socio-ideological context encompassing a wide range of cultural backgrounds from poor Indians to the rich, educated and self-assured Americans. It seems impossible for Elli, an American physician, to understand Khaufpuris boycott of her clinic, while Khaufpuris who experienced "that night" and its aftermath cannot imagine that anything good could come from "Amrika" – one of the

novel's many neologisms; others being, for instance, jarnalis (journalist), internet (internet), Kampani (Company), Ostrali (Australia), or Apokalis (Apocalypse).

Probably the most effective linguistic aspect of the novel is the use of vulgar language. The text abounds with curse words, which enhance the authenticity of the narrative, and express the harsh life of the speakers; in the most dramatic moments, however, create a powerful contrast between ignoble background and noble thoughts and deeds of the characters. For example, in Animal's friendship with Farouq, which is full of harsh verbal exchanges, we also witness deep understanding and even willingness to make sacrifice for the other. An impressive linguistic cocktail can be also found in many verses, which, in accord to the ancient Indian tradition, enliven the narrative. In this song, for instance, Animal, in spite of his abject status, desires to maintain his dignity:

I am an animal fierce and free
in all the world is none like me
crooked I'm, a nightmare child
fed on hunger, running wild
no love and cuddles for this boy
live without hope, laugh without joy
but if you dare to pity me
i'll shit in your shoe and piss in your tea (172)

The vulgarisms never slip into obscenity; they are comic and increase our sympathy for the hero whose natural desire for sex and love cannot be satisfied. His deformity makes him unique: "Animal mating with human female, it's unnatural, but I've no choice but to be unnatural" (78). Yet, in spite of his persistent sexual thoughts and frequent erections, at the first real opportunity to fulfil his sexual desire, he hesitates, and instead segues into poetic contemplation: "What is this thing? It feels wrong to call it a thing, from nowhere the word grace jumps into my head" (243).

Magic realist elements in combination with satire and a wry humour are adequate to the surreal reality of Khaufpur. For instance, we are introduced to the two boards of directors:

one representing the “Kampani” that, we assume, comprises of top executives, and the other consisting of human foetuses, preserved in formaldehyde, which were monstrously deformed at a prenatal stage after exposure to toxic chemicals from the Kampani factory; two-headed Khā-in-the-Jar being the chairman and spokesman of the latter:

Everyone on this earth has in their body a share of the Kampani’s poisons. But of all the Kampani’s victims, we are the youngest. We unborn paid the highest price. Never mind dying, we never even got a fucking shot at life. This is why, Animal miyañ, we are the Board of Directors of the poisonwallah shares. (236-237)

Not only do the two boards have ridiculously different members, but they also pursue different aims; Khā-in-the-Jar thus outlines the mission of his group: “To undo everything the Kampani does. Instead of breaking ground for new factories to grow grass and trees over the old ones, instead of inventing new poisons, to make medicines to heal the hurts done by those poisons, to remove them from the earth and water and air...” (237). This absurd confrontation amplifies the unethical behaviour of the corporation.

We find much wry humour, for instance, when poor Indians watch television news of the 9/11 attack in amazement. On the one hand, educated by Hollywood movies, which are full of violence, and on the other, having first-hand experience that the United States as the most powerful country cannot be forced to take responsibility for the worst crimes, they are unable to figure out whether the attack on the World Trade Center is real or just another Hollywood spectacle. The stories in the novel implicitly explain the cause of what became known as the War on Terror, and the volatility of its terminology: “Terrorists are those who cause terror, who endanger innocent lives, who don’t respect law” (283). There are numerous allusions to neo-colonialism in the novel; among others, the lighter with the engraved name of the region in Vietnam where the Australian military forces were deployed during the Vietnam War. The lighter, which Animal received as a gift from “the jarnalis, name’s Phuoc, from a

crocodile place” (81) is later used for setting fire to the ruins of the factory including all the chemicals that the Kampani left there since “that night” twenty years ago.

As noted earlier, Sinha’s novel does not separate human ethics from animal ethics because its subject matter relates to the immoral behaviour of a multinational corporation and its minions in the state administration towards the nameless and powerless victims of their hazardous business. These victims included humans as well as animals, and the culprits treated humans with the ruthlessness that often marks the human treatment of animals. I mentioned sentimental romance above: we see this in the final miraculous resurrection of the hunger strikers, Zafar and Farouq, their reconnection with Animal, followed by two happy weddings and the planned third after the bride is released from indentured slavery in a brothel. These elements are indeed more magic than realistic. Nevertheless, they do not diminish the main message of the novel, its accent on the positive human traits, compassion, empathy and solidarity, and the right to a good life, which should not be denied even to the poorest and to animals.

Both novels discussed in this chapter use perspectival shifts facilitated by the bodily transformation of the leading characters. In *Under the Skin*, the protagonist’s awakening comes with her metamorphosis into an inferior creature and social degradation. The narrative destabilizes human-animal distinctions and highlights ethical issues in the human treatment of animals, particularly concerning industrial meat production and meat-eating. Animal in Sinha’s novel is a disfigured human whose outer animality, contrasting with his inner humanity, accentuates social and cultural distinctions within society that placed the underprivileged in the position of animals. Both novels demonstrate that animal ethics is inseparable from moral considerations of social injustice, and environmental damage and sustainability, though the message is conveyed by purely literary means. In this respect they differ from the work that I will examine in the final chapter.

Chapter 4

Crossing Literary Boundaries: J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*

J. M. Coetzee is probably the most prominent living author who deals with the topics of the transformation of human thinking about nonhuman animals, and possible ways of communicating the issues of animal ethics in present-day Western society. His fiction oscillates between philosophy and literature and he is preoccupied with the struggle between good and evil that lurks in man and manifests itself, overtly, in wars of conquest, totalitarian regimes, and restrictions on freedom, and covertly – in seemingly peaceful, technologically advanced and rich first-world countries – in the meat industry. His protagonists are introverts, ordinary in their capabilities, forever doubting, searching, weak insofar as they cannot bring about change (nor do they have such ambitions), but strong in that they instinctively resist manipulation and submission to the system. Such is his Michael K., who wanders through a fictional country reminiscent of South Africa in the apartheid era (*Life & Times of Michael K*, 1983); or the magistrate peacefully serving in a forgotten corner of the Empire who refuses to submit to the Third Bureau and its imaginary threats posed by unknown barbarians (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, 1980); or David Lurie, a white professor of modern languages who cannot cope with the reversed realities and injustice in post-apartheid South Africa (*Disgrace*, 1999).

Elizabeth Costello is another important character. She is an obscure Australian writer, an autodidact in philosophy and a reclusive elderly woman, who rarely travels abroad and if she does so, then it usually brings bitter disappointment to both, her hosts and herself. On these occasions, she courageously and consistently defends her unorthodox opinions, even though articulated in a moderate, almost humble style. Costello appears in several of Coetzee's books: *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005), and in the short story "Lies" (2011). She is commonly assumed to be Coetzee's alter ego,

through whom the author expresses his attitudes and opinions and, at the same time, keeps a sufficient distance from them.⁸⁸ This strategy serves several purposes: it tests the strength of his philosophical argument in a fictional environment, and it scrutinizes the possibilities of literature and its writers to affect the real world. In fiction, the author can deploy not only rational, scientifically supported facts, philosophical definitions, axioms, propositions and imperatives, but also express feelings, emotions, passions and compassion; aspects, which play a significant role in human thought and decision making, though they are formally barred from the domain of academic writing.

Coetzee experiments not only with the character of Elizabeth Costello, but also with the genre. In 1999, he published the book *The Lives of Animals* (1999) consisting of two parts: the first contains the transcript of Coetzee's Tanner Lectures on Human Values delivered in October 1997; and the second includes a collection of essays in which distinguished scholars with different expertise respond. His presentation at Princeton, however, was not a structured lecture on an academic topic, but a work of fiction depicting how Elizabeth Costello lectured at the fictional Appleton College. In other words, on the occasion of a plenary session attended by a privileged, carefully selected audience who expected an academic reflection on an urgent moral issue, Coetzee, without a word of introduction or conclusion, gave a reading, without the usual Q&A afterwards. The circumstances of the lecture and its surprising content placed some listeners in an uncomfortable position, and the reviewers of the book shared that impression, as David Lodge later described:

Not surprisingly most of the commentators felt somewhat stymied by Coetzee's meta-lectures, by the veils of fiction behind which he had concealed his own position from scrutiny. There was a feeling, shared by some reviewers of the book, that he was putting forward an extreme,

⁸⁸ Ben Etherington, "Worlds, World-Making, and Southern Horizons," *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Jarad Zimler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 179. Lucy Graham, "Textual Transvestism: The Female Voices of J. M. Coetzee," *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 217-236.

intolerant, and accusatory argument without taking full intellectual responsibility for it.⁸⁹

In 2003, Coetzee included his controversial lectures at Princeton in another book, *Elisabeth Costello*, which also can scarcely be classified as a novel, even if Lodge used the term “as one must call it for want of a better word.”⁹⁰ However, there is no unifying plot in this thin book; rather it resembles a series of excerpts from the life of a fictional character, which the author uses for communicating his ideas in a somewhat realist mode, though in parallel, continuously relativizing the content and the form of the text. Accordingly, he gave the book the subtitle “Eight Lessons.”

In the first lesson, “Realism,” Coetzee aims directly at the genre. He introduces the central character, lets Costello and others speak, but often interrupts the narrative with either short inserts, for example: “let us assume that,”⁹¹ “we resume back at the hotel” (7), “we skip to the evening” (15), or longer comments relating to literary realism; for instance: “The blue costume, the greasy hair, are details, signs of a moderate realism. Supply the particulars, allow the significations to emerge of themselves. A procedure pioneered by Daniel Defoe” (4). These raise a broader question about the possibilities of this genre and literature in general to convey ideas, maybe to help solve the problems in real life, or, at least, to survive the time of its creation and become a classic:

Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations [...] in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. (9)

⁸⁹ David Lodge, “Disturbing the Peace,” *The New York Review of Books* 50.18 (20 Nov 2003) <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2003/11/20/disturbing-the-peace/>> 14 December 2021.

⁹⁰ Lodge, “Disturbing the Peace.”

⁹¹ J. M. Coetzee, *Elisabeth Costello* (London: Vintage, 2004), 1. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Each of the following six lessons, with the exception of “Eros,” represents a stop on Costello’s travels where she is invited to lecture on literature or attend an event. These lead to uneasy confrontations on literary, ethical and private levels. In “The Novel in Africa,” on the cruise ship sailing in the Southern Ocean, Elizabeth debates with Emmanuel, an African writer and her old lover, about colonial heritage, persistent neo-colonialism, racism, and the roles of Western literature and languages in these issues. Emmanuel seems to be more energetic and spirited, even if he “has not written a book of substance in ten years” (53). Elizabeth, in contrast, is firm in her views though doubtful about her ability to communicate them. Another trip brings Costello to rural Zululand in order to meet her sister Blanche, who devoted her life to medical missionary work in the local hospital and wrote a book about this, for which she is to receive an honorary degree from a university. Blanche’s speech upon receiving the degree concerns the topics of the humanities or “the *studia humanitatis* [...] studies in man and the nature of man, as distinct from *studia divinitatis*, studies pertaining to the divine” (120), which have been, in her opinion, restricted and thus degraded to textual scholarship and the humanist movement that enthroned “the monster of reason, mechanical reason” (123), bringing the *studia humanitatis* to the deathbed.

This assertion ignites a vivid discussion about the humanities, human sciences, reason, religion, and literature, but the words that Elizabeth notices in particular come again from Blanche: “I do not need to consult novels [...] to know what pettiness, what baseness, what cruelty human beings are capable of. [...] If the study of mankind amounts to no more than picturing to us our darker potential, I have better things to spend my time on” (128). Blanche rejects the classics, the Greeks, and Hellenism as an alternative religion, because it cannot resolve the major problems of mankind and diverts people from Christianity that “help[s] them bear their cross” (141). Elizabeth is not persuaded; she still believes that people cannot live without hope of improvement “here and now,” of resolving “poverty, disease, illiteracy,

racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia” (132), and without art celebrating humans; she argues that the Greeks and the humanities can teach us about *humanity* as the quality of being kind to other sentient beings, and about beauty. But what Elizabeth regrets probably the most is that she and her sister cannot understand each other: “Blanche, dear Blanche, she thinks, why is there this bar between us?” (155), which may be understood in a broader sense as the inability of humans to communicate their ideas. Other lessons in the book are no less serious and challenging, and two deal explicitly with the topic of this thesis – animal ethics.

In lessons three and four we come back to Coetzee’s Tanner lectures, which sparked controversy among the audience; the controversy that Coetzee anticipated and incorporated in the fictional account of Elizabeth Costello, which he read at Princeton. Coetzee’s experiment tested the power of literature to convey an ethical issue on a sample of humans who expected a detached, academic lecture. As indicated in the quote from David Lodge’s review, he did not quite succeed, at least not immediately. The main reason was, primarily, the ethical issue in question, which was the abusive treatment of animals in factory farming and in slaughterhouses as well as in laboratories for military, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic industries. These ethical problems are overlooked, not considered to be problems, or at least incomparable to the plagues that threaten human existence, such as wars, contagious diseases or human-induced natural disasters. It is also a highly controversial topic because the exploitation of animals concerns the basic principles of the current world order, which is based on the continuous economic growth and the development of consumer society. Another factor contributing to the overall uneasiness induced by Coetzee’s reading at Princeton was that he remained hidden behind the text containing various opposing views, and did not seem to side with any of them. He let his fictional characters speak out, and his audience make judgements without academic guidance.

The account of Costello's engagement at the fictional Appleton College in the United States is divided into two parts: "The Philosophers and the Animals," and "The Poets and the Animals," which include her lecture and a sequence of partially pre-arranged and partially spontaneous debates about ethics, animals and literature. Costello is the prime mover of all events, but in order to enhance the authorial detachment and hence a putative objectivity, the story is narrated in the third person and using Costello's son, John Bernard, as a focalizer. He loves his mother and empathizes with her, but does not favour her philosophical positions. He is an academic but in a different field so that he can represent to some extent an impartial position, and his unpronounced remarks are of great value.

Costello's frontal attack on the conscience of the audience at the college, where she was invited "to speak on any subject she elects" (60) and promised to talk "about a hobbyhorse of hers, animals" (60), actually concerns "what is being done to animals at this moment in production facilities [...] in abattoirs, in trawlers, in laboratories, all over the world" (63). When she puts the Holocaust side by side with "a fresh holocaust" (80) ongoing every day around us, in the places of animal slaughter, the reaction is revulsion. She does not wish to affirm the suffering of the Jews because it is undeniable, or to compare them to cattle as it would be, sadly, perceived by some spectators, but to point out the unpleasant fact that millions of ordinary people, Germans but also members of other nations, lived in proximity to the extermination camps, knew or could easily reckon what was going on there but chose to turn a blind eye. She reminds us that Germans who massively supported and participated in Hitler's war of extermination have been regarded "as standing a little outside humanity" (64):

We may not, all of us, believe in pollution, we may not believe in sin, but we do believe in their psychic correlates. We accept without question that the psyche (or soul) touched with guilty knowledge cannot be well. We do not accept that people with crimes on their conscience can be healthy and happy. We look (or used to look) askance at Germans of a certain generation because they are, in a sense, polluted; (65)

Similarly, she goes on, we, the modern civilized people, are marked by our tacit acceptance of animal cruelty on an industrial scale:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (65)

She argues that the people who deliberately ignore the suffering of other sentient beings are at least partially and indirectly responsible for it, and that they suffer as well.

In the next part of her speech, Costello attempts to counterbalance her passionate introductory argument with a more academic approach. By referring to various Western philosophers and providing examples from fiction (Franz Kafka's "A Report to an Academy"), non-fiction (Plutarch's "Of Eating of Flesh," Wolfgang Köhler's *The Mentality of Apes*) and history (Srinivasa Ramanujan), she poses the fundamental question of present-day philosophy. It seems that the spirit of Enlightenment and its belief in the power of human reason and knowledge is challenged by postmodern philosophers who acknowledge the relativity of knowledge and foreground non-cognitive human traits, such as imagination, passion or compassion. As Leist and Singer put it:

If philosophy today is perhaps more difficult to assess than at any previous point in time, this is because of the diversified positions that fall under the umbrella of postmodernism, the pending conflict between the postmodernists and pragmatists, and the even more open and sometimes more hostile conflict between the anti-knowledge camp and the analytic philosophers.⁹²

Costello rejects the human concept of reason as the primary factor that distinguishes humans from animals (or, in a broader sense, that defines human experience in all respects) and entitles the former to exploit the latter. She says: "To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness,

⁹² Anton Leist and Peter Singer, eds., *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.

embodiedness, the sensation of being [...] a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world” (78). This state of “full being” is denied to confined animals (factory farms, laboratories, zoos) and negated in industrial meat production.

Instead of idolizing reason, Costello strives to appeal to those human abilities, which may seem irrational, such as sympathy, empathy, kindness, love. Her address, delivered in simple language and an awkward rhetorical style, is difficult to grasp and even more difficult to espouse. It is hard to find a way to feed the growing human population that, because of technological advancement and the spread of democracy, demands a large choice of foodstuffs, which for most is unimaginable without meat. In parallel, it is difficult for the consumers and for those whose livelihood depends on the meat industry to cope with accusations of unethical behaviour. The bewilderment and disagreement of the audience is contained in the question of one of them: “what you are actually targeting” (81). Her response (“open your heart and listen what your heart says” [37]) sounds weak to those who feel secure only when being solidly anchored within the Cartesian coordinate system, and bold to those who tend to believe that “Dasein is always its possibility;”⁹³ in other words, that one chooses the way of one’s being.

As indicated earlier, the backlash against Costello unfolds directly in the text. The academics attending an informal dinner discussion remain more or less aloof, if not openly ironic towards Costello, even though their reflections on whether animals are fit for food, for having sex with or whether they feel shame, are not particularly difficult to deal with. But an old poet, Abraham Stern, turns out to be a serious rival because he obviously did open his heart; he is considerate of the suffering of his people and rejects the analogy between the maltreatment of Jews in the Nazi camps and of cattle in slaughterhouses. He delivers his

⁹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 56.

opinion to Costello in the form of a polite letter without expecting an answer and she wisely gives him none, because there are situations where all words are useless.

The next day, a formal debate is organized, in which Costello has to answer three pre-prepared questions from a local professor of philosophy. He refers to Western postcolonial arrogance imposing universal ethical norms, questions the issue of animal rights, advocates “the humane treatment of animals, even and particularly in slaughterhouses” (109) on the grounds that animals lack the intellectual capacity to reflect on death, and finally raises the question of a putative friendship between humans and animals. His theses are well structured and relevant; they reveal on the one hand current trends in academic discourse, and on the other, the fragmentation and contradictions among various schools of thought in animal studies. Costello proceeds patiently with her response, not mentioning that she did not speak about animal rights or friendship in her lecture, but in the end, she gives up, realizing that her words do not have sufficient persuasive power and that the difference in the mindset between her opponent and herself does not allow further discussion. The end is awkward, embarrassing, Costello seems to lose, at the college and also at her son’s family. John tries to console his wife who can’t stand her mother-in-law: “A few hours and she’ll be gone, then we can return to normal” (114), and also his mother who is confused and distressed, locked in the Kafkaesque world where she can see what others cannot.

Coetzee’s collection of lessons is a philosophical work that invites the reader to the intimate world of an individual who, by virtue of her sensitivity, empathy, critical thinking and study of the classics, has reached a certain degree of knowledge, and struggles with the underlying barbarism of the so-called civilized human. It presents ethical considerations about maltreatment of animals on the one hand, and a sustained effort to conceal or downplay the problem on the other. But it is not and cannot be restricted to the theme of animal ethics because morality relates to all areas of human agency, and Coetzee does not hide that the

human stands in the centre of his attention, that he cares for humanity in the sense of moral philosophy. He suggests, however, that reason is not the only kind of knowledge humans ought to rely on, that reason needs to be complemented by other human traits such as emotionality, warmth, self-control, and morality. This reminds us of Spinoza's *Ethics*, in which he differentiated knowledge of the second class (*cognitio secundi generis*) and of the third class (*scientia intuitiva*), by which he meant the intuitive knowledge of God: "from this third class of knowledge the greatest possible mental satisfaction arises."⁹⁴ Perhaps needless to say that Spinoza's God far transcended the sense of the word limited by different religious denominations.

Coetzee's second major concern relates to the power of literature to communicate ideas and moral urgency, which is most explicitly expressed in the final lesson, "At the Gate." Costello, as a human being and as a writer, finds herself in front of a gate in a mysterious, Kafkaesque place; she needs to pass through the gate, probably because she wants to know what is behind, but is not allowed to enter unless she provides satisfactory answers to the questions posed by a strange and constantly changing jury. The entire story is apparently a product of Costello's agitated imagination, which mingles her reflections on her vocation as a writer, her consciousness, personal beliefs and views on humanity, and allusions to Coetzee's other works. Nevertheless, there is a strong undercurrent that seeks the truth, though doomed to never achieve it: "A curse on literature!" (225). Leist and Singer speak about Coetzee's *paradoxical truth seeking* as "the engagement in a never-ending spiral movement that at no point leads to 'full' truth [...] [and] ends in confessions and expressive subjectivization, in living through the attitude of criticism and self-criticism."⁹⁵ And this is how we might read Coetzee: he does not preach a new dogma prioritizing beliefs and emotions over rationality, or humans over animals, and Costello is not his alter ego; she is a fictional character engaged in

⁹⁴ Spinoza, 215.

⁹⁵ Leist and Singer, *J. M. Coetzee and Ethics*, 2.

a dialectical process that may transcend the boundaries of literariness, providing there is a reader willing and able to participate and make his own choices. Coetzee indubitably appeals to virtue ethics, to the inherent human need to “care for the soul” as it was postulated by the Hellenistic classics.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Noburu Notomi, “Socrates in the Phaedo,” *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*, ed. George-Boys Stone, Dimitri El Murr, and Christopher Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 61.

Conclusion

This thesis examined selected works of anglophone literature in relation to the topic of animal ethics and cruelty. The works were selected for the variety of their styles, settings, and social contexts, as well as the authors' experience of living in different countries and cultures; they were all published in the new millennium and reflect current ethical and existential challenges.

In order to provide a theoretical background applicable for a critical understanding of the selected works, it was necessary to explore the basic concepts and trends in moral philosophy, including a brief outline of its history. The outcomes from this part of the study confirm the ongoing contest between traditional Western philosophy based on the search for what is natural in the hierarchically structured world, in which humans occupy a morally superior position, and the alternative philosophical currents that challenge the core premises: natural, hierarchical and superior. Although the prevalent approval of animal abuse and cruelty in the name of human interests is established in Western consumer society and, to some extent, backed by the leading humanist philosophers, opposing views promoting the well-being of animals are gaining ground, albeit mainly in the field of theory and rhetoric, rather than in practice. While the old iconoclasts from Plutarch to Bentham targeted specific ethical issues, such as animal killing and meat eating, the thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century and further have focused on metaethics and its ontological, epistemological and semantic presumptions.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduced a rhizomatic evolutionary schema and the concept of becoming minor/animal. Jacques Derrida showed us how we might deconstruct the concept of "the animal" and the distinctive difference between man and animal. Both foreshadowed posthumanist thought that conceptualizes the universe as a space in which

humans are just one among innumerable other subjects, and seeks to expand humanism beyond anthropocentrism and speciesism. Within the three major groups of normative theories (virtue, deontological, and consequential), Peter Singer is the most prominent philosopher dealing with practical animal ethics. His approach is secular and utilitarian, promoting the continuum of the morally important mental attributes (consciousness, self-awareness, personality, cognition, ability to suffer, mourn, plan a future or reminisce a past), and the principle of equal consideration of interests.

A noticeable shift in social and philosophical views on animal ethics has been also reflected in literature. Some recently published fiction that deals with human-animal interactions prompted a rapidly growing body of literary criticism, which interprets new texts and reads earlier literary works from a new perspective. Both scholars and authors tend to write about animals not only as objects representing and/or completing the image of the human world, but also as about autonomous subjects. Exploring new themes, spaces and perspectives, they experiment with genres, narrative forms, language and typographic elements in order to emphasize human-animal proximity and challenge human cultural constructs.

The thesis maps this new literary territory while keeping in mind the core aspect: *animal ethics*. The works show some rhizomatic development in their approaches to this topic, in their use of literary devices and genres, and finally in the depth and scope of considerations on human-animal interactions. The texts discussed in the second chapter deal with the theme of suffering of humans and animals under dire circumstances attributable to human agency, focusing on the psychological and emotional dimensions of human-animal relationships, and demonstrating the possibilities of crossing human mental boundaries in communication with animals. They take a rather conventional approach insofar as they project human concepts onto the imagined subjectivity of animals, even as they experiment with

genre and narrative voice. Fowler overtly refers in her novel to real-life animal testing including concrete names, procedures and results in a quasi-documentary style, while Dovey's anthropomorphised animals converse with historical figures in her postmodern pastiche short stories. Both authors contribute to the discourse on animal ethics by calling attention to the collateral impact of human violence on animals, and to experiments on animals. However, their aim to humanize animals and Fowler's speciesism within the realm of nonhuman animals may be counterproductive.

The novels discussed in the third chapter effect a perspectival shift triggered by physical transformation of the protagonists. Faber amplifies the human-animal duality and proximity in the world seen through the lens of the aliens who have physical attributes of animals, intellectual characteristics akin to the earthly humans and call themselves humans, and who mercilessly exploit the earthlings for their delicious meat. The contrast between the science fiction components of the novel and realistic description of present-day British society paradoxically blurs the distinctions, accentuating the volatility of cultural constructs, including the "meatness" of human flesh. Sinha's novel places animal ethics in a wider context of social injustice, which is manifested not only on the level of the infamous caste system of India but also within the frame of neo-colonialism and globalization. Here human-animal closeness is presented not as evolutionary fact or part of posthumanist discourse, but as a deplorable result of the social and cultural distinctions within human society. While Faber encourages the reader to consider the ethical issues surrounding the commodification of sentient beings and factory farming, Sinha offers a striking parallel between the moral status of animals and that of socially disadvantaged humans. Both novels also demonstrate that human-animal ethical issues are closely linked to global environmental problems.

Coetzee's book differs from the previous texts in that it crosses the boundary between fiction and philosophy. His narrative shows characters who seek truth and morality, while also

foregrounding these academic discourses, as literature and philosophy converge. The protagonist enters into academic disputations and private conversations, in which the power of reason and knowledge is confronted with the potency of imagination and emotions. At the same time, Coetzee, through authorial interventions or through the mouths of characters, examines the power of literature to communicate philosophical ideas and ethical issues. Animal ethics plays an important role, however, he does not emphasize human-animal evolutionary and cognitive kinship, or emotional bonds and shared experience, but negotiates morality, including animal ethics, as a phenomenon that is unique to humans and which humans, above all, need to live a full and happy life.

This thesis has shown a few directions taken by contemporary anglophone authors as they explore human-animal interactions and relationships with reference to animal ethics. It does not provide a full picture of the many ways in which this expanding field has been approached. Further research could focus on other possibilities and strategies of literature in conveying positive subjectivization of nonhuman animals and hence contributing to the animal ethics discourse, which is, just like global climate change, ultimately a political matter:

This is not an innocent dream of all species living in harmony, but instead a more complex politics of how to live as omnivores among herbivores and carnivores, in relations of mutual consumption and mutual dependency, but without reducing some species to objects that can be ruthlessly exploited without ethical dilemma.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Sherryl Vint, *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 28.

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