

# Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Post-Darwinian Animal Fable: Only the Animals by Ceridwen Dovey

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Post-Darwinian Animal Fable: *Only the Animals* by

Ceridwen Dovey

(diplomski smjer: engleska književnost i kultura)

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## 1. Introduction

The South African-Australian author Ceridwen Dovey, an emerging voice in contemporary Anglophone literature, is a prolific essayist and fiction writer who has taught creative writing courses at several Australian universities. With seven books and numerous essays behind her, she also regularly writes about natural sciences for popular publications such as *WIRED*, and has even dipped her toes into film production (“Bio”). Dovey’s personal and educational background is also an interesting one – she is a white woman born in South Africa at the tail end of the apartheid, has spent most of her life and currently resides in Australia, and was primarily educated at Harvard, USA. She holds a post-graduate degree in social anthropology (“Bio”; Walsh 213), is “familiar with postcolonial theory” (Symonds 104), and has a keen interest in environmental issues, zoology and space, as exemplified by the long list of articles she has published (“Essays & Articles”). Regardless of her significant output, this eclectic author has long gone unnoticed by scholars. Indeed, the research undertaken for this thesis has failed to uncover a copious amount of academic writing on Dovey in any sense.

However, the tides seem to turn for Dovey’s literary works with the reception of *Only the Animals* (hereinafter: *OTA*), her 2014 collection of short stories. *OTA* features ten doubly distanced narrators – the souls of animals, therefore both supernatural and nonhuman – recounting their autobiographies as they relate to the moment of their death, during historically notable instances of global human conflict. Due to this cross-species and transnational context, literary theorists are slowly beginning to take note of the collection. The great majority of these literary takes employ a specific perspective: ecocriticism (the study and interpretation of environmental concerns and themes in cultural texts), zoocriticism (the study of the representation of animals in cultural texts and its impact on social attitudes towards them, i.e. animal rights), and studies of animal narration (the critical studies of literary texts centering animal narrators and protagonists). Thus, David Herman examines Dovey’s animal

autobiographies as an example of “narration beyond the human” (3) and Habibur Rahaman reads them as “re-interventions on anthropocentrism” (1405). Clearly, the current ecocritical turn in literary analysis, which this thesis will expound on in the following chapters, is the prime method for analyzing a contemporary book centering animal protagonists.

Nevertheless, due to *OTA*'s focus on anthropogenic conflict and the cross-species relationship between animals and humans in various historical contexts, this thesis will argue that a postcolonial perspective should complement that type of analysis. Dovey herself comes from a postcolonial, transnational background. As a white woman, she has self-admittedly benefitted from the apartheid as a child (Symonds 100). Subsequently, her US education marks her move to a third Anglophone postcolonial space. She has a stated interest in postcolonialism, and even addresses the issues of her postcolonial identity in her writing – her autobiographical novel *In the Garden of Fugitives* explores the “guilt she feels as a person who benefitted from her apartheid childhood before emigrating” (Symonds 38). In addition, the animal narratives in *OTA* are marked by their transnationality – the animals' individual stories are placed in various parts of the globe, and several colonial contexts, from Australia during its settler-colonial era (“The Bones”) to the currently neocolonized space of early 2000s Lebanon (“Psittacophile”). These transnational contexts merit closer examination, and this thesis will aim to provide insight into precisely these aspects of Dovey's writing. It will therefore utilize the doubling framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, a recent interdisciplinary outlook on literature, which will receive a proper discussion in the following chapter.

Additionally, Dovey's narratives are heavily intertextual, both explicitly and implicitly. *OTA*'s narrators are either directly taken from preceding literary texts dealing with animal protagonists, or have an implicit narrative or stylistic basis in them, as Dovey often replicates the register of her literary predecessors, i.e. *OTA*'s *hypotexts*. The term hypotext is here derived from Gérard Genette's theories of hypertextuality. According to Genette, hypertextuality is

“any relationship uniting a text B ([or] *hypertext*) to an earlier text A ([or] *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (5). Furthermore, hypertexts can be created out of hypotexts through the process of “*transformation*”, which acts as the prerequisite for the mere existence of the hypertext (Genette 5). Such is the case in *OTA*, and, as this thesis will show, is evident in Dovey’s subversive use of intertextuality. As Kirk S. Walsh notes in his review of *OTA*: “Story by story, Dovey pays homage to one author after another [...] and, in some cases, seamlessly integrates the intonations and words of respected writers” (213). As she often replicates the register of her literary predecessors, therefore, *OTA*’s narrators have an implicit narrative or stylistic basis in them. Dovey also often employs direct quotes from her hypotexts, or parts of the hypotexts are woven into her narrative, which is explicitly stated in Dovey’s list of sources: “Many of the animal narrators intentionally use words, phrases and sentences taken verbatim from the work of other authors” (“Only the Animals”).

As noted, this pastiche technique has not escaped reviewers and theorists interested in Dovey’s writing, nor could it have, since the aforementioned list of sources is available in full on Dovey’s website (*Ceridwen Dovey*). In providing this list, the author in fact highlights the artificiality of her work. According to Patricia Waugh, this is precisely what defines metafiction: “*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (40). In building her narratives, Dovey fictionalizes famous authors (e.g. Henry Lawson, Jean Cocteau and Sylvia Plath) and additionally fictionalizes fictional works (e.g. Virginia Woolf’s *Flush* and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*) in order to intentionally turn the reader’s attention to her hypotexts, thus emphasizing her construction of *OTA* as an artefact and laying bare the collection’s intertextuality. As will be

explored further, the author employs her literary predecessors as the vehicles through which she engages in speaking for animals.

In her review of the collection, Jo Langdon states that “by drawing our attention to occluded histories and perspectives, *Only the Animals* also serves as a powerful reminder of the ways in which our world values certain human and nonhuman lives more than others” (Langdon). This is echoed in Herman’s article as well. According to him, *OTA*’s stories “unsettle [...] broader assumptions about cross-species relationships that both shape and are shaped by practices of giving voice to nonhuman experiences” (12). It follows that *OTA*’s narratives, both due to their focalizing narrators and Dovey’s use of intertextuality, can be read as subversive. Specifically, Dovey’s postcolonial outlook and her use of intertextuality will prove to highlight the texts’ engagement with and rejection of the anthropocentric perspective. A look at the ecocritical turn in postcolonial cultural studies in the past 15 years will further help explore Dovey’s departure from anthropocentrism, equally as posthumanist as it is post-modern.

### 1.1. Animal fables – an anthropocentric history

As long as humankind has been capable of literature, animal imaginings have accompanied their creative endeavors. At the same time, animal representations were utilized in maintaining human superiority over both animals and over othered humans. As Chris Danta notes, human thought itself is brimming with “orientational metaphors” (4) designed to ascribe a higher value to the human as opposed to the animalistic, one that is implicitly “gendered male” (6-7). One can also argue it is implicitly racialized, since animal imaginings have been used as a tool in human-on-human subjugation. As stated by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin:

the western definition of humanity depended – and still depends – on the presence of the ‘not-human’: the uncivilised, the animal and animalistic. European justification for invasion and colonisation proceeded from this basis, understanding non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, ‘unused, underused or empty’ [...]. The very ideology of colonisation is thus one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable. (5)

Whichever social function of animal imaginings one might discuss, ultimately, our orientational animal imaginings (and animal fables specifically) carry a social function that is exclusive to humans. In conventional readings of animal fables, there exists a “critical commonplace that the anthropomorphized animals in fables are ciphers for purely human dramas.” (Danta 10), or rather, that they act as correctional lessons for human behavior. This reading, of course, is heavily anthropocentric and it disallows interpreting the animal as animal.

Nonetheless, these types of readings are not the only ones available to the contemporary theorist. As Delia Falconer notes in her review of *OTA*, “Over the last decade, scholars [...] are re-reading fiction to trace what it tells us about animals themselves, or about the complex entanglements of our lives with theirs” (“Go ape”). Therefore, literary scholarship is gradually turning towards a biocentric perspective (i.e. one that grants a moral or ethical status to all sentient beings) rather than an anthropocentric one.

This is precisely the type of reading Danta argues for in his 2018 book *Animal Fables after Darwin: Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor*. Specifically, he explores “how the [animal] fable was adopted and readapted by nineteenth and twentieth-century authors to challenge traditional views of species hierarchy” (n.pag.). Danta claims that Darwin’s theory of evolution had a major cultural impact on humans’ view of the hierarchy of beings, and subsequently, animal narratives came to reflect a horizontal rather than a vertical perspective



of humans towards animals. As Danta states “[one] of the most fundamental orientational metaphors in Western culture gives the concepts of human and animal a spatial orientation: human is up; animal is down” (4). Preceding Darwin, this perspective was prevalent in Western society, and amplified by the “Christianization of Aristotle’s *scala naturae* or scale of nature, that organizes nature into a static vertical order rising from inanimate matter at the bottom to plants, animals, humans, angels, and finally, God at the top” (Danta 12). According to Arthur O. Lovejoy, this Christianized view of the world was universally accepted from the Middle Ages to, and throughout, the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

the conception of the universe as a “Great Chain of Being,” composed of an immense, or [...] of an infinite, number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents, which barely escape nonexistence, through “every possible” grade up to the *ens perfectissimum* [...] the highest possible kind of creature, between which and the Absolute Being the disparity was assumed to be infinite [...]. (Lovejoy 59)

While the Great Chain of Being defines animals as removed from humans on the basis of their lack of reason, which makes them unable to sin, it also degrades their value and justifies humans’ disregard for them. Human uprightness, therefore, is ascribed a moral value opposed to the lowliness of animals and the animalistic. After Darwin, however, this perspective begins to shift, and this cultural change can, according to Danta, be best explored via the animal fable: “the fable offers [...] writers a readymade literary form with which to interpret, translate, and transform evolutionary and anthropological discourse of the mid- to late nineteenth century. The fable is ideally suited to this task of reconceptualizing the place of humans in nature” (20). Darwin’s work, therefore, marked a shift in consciousness that brought about a step towards an egalitarian status between human and animal in literature, as well as their own status as

animal. This is a perspective that Dovey will prove to embrace in her animal autobiographies. Effectively, Danta's reading of several seminal works in the history of animal literature successfully argues for an animal-centric reading of post-Darwinian animal narratives.

Today, most studies of animal narration are increasingly becoming animal-centric, which is beginning to contribute to new forms of thought on nonhuman entities. In his article "Hermeneutics Beyond the Species Boundary," David Herman maintains that:

animal narratives can contribute to the process of what Ricoeur (1991c) calls distanciation, in which initially taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding are bracketed, reconstrued as targets of explanation, and then reassimilated into (or repossessed as) new forms of understanding. In the case of norm- challenging animal narratives [...], default assumptions about nonhuman agents and human-animal interactions are what come into question — and in the process make possible new ways of orienting to modes of creatural life that extend beyond the human. (4)

Proceeding from Herman, one can conclude that the current approach towards animal narratives in cultural studies is introducing new ways of looking at both nonhuman agents and human action towards them. Cultural expression itself is following the same impetus: "Increasingly today, animals are allowed to speak for themselves, demonstrating a new awareness of animal subjectivity, and a desire on the part of many animal lovers to give that subjectivity a voice" (DeMello 4). The findings of such works and studies have the potential to reorient the reader's vertical thinking and allow them to enter a horizontal mentality when it comes to their relationships to and representations of those deemed "less-than" – be they human or animal.

In view of the post-Darwinian turn and the social function of the animal fable, as well as the environmental issues Earth is faced with today, animal-centric narratives in contemporary global literature are also becoming increasingly anthropocritical. In line with their general “animal turn” (Jacobs xi) literary studies are following suit. A recent publication dubbed *Animal Narratology*, for example, collects articles that span the latter part of the 2010s – including Herman's analysis of *OTA* (3-20) – and are explicitly animal-centric. Along with Danta's book, this thesis will utilize Herman's work to explore Dovey's own animal-centrism. Another worthwhile source in line with the animal turn is *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*, which collects essays by seventeen authors interested in the problem of speaking for animals in human cultural production, from literature to websites. According to editor Margo DeMello, “the authors in this collection examine a number of questions, including how we speak for animals, why we speak for animals, and perhaps most importantly, what the implications are for the animals themselves” (1). In order to examine Dovey's approach in speaking for animals, this thesis will make use of several works in the collection. With these approaches in mind, and alongside *OTA*'s (post)colonial concerns, an opportunity presents itself to explore a relatively recent development in literary theory: postcolonial ecocriticism, i.e. the study of environmental themes through the scope of postcolonial cultural studies.

## 1.2 Postcolonial ecocriticism

As Timothy Clark argues in his book *The Value of Ecocriticism*, environmentalism has engaged with sociopolitical issues at least since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Environmental movements in the West emerged in the 1960s almost always in tandem with the peace movement in various forms” (3). Similarly, according to Huggan, postcolonial cultural criticism has been interdisciplinary (or at least interdiscursive) since its rise in the

1980s and '90s (10), and continues to be “irresistibly plural” and cross-disciplinary (17). Literary interest in environmental issues, both practical and theoretical, developed at the same time: “Since the 1990s [...] there has been evidence in both literature and literary criticism of the centralising of ecological issues in literary studies, leading to some radical experiments in genre practice, point of view/interpretative focus, and other potentially innovating aspects of literary form” (Huggan and Tiffin 17).

However, the intermingling of postcolonialism and ecocriticism has only received widespread theoretical attention during the past two decades. In 2007, Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey explore the increasing cross-disciplinarity of the fields in the early 2000s (76-80) and argue “that the best ecocritical and postcolonial scholarship is interdisciplinary, transnational and comparative” (80), as well as committed “to an open dialogue about the diverse production of local and global knowledge(s)” (74). Similarly, in his 2009 article “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World,” Neel Ahuja states that “Recent scholarship at the intersection of postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, and species studies acknowledges links between species, race, and transnational power structures that underlie the production of culture” and “offers new tools for rethinking transnational circuits of power and identity” (557). Ahuja predicts further development of a postcolonialism that crosses the species boundary, and is correct in his predictions. Alongside the contributions mentioned above, there are two major postcolonial ecocritical authors that inform this thesis: Graham Huggan (*Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*, 2008) and Helen Tiffin (along with Huggan, the co-author of *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2010). Alongside Danta and other animal-centric scholars, as well as Clark, these texts will be utilized in analyzing Dovey’s narratives.

It is reasonable to ask why the two fields are converging precisely at this moment in time. Taking into account the increasing transnationality and global environmental crisis, one

might conjecture that this theoretical approach developed due to the contemporary rise of environmental awareness and its convergence with social issues. The aforementioned scholars affirm that conjecture. According to Clark, ecocritics today argue that

the environmental crisis demands a reconsideration of society's basic values, constitution and purposes, and that art and literature can be vital in that work. The stress on cultural values as pivotal also highlights the degree to which day-to-day life and its cultural politics are implicated in environmental questions. (15)

It follows that, in order for the human species to cope with and attempt to mitigate the effects of a global environmental crisis, cultural attitudes need to shift and be re-narrativized through cultural means. Additionally, "humanity has become a species with global geological impact [...] but [it] is the first *knowingly* to be so" (Clark 18). Therefore, the convergence between the two focuses becomes a necessity in contemporary cultural studies, as humanity's awareness of its socio-environmental agency and impact increases. The same is noted by Huggan and Tiffin, who state that postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes "the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment – one that requires attention [...] to the cultural politics of representation" (12). Clearly, this is a timely critical approach toward contemporary cultural production, as well as an effective vehicle for revisiting and reevaluating previously existing perspectives.

At the same time, ecocritical studies and postcolonial studies do not always gel smoothly. This can also be gleaned from postcolonial readings of animal studies in general. According to Ahuja's postcolonial interpretation, animal studies specifically "often assimilates racial discourse into species discourse, flattening out historical contexts that determine the differential use of animal (and other) figures in the processes of racialization [...] taking

animalization as the generic basis for racism” (558). This position, according to which animal-centric studies gloss over and add to human inequalities is echoed by Cilano and DeLoughrey, who begin their article by citing a critique of deep ecology by Ramachandra Guha: “by foregrounding a biocentric view, ‘deep ecology [indicates] a lack of concern with inequalities *within* human society’ and how they are socially and historically produced” (71). Additionally, they list a variety of critiques against ecocriticism itself. They argue that the development of natural sciences has benefitted colonialism (Cilano and DeLoughrey 74); that “Anglo-American bias” and “racial exclusivity” in ecocriticism support the oppression of people of color (75); and that prioritizing a global ecological outlook over one that takes diversity into account glosses over inequalities (78). What is at stake in these critiques is the position of ecocriticism as a western Anglophone discipline and an academic preoccupation that risks supporting the very structure postcolonialism aims to dismantle. Likewise, postcolonialism itself is not without its perceived faults from the ecocritical perspective. Huggan cites several critiques of postcolonialism put forward by John McLeod. McLeod argues that postcolonialism “[relies] on Western critical-theoretical models” and therefore, like ecocriticism, perpetuates oppressive structures; that it ghettoizes non-Western literature, and that it fails to address socio-economic diversity (qtd. in Huggan 1). Apart from their mutual criticism, the fields also supposedly diverge in their prioritization of subjects. According to Huggan and Tiffin, “ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritise extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged human groups, while postcolonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinkingly, anthropocentric” (17). Evidently, the journey towards a conjunction of these fields has not been a tranquil one.

How, then, did two disciplines whose proponents were seemingly at odds come to terms with each other, and what can be gained from that? In 2008, Huggan argues that an interest in

environmentalism has always existed in postcolonialism, as well as that postcolonial outlooks are becoming more prevalent in ecocriticism at the outset of the early 2000s:

postcolonial criticism has effectively renewed, rather than belatedly discovered, its commitment to the environment, reiterating its insistence on the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse. Conversely, recent evidence can be cited of a “postcolonial turn” in environmental criticism and philosophy that combats the tendencies of some Green movements towards Western liberal universalism. (65)

By 2010, alongside Tiffin, Huggan proposes a full-fledged basis for postcolonial ecocriticism, which specifically hinges on the question of human as part of the environment: “if the wrongs of colonialism – its legacies of continuing human inequalities, for instance – are to be addressed [...] then the very category of the *human*, in relation to animals and environment, must also be brought under scrutiny” (18). Therefore, postcolonial ecocriticism is not only possible, it is plausible, and could prove effective in exploring both aesthetic and activist concerns related to human inequalities and the environment.

An aspect of postcolonial ecocriticism that is especially pertinent to this thesis’ analysis of *OTA* is zoocriticism as defined within the scope of literary studies, which “is concerned not just with animal *representation*, but also with animal *rights*,” and “understood here in the context of intersections between animal studies and postcolonialism” (Huggan and Tiffin 18). As narratives that combine both anthropomorphism and abject horror at the similarities between human and animal experiences, as well as carry a social function or moral, animal fables become fertile ground for interpretive action and analyzing human mentality around othered forms of existence. Due to the racialized history of Western animal symbolism, as well

as the real-life impact literary typification has on the species in question (Huggan and Tiffin 19), animal narratives hold the potential of subverting and reinterpreting the notion of otherness, whether animal or human. Likewise, they can explore “questions of animal and human agency” and “cross-species contact” (Huggan and Tiffin 21).

While animal imaginings have historically been used in order to place certain actors into positions of power over others, contemporary culture that is growingly steeped in questions of environmentalism and inequality holds the potential to review and shift those structures of power. As a cultural product, centering both postcolonial and cross-species concerns, *OTA* is no exception.

### 3. (Post)colonial narratives in *OTA*

As argued earlier, there exists a contemporary need to address and restructure human cultural representations of and attitudes towards their animal counterparts, and the way they have been used in the colonizing project. While primary motivators in this need are diverse (from animal rights activism to general environmental advocacy) the subjects of study remain human cultural expression and attitudes. This does not, however, imply anthropocentrism. Rather, this approach can create an avenue towards cross-species cultural considerations. As Huggan and Tiffin argue, this is precisely where the interests of postcolonialism and ecocriticism converge, but it can also serve as a vehicle for oppression:

Postcolonialism’s major theoretical concerns: otherness, racism and miscegenation, language, translation, the trope of cannibalism, voice and the problems of speaking of and for others – to name just a few – offer immediate entry points for a re-theorising of the place of animals in relation to human societies. But dominant European discourses



have expressed that dominance by constructing others – both people and animals – as animal, both philosophically and representationally. (135)

As European colonizers sought ways of othering fellow humans, therefore, they used animals to represent their otherness, thus placing them lower on the scale of value, and of evolution. Similarly, the fact that animalization was a successful vehicle in human-on-human subjugation reflects Western attitudes towards animals. This is precisely what the narrators of *OTA* explore, likewise revealing the holes in dominant European discourses as they pertain to animals. There are two stories in the collection that particularly focus on (post)colonialism and its effects on animals – “The Bones” (1-13) and “I, the Elephant, Wrote This” (153-175).

### 3.1 “The Bones” – animal as the unwitting colonial accomplice and displaced victim

The introductory story in *OTA* follows a camel accompanying Henry Lawson, one of the seminal authors of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australian literary canon, through the Australian outback. The story locates displacement both in its human and its nonhuman characters, but centers the perspective of animal ones. Firstly, the camel narrator is highly aware of *how* and *why* he<sup>1</sup> ended up in Australia:

I too have ghosts in my past... The ghosts of other camels who were shipped with me from our birthplace on the island of Tenerife, sold along with our handlers – who had come from somewhere else far away... I was the only one of my caravan to survive the dreadful sea journey. [...]

---

<sup>1</sup> The animal narrators in *OTA* are explicitly sexed and, at times, gendered, which amplifies their representation as personhoods analogous to humans'. Likewise, in several cases (e.g. in “Red Peter’s Little Lady” and “A Letter to Sylvia Plath”) their sex and gender directly influence their behavior. With respect to these factors, this thesis will use gendered pronouns when discussing the animal narrators.

It wasn't unusual to see an entire caravan of camels lugging supplies across the vast desert, especially further north (we had been brought to this country for that purpose; a railroad was being built on our backs) [...]. (Dovey *OTA* 5, 9)

These passages directly reference the displacement and exploitation of animals in colonialism, as well as their practical usefulness to the colonizing project. The camel was used as labor in supply transport and railroad building for the colonizing force; but he was also a victim of forceful displacement and inhumane treatment, akin to that imposed on (animalized and othered) humans. The camel character in fact directly voices the issue of his simultaneous displacement and unwitting complicity in oppression:

I was going to run away [...] until I was deep enough into the desert to forget what I could not understand. None of it made any sense [...]. I wasn't blameless, but I was innocent of *this*, of whatever Henry Lawson and Mister Mitchell and their kind had done. I had only arrived a few years ago, how could I have done anything wrong?  
(Dovey, *OTA* 11)

The camel thus invokes the issues of complicity, displacement, innocence and guilt, themes Dovey repeatedly returns to in her literary output ("Ceridwen Dovey: Author Interview"). However, within the context of *OTA*, it is the animal himself that is the focalizer (as he is in his physical existence, an aspect that will be explored in the final chapter), rather than a stand in for humans or the author herself. It is also the animal himself that recognizes the effect his actions have on the othered humans around him. By employing the camel as a participant in the colonizing project, "The Bones" echoes Michael Niblett's discussion of nature and society as inextricable from each other: "nature and society [...] form a dialectical unity ... 'nature'

and ‘society’ must be grasped as singular abstractions and as the *results* of the dialectic of human and extra-human natures” (qtd. in Clark 149). The camel narrator has contributed to this dialectic, assisting an oppressive force, but also having been oppressed himself.

This perspective allows the narrative to explore the role of animal-as-animal within the colonizing project, both complicit with and victimized by humans. As Rahaman puts it, the camel and the other animal narrators in the collection are not “mere metaphoric or symbolic embodiments of human sufferings, rather they represent an autonomous world of beings” (1405). “The Bones” unites this world with the human world precisely through its colonial context – it addresses displacement, oppression and exploitation as a *cross-species* issue, one that *equally* affects othered humans and nonhumans during colonialism. This is further supported by a comparison the character of Henry Lawson makes between camels and Australian Aboriginals in “The Bones”:

“we were told our blacks are the lowest race on earth [...] There was a painting of some Aborigines hung on the schoolroom wall, but they looked more like you, like camels, peculiar creatures that shouldn’t exist [...].”

But I do exist, I thought. I may have oval red blood cells, three stomach compartments, and urine as thick as syrup, but I exist [...] I felt sick [...] Homesick.  
(OTA 6)

For Lawson both the camel and the depicted Australian Aboriginals represent an other life form that *should not* exist, that has no place in his human Eurocentric reality. The painting portrays Australian Aboriginals as dehumanized, and clearly represents them as less-than from the perspective of the white settlers. The story places the source of this dehumanization precisely in animalization, i.e. the “the organized subjection of racialized groups through animal

figures.” (Ahuja 557). Likewise, the passage implies a pre-Darwinian hierarchical view of both the animal and the animalized human others as *lower* than the idealized European white human: the animalized are seen as “peculiar creatures that shouldn’t exist” (*OTA* 6). Through this passage, the narrative reveals that the colonizing project employed animalization as a means of subjecting both non-white humans and the displaced nonhuman animals in the British colonization of Australia. But rather than exploring an exclusively Eurocentric view, the text also touches on the Australian Aboriginal relationships with animals.

“The Bones” alludes to the concept of *oneness*, described by Bob Randall (a Yankunytjatjara elder and cultural educator) as intrinsic to the Australian First Nations’ culture: “To us it was a natural way of being, being part of all that there is was just the way it was. You didn’t see anything any different from you. It was just a way of life that was inclusive of all that there is, through life. Life is the binding and the connecting way the oneness is.” (“The Land Owns Us”). This holistic cultural concept was foreign to British colonizers, and the camel’s story reflects that in the character of Mr. Mitchell. Mitchell’s father took part in the Hospital Creek Massacre (*OTA* 7), a bloody real-life event in Australia’s colonial history (“Hospital Creek Massacre”). Mitchell attempts to protect himself from the ghosts of his father’s victims by stealing the bones of an Aboriginal “queen” from before British colonization (*OTA* 10). However, his act has unintended consequences, ones explicitly tied to the connection between Australian Aboriginals and their country. Throughout the narrative, the camel and the humans are menacingly stalked by a goanna from the moment Mitchell removes the Aboriginal elder’s bones from the ground (*OTA* 8). The goanna, perceived as a threat by the depicted Europeans, is in fact native to Australia and is “commonly represented in Aboriginal Dreamtime stories” (“Goannas (Monitor Lizards)”). Dreamtime or The Dreaming is the foundational complex of beliefs and law that forms the basis of Aboriginal cultures and

society and is known in the Aboriginal Warlpiri language as Jukurrpa<sup>2</sup>. According to the late Warlpiri educator Punayi “Jeannie Herbert” Nungarrayi, Jukurrpa is “an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment.” (qtd. in Nicholls, “ ‘Dreamtime’ and ‘The Dreaming’ – an introduction”). In “The Bones,” the goanna is a part of this system, and is thus both one with its country and responsible for the protection of all of its parts – including the bones of the Aboriginal elder and the memory of the Hospital Creek victims.

The story closes with Mitchell confronting the goanna as if it were a person, an antagonist and witness to colonial crimes: “Father warned me about you, [...]. He said to kill you [...]. It’s you he dreams about, you who comes to haunt him. It’s you who saw him light the bonfire” (*OTA* 12). The goanna is both witness to and living memory of the sins of Mitchell’s father, and her death is Mitchell’s solution to his hauntings. As he raises his gun, the goanna bolts towards the camel, who reacts by lunging to his feet (*OTA* 12). The goanna dies as a result, and the camel is dying, but there is a narrative gap which leaves the culprit for the animals’ deaths unknown: “I lunged to my feet. There was an excruciating silence. The goanna was dead, I saw that first. I felt my cold cheek on the cold midnight sand” (*OTA* 12). The narrator, aware of his condition, does not return to the question either. Rather, he only notices the absurdity of the situation and the cruelty of the human colonizers at the sight of it: he sees “Henry Lawson [...] laughing hysterically at the scene before him: a dead goanna, a dying camel, a white man clutching a bag of old bones.” (*OTA* 13). Regardless of the cause of the camel’s death, the narrative places the blame in the colonial situation rather than in any of the individual actors. It is clear, however, that it is the colonizers who remain standing.

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation of Jukurrpa and other Aboriginal belief and law systems as the Dreaming or Dreamtime is highly contested, due to its reductive connotations. As Christine Nicholls argues, these translations, “[serve] to erase the complexities of the original concepts in the many different Indigenous languages and cultures, by emphasising their putatively magical, fantastic and illusory attributes” (Nicholls, “ ‘Dreamtime’ and ‘The Dreaming’: who dreamed up these terms?”).

While “The Bones,” as an explicitly postcolonial narrative, emphasizes the role and victimhood of the camel in colonial Australia, the impact of humans on nonhuman animals does not stop with the displaced, exploited accomplices in colonization, nor does it end with the existence of colonies.

### 3.2 “I, The Elephant” – animal as the oppressed other in (post)colonialism

Another colonial space Dovey’s animal souls inhabit is Mozambique, one of Portugal’s former colonies. Told by the soul of an elephant, “I, The Elephant” describes the lives and deaths of a matriarchal elephant herd under the Mozambican Civil War, which took place in real life between 1977 (two years after Portugal relinquished its colonial claim on the country) and 1995 (“The Mozambican Civil War”). Both colonial and postcolonial, this particular story traverses the idea of animal oppression via colonialism as past, and it does so precisely through its animal narrator. The elephants remember, and one of their initiation rites as portrayed in *OTA* is to transfer the (hi)stories of their ancestors, marked in the elephants’ cultural perception as constellations, to their offspring. Their most secretive formative stories are directly tied to the Portuguese colonization of Mozambique, the country’s liberation, and its consequences on animal life: “There was a human war in our country [...] Between the Portuguese and the local people [...] Many of our clan were de-tusked and left to bleed out by the Portuguese as they fled the country” (*OTA* 160). Thus, Dovey demonstrates that animals were not only victims of colonization itself, but of its consequences as well – the war that liberated the Mozambican nation included the colonists’ disregard of Mozambican animal life.

Of course, this disregard also happened during the Portuguese colonization of Mozambique. One of the most brutal elephant (hi)stories in the herd of “I, The Elephant” is precisely one implicated in the country’s colonial context. In a move to make space for

agriculture, the Portuguese decide to eliminate elephants from their habitat, but their violence goes even further:

They ordered a local hunt supervisor to kill two thousand elephants living on the land. He followed his orders, but he had a scientific bent to his mind. He decided to cut out and collect every unborn baby he found in the wombs of the dead.

His ambition grew. He could not stop until he had the world's only complete collection of elephant fetuses, one for every month of the twenty-two months of our gestation [...] he had them preserved in formaldehyde and donated them to the curator of the Lourenço Marques Natural History Museum – this was before our capital was renamed Maputo – who still displays the jars. (*OTA* 162)

Indeed, in real life, this collection still exists and is one of the most alluring tourist attractions in the Maputo Museum of Natural History (“Museu De História”). In the colonial museum, even today, the elephants are displayed to the European gaze as scientific oddities of a bygone era, constricted to their status as freak exhibits. From the perspective of the elephants in the narrative, however, the collection and exhibition of their fetuses is a vile historical horror and evidence of the perverse outlook humans have towards their kind. It also shows that the oppressions elephants face in colonized lands are perpetrated by their cohabitating humans themselves – the *local* hunt supervisor is the direct perpetrator of this atrocity.

Many of the (hi)stories described in “I, The Elephant,” colonial or otherwise, include these types of atrocities, depicting the oppression and exploitation of elephants. For example, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Ceylonese elephant Suleiman (based on José Saramago's novel *The Elephant's Journey*, which was itself based in historical fact [Péndola 133]) was displaced several times over through the human act of gift-giving, used in colonialism as an entryway to political

alliances. Margot C. Finn describes the practice of colonial gift-giving as one of the “emotionally-charged exchange mechanisms” that “play a vital role in political relations, and the body figured centrally in the political purchase of the gift” (205). As told by the elephant narrator’s great aunt, Suleiman is sent to Lisbon as a gift, but also “as part of a diplomatic outreach to King John III and Catherine of Portugal” (*OTA* 158), in an era of Portuguese imperial expansion (Péndola 138). In *OTA*, Suleiman is forced, as a colonial gift, to travel on foot through Europe, only to end up as a glorified pet and display piece at Archduke Maximilian II’s Viennese menagerie, isolated from his own kind and, finally, getting poisoned as a result of Christian superstition (*OTA* 158-9). Through Suleiman’s story, “I, the Elephant” displays the colonial gift-giving as another colonial practice that exploited, displaced and harmed animals in the name of imperial progress.

Whether displaced from their habitat or oppressed and annihilated within it, the elephants’ culture is enmeshed with humans’ impact on it, whereby humans effectively become an intrinsic part of the elephants’ story. This stands in stark contrast to the human perspective, which either disregards elephant life altogether or treats it as an amusing oddity, but always places it in a subjugated position. Transcending the postcolonial perspective, “I, The Elephant” in fact takes on an anthropo- and ecocritical stance that directs attention back to “the complex internal politics of many countries, where ruling elites are now effectively continuing and often accelerating practices of former colonial powers” (Clark 141), including the practices performed on the animals, and their environment. The elephant narrator and her herd live in the Sarangosa National Park, mostly undisturbed since the Portuguese’ departure. As a consequence of the Mozambican civil war, however, their habitat becomes a settlement and training camp for one of the warring human factions (*OTA* 166). The elephants simultaneously increase their caution to keep away from humans, and start to experience the dwindling of resources due to drought: “Now we were unsure whether to return to Lake Urema and risk



being close to the strange humans, or to stay and hope that by some miracle, the Muaredzi's waters might begin to swell" (*OTA* 167). The elephants collaborate to keep their herds alive – the narrator's herd shares information and resources with another herd "within [their] bond group" (*OTA* 167), and a bachelor's herd allows the "younglings" to eat from the patch of grass they had been protecting (*OTA* 172-3). The humans, however, do not show the same willingness, or are forced into denouncing it by the force of their own circumstance. In their last moments, the narrators' maternal herd is hunted down, surrounded and killed by "hungry villagers" (*OTA* 174), succumbing to the consequences of a human war. The elephant's story, therefore, shows several forms of suffering she falls victim to as an animal: her herd is displaced due to drought, but also the arrival of humans who disregard Gorongosa as an animal habitat and an ecosystem within itself. Likewise, she dies as the result of human hunger, which takes precedence over the animal's own survival. Thus, she joins the voices of the other animals in the collection to criticize her standing in the human-animal world, especially in wartime – to humans, the animals come second, if they are given any consideration at all.

#### 4. War and animal-as-other in *OTA*

As mentioned in the introduction, Dovey explores war as a global, anthropogenic and anthropocentric occurrence that affects nonhuman animals as the collateral victims of humans' belligerent efforts: "As war-critiques, every story of the book shows how war has been validated by humanist and cultural traditions of will-to-power motifs that have resulted in an imperialist commerce and devastating consequences for the nonhuman world" (Rahaman 1410). Alongside showing them as casualties of and unwitting accomplices in colonization, Dovey also highlights the animals' general suffering through displacement and exploitation, which benefits humans (or is perceived as beneficial for them, by them), and, at times, assists their belligerent efforts. This theme of suffering is in fact common in animal writing: "It should not surprise us that when animals are ultimately given a voice, even if that voice is a literary

device, it sometimes articulates pain, neglect, or abuse” (DeMello 8). In all of *OTA*’s stories, the animals are not only victims of war, but they also suffer due to their subjugation to humans in general. The collection explores various aspects of this cross-species relationship in order to explore the animals’ subjugation.

In certain stories, Dovey continues the direct evocation of animals as victims of war. “Telling Fairytales,” for example, exposes the othering of animals in their treatment as survivors. The story features two bear characters, the last remaining residents of the Sarajevo zoo during the 1992 siege (again, based on real-life events [Burns]) and focuses on their gradual starvation under the siege. While local humans make an effort to feed the animals (*OTA* 184, 189), foreign rescuing efforts fail to consider them. As voiced by a non-Bosnian human character when he’s faced with the question of smuggling the bears from Sarajevo, what would saving the animals “say to the people left behind? Why bears, not babies?” (*OTA* 191). This part of the narrative is historical fact – in 1992, during the Sarajevo siege, locals went through great pains to keep the remaining zoo animals alive, even during their own starvation. However, “The efforts of animal groups, to rescue [the last survivor in the zoo] were frustrated by obstacles, including the refusal of United Nations officials to fly the bear out aboard a relief plane” (Burns). Regardless of the locals’ efforts, therefore, the Sarajevo bears are still relegated to an othered position that can be disregarded in times of war as an antithesis to humans. As Huggan and Tiffin put it, this treatment testifies to the still hierarchical status animals have from the humanist, and humanitarian perspective: “Animals in most human societies are virtually powerless; we can do as we please with them – exploit, enslave, murder or vivisect to improve our lot in life” (151).

*OTA*’s animals are also exploited as scientific experiments, vehicles and weaponry in Dovey’s collection. As an example, the dolphin narrator in “A Letter to Sylvia Plath” is born in captivity, within the “US Navy Marine Mammal Program” (*OTA* 209). She serves the US

military “in finding and tagging mines embedded in the ocean floor” (*OTA* 216) and planting supposed trackers on enemy divers (*OTA* 226). It is precisely the dolphin’s animal nature (i.e. her supposed hyperintelligence when compared with other animals) that makes it interesting to humans and useful to their warring projects: “The Navy trainers quickly realized that dolphins could be counted on to return to them after being ordered to find or fetch objects, even in open water” (*OTA* 209). Throughout her training as a Navy animal, the dolphin narrator understands her purpose and is committed to it, even refusing to leave once the chance to be released occurs (*OTA* 218). But she does not grasp the full extent of her mission – the devices she was trained to attach to enemy divers turn out to be explosives. The dolphin narrator inadvertently murders an Iranian diver, and her guilt over taking the life of a human causes her to commit suicide: “We take killing a human very hard. It is as taboo for us as killing our own babies.” (*OTA* 228-9). While the story does feature one sympathetic human (as many of *OTA*’s stories do, as will be discussed in the following chapter), the animals are again shown to be expendable to humans; their otherness, based in their animalism, is used as a military ploy. But the dolphin regards humans differently, in kind with its kind, part of one species, whose life holds equal value to its other members. She cannot bear her complicity in the suffering of fellow animals, and her realization of the atrocities she committed for the humans is precisely what leads to her death.

The war context in *OTA* is also used to emphasize the inequality animals face as pets. This is most explicitly explored in “Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I” and “Psittacophile,” whose narrators perceive themselves as companions to humans, but are also abandoned by them. The cat Kiki-la-Doucette in “Pigeons” is “inadvertently” left by her human, the French writer Collette, on the Paris battlefield in WWI (*OTA* 18). While Kiki is convinced that her human will come collect her, this never happens. Unlike Fufu the pony’s (*OTA* 25), Kiki’s human does not even attempt to ask for her to be returned. Similarly, the parrot’s human at the

close of “Psittacophile,” flees the Lebanon war, abandoning its companion. The interesting aspect here is the stance the parrot takes in the final lines of the collection: “I knew what she was doing [...] What choice did she have but to hook my cage to the awning overhead and leave as quietly as she could, before I realized I was alone?” (*OTA* 245). At the end of the line, when faced with war, humans abandon animals, even their companions, and the parrot voices his awareness of this.

In all of *OTA*’s stories, Dovey continuously juxtaposes the human and animal perspective, while centering the animal one and exemplifying the suffering animals face under the hierarchical human worldview. The stories are entrenched in human cruelty and exploitation towards animals, and the animals understand it as such. Yet the animals’ view of the humans is not as antagonistic.

## 5. Human-as-animal in *OTA*

On the one hand, *OTA*’s animals observe humans and express curiosity and fascination at their behavior. In “Plautus: A Memoir,” for example, the tortoise narrator ponders on the difference of female and male human solitude (*OTA* 125). On the other hand, the animals in fact create connections with, and, like the dolphin, express empathy towards humans. In “Hundstage” the dog narrator considers it “a privilege to be a companion species to humans” (*OTA* 75), while Kiki not only sees herself as a companion to her human, calling her “my beloved” (*OTA* 18) and “longing” for her (*OTA* 22), but also describes Collette herself as having “cat-like instincts” (*OTA* 18). Rather than observing them as an *other* life form, *OTA*’s animals witness humans, share their ecosystem, create connections with and *value* them as much as their own kind – or, as if that is what they were. But they do not suspend their judgement of human attitudes and actions. As the dolphin narrator asks “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?” (*OTA* 206). The narrators therefore accept the shared creatureness of both humans as animals, but critique and ponder over humans’ attitudes and actions. This animal gaze and its focalizing narrators thus create a radical approach to human imaginings, a cultural representation that treats the animals as the narrators of their own story as much as the narrators of our shared one. As Herman puts it,

Dovey’s collection as a whole suggests how animal autobiography can be used to create oscillating human–animal alignments via (different sorts of) acts of speaking-for. Some life stories told by nonhumans can be read as co-authored acts of narrating in behalf of equally hybrid (or humanimal) principals; these experiments with narration beyond the human afford solidarity-building projections of other creatures’ ways of being-in-the-world—projections that enable a reassessment, in turn, of forms of human being (Herman, “Animal Autobiography” 16)

Thus, Dovey not only examines the position of animals in human life and its cultural imaginary, but gives voice to the animals on the position of humans themselves, not only towards animals, but towards each other. As Jo Langdon states in her review of the collection: “Dovey grants her animal narrators speech with a twist of magic that calls to mind every other unheard voice from history: children, women, and those otherwise silenced by louder people’s wars”. *OTA*’s animals are able to observe, empathize with and influence humans, they can be critical of them and voice their critique from a distant, but not unequal point.

All of the animal narrators observe and describe the humans around them without othering them, through language charged with physicality. In “Red Peter’s Little Lady,” Hazel is extremely physical in her writing and comments on the human behaviors imposed on her: “Frau Oberndorff won’t let me scratch. [...] She says my breath is a problem. It stinks. I like

the stink. I breathe out and sniff it in” (*OTA* 52). In “I, The Elephant,” the elephant narrator describes weaponry as human “technologies of fire” (*OTA* 172), but also recognizes human groups by their “collective scent” (166), just as she recognizes elephants through “infrasonic soundwaves” (167). Plautus, the tortoise observes humans in their solitude and examines the concept (*OTA* 125). Yet through his own physicality, he also describes human-as-animal compassion:

Virginia Woolf [...] immediately *sensed* I was in pain and quickly figured out what to do about it. She gave me a warm salt bath daily to treat my infected shell, and fed me only water and fresh greens for weeks. She *understood* that my shell is a living and very sensitive part of my body, not anything like the fingernails of humans, and *she was horrified* [...]. (*OTA* 131, emphasis added)

Plautus, therefore, perceives his connection with Virginia as kinship from the outset, a mutual, animalistic understanding. The animals of *OTA* in general are inscribed with this herd-like, egalitarian quality – they recognize their difference from humans in the same way they recognize other animals, through and via their physicality and actions within the shared world. In treating humans as co-animals, *OTA* effectively deconstructs the species boundary, and can be seen as *posthumanist*. As Clark argues:

The erosion of the ‘human/animal’ boundary informs [...] ‘posthumanism’. The term names modes of thinking which do not necessarily see humanity as the sole source or object of value in the world, and which are suspicious of idealisations of human ‘individualism’ and ‘autonomy’, stressing instead not only the fact that human beings are animals among other animals [...]. (13)

By eroding the species boundary and by therefore figuring the human as animal, *OTA*'s narratives take on a posthumanist perspective. An exploration of the way *OTA*'s animals speak for themselves will serve to further prove the text's engagement with this concept.

## 6. Animal-as-animal and intertextuality in *OTA*

As Danta explores, and as Huggan reminds us, "the animal fable [is] a genre deployed *traditionally* to support moralistic, often highly conservative views of the human educational process and, more recently, to prop up the social hierarchies and disciplinary regimes that legitimize imperial rule" (Huggan 75, emphasis added). However, this tradition has changed throughout the past centuries to accommodate the shift in the social (and environmental) circumstances both humans and animals have been facing, and continue to do so. As explored in the preceding chapters, the animals in *OTA* are in line with this shift. They are given the role of witness, companion, victim and unwitting accomplice; but they are also given a selfhood, a culture, a moral compass and a fictionalized experience.

This approach, however, one that places human-like behavior onto forms of animal cultural expression, is not without its pitfalls. As Ryan Hediger notes in his analysis of two animal autobiographical novels,

Such books map human ideas onto other forms of life. They thus naturalize what is, even at best, only ever a historical, human understanding of animals. [...] indulging in too much fantasy about [animals] can sever the actual from the literary, making it too easy to dismiss not only politics about [animals] but even the possibility of thinking seriously about [animal] minds [...]. (38-9)

On the one hand, *OTA* does run this risk – the animals *are* ascribed with “human-seeming” (Armbuster 24) cultural concepts. The elephants, for example, come to terms with their deaths at the hands of humans by establishing a storytelling culture that glorifies death, and, as mentioned, they interpret constellations as representations of their ancestors’ (*OTA* 155-6). This aspect provides a spiritual dimension to the elephants, and is akin to the spiritual concepts humans employ in their own relationship with their mortality. While the elephant narrator questions this glorification as she produces her own offspring (*OTA* 164), she also takes comfort in this spiritual dimension as she and her twin are dying: “we were children again, [...] longing to die gloriously and have our souls pointed out to the youngest in the herd on warm evenings: see, there are the stars which form their trunks, and there are the stars of their tails” (*OTA* 178). The elephant’s story thus reflects a human-seeming approach to mortality. Their cultural expression, however, does not derive from human stories within the narrative, i.e. it is not based in humans’ perception of them. Rather, it is an elephant-centric culture, which, while formed in relation with human violence, centers the animal experience. But *OTA* also includes a story that specifically comments on the dangers animal subjectivities face when ascribed human beliefs.

“Hundstage” depicts the dog as an indoctrinated follower of his Nazi “Master” (75), Heinrich Himmler. The dog believes in his own superiority to other dogs (as a German Shepherd) (*OTA* 76), but also in human superiority over animals: “I might be reincarnated as a human being in my next life. A human being! The thought was intoxicating” (*OTA* 78). He takes on his owner’s beliefs in a sycophantic way, obviously meant to resemble human indoctrination under the Nazi regime. These beliefs, though based in his owner’s faux-egalitarian attitude towards animals (*OTA* 76) actively harm him as an animal. While naturally carnivorous, he is made to be vegetarian in keeping with his humans’ Buddhist-inspired principles, which leads to the dog “starving” (*OTA* 78). He is also bound by a sense of loyalty



to Himmler, and once he gives in to his natural instinct of companionship with humans in general, allowing himself to be petted by another human, he is exiled for his “betrayal” (*OTA* 84). His indoctrinated state does not end with his exile, however, and he continues to self-punish for his natural instincts (*OTA* 87). For the dog, his anthropocentric indoctrination transforms into a self-flagellating act through which he punishes himself for not being human. “Hundstage,” therefore, directly comments on the “imposition” (Hediger 38) of human beliefs onto animal lives through a subversive act of anthropomorphization that is taken to the extreme.

Other narrators of *OTA* directly voice critiques of anthropomorphization and the human gaze in general, and they often do so through intertextuality. The dolphin’s contact with writing on animals, for example, causes her to ponder the animals’ status as symbols and justifications for humans’ actions towards them. Critiquing Ted Hughes, she says:

I had admiringly thought he was trying to understand the human by way of the animal, but now I can see that in fact he wanted to justify the animal in the human. [...] He justified killing wild animals thus: ‘Do you know Jung’s description of therapy as a way of putting human beings back in contact with the primitive animal?’ It was all a licence to behave badly. (*OTA* 205)

For the dolphin, contact with human writing creates an avenue to understand and critique her position as a mere representational instrument. The animals in Dovey’s stories, therefore, do not function simply as ventriloquist puppets for a human perspective. Rather, they are granted their own, precisely through fictional means that allow them to voice their own subjectivities and critique their position in an anthropocentric world. As Hediger admits, “some measure of fictionalization and even sentimentality can often prove useful – perhaps as a first step – in awakening attention to nonhuman realities” (Hediger 43).

Dovey also goes to great lengths to emphasize the actual lived experience of the animals she describes, and to give them a perspective that can only be imagined through factual findings on them. Dovey's list of sources lays bare this particular aspect of *OTA*. Not only does she employ literary hypotexts, but also academic papers and reviews on those very literary hypotexts, as well as on the animals she portrays as narrators. Almost all of *OTA*'s stories are sourced from non-fiction on animals and their influence on and utilization in the development of human culture(s) – for example, the camel narrator in “The Bones” is informed by a 1969 piece on feral livestock in Australia and its impact on Aboriginal cultures (“The camel in Australia”). More often than not, Dovey's non-fictional sources focus specifically on wars, or, even more particularly, on war's effect on animals (as is the case with *Animals in the Third Reich* by Boria Sax, one of the sources for “Hundstage;” and *Animals in War* by Jilly Cooper, which is listed as a source for “Pigeons,” “Plautus,” and “A Letter”) (“Only the Animals”). On the one hand, this is yet another risk in speaking for animals. As Ambruster argues, “aiming for a realistic, accurate portrayal of animal being is not the best way for a literary text to bring human readers to a complex sense of the lived reality of other animals.” (24). On the other, factual accuracy about animals' bodies and lives can deepen their subjectivities and serve as an “antidote to the misrepresentation and erasure of difference” (Armbuster 23). Such is the case in *OTA*.

It is precisely her factual research that allows Dovey's narrators to express a nonhuman perspective, not only as observers of human behavior but as selves inhabiting specific bodies, social structures and behavioral patterns. The camel has “oval red blood cells, three stomach compartments, and urine as thick as syrup” (*OTA* 6); Hazel the chimpanzee acts characteristically for her species to combat Frau Oberndorff's humanizing attempts (*OTA* 52), the mussels in “Somewhere Along the Way, a Pearl Would Be Handed to Me” use metaphors based on their physicality, such as “it sure had taken the water out our siphons” (*OTA* 104),

etc. This approach is present in each of the stories in the collection, and as is evident from these examples, the ones discussed previously, and the sources used in their construction, Dovey leverages scientific findings and a fictionalized animal gaze as an antithesis to human cultural perceptions of animals as less-than, as well as her own act of anthropomorphization. While they are often described *in relation* to humans, the animals' qualities and behavior are portrayed as valid on their own, beyond how human characters perceive them. This is yet another instance of *OTA's* engagement with the posthumanist perspective, through which the collections rejects "a kind of modernist orientation that places humans above all other creatures, that tells us that we alone are exceptional" (Rudy 151).

Additionally, while all of the animal narrators have human-like interest or knowledge, they are truly *themselves*. Herman notes several examples:

[T]he roving mussel and his conspecifics are caught up in a wanderlust with distinct echoes of that experienced by Kerouac and the other members of the Beat Generation; yet, they are also able to detect subtle changes in the temperature and salinity of sea water ([10], loc. 1328). For his part, Plautus the tortoise can quote Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1892 address to the US House Judiciary Committee concerning women's rights, as well as passages from Woolf's *Flush*, but also hibernate for months at a time and detect smells humans cannot perceive, including the icy smell of space outside his capsule's walls. ("Animal Autobiography" 15)

By embedding their personhood in their physicality, *OTA* therefore treats its narrators not only as vessels for human-to-human moralistic lessons, but the actual animals in question, as well as vocalizers for the post-Darwinian egalitarian representation of human- and animal-as-animal. By employing both anthropomorphizing strategies and factual accuracy, *OTA* manages

“to somehow remind the reader of the real animals that hover outside the human-created text, both inviting the reader to identify with the nonhuman animal as fellow living being and reminding him or her of the inevitable differences between humans and other species” (Armbuster 24). Dovey’s animal narratives, therefore, traverse the species boundary by subverting their prior representation as stand-ins and lower beings precisely through human language.

Likewise, by employing animal-centric literary intertexts and weaving them into her animal-voiced narratives, Dovey allows the narrators to utilize the human animal imaginary in order to form their own representation. As Rahaman states:

She serves dual purposes with her ironic deployment of inter-textuality: on the one hand, she figures out a vast oeuvre of literature that has been written by using nonhuman beings, on the other, through the animal narrator-characters she unveils the sheer anthropocentric nature of animal literature and the commodification of nonhuman beings in literature written to date. (1411)

Perceived by humans as the highest form of expression and communication in all of life on Earth, language and cultural representation become a tool for nonhumans to reach out of their marginalized existence and speak in unison to express their equality with and sacrifice for humans. When read as such, one might conjecture that Dovey in fact lends her literary voice to a zoocentric act of *minor literature*. According to Deleuze and Guattari, who first coined the term, “minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16). They identify three major characteristics of the concept: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari 18). By

placing animal subjectivities within human language, and employing literary intertexts that had so far represented animals, Dovey in fact deterritorializes human language as a whole, allowing animals as the “minor” to burst through the human, as the “major”. The same is noted by Rahaman: “these stories advance a ‘deterritorialisation’ [...] of human-centric storytelling which involves nonhuman-human inclusiveness of a democracy” (Rahaman 1411). Secondly, *OTA*’s stories feature individual narrators, but they speak out as a *collective*. This idea is introduced by the camel narrator at the end of “The Bones,” in his warning to Henry Lawson, and to the human reader: “be careful. You’re not the only one who can tell a good story about death in the wastelands.” (*OTA* 13). This line ushers in the other animals’ voices. The notion of collective enunciation is also raised by the dolphin, who compares herself to “the other animals who have told their stories here” (203). This does not only unify other animal narratorial voices, but also signals that the dolphin, and in extension the other animal narrators, are aware of their own “animal-textual” fictionality, adding to the overall metafictional aspect of *OTA*. They are the animal narrators *consciously* narrating their stories that are unfolding in a collection the reader is holding in their hands.

As has been exhibited through their individual analyses, these stories are individual in their treatment of certain themes (such as human-animal companionship, colonialism, indoctrination, etc.), but they function as a collective enunciation of animal subjectivities, both on themselves and the humans. Thus, in *OTA*, “there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that ‘master’ and that could be separated from the collective enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). This act of speaking for animals is therefore also political, not only through its critique of war and othering, or even only through its animal-centrism. Rather, *OTA* employs the deterritorialized literature of its predecessors *as well as* its basis in the fact of historical conflicts to achieve its political dimension. By creating an intricate pastiche of different literary voices, allowing the animals to speak through them, and

addressing the political dimensions of the animals' existence, the "cramped space" of *OTA* "forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (Deleuze and Guattari 17). By speaking for the "minor" animal, therefore, Dovey firmly places herself in line with the post-Darwinian fabulists, who "critique the idea of human exceptionalism by anthropomorphically adopting the perspective of the so-called lower animals" (Danta 193), while also disrupting dominant narratives of pre-existing cultural perceptions of nonhuman life.

## 7. Conclusion

*OTA* is a complex work of fiction, written by a postcolonial author, that centers animal voices and problematizes human attitudes towards them. Its metafictional nature, i.e. the use of preceding literary works in its construction and the laying bare of its intertextuality, allows scholars to view it from different perspectives and employ a variety of approaches to its analysis. This thesis has, like Rahaman and Herman, approached the work from the framework of studies of animal narration, but it has also employed postcolonial ecocriticism in order to explore *OTA*'s act of speaking for animals.

The reason this approach was taken is twofold. Firstly, two of *OTA*'s stories feature colonial contexts, and a significant portion of this thesis has been devoted to their analysis. Secondly, postcolonial ecocriticism allows the examination of the complex relationships between colonial practices and the animals that suffer under or are exploited by them, but it also reveals the human-to-human inequalities based in othering through animalization. As argued, this is precisely the case in "The Bones" and "I, the Elephant." Both stories address colonial practices towards animals, but do so through different means. "The Bones" establishes its camel narrator as an unwitting accomplice in the colonization of Australia, displaced from

its native Afghanistan, but also exploited in the colonial ravaging of the country's environment, as well as the degradation of its native humans through animalization. It also figures the goanna and the bones of an Aboriginal elder as examples of the native colonized life, *and* culture, by invoking the Aboriginal concept of oneness. "I, the Elephant," on the other hand, traces the history of colonial practices towards elephants, through the story of Suleiman as a colonial gift, and the story of elephant fetuses as museum exhibits, thus portraying the status of the animal colonial other. But the story also expands the topic of colonialism to cover its aftermath and remnant practices through its depiction of the elephant's present in postcolonial Mozambique. Both stories reveal the exploitative, oppressive treatments animals receive in the course of the colonizing project, but "I, the Elephant" also reveals the general impact human practices (such as the invasion of their habitat and their exploitation as food sources) have on animals.

Apart from the (post)colonial, the belligerent contexts employed in the rest of the stories further explore animal suffering in anthropogenic conflicts. All of the animals in *OTA* are victimized by war, but in different ways – some as direct casualties (such as the elephant), or victims of wartime starvation (such as the bear in "Telling Fairytales"), while others are exploited as weaponry (like the dolphin in "A Letter") or abandoned as second-class beings, unworthy of survival in wartime (like the cat in "Pigeons," the parrot in "Psittacophile" and the bear in "Telling Fairytales"). *OTA*'s depictions of animal suffering thus follow suit with animal narratives in which "animals do not act (only) as stand-ins for something else, but demonstrate, baldly, their own suffering, generally at the hands of humans." (DeMello 9). The analyses of these stories further prove that *OTA* comments on human-animal inequality, not just in times of war, but in all aspects of human-animal relationships, in which the animal is always perceived as less worthy.

The collection also succeeds in taking on a posthumanist perspective of humans themselves. From the point of view of its narrators, humans are *fellow* animals, different, but

not other. This is obvious in the narrators' descriptions of their relationships to humans, like in "Pigeons," as well as their critiques of human attitudes towards fellow animals, like in "A Letter." By employing literary intertexts, *OTA* allows its narrators to examine the suppositions and prejudices aimed towards them in human representations. By figuring humans as animals and doing so from the animal gaze, the collection thus allows for an animal-centric critique of "the values of a supposed human exceptionalism" (Clark 14) and falls in line with the post-Darwinian fable, which "implicates readers in the biological order by forcing them to contemplate and confront the existential fact of their apehood" (Danta 19).

Finally, the animals in *OTA* do not only speak of their suffering and their fellow humans. Rather, they voice their full physical existence and experience through an amalgamation of zoological and ethological accuracy, imagined culturality and spirituality, and intertextuality. On the one hand, they speak in physical terms, describing their bodies and bodily functions not as foreign or shameful, but as a part of their subjectivities. On the other, they are framed as personhoods with reason and culture (like the elephants with their storytelling, stargazing culture). However, as is portrayed in "Hundstage," the collection is also critical of the imposition of human perspectives on animal selves – the dog is figured as an extreme example of internalized anthropomorphization. In another critical move, the animals' fictionalized contact with literary intertexts allows them to examine and critique human attitudes towards them, like in the dolphin's critique of Ted Hughes. Dovey thus utilizes human language and literature to speak for animal subjectivities without succumbing to the perils of anthropocentrism in the act of speaking for animals. Her use of literary predecessors' work in giving voice to the animals' subjectivities can also be seen as an act of minor literature. The animal narrators are figured as retelling, rewriting and commenting on human works about them, thus deterritorializing literature as a language-based human cultural expression. Their individual stories also function as a collective annunciation of animal subjectivities with the



political goal of bringing the invisible, incomprehensible and disregarded position of animals to the forefront.

Dovey's collection, then, does not constitute an "accurate" or strictly imaginative depiction of animals. But it is not necessary for it to do so to reach its goal of speaking for animals. As DeMello puts it, "what is important about literary representations of animal minds isn't whether or not they're accurate; it's what they reveal about how humans think about animals, and what the consequences of that thinking is" (10). *OTA* is thus an act of speaking for that allows animal subjectivities to reach out and across the human animal imaginarium, and subvert the way they have been (mis)represented and disregarded, allowing the reader to rethink their own position on the ever-threatened nonhuman bioworld.

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## Abstract

*Only the Animals* by Ceridwen Dovey is a contemporary Anglophone collection of short stories, written by a postcolonial author, that centers animal subjectivities – i.e. the souls of ten dead animals implicated, each in their own way, in historical global conflicts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to present times – as its narrators and focalizers. The collection is constructed as a pastiche of previous literary works that center animals, which makes it heavily intertextual. Likewise, it is accompanied by a list of sources that brings into focus the artificiality of its construction, making the work metafictional. By employing postcolonial ecocriticism alongside studies of animal narration as its critical apparatus, this thesis expands on previous ecocritical readings of *Only the Animals* and argues for a reading that takes into consideration both the figuring of animal-as-animal, and human-as-animal. Through its animal narrators, *Only the Animals* unpacks animal oppression within human colonial and warring projects by exploring both animal complicity and animal oppression within anthropogenic conflicts. While it does constitute an act of speaking for animals, the collection successfully constructs a zoocentric perspective rather than succumbing to anthropocentrism, and functions as an act of minor literature on behalf of its animal narrators through its use of intertextuality and zoological and ethological accuracy. Likewise, through its figuring of animal subjectivities as the focalizers, *Only the Animals* follows the post-Darwinian turn in animal fables, i.e. it represents animals as equal to, rather than lesser than humans. The animal narrators' commentary on both humans and human literature engages in a critical, posthumanist perspective of human-animal relationships that challenges anthropocentrism and western human attitudes towards animal life. Dovey's collection, as this thesis argues, is thus an act of radical rewriting of animal narratives and histories that challenges the notion of human

superiority and utilizes literary representation as a means of renegotiating the cultural treatment of animals in a shared human-animal world.

Key words: *Only the Animals*, Ceridwen Dowey, postcolonial ecocriticism, zoocentrism, animal fables, animal narrators, intertextuality, posthumanism